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Essay

Perfect 12

A woman puts her Texas-size feet in the hands of an expert Florentine shoemaker for an aah-mazing fit

By Susan Huston

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It's not that I *wanted* another pair of cute shoes. A good pair of shoes is a necessity. Really. (Is there a woman alive who hasn't said that?)

I have feet issues, big time. I wear a size 12 in ladies' shoes, and in athletic shoes, a men's size 10 1/2. Did I mention I have fallen arches and huge bunions? Needless to say, my feet always need help.

After more than 40 years of pushing around rolling racks as a fashion coordinator, I decided that it was time to invest in a good shoe. My giant feet were sending me a message: Get some fashionable shoes with comfort. With this in mind and credit card in hand, I decided to listen and invest in some custom-made shoes.

Great idea. But how do I find these "investment shoes"? Lucky for me, I was about to go on a trip to Italy where the finest shoemakers in the world would surround me. Surely it would be a breeze to find relief for my poor old feet. I travel to Italy every two years and have noticed the small, quaint shops of handmade leather shoes, but I never thought about having a pair made.

Now that I had decided, where would I go? I could just wander the streets and by chance happen upon a shoe shop, but I had a better idea. I turned to the Internet and found some likely candidates.

Then, I decided that I would e-mail my friends in Florence and ask for their help in finding the perfect *maestro calzolaio* (master shoemaker in Italian).

After all, my friends are top craftsmen in their own fields. Jean Saade, a third-generation jewelry shop owner, and Smilie Mimmo, a third-generation leather factory owner, both design fine handcrafted goods. I hoped they would help me find a shoemaker and would explain my wants and needs, rather than let me wave my hands around trying to explain my predicament with my limited Italian vocabulary. Within 24

hours, I had my answer. Yes, Jean and Smilie would help me. I decided the best and most versatile shoe for me was a ballet-type flat, with an orthotic built into the shoe and designed to avoid my bigger-than-Texas-size bunions.

Fast-forward a few months, our trip had finally begun. After a few days of traveling in Italy, my husband and I arrived in Florence and took a walk along the cobblestone streets, wandering off on a side street away from the hordes of tourists. Suddenly, I stopped in front of a tiny shop window.



Susan Huston shows off her custom-made Italian shoes.
Star-Telegram/Ron T. Ennis



The shoes were shipped to Texas by the Florentine shoemaker.

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