



# THE GENTEEL

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## DESIGN

### Stepping Up

by **Semmi W.** | Posted February 25, 2013

*Topics: Avant-Garde, collection, commentary, concept, Contemporary, craftsmanship, creatures, Design, designer, eccentric, everyday, fashion, Footwear, heels, History, Hong Kong, Innovative, inspiration, Israel, kobi, label, Lady Gaga, levi, Material, mojito, museum, nouveau, Paris, risk, runway, shoemaking, shoes, sidewalk, taboo, technology, weird*

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A selection of shoes by Israeli shoe designer, Kobi Levi. Source: kobilevideisign.com.

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Shoes by Helen Red Richards.  
Source: girlybubble.com.

For true style connoisseurs, shoes are more than just an accessory - they begin and end a story. Like that of an architect, the mind of a shoe designer is preoccupied with a structure's foundation - is it strong enough to withstand environmental pressures? Will its materials distract from the overall concept?

One divisive question in particular is: are they comfortable? The answer, of course, depends on one's interpretation of utility. It's reasonable to say that one's pain threshold is proportional to the desire for a particular pair. More often than not, purchasing novelty heels are a vain pursuit, a decision intricately tied to an admiration for craftsmanship and beauty. But comfort? Who needs comfort when you can stand tall in dinosaur platforms?

In major fashion capitals like Paris or Hong Kong, you can spot men and women standing proudly in experimental shoe designs. Heels made to look like coffee spills, flying doves,

and even a Nintendo Game Boy punctuate outfits, turning style aficionados into walking artifacts. One of these creative visionaries, Israeli-based shoe designer [Kobi Levi](#), aptly refers to his innovations as "creatures." The 36-year-old first catapulted into fame after Lady Gaga requested a custom pair of boots to wear for her video, *Born this Way*.

Like Levi, other leading designers are channeling their artistry into quirky shoe collections. Their blind sense of commitment isn't just a principle, but a branding mechanism. A niche market has emerged, and heels made by the likes of Helen Red Richards, Dolce Vita, or German designer Iris Schieferstein and her infamous pair of "horse hooves" are redefining the very meaning of exclusivity.

Owning a pair of Levi's creations for example, can run you upwards of US\$3,000. Steep price points, however, become justified not solely because of their luxurious quality or label, but their oddity. Dressing outfits with illogical, but nonetheless beautifully constructed platforms is a badge of honour. "Weird" is the new cool. And novelty heels tap into the sentiment of nouveau riche style eccentrics who have no wanting for mainstream acceptance.

This March, Levi will showcase his experimental designs at Germany's [Grassi Museum](#), as part of a special exhibit dedicated to profiling futuristic and offbeat collections from around the world. Many other experimental shoemakers also have the unique privilege of showcasing in contemporary museums - the kinds that don't necessarily cater exclusively to fashion or costume design. The reason is tied to how items are constructed. Shoes hold a very special place in history - conquests, proclamations and romances have all been declared on the heels of ever-changing structures. Entire institutions like Toronto's [Bata Shoe Museum](#) and the SONS museum in Brussels are dedicated to the curation and study of shoemaking. Footwear is a mini marker of technological advancement. And no matter what part of the world you reside in, shoes help denote everything from social status to the weather.



Iris Schieferstein's hoof heels.  
Source: [inventorspot.com](#).

Hakes' fascination with design elements is palpable. In the eyes of both designer and fashion lover, the construction of novelty heels is a technological expression of fantasies, taboo and humour. To don a pair of avant-garde heels is to cater to the soul. Like a portrait, a visual statement is projected - one that doesn't require a paintbrush or frame. When the sidewalk becomes your canvas, the only risk that exists is to avoid taking one in the first place.

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Architect-turned-shoe-designer [Julian Hakes](#)' creation, the *Mojito Shoe* is reflective of how the process of shoemaking is another way to investigate the physics behind structural engineering. Worn by the likes of Gwyneth Paltrow, the *Mojito Shoe* started from Hakes' fascination with bridges. "I always wondered if a traditional shoe is only the way it is because of the materials that existed when it was designed," explained the British designer, "what would happen if you started again? I don't think you would start with a traditional shape. You would look at the way the foot moves, the way the body transfers load, and then it's how to manifest that in a shape. It was an investigation into materiality, form and design technique, and that resulted in this shoe."