

NAFA Alumni Solo Spotlight Series

A Decade of Shoe Making

Lisa Teng

Bachelor of Arts (Honours) Fashion Design, 2006

Founder and Footwear Designer, Lisa Teng Studios



1. Thanks for accepting this interview, were you always fascinated by footwear design or was it a gradual discovery through your fashion journey?

Footwear design was a gradual discovery through my fashion journey. My interest in footwear design was piqued when I had difficulties finding the right style of shoes to match outfits for my graduation collection. I ended up customising shoes by painting them red to match the garments.

I then moved to London to study shoemaking with the intention of launching a fashion collection with clothes and shoes together. Though my time in London was supposed to be brief, after seeing the immense effort it took to design and construct a pair of shoes, I decided to stay longer to master different traditional and modern techniques in shoe making.

Upon recollection, it has been a decade since I went to London to study shoe making, gaining work experience with a podiatrist and starting my business.



2. What are some materials you commonly work with and why did you select these materials specifically as part of your design?

I work primarily with leather, but I am also open to working with natural alternatives such as heavy weight cotton, cork and Piñatex (non-woven material made from pineapple leaf fibre).

Genuine leather may be a slightly controversial material to use due to its cost, and for some; morality and environmental concerns. However, it is more versatile and durable than synthetic leather, which disintegrates easily under hot and humid conditions. Hence, I consciously purchase new leather in a specific colour or style only if I am sure there are multiple uses for it.

Usually to reduce my environmental impact, I will source for materials from off-season collections and off-cuts (remaining pieces that are usually discarded). I will also make sure that there are some natural materials such as natural rubber, jute and wood used in my heel or sole designs.



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3. What are some workshops that our readers can experience at your studio?

There is an array of workshops to experience at my studio, primarily creating your own footwear and other types of leather accessories within a day.

The most popular workshop is our [espadrille mules and slides workshop](#) where participants customise their own casual shoes with the colours they like.

Our [sneaker making workshop](#) is also another favourite, where the amount of glue is reduced while constructing the shoes.

We also have participants who prefer having a [personalised workshop](#) over a few sessions to create other shoe designs upon request.

In addition to workshops, I also offer [made-to-order shoemaking services](#) for customers who prefer to have something tailor-made.



4. What are some of your most challenging footwear created to date?

“Design is the elusive skill of knowing what to leave out as much as knowing what to include.”

- Lisa Teng



Challenge #1

Men's Bespoke Oxford Shoes

- >Various knife-cutting skills involved
- >Meticulous hand stitching required for minimal look
- >Bespoke techniques applied with minimal use of modern machinery



Challenge #2

Acrylic Soles

- >Experimenting with acrylic laser cutting using CAD (computer-aided design) software while studying at London College of Fashion (UK)
- >'Serendipitous' shoe sole design as seen on the left that was achieved through various shapes and design permutations created on Lisa's laptop

5. What were some skillsets picked up during your time at NAFA that stayed relevant to you throughout your career?

When I was a student at NAFA, I had the time to research, experiment and refine my designs before our final fashion runway, building my skills set and confidence as a designer.

Most of the basic skills during my studies such as drawing and creating a concept board were interchangeable when I started designing and creating footwear. Through NAFA's degree exchange program with the University of Huddersfield (UK) in 2006, I also learnt to be more open minded, persuasive and confident in my own designs.

The recommendation and encouragement from my tutors at the time also gave me the opportunity to continue my studies overseas and ultimately inspire an everlasting interest in footwear design.

6. What are some first steps that an aspiring footwear designer can do to get a head start in footwear design?

An aspiring footwear designer and shoemaker will need to:

- > Be passionate enough to learn and embark on your own personal research on the topic of interest.
- > Be good with your hands. However, the great news is that this can be developed overtime with tons of practice! Start creating organically, whether it is drawing multiple designs or working on a scrap piece of leather. If you feel you need to improve or learn a new skill, find a suitable course to attend and don't be afraid to ask questions.
- > Remember that a great idea takes some time to cultivate and be open to improvise along the way as the results can be astonishing.
- > Take the opportunity to do some networking and share your aspiration with your collaborators and peers as they can help you.
- > Be observant and avoid rushing the (creation) process simply because a competitor is doing the same thing. Remember to relish the process and the journey.