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# Best feet forward

Forget ‘it’ bags – footwear sales are soaring and designers are rising to the occasion



David Hayes FEBRUARY 1 2013

Next month Selfridges will be hosting its very own “Shoe Carnival”. The London store has plenty to celebrate, now selling 10,000 pairs of shoes a week on average (yes, really) since the unveiling of its 35,000 sq ft women’s Shoe Galleries in September 2010, an area which carries more than 150 brands. And as a, er, footnote, Selfridges also boasts the world’s largest men’s shoe department, where sales have increased by more than 100 per cent since it opened in November last year. Rival department store Harrods, meanwhile, devotes a whole 22,750 sq ft to women’s shoes, featuring 75 brands, a multi-brand “Shoe Salon” and no less than two Manolo Blahnik boutiques.

Globally, the footwear market is expected to reach \$195bn by 2015, with sales exceeding 13bn pairs last year alone, according to Global Industry Analysts, Inc. It’s hard to imagine there are so many shoes in the world.

“Shoes are bestsellers online, both in terms of speed and lowest return rate,” says Federico Marchetti, chief executive and founder of the online fashion store Yoox, which launched shooscribe.com last March, an online store devoted to women’s shoes, complete with a “shoe subscription” service that offers customers free shipping, free repairs and 50 per cent off a pair of shoes on their birthday. Marchetti notes its parent company Yoox has sold more than 5m shoes since 2000. “Needless to say, it didn’t take much for us to want to fill that gap in the market.”

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As a result, it’s hard to escape the conclusion that shoes are the new “It” bags – and indeed, as with that phenomenon, designers and brands are rushing to satisfy demand for shoes. The following is our guide to the brave new world of footwear, from fresh names to the old guard, the hottest men’s styles, and other titbits from the frontline.

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