

# Brogue female

Women are falling hard for a classic shoe with a contemporary twist. By Lucie Muir

**Y**es, the 1980s are back, courtesy of Balmain's door-busting shoulder pads and the remake of one of the decade's seminal films, *Fame*. But, in one respect at least, fashion has moved on (thank God). In those days, women relied on the "working girl" trainer to get from Tube train to boardroom; today's business women can call on the infinitely more stylish and equally comfortable brogue. From experts such as Church's and Repetto, to collaborative pairings including Olivia Morris for Grenson, Yohji Yamamoto for Salvatore Ferragamo and J Maskrey for Brazilian shoe label Melissa, women's footwear is having a male moment.

Amanda Scott, director of women's accessories at John Lewis, where sales of women's brogues have doubled in the past month, says: "Once a fashion trend like brogues starts to impact on sales at John Lewis, you know it's infiltrated everywhere. This season's mannish trend has not only affected sales of brogues, which have performed consistently well, but has also seen sales of small size men's shirts and cardigans rise as women seek authentic 'boyfriend' outfits."

Jean-Marc Gaucher, chief executive of Repetto, says: "Many young women who grew up wearing branded trainers are now

*'With the brogue [you get] a pair of shoes which looks better and becomes more comfortable as time goes on'*

after something just as comfortable, more grown-up, yet maintaining that tough sports/dance attitude." The Parisian dance shoe label is perhaps best known for its signature jazz shoe, which made the leap from the dance studio to the street in the months Repetto's brogue collection (from £145) is updated with new colours and materials, and next August sees the opening of a stand-alone space in London's Selfridges.

"With most shoes, you put them on and have to wear them in," says Rebecca Lewison-White, manager of Black Truffle, an independent shoe store in London. "With the Repetto brogues, the minute you put them on, they fit perfectly."

Church's, the historic British shoemaker bought by the Prada Group in 1999, has also been adding a new version of its classic Burwood brogue every season. In addition to classic black and tan versions, the current line (from £190) includes a tartan brogue that combines leather with woven Scottish fabric.

Tim Little, Grenson's creative director, says: "Women who buy their



**Unique** Twiggy wears a pair of brogues made for her by British shoemaker George Cleverley in the early 1970s. Below: Church's tartan version and Yohji Yamamoto's for Salvatore Ferragamo



shirts at Turnbull & Asser or their suits on Savile Row want the latest thing, something totally unique. With the brogue, not only do you get a proper pair of shoes but a pair of shoes which looks better and becomes more comfortable as time goes on. Men have long known about this 'investment' factor and now, it seems, women are contending on to it too."

Olivia Morris's 'made-to-order' Grenson brogues (£200) are the first ladies' shoes the traditional men's wear brand has sold.

"I learnt that there is a real balance that you have to get right between traditional and contemporary," says Morris. "It's not about over-designing something new but more about

## SHOES WHO

### Flat feet

From Marlene Dietrich to Ellen DeGeneres, the brogue has played a crucial role in the lives and looks of the past century's boldest dressers. Here's a who's who of the shoe's most famous exponents.

**1920s** Marlene Dietrich, the woman responsible for most things mannish on the catwalk. She wore tuxedos, cut her hair short and strutted around town in a pair of dapper brogues, spearheading a trend for androgyny that has never disappeared.

**1930s** Norma Shearer, one of cinema's feminist pioneers and star of the film *The Divorcee*, was a fan of flat footwear and would team her white brogues with argyle knit stockings and a cloche hat.

**1940s** The Landgirls. From boy's tweed separates to lace-up brogues, this wartime style was "make-do-and-mend". Functionality became key, and that meant flat shoes.

**1950s** Katharine Hepburn, Hollywood's anti-glamour heroine, showed in films such as *African Queen* that the "gentler sex" could wear the trousers – and the brogues, too.

**1960s** The Modette. The women of Britain's Mod movement had short, boyish haircuts, used little make-up and wore flat lace-up Winklepickers, which were a pointy-toed brogue.

**1970s** Twiggy, famously skinny and hip British model, and the first woman to convince shoemaker George Cleverley, who specialised in bespoke shoes for men, to make her a pair of flats. In 1972 he crafted the two-tone brogue (pictured left) especially for her.

**1980s** Annie Lennox. Eurythmics singer and queen of the pin-striped suit, white shirt, red tie and ginger crop. Her gender-neutral look was completed by a pair of buffed leather brogues.

**1990s** Ellen DeGeneres, stand-up comedienne and star of the sitcom *Ellen*, who donned a pair of two-tone lace-ups – controversially – at the Oscars.

**2000s** Alexa Chung (pictured), US MTV presenter rarely seen in anything with a heel, and the banner woman for the No-nagties brogue. Pairing her flats with short skirts, cardigans and bare legs, she proves the footwear can be feminine, too.

**Rebecca Johnson**

