



Keeping Your Shoes in Shape: Tips on Care

By Constance Dunn

The pumps were a supple kidskin pair with a buckle. Their pointy toes and shapely two-inch heels beckoned the 1950s. But it was their color--a sunset pale-pink--that sealed the deal.

Eager to keep my latest shoe score in fine shape, I lathered a soft white cloth with saddle soap and spread it on the vamp with care. With each dab, the delicate pink deepened into a harsh pumpkin hue. I polished more intensely, trying to bring back the original shade.

It was no use, and it turns out it was the saddle soap applied to such an absorbent leather, shoe-master Steve Windham later informed me, that was the critical "no-no."

Windham's Shoe Repair has been offering meticulous, cut-no-corners service since it opened in Riviera Village in 1954. Windham says this attention to detail is a big reason his family has been successful in the business for almost half a century. At one time the Windhams owned 50 stores in the South Bay.

A wellspring of shoe knowledge, Windham shared the following tips about proper care with me.

Prevention is the best cure. Before taking one outdoor step in your new shoes, have them guarded against wear. This is particularly true of fine shoes, with their notoriously wafer-thin leather soles and sometimes fussy material. Rather than gamble on do-it-yourself shoe care for your high-profile shoes, have a professional handle them. "A substance that works on one pair of shoes might completely destroy another pair," Windham cautioned.

Guard the soles. Have the soles of any shoes you wish to keep for a while covered with a durable rubber bottom. Windham has these in black and an increasingly popular (for the ladies) red. He showed me a luxurious pair of new Christian Louboutin platforms that he affixed with scarlet, skid-proof soles. One of his customers was clever enough to request such work before she wore these shoes.

Shelter the material. Have the material, whether fabric, skin or something else, protected against the outside world. Water and staining are particularly fatal to lightweight and absorbent materials--think soft suede boots in a light caramel,

for instance. Reapply protectant at intervals of six months or less, depending on frequency of wear.

Protect the shape. The wooden gadgets tucked into the shoes lining my father's closet always struck me as mysterious when I was a child. They seemed almost like surgical devices. When I was older I realized that shoe trees perform a crucial shoe function: protecting the shape of shoes. If in doubt about how important a shoe's shape is to its overall look, compare the silhouette of a luxury men's shoe to that of a bargain-basement pair. Use cedar shoe trees (about \$25 a pair at Windham's) if moisture is an issue.

When in doubt, seek professional help. Uncertain whether you can resuscitate the Oxfords you rescued from the exuberant jowls of a puppy? Are your favorite summer sandals shedding flakes of color with each step? Take them to a shoe professional before tossing them in the trash. Windham, a third-generation cobbler, has seen every conceivable type of shoe malady or malfunction, and knows what--if anything--can be done to remedy it.