

# Shoes you can happily use

BY DIANE COLE



If the shoe doesn't fit, ask a surgeon to alter your foot. As bizarre as that statement sounds, the trend of shortening toes or narrowing the foot to fit into high-fashion shoes is real and growing—and anathema to foot experts. The very idea of cosmetic foot surgery puts Johanna Youner, a New York podiatrist and director of the podiatry clinic at New York University Downtown Hospital, in mind of foot-binding in imperial China. The American Orthopaedic Foot and Ankle Society, as well as the American College of Foot and Ankle Surgeons, similarly warns against such procedures, saying the medical risks outweigh any potential benefits. Indeed, when AOFAS surveyed its members recently, half of them reported treating patients who had experienced complications from such surgery.

There is a better way. To sidestep shoe-related pain and still be chic, learn to shoe shop like a podiatrist admits a fondness for the elegant lines of Chanel shoes and has even “limped through a date” in killer heels by Manolo Blahnik, provides a scouting report

**TOE TO TOE:** Little piggies will be tightly squeezed in Miss Sixty Flash (left), a shoe designed for limo riders. The roomier toe box and ankle strap of the \$150 Fornarina Bonnie pump are kinder to a gal's tootsies.

from Bloomingdale's hip new store in New York's SoHo.

In the second-floor women's shoes department, bright colors, bold prints, and flashy stripes entice in an abundance of flats, heels, sling-backs, slides, and ankle-strap stilettos. For casual wear, fashion sneakers—spritely rubber-soled lace-ups from Polo, Diesel, and

ste, among other well-known designers—offer several pluses over an equally fashionable rival this season, the wispy, ultraflat ballet slipper.

Placed side by side, both styles are

designed in the shape of a real foot, with a roomy toe box that won't squeeze your toes out of their joints. Both keep you balanced on the ground. But the ballet slipper is too flat, with no arch support, a situation that can lead to plantar fasciitis, an inflammation of the arch.

**The bends.** By contrast, fashion sneakers offer a slight heel, and the rubber soles provide some cushioning. Two models on display—a \$98 Lacoste Keds-like sneaker in periwinkle and white or rust and gray and a suede and mesh \$80 Puma in raspberry and gray—seem a bit sturdier than the others. (Youner's litmus test for stability: The shoe should bend only at the forefoot; if the heel collapses or if the shoe twists at the arch, the shoe is too flexible to support comfortable walking.)

Even so, don't be misled by their streamlined design into thinking that fashion sneakers are hardy enough for a workout or a jog. “You'd look cute at the gym, but your feet would not have enough shock absorption or support,” Youner says. “These are adorable



**HIP FLOP.** The \$38 animal-print sandal by Mella earns points for its stiff sole. Plus, the thong keeps your foot from sliding forward.

## THE SOLE OF A MAN'S SHOE

In men's shoes, as in women's fashion and athletics merge in the form of this season's hot hybrid, the fashion sneaker. Adidas offers what might even be called a \$175 novelty sneaker in the form of the

9 1/2-inch-tall, Super C Nizza in canvas camouflage. “These are great see-and-be-shoes, but not for a long walk or serious exercise,” says podiatrist Johanna Youner. At \$250, Adidas's limited-distribution, gold suede dress-up Azteca Gold sneaker seems to celebrate Olympic gold; compared with dedicated athletic shoes,

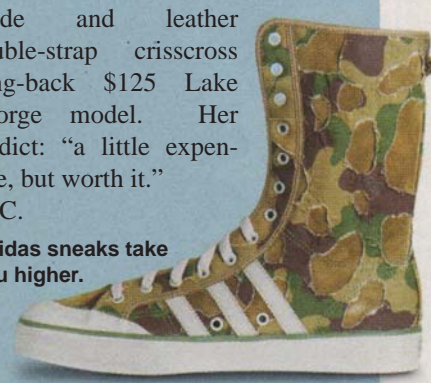
however, it lacks padding and firmness.

For cool sandal comfort, Cole Haan's G Series, designed in conjunction with Nike, wins Youner's approval for its use of natural fabrics and arch support. Good best include the \$145 San Diego Slide, made of fabric with an embroidered Japanese wave motif, and the

suede and leather double-strap crisscross sling-back \$125 Lake George model. Her verdict: “a little expensive, but worth it.”

-D.C.

**Adidas sneaks take you higher.**



with a skirt for summer. But they are fashion statements, not exercise shoes." And don't even think about trying a marathon in the \$60 stiletto-heeled sneaker by NM70. For a real athletic shoe, Youner swears by the Asics Gel-Kayano line.

**Love thongs.** As for sandals, thongs are the rage this summer. From Youner's point of view, that's not bad at all, because this style "keeps the forefront more stable" than most other sandal styles since your foot will not slide forward as much. Even so, she cautions, be prepared to wear band-aids between your toes for the first two weeks until the skin thickens from the friction. Other points to look for include uppers made with natural fibers that wick away moisture (plastic and acrylic may be in, but the feet will sweat, creating "a petri dish for athlete's foot") and a stiff sole (remember the twist test).

A playful (and at \$38, inexpensive) sandal meeting all these requirements is the Melia animal-print ribbon thong. It comes in three colorful species: chocolate and fuschia owl; black and white panda; and orange and fuschia lobster.



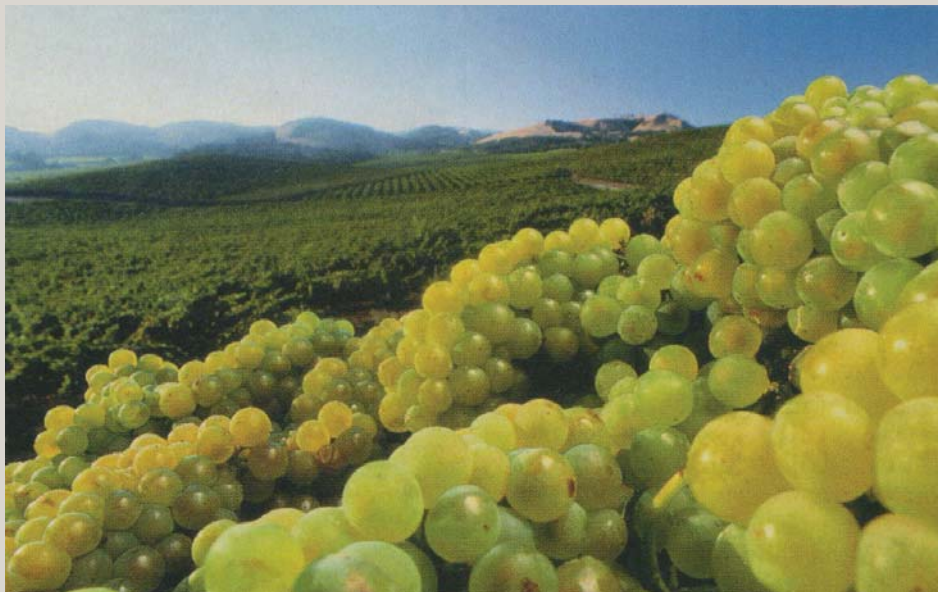
**CASUAL CHOICE.** The popular ballet flat is cruel to arches, but all hail the fashion sneaker (this one is a \$98 Lacoste).

For dressier fare, there is some foot comfort in pumps that hark back to the 1940s: The rounded toe silhouette is roomy, and ankle straps provide added support. One eye-catching possibility with both attributes is the \$150 Fornarina Bonnie pump, with ankle straps and 3-inch heels. To provide extra shock absorption between your feet and the concrete below, Youner advises adding a small padded insole. "That will be your best friend," she says.

At a slightly higher price, Miss Sixty Flash is a fashionista's dream: super-high slingback stilettos in yellow, purple, or black patent leather with zigzag wing cutouts. Your feet won't thank you, says Youner. But a few days after her visit, the shoes were gone with the fashion winds. Bloomingdale's inexplicably dropped the Miss Sixty line. Maybe it wasn't selling well. Or maybe women have a new motto: If the shoe doesn't fit, don't buy it.

## What A Trip!

# BRING YOUR NAPKINS TO NAPA



**GRAPELAND.** Known for its wineries, Napa Valley is now luring visitors with food tastings.

They grasped a sample, eyed color and consistency, sniffed, then sent it down the hatch. The verdict: a fruity nose and a rich, sugary flavor with chunks of strawberry.

Clearly, this was not just another tasting in wine country.

For decades, visitors have flocked to the breathtaking Napa Valley, 50 miles north of San Francisco, to scope out the 300-plus wineries. But tourists do not live by wine alone.

For a respite from grapes, chow down at Copia: the American Center for Wine, Food, and the Arts. The 2 1/2 year-old educational attraction, partly funded by vintner Robert Mondavi, has carved a new tourists niche by offering mouth-pleasing activities like that strawberry jam taste-off. While fine dining has always been a trademark of the area, famous for restaurants like the French Laundry, Copia encourages all-day nibbling.

Admission (\$12.50) includes two wine sampling stations, but visitors can take advantage of food tasting, too, as well as edible gardens (munching encouraged) and lively cooking demos by staffers



and the occasional celebrity chef. To burn off calories, wander through exhibits like "Opening Acts: Three Centuries of Corkscrews" and "Forks in the Road," the permanent display on the history of food and wine, with panels on subjects like Mesopotamian straw usage. (Early beers, it seems, were thick and messy.)

Copia's location in downtown Napa, just blocks from an International House of Pancakes, doesn't evoke the rolling hills and endless grapevines of the rest of the valley. So when you've filled up, drive 15 minutes to St. Helena Olive Oil Company, a picturesque store nestled among a row of wineries. Taste bud stimulation awaits in the wide selection of gourmet food, from chipotle chili marinade to truffled artichoke tapenade - all out for sampling - and olive oil and vinegar tasting bars. Wine snobs, don't worry. Vino has its place at the store - in barrels in the back, where its turning into vinegar.

### FOOD FOR TOURISTS

**Copia: the American Center for Wine, Food, and the Arts** 500 First Street, Napa, Calif.; copia.org, (707) 259-1600, open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

**St. Helena Olive Oil Company** 8576 St. Helena Highway, Rutherford, Calif.; sholiveoil.com, (707) 967-1003, open 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

-Vicky Hallett