

Almost three decades ago, Christian Louboutin added colour and created an iconic shoe – and the innovation shows no signs of slowing

Red alert

By Grace Cain

Even if you didn't know fashion, you would know Christian Louboutin. From the era of *Sex and the City* and J-Lo's anthem 'Louboutins' (surely a golden age for us all) to Zendaya's street style and the poetry of Cardi B, those red soles have become a cross-generational signifier of glamour, empowerment and sex. Thankfully, since 2011, there has also been plenty for the men. Whether you like your sneakers bold, your loafers spikey or your boots covered in shiny studs, there's a lot for the well-dressed gentleman to love in the Louboutin world – as the likes of Leonardo DiCaprio, Ryan Gosling and Idris Elba have already proved.

The life and times of Louboutin (the man) is akin to a Dickensian coming-of-age tale, only with more Parisian nightclubs. From dropping out of school in his teens to serving an apprenticeship in the dressing rooms of the Folies-Bergère cabaret hall – and of course the pivotal moment his fascination with shoes began (thanks to a sign banning stilettos at the Palais de la Porte Dorée, the same museum that hosted a landmark retrospective of the designer's career earlier this year); no question, Christian Louboutin is full of stories to tell. Let's start with how the trademark scarlet first came to be...

So why the red soles?

A happy accident! My assistant was painting her nails red when we received one of my first prototypes. I didn't like the shoe's black sole, so I grabbed her nail polish and painted it. Thirty years later, it's still my signature.

How many shoes do you have in your personal collection?

Last time we counted it was something like 360.

What shoes should every man have in his wardrobe?

A pair of white sneakers and a black laced shoe.

What do you think of modern men's fashion?

You can find great pieces from many different designers, but you should never do total looks.

What does 'fashionable' mean to you?

Fashionable is not necessarily a compliment. I prefer that word when it speaks about something other than clothes – food, for example.

What is your fashion pet peeve?

Clogs. I hate them.

Who do you most admire?

Salesmen who have the patience and the enthusiasm to give great advice to their client. It takes a great deal of energy and generosity to be beside people while they are shopping, because although this is often a moment of joy, it can also be one of insecurity.

What's your guilty pleasure?

I prefer not to reveal them, but I have plenty.

What do you collect?

I'm not really a collector; I'm more of a gatherer. Collecting is too restrictive. You can collect so much, from 1960s Scandinavian furniture to Pre-Columbian art, and I'm interested in too many things to stick with one. I'm easily emotional when it comes to objects and pieces of art, so no *fil rouge* required.

How would you describe your taste in interior design?

Some people would call it 'eclectic', which is perfectly fine with me.



Christian Louboutin at the Palais de la Porte Dorée's 'L'Exhibition(nist)', a retrospective of his work

I'm more of a maximalist, mixing different cultures, eras and styles. I like curated accumulations.

What's the best item you've ever purchased?

A Bella Freud jumper with a message.

What does 'luxury' mean to you?

Recent events and the situation we now find ourselves in have proved to me that time is definitely luxury. And until we were confined, I didn't realise how much I loved to see my garden blooming.

How do you relax?

I consult Terrence the Teacher [a practitioner at The Wellness Clinic on the Fourth Floor of Harrods]. It's very practical. He is a genius at understanding what different personalities need to feel better.

Can you describe your ideal evening out?

Good friends, some drinks and a great DJ firing the dance floor with Tina Turner, Donna Summer, Maluma and Rosalía.

How about your ideal evening in?

A glass of bourbon on the rocks after walking back home from the office in the golden-hour light under a dark blue sky.

What's the secret to hosting an amazing party?

Serve strong and powerful cocktails early in the night to make sure

the guests get a little bit tipsy – then the party takes off quickly!

What do you love most about Paris?

Having my friends and my family here. It makes it home.

You were once a gymnast. Discuss...

I used to do trapeze a while ago, after watching Solveig Dommartin in *Wings of Desire*.

Who made the biggest impression on you when you first met them?

Prince. One thousand times, Prince. For such a small man, he had the tallest charisma and a very powerful aura.

Who would you most love to see wearing your shoes?

I would have said the Pope, but it's kind of already been done as I made the shoes for Jude Law in the television series *The Young Pope*. So now I would say the Queen.

What is your proudest achievement?

My daughters.

Can you summarise your 2020?

Introspective, challenging – and definitely worth living.

The Loubiworld fragrance collection is now available exclusively in-store. The Beauty and Perfumery Halls, Ground Floor



Derbytoto shoes £695



Loubishark trainers £695



Samson boots £965



Lou Spikes VS sneakers £795

Menswear, Second Floor