

CASE STUDY: LIZA SNOOK

Dutch footwear enthusiast and curator Liza Snook traces her love affair with shoes back to her early childhood, when she saw a pair of shoes in the window of an Italian shop. Despite training as a graphic artist she has, since her childhood, been interested in all things relating to footwear. The Virtual Shoe Museum is an online gallery and portal that celebrates all things footwear. Its origins go back to the mid-1980s, when Snook started to collect and archive shoe-related information from newspapers and magazines, as well as real shoes. She also has an extensive collection of Barbie shoes. The website is designed by Liza's partner, Taco Zwaanswijk.

Q What is the purpose of the museum?

A It started as a project to collect and categorize the shoes I liked best. Today it has become a worldwide network for shoe designers and shoe lovers and a source for journalists, publishers and young talent. The core of our virtual collection focuses on designs that question the very essence of the shoe. Is this a shoe? Is this wearable? Does it matter? Is it tickling your imagination? Designs that balance between these values and still present a shoe that can be worn, or looks as if it could be worn, are what I'm after – a twist, a sense of humour.

Q How do you choose material for the museum?

A I like collecting designs, works of art, inspiring images and objects, and in particular anything about shoes. My hunting grounds are very diverse: the Internet, flea markets, book stores, museums. Now many artists find us and present their prototypes or designs to be included in our collection. In the beginning I relied on my own archive and personal interest in the shoe designer community. Of course in time you meet so many designers and artists, and I'm glad they find their way to us when they're working on a new collection.

Q You also gather drawings and pretty much anything relating to footwear. Do you have some kind of a system?

A Having a system, method or protocol will inevitably exclude things that won't fit. The things that won't fit are in fact the ones that interest me most. They exist on the edge, and that's what I find interesting. So no, there is no list with qualifications or criteria you have to meet to be selected. Any proposed design will be judged on originality, influence and potential, no matter who the designer is. Of course there are people I follow, because they keep reinventing themselves and I really admire this. But new talent is always welcome, since my museum doesn't have any limits on presentation space.



Liza Snook's Virtual Shoe Museum provides a platform and a portal to a world that celebrates the diversity in footwear design. The content can be searched based on numerous indicators and end use, colour and materials.

Q Why do you think it is important to preserve some of the ideas you have gathered?

A Preservation is important for various reasons. Most shoe designers are focused on their next collection, as they should be. Sometimes their current and previous collections can get dismissed. The Virtual Shoe Museum aims to present relevant work from any era, so designers and shoe lovers can be inspired by designs from all ages. Another reason is that many designs that are presented today mimic designs we have seen before. But the fashion industry is so committed to what's next that historical awareness is sometimes lacking. With our rooms dedicated to different themes, materials, colours and focus we try to create a context for the designs of tomorrow. The final reason for preservation is that the Virtual Shoe Museum aims to be a platform for young talent. Shoe designers and artists can have direct contact with the curator of the museum. Mail is replied to quickly, and when a design is innovative and inspiring it will find its way to our homepage.

Q What are your plans for the future?

A We are hoping to set up a shop, so we can start to earn funds to support the growth of the non-profit initiative. One of the things we like to do is to connect and inspire people, share information. A new way of doing this has been to become a 'non-virtual' space. Some of the products were presented in real time at fairs such as GDS in Düsseldorf (Germany) and the Dongguan (China) shoe fair.

Q Can you mention some of the designers you feature?

A Our virtual shoe collection includes a big variety of shoes: shoes made by designers and artists but also shoes made by architects, illustrators and photographers. I admire designers such as Marloes ten Bhömer, Kobi Levi and Ted Noten as well as artists such as Barbara Zucchi, Iris Schieferstein and Svenja Ritter.

Q What do shoes signify for you?

A To me shoes are wearable art objects. They can make or break your outfit. The kind of shoes you choose show who you are: they are a public announcement, a personal touch to an outfit. So, be aware of your shoes!

Q What advice can you give a future shoe-design hopeful?

A Push the (shoe) design limits! Inspire and awe people. Go crazy, think weird, out of the box and broaden your perspective.