



Clockwise from left: patination in progress on Berluti Venezia leather Alessandro shoes, £1,350. JM LeGazel leather Carrosse boots, €550. Bespoke Patina by Lacour leather Zephir trainers, from €300. Maison Corthay suede and calfskin Brighton loafers, £1,280. Bontoni calfskin Speciale Derby, £1,395

# patina of shiny feet

Patinated shoes are gaining ground across the style spectrum, putting a swagger in every step. **Nick Scott** reports

**T**here was a time when the word “patina” rarely came up in conversation – unless, perhaps, a child asked why the Statue of Liberty is green. Nowadays, it has become as much a part of the shoe buff’s lexicon as “last”, “welt” and “upper”. Real enthusiasts stroke their chins and ponder the depth and nuance of dye applied to shoe leather like art critics poring over the brushwork on a Winslow Homer seascape, while workbenches littered with brushes, sponges and bottles of multihued ink enjoy altar-like status in the factories of luxury brands the world over.

Meanwhile, a bold approach to patination is becoming de rigueur among the style-conscious, thanks in part to the rise of sartorial individualism – and its enforcer, personalisation. “The uniqueness of each pair of shoes, and the handcrafting, is what makes a difference in this world of mass manufacturing,” says Toronto *ennoblesseur de cuir* Emmanuel Farré of Maison Patina. “When

clients ask me to copy an existing shoe’s patina, I let them know the outcome isn’t going to be the same – every stroke turns out differently.”

“We owe a lot to Olga Berluti,” says Landry Lacour, an independent artist operating in Brussels, of the woman formerly at the helm of the brand perhaps most readily associated with patinas. “In the early 1980s, she started to introduce patination as a way of reproducing the beneficial effects of age on leather.” While the Parisian house safeguards its patination methodology like the Vatican does its *Archivum Secretum*, its master shoemaker Anthony Delos does offer some insight. “Our patina is achieved by our expert colourists on our emblematic Venezia leather – a natural leather that goes

through mineral and vegetable tanning, which is what gives the colours their characteristic transparency – using pigments and essential oils,” he says.

Berluti’s Alessandro lace-ups (£1,350, pictured top) in Venezia leather, whose uppers’ rich amber graduates to a tobacco brown at the shoes’ extremities, have a hint of swagger that’s subtle enough for the most formal of surroundings. Similarly, the Classic monkstraps (£1,440, pictured overleaf) in medium flannel black (think brushed steel) with *scritto* etching are unorthodox but won’t furrow brows, even in stiffer surroundings.

Lacour’s own recently launched ready-to-wear collection, manufactured in a small atelier in Veneto, Italy, also offers boardroom-friendly flair, notably the Sunrise Derby (£390). Like Farré, Provence-born Lacour has a thoughtful approach to his work. “It’s important to respect the leather, just as you respect the wool when making a suit,” he says. “I’d never use solvent to strip the hide – it reduces its lifespan – and I’d always start with raw crust leather, never aniline or chrome leather. To apply the colour I use cloth, brushes, sponges, bird feathers, but never an airbrush.”

His craft, he says, is all about animating the final product. “With

bespoke-grade patinas, it’s not just about putting a colour on a shape; it’s about using a colour to enhance a shape. Colour can give depth, or it can appear to reduce width. Light colours make parts appear bigger. The leather assumes a new life of its own at the hands of a patina artist.”

Franco Gazzani, co-founder of Bontoni – a third generation shoemaker, which hand-makes fewer than 2,200 pairs a year in its workshop in Montegrano – agrees. “When one layer of dye overlaps another, it builds an entirely new hue. This delicate interplay of translucency and depth is critical to accentuating the natural beauty and grain of the leather. It takes between three and four days to finish a patina. Some of our formulas have 13 to 15 blends of essential oils, natural pigments, dyes, creams and waxes.” Bontoni’s Speciale lace-up Derby (£1,395, pictured on previous page), with antiqued olive wood patina, are an elegant choice for those seeking to inject some élan into their smarter casual ensembles.

More chromatic swashbuckling on classic shoes can be found in the Savile Row premises of Gaziano & Girling, which two years ago launched a patina service across all its products, but primarily on its bespoke and made-to-order offerings. The relatively young house’s Mitchell full brogue Oxfords (from £1,045, pictured top right) in midnight blue, along with its classic Burlington (from £1,015) and Forsyth (£610) shapes in rich blends of primary colours, offer head-turning results with jeans. “We start with almost a pastel form of the finished colour, then apply layers of dye with a brush, building up the colour and creating a nice transparent flow through the shoe,” explains in-house patina master Neus Benavent. “Finally we work with the contrast, shading darker in certain areas to give a real three-dimensional effect.”

Other colour-saturated options to wear with casual trousers include JM LeGazel’s Goodyear welted brogues (£305) in two-tone absinthe green and grey, as well as the jodhpur-style Carrosse boots (€550, pictured on previous page), which have a lightly dappled blue patina that the brand calls galaxy blue, along with American maker Paul Parkman’s crocodile-skin Oxfords (\$1,975, pictured below) in bordeaux.

For those who embrace experimentation, consider a recent collaboration between small Florentine atelier Stefano Bemer and Dandy Shoe Care – Alexander Nurulaeff’s Parma-based enterprise, which maintains and embellishes footwear to order. The duo’s Life is a Jungle camouflage offering (€1,500, pictured below centre) is one of the edgier examples of Nurulaeff’s



Clockwise from above: Gaziano & Stirling calfskin Mitchell brogues, from £1,045. Santoni calfskin moccasins, €680. Ermenegildo Zegna calfskin Modern Mocassin, £460. Applying a first liquid patina colour at JM LeGazel



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capacity for “delicate chromatic balance”, as Stefano Bemer CEO Tommaso Melani describes it.

Stepping down the formality ladder another rung or two, Santoni’s autumn/winter collection features stunning moccasin/loafer hybrids in burned brown and burgundy (€680, pictured above right), made using a method that involves between six and 15 layers of colour for each shoe, and Ermenegildo Zegna has a wonderfully simple patinated brown slip-on, the calfskin Modern Mocassin (£460, pictured above left), in its spring/summer collection. Parisian shoemaker Maison Corthay has taken the art into more audacious realms by applying patinas to suede. In its latest collection of loafers, the Brighton (£1,280, pictured on previous page), with an olive patina gently morphing into chardonnay towards the tip, is the standout. “We work with a special paintbrush for suede,” explains the brand’s founder Pierre Corthay. “It’s a long process, as we must be very careful not to apply too much paint – suede absorbs the liquid very quickly.”

With patination also now being applied to upmarket trainers – notably those from Lacour’s ready-to-wear collection (example pictured on previous page, from £300) and Berluti’s Playtime low-top sneaker (£990) – patinated footwear is now available right across the formality spectrum as well as the chromatic one.

Interestingly, though, not all makers have caught the bug. Northampton company Crockett & Jones prefer a process it calls burnishing, which alters the tones of the leather with gentle friction, while James Ducker, co-founder of Carréducker, points out that patinated shoes can be high-maintenance. “To stay looking good they need a high shine, which in turn needs daily top-ups – and a layer of lacquer applied on top is not good for the longevity of the uppers,” he says. “So they’re an investment to keep looking good...”

It’s an investment worth making, though, if classic elegance with a soupçon of flamboyance sounds like a compelling sartorial standpoint. ♦

## STROKES OF GENIUS

**Berluti**, 43 Conduit St, London W1 (020-7437 1740; www.berluti.com). **Bespoke Patina by Lacour**, +324-6095 0567; www.bespokepatina.fr. **Bontoni**, Via Elpidiense Nord 27, 63014 Montegrano (+39335-495 282; www.bontoni.com). **Carréducker**, Studio W9, Cockpit Yard, Norththington St, London WC1 (020-7813 0093; www.carreducker.com). **Crockett & Jones**, 92 Jermyn St, London SW1 (020-7839 8717; www.crockettandjones.com). **Ermenegildo Zegna**, 203-204 Sloane St, London SW1 (020-7201 7000; www.zegna.com). **Gaziano & Girling**, 39 Savile Row, London W1 (020-7439 8717; www.gazianoandgirling.com). **Harrods**, 87-135 Brompton Rd, London SW1 (020-7734 1234; www.harrods.com). **JM LeGazel**, Le Palais des Congrès de Paris, 2 Place de la Porte Maillot, Paris 75017 (+331-4068 0372; www.jmlegazel.com). **Maison Corthay**, 24A Motcomb St, London SW1 (020-7235 5481; www.corthay.com). **Maison Patina**, Loding Toronto, 133 Avenue Rd, Toronto M5R 2H7 (+1416-962 0133; www.maisonpatina.com). **Paul Parkman**, 3503 Jack Northrop Ave, Hawthorne, CA 90250 (+1888-414 6439; www.paulparkman.com). **Santoni**, Via Monte Napoleone 6, 20121 Milan (+3902-7628 0508; www.santonishoes.com) and see Harrods. **Stefano Bemer**, Via di San Niccolò 2, Florence 50125 (+39055-046 0476; www.stefanobemersrl.com).

From far left: Berluti leather Classic monkstraps, £1,460. Stefano Bemer x Dandy Shoe Care box-calf Life is a Jungle, £1,500. Paul Parkman crocodile Oxfords

