



BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

After an "awful year in 2000, I didn't know what I was going to do and ended up upside down. Friends of mine in the shoe industry said, 'George, you know what to do. Why are you trying to look for a job? You know more than most people in this business do.'" With that, Mang and a friend sat in a coffee shop, drank espresso and put together a business plan. "Hook me up to a coffee IV and I'm happy," says the self-professed "hyper" shoe guru. And, in 2003, a super-charged George Mang shoe line was born.

MOTHER'S LITTLE HELPER

"I think my customer is the Manolo Blahnik customer's daughter or little sister," says Mang. "The shoes have a little bit of an edge to them. They're very sophisticated, beautiful shoes, but they have a certain flavor to them." Mang has no animosity for Blahnik. In fact, it's just the opposite. "Thank God for Manolo Blahnik. He paved the way for me because he's brought attention back to footwear." Mang never thought he'd see the day "when people would pay \$500 for a pair of shoes. But young women in their 20s and early 30s grew up with prices like that and it's not a big deal to them."

SOME GIRLS

The designer notes slight differences in how East and West Coast women wear their shoes. "In New York, you see a lot of boots because of the weather. In Los Angeles, it's open shoes all year long." Mang's line "translates to both coasts. It's a broad enough collection even though it goes from high heels to higher heels. There's not a low heel in the bunch. That's not where I'm going with this."

SYMPATHY FOR THE (SHE) DEVIL

"The first thing women say when they try on a pair of my shoes is, 'My God, they're really comfortable.' My shoes really fit." And though his heels are high, they're well balanced, right down to heel design and padded sock linings. "Women aren't going to put up with shoes that are uncomfortable."

STEEL (W)HEELS

"Embodying that rock 'n' roll feeling," silver spiked heels and metallic linings enhance Mang's collection, finishing the black and white short London boot and the seemingly proper purple satin pointy-toed pump alike. The designer "did some sweet little shoes with tassels, but you spin the shoe around and it's got a metal stiletto on it. I like the surprise element. Somebody said I'm the architect of the shoe business. I like modern touches like a metal heel on an otherwise classic upper. It works, but you have to do a doubletake."

SHE'S A RAINBOW

"I believe in color," says Mang. For Spring 2004, he's working with "pastel colors. They'll be bright, but moved up a notch. The purple is going to be brought up to a bright lavender. The pink is going to be a bit peachier. Color puts you in a good mood."

ANGIE

"Angelina Jolie is great," says Mang of the woman he plans to see in his shoes. "There's a certain mystery about her. She's spectacular." And Mang romances Jolie's edgy sophistication in his shoe designs. "The woman who wears my shoes has to be bold. These are not safe shoes. They're not for everybody." Though not for everybody, they're for every occasion. "A woman can wear a pair of my shoes with an evening gown and wear them again the next week on holiday in the Hamptons with jeans."

YOU CAN ALWAYS GET WHAT YOU WANT

"I'm an extreme sort of guy. I chain smoke Marlboros, but I run marathons. I'm complicated." Bi-coastal — international, really — Mang spends about 300 days a year on the road, selling shoes, working with Italian factories, designing collections, or trend spotting by watching girls passing by. "It's like a rock 'n' roll band. I think I'm onto something here."