

BOB INCORPORATED



Lady's pumps with turquoise suede upper with golden leather straps with gold print decoration and waisted heels.

Bob Inc., N.Y., 1925-1927, USA

What's in the name?

Attributing shoes is not an easy task. Some styles, regions or periods are easier to define, but others keep their mystery of origin.

Art Deco era with its ostentatious opulence have coincided with the start of globalisation and development of new speedier transportation systems that resulted in faster exchange of technology and ideas, including fashion. Paris was the European fashion capital and the word "French" was often taken for fashionable. Shoe styles were shamelessly copied, but at the same time designers were gaining more prominence and shoe design was becoming a value in itself.

Big names in shoe manufacturing in the USA were one way or another connected with great European designers. Examples are numerous: it was customary for Israel Miller to travel to Europe every year to buy new shoe styles, new buckles and celluloid heels. His brother Leo, responsible for the creative side of business, lived in Paris and worked with Andre Perugia.

Italian self-taught shoe genius Salvatore Ferragamo was catering for Hollywood stars, Italian-born French shoe artist Andre Perugia was creating shoe styles for Sax Fifth Avenue and even registered a new Padova brand for US

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CUSTOM FOOTWEAR BY **PADOVA** PARIS

In opening the Padova shop on our fourth floor—replica of the much favored Padova shop in Paris—we inaugurate a new service in fine footwear. Padova shoes are the creations of one of the greatest shoe designers in the world today. It is our great pleasure to announce that all Padova models are sent to us from Paris and will be faithfully reproduced here in the Padova shop just opened on our fourth floor. Padova shoes are custom-order only. Each pair is made entirely by hand to individual order. Models for Spring are now being shown, priced from \$45.00 according to material and design chosen.

Padova design—original model developed in concrete shape of black patent leather lined in silver kidkin.

Padova design—original model developed in blue kid with reversed camp collar and high heel of white kid.

CHICAGO **SAKS FIFTH AVENUE** NEW YORK
*Design Patent Applied For

Padova brand was created by Andre Perugia in 1933. Exclusive rights for the US market were owned by Sax Fifth Avenue. They have opened a replica of the Padova shop in Paris at the fourth floor of Sax in New York. All models were sent from Paris and reproduced in Sax. Shoes were custom-order only and made by hand. Depending on the design and materials used they were priced from \$45.00.

distribution. Herman Delman - a high-style shoe designer himself, was cooperating with artists like Erte (Romain de Tiroff), shoe designers like Edward Rayne and Roger Vivier. Henri Bendel, founder of the most fashionable eponymous store in New York, was selling shoes made exclusively for him in Belgium by Debusschere.

These are just a few well-known and documented instances of cooperation between American manufacturers and retailers with European shoe designers. Way more than what fashion historians know is buried under the dust of fast changing shoe style preferences.

Here comes the Bob!



One of the brands in my collection, that I have always been proud of is Bob Inc. For a long time I did know anything about the firm and even 17 pairs with the same label in the Met museum were not of much help - no information there either.

Recently I have discovered that Bob Inc. was incorporated in June 1919 in Manhattan by G.S. Harron, Elisabeth Spear, who served as president and Vida L. Moore - vice-president and treasurer, with the registered capital of 5 000 dollars. Mrs. Elisabeth Spear died in 1950 at the age of 87 and the NY Times obituary said that “despite of her age she had been active in the firm until her death.”

Her son, George F. Spear, partner in the shoe firm, was running the business till he died in 1960 at the age of 76 and bequeathed all 500 shares issued by the corporation to the employees of the firm. One of the names mentioned is Leo Amato, who at that time seemed to be a young boy.

On October 26, 1970 New York Magazine published a two-page feature by Janet Spencer about custom shoemaking in the Big Apple. Here is how she described Bob Inc., - one of the few surviving but still thriving companies.

“The waiting room of Bob Inc. (363 Seventh Avenue at 30th Street, eighteenth floor, Monday-Friday 9-5) has the opulent charm of the 1930s, when society’s grandes dames filled the book with orders. Today, Leo Amado, the owner, laments that women will spend \$1,000 on a dress but will not put that much money into shoes - in the old days one woman customer ordered 50 pairs a year. In spite of it all, he carries on in good fashion and still makes shoes for such notables as Mrs. Merriweather Post. His shop is primarily for women, but he does make men’s shoes as well. Lasts cost \$100, and the shoes start at \$140. The 60-year old shop has eight employees and no Bob (no one is quite sure where the name come from). They do a great deal of piecework for other bootmakers in town.”



Delman ad page in Vogue with news about new fashion styles cabled from Paris.

Vogue 1937, USA



Ladies pumps with gold embossed leather upper

Bob Inc., 1925-1927, USA

Here comes the artist!



Bob Inc. shoes

When you look at some of the shoes by Bob Inc. you get the feeling they are a work of art. So, who was that artist? And once again no clues at all until quite suddenly I spotted a page from French Vogue (October 1, 1924) with the advert of new Perugia shoe styles. The text of the ad stresses the contrast between richness of the shoes made of gold and silver brocade, lamé, printed and embroidered velvets and chastity of the dress. The shoe models at the page are quite different in style, but one model seemed to be very familiar.

In comparison the similarity was striking - there was no doubt, it was Andre Perugia design incarnated in a shoe by Bob Inc. I am sure it was not a mere casual copy, but most probably some kind of legitimate cooperation between the famous French designer and American high-class custom shoemaker.

I would not say that the mystery of Bob Inc. is solved, but at least some light is shed on its glorious history.



Advertising page with new shoe styles from
Andre Perugia

Vogue, p 3, October 1, 1924, France