

# Sole Man

Giuseppe Zanotti talks to Hafsa Lodi about low-key living, outrageous celebrity requests, and maximum heel height

Giuseppe Zanotti has created far-fetched footwear for some of the world's most famous feet. And with a client list that reads like the who's who of Hollywood and includes supermodels, the First Lady and infamous lover of leftfield footwear Lady Gaga, the designer could be forgiven for having a head the size of one of Gaga's platform heels. The opposite is true. Grounded by his desire to design for real women and spread happiness in the middle of global crises, Zanotti is high-spirited, refreshingly fun and pleasantly humble on his recent visit to Dubai. But he's no push over, even where his big-name clients are concerned. Extravagance and opulence might define his creations, like the Dhs21,300 white knitted stilettos he produced for a collaboration with Kanye West, or the gold lace-up boots he made for Nicki Minaj's recent Super Bowl halftime performance, but even a designer of his prowess has his limits. As proven when a certain celebrity, who remains anonymous, asked him to create shoes made entirely out of ice. Giuseppe politely declined. "I like to do clean, artistic and sculptural shoes," he explains. "But I can't create the impossible!" Zanotti's home life is dictated by the same down-to-earth charm.



*"I like to do clean, artistic and sculptural shoes, but I can't create the impossible!"*

Words by Hafsa Lodi, Photography by Atif Abu-Samra



Contrary to his celebrity fans, many of whom thrive on the avant-garde and ostentatious, he is, at his core, a simple man. At our photoshoot, when presented with a lavish room decorated in gold and scattered with ornate furniture, he plumps instead for an abandoned grey storage space. He loves the empty area, moving chairs, dishes and garbage around to style his own backdrop. Giuseppe likes his work environment, like his home, to feel organic. "In Italy, I don't live in Milan, or in Rome, I live in the perfect suburban area on a little farm," he tells us. The designer is also inspired by the way culture coexists with modernity in the Middle East, and muses that Middle Eastern women effortlessly embody both, especially in Dubai, a city that he feels is "open, beautiful and sparkling, with new vibrations and energies," reminding him of New York City during the '80s. "We have traditions on one hand and modern life on the other. I like this stage of being in between, this balance," he says. "Never forget tradition, but also look forward." In addition to having one foot in the past and one in the future, the Middle Eastern Zanotti woman, according to the designer, is cultured and appreciates luxury, but has a life outside of clubs, parties, galas and banquets. He prides himself on creating practical pieces for real women and claims that 75% of the 800 shoes he produces each season are dedicated to women who are out and about during the day. "A woman's real life is going to drop her kids to school in the morning, doing work at home, spending time with her family and friends. He adds: "My client will have pieces from both H&M and Chanel in her wardrobe. She needs to play with fashion; she has the responsibility of putting together her own outfit."

Zanotti also views his creations as gifts to women, who deserve occasional splurges in an era where news and current events are dominated by conflict and tragedy. "We know that there are problems everywhere, but we should not think about them all the time," he says. "When women go shopping they need to feel free." His fundamental mission is to spread optimistic energy, which is why he plays a big role in planning and executing his campaigns. This upbeat energy is translated in his new collection for Spring Summer 2012, which features colour-blocking in sherbet shades, hues of turquoise and cobalt blue, python textures, platforms and jewelled embellishments. An ideal outfit for the season, he says, would be white denim jeans and a t-shirt with colourful pumps, or for the more Gaga of us, a pair of heel-less shoes. For those who think they can muster the pluck to wear these daring backless beauties, Zanotti advises that they restrict themselves to a maximum height of 30cm, and choose styles that have a platform at the front of the shoe. They can be dangerous to walk in, and he works on the design of each model for up to three months to ensure its stability. Much of his time is spent perfecting the technicalities of his shoes, so that they are easy to sell and fit, but most of all, beautiful and unique. We're sold.

*The Giuseppe Zanotti boutique is located in the Dubai Mall.*

