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# These Boots Were Made for Walking

By Annie Osburn

## A Would-Be Cowgirl's Journey to Lasso the Perfect Boots

For as long as I can remember, I have wanted my own pair of custom-made cowboy boots. While a half-dozen pairs of boots call my feet home, including my first denim-blue Panhandle Slims that I bought in 1988, none were made especially for me. For my latest pair, instead of trekking to a boot factory outlet store, I decided to go “old school.” I visited Deana McGuffin of Albuquerque, New Mexico, a third-generation bootmaker and the real deal.

I wore my best pair of Nocona's—burgundy leather with cream cut-out overlays and underslung heels—but McGuffin was polite enough not to look below my knees. I went with the intention of having her craft a kickin' pair of custom boots, but I left with another notion altogether. McGuffin teaches one-on-one, two-week boot-making classes. Call it a learning vacation or call it obsession, but I already have my fire-engine red kid leather boots with yellow kangaroo sunflowers mapped out. Although I drove to Albuquerque's South Valley with visions of having an Our Lady of Guadalupe emblazoned on my front boot shaft, it was that yellow kangaroo that made me decide to make my own.

Inside of McGuffin's shop, boots in a rainbow of colors and designs line the workbenches, some dating back more than 30 years to when her father crafted boots after learning the trade from his father, who began boot-making in Roswell, New Mexico, in 1915. Following in their footsteps, McGuffin has been making custom cowboy boots for more than 25 years and is one of only a handful of women bootmakers in the country.

“Factory boots are made for everybody. Custom boots are made for you,” says McGuffin, whose boots range from \$2,100 to \$6,000. “The big difference is fit and quality of materials. Most of my customers don't want fancy boots. They just want *quality* boots.”

The downside of buying factory-made boots, even top-line brands like Tony Lama, Lucchese or Rocketbuster, is the necessity to try on a dozen pairs before you find those that fit like a glove. I already know that nothing will compare to my custom-made pair—with uppers that gently embrace my instep, covers that hug my narrow heels and arches that speak the language of my flat feet.

Perhaps I heard it best in a comedic film about a shoe factory that converts production from wingtips to boots in order to save the family business. A factory

worker in the film noted that a boot's arch is steep, which shifts the body's alignment, lifting the posterior. While that never stopped a cowboy, there is a magical attitude adjustment that can only be found inside a cowboy boot. ■

*Annie Osburn writes for national magazines, including National Geographic Traveler, Art & Antiques and Jewelry Artist. She is the author of three books. Her latest is Visions of Sonwai.*

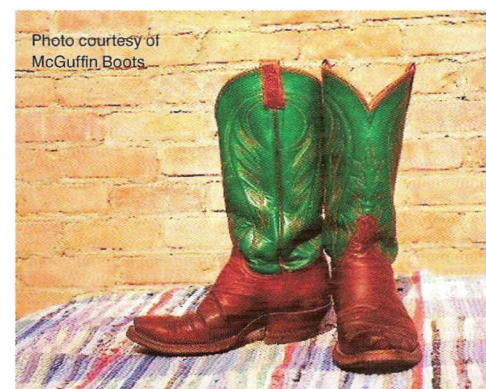


Photo courtesy of McGuffin Boots

Custom boots by Deana McGuffin

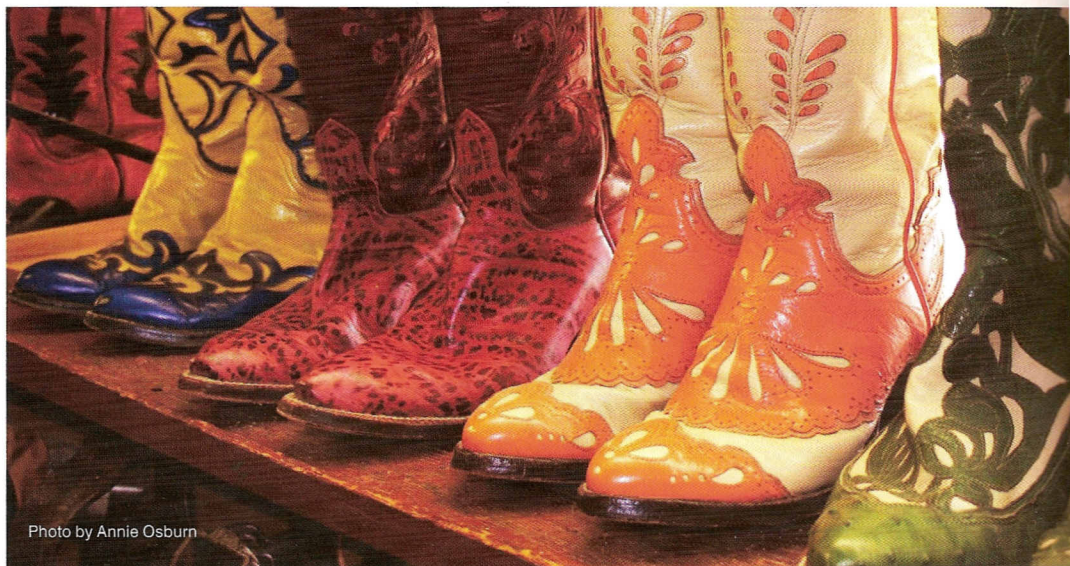


Photo by Annie Osburn