

# the spill

## louise mcbride

Marie-Christine Sourris interviews this tax law specialist and haute couture collector.

**I'VE PRACTISED** law for over 20 years and started collecting haute couture in 1988 after my daughter was born – I bought a piece to mark that massive milestone in my life. Now I think I own about 20 pieces. Each one has significance to me, because I usually buy them as a reward for achieving some goal I've set for myself.

I believe all couture outfits are for wearing, not just for putting behind glass or in a wardrobe to collect dust. I don't buy all the time, so when I do it's because I really love it. Not all couture is eveningwear – I have a number of business suits I wear all the time. Other pieces are suitable for dinner or cocktail parties and I do have several more spectacular outfits that are for balls or big parties, which I do wear, but less often.

If I'm thinking of buying a piece, I go to the haute couture shows in Paris in July or January. After the show you make an appointment and go back to the salon and look closely at all the pieces. It's sheer pleasure for me, like being in an art gallery. You can sometimes try them on if they're not too tiny; if you can't fit into a sample, usually they send you a dossier with a sample swatch, a sketch and the price. Then you place an order if you're happy with it.

A fitting can take one to two hours depending on the outfit. The designers aren't present; the most important person to meet is the head of the department that is in charge of your outfit. I have met Karl Lagerfeld, Yves St Laurent, Valentino and Alexander McQueen (when he designed for Givenchy) either after the shows or at a lunch, but never at a fitting.

The price can really be anything. A suit could range from \$25,000 to \$50,000; an evening dress from \$80,000 to \$250,000. Smaller items like silk shirts are about \$10,000. It really depends on the item, the fabric and embroidery (if any) involved. Typically, they work on a three-month delivery time.

I don't really collect shoes because they get beaten to death.



I'm very hard on them. I've lost count of how many I own. Certain shoes I really love so I keep re-heeling them, but after a while they're just too scruffy to wear!

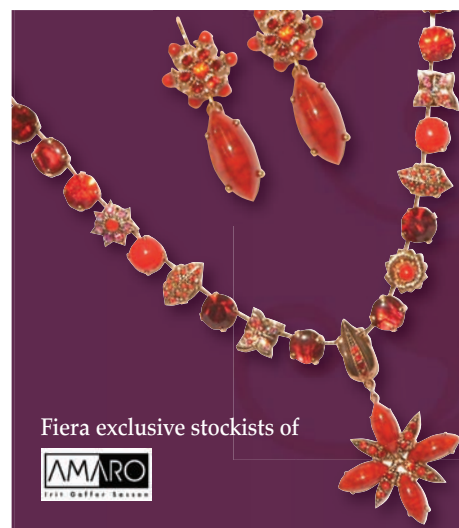
One day I was getting ready for work, and I wanted to wear a fabulous pair of red slingbacks I own with a pair of fishnet stockings. I was running late and realised I wouldn't be able to walk to my meeting in a hurry because every few metres I would be stopping to hitch up the strap! I was complaining about the problem to my friends and contemplating why I was so stupid to wear ridiculous shoes when someone showed me a DVD of *Sex and the City* (a show I hadn't seen before) and Carrie was doing the same thing – pulling up the slingback on her shoe as she tried to walk along the street looking dignified.

I decided it must be a global problem if it made a major TV series; I thought there would already be a product out to keep shoe straps in place, but there wasn't. I started to research the idea and experiment. The strips needed to match the width and length of most slingbacks. The glue was the next issue: we had to search for a non toxic, long-holding, non-irritating glue which wouldn't stain or mark; that would let you take the shoe off and put it back on, and still hold. I wanted a substance that could come into contact with itself without ruining.

My business partner, Tom Kowalczyk, and I had a few goes at getting it right. I had one sample that was so sticky that when I crossed my legs under a table, it actually stuck them together. I could write a book about the funny experiences I had trying to perfect the product. I had shoes in mind when I did the prototype, but the product works to keep bra straps, tops, even jewellery in place. A lot of celebrities are wearing the strips already. I have a doctor friend whose chemo patient is using Shoo Sticks to keep her wig in place. I'm really thrilled we ended up with a multi-use invention, even though it wasn't what I set out to make!

Setting up the company and getting distribution has taken so much time and planning, but eventually my business partner will run it. I think that being a lawyer helped me, because I'm trained to research and solve problems. (I've practiced law for over 20 years, and headed up the tax finance section in an international firm.) I think the excitement of inventing a product, seeing it manufactured and then receiving your first shipment is a bit like having a baby: any pain or fatigue seems to pale into insignificance given the sheer thrill you get from the end result.

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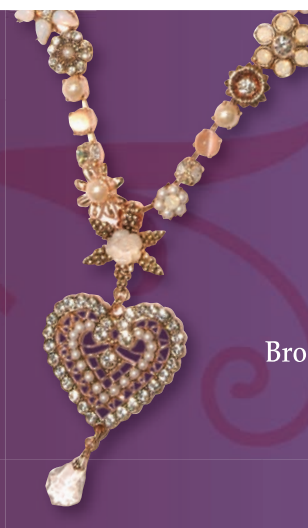


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