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# Holiday HOMES

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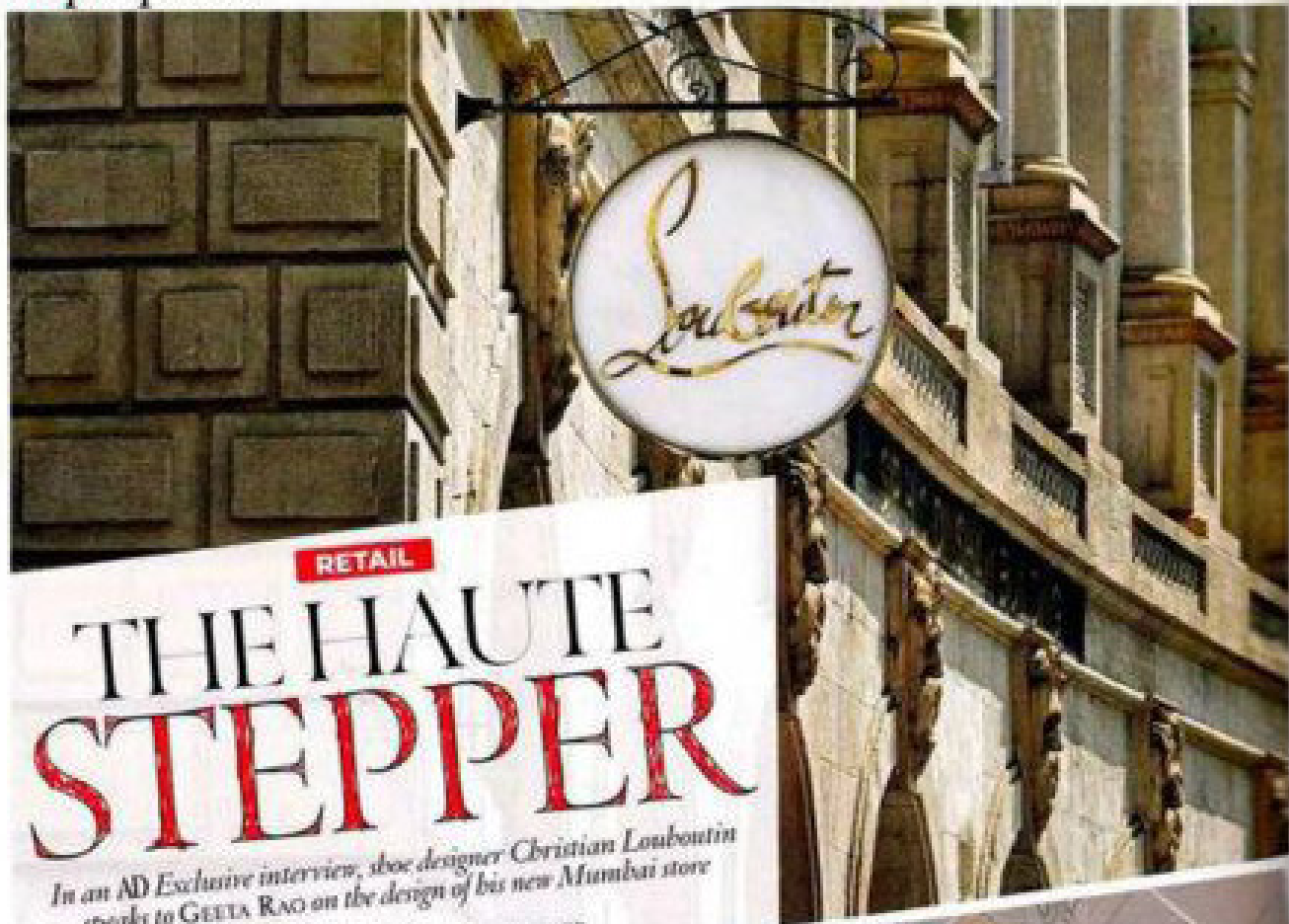
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**PLUS!**

MARC NEWSON IN MUMBAI

CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN'S  
LATEST INDIAN STORE

IN CONVERSATION WITH  
PRITZKER-PRIZE WINNER TOYO ITO



RETAIL

# THE HAUTE STEPPER

*In an AD Exclusive interview, shoe designer Christian Louboutin speaks to GEETA RAO on the design of his new Mumbai store*

PHOTOGRAPHER RITAM BANNERJEE

**T**he mid-morning sun turns the Porbandar stone of the 148-year-old Horniman Circle precinct an unusual shade of gold. Look up, and you will see bearded male terracotta faces gazing stoically past you as they survey the circular park and Italian Gothic style of the arcade. Largely inhabited by banks and printing presses, the Circle now has some interesting new tenants.

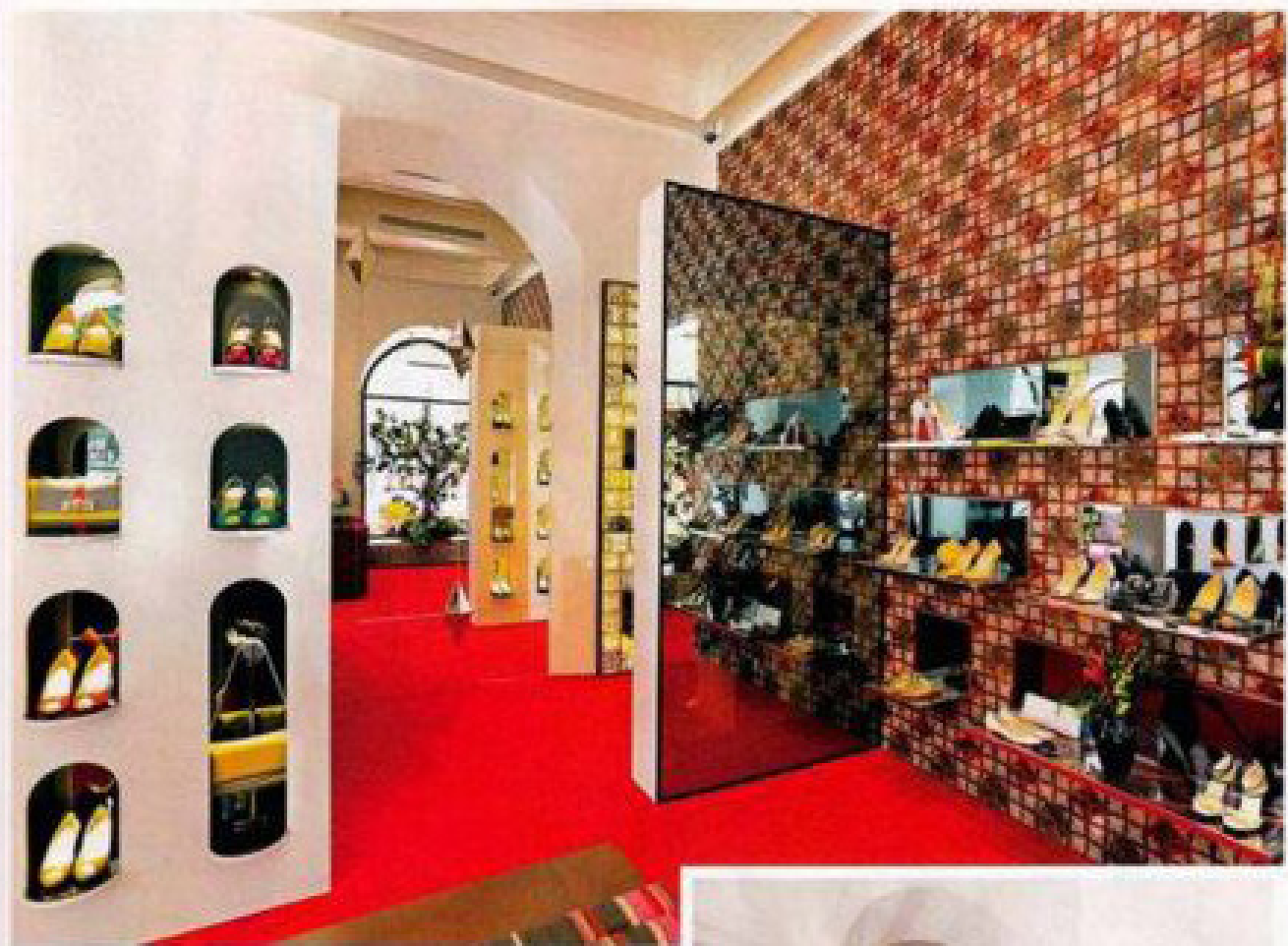
Horniman occupies two floors in the elegantly restored 15A. Now, Christian Louboutin, the man behind the 'Maralena', the 'Lady Sling' and 'Pigalle' spikes has set his coveted signature red (the trademarked Pantone-68 Chinese red) soles in the building old-time Mumbaiers know as the 'Zoroastrian Bank'.

Surveying his second Indian store, Louboutin is an excited man. The Sir HC Doshiwar building has been maintained in impeccable condition by its owners, but most importantly, it has an arcade that will protect his precious shoes from fading in the sun. The vision for Louboutin's second Indian store has been interpreted by Eric Clough, principal architect of New York-based firm, 1230x. Local architect Rooshad Shroff collaborated on the ground with the artisanal inputs.

## FOR THE WELL-HEELED

Louboutin's eponymous shoes are a skilful coexistence of design, beauty and flamboyance. And with their vertiginous heels, you





could add engineering and structural excellence to the list of superlatives. The prices may be vertiginous too, but that has not deterred women, especially Hollywood stars, from flocking to his stores.

In 2007, the designer's collaboration, titled 'Fetish', with photographer David Lynch, treated shoes as erotic sculptural objects. His creations earned him a retrospective at London's Design Museum in 2013.

Beyond shoes, however, his stores too are becoming destinations that are a convergence of the designer's ideas and aesthetic. And Clough has been his co-creator on most of them.

His Miami store (also Louboutin's favourite) for instance, has an installation by artist Madeleine Berkheimer; it is an erotic spider web made out of lingerie. Or the New Delhi one, his first in India, which has a braid made from hammered New England tin.

#### TILE TALES

Tiles are a recurring motif in his stores. So while in São Paulo, codes tiles with over 9,000 encrypted numbers and symbols mimicking hieroglyphs form a giant backdrop, in Dubai, they form an embedded poem. In Delhi, marble tiles in 32 languages form the Eiffel Tower. Tiles are a talking point in the two-level Mumbai store too. Wooden tiles, embroidered leather tiles and travertine (Italian sandstone)



#### RED-CARPET WELCOME

The store is spread over two storeys, where the shoes are displayed in racks and niches in the walls.

*(Opposite page: from top left)*

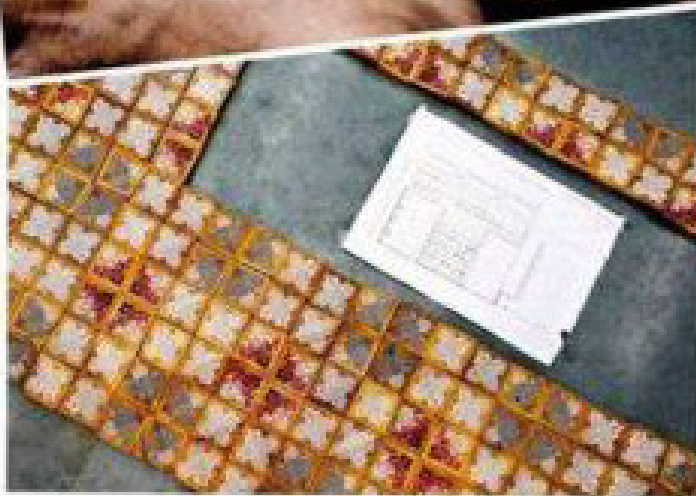
#### SIGNING IN

The signage of the new Louboutin store in Mumbai. Christian Louboutin is in the top-floor men's section.

*Of the shop*

**MEN AT WORK**

Carpenters and craftsmen working on wooden and travertine tiles that have been used in the men's section; an embroidery of French knots worked into the tiles. The spiral staircase leading to the upper level (right)



**"Christian's appreciation of local crafts, and the opportunity to use the local artisans to design elements within the boutique, allowed for an interesting collaboration between Zizbox and myself. We took the embroidery-on-wood technique a step further and incorporated it on a larger scale within the interiors as wall tiling" — ROOZHAD SHROFF**

• tiles are used innovatively in the men's section. A cash counter made of beaver rim and a wall of backlit etched brass tiles form an interesting counterpoint to meticulously handcrafted wooden screens. The centerpiece is a wall of 1,000 convex wood panels, each of which is handmade and hand embroidered with colored thread.

The arched windows of the heritage structure sit well with the newer design elements. But the signature alcoves for the famous shoes are still a focal point.

"My stores are different across the world but there are certain things that don't change," says Louboutin. "The shoe display shelves, the arched alcoves and the red carpet are in every store," he elaborates. "The display niche was in my first store. It's like a dovecote, a house of birds ready to take flight on some feet. Every shoe of mine has its own niche. It has transformed, become transparent and has mirrors. It has evolved so you can see the shoe in full but it is still true to the original."

"The red carpet is a reflection of the Louboutin red soles. That is my signature. You feel your feet are red, like the brides in India with red feet. I never do red on walls, no red on niches, always on the sole," he explains of the red touches, a signature shoe element that is reflected in the store design.

**THE INDO-FRENCH CONNECTION**

What sets the Mumbai store apart from his other boutiques across the world is the use of a mix of craftsmanship, embroidery and carving



*(From the top)*  
**FASHIONING A SPACE**  
 Workmen putting up the tiles, which have distinctly Indian craftsmanship. The waiting area at the store.

— that is quintessentially Indian. Clough has combined elements of different weaves, and materials like wood and stone with embroidery. While travertine and leather tiles were also used in other stores, here the masculinity of the tiles was offset by the delicacy of Indian embroidery.

"We have used wood panels and embroidery with classic French knots—a word play on the fact I am French—to form the Louboutin logo. It's in red and the French knots make it pop out but it's discreet. Around it is a geometric pattern, also seen in the embroidery, recreated by Eric. It's like layering a Parisian touch with the Indian and will form the centerpiece of the store," Louboutin explains. And the local touch is unmistakable: "I have used my name in Marathi for the exterior of the store."

#### SECRETS IN THE CLOSET

The design process was as much about chance discoveries along the way as it was about maintaining the aesthetic associated with the brand. Like the excitement of discovering things as the designer and the architect worked together on the building. "Under the plastering, we found an iron-wrapped pillar that we stripped, and decided to retain in its original form in the upstairs section," says Louboutin.

A beautiful wrought iron balcony frame has been stored away, to be used after incorporating the Louboutin initials into it. And like everything that has the designer's signature, it comes equipped with the flourish that is trademark Louboutin. ♦

## GLOBAL INSPIRATION

Over coffee from Starbucks—another newcomer in the vicinity—Louboutin talks to GEETA RAO about design, heels and Indian women

#### TWO-NATION THEORY

Egypt and India have had a great impact on me. India's impact has been on the details and colours, whereas Egypt is more architectural and detail oriented. India is more feminine, Egypt, masculine. Its forms are angled, straight lines. India is curves and embellishments. The thing about India is that it has never been cut off from its craftsmanship, so it is easy to find collaborations here."

#### CINEMA, CINEMA

"As a young man in Paris I watched a lot of Indian films and loved Dilip Kumar and Hema Malini. At that time, all the big studios were in Chennai. So when I came to India I went to Chennai. I even acted in a film but have forgotten the name.

European cinema was all about realism and darkness in the 1970s. Here everything was wonderful, alive and blossoming. The film posters had sequins and glitter and were so colourfully painted—I was very inspired.

Some of my collections have been Bollywood inspired (the most recent being the Spring-Summer 2011 collection). All the embroidery on my shoes is done by Jean-Francois Lesage in Chennai."

My house in Portugal looks quite Indian, it is covered with Bollywood posters."

#### INDIAN WOMEN

"Indian women know what they want. They love high heels but also want flat and medium heels... especially medium heels for saris. They are very specific so we created a special collection. In India, I have had to make heels into sandals!"

#### ARCHITECTURE OF THE HEEL

"It's all about balance. It's something that is in-built and comes naturally to me when I design. My heels go up to six inches. At one time, three inches was considered high. But I like high heels—they give you a different kind of body language. They make you slow down. Otherwise, everyone is running all the time. I don't see the point of that."