

Alexandra Voltan

What is 'behind the scenes' of an 'Alexandra Voltan' shoe?

Quite simply, a shoe factory. This factory is still family run, since its foundation in 1898 by Luigi Voltan, a man of volcanic intelligence and gifted with creativity. He was the very first in Italy who started production of shoes on an industrial scale. Up to that point, shoes were still produced by artisanal handwork, and I mean even for common everyday footwear. Voltan did his traineeship in the United States and then brought large-scale production know how back to his native town of Stra on the Riviera del Brenta – not far from Venice. Within a few years there were already 400 employees, and a production of 1000 pairs of shoes per day (and this at the beginning of 1900!). As other great businessmen of those years, he had a vein for philanthropy, in the sense that factory owners and workers were all viewed by him as a big family working together for profit, and therefore everyone should not only work for this, but should also profit from it. He provided housing for his workers: close to the factory and at a very low rent; he supported, both financially and with know-how, the local school for artisans and shoe-makers, and provided scholarships for orphans so that they could learn the job. Many famous names of the Riviera del Brenta who now produce footwear for haute couture brands or who even have their own brand name, are descendants of workers and supervisors in the Voltan factory.

How does your collection integrate into this tradition?

My collection, in the complete Voltan tradition and approach, puts the quality of materials and comfort ahead of all other requirements. Then comes the design front: mine are pieces that require much hand labour in their details and finish.

What are the materials used to achieve this?

This approach can be seen in our most representative shoe – the 'Doge's Slipper' – in its haute couture version: in velvet or suede for winter, satin or Fortuny fabric for summer. This model is distinguished by its characteristic St Mark's winged lion on the front, hand embroidered in paillettes and beads. With this same iconic embroidery, we have other styles of shoes (ballerinas, décollettes, Sabrina heels ...), and a variety of matching pochettes and tiny shoulder bags. The embroidery detail alone takes four hours of artisanal sewing for each piece.

Have you succeeded in the merge of design and comfort – two seemingly opposite aspects?

Yes. I think so. It is something that I do every day endlessly with myself most of all. I am German and Italian: a chaotic outgoing Italian with a sense of style; I get caught up in things, I lost track ... I'm like a butterfly. This ... until I hear the call to order of the German within me.

Inspiration?

I adore Venice. I am more of an artist inside, so Venice is in my heart: it is to me the pivotal point of art and beauty. The collection is inspired by icons of the city. First of all, Saint Mark's lion, very fitting as a symbol of power, with wings to allow creativity to fly far away. But also other icons, such as the red rosebud, or the pink flamingo that appears seasonally in the lagoon.

