

BOOT UP

Tried-and-true footwear for the cowboy lover in all of us

BY WENDY ILENE FRIEDMAN

The American Southwest is known for its outlaws, landscapes, horses, guns, gold and of course — cowboys. And rarely will you find a bona fide cowboy without a pair of trusty boots.

This cowboy trademark can trace its roots back to the Wellington boot worn by the Duke of Wellington, as told by Jakki Francis in *A Brief History of the Cowboy Boot*. Originally a straight-top boot revered by riders, the construction morphed over the years into the style we now recognize and revere.

The look gained popularity in the 1920s and 1930s after the V-cut boots appeared in movies about the Wild West, and the attraction continues to this day. Open a magazine or gossip rag and most likely there is a movie star, fashionista or even a politician wearing the signature Southwest footwear.

Suzanne Grais, a 30-year cowboy boot business veteran and owner of Kowboyz on Guadalupe Street, knows the appeal reaches across all social strata. She also knows people love a good story, which is a by-product of the second-hand boots she carries in the store.

"All of these boots have a history," she said. "People always want to know where they came from and who wore them."

Throughout the years she has sold and traded with rock legends and other well-knowns, including Bruce Springsteen. The Western-wear enthusiast has seen Reese Witherspoon wearing her boots on the big screen in both *Sweet Home Alabama* and *Walk the Line* along with most of the characters in *Brokeback Mountain*.

She also recalls the time Brittany Spears came into the LA store to buy vintage boots from the 1970s, spending around \$80 for the pair. The next thing she knew "different manufacturers started to make a similar boot, called it the Brittany boot and charged \$300-\$500."

Susan LaPointe, sales manager at Back at the Ranch on East Marcy Street, is also no stranger to high-profile boot fans. She says they have orders from around the globe. She often ships custom styles to Mumbai movie star Sanjay Dutt. "He's like the biggest bad-boy actor in Bollywood," she said. Ronnie Dunn of Brooks and Dunn gets most of his boots from the store and Gov. Bill Richardson is a regular. "He likes the classic rough cut style." (Rough cut is when boots are fashioned with the inside of the skin facing out.)

Yet whether purchasing a new pair or ones with a famous past, when selecting boots, it is important to get the fit right. Grais explained that boots fit differently than shoes and there should be at least a quarter of an inch lift in your heel when you walk. "You should feel your heel leave the bottom of the boot, like cross-country skiing," she said. "It's awkward at first, but after you wear them a bit, you get used to it."



LUIS SÁNCHEZ SATURNO

Colorful vintage cowboy boots

And while it is a general notion that cowboy boots need to be broken in, Back at the Ranch's LaPointe explained that this is not the case with custom-made boots. "They should fit like a glove," she said.

Finding a well-fit pair is easy in Santa Fe. There are several stores in town that specialize in cowboy boots, each with its own distinction.

Kowboyz primarily sells pre-worn boots and their selection is vast. They also sell boots for as little as \$89. "No one can beat our prices," Grais said.

Legendary brand Lucchese, long known as the Cadillac of boots, sells its collections at their boutique on Water Street. Prices start at \$299 for the 1883 styles, \$499 for the Lucchese Classic and \$549 for the roper cut.

Double Take consignment shop also carries cowboy boots (at discounted prices). According to Susan Benson, the boot-section manager, the store sells "select-only high-end boots in useable, good condition."

For hand-crafted, custom-styled boots, Back at the Ranch and Boots & Boogie are local favorites. Now celebrating its 20th year in business, LaPointe accurately describes selections at Back at the Ranch as "top-of-the-line, handmade custom boots" using only "the finest quality skins." Back at the Ranch has a large selection in many colors, patterns and skins on the shelves at all times, including innovative styles like the popular Lugg sole all-terrain boot.

For shoppers who want something special, the store can order one-of-a-kind styles at a private factory in Texas. "We can custom-make anything," LaPointe said. "We've done logos, brands and even pictures of people's pets."

BACK AT THE RANCH

209 E. Marcy St.
989-8110
888-96BOOTS
www.backattheranch.com

BOOTS & BOOGIE

Historic Santa Fe Village
227 Don Gaspar Ave.
983-0777
www.santafebootsandboogie.com

LUCCHESE

203 W. Water St.
820-1883
800-871-1883
www.lucchese.com

KOWBOYZ

531 S. Guadalupe St.
984-1256
kowboyz.com

DOUBLE TAKE

321 S. Guadalupe St.
983-5055