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**SPECIAL
HOLIDAY
ISSUE**

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ARRIVES IN
TORONTO!**

**FW'S
HOLIDAY
GIFT GUIDE**

For Family, Friends
Lovers, Co-workers

**IN CELEBRATION
OF FW'S 25TH
ISSUE**

**HOLIDAY RECIPES
That Are Easy On Your
WAISTLINE!**

HIGH HEEL HISTORY

On A Pedestal - From Renaissance Chopines to Baroque Heels

By Medge Beauvoir, FW Staff



On November 19, 2009, Toronto's famous Bata Shoe Museum opened its doors to showcase one of the most fascinating exhibits; shoes from the Renaissance and the Baroque periods. In other words, these are the shoes worn by women in the Western world between 1500 and 1660. World renowned museums, including those in London, Florence and Milan, donated pieces to the Bata Shoe Museum for this collection. The Renaissance chopines and the Baroque heels are two of the most extreme forms of footwear. If you think today's footwear is difficult enough to wear, let alone keep up with, then it's time to catch up on your high heel history.

Today, provocative heels are the 6-inch heels we keep aside for those special occasions. During the 16th century, there was no distinction between the classy heels and the controversial ones. Both courtesans and upper-class woman had interest in one shoe; the Italian chopine. This is a platform-like heel that sometimes measured over 50 cm in height. Though we might find it difficult to grasp, the Italian chopine dominated fashion footwear during the Renaissance. The chopines were the ultimate proclamation of status and wealth in female dress.

At the end of the 16th century, the heel was emerging. The Near East adopted the heel, which marked an historic and enduring transformation of Western footwear that continues to have relevance today. Interestingly enough, it wasn't only the women who jumped on this trend first-it was the men! Upper-class men were the first to wear the high heel. Could you imagine having men today walking down the street in those super cute Jimmy Choo's? Or showing up on a date and he's wearing nicer heels than you? That would be an interesting scenario, to say the least.

Going down to the Bata Shoe Museum to see this exhibition is certainly worth it. We've all learned some history on our own backgrounds, so why not learn some shoe history? We owe it to our shoes and to our feet to understand what they've been through. *On a Pedestal: From Renaissance Chopines to Baroque Heels* will be featured at the Bata Shoe Museum until September 20, 2010. For more information, please visit www.batashoemuseum.ca or call 416.979.7799.