



**Fluevog dishes on Madonna and more**

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Fluevog dishes on Madonna and more; Celebrated shoe designer opens a cutting-edge museum in the heart of Calgary

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When John Fluevog sent pop-goddess Madonna a pair of his handcrafted shoes back in 1990, he never expected she would pay her respects by whipping them out of the box and putting them on during a scene in her infamous, sex-fuelled film Truth or Dare.

"Yah like 'em?!" she said, as she flirted with the camera, showing off the pink platforms.

At the time, it was a massive publicity break for the respected, but still little known, Canadian designer. Yet, to this day, Fluevog says he's never watched the movie.

"It doesn't interest me," he says, with a laugh, from his office in Vancouver.

The independent businessman is known for his avant-garde designs and gaggle of loyal fans, lovingly nicknamed "Fluevogers."

As one of Canada's few fashion icons, it should come as no surprise that he has plans to open a retrospective of his work in the form of a small museum. What wasn't anticipated is that he picked Calgary for its location, as opposed to his hometown, Vancouver.

"The truth is, the space we have on Stephen Avenue lends itself to be a museum," Fluevog says.

The Community Creative space, as it's called, will be housed

at the Fluevog boutique (207 8th Ave. S.W.) and will feature a rotating art gallery of the designer's past work; a community break room, where Calgarians are welcomed to "hang out" or hold meetings; a Fluevog-filled arts and crafts vending machine, showcasing and selling works made by artisans; and an area for artists and groups to hold exhibitions.

According to Fluevog, who has been designing since the 1970s, his team has been collecting his old shoes (some of which they've located on eBay and purchased back) for the past few years.

"I never kept a large collection or saved a bunch of shoes. I'm not really a sentimental kind of person and, as a designer, I don't want to look at what I was doing before. I want to look ahead," he says.

"Fashion is very interesting to look back on. It shows what people were doing, thinking about and going through at the time."

During the grunge-fuelled music era of the '90s, Fluevog's Angel Boots became the shoe du jour for rockers looking for accessory options to complement their laissez-faire attire and attitude.

Madonna was at the height of her rebellious period when she chose to sport those powerful pink Fluevog platforms during Truth or Dare (1991). And more recently, rockers the White Stripes ordered pairs of custom-made red and white Fluevogs. "I think (the White Stripes) came about because the band started buying stuff in our L.A. store. I've never met them," says Fluevog, clearly nonchalant about his celeb connections.

He says he rarely tells the story of how Madge ended up with a pair of his kicks.

"I don't really like giving away shoes. It's not what I do. This is a business," he explains.

"One night I was watching (Madonna) on one of those American talk shows. She was being very naughty, talking about spankings and saying all of these silly things. I thought, this is a game player. Her whole thing is a game. She needs a pair of my shoes."

Through a connection Fluevog had to one of the Queen of Pop's stylists in New York, he boxed up a pair and sent them Madonna's way.

"I never heard back. Not a thank you, not anything. Then, one day, someone told me she wore them in the movie. . . . I didn't like Madonna's game. I found it annoying, but I respected what she was doing."

The movie moment was a game-changer for Fluevog. "Things exploded for us. I was just this kid from Burnaby and it was all a bit of a shock to me, but I've never taken the company public or gotten outside financing. I never wanted anyone telling me what to do," Fluevog says.

He now has stores in several North American cities, including L.A., Montreal and New York. The company is run by Fluevog and a close-knit handful of trusted employees. His son, Adrian Fluevog, who takes care of retail development for the chain, is one of his right-hand men.

Adrian, who grew up watching his father build shoes in the family's garage, says he has witnessed first hand the sacrifices his dad made to remain in control of the business.

"When I was about 10 years old, he had to sell his Jaguar to get the money to open his first store in Seattle. He did things by himself. He's had investors approach him over the years and he's kind of struggled with that, but the truth is you lose control of your company when you do that," Adrian says.

"My dad has created a product and environment that he can control. It's pure. I see it as more than just retail; he's created a piece of our culture."

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