

oh those



Perfectly Copper Wedges



Letters From Home

wedges!

by Margot Silk Forrest

Ever since I discovered three years ago that my favorite fabric paints would adhere to leather, I've been in a fever of DIY shoe design. The result is that I've started to see shoes — both old and new — as canvases on which my creative spirit can express itself in all its colorful quirkiness.

Here are two pairs of shoes from my no-holds-barred adventures into the world of DIY shoe design. If you pay close attention to the information on how to work with the special paints and how to attach embellishments, you'll find you can use these skills to design fabulous shoes starting with inexpensive new or recycled shoes as the canvas for your infinite creativity.

The "Letters From Home" sandals were originally a pair of purple faux suede mules I found on sale last summer. I was attracted by the decorative-punched holes across the upper, an area that was practically begging to have embellishments stitched to it.

What I had in mind was adding a couple of rows of round antiqued brass bracelet links I'd picked up in a scrapbooking store. These links had the look of typewriter keys, but featured full words, both French and English. They also had loops on either side that I could use to stitch the links to the shoe.

I started by painting the sandals a color that would form a good backdrop for the black and antiqued brass of the bracelet links. Then I stitched on the links and tied floppy little scarlet knots to add some feminine pizzazz to my "typewriter" mules.

I found the high wedges — originally a cloudy-day bluish gray with plastic-raffia-covered wedge — on sale for \$20 at Urban Outfitters. What attracted me was actually how ugly the plastic raffia was. It made me want to slather it with gleaming metallic paint and give the shoes a chance at real beauty. I also painted both the formerly blue-gray upper and added a design element to the insole.

Finally I added some treasures I had found at a gem and bead fair: two copper pendants shaped like oversize flowers and made by a local copper artist. The loops on the back of the pendants were perfect for stitching them to the shoes.

Tools & Materials

- Braided fishing line: (FireLine — 6 or 8 LB, smoke color)
- Cotton balls & cotton swabs
- Fabric glue
- Floor wax: (Future Floor Finish)
- Leather needle (Glover's)
- Paint: (Lumiere — Metallic Rust; Metallic Copper; Pearl Violet); (Pearl Ex powder — Antique Copper); (Jacquard — Neopaque Flowable Extender)
- Metal embellishments: 2–2½ inches in diameter (2)
- Paintbrush: medium-sized, soft (I prefer a fan brush); small, soft, fine-pointed
- Rayon yarn: bright, contrasting color
- Removable adhesive: (Earthquake Putty or a type of poster putty)
- Round links: varying designs with metal loop on each side (22)
- Rubbing alcohol/acetone
- Sandals: wide-strapped, smooth (don't use real suede or plastic)
- Scissors
- Thimble
- Water containers: one to hold paintbrush; one of clean water to erase mistakes





Technique

LETTERS FROM HOME

Painting

Prep surface of shoe to remove any oil or manufacturer's finish. If your shoes are leather, prep them by swabbing the surface with a cotton ball dipped in rubbing alcohol. If they are manmade "leather," swab with acetone instead. (There's no need to prep faux suede).

Be sure to shake your bottle of Lumiere energetically before and during use. Paint the toe strap by laying the paint gently on the surface with a soft brush. Don't try to brush it in. Use your small brush for getting up close to the sole of the shoe without over painting.

Depending on the original color of the shoes, you will need one or two coats to cover. Seal the paint by brushing on a thin coat of Future Floor Finish, which will give the paint extra protection against scuffing. Wash your brush immediately.

Stitching

Lay out and arrange your bracelet links. The top row will take six links, the bottom row takes five. Do this for both shoes before starting to stitch them on. That way, if you get to your second shoe and don't like the links that are left (this is important when you're using word links as I did), you can still swap the links around.

Measure and mark the center of the toe strap. Working from the center out, temporarily tack your bracelet links to the shoe using removable adhesive. Your top row of six links will be divided in half at the center line; your bottom row of five links will have its middle link right at the center. Leave each link tacked in place until you have stitched one side of it down.

Thread a leather needle with a long double strand of FireLine (an incredibly strong type of fishing line that can also be knotted), but don't knot the ends. Start and end your stitching on the OUTSIDE of your shoe and underneath your bracelet link. You don't want knots later rubbing against your foot. Leave a four-inch long tail when you start stitching so that when you are ready to knot off your needle thread, you can come back and use the tail as the second strand with which to tie your knot.

Use two surgeon's knots to tie off your threads. A surgeon's knot is just like a square knot except you make an extra wrap-around on the first half of the knot. Cross the right end over the left, and wrap the right end around the left as if you were starting to tie your shoelaces. Now, before pulling the ends taut, wrap the right end around the left again. Pull taut. To complete the knot, cross the left end over the right, wrap it around the right once, and pull taut. Make a second surgeon's knot.

Before cutting the threads, bury the tails in the leather of the shoe. (You'll need to rethread your original tail into a needle to do this.) This is crucial because no matter how secure a knot you tie, if you cut the threads off really close to the knot, it will come undone over time.

To add little red ties, cut 2-3-inch pieces of rayon yarn and tie them with a simple right-over-left half-knot, then put a dab of fabric glue on it. These bright little ties will appear to be holding your bracelet links lightly in place.

PERFECTLY COPPER WEDGES

Prep the shoes according to the directions for the previous shoes. (Be sure to prep the inside of the upper too.) Paint the upper with Metallic Copper. Paint the inside of the upper with Pearl Violet. Paint the fake raffia with a mixture of 4 teaspoons Pearl Ex powder in Antique Copper stirred thoroughly into 1 ounce (by weight) of Jacquard's Flowable Extender. Paint little bubbles on the insole using Metallic Copper and Pearl Violet.

Seal the painted areas (except the inside of the shoe) with Future Floor Finish. Stitch on the copper pendants with FireLine, following the directions for the previous shoe.

