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THE GET

Bootie Call

BY ARMAND LIMNANDER

It would be a challenge for anyone to call El Paso a fashion hotbed — the prevailing uniform in this Texan border town consists of jeans and a 10-gallon hat. Still, there is one local who has powerhouses like [Dolce & Gabbana](#), Dior and [Ralph Lauren](#) coming here for inspiration. Over the years, they have all relied on Pedro Muñoz, the owner of Stallion Boot, to give their collections a Western kick.

This is why the English designer Simon Spurr recently paid a visit to Muñoz's workshop, located on an anonymous strip in downtown El Paso. For his fall 2008 men's-wear collection, Spurr had asked Muñoz to create a short python boot, something that could, according to Muñoz, appeal to the "metropolitan, cosmopolitan city cowboy."

In the studio, next to a vault of exotic skins like crocodile, stingray, ostrich and hippo, a team of artisans is whipping up a pair of gray alligator boots. They look like your standard cowboy boots until you notice the bright pink skeleton designs on the side — a work in progress for a Celine fashion show. When Spurr (who once designed for [Calvin Klein](#) and Ralph Lauren) was looking for a bootmaker, he researched more established brands like Lucchese and Rocketbuster before choosing Stallion because of made-to-order details like this. "I try to support small-scale American manufacturers," says Spurr, who has his horsehair belts hand-woven in Colorado and his denim sourced from a North Carolina company that still uses vintage looms.

At a different worktable, another group huddles over a pair of alligator skins, which had been tanned an iridescent gold; they were then embellished with 10,000-year-old Balinese ivory that had been set in 24-karat gold. The boots were being made for a client in Los Angeles. "Those are about \$15,000," says Muñoz, who counts [Bob Dylan](#), Shakira and [Arnold Schwarzenegger](#) among his customers.

Muñoz, 51, was studying to become a veterinarian when he saw "Urban Cowboy" in 1980. "Everyone suddenly wanted Western boots," he says. "They represented a casual way of living." Muñoz, who was newly married with a newborn at the time, figured that designing boots could provide a decent income. Almost 30 years — not to mention a divorce, several girlfriends and a few more kids — later, his custom-boot business is booming. "I think we have the highest man-per-boot ratio of anyone in the area," says Muñoz, who also employs his daughter Annette. And though he keeps his output small — only 60 or 70 pairs are made each week — he sells at European shops like Colette in Paris and Möller & Schaar in Frankfurt. "Thank God for the Germans," he says.

Soon Muñoz plans to spend about six months of the year promoting the Stallion brand abroad while his children head up the operations back home. He recently bought some land in neighboring New Mexico in

order to build a larger workshop. “It’s really important for me to keep this craft alive,” he says. “I want to go up to about 200 boots a week, but not more than that.”

Visitors can buy direct at Stallion Boot & Leather Goods, 100 North Cotton Street, El Paso; (915) 532-6268. A basic pair of calfskin boots starts at around \$900.

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