



MASARU OKUYAMA SHOEMAKER

DISSATISFIED WITH THE DIRECTION OF HIS COMFORTABLE BUT ULTIMATELY UNFULFILLING LIFE, MASARU OKUYAMA SET OUT TO PURSUE A PERSONAL DREAM OF BECOMING A BESPOKE SHOEMAKER. TODAY HE RUNS A WORKSHOP IN HONG KONG, CREATING REFINED, ELEGANT SHOES FROM THE FINEST NATURAL MATERIALS.

and a comfortable life, he felt something fundamental cess, but lose the rest of his accumulated knowledge. was missing. That's when he decided to become a shoemaker. After an intensive two-year program at a Japanese shoemaking school, and an apprenticeship under master craftsman Chihiro Yamaguchi, he set up his own business in 2008 focusing on bespoke shoemaking, with a belief that "A pair of shoes is the attire that expresses your seriousness about life."

Like all great creatives, he experienced moments of doubt on his journey, even travelling to Paris to of disheartening rebuttals, a chance encounter with

fter graduating from Nihon University College crafting the shoe and polishing it to completion. If of Art, Masaru Okuyama began working for a he trained with one of the more established names, Japanese jewelry brand, but despite the good salary he would become an expert at one stage of the pro-

After moving to Hong Kong, Masaru started working from the balcony of his apartment, and through referrals and word-of-mouth recommendations, his bespoke business was born. Today he has two apprentices under him and they work solely on bespoke shoes, a painstaking method that isn't for the faint of heart. The entire process, from taking measurements and choosing materials, making the lasts, checking the fit and designing a trial pair, making try and secure an apprenticeship with one of the re- adjustments for comfort (often several times), then nowned European shoemaking houses. After a series making and delivering the shoes can take from six months to a year. Working like a sculptor to create the shoemaker Ricardo Bestetti in Milan led him to his perfect last for each foot, he is inspired by the curves current path. Bestetti reassured him that as a fully of nature, noting that there are no straight lines on a trained shoemaker, Okuyama could create a bespoke shoe. "The design of shoes is all about curves," he pair of shoes entirely scratch-from taking the cus- says. "Lasts are like sculptures made for your feet. tomer's measurements to creating the last, and then
Even when there's a straight line in the design, it

espoke shoemaker asaru Okuyama.

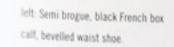








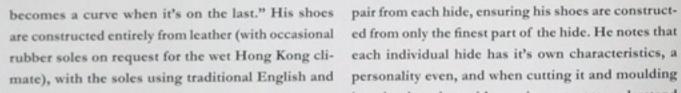
HIS SHOES ARE CONSTRUCTED
ENTIRELY FROM LEATHER,
WITH THE SOLES USING
TRADITIONAL ENGLISH AND
GERMAN OAK BARK TANNED
COWHIDES WHICH THEMSELVES
TAKE AROUND 12 MONTHS TO
PREPARE FOR USE.



above: Masaru Okuyama uses a wide variety of leathers for his bespoke shoes, including sheep, goat, cordovan, lizard, alligator, lama, and shark, to name a few.







MASARU'S WORK FEATURES A STRONG TRADITIONAL INFLUENCE, WITH SMALL, ALMOST IMPERCEPTIBLY PLAYFUL DETAILS.

take around 12 months to prepare for use. When it comes to the upper of the shoes, the options are alknown to create shoes in sheep, goat, lizard, ostrich, wear collection, the most important consideration for cowhide can provide the material for four to five pairs own hands, honing his skills, and further mastering of shoes, but Masaru prefers to make only a single his chosen vocation. •

ed from only the finest part of the hide. He notes that it to the shoe shape, it's very important to understand this character to bring out the best of the leather and create a shoe that is both beautiful and durable.

Striving to combine the stylish elegance beloved of French shoemakers, with the simplicity and dignity of the refined English aesthetic, Masaru's work features a strong traditional influence, with small, almost German oak bark tanned cowhides which themselves imperceptibly playful details like brogueing around the top of the shoe's tongue, creating shoes that are most endless. While French box calf leather is the he may seek to create a second line of custom-made material he uses the most, Masaru has also been shoes at a more accessible level, and even a ready-toalligator, and even shark leathers. Usually a single Masaru is that he can continue to craft shoes using his





above: Masaru Okuyama shoes combine meticulous Japanese savoir-faire with French elegance and a refined English aesthetic.