



Designer Chat: Ausie Boots Australia



"WE'RE A GREAT partnership in crime," says Melissa Tampi, Ausie Boots Australia co-owner and designer of her and husband Ivan's footwear venture. The couple's unique design experiences—Ivan was involved in custom automobile design and Melissa worked as a buyer for her parents' USA-made concept stores in Australia—has somehow morphed into making a line of luxurious, handmade sheepskin footwear in the U.S.

Despite launching in August '08, a time when Melissa says retailers were reluctant to bring in new luxury brands (even the ones they liked), the recent round of trade shows saw retailers looking to once again spice up their mix. "Without getting away from the comfort aspects, we are offering women sheepskin boots that can complete and add to stylish ensembles," Melissa says. "People are ready for fashion beyond the basic boot."

According to Ivan, that involves using double-face Grade A Australian sheepskin, fine merino wool, distressed leathers and saede and Italian hardware on modern silhouettes and handcrafted Alder wood heels. "Our fall collection has a vintage-feel with materials but is fashionable enough to wear out on the town," he describes. Other styles combine platform wedges and chunky



Clockwise from top left: **Bettye Muller** slingback; peep toe by **Coye Nokes**; **Nine West** cage stiletto; **Jean & David** persp; quilted platform pump by **Sergio Zelicar**.

EDITOR'S PICKS

The Other Sheen

Sleek heels and patent leather prove to be a winning combination for fall.

military-inspired lasts for navigating rough winter weather. And for the first time, the fall collection, which retails between \$250 and \$1,000, includes alligator tail details. "It's a unique combination," he says. "Since we are a husband-and-wife team, we are willing to trust one another and take chances." —*Angela Velazquez*

Where do you find inspiration? *Melissa:* We're huge admirers of Donatella and Gianni Versace. Versace's designs are timeless, elegant and focused. Everything makes sense and is deliberate.

Which footwear designers do you admire the most? Alexander McQueen was fearless. His footwear collections are amazing and the shoes are designs that *he* loved. He wasn't just making shoes to satisfy the masses.

What are your favorite fashion magazines? *Vogue Italia* and *Harper's Bazaar* are true fashion magazines.

Who is your all-time fashion icon? There are certain people who tend to get it right all the time. For example, Diana Ross. Her customs are timeless. And my husband is a Jennifer Lopez fan.

What is your favorite shoe to wear? Our Swagger Rock boot. It's short with double fringe, chrome studs and trimmed with braided suede. I get compliments every time. I also wear our Angelina wedge a lot. It has a sculpted wood wedge that makes your feet look smaller.

If you weren't designing, what do you think you'd be doing? My other full-time job as mom to our three children.