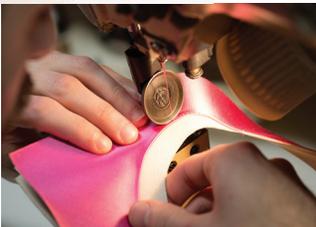




Below right: A leather lining is stitched to the fabric, then each piece is held over a flame to activate the adhesive

Above: A drawing pattern is precisely placed on the fabric to define the shape of the shoe as per the measurement



TRANSLATING PEN-TO-PAPER fantasies into a three-dimensional creation is Christian Louboutin's ardour. His sketches are like a recipe, where the result often turns out to have more flavour than intended. But just like not all batches of *bœuf bourguignon* taste the same, not every shoe's fit is comparable, hence the emperor of the red sole has introduced an exclusive Made to Measure service. Hidden in a traditional courtyard of his atelier in Paris' 1<sup>st</sup> arrondissement, Louboutin's clientele is invited to create her own one-of-a-kind shoe, meticulously crafted for her personal style and measurement. It could be the client's vision to covet a masterpiece for a special occasion or her desire to own a red-soled icon deserving to be labelled as the most luxurious bespoke item in her closet.



# If the shoe fits...

WORDS SHITIKA ANAND

The service starts with sketching the concept, then sculpting the shoe as per her measurements, and finally, giving the client that Cinderella moment where the customised shoe fits her perfectly. "This is a world of standardisation. To fulfil a woman's precise desire – that is the ultimate luxury," muses the Parisian.

**1** The fairy tale of the dream design starts behind the wooden doors at an atelier on rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau in Paris. The atelier director and craftsman starts the process by measuring each foot by hand at more than a dozen points, before creating a foam mould called a last, which memorises every detailed, three-dimensional imprint of the foot.

**2** The client selects the heel height, shoe style, and toe shape of her shoe, the stage which the craftsman deems "maybe the most difficult part." The artisans would then begin sculpting a cast of the foot and precisely layer multiple pieces of leather to perfect the customised measurements and fit.

**3** Once the last is made, the artisans design a pattern as per specifications, hand-cut all the elements – embroidery, fabric and embellishments – and pass on to another specialist for sewing and assembling onto the shoe. Hereafter, the insoles, heels, and soles are mounted on, marking the end of the first draft of the bespoke shoe.

**4** The first draft of the shoe can go through three rounds of fittings before reaching its impeccable state. The finished piece then goes through *bichonnage*, where final quality checks are performed. No shoe leaves Christian Louboutin's atelier without the master's stamp of approval, and the signature red lacquer. When that's complete, she's free to strut off. ●