



Shoes WITH SOUL



Tammy Beacham, the mother of triplets, is among an eclectic group of models photographed in Vasilis Stamatakis shoes, none of whom would accept payment for their work. DENNIS KEYES/SUBMITTED PHOTO

Woman treasures Greek artisan's work

By **Sandy Marwick**
 Eagle Focus Editor

Never mind if the shoe fits. According to jae Brown, it's sometimes better to cherish the shoes than to wear them.

Although Brown herself sports a sensible pair of square-toed pumps, a metal utility cabinet in her Emlenton home contains 39 pairs of colorful classics made by Greek shoemaker Vasilis Stamatakis.

The shoes represent a modest sampling of 36 collections made by Stamatakis between 1941 and 1969. And much like Brown uses the cabinet doors to shield the shoes from harm, for much of his life Stamatakis hid his creations in a private workspace adjoining his shoe store in Heraklion, Crete.

The obscure artist is being honored posthumously, as photos of his vibrant platforms are displayed in the Virtual Shoe Museum, curated by Liza Snook of The Netherlands.

"You don't get your shoes into her museum out of pity. She is very, very particular," said Brown, a writer and founding member of the Allegheny RiverStone Center for the Arts.

Window shopping

Brown's many visits to the island of Crete began in 1966 through her second husband, but she did not meet Stamatakis until 1995, when jet lag prompted her to window-shop in the wee hours of the morning.

A lifelong shoe fanatic, Brown was breathless when a few pairs of the unique platforms caught her attention from a storefront otherwise filled with trinkets.

"I knew they weren't like any shoes I had ever seen," said Brown, describing a pair of grass green sandals, the top layer of leather carefully cut to reveal white polka-dots beneath.

Brown returned there at 9 a.m. when



jae Brown of Emlenton shows one of the shoes made by Greek designer Vasilis Stamatakis in her collection. Brown has

39 pairs of the shoes. DAVE PRELOSKY/BUTLER EAGLE

the shop opened, and the worker summoned Stamatakis.

Through conversations with the shoemaker that day and over the next two years, Brown learned the souvenir shop had once been his shoe store, where he catered to conservative local tastes for sensible, nondescript footwear.

"Many artists have this incredible creative ability but they do not have shrewd business sense," Brown said of the store that kept him in business.

"He realized early on as much as he loved his shoes, nobody was going to buy them."

So Stamatakis created the avant-garde shoes in secret, allowing them to accumulate by the hundreds in the expansive space behind his shop, Brown said.

infused with sophisticated tourists. "I was still living in Manhattan when I bought the first batch of them," Brown said.

"A famous dominatrix did beg for these at the Chelsea Hotel," she added, holding up some tall red platforms piped in white.

"You could whip these out in Milan right now and stop traffic," she said of another pair.

Despite the whimsy Stamatakis expressed in shoes, Brown also holds dear his more stately designs.

Of those, she presented some black suede pumps, embellished with subdued black star bursts and patent heels.

"I think these are the most beautiful shoes I ever saw in my whole life," she said.

Stepping out

Brown is not the only one captivated by Stamatakis shoes.

She bought the first few pairs in her own size — a 9 — but soon decided to save them as artwork, especially since commonly worn sizes quickly were lost to eager shoppers.

Brown also was not alone in thinking the shoes should be displayed: During

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