

School for craft Vienna

Preface

The skill required to make a pair of shoes that fits you, and only you, is one that needs patience, a careful eye, a steady hand, and someone who's been doing it for years to show you how. Here we celebrate the small companies that recognise the value of passing on a trade to the younger generation.



01 Scheer & Söhne

Located on a narrow side street in Vienna, Rudolf Scheer & Söhne has created fine handmade shoes since 1816. Dressing the feet of heads of state as official shoemaker to the Austro-Hungarian empire's royal court, the company supplied its loyal clientele with exquisite footwear for life.

In 2010, seventh-generation owner Markus Scheer increased the number of apprentices at Scheer, launching what he calls a shoemakers' "academy" in the firm's workshops. "When you have a passion for something, it doesn't make sense to hide it," says Scheer, a 41-year-old father of four. "My kids are small, but what if they don't want to take over the company? I wanted to make sure this know-how doesn't die out."

The shoemaker perfected his craft with his grandfather, who died in 2011. Teaching the apprentices is an investment in the firm's future. Scheer still hand-carves each wooden last to the exact shape of a customer's foot, a process that limits the pairs of shoes he can create to 300 a year. In an effort to carefully increase this number in the next decade, he is now offering various levels of mastery to his charges. In three years, the apprentices receive fundamental training; in five years they are master craftsmen and, "if they stay 10 years, they are a Scheer", he says.

Many European shoemakers have stopped training apprentices so it's even more important that expertise is passed on. Scheer maintains a perfect balance between respecting tradition and moving into the future; in 2012 he opened a space in the adjacent storefront that sells new products like shoe polishing kits, and has a lush new basement dining area for special events. Yet the main workshop still looks as it did 150 years ago, and the core of the company will always be perfect shoes. — (M)

