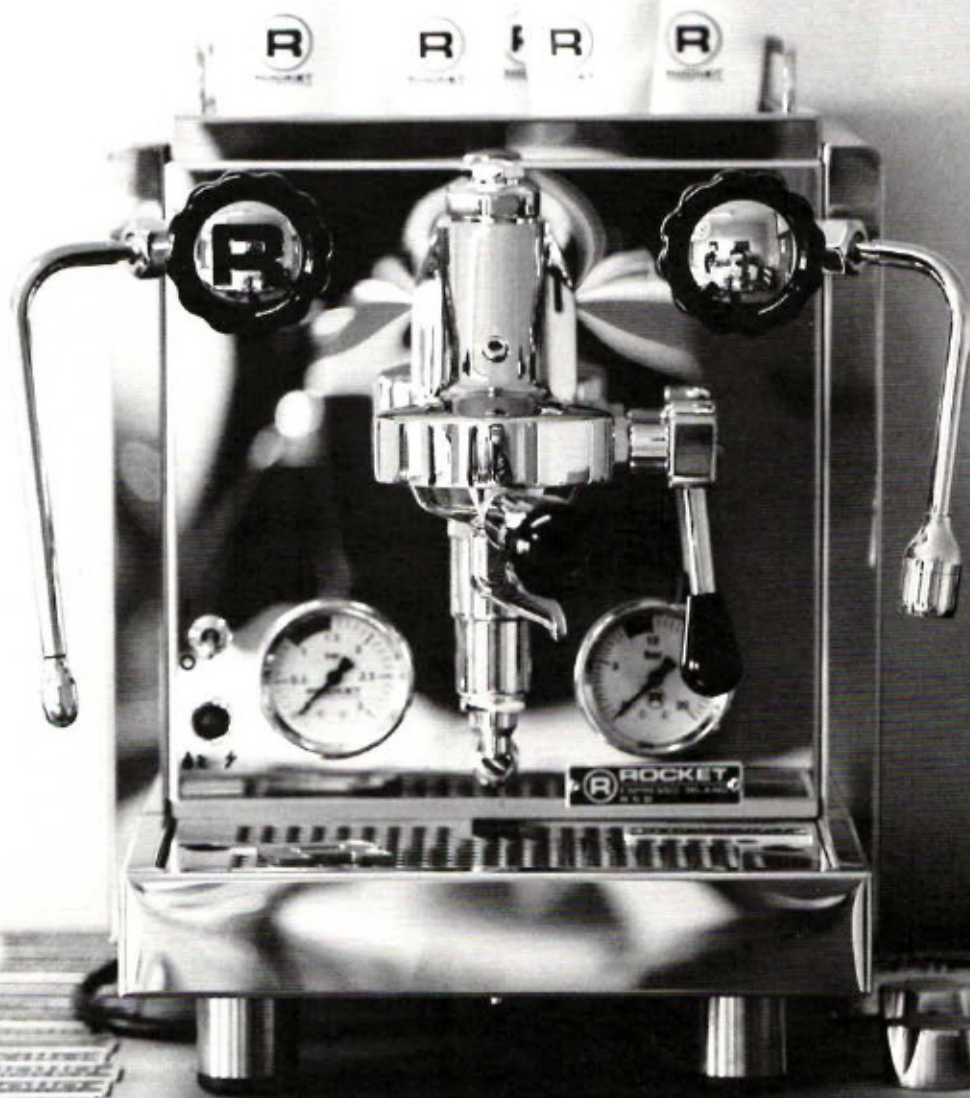


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I CENTO ANNI DEL GIRO D'ITALIA

1909 GANNA Luigi
1910 GALETTI Carlo
1911 GALETTI Carlo
1912 le squadre ATALA
1913 ORIANI Carlo
1914 CALZOLARI Gaetano
1919 GIRARDENGO Costante
1920 BELLONI Gaetano
1921 BRUNERO Giovanni
1922 BRUNERO Giovanni
1923 GIRARDENGO Costante
1924 INZICI Giuseppe
1925 BINDA Alfredo
1925 BRUNERO Giovanni
1927 BINDA Alfredo
1928 BINDA Alfredo
1929 BINDA Alfredo
1930 GAZZONI Carlo
1931 GAZZONI Carlo

1932 GAZZONI Vittorio
1933 DITTA Gianni
1934 GAZZONI Carlo
1935 GAZZONI Carlo
1936 GAZZONI Carlo
1937 GAZZONI Carlo
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1948 GAZZONI Carlo
1949 GAZZONI Carlo
1950 GAZZONI Carlo

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ALESSANDRO STELLA

“THE LEATHER—EET EEZ ALIVVVVVE!”

It's 2 o'clock in the afternoon and Alessandro Stella and I are into our third glass of Chianti. He's gesticulating wildly, talking in his charmingly accented, yet perfect English about the shoes he makes. This started as an innocent enough lunch, but now I've worked him up a bit. It's easy to do—Alessandro, or Ale as we often call him—is excitable, especially when you get him talking about the deeper philosophical meaning of shoemaking.

Stella trained in both England and Florence and has been making shoes full time for the better part of 27 years. The process, for him, involves a combination of skill and emotion; the shoes have to come together correctly, sure, but they also have to feel right. Leather shoes were once beings that lived and breathed—that important detail has never been lost on Stella. Because the leather is alive, as he is fond of saying, it infuses the final product with specialness that transcends the precision of construction and meticulous crafting that goes into each pair.



WORDS & IMAGES: HEIDI SWIFT

Made-to-order Derbies, Oxfords, boots and loafers line the shelves of his shop in Siena, waiting to be shipped out or picked up. His worktable is a picture of organized chaos, covered with tools, scraps, trims, notes, measurements and peels. Hundreds of wooden lasts hang overhead in unruly clumps. On a shelf to the side, rolls of thick, lush leather are stacked in a colorful pile: cognac, hazelnut, ebony, tobacco,



ALESSANDRO STELLA

SARTORIA DEL CUIOIO DE ALESSANDRO STELLA
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yellow, red and blue suede. Stella himself is handsome and weathered—mischievous black eyes under a shock of dark brown hair that he is fond of running his fingers through when he becomes agitated or excited.

Making just two or three pairs of shoes a week, Stella is immersed in the detail and art of his everyday craft. He loves his work, often describing it as “playing with leather all day” and is refreshingly difficult to find on the Internet or social media. In an age where everything can be had with a click of a button, his is still a shop that requires discovering. All the better, really, because the beauty of these shoes is in the feel and the smell—both exquisite and rich. They make you want to hold them against your cheek, close your eyes and take a long inhale. But be careful not to get too attached unless you’re ready to make a big commitment: Stella’s custom, made-to-order shoes start at \$1,150 and can cost as much as \$2,500. And if you’re looking for something truly unique, ask him about getting a pair of shoes made from 200-year-old Russian reindeer leather that was salvaged from a ship that sank in 1786.

Because almost all of his shoes are custom, the creation process differs for everyone; on the day that we dreamed up the Swift Pipa Oxford we stood shoulder to shoulder hunched over a high counter where he drew pictures. “I will perforate the leather with this!” he exclaimed, gesturing to a large industrial machine to our right. We were surrounded by thousands of rolls of leather and we’d pulled seven or eight to lay across the table to make our selection. The two-toned, perforated Oxfords that appeared three months later (minimum lead-time for custom shoes is eight weeks) were more than worth the wait. The leather—it really is alive! **P**

HEIDI SWIFT first met Alessandro Stella while working in Lecchi, Italy, on a story about inGamba Tours. A longtime friend of inGamba founder João Correia, Stella is a regular at inGamba dinners and events, and he counts many of the touring company’s guests among his best repeat clients.

