

IN HER SHOES

Vegan-friendly shoe designer **Arden Wohl** shows that style and substance are a natural fit.

By Anne Marie O'Connor // Photography by Dorothy Hong



GOODY TWO-SHOES
Wohl, seen at her studio, wearing Clio sandals from her Spring 2015 collection and headpiece and necklace by Erickson Beamon

“It wasn’t the easiest thing for me to give up Miu Miu, Prada and Dries,” says Arden Wohl of the animal-product divestiture she made of her closet six years ago. Wohl, who is designing her fourth footwear collection for Cri de Coeur, is on a mission to show the world that vegan shoes can be as chic as leather ones. “Fashion has always been part of my DNA,” says Wohl, a longtime fashion “it” girl who’s famous for her signature headbands. (She was also reportedly the inspiration for Blair’s look on *Gossip Girl*.) “But if you don’t wear leather, you cut carbon emissions by 29 percent. And we’ve got to change—global warming is happening!”

Wohl, who came to this interview in an Agnès b. gingham dress and a pair of colorful high-heeled sandals of her own design, defies the clichés about vegans and fashion. She credits much of the success of her shoe line to her many friends in the business, including designers Zac Posen and Victoria Bartlett. “And I’ve learned so much from the women [who founded] Cri de Coeur, Gina Ferraraccio and Julie Dicterow. I met them through the vegan community, at a Humane Society event. We always talked about doing something together. Finally, one day, we said, ‘We’ve been talking about this for three years—let’s do it!’ They’ve taught me everything about shoemaking.”

Before launching her shoe line, Wohl was a filmmaker—she graduated from New York University’s film school and made several short films—and attended pastry school. A resident of West Soho, she still loves to cook and even makes her own tofu and soy milk at home. She also frequents some of downtown’s vegan-friendly restaurants, including Dimes, Blossom and Buddha Bodai, where she’s obsessed with the faux ribs. “They’re two pieces of seitan and in the middle is mochi, which tastes like animal fat.”

For her latest collection (\$100 to \$250), she’s skipping a presentation in favor of an installation in a window at the Riff Hotel (300 W. 30th St., riffhotels.com) in Chelsea. The artist who’s designing it, Marlous Borm, is another friend of Wohl’s. “We’re taking the fine-art concept and combining it with the shoes,” she says. “It’s going to be stunning.” (The exhibit will be up for a month, starting Sept. 8.) But more than just a fashion venture, she says her line “is a great way to get the message out that you can still look great in vegan shoes.” And is there anything chicer than guilt-free fashion? cridecoeur.myshopify.com