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At Josefinas, Ballet Flats with a Twist

From Gloria Steinem to Leandra Medine, Josefinas is the new go-to ballet flat brand. And they just opened a store in Nolita.

by [Gillian Sagansky](#)

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When [Audrey Hepburn](#) paired skinny jeans with black ballet flats in *Funny Face* (1957), a sartorial phenomenon was born. Since then, the ballet flat has weathered fashion's many phases: throughout the 60s by [French New Wavers](#) Anna Karina and Brigitte Bardot, on the glamazons of the late 80s (cue: Sam & Libby), and in the early 2000s as a reprieve from Uggs. And now they're back again, this time from the far shores of [Portugal](#).

"I felt that I needed the perfect pair of flats to conquer the world. So I created Josefinas," says 35-year old Portuguese shoe designer Filipa Júlio who founded Josefinas in 2013 with her business partner Maria Cunha. A former [ballerina](#) and architect, Júlio admits the idea for her own line of footwear was a natural way to marry her passions of construction and dance.

"[Shoemaking] was something I never expected in my life," she says, "but now I can't imagine my life without thinking about shoes all day." After all, shoemaking is in her blood. Not only did she name the brand after her ballet-dancing grandmother, but her grandfather was a shoemaker by trade. "He probably influenced me without me knowing it," she says. But as he never passed down any pointers on the craft, Júlio set out to learn the tricks of the trade from scratch. And in three short years she's come a long way.

Josefinas opened their first flagship store in New York's Nolita neighborhood last week, and tapped designer Christian Lahoude (who has designed flagships for [Gucci](#), Tiffany's, and Jimmy Choo) to outfit the haunt with pearl-encrusted wall coverings and rose gold adornments. The shoes are of equal panache. The brand takes their material and aesthetic cues from Portugal's rich artisan history, hand-crafting each pair in the small town of Sao João da Madeira, which is famous for producing luxury wares.



The new Josefinas store in Nolita.

Courtesy of Josefinas.

But what started as a line of classic leather ballet flats has since expanded to include twenty-five different colors, a range of fabrics (from crocodile to lace and suede), and other models such as mules, sneakers, low-heeled ballet flats, and knee-high boots. The shoes retail between \$179 for a pair of classic leathers, and as high as \$3,300 for their topaz-adorned ‘Blue Persian Salt’ flats, which are heralded as the most expensive ballet flats in the world. “A shoe can be simple, but extraordinary,” says Júlio, who is always thinking of inventive ways to reinterpret the classic style, such as her ‘Moscow’ shoe, which resembles a pointe shoe and comes in a rather extravagant, custom-made music box.

It’s no wonder Josefinas has garnered a unique following, such as [Eva Chen](#), Sarah Sampaio, Leandra Medine (who owns three pairs) and Gloria Steinem, who collaborated with the brand to design a limited edition pair to benefit the non-profit Women for Women International. But it is their logo – an asymmetrical bow—that best summarizes their feminist, go-getter mentality. “It just didn’t make sense to have a perfect bow. Life is not perfect, handmade is not perfect, and you can adjust your life as you go,” says Júlio. “Our bow became a symbol of this.”

