

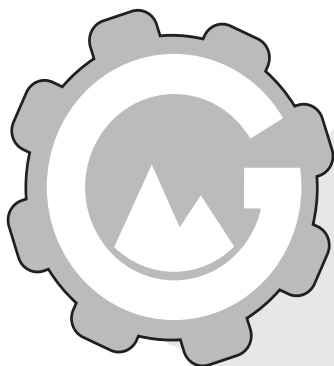
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BUSINESS



LOCAL MANUFACTURING - A seamstress begins the shoemaking process at SOM Footwear in Montrose. The budding business currently employs a total of seven people. (Photo by Gus Jarvis)

A Sense of Motion Finds a Home in Montrose

*New Shoe
Manufacturing Brings
Simple, Fashionable
Sneakers to the Masses*

BY GUS JARVIS

MONTROSE - When avid runner Olie Marchal was told by his doctor he should hang up his running shoes because of back pain several years ago, he decided to try running in more simple forms of footwear. He tried everything from aqua socks to flat-bottomed Converse shoes to even going barefoot.

Not only did wearing simpler forms of footwear cure his back pain, it led Marchal, along with his wife, Nathalie Bouchard, to create a new, simple line of fashion sneakers designed and manufactured in Montrose. After years of planning, work and shoemaking education SOM Footwear hit full production in Montrose in early August.

Inspired to recreate the feeling of running barefoot, SOM Footwear's two lines of shoes - casual and sport - bring an unencumbered feeling of natural balance, stability and an "original sense of motion," or SOM.

"They are fashion sneakers," Marchal said inside the office of SOM Footwear's Montrose headquarters last week. "What we have done is create a light, soft and active shoe. What we've done really well is the comfort. They are super soft."

While the manufacturing operation has only been fully operational for a couple of weeks, Marchal and Bouchard have been testing their design on interested parties at recent Norwood Farmers Markets and at last week's Montrose Main in Motion. SOM Footwear will be at the next Telluride Farmers Market on Friday, Aug. 22.

"People say they feel like slippers," Bouchard said. "Some of the people who bought them have been very pleased. One person said, 'I can't seem to take them off.'"

Becoming "tired of all the products made overseas" Marchal said the idea to create locally manufactured shoes was sparked back

MADE IN MONTROSE - Olie Marchal and Nathalie Bouchard with their line of SOM Footwear shoes inside the Montrose-based manufacturing facility. (Photo by Gus Jarvis)



in 2011. After being a runner for close to 20 years, Marchal's back problems led his doctor to suggest he stop running, and find another sport. Bouchard is French Canadian and Marchal is French. Both have lived in Colorado since 2004 and received citizenship in 2011.

Marchal, a metal worker based in Norwood for over 10 years, said he was puzzled by his doctor's recommendation. He went on to read Christopher McDowell's *Born to Run*, a book that tells the story of the Tarahumara Indians of Copper Canyon known for long distance running completely barefoot. Inspired by the book, Marchal, like many who have read the book, tried running barefoot.

When that didn't work out, Marchal said he decided to give minimalist footwear options a try.

"I went to the simplest things I could try," Marchal said. "I did a trail marathon in Converse. Then I tried water shoes, which didn't last an entire run."

At that point, he decided to make his own shoes.

Not knowing how to even thread a bobbin, he bought a sewing machine at a thrift store and went to work.

"Sure enough, I made my first pair of slippers and went for a 10-mile run, and I said yes! I ran a 50 K in those shoes. I didn't win but I finished it," he said.

Knowing he was onto something special, Marchal said he and Bouchard decided to try make simple shoes, locally. He attended

a trade school in Paris, found used machinery and secured private financing, with a boost from the the Telluride Foundation's Telluride Venture Accelerator program.

"It's important to mention the help we received from the Telluride Venture Accelerator," Marchal said. "I said I wanted to do this locally and that if I had to go to China, I just won't do it. Just for that, they said yes and helped us out."

Initially, the two planned to base the SOM Footwear's operation out of Norwood, but the deal fell through at the last minute. Moving forward, the two found space in Montrose on North Cascade Avenue. Getting the machinery, and then tweaking operations to their standards, took awhile. But now, the operation is fully operational, with a total of seven employees helping to manufacture and market the shoes.

"The entire shoe is made from scratch here in Montrose," Bouchard said. "There is no outsourcing whatsoever."

The two lines of SOM Footwear shoes, which Marchal said aren't made for running, use simple sole designs and come in charcoal, black, red and yellow. Once those materials are used up, a new set of colors will be introduced.

What is the long-term vision of SOM Footwear?

"Pretty big, I hope," Marchal said. "I think it's a good thing for the community. Local manufacturing is so vital to this region."

Shoes and more information are available at SOMfootwear.com.