Leather is timeless...

Typical for Surinamese crafts, the leather line that artisan Nicky Wong (and his two co-workers) developed for Readytex beautifully combines new and ancient techniques, designs and decorations which proof that leather is really timeless! The material is local leather, natural, decorated with imprints from stamps on colour stained edges. This material, creativity and 25 years of craftsmanship results in typical slippers, sandals, belts, document maps in three sizes, coin-purses and cute little miniature slippers as key chains. Very popular are the sandals and slippers in all sizes for every man, woman and child who want reliable and comfortable footwear.

The new favorite for girls and ladies is the **rose slipper**. This is a 2004 creation of Wong, where a stylized rose of leather blooms between the first and the second toe holds the fore foot and a strap holds the rest. The rose slippers stir visual images of collective universal memories. Images of **siddhis**- wise men- of India who traditionally walk on wooden slippers in this rose model thus continuing a 4000 years tradition of some of our forefathers of the far east here in the Amazon.

**Contemporary handmade leather crafts**

Handmade leather footwear, bags, purses and belts were re-introduced in the Guyanas by traveling craft people, hippies from Brazil, Argentina and Mexico in the nineteen seventies. Guyanese craftspeople were eager to learn stamping techniques from the Brazilians and molding from the Mexicans. Since it was fashionable, artistic handmade leather footwear and accessories from India were on sale in Suriname’s capital. Inspired by the success as salesman of leather crafts from his brother Ken Wong in Paramaribo, Nicky Wong left British Guyana in 1979 and started as a leather crafts man here. His hand made leather products were soon on sale on different locations in Paramaribo because of the growing demand. The closing of the only tannery, and other difficulties forced the artisans to a semi-slumber in the crafts for 8 years, in which the Surinamese consumers had almost no handmade leather products. A great and welcome change came in 2000, when Readytex became the sole distributor of Wong’s products. Together they form a proud and creative combination offering their customers quality handmade leatherwear and at least two new designs every year.

Elvira Rijstrijk

And at Readytex in modern Surinamese designs

Leather history

Like every colonized country local people wore shoes in western designs made by Surinamese shoemakers. All over the world most people had but one pair of shoes for their entire adult life. The price of shoes was incredibly high in those times, even in Lynn, North America, the shoe capital of the world. This because of the highly skilled craftwork required for the task of lasting, the sewing of the leather - uppers to the sole, which was a costly and tedious process that was done around the last, a wooden model of the human foot. **Remarkable is that a black, Surinamese inventor changed all this:** Jan Ernst Matzeliger (1852 - 1889). Matzeliger made possible the modernization of the shoe industry by designing and patenting a shoe lasting machine in Lynn in 1880. The lasting machine would automatically stitch the leather of the shoe to the sole. This resulted in lower cost to both the shoe manufacturer and the customers and shoes became more affordable. Today, in shoe manufacturing centers around the world, machinery very similar to the Matzeliger original is still in use. Only special or exclusive shoes were handmade since the invention of the lasting machine revolutionary changed the shoe market. After that shoemakers were mostly consulted for shoe-repair. The last well-known cobblers in Paramaribo were Kamperveen, Liesdek and Kempes, the latter two still being in business. When Kamperveen retired the family donated the contents of his entire workshop to the Surinamese Museum, who has this antique shoemaker’s workshop on display in Fort Zeelandia. Very interesting to visit!

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