



HAPPY FEET

Stuart Weitzman beams when he talks about his shoe empire that designs for the well-heeled likes of Jennifer Aniston and Angelina Jolie. But if you want to see real happiness just ask about his family and his favorite game of airplane roulette

by **JILL JOHNSON** photograph by **WILLIAM TAUFIC**



At Stuart Weitzman's headquarters on 57th Street in New York, fabulous footwear fills a showroom the size of a tennis court. Reclining upon glass shelves are those wildly popular calf-hugging boots with stretch-fabric backs. Beside them, sassy ankle boots await the Kardashian set, and lofty platform heels beckon gossipy girls. On another wall, ballet flats pose primly, except for a rebellious posse of python prancers in hues of purple, orange and red. High wedges sit in the shadow of crazy high wedges. Loafers loaf. Tippy evening shoes, overdosing on glamor, fall across couches and pile up on chairs. In the center of it all—both literally and figuratively—is designer Stuart Weitzman. He is lying on the floor, in a bed of jeweled strappy sandals and spectacular pumps.



This one-of-a-kind Cinderella-inspired shoe, featuring a five carat amaretto diamond as well as more than 500 diamonds from Kwiat, was worn to the Academy Awards in 2004 by singer Alison Krauss, who was nominated for two Oscars that year.



Stuart and Jane Weitzman

The limber Weitzman, doesn't complain about the requested pose for the magazine layout. He just warns, "I may fall asleep." Designing 600 styles of shoes per year is bound to make a guy tired. He quickly rallies with, "How many push-ups you want me to do?" He's got spunk, though his charcoal sport jacket, burgundy tie and grandfatherly appearance don't necessarily say "spunk."

A debate ensues about the tie. "Well, do you usually wear a tie?" asks the photographer.

"No, *they* told me to wear a tie!" he says, like a kid on Sunday morning. *They* are his people—anyone with an empire the size of Stuart Weitzman's needs them—and *they* chuckle as he removes the tie and tosses it aside. The photographer captures several frames of Weitzman's amiable smile and the shoot wraps. However, Weitzman is not ready to talk shoes until he offers some advice to the lensman, who has revealed that he has teenage daughters.

"Can I?" asks Weitzman, now standing, and addressing the women who handle his schedule and must know what anecdote is coming. Of course



A sketch from
the 2012 line



PHOTOGRAPHS BY WILLIAM TAUFIC



Weitzman's store on
Greenwich Avenue

he doesn't really have to answer to anyone, so he launches in.

"I was stuck in London during Wimbledon with one of my daughters—she was eighteen or nineteen at the time. The matches were rained out. I said, 'Let's just go away for two days, then come back.' As we headed to Heathrow, she kept asking, 'Where are we going?' I said, 'We're going to play Airplane Roulette.' I just made it up. I said, 'We're going to look up at the screen, and we're going to the first city listed.'"

»



Created in 2005 for actress Regina King, this shoe featured the earrings of the iconic Marilyn Monroe.

Weitzman didn't know anything about Bergen, but they found themselves in the beautiful fjords of Norway and had a fantastic trip. And so a Weitzman tradition was born. He has been playing airplane roulette, taking separate trips with each of his now grown daughters, for the past sixteen years. They have wound up in Reykjavik, Venice, San Sebastian, Tenerife, St. Louis... "These trips are a big part of why my daughters are my best friends," asserts Weitzman. "You have to try it!"

Marilyn Monroe's crystals, 1,800 diamonds, 642 rubies—these are the kind of details found on the one-of-a-kind shoes Stuart Weitzman designed for a lucky nominee each year at the Oscars from 2002 to 2008.

The question of how much all these last-minute plane tickets cost doesn't come up, but the wide-eyed enthusiasm of the game's inventor makes that oversight seem more endearing than pretentious.

At five feet eight, with a hint of gray in his thinning brown hair and gentle blue eyes, Weitzman is not showy. He wears black-framed glasses that hover between industrial and artsy; he could be a cobbler in Eastern Europe (where his ancestors hail from) or the low-key mastermind behind a company that sells two million pairs of shoes per year in seventy countries. Google Stuart Weitzman and you might find an image of him playing Ping-Pong in jeans and a T-shirt or a picture of his opulent Diamond Dream shoes designed for the Oscars.

ORIGIN OF A SHOE FETISH

Stuart Weitzman grew up in Long Island. His dad, Seymour Weitzman, opened his own shoe business, Mr. Seymour, after running the national chain A.S. Beck. His mom was a former model.

"My mom was a glamorous woman. She had great shoes. She was my dad's model size, so she probably had a thousand pairs. I was fascinated with them," recalls Weitzman, now seated in his showroom,

where the photo team has dispersed. "If you look at a shoe, it really is a piece of sculpture. There's a certain architecture to a shoe."

"In those days, there weren't ballet or sport shoes," continues Weitzman. "Women had a glamorous role; they dressed up. Audrey Hepburn was the first to wear chic flats. When I see a woman in flats, I see that as a sign of absolute confidence. There's a psychology to shoes."

Weitzman had a creative side growing up—he enjoyed drawing and painting—but he didn't see shoe design in his future. "I went to Wharton and was ready to hit Wall Street. You know, I was going to be the next Vanderbilt," he says, chuckling. Weitzman did odd jobs at his father's factory during the summers and dabbled in design. "I got so excited seeing the shoe I designed in stores," he

Made with 1,420 Kwiat diamonds, the Diamond Dream Shoe was worn by actress Anika Noni Rose in 2007.



A sketch from the 2012 line



says. Weitzman's father was so excited about one of his son's designs that he had it bronzed. "It was a kitten heel, sort of curved, with a nice sexy sideline cut," describes Weitzman. "It was built up at front, with a slit and shoe string bow. It was sexy."

Weitzman was just out of college when his father died unexpectedly in 1965. Weitzman's brother Warren handled the manufacturing side of the family business, while his father had handled design and sales. "Warren asked if I could help him out," says Weitzman. "I made some sketches. I told Warren, 'I want to try this for a year.' My hobby became my work."

BUILDING A BRAND

Stuart Weitzman has been working at his hobby for almost fifty years. He remained at the helm of Mr. Seymour when it was sold thirty-five years ago and production moved to Elda, Spain (where it remains today). He eventually bought back the company and, in 1986, renamed it Stuart Weitzman, Inc.

"I started so small," says Weitzman. "We have five floors in this building; we started with half a floor. Same in Spain. Now there are nine factories plus two handbag factories. I still know everybody by name." Between factories and suppliers, 2,000 people work for the company. Weitzman built allegiance from



Weitzman designed this ruby and platinum shoe in 2003 with more than 100 carats of rubies. However, in deference to the recently declared Iraqi war, he decided to pull the shoe and it went unworn.

the ground up. His workers in Spain nominated him for the prestigious “El Hijo Predilecto Adoptivo de Elda” award (“Favorite Adopted Son of Elda”). For the Spaniards to “adopt” a foreigner as one of their own is quite an honor, not to mention that the circle of winners is tiny. The town has given out only four of these awards since the end of the Spanish Civil War. With his employees’ endorsement, discerning customers around the world willing to pay a few hundred dollars for a pair of his shoes, and now a client list that includes names like Jennifer Aniston, Angelina Jolie and Beyoncé, Weitzman’s loyal following stretches from the ground to the stars.

Weitzman opened the first retail store in 1993. His wife, Jane, who used to call customers back when all the company could afford was a secretary two days a week, spearheaded the project. “I wanted to give Southern service in a store on Madison Avenue,” says Jane, who is originally from Atlanta and met Weitzman when they lived in the same building in Boston right after college. Now there are seventy-three stores across the globe, including a new one here in the town the Weitzmans have called home since 1975. The Jones Group bought a majority stake in Stuart Weitzman in 2010 but “they are acting

mainly as investors,” says Weitzman.

Wayne Kulkin, who has been in the shoe business since age fourteen and is president of Stuart Weitzman, says of his boss: “He’s the ultimate left brain-right brain person. He has as much business acumen as any executive I’ve met.” His ethics are what Kulkin respects the most, though. He says, “Stuart will always do what’s right over what would make more money.”

Kulkin reveals that Weitzman has never sent an e-mail, but no cluttered inbox means more time—“twenty hours a day”—to focus on his passion.

“Stuart is so clever in regards to coming up with beautiful designs, but what makes him special is that he’s also a master technician and pattern maker.” Jane commented that her husband cut his own patterns on their dining room table for years. “He knows how a shoe will fit,” says Kulkin. “There are maybe two or three people in the world like that.”

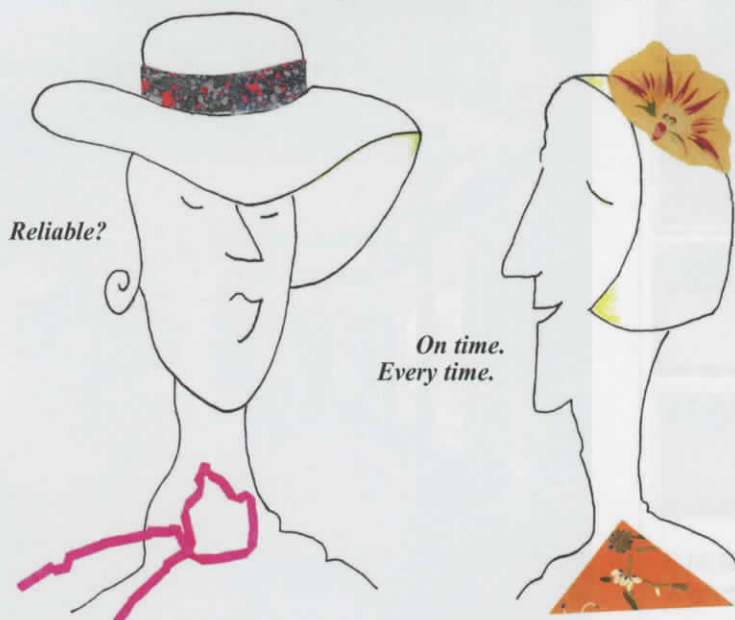
THE MUSE & THE SHOES

Weitzman is not a one-muse man. He gets his inspiration “from all types of women. One day I’m thinking of the suburban girl who’s always in jeans.

Weitzman’s father was so excited about one of his son’s designs that he had it bronzed.

“It was a kitten heel, sort of curved, with a nice sexy sideline cut,” describes Weitzman.

The Talk of the Town



Our impeccable door-to-door service is at your disposal 24 hours a day, 365 days a year and is supported by a large staff of highly professional and very knowledgeable travel advisors. No wonder discriminating corporate travelers have been relying on us for more than 50 years.

 **RUDY'S**
EXECUTIVE TRANSPORTATION

1-800-243-RUDY

Since 1956 www.GoRudys.com

DOT# 1951 • ICC# MC15081



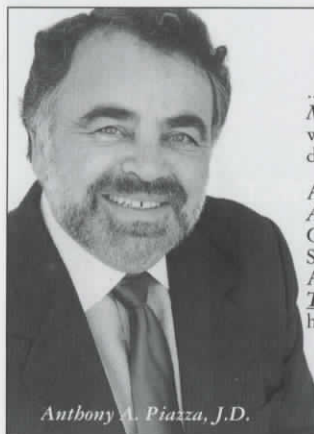
Even the tiniest of feet can go glam.

The next day, it's the girl who has to impress her friends with everything she wears. He also ponders the "celebrity, career woman, retired well-off woman, the bride"—and his wife. "She says to me, 'I'm not competing with those bim-bos in high heels. Make me beautiful shoes I can walk in!'"

Weitzman considers the divergent styles of his daughters (both of whom attended Greenwich Academy and Greenwich High). "They wear totally different kinds of shoes," he says. "Rachel is a performer—a singer and songwriter; the shoes can't be wild enough. If she finds five shoes in this room she loves, then I know I've made it. That funky, young, cool customer is so hard to satisfy. Elizabeth, one of the head film critics at the *Daily News*, is Ivy League all the way." Weitzman asserts that the women in his family wear only his shoes but "not because I make them."

"If you think about it, someone designed everything we use," muses Weitzman, gesturing around the room. "There is creativity in everything." That being said, Weitzman finds some creative endeavors more exciting than others. A new shoe line in collaboration with Scoop's Stefani Greenfield? Yes!

WILLIAM TAUFIC



Anthony A. Piazza, J.D.

Divorcing Is Never Pleasant...

...but it need not be emotionally and financially draining. **MEDIATION** also brings to an **END** your marital relationship but with more control and less stress. Best of all, it is less expensive than divorce and allows you to move on with your life much sooner.

A practicing attorney for over 36 years in the area of family law, **Anthony Piazza** is also a trained mediator. An experienced Federal Court Mediator since 1979, he has acted as a Special Master for the Superior Court, State of Connecticut, to mediate pending divorces. Appointed a trial-referee since 1984, Piazza is also listed in *The Best Lawyers in America*. In Connecticut Magazine's Survey, he is listed as one of the top 50 lawyers in the state.

GREENWICH/STAMFORD
DIVORCE MEDIATION CENTER
112 PROSPECT STREET, THIRD FLOOR, STAMFORD, CT 06901
203.348.2465

“Audrey Hepburn was the first to wear chic flats. **When I see a woman in flats, I see that as a sign of absolute confidence.** There’s a psychology to shoes.”

Handbags? Absolutely. Kids’ shoes? Yep. But don’t expect a men’s line. “What fun is there in men’s shoes?” asks the designer. “Are men going to wear platforms, red patent leather, Swarovski crystals?”

Marilyn Monroe’s crystals, 1,800 diamonds, 642 rubies—these are the types of details found on the one-of-a-kind shoes Stuart Weitzman designed for a lucky nominee each year at the Oscars from 2002 to 2008. He names the Million Dollar sandal of 2002 as his favorite and most original shoe: “Joan Rivers grabbed that shoe and said [on camera], ‘Look at this Stuart Weitzman shoe!’ I couldn’t buy that kind of exposure.”

Often a woman first puts her foot in a Stuart Weitzman shoe on her wedding day, and aptly a bridal shoe is what won Weitzman his first design award. “I’d go to weddings and see brides hiding their acetate leather pumps under these gorgeous gowns, but you *would* see them. I designed a lace pump, which was complicated because lace isn’t strong. *Brides* magazine recognized it as the Accessory of the Year.”

Another shoe that stands out in Weitzman’s mind is his Alex espadrille, “the one Jennifer Aniston has adopted. It’s a jute-rope wedge with hand-crocheted straps—typically you see this kind of work in clothing, not in shoes,” he explains. On Aniston’s feet, the Alex espadrille was a ubiquitous feature in



It takes work
to fill these shoes.

You work hard making your home a place of elegance and relaxation—raising the children, preparing gourmet meals, practically becoming a contractor during renovation. There comes a time you need assistance. Whether a Housekeeper, Personal Assistant, Private Chef, Nanny or Elder Care Expert, LifeWorx® will provide fully screened, skilled, reliable staff to improve the lifestyle you’ve built...all with superior customer service. Call us...

 **LifeWorx®**

Nannies ✕ Housekeepers ✕ Personal Chefs ✕ Estate Managers
Elder Care ✕ Child Care/Mother’s Helpers ✕ Personal Assistants www.LifeWorx.com

21 Post Road
Westport, CT
203.966.3400

145 East 62nd Street
New York, NY
212.257.6706

400 King Street
Chappaqua, NY
914.458.9933

Insured and Bonded

**AUTOMATED GATE
SYSTEMS**



DESIGN ASSOCIATES, INC.
60 CONNOLLY PARKWAY, HAMDEN CT 06514
GATES CUSTOM DESIGNED & BUILT
ADVANCED & RELIABLE AUTOMATION
ON-CALL SERVICE
203-407-8913 203-838-5971
MAIN OFFICE NORWALK OFFICE

**DIET
CENTER**

DIET CENTER OF RYE



914-967-9462
135 Purchase St. • Rye, NY
Same location for 25 years
Only 10 mins. from downtown Greenwich

Haggerty Pools



SERVICE & CONSTRUCTION
203-348-6899
 WWW.HAGGERTYPOOLS.COM

Providing Answers
 Honoring Choices.
 Creating Hope.



At Planned Parenthood, we are here for young women and men, with high quality personal care at an affordable cost.

www.ppsne.org 1-800-230-PLAN

 **Planned Parenthood**
 of Southern New England, Inc.

Serving Connecticut & Rhode Island

To learn more about supporting CT women, children and families call 203.865.5158. Donations made to Planned Parenthood of Southern New England are tax-deductible to the fullest extent allowable under the law.

paparazzi pics last season.

What will we have on our feet this fall? According to Weitzman, tailored platform heels and high-wedge boots (fashionistas), flat boots with an inner wedge for support and loafers with latex soles that are "like walking on a sponge" (comfort crowd), kitten heels and the return of pretty mid-heels (party circuit), back stretch boots and ballet flats (everyone, everywhere), and "Let It Rain" boots that marry chic waterproof leather and suede uppers to rubber boot bottoms (whoever is looking for a cool alternative to Hunter wellies).

FEET UP

Well, not so much. Relaxation for Weitzman doesn't involve an ottoman. Rather, it generally involves a racquet or paddle. "He's an amazing Ping-Pong player," says Kulkin. "It's really something to watch him play." He represented the USA in Masters Ping-Pong at the Maccabi Games, the "Jewish Olympics," and plays regularly in Chinatown.

Weitzman also enjoys playing tennis on the red clay courts in Spain, where he spends half his time, and on his court at home in backcountry Greenwich, or down the street at the Banksville Club. "Playing sports is the only thing that gets business off my mind," says Weitzman.

He is anticipating another diversion, with his young granddaughter. "I can't wait until she's twelve to start playing airport roulette with her," he says excitedly.

While her husband works in Spain, explores the globe with the girls, and smashes balls around, Jane finds plenty to keep her busy. "She helps with the business—retail, p.r., major events—in her spare time," boasts Weitzman. "Her full-time job is charity work. I asked her to make me a list, because if she dies, someone needs to document everything she's done. The list is three pages long. She's got the big heart!"

Heart and sole—they make a good pair. 