

Footwear

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There's life in your old leather yet

Wear and tear need not spell the end of quality goods, if you turn to a master.

The title maestro usually applies to a musical genius, but Evan Skliros is certainly a maestro with leather. He is a craftsman of the old school, and a visit to his domain involves a journey into Melbourne's history in the CBD's magnificent Royal Arcade.

Evans Leather Restoration's heritage workshop is on three levels inside the arcade's second and third floors, where a team of restorers trained in the old master's secrets continue the company's 60 year tradition of bringing leather back to life.

Skliros was a shoemaker and shoe designer in his native Greece. He migrated to Melbourne in 1955 at age of 20 and set up shop soon afterwards, becoming affectionately known within the arcade simply as "Mr Evans".

The business grew over the decades as countless customers recognised the quality of his work, and the 82 year-old still regularly visits the workshop to oversee the work done



A maestro of leather restoration, Evan Skliros is a Royal Arcade fixture. Picture: Dominik Staszowski

by his team. "It's like my home", he says.

The company's leather services include traditional shoe repairs, leather restoration, waterproofing, cleaning, recolouring and alterations for boots, heels, leather clothes,

bags and all types of leather accessories.

"We also do protective soles for men's and ladies' shoes as well as changing linings and zips - everything to do with leather," Skliros says. "Some of the items we restore can be

very valuable and the old leather is usually better quality.

"It's better because it used to be what they called calf leather, but you can't find it today. Also, the tanneries were better. Now they want to produce the leather as quickly as possible and they don't do as good a job as they used to.

"I can tell the quality of leather immediately. Not only by looking at it, but by feeling and stretching it. It's always possible to restore and we have a very nice nourisher, so we nourish the leather, wash it, restore it and then dye it to the original colour."

Even items with rips or tears can be made to look new in the workshop. "We do all sorts of repairs, and if we put in a new section it will be invisible," Skliros says. "We do it for shoes, handbags, jackets, purses, belts, anything in leather."

One of Evans Leather Restoration's specialties is recovering women's shoes or handbags with new material to match other clothing, a service that has proved popular for weddings and other formal occasions. Items with a leather exterior can also be dyed to any colour, or restored and dyed to their original appearance.

When water penetrates leather it causes it to become dry and lose its durability, and Skliros advises using a premium waterproof protection spray on shoes, bags and other leather accessories as an essential part of caring for them.

Another essential protective measure is applying a good quality leather conditioner, which lubricates the fibres, protects the surface from stains and makes the leather more flexible, durable and supple.

EVANS

LEATHER RESTORATION

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