How Larroudé became the hottest fashion shoe brand despite the pandemic

By Roxanne Robinson - 21 July 2022

Crisis is often just another word for opportunity. It certainly applies to the 2020 launch of Larroudé—a designer-level shoe brand founded by fashion industry professional Marina Larroudé and her financier and entrepreneur husband Ricardo Larroudé—without designer-level price tags.

In just over 18 months, the brand has achieved several milestones such as a Launch of the Year award, First Lady Jill Biden sporting a Larroudé bag at three high-profile international events, and developed four brand collaborations, with number five releasing this week. According to the Larroudés, offering a solid quality product that delivers fun, experimental fashion shoes at half the price is the key to this start-up’s success.

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The first collaboration was with Melissa, a natural fit since the rubber shoe company hails from Brazil. Next was Oscar de la Renta, with whom they teamed up to make shoes for their Spring 2022 collection. LoveShackFancy followed a similar concept. A fake Supreme collaboration was posted on social as part of an April Fool’s joke.

“Making quality shoes is hard; many brands don’t make them. We have a strong team here and in Brazil that can make it happen and deliver product quickly so brands approach us to partner,” Marina said, noting from initial conversations to finished product can be a matter of twelve weeks or less.

This September, the brand will add Bloomingdale’s to its wholesale client roster, such as Nordstrom, Saks Fifth Avenue, Intermix, and Fivestory.

“We are making this delivery happen within two months of first discussing the project,” she said.

The latest pair is with Favorite Daughter, the buzzy Instagram-fueled line by sisters Erin and Sara Foster, who decided to make those of the moment must-have wardrobe staples rather than search endlessly for them. Marina knew their sister Jordan, a stylist, so the idea started there.

“We did a super clean sandal; it doesn’t look like much, but it’s the workhorse of a shoe that you always wear,” Larroude said of the 35mm kitten-heel style that will arrive in black, ivory, and royal blue.

While the line offers plenty of simple styles, it’s mainly getting known for its novel, printed styles, something the Larroudé’s refer to as ‘conversational’ shoes.

“I saw customers come to Barneys and fall in love with whimsical shoes but bought the black version. The desire was there, but the client couldn’t justify the price tag but also did want to go mass market with Zara or Steve Madden for novelty. Larroudé is a pleasant middle ground of quality and fun taste level that they know and trust,”
she continued. The brand has tracked a 50 percent customer return rate.

Even though Larroudé has managed to keep prices reasonable, they aren’t immune to supply chain issues and inflation. “We will have to adjust the price about eight to ten percent in the fall to maintain our quality production partners,” said Marina.

After a high-profile career as an editor at Teen Vogue and Style.com, Marina transitioned to the retail world, taking a role at Barneys New York as its fashion director. Once the beloved department store closed after declaring Chapter 11 for the final time, she then went to head Brazilian shoe brand Schutz in the U.S.

“During the pandemic, I found myself without a job [at Schutz] and no one hiring. Ricardo was on furlough from his job. In the lockdown, all the doors were closed so I decided to take my experience and do it for myself,” she said.
The former editor and fashion director remembered retail’s comeback after the 2008 financial crisis and felt that fashion and retail would make a strong return once the pandemic was under control. Initially, she was approached to do private label shoe design work and, in that process, decided to launch Larroudé. (Currently, in a full circle moment, the couple develops private label collections with several designers such as Monique Lhuillier and Caroline Constas.)

She and Ricardo joined forces and tapped Gabriel Bolzan, a Brazilian shoe designer with over 16 years experience who had a family connection to a Brazilian shoe factory. Strategy and business development was handled by Victoria Quintino and Grasiela Claro became managing director.

On December 1, 2020, the brand launched with a website and stock to sell, itself a feat as many factories were un-operational in traditional shoe production places like Italy, Portugal and China.

While Brazil had its fair share of factory closures some managed to remain open with reduced workers and with strict protocols in place. The lack of other brands moving forward with production was windfall for the arroudés. In one case, the start-up kept one factory working exclusively for a year, helping keep employees working.

Producing in their native Brazil was aimed at offering a top-tier shoe without the designer shoe price tag that usually starts at $600 and can top $1,200. Marina was overwhelmed by the finished product when the first samples arrived.

“We built the shoe from the ground up, designing the last. I want the product to be prime but attainable so a lot of people can afford these shoes. But they needed to be comfortable; we added a suede outsole, made the last 5mm wider, added a cushioned sole. I started crying tears of joy when they arrived because of the quality. It’s a misconception Brazilian shoe production isn’t as good as Italy,’ she said. “We believe fashion shoes should cost $275 to $495. It might be that ‘Warby Parker’ moment where customers realize that designer shoes shouldn’t cost $600, $700 or more either,” added Ricardo noting. “It’s possible to take a bigger fashion risk if the price is right.”
Ricardo is also responsible for developing a QR code system currently in patent pending for the shoes that ultimately benefit both the brand and customers.

“It’s like providing a social security number for the shoe that can be tracked. The code provides a token with a link to share. If a new customer buys that shoe through the link, they get a discount, and the shoe owner gets a discount on a future purchase. Why should Google get the money?” Ricardo asked, referring to the paid ads the internet search engine uses.

It’s that ‘share the wealth’ philosophy that Ricardo envisions for a one-day physical location for Larroudé which will be part office space, part showroom, part retail space, part co-working space and part café.

“I don’t just see a wall of shoes but rather a space to serve as a platform,” he said. He sees a place where creatives would co-mingle and support one another’s quests.

“Maybe we would build a Cyc set for photo shoots and then feature that product first. Many creatives found themselves out of work after the pandemic, so it could be like an incubator for new projects,” he said, continuing, “Fashion is a very engaged workforce. It would be a place to hang out, do some work, have lunch, or do a photo shoot with a sharing economy model. It’s not that expensive and cheaper than making a museum store.”

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