

## STYLE &amp; FASHION

LOVE STORY

## Just for Kicks

Writer Gay Talese's shoe obsession started early—in the dapper Deep South—and continues up North in stride

BY STEVE GARBARINO

WHEN MANHATTAN journalist, author and man-about-town Gay Talese begins his day around 7 a.m., he dresses "like I'm going to the lunch I'm not going to."

Invariably, that means he's impeccably turned out, from his signature fedoras to his bespoke Oxford shoes.

For the author of "Thy Neighbor's Wife" and writer of many other books and fabled Esquire articles ("Frank Sinatra Has a Cold"), shoes have helped make him the man he is today: dignified, meticulous, dapper.

Mr. Talese isn't sure how many pairs he owns. "I have about 80 in all, but I've never really counted them," said the author from the parlor of the circa-1872, Upper East Side brownstone he lives in with his wife of 53 years, the publisher and editor Nan Talese.

"I have about 40 pairs here in the house. And we have a house in Roxbury, Conn., where there's about the same," said Mr. Talese, who was wearing on this day what he called "an afternoon outfit," consisting of a dark-green three-piece suit made by Cristiani of Paris; a button-down from Addison on Madison by Brian Hall (he has 60 such shirts); a red Sulka tie; a pocket square from Stefano Ricci; and a Cartier bracelet watch.

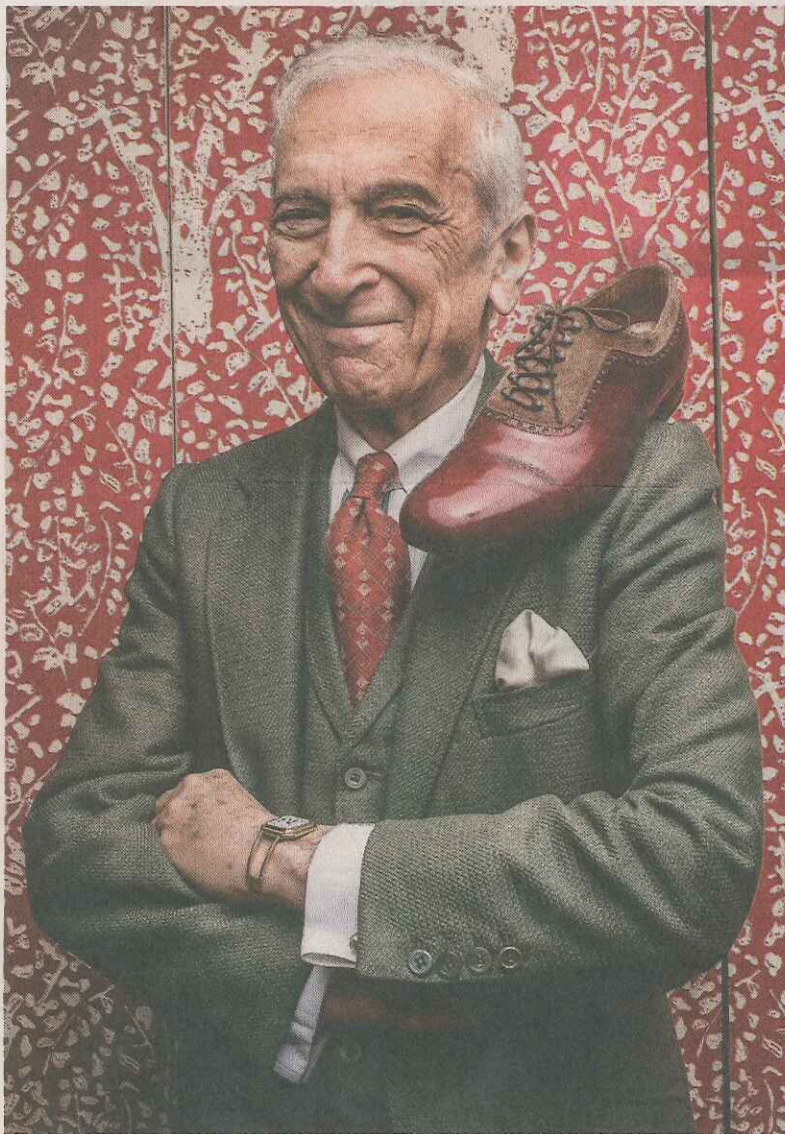
His tan fedora—which begs a "PRESS" card in its band—is made, like all his hats, by Bruno Lacorazza, of Puerto Fino Hats in North Miami.

For footwear, the 80-year-old often leans toward the hues of woods and spirits. On this day, to match his suit, he wore a pair of lace-up olive Oxfords from Domenico Vacca on Madison Avenue. "A very nice shoe," he said from his writing room, a converted wine cellar he calls "the Bunker," where he's currently at work on "A Nonfiction Marriage," a history of his life with Ms. Talese.

But the shoes he's most famous for are created by Roman Vaingauz of Vincent & Edgar, a Lexington Avenue boot maker. The hand-made affairs are exact replicas of a pair Mr. Talese purchased in 1960 at a dearly departed Manhattan haberdashery called Lefcourt.

"What distinguishes them is this suede trimming around the leather, and these tiny raised metal hooks that hold the laces in place," he said. "The original Lefcourts wore out after a year, 'which is when I discovered Vincent & Edgar.'"

Nearly all of Mr. Talese's shoes abide a similar design: two-toned with

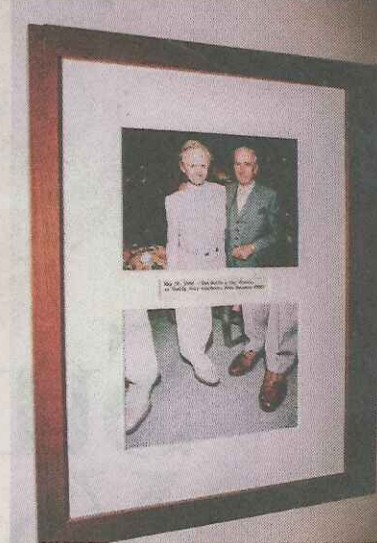


six eyelet rows and a narrow toe. "I rotate them so much that some have lasted for 20 years," he said.

Looking smart and wearing nice shoes is in Mr. Talese's blood. The Ocean City, N.J., native's mother was a buyer for a Brooklyn department store. And he's the son and the grandson of

"proudful" Italian tailors.

Mr. Talese—whose first name is short for Gaetano—has worn tailored clothing since he was a grade-schooler. It was in Rome, in 1955, however, that he first saw a Brioni suit (he now owns a dozen of them), while visiting the city as a lieutenant stationed in Frank-



## IF THE SHOE FITS

Clockwise from top: Gay Talese in his Manhattan home; one of his favorite Oxford styles; a framed snap of Mr. Talese and friend Tom Wolfe at a lunch at the Four Seasons in New York; a collection of his made-to-measure Vincent & Edgar shoes.

furt. It was a defining moment in his sartorial evolution: "I'd never seen a Brioni until I strolled past the store window and liked what I saw." In New York in the mid-'50s, he became a regular customer (as he has with Zegna and an Upper East Side tailoring shop called L&S).

The power of the shoe, however, preceded his custom suits. Mr. Talese's first loves were the white bucks that students wore at the University of Alabama, where he started as a freshman in 1949. Since then, his affinity for white bucks has faded (he owns none), but distinctive footwear has occupied and overtaken closet spaces throughout his home.

The trim-and-fit writer doesn't revel in shoes simply to showboat around, he said, explaining how he changes pairs four times a day, with each set playing a functional role in his routine. ("I don't own a pair of sneakers. I don't have bluejeans—neither blend in with my day.")

When he's writing at home, he said, "I wear a fine pair of Artioli slip-ons. They're very soft leather, very comfortable, and yet not so casual that I could not remain in them when dressed in one of my Cristiani suits, or a Brioni."

'I don't own a pair of sneakers,' said Mr. Talese. 'And I don't have bluejeans—neither blend in with my day.'

For his daily workout at a nearby gym, he wears "soft, low-cut white leather lace-up Barbagrigia sports shoes, which vaguely resemble moccasins."

Exhibiting a dozen or so of his favorites lined up in shoe trees, Mr. Talese mused that he enjoys stylishly strutting through each living hour as if it were his last. "People dress up for funerals," he said. "Why not dress up to celebrate that you're alive?"

The former New York Times reporter has long said that he came from an era in which newsmen "dressed for the story."

And then there are all those common threads that writing and shoemaking share. Mr. Talese often bonds the two—their process and craftsmanship—in conversation.

"I hesitate to tell you the cost, or the time Roman Vaingauz takes to make me a pair. You could write a novel faster than he makes shoes," he explained.

"It's that pride in doing something well. It's the craftsmanship. And how, like a seamless story, it all stands up to the test of time."