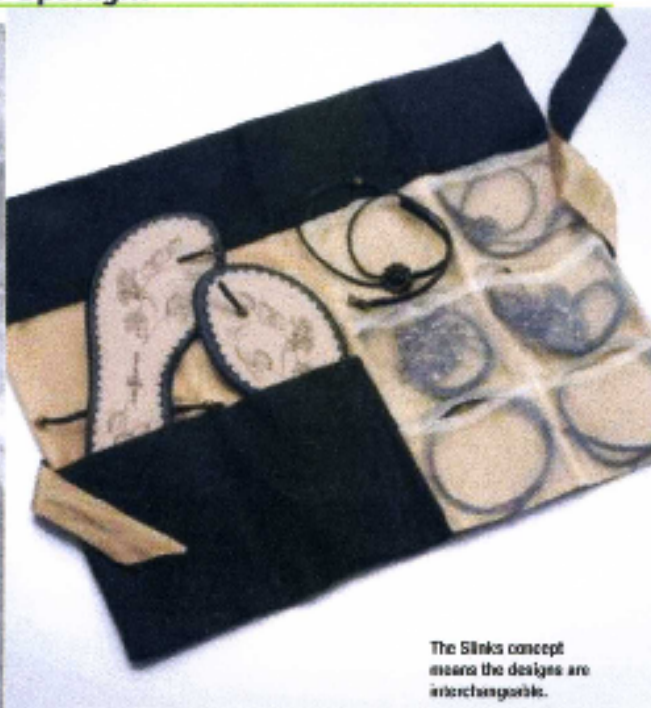
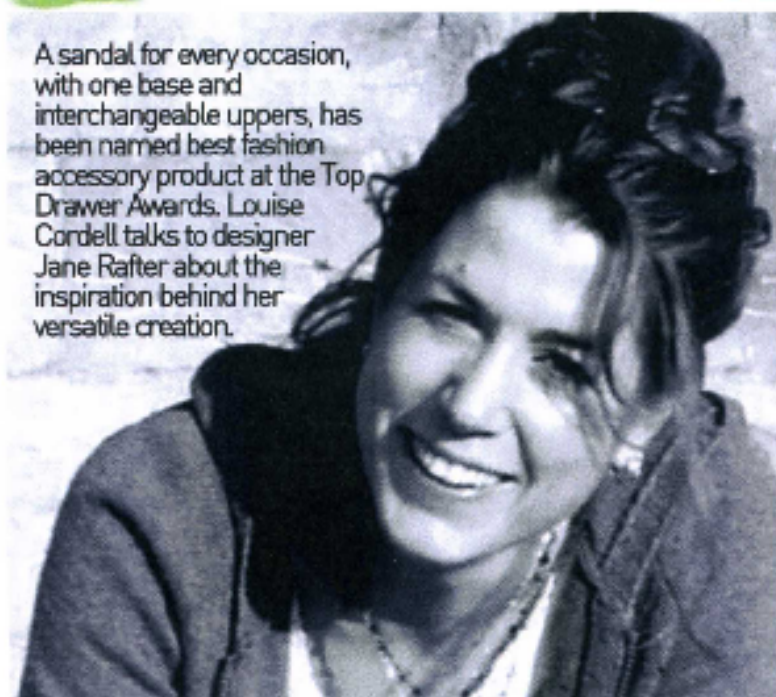


Designer Spotlight

A sandal for every occasion, with one base and interchangeable uppers, has been named best fashion accessory product at the Top Drawer Awards. Louise Cordell talks to designer Jane Rafter about the inspiration behind her versatile creation.



The Slinks concept means the designs are interchangeable.

Jane 'Slinks' off with top award

BORN and raised in Madrid, Irish/Australian designer Jane Rafter started her career with a fashion design degree in Dublin.

Her final year show earned rave reviews in the national press, winning awards for both the Most Original and Most Commercial collection at the National Fashion Awards.

She said: "My designs have always been about innovative solutions that combine beauty and simplicity."

"After finishing my degree I moved to London and worked with the designer Antony Price doing pattern cutting, boarding and embroidery as well as helping him create one-off dresses for his haute couture shows."

Her latest creation is Slinks, a versatile sandal with padded leather soles and three attachment points allowing the upper to be changed using a system of locking beads.

Jane added: "I first had the idea after making some beaded foot jewellery for a fashion show.

"Friends loved the effect they gave and I started thinking about ways to combine the look with bases to make practical footwear.

"I was also going through a period of attending weddings and events almost every weekend.

"I was getting tired of searching for new shoes to match every outfit and it really brought the idea of easily changeable designs to the front of my mind."

Slinks have now been on sale for about three months and, after receiving a positive reaction at Christmas fairs, Jane decided to exhibit at Top Drawer, her first big show.

The gamble paid off and, as well as receiving orders from ten boutiques, Slinks was named Top Drawer Best New Jewellery/Fashion Accessory

Product.

She added: "Winning the Top Drawer award was fantastic, it was such a boost.

"It has shown me that these days people are moving towards more unusual, quality products.

"I think they like to find a little treasure and to discover something unique and different to the things they see every day.

"Obviously it can be hard to compete with high street prices but quality will always be important to people and if you can offer them a little something extra then I think the product will be popular."

Jane now has plans to expand the range, introducing more styles and colours as well as some different heel height options.

She added: "I think one of the best things about the way these shoes are designed is that there is so much

scope for new styles and inspiration.

"In fact one of the main difficulties in putting together the first collection was narrowing down all my ideas into a few designs.

"I want them to appeal to as many people as possible and hope that they strike the right balance between glitz, glamour and simplicity.

"I had assumed they would be more of a spring/summer product, but they were in demand for Christmas presents and also by anyone off on holiday, so people seem to want them all year round.

"There has also been a big response from the bridal market with them being given as gifts to brides for their honeymoons, so that is another area to expand into.

"At the end of the day I just love to see the shoes being worn and I want to make them available to as many people as I can."