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## Morgan Buckert's Boots Are Made for Walking-And Looking



Morgan Buckert lovingly stitches her handsome cowboy boots.





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Sunday, November 10, 2024

BY KAREN BOSSICK

Morgan Buckert wears her award-winning art on her feet, celebrating a 150-year-old tradition dating back to the Chisholm Trail.

Buckert, a custom cowboy boot maker, only started learning her craft about 10 years ago. But this fall she won the prestigious 2024 Heritage Craft Prize, which celebrated her technical mastery and her knack for tradition and innovation as a Women of the West.

"I love using a tool of ranchers as my canvas to showcase ranchers' interests and desires. Custom made cowboy boots are like tattoos—you can choose how to show yourself to the world. And creating that experience for someone is heartwarming to me," said the Hailey woman.



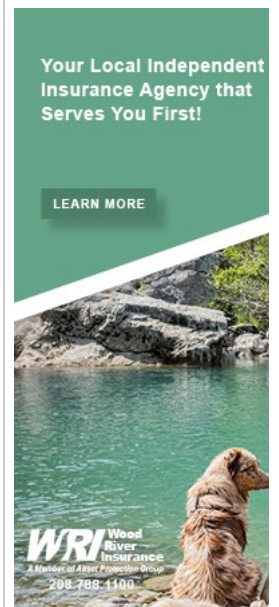
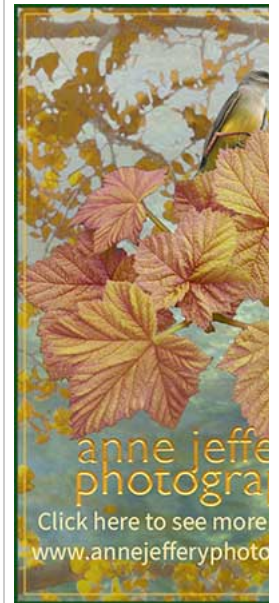
Morgan Buckert says kangaroo leather, which makes up the grasses on these boots, is the most popular leather as it's easy to work with and can be tanned in a variety of colors.

Buckert is one of just 300 custom boot makers in the United States and one of just a handful in Idaho. She is one of only a dozen female boot makers nationwide.

She grew up on one of the largest and most historic ranches in the country in the saltwater country surrounding Goliad, Texas, a seventh-generation Texan in a German-Czech family where custom made cowboy boots signaled a rite of passage.

"My parents always had custom boots and I was in awe of them. They presented me with a pair of custom cowboy boots for high school graduation, which I still wear today."

Buckert got a Master's degree in history from the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque before heading to Sun Valley where she found work with The Nature Conservancy and as a flyfishing guide.





Megan Wimberley and Morgan Buckert co-chaired the Cowgirl Artists of America's Women's Work Exhibition at the A.R. Mitchell Museum of Western Art in Trinidad, Colo., this summer. COURTESY

But it was a shoemaking class at the Penland School of Crafts in the mountains of western North Carolina in 2013 where she found her calling. She apprenticed for two years with Seth Teichert of Mackay through the Idaho Commission on the Arts' Traditional Artist Apprenticeship Program, then apprenticed under Nashville's Wes Shugart, considered one of the top boot makers in the country.

In 2023 she got an Art of the Cowgirl Fellowship to spend two months living with and learning from master boot maker Lisa Sorrell in Guthrie, Okla.

While her husband Paddy McIlvoy sells ski boots out of Backwoods Mountain Sports, Buckert has established herself as a custom cowboy boot maker with a waiting list extending into 2025.

Her microscopic control over each detail from welting to hand skiving has only grown with practice.

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Morgan Buckert, second from the right, received the Nest's Heritage Craft Prize sponsored by Kendra Scott in Jackson, Wyo. COURTESY

"It's the first thing I've ever done that filled my body with a combination of creativity, brute force plus the precision of math necessary to make the boots fit," said Buckert, who also creates leather hand bags. "I'm tired and fulfilled at the end of day."

Cowboy boots are quintessentially American, rooted in the cattle drives of the late 1800s, Buckert said. Riding boots originated with the Mongolian horsemen, those boots evolving into Spanish riding boots and the Wellington boots of northern Europe.

These two forms met on the Chisholm Trail in north Texas, Oklahoma and Kansas.

"It was like a tornado as Spanish and Mexican cowboys came up from the south colliding with Germans from the east," said Buckert.



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Buckert started out making cowboy boots with an Urban Cowboy flair but eventually found her niche with mountains and wildflower designs accented by zig-zagging lightning and clouds, such as those symbolizing the White Cloud Mountains.

"The first mountain range I designed was the Lost River Range with some of Paddy's favorite ski lines. Once you make one, everyone wants it," she recounted.

One of her recent boots—done for the Cowgirl Artists of America Women's Work exhibition - displays olive green ostrich leather covering the toe. Powder blue kid skin, or goat skin, covers the calves, providing a backdrop for tan and gold kangaroo leather forming the native grasses on her sister's ranch in Texas. White frog leather anchors the inner side of the boot.

"It requires a lot of skilled labor to tell the story of place," she said, noting that it can take between 65 and 90 hours to build a pair of boots. "And they're meant to last a lifetime."

Buckert will spend at least an hour with a client, getting a sense for the look they envision on their boot and measuring them in eight places, including the ball of the foot, the instep, heel, short heel and leg. She takes a myriad of measurements to make sure the boot fits a particular foot.

There are 75 pieces of leather in a boot from the pull tabs to the insoles. Buckert uses an array of special equipment, including a 1915 treadle machine., a sole stitching machine made in St. Louis in the 1940s and an 11-foot line finisher once used in Grangeville to build boots for Forest Service workers,

"Sometimes I even put message inside the boot—like a special message for one woman whose father recently passed away," she said.

Buckert says Wood River Valley residents tend to have a lot of crazy things going on with their feet due to the intensity with which they pursue recreation. Some have had a ski accident that changed their foot. Professional skiers have sported bumps on their ankles, while a dedicated soccer player had bumps on the bottom of his feet.

"There are so many minute details. It's so satisfying when you fit a boot to difficult feet and have it comfortable," she said.

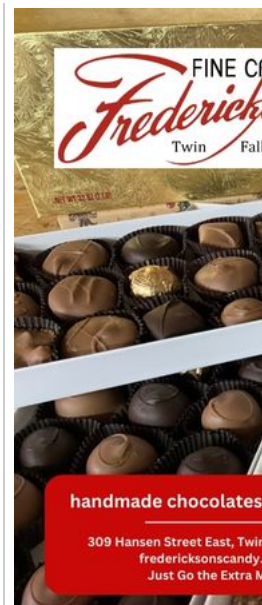
Buckert has become a leader in her industry. This past summer, for instance, she served as co-chair of Cowgirl Artists of America's Women's Work exhibition at the A.R. Mitchell Museum of Western Art in Trinidad, Colo., where each artist was paired with a female rancher to create a piece based on shared interests.

She has also organized gatherings like the Idaho Cowgirl Congress made up of Western women artists creating saddles, boots, leather goods, textiles, paintings, silver jewelry and hats. She was featured on Art of the Cowgirl on the Cowboy Channel. And she helped organize the Idaho Cowgirl Congress, which brought together artists, at The Art Museum in Idaho Falls.

Custom cowboy boot making is a \$20 billion industry in the United States, thanks in part to Beyonce and "Yellowstone" making cowboy cool, Buckert said.

"It's important to show the wider world that this exists and that it's art," she said. "And just because it's functional doesn't mean it isn't art."

Want to learn more? Visit Morgan Buckert Custom Boots at [www.morganbuckert.com](http://www.morganbuckert.com). Or contact Morgan at [morganbuckert@gmail.com](mailto:morganbuckert@gmail.com) or 208-720-9390.



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