

Legendary designer Stuart Weitzman gifts part of his shoe collection to Historic New England

His father and brother owned a shoe company in Haverhill building that now houses HNE

By **Cate McQuaid** Globe Correspondent, Updated December 9, 2024, 2 hours ago



The legendary designer Stuart Weitzman has donated part of his shoe collection to Historic New England, with a "Shoe Stories" exhibit planned for next fall. HANDOUT

Shoes are returning to Haverhill, once a [center](#) of the American shoe industry, courtesy of an iconic designer with ties to the town.

In the 1960s, before [Stuart Weitzman](#) designed shoes worn by Aretha Franklin, Taylor Swift, and Beyoncé, he worked summers at Mr. Seymour Shoes, a shoe company in Haverhill owned by his father and brother. The company left Haverhill in 1971.

Last year, Historic New England purchased Mr. Seymour's former home, the Lang Building on Essex Street, and several adjoining lots. They plan to develop the [Haverhill Center for Preservation and Collections](#), a sprawling [arts and culture hub](#).

In November, Weitzman donated part of his personal shoe collection to HNE. Next fall, "Shoe Stories" will be the debut show with the opening of the first space, an exhibition, programming, and welcome center.

"When my brother closed the factory, I took 100 shoes, samples, as mementoes of my dad's work," Weitzman said over the phone from his home in Greenwich, Conn. The collection also includes his own designs and several antique shoes.

The Haverhill Center is expected to take several years to develop, but the Lang Building will be ready for "Shoe Stories."





A small selection of vibrant heels by Seymour and Stuart Weitzman, including a one-of-a-kind pink silk and rhinestone metal pair made exclusively for Seymour's longtime assistant in his Haverhill factory, Betsy Conte. KAYLA EBNER/K. EBNER CREATIVE

“The whole first floor has been demoed,” said fashion and design historian and curator Michelle Finamore.

“We’re taking a piece of that space to turn it into a teaser for what’s to come.”

A century ago, Haverhill was home to [more than a hundred](#) shoe factories. Weitzman called it “a hotbed of economic success. Everybody was participating in the best of capitalism. There were heel factories, sole factories, factories for adornments.”

Changes in manufacturing such as outsourcing ultimately shut the industry down in the city.

Mr. Seymour Shoes was “really one of the last surviving shoe companies operating in Haverhill,” said Finamore.

“It was pretty impressive that they lasted that long.”

Weitzman’s own designs, she said, are witty, innovative, and comfortable. The 127 shoes in his gift to HNE include a model of his 2002 Million Dollar Sandal (the real thing was made with diamonds), a shoe with a machined steel heel, and the Yes/No heels, useful for replying to admirers.





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Stuart Weitzman's "Yes/No" heels were originally accompanied by a purse that read "Maybe." Weitzman noted that a woman could communicate by flashing one of the shoes or with a swish of the purse. KAYLA EBNER/K. EBNER CREATIVE

An HNE oral history project with locals affiliated with the shoe industry will be part of the show, Finamore said.

“We are going to try to wrap in the stories of people who are really engaged with these industries.”

“Shoe Stories” is just the beginning. With the proposed Haverhill Center, “We’re really thinking about how we revitalize not only the city, but reanimate those buildings,” Finamore said.

“They picked the right city,” Weitzman said. “I’m happy they did.”

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