



Boots Are Her Bag

This crafter's purses are in step with the West.

By **Geanie M. Roake**
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The boots in Sue Roake's fashion line aren't made for walking... but admiring. She brings new life to old leather by turning boots into handbags that turn heads everywhere.

"I use the top of the boot—the pretty part," Sue explains of how she makes Diamond 57 Cowboy Boot Purses on her farm in Gresham, Oregon. "The intricate leatherwork is usually hidden under a pair of jeans. It deserves to be displayed over a shoulder."

Sue started making boot purses 5 years ago, quite by accident. "Due to a back injury, my husband, Tom, couldn't wear his beloved cowboy boots any more," she says. "It seemed a shame to have that gorgeous footwear sitting in a closet. So I came up with a way to recycle them."

"At first, Tom balked at the idea of his macho boots becoming something cute. But he soon came around. Now, he's my scout, tracking boots, belts and accessories I use to make purses. We find raw material at auctions, estate sales and ranches that need to clear out old tack."

A busy mother of five, Sue has walked many a mile in a cowboy's boots, too. For 20 years, she and Tom have raised Minia-

ture Horses—including a three-time world-champion stallion.

"When I got into leather crafting, we converted our old foaling barn into a workshop," says Sue, pointing out three industrial sewing machines and cutting tables strewn with carving tools. "I hand-sew the bottom of every purse with strong kangaroo lacing for durability."

Purse handles and straps are made from belts and harnesses, and can be embellished with braided leather, silver clasps and buckles.

"Decorating is the fun part," Sue says.

"My purses are trimmed with everything from brass tacks and conchos to fringe and sparkly rhinestones.

"I get excited when a customer comes to me with a

Fancy footwork. Sue Roake (above left and below) gets a kick out of lopping the tops off of worn cowboy boots to create trendy purses.

cherished pair of boots that has a unique memory attached," Sue adds. "Then the bag becomes a keepsake. I even see tears when I deliver those purses."

Her crafty carryalls sell well at rodeos, art shows and boutiques and on the Internet. "I always have a boot purse on my arm when I go out," Sue notes. "People walk up and ask where I got it."

"Some of the boots I recycle had an easy life on the dance floor while others worked hard on the ranch or rodeo circuit. The leather's patina tells it all," she says, polishing the satiny surface. "Every boot has a tale about where it's been—from the scar of a barbed wire fence to the scuff from a stirrup."

But whatever the background, a pair of boots in Sue's hands becomes a cowgirl accessory that shows purse-onality aplenty!



Editor's Note: For more on Sue's boot bags, contact her by phoning 1-503/756-1480. Or connect to her Web site through ours, clicking "Links."

