

Sweet and low down

Examples of selfeets from, left to right, Popham Designs, Kim Grace and Sebastian Erras.

A new variation on the self-portrait shows how beautiful shoes can accentuate beautiful floors

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It's hard to imagine that the selfie – the digital calling card of duck-lipped poseurs in bathrooms everywhere – could stoop any lower. And yet a new variation on the self-portrait, called the selfeet, is doing so in a very literal way, capturing a person's shoes atop high-impact flooring.

Since they made their first appearances early last year, selfeets have been leaving their footprints all over social media. Instagram alone boasts 117,427 of them and that's not including variations on the [#selfeet](#) hashtag. On [selfeet.club](#), strangers share and swoon over each other's compositions, while related selfeet hashtags such as [#floorcore](#) and [#ihavethisthingwithfloors](#) – both a hashtag and [an excellent Instagram account](#) with 522,000 followers – have become common cool currency.

Of course, there are clichéd versions of the selfeet out there: bare feet in a beachy locale (yuck) or moisturized toes propped suggestively on a bedroom pillow (double yuck). But the coolest ones capture a painterly union of on-trend footwear and tiling, making them a source of fascination among fashion and decor lovers. On the flooring side, vividly coloured and boldly patterned tiles hold sway. Take the modern, graphic encaustic-cement beauties that are handmade by Marrakesh-based [Popham Design](#) or the riveting art-glass versions from Vancouver's [Edgewater Studio](#) that come in equally striking shades (deep caramel, electric violet) and motifs (chevrons, plumes, cartoon clouds). The trend has even made that old standby, marble, more dynamic: Each tile in Edgewater's Shalimar line, for instance, sports a tuxedo-dapper, wavy black border inlaid with contrasting white stone.

At Mosaic House, a tile hot spot in New York, Toronto designer Sam Sacks weighed in on the style of tile that is figuring prominently in

selfeets at the moment, calling them "incredibly beautiful." Sacks, known for bohemian-chic interiors that mix eclectic prints, textures and furniture styles, welcomes the bold shift in flooring. "We've been looking at quiet stone, like marble, for years now, so all of a sudden to have this riot of pattern and colour is really exciting," she says.

Back in Toronto, at the tile studio Metro Source, vivid tiling is not only a hot commodity – "beyond popular," as Sean O'Neil, who runs the business with his wife, Myriam Velasquez, describes it – but also a form of entertainment. Buyers who drop by the studio in the city's Caledonia design district are encouraged to have a latte while playfully piecing together tiles on the floor "to create a giant, living design board," O'Neil says.

The trend is a big departure from the clean, quiet designs that were favoured when he and Velasquez opened shop in 2003. "There's been a huge movement towards rich blues – not turquoise and aqua, or flat slate blues – but intense indigos."

Unlike Popham's hand-painted pieces, many of the tiles O'Neil sources from factories in Spain and Italy have been digitally created by artists using Photoshop.

One such line, new to Metro Source, is the supergraphic, interchangeable Tangle series from Italy's Modena region. The bold black-and-white tiles are marked with high-contrast doodles in the shapes of triangles, chevrons, pop flowers, squares and lines that look as though they were rendered in Sharpie.

Each is a hefty 24 by 24 inches and offers an ultramodern update to checked diner floors. They would make for an excellent selfeet – particularly paired with inky-black brogues.

And there's the other variable in the equation: In an ideal selfeet, footwear co-ordinates sublimely with the floor.

Take the snapshots by German-based photographer Sebastian Erras, whose weaved Hadstone Derbies sit archly atop the Louvre Museum's floors, his grey cuffed pants and black shoes an artful complement to the earthy-toned marble blocks. On another occasion, he shoots himself in striped espadrilles that echoed the licks of turquoise in the mosaic floor at the Place des Pyramides, a Parisian public square. Carefully composed selfeets such as these have attracted 27,000 followers to his [@Parisianfloors](#) feed, even though it contains only 155 posts.

The most hard-core selfeet enthusiasts, such as Erras, art-direct their snaps, placing their feet at the edge of the image just so, giving their pics the feel of an ad. Are they selling the shoes or the floor? It can be

hard to tell. And, as contrived as some of these images may be, like a well-designed room, successful ones come across as a lucky accident.

To wit: The thickly striped Louboutin loafers of Lacoste's visual merchandising director Nick Sizemore melting into the geometric striped flooring in an apartment in Manhattan's Chelsea neighbourhood, posted on his Instagram page, [@Sizemorenick](#). See also [@SincerelyJules](#), the account of Los Angeles-based fashion blogger Julie Sarinana, which has 2.8 million followers. She earned 52,500 likes when she showcased strappy studded Givenchy pumps against the faded floors at the public square Place des Vosges in Paris. (She was forthcoming about the location, but wouldn't tell commenters where she snagged the shoes.)

Arren Williams, former creative director of home at Hudson's Bay in Toronto, shares Sizemore and Sarinana's affection for selfeets, though he takes a more iconoclastic approach, admitting that he doesn't care much if his shoes match the floors, but notes, "The better the shoes, the better the shot."

His feet-on-tile portraits, many taken in Olhao, a picturesque outpost in the Algarve region of southern Portugal, where he joined his husband on sabbatical this summer, are especially colourful.

So are the expat selfeets of Kim Grace. The New Zealand-born brand manager for Hat of Cain, a bespoke Panama hat business, who goes by the handle [@singaporegypsy](#) on Instagram, moved to Singapore three years ago and recently started chronicling life there with her camera pointed down. Her stunning shots of the city's bright tiles act as a visual travelogue, inviting lurkers on a walking tour.

"Feet humanize tiles," Grace says of her snap habit. "And it makes people feel like they are seeing the world through my eyes. And I like the anonymity."

And there's the thing about the selfeet. Its highly aesthetic, faceless composition can seem somehow less narcissistic than a selfie.

However, Jordan Peterson, a professor of psychology at the University of Toronto, doesn't see much difference between the two. "Both are primarily of interest to extroverted people," he says, describing selfeets as a "fad, like the ALS ice-bucket challenge."

People who take selfies and selfeets, he says, "find it difficult to not communicate about themselves, and the more extroverted, gregarious and social, the more they have to tell you everything they do."

Not to worry. Whether you're capturing your face or your footwear – or seeking inspiration for your next remodelling project – it isn't all just a vacuous exercise. "People take selfies in different locations to

have an external record of their lives, as a form of memory, and new technology helps facilitate that," Peterson says. "It's a way [for people] to define themselves."

Special to The Globe and Mail

Tootsie roll

Three selfeet hot spots for upping one's shoes-on-tiles game



Colette Grand Café

Brandon Barre/for The Globe and Mail

The Studio Munge-designed Cluny Bistro in Toronto's Distillery District features encaustic tiles from Mexico that cascade through the dining area as if they are carpet runners, stealing the spotlight from the room's light wood floors.

Faded blue-and-yellow porcelain Spanish tiles at the Audax Architecture-designed Colette Grand Café at Toronto's Thompson Hotel have a charming vintage look that resembles handmade silkscreen.

A tumbling-cube design makes for snappable floors at the French eatery République in Los Angeles by architect Osvaldo Maiaozzi. The restaurant's designer, Walter Manzke, custom-created the ceramic tiles, which were handmade in Manila.