The artisanal Crocs have landed

Lots of objects look good stuffed into a pair of Crocs. Strange things you wouldn't expect, like mini plastic bowls of ramen, beaded butterflies, or, like in Jillian Maddocks' case, a pile of pistachio green foam with a cherry on top. Maddocks started selling her take on Jibbitz, a Crocs-specific word for charms that stick into the shoes' holes for decoration, as part of her 323 apparel line. She repurposed materials she already had lying around — foam she uses to make headbands, fake cherries, and seashells — and ended up designing charms that make the Crocs look like a wearable sundae.

"I've sold more [Jibbitz] than I sold everything else this year, which is really weird and funny and exciting," Maddocks says. She guesses she sold around 100 total pairs in the three months they were live in her shop before she stopped taking preorders to perfect the design.

A number of artists added Jibbitz to their inventory this year, thanks mostly to the interest Instagram drives in them. The #Jibbitz tag on Instagram has more than 105,000 posts where creators show off the ways in which they've made the shoes their own, from *Among Us* customizations to fully stuffed shoes with chains on top. Some creators design their Jibbitz from scratch, while others want to show off their decked-out shoes with pre-made accessories or how they put together a variety of trinkets and Jibbitz to create a wholly new Croc.

Pandemic leisurewear is in this year, and Crocs are becoming the shoe of the moment. *The New York Times* reported sales of Crocs were up 48 percent in September this year, compared to 2019, and Crocs says its revenue reached new records in the

third quarter. *GQ* and *The Cut* deemed the shoes stylish and cool, and Justin Bieber, Bad Bunny, and Instagram-centric creators like Nicole McLaughlin released their own limited edition collaborations with the brand. Crocs are even for sale on Grailed, the reselling platform, for upwards of $100. The clogs might actually be coveted in 2020, mainly pushed through Instagram posts of cool people wearing them and teasing those exclusive celebrity shoe drops.

It's the Jibbitz accessories, though, that make the shoes pop, and Crocs says revenue from selling the charms doubled last quarter. Crocs, the corporation, sees Jibbitz as an easy upsell. "The reason we love Jibbitz, besides they're high margin, is they really can create really good consumer engagement and they sell clogs," said CFO Anne Mehlman in an earnings call. "It's our unique way to really do personalization in a way that resonates with the consumer."

All of the limited edition collaborations feature unique Jibbitz, like a flashlight and rope on McLaughlin's and glow-in-the-dark charms on Bad Bunny's. Crocs continues to introduce new Jibbitz to its arsenal, too, including some that promote the Black Lives Matter movement. People still seek out third-party creations, though, to find Jibbitz that really fit their interests or to support designers they enjoy. For the creators who sell Jibbitz on their own, the charms are a more affordable way to show off their designs, especially when everyone wants to be at home and comfy.

"A lot of the people who shop with me can't really afford an $800 pair of shoes, but they can afford something that's a $40 set per shoe that they can put on that makes what they're wearing feel really expensive and special," Maddocks says. "I feel like that's part of why they're doing really well."

Carley Holtsinger, who designs under the brand Sparkle Diva, received her first pair of Crocs for her birthday this year and got hooked. She couldn't stop wearing them, although they

were a bit bland for her taste, so she whipped up her beaded, stringy pom-pom Jibbitz. They sit atop the shoe and result in something like a disco ball effect or like seeing dangly earrings on someone, drawing your eye to them.

“I was like, ‘Oh my god I need to throw in some Sparkle Diva homemade Jibbitz, so it just kind of went from there,” she says. “I get so many compliments from all walks of life in them, especially because people can hear me walking up and they’ll turn around and look at my shoes and they’re like, ‘Oh my god, I love those.’”

Holtsinger says her charms haven’t been a massive hit, although her Instagram post showing them off is one of her most popular. She considers her Jibbitz a niche product, really only for people who are willing to make noise with beaded pom-poms and draw even more attention to their Crocs. (Crocs doesn’t seem to mind creators using the word Jibbitz to promote their products, but the company didn’t respond to a request for comment about this.)

“I have a few orders, and I’ve definitely had several friends reach out to me and be like, ‘Oh my god, I just bought my first pair of Crocs I’m obsessed,’ so I feel like they’re not my most popular product, but it’s definitely piqued some interest, and I think it’s a fun novelty thing to make for me,” she says.

Meanwhile, Susan Korn, a designer most well-known for her beaded bags under the name Susan Alexandra, posted an image on Instagram of her “shoe tzotchkes,” featuring glued-on beaded butterflies and other oddities she found around her studio, and people seemingly loved it. “I don’t believe in soulmates but I think these are mine,” one person commented. Korn says Crocs reached out almost immediately to discuss a possible collaboration.

“The plan is to … create jewelry for the shoes and then

elevate this very casual, utilitarian shoe into something that’s almost like high fashion, and really sparkly and fancy and pretty,” she says. “They’re objectively ugly shoes, they’re shapeless, have holes in them, etc., so it’s taking something that’s like a potato and shining it up.”

These designers, who focus on creating handmade charms to go in the shoes, join a legion of creators on both Instagram and Etsy who sell fully formed Crocs with pre-made plastic charms that more align with the bubbly style Crocs created.

Jadyn Taylor, a 17-year-old in Georgia, has gained over 12,000 followers on Instagram since June, under the name Cozy Creationz, selling assembled Crocs. She orders the shoes from China, charms from various places online, rhinestones from Amazon, and puts it all together to make the shoes sparkle. People order her Crocs so that instead of receiving a boring pair and having to individually customize their shoes, they’ll receive some that are ready to be shown off. Taylor says she’s sold 200 orders so far.

The pandemic no doubt helped propel Crocs to newer, cooler heights. But when it wanes, will people still want to wear a pair of “objectively ugly” shoes? Maybe if there’s art attached.

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