

# 118. Crafting Cowboy Boots w/ Lisa Sorrell

[00:00:00]

**Dan Dissinger:** Hi everyone. Welcome to another episode of Writing Remix. I'm your host, Dan Dissinger, and today I'm here with a really special guest, um, someone I've been working on booking for the last few months. Uh, probably longer than that because when we met, we met. First of all, an amazing dinner, um, with, uh, the writer, Holly George Warren.

Um, but I've been so looking forward to this conversation. It's why I love this podcast. It's like my personal classroom and I'm looking forward to learning so much and just having this conversation. So today I am here with Lisa Sorrell Cowboy boot maker from Guthrie, Oklahoma. And, um, yeah, Lisa, thank you so much for coming on the podcast.

**Lisa Sorrell:** It's great to be here. Thank you.

**Dan Dissinger:** When we met and we were eating at this really cool restaurant in downtown la you were talking so much about, you know, being a boot maker and the history part of cowboy boots and everything. And I was [00:01:00] so. Interested. I was like, I need to have Lisa on the podcast.

This is something that I don't, I've never heard about. You know, I'm a city person. I'm from New York originally. I live in la So this whole culture or history of cowboy boots is like something like. Totally outside of my understanding. And it's so cool. And if you're watching this episode too, like on Substack and everything, you could see like Lisa's in her in her, uh, workshop and stuff.

It's so fun to be to see that too. I love it. Um, but before I get ahead of myself and everything, why don't you tell, uh, the audience a little more about yourself and, um, then we'll, yeah. Jump right in.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Okay, well the, the first question that I'm usually asked is, how did you get into this business? Was your father or grandfather a cowboy boot maker?

And the answer is no, absolutely not. I was raised in a conservative little church where the ladies all wore long hair and long dresses, and we typically made her own clothing. My mom began teaching me just sew at age [00:02:00] 12, and by 14 she was coming to me for sewing help. And by 15, I was sewing clothing professionally.

So then at 20, I got married and my husband and I are both from Missouri and we moved from Missouri to Guthrie, Oklahoma. And I left my sewing business behind. And after six months in a three room apartment, I just got bored and I answered an ad in the paper for stitching boot tops. I had no idea what that meant.

I did not know that people could make footwear, but it sounded like sewing. And I answered the ad. And the old guy when I called he, he yelled at me and told me that sewing leather was nothing like sewing fabric. And he was correct. He was an alcoholic and he liked to scream and cuss, and I was a complete innocent.

So I used to go hide in the bathroom and cry, but I, as soon as I figured out what was going on there, I loved it.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. Wow. And so like, how long have you been doing this then? Um, since that point now, like, it seems like to [00:03:00] me, like I've been looking at your website and looking at your blog and really thinking about these questions in terms of, you know, mastery or even just the idea of like, the journey of like the craft.

Like, so how long have you been, um, doing this particular craft of boot making?

**Lisa Sorrell:** 35 years. Wow. I like to tell people I started when I was four years old, but it's a lie.

And even that's getting older. Wow.

**Dan Dissinger:** But 35, that's amazing. So you must have, I mean,

**Lisa Sorrell:** I was 20.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow. So my, my, my question then, one of the things that I was curious about is what is, what makes a cowboy boot? Special. Right? Because I feel like there's something about, as I was looking at the way you

were, you know, the journey of a boot on like your blog or on your website, and I'm like watching you put each step together, like, and put the boot together and the particulars of every [00:04:00] detail.

Right. And I think one of the things you said, like you make everything, like these are original boots. Everything you do is pretty, is original and I'm, I'm one of a kind and I'm like. What is the difference? Because me, again, like I live in New York, boots are like very like, you know, work boots or Timberlands and stuff like that, right?

Like that's our, you know, that's the, the extent of my understanding what makes a cowboy boot. Like what's the specialness of a cowboy boot?

**Lisa Sorrell:** That's an interesting question because people seem to have this really emotional connection to cowboy boots. When I do shows. Even people that aren't going to order cowboy boots, they come up to me and they say, my grandfather used to have a pair of cowboy boots and this is who he was and this is what he did in them.

Or I used to own a pair of cowboy boots and there there's just this connection. People have to cowboy boots, and I really think that a lot of it is because the boot tops. This great canvas for expressing [00:05:00] personality, and that's something that most other footwear doesn't have. We all, we all want to be seen and to express ourselves and cowboy boots have this big canvas for doing that.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. Oh, I like that. Like, you know, especially we think of, I mean, for me, footwear especially in terms of the, the culture of sneakers and sneaker heads and stuff like that. Mm-hmm. This is so interesting because. Those things aren't so much of one of a kind where like a boot, like the A cowboy boot specifically is so much more, and I love how you use that word, a canvas because like when you think of a canvas, there's that connection to painting and to art.

Yeah. That real artistic aspect. Mm-hmm. Of that. So when a person comes to you and wants a boot made, um. How do you, what is the process, right? Like, because personally, like in terms of the podcast too, and I think of like writing and poetry and stuff like that. There's like this really personal process or there's a [00:06:00] craft process or a way in which someone approaches the page.

Like, and for me, I'm thinking of the boot top. The way you talk about it as like a page, it's like almost like that space to create this moment. What, what is the process that go, that you go through or that. To do that?

**Lisa Sorrell:** Well, for one thing, it's interesting because cowboy boots are collaborative art. I'm the artist, but you are the client and you're telling me what colors you like and what design you like and what aspect of your personality you're trying to convey here.

So that, that's interesting in that I'm often working with the client to know exactly what I'm going to make. Not always, because I, I do. Also make whatever I want to make. Mm-hmm. Um, it starts with me when I'm making boots for a client. It starts with me measuring your feet. Mm-hmm. And then I talk to you about what designs you like, what colors you like.

I'll often begin [00:07:00] with what color foot do you want? Because that's going to be the most obvious to you. You're gonna look down and you're gonna see the foot color you're gonna. Plan your outfit around what color the foot is. And so I usually start with what color do you want the foot to be? And then we kind of build on that as far as the, the colors that we're gonna use for the design.

When I have customers look through my portfolio and I, I do sometimes design something. Specifically for a client, but usually they're looking at my portfolio and I always tell them, as you look through the portfolio, keep in mind you're looking at two different things. You're looking at design and you're looking at color scheme.

So you can say, I like this design, but I like this other color scheme. Mm-hmm. And I often let color guide me as far as where the design's going to go.

**Dan Dissingier:** Hmm. So how did you then the design, because I was looking at those that too, and I'm like. I think of like when I write a poem, like I'm always thinking about [00:08:00] the page and like mm-hmm.

Where a word is gonna land, where my line breaks are, maybe I'll go across much longer. Like does design, do the design elements change or is it. Is it something that you kind of feel out, right? Because it's also like the way you're talking about it, it sounds like the way a tattoo artist like creates something where they talk to the client, they think about the different things and the design elements, the arm or the leg or the placement of it.

Like how do you decide the, the type of desi, the design elements and like how big or smaller are there? I'm sorry. There are so many questions here. Like are there classic design elements that you use and maybe alter?

**Lisa Sorrell:** There are definitely classically classic design elements. Hmm. Um, traditional themes for cowboy boot designs are flowers and butterflies.

And I'm often working within those themes of flowers and butterflies, [00:09:00] sometimes eagles, but to a lesser extent. And really one of the reasons for that is if you think about a cowboy boot top, typically you have a scallop coming down from the top. And then you have the boot tongue coming up from the bottom and what you're left with is kind of an H shape.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And so you have to think about that shape just like you're thinking about the paper and how everything's going to flow on the paper. Mm. I'm always thinking within that H shape. So if you do a butterfly, you've got those outspread wings and that fills that H shape. Well, the same for eagles. With florals, you can, you can, um.

Have them flow within that shape. Hmm. And so that's one of the main things I'm thinking about. If I, for instance, I just designed a boot with a Swallowtail, excuse me, a scissor tail bird on it. 'cause that's the Oklahoma State bird. And so I had to think about how is the scissor tail going to flow within this design?

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. Wow. That's amazing. So even in terms of, [00:10:00] hmm. Even in terms of men, like. The, the client, male or female, like the main things are flowers. No. Like is there, is it, is it because I'm curious about that. Yeah. Like it may, it's interesting to kind of think of like that.

**Lisa Sorrell:** I love this fact. There are really no gender distinctions in cowboy boots.

**Dan Dissinger:** Oh wow.

**Lisa Sorrell:** So flowers and butterflies are simply a common traditional theme. And they're not male. And they're not female. And I find that so interesting because western culture. Tends to be very conservative and, uh, strictly gender policed. Yeah. Except when it comes to cowboy boots, huh? As a cowboy boot wearer, if you're into pink butterflies as a man, you can wear them and no one will say a thing.

As a boot maker, you can design them and no one will say a thing. And yet, if you wore pink jeans. Or a skirt As a man, [00:11:00] people would judge you.

But with cowboy boots, it seems like that judgment is suspended in this little bubble just for cowboy boots.

**Dan Dissinger:** That's so interesting because even as like we're in this moment right now, this like a lot of my colleagues at school, like this moment in, in the country, right?

I know so many lines are being like redrawn, but also like. Soli like almost defended even harder and harder. Mm-hmm. Yet you're saying here we are in what seems like, you know, the idea of the Western cowboy is like this very masculine type of figure. Mm-hmm. Though the cowboy boots are this really interesting space where they can celebrate whatever it is, or it is a very gender neutral, almost celebratory celebratory.

Place for people that, that's interesting. That's wild. It

**Lisa Sorrell:** is. I love to tell the story. I was at, there's a, A boot and Saddle make's Roundup every year in Texas and several years ago I was at the [00:12:00] roundup and there was this man blue jeans plaid shirt. Very typical Texas cowboy. Yeah. And he was wearing, he was wearing a pair of cowboy boots that were, the foot was kind of a raspberry pink color.

Mm-hmm. And the tops were completely covered with butterflies in like butterflies. It wasn't just one butterfly, it was multiple butterflies. And it, they were beautiful, but it just made me smile because if he had been wearing a skirt with a butterfly. He probably would've been kicked out of the building.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm-hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And yet he's wearing cowboy boots with butterflies in the color pink. And everyone as he walks by, people are just like, Hey, great boots. That's

**Dan Dissinger:** so, that's amazing. I love that. It, it really is. It, it's amazing. And it's also at the same time, like you, you think of things like that and you're just like, why can't people just understand this in a more.

Outward way. Right? Like it's just like

**Lisa Sorrell:** Exactly.

**Dan Dissinger:** It's like, um, if you [00:13:00] allow it here,

**Lisa Sorrell:** why can't you just butt out and allow it everywhere?

**Dan Dissinger:** Right. Exactly. Like, and if we are allowed to, well, if there's a per odd permission in this boot cowboy boot world to kind of have these like masculine and feminine type of, you know, back and forth and mixing all in this one canvas, then like mm-hmm.

Why is it such a big deal in terms of other things, like what are we missing or what are we not paying attention to, you know?

**Lisa Sorrell:** Right. And I find it interesting too that, again, it works also for the male boot makers. Hmm. I, I find in the western art world, the western art world tends to be very male dominated and, uh.

The Western painters tend to do things, you know, like bucking Bronx and wildlife and cowboys, doing cowboy things, and they rarely ever lean into what we would say a more feminine side. If you look at Western art in feminine [00:14:00] spaces, there's a whole lot more use of color. You will notice that immediately there's so much more use of color and um, they paint women doing things, whereas in male art damage.

Art spaces, they tend to paint women looking pretty. Hmm. But in women spaces, they tend to, to paint women doing all the things that need to be done on a ranch that women do. Hmm. But, um, in cowboy boots, even the makers, the male boot makers. Love to design and they love to use color. And some of the best designers I know are men, uh, Jay Griffith, who taught me that, that grumpy old man who used to scream and cuss.

**Dan Dissinger:** Yeah.

**Lisa Sorrell:** People, people will say to me, oh, you're good with color and design because you're a woman. And I say, everything I know about color and design, I learned from a grumpy old alcoholic.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. Wow.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And so there's, there's also this space for, for men. To explore a very artistic side of themselves [00:15:00] that isn't really granted, in my opinion, in male western art spaces.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm. Yeah. Yeah. Mm. It makes me, uh, it makes me feel a lot of things, what you just said too, like it's, there's a sadness to it, you know?

Mm-hmm. In terms of like, um. I study and like write about and personally reflect on these ideas of masculinity and manhood and like, kind of like the spaces where in a way men can, in a way are permitted to kind of like do this thing that's more soft, right?

Mm-hmm. To celebrate their man like maleness and however anyone identifies as that, like in a way that is outside these like stereotypical norms, right? Mm-hmm. To think that like this guy that you're talking about, Jay Griffith, you said his, yeah. Mm-hmm. There's a odd, there's a suffering almost to like being like holding that [00:16:00] in, but only allowing it through this like little pinhole of being a cowboy boot maker of being like, that's where I can do this one thing.

Absolutely. Everywhere else in my world, this is what ha you know, and it's, it's something you see in a lot of spaces I feel like, especially like when. The hardness of that really hurts just the personal experience of the world and like you finding that one thing thankfully helps, but it's not always enough because it's, yeah.

**Lisa Sorrell:** I, I'm glad that window is open. It's just odd to me.

**Dan Dissinger:** Yeah. It, it really is. Yeah. Mm hmm. So when you went, okay, so when you went out on your own and you opened your own shop and you're doing this thing like, you know. How did you, when you came to, to that, like what was the decision? Like, how did you, you know, you're just like, I just wanna jump into this.

Like, let's go and let's do this.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Pretty much, um, like I said, I had to work there for a few months before I [00:17:00] figured out what was going on because like I said, I didn't know people could make footwear. But once I figured out what was going on, I, one of the things that really appealed to me about Cowboy boot making is with my background, the church I was raised in, girls did girl things and boys did boy things.

And um, so sewing was a girl thing. And, and I loved sewing, but I hated the fact that I was conforming. And so when I found boot making, I loved it because I got both. I got to do these really. Stereotypical feminine things like work with color and draw beautiful butterflies and flowers. Mm. But at the same time, the process of building boots is very physically difficult.

And so I got to hammer and pull and stretch and I, I liked that marriage of art and craft.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. So when you Um hmm. So we're in a, we're in a time now where like you have, [00:18:00] um, artisans doing things like you're doing, like being a cowboy boot maker. And, you know, I would say it's, right now writing is a very artisan thing with, you know, the on incoming AI issues and everything like that where art and creativity is becoming this thing that people are racing to finish like.

It seems to me like something that you're doing, like cowboy boot making is very, uh, contemplative, almost like, and there's a slowness to it, right? There's a very meditative like process to it.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Ab absolutely, and I've been, I've been studying cowboy boot history and shoemaking history, and that's one of the things that shoemakers were known for.

Mm-hmm. Is. Is thinking deeply and philosophically because there are times when you're just sitting there quietly hand stitching. And so you, you can think and sometimes in the older shoe shops, because the original factories weren't like, we think of factor stay with lots of machines. Uh, the original factories were people.

Sitting side by side [00:19:00] making shoes. Yeah. And so while they were hand sewing, they would have an apprentice read to them or something.

**Dan Dissinger:** Oh wow.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Yeah.

**Dan Dissinger:** So, so they're doing that and then the apprentice is sitting there reading while they're like anything, they could be reading some, a book basically, like while they're doing, almost like having a radio on in a way like that's happening yet.

Exactly.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And so it was a time to set, it was accepted that it was a time to set and think. Hmm. And I still do that when I'm, uh, the main process that I do by hand is called in seeming, and it's, it's sewing on, there's a strip of narrow

strip of leather called the welt. So if you look down, if you're wearing boots and you look down and you see stitching going around the toe.

That stitching is not on the sole. You hand sew a strip of leather called the welt to the boot, then you put the sole on and the sole is stitched through the sole and the welt, and that's what holds the sole on.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow.

**Lisa Sorrell:** So the welt is stitched on by hand, and that's a process that takes me about 45 minutes for a pair of boots [00:20:00] and it's all just hand showing.

It's very quiet. So that's usually when I turn on the, I turn on the radio and sing along if no one's in my shop to hear.

**Dan Dissinger:** So that take, that process takes 45 minutes. That one piece of, of the boot. That one. And so like double because like you're doing both boots or is it 45 minutes for both?

**Lisa Sorrell:** It's, it's, no, it's 45 minutes for one.

Wow. It depends on the size, you know. A lady size four, I can do faster than a man. Size 13.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow. Wow. That's amazing that you never think of these things. Like, I feel like, you know, in terms of, you know, the way in which we live in this like capitalist world where like our clothes and shoes and things like, we're just like whatever.

Mm-hmm. And you go about your day to think that there's, um. This artistic process that you're doing and you're, you know, keeping alive in this way as well with other boot make cowboy boot makers around the country and possibly the world? I have no idea. Like, it's that, you know, there's something to be said about, [00:21:00] you know, understanding that if you want a pair of cowboy boots that you, there's a waiting period and you have to really be okay with that waiting period to like, if you want something that's special.

Yes. That's really beautiful.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Yeah. My wait time is around 18 months and that's really common. Most shoemakers are around a year to 18. 18 months.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow. That's amazing. Wow. So is this something, I remember we were talking to when we were in, you know, in downtown LA and we were, you know, at that restaurant and you were talking to about wanting, like you just mentioned before, like the history of cowboy boot making and the Hi like is, um.

I'm thinking, if I remember correctly, you were like, there's not many people, if not anyone doing this type of like, historical type of, um, work. Almost like historical archeological work or tymo, you know, almost like an etymology of these boots or boots that are out there or things like that. Like what [00:22:00] interests you so much in it, in the history of, of this, of this, um, of boot making.

**Lisa Sorrell:** I think one of the reasons I'm interested is because no one's ever done it seriously. Um, there are, there are boot makers who've been interested in the history, but as far as any scholars with PhDs, it's not been studied. I have on my computer, I think five research papers that have been written, you know, all five of the research papers written on cowboy boots.

Wow. And their, um. Laughably inaccurate. Wow. I mean, it's just horrifying. Wow. And, and so that, I think the problem is there are things about cowboy boots and cowboy boot history that you cannot understand without being a boot maker.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And, and so that makes it difficult to study. And so then I'm coming at it from the other end, whereas I am a boot maker, but I wasn't trained to [00:23:00] be a scholar.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And, and so I'm trying to learn all that, but Hmm. You know, to finding someone who's both is so far hasn't really happened there. There's one paper that was written about cowboy boots that is. Absolutely amazing. Uh, the lady is a quilter of all things. Her name is Barbara Brackman. Oh, wow. And it's called, uh oh, I can never remember.

Something about cowboy boots, myth and legend.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm-hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** If you put myth and legend in there and Barbara Brackman, you'll find it. That's the best paper I've ever read.

**Dan Dissinger:** Oh, wow. I look for that. The rest,

**Lisa Sorrell:** yeah, all the rest of them are just really, really terrible. There's one. Oh goodness. I probably, I probably shouldn't go there in case

**Dan Dissinger:** Okay.

**Lisa Sorrell:** In case the person is listening. But really, um, and it's not their fault. Uh, there's nothing about, there's nothing about cowboy boots that's intuitive. If [00:24:00] you come in here to try to make them, uh, they will not be made the way you imagine they're going to be made, uh, your hands won't automatically just know how to do stuff.

It is a very complex craft.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. And,

**Lisa Sorrell:** and so writing about it without knowing what you're writing about, and this is one of the things that I talk about when I, when I speak, I love to speak and teach and lecture. And one of the things I talk about is the reason, for instance, boots are never catalogued properly in in museums or.

The cataloguing is, in my opinion, incomplete. And the reason for that is if I say buttons or sleeve or lapel to you, you know what I'm talking about. But I, if I say vamp and counter and clinch nails and crimping, you have no clue.

**Dan Dissinger:** Not at all.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And, and so that leaves you with no vocabulary to describe what you're seeing.

Mm. [00:25:00]

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. So the vol, so that's something that you're, in terms of what you're saying, in order to catalog and historicize and create a scholarship around this craft, and not just about the craft, but like about the, the boots themselves being, it's almost like his there, his, there like, um, like I said, like archeological artifacts, like mm-hmm.

You really need to know experientially. How to make them or like have a knowledge of that Like and are you saying that exper it's much to have that knowledge is to have it experientially like to be in, to be a craftsman, a craftsperson.

**Lisa Sorrell:** I, I hate to to say that. I'm not sure that you necessarily have to be a craftsman, but it's just the vocabulary has been lost, and so you have no way to get that vocabulary unless you work in a shop.

Uh, there's a [00:26:00] story I like to tell. There's a, there's a tribe, the Himba people in, uh, I think it's Tanzania, but I'm not sure. Anyway, they don't have a word for the color blue. So if you show them a blue screen and a green screen, they will look at that and then they will say, both of them are green. Some of the younger ones will look confused, but they will say it's green.

So to me, the question is, can they see the difference between blue and green or without a word is, is it the lack of a word that keeps them from seeing the difference between blue and green? Because if you don't have the word for blue. You can see, oh, that's something's different here, but I don't have a word to say what it is.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm-hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And so I think that's what happens with cowboy boots. We can see that they're beautiful, we can see that they're interesting, but without the words, how do we tell other people about them? Mm-hmm.

**Dan Dissinger:** That's so interesting. [00:27:00] But I talk to my students a lot about like language and how much language plays a role in.

Passing knowledge along. Mm-hmm. And also when you lose an entire language or say like when you have these linguistic hierarchies and like language, you know, linguistic prejudice that kind of pushes languages down as if they're not valuable, even dialects and accents, right. You lose all this wisdom because like it, there is no possible translation into another language, or you are at least saying there's nothing worthwhile here because it's not in, you know, with writing.

Standard American English, and because it's not that we don't, we can't see it, we can't hear it. Mm-hmm. We don't understand it, but we all speak different types of dialects of English. We, we know how to do this. It's almost very

similar. It's interesting to think that like, because the vocabulary is so, you know, part of the craft that the scholarship.

Is like what you're, it's interesting to think like the scholarship doesn't, is [00:28:00] not passing through to like quote unquote, like ivory tower academia because like mm-hmm. Let's be honest, academia is all about like intellectualizing everything to have to get their hands dirty in the process. So to be there is not really something that they normally do, right?

Mm-hmm. That's amazing. I, I mean, yeah, go ahead. Go ahead. Well,

**Lisa Sorrell:** one of the things that I find interesting is in the 1860s census shoemaking was second only to agriculture in the number of people it employed. So imagine how much organic knowledge you would've had. With surrounded by that many people working not just in shoemaking trade, but also in related trades.

Like they were tanning leather, they were making the tools, and you were just surrounded by people in this industry. So you would've known these words, you would've understood what was happening compared to today where we barely have any shoe factories left in the [00:29:00] US and we have, you know, all, ugh. A hundred of us at a generous guess, actually physically making shoes.

And so it is just all been lost. The vocabulary is gone.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow. I was gonna ask you that. Like how many cowboy boot makers or, or, or in the country. And if you're saying it's around a hundred, that's

**Lisa Sorrell:** I, I'm just guessing. And the thing is, if you define it as someone who makes their living. Making cowboy boots.

Right. Doing it full time.

**Dan Dissinger:** Sure.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Then I'm going to say maybe 30.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Wow. I mean there's, there's a lot of people and, and I can almost include myself in this because I don't, I have another business. I sell leather tools and supplies to other boot and shoe makers. Yeah, yeah. And so I'm still in the industry.

Mm-hmm. But I have transitioned to. I'm old, so I have transitioned to only making the boots for the people I want to make them for. [00:30:00] Yeah. Only making the boots I want to make. Um, so I, I don't know if you wanna call me full-time or not, but, um, there, there are many hobby boot makers and that's fine. I welcome them all.

**Dan Dissinger:** Yeah.

**Lisa Sorrell:** But, um. Obviously it's, it worries me that it's going to be lost. We really have two areas that worry me. One is the supply side. I'm selling leather tools and supplies to try to keep that going 'cause Right. It doesn't matter how much we all know. If we can't get the tools and supplies, we can't make boots.

**Dan Dissinger:** Absolutely.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And the second one is, this is a very difficult way to make a living. I don't know of any boot maker. Who, uh, there's probably one or two that could prove me wrong, but, um, the vast majority of cowboy boot makers have another source of income.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm. Mm-hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Whether it's a working spouse or an inheritance or a retirement, and that right there is an issue.

[00:31:00] Many boot makers don't start doing this until they retire. Which is great. I am absolutely thrilled that they do. But here's the thing. I started when I was 20 and it took me 20 years to reach the point where I felt like I knew enough that I could teach. Oh, wow.

**Dan Dissinger:** If you don't

**Lisa Sorrell:** start until you're retire from something, you're 55 or 60, you.

You're, you're gonna do fine. You're gonna enjoy it. You're gonna make boots and, and it'll be great. But you don't have 20 years before you start teaching,

because if you start at 55, from 55 to 75, your, your physicality is going down instead of up.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And so by the time you're 75, it's not that you can't make boots anymore, it's just.

Physically, you're going down. That's the grim reality of it. And, and you don't have the time left to teach.

**Dan Dissinger:** Right? Yeah.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And, and so that worries me, uh, getting young people into [00:32:00] this trade because they can't support themselves.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Unless they have a spouse who's willing to, to support them while they're buying machinery and leather and making mistakes and doing all the things it takes to get to 20 years.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow,

that's, um, there's, hmm. It's, it's sad because it's like, it's, um. There's such a, a cultural significance to these boot to cowboy boots and it, they're really,

**Lisa Sorrell:** really, there is, um, cowboy boots are uniquely American craft. Mm-hmm. We have so many crafts that came from somewhere else.

**Dan Dissinger:** True. But cowboy

**Lisa Sorrell:** boots were invented, I hesitate to use that term, that term, because they kind of evolved out of the riding boots of the 1850s and sixties, but they were invented.

Here in the US in Kansas, not Texas, by the way. And [00:33:00] it's an American craft.

**Dan Dissinger:** Yeah.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And it, it's an American icon. You can show anyone in the world a pair of cowboy boots and they know the American west, they know the cowboy,

**Dan Dissinger:** and I

**Lisa Sorrell:** don't want it to be lost.

**Dan Dissinger:** Is there like, I don't know, I want to maybe use the word demand, but r.

You know, do people in other countries, um, wear or like actually, or you, or have a need for cowboy boots in the, in the way that kind of in the United States they, you know, we've had them and been using them and, and things like that?

**Lisa Sorrell:** Well, I'm not sure that. Very few people actually have a need for cowboy boots.

**Dan Dissinger:** That was another question of mine. Like I was always interested in that utility for them. I didn't understand. Yeah. I don't understand them as a, as a shoe or as a boot. Like Yeah.

**Lisa Sorrell:** The Cowboy boot is a, is a riding boot.

**Dan Dissinger:** Okay.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And, [00:34:00] uh, you know, you could, you could do it in a pair of English riding boots if you wanted.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm-hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** The point is, you're sitting in the saddle and your feet are in the stirrups. Mm-hmm. And, and. Few people have that lifestyle anymore. Sure. So, so cowboy boots, and here's something that most people don't really wanna think about in the western culture, is the fact that cowboy boots have been associated with entertainment from the very beginning.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Because think about it, if you're on a horse sitting in the saddle roping cows. It does not make your boots any more functional if they have yellow flowers and purple butterflies on them.

**Dan Dissinger:** That's right. Wow.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And that happened. That began happening around 1910. Hmm. Guess what else was happening around 1910?

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Movies. That's right. So, um, [00:35:00] rodeos and I really feel that I've been trying to trace the history of leather inlay and overlay, which is leather, inlay, and overlay is how you add color. So inlay would be, for instance, if I cut out a butterfly shaped hole and put a different colored leather behind, that's inlay.

If I cut out a butterfly shape and lay it on top, that's overlay. Okay. So I feel like this was happening earlier. For sure, but it doesn't show up. The only written records that I've been able to find so far are, um, catalogs produced by the boot makers themselves, and one of the earliest cowboy boot makers in Kansas was higher, higher boots, and it inlay overlay doesn't show up in their catalogs until 19 one.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow.

**Lisa Sorrell:** I'm sure it was happening earlier.

**Dan Dissinger:** Right?

**Lisa Sorrell:** But it doesn't start showing up in the catalogs until then. And, but think about it. Uh, the first rodeo, I think, was held in 1892. You also had Buffalo Bills Wild West shows [00:36:00] in the 1890s, right? Uh, the Great Train robbery was filmed in 1902. Uh, Owen Worcester, the Virginian came out.

1902, 1905, I can't remember. And then a lot of the early silent movies were westerns and then a lot of the early audio movies were westerns. And so you have this whole culture. And so think about it, you've got a rodeo or Buffalo Bills Wild West show. We, they don't have big screens and so everything has to be loud and exaggerated.

Hmm. And with the movies, they don't have the, you know, it's not the quality that we expect today. And so everything needs to show up. And I think that that's where the, the inlay overlay came from. Like the higher boot catalogs. I have one from 1926 and there's like four pages of people wearing their boots.

Look at these people wearing their boots. They're famous people and they're all [00:37:00] actresses or actors or rodeo producers.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** It was about entertainment.

**Dan Dissinger:** So then that makes sense. Like, so then the transition to like country music stars and, and things like that. Exactly. That makes sense because I was gonna be like, uh, like they're standing on stage, they're performing, what does, why do they need to wear cowboy boots?

But it seems like Yeah, it's part of the. I don't wanna say uniform, but part of the, part of what the whole, the wear, right? Like yes. You have your cowboy boots, you have your cowboy hat, you have, you know, I'm singing country music. This all makes sense.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And don't get me wrong, cowboy boots are gear. They are a riding boot.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm-hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** But they didn't have to have two inch heels either.

**Dan Dissinger:** No, they didn't.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Because another thing, here's what happens with two inch heels. Wow. It immediately changes your posture and your gait. Sure. So this cowboy's walking down the street and he's walking like a cowboy. And also another thing that the [00:38:00] two inch heel says is, I ride a horse.

I don't walk. And cowboys were very proud of the fact that their job did not involve walking. It involved riding farmers. Farmers walked cowboys road. And so it was all about presenting an image. I often think of that line I see by your outfit that you are a cowboy. Mm, it's right in there. Mm. The Cowboy was very insistent that you understand who he was and what he did, and the Cowboy boot was part of that.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow. Yeah. I mean it's also like, it's funny when you watch a Western or you watch a movie where someone's wearing cowboy boots before you see the person, you see their boot. Mm-hmm. And you hear their boot, like you hear them coming up. Yes. Up and so it's like interesting to think of the boot as this communicative tool of like a person that we don't, we don't see yet.

We don't know what they look like. We don't know anything, but we hear them coming in some way. Here's the boot and then [00:39:00] here's the person. That's so interesting. I never put that together. That's amazing.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And, and it's true. It's funny that you say that because, um, when I bought this building, we had to gut this building and I specifically said, I want hardwood floor because I love the way cowboy boots sound on a hardwood floor.

That's right.

**Dan Dissinger:** That's amazing. Oh wow. Wow. So, um. So you make, you, you're, you know, you're making boots. Uh, has there ever been a favorite pair of boots that you've, that you've made and, um, that stick with you, that have stick stuck with you or, you know, things that are really. Interesting. Um, um, well, let's put that, and I, I don't have, I have a word that's escaped my brain, which always happens on this podcast.

Yes. But yeah, like, are, is there a pair of boots that you feel like has that stay with you in terms of like making them.

**Lisa Sorrell:** Yes, there is. And it's a very, very odd story. You're gonna know [00:40:00] I'm a complete nerd after I tell this story. But you know, nerds are

**Dan Dissinger:** welcome on this podcast. That's what, this is a whole thing,

**Lisa Sorrell:** right?

Okay. So as I said, I was raised in a very conservative home. We only listened to gospel music and there was a brother duo from the 1950s called The Louvin Brothers. Mm-hmm. And I love The Louvin Brothers. I was raised on. Two of their albums, the family who Prays and Satan is real.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm-hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** So Satan is real. Does not glorify Satan, by the way.

I'm accused of that all the time. Satan is real. Um, the album cover is the title cut from that album. Mm-hmm. And for the album cover, Ira and Charlie Louvin. Cut out this plywood, Satan, like six feet tall plywood. Satan painted him red, gave him horns and a spear, and they set him up in a bunch of rocks and then they, they put tires and covered them with rocks and lit fires.

And so it's supposed to look like hell with Satan there. [00:41:00] And that's the album cover. Mm-hmm. If you look up the album cover for Satan is real, you will find on the internet. It shows up on the best album covers of all time, and the worst album covers of all time lists and, um. I just, I love the Louvin brothers.

And so I had always thought, wouldn't it be fun to make a sat, a pair of Satan as real cowboy boots?

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And, um, several years ago I met a band called The Malpass Brothers, I into Brother Duos, and I met The Malpass Brothers, and I ended up making a pair of boots for Taylor Malpass, the younger brother. And I said, Taylor, what do you want?

And he said, could you make me a pair of Satan's real boots? And I was like, I love him. I've been waiting for this question. And um, so those will always be my favorites, the Satan is real boots.

**Dan Dissinger:** Wow. That's a really cool story. I love that. I love that. That's, um, it's so interesting. I'm, I'm seeing such a correlation [00:42:00] between how you know, the work that you do and like I said in the beginning of this, uh, episode too about like, uh, being a tattoo artist, like mm-hmm.

The idea that someone comes in and like asks for something and they're like, oh my God, I've been waiting my whole life to do this tattoo.

**Lisa Sorrell:** I'm actually thinking about getting a Satan is Real tattoo.

**Dan Dissinger:** Oh my God. That's amazing. Yeah. It's just so interesting. Um, but it's, it's also fun because it's like, this is something that a boot can, you know, a boot can be passed down, like, you know.

Mm-hmm. And wear a tattoo really can't. Right. You know?

**Lisa Sorrell:** It's interesting. Tyler Beard was an author who wrote several coffee table books about cowboy boots. Mm-hmm. And he went into the history of it some, and wrote about various boot makers. But one of Tyler beard's quotes that I love, Tyler, said, cowboy boots are a tattoo for the soul.

**Dan Dissinger:** Oh, wow. That's, and

**Lisa Sorrell:** so, yeah, there is this. Tattoos are really used to express your personality [00:43:00] and your thoughts. And cowboy boots are the same in that way.

**Dan Dissinger:** Mm-hmm. Except you

**Lisa Sorrell:** can switch if you feel different on another day, you can wear another pair.

**Dan Dissinger:** You can wear another pair. Exactly. Yeah. Wow. So do you have, um, so I know you teach and, and things like that.

Do you see an interest in people learning, uh, learning this trade and or, um, does it depend, you know, um. You know, I guess in different times or, or, yeah. I mean, what is the interest like in, you know, when you, when you're doing that work,

**Lisa Sorrell:** there's a lot of interest in it. I no longer teach beginners, but I. I regularly get people contacting me saying, do you teach?

Will you teach me? Um, there's a boot maker in Texas that I recommend for teaching because I don't do that anymore. What I do now is I like to take, I like to take people who have already been making boots, but they just want a little additional help or. They need something refined. And, and that's the point I like [00:44:00] to take them because with the supply business, I spend a lot of time on the phone.

So I need someone that I can trust, do this thing, and I walk away and I'm not gonna come back and you've cut your finger off.

**Dan Dissinger:** Okay.

**Lisa Sorrell:** So that, that's the, the level that I teach now. But yes, there is a lot of interest.

**Dan Dissinger:** Oh, that's great. Wow. I mean, it's good to hear because you want people to, you know, for an art to be passed down and for, you know, a trade to be passed down, you know, and it's, uh, if some people are interested in it, it's almost like hat making, like I know, like that's something that people are, you know, that's another trade that people don't necessarily really know, like, you know.

Mm-hmm. Making real hats. My grandfather used to have this beautiful fedora. Mm-hmm. Unfortunately, it was too small from my head because I was like. Just a little too small, but it was like the most well made hat. Like you look at it and you're like, this is never going to disintegrate, this is never going to break down.

This is a hat that's gonna last forever. And um, I feel like [00:45:00] that's so important these days in terms of things like lasting. Mm-hmm. Because like we are such a disposable culture in terms of like how we consume stuff, where this is so different. I

**Lisa Sorrell:** agree. Craft is so important. Um, doing craft is, is great for your mental health.

It's so satisfying to make a tangible thing mm-hmm. And be able to say, this is something that I made, but it's also satisfying to, to purchase that. And say, this is something that's, that a real person spent time on and craft is just incredibly satisfying on either side of that equation.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. I like that.

If there was something that, you know, as we're winding down now, that, that was beautiful, like as we're winding down, um, that you would like to leave the audience, you know, kind of with, at the end of this, at the end of this episode, or, you know, in terms of people [00:46:00] who you know are listening, you know, that we didn't get to yet, or something, you're like, I really wanna leave this.

Like, what, what would it be? Like something that you can. Leave at the, for them.

**Lisa Sorrell:** I would just encourage people to explore craft, um, talk to artists, look at at things that are made by real people, get into making things. Um, it doesn't have to be cowboy boots, but I, I feel that, that sometimes, and I don't, I don't want to, um, I don't want to make this seem.

Not important, but I had a daughter who died at age 20 of suicide and she suffered from depression. But I watched her in the times that she was in my shop. Find peace. She found peace in making things. And um, so I don't wanna trivialize, um. Mental health at all. Mm-hmm. Believe me. But on [00:47:00] the other hand, I, I encourage people to, to make things, find the joy that you can find in, in gathering yourself and being quiet and, and just being part of watching your hands work.

And, and it, it just centers you so much to make things do embroidery, do crochet knit. Just experience that. It's, it's wonderful.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. Wow. Thank you so much. I, I, I really appreciate you saying that and, you know, sharing that, you know, uh, at the, uh, here in, in the podcast because it is something that's important.

Um, we. Health has been something that we've been, that I've been talking about on the podcast more, and we talk about, my friend on this other series, we do inspire belonging. We talk about bell hooks and things and mm-hmm. I've shared things about me, like dealing with borderline personality disorder, anxiety and depression.

Mm-hmm. And it's, [00:48:00] it's not, uh, it's, it's one of those invisible things that people go through and, um, and, and there's so

**Lisa Sorrell:** much stigma around it and there should not be there if, if I have. If I have cancer, I'm not embarrassed to tell you I have cancer. So why should we feel shame that our brain is sick? Hmm.

It, it's okay, but at the same time it's painful and it's debilitating and um, adding a layer of shame on top of it is not helpful.

**Dan Dissinger:** No, no. And I think you're right when you said like there's something that. Doing something with your hands and doing something real, seeing something in a way grow, right?

Mm-hmm. Like we could say a boot grows from the materials into a boot for me, like writing a poem grows from a blank page into whatever it is once it's printed or something. And, and craft, [00:49:00] as you said, in a, in a very beautiful way, um, does that for people. And I think especially now in such a. Ephemeral experience that we're in, in terms of the digital world.

Um, something tangible to hold onto kind of root roots, us back down into our own. I agree. Experience and our body. I can't

**Lisa Sorrell:** pro Yeah. I can't promise you it will fix you, but it might, it might give you a few moments of peace to just ground yourself in that manner.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm. Absolutely. Wow. Well, Lisa, I, I appreciate this so much.

This conversation was so great. I am, I hope everyone listening to this episode like really enjoyed it too as much as I did and, and will, you know, explore some of the things that you're saying, especially about craft and also like look at some of the work you're doing. You know, where can they see some of the stuff that you're doing?

**Lisa Sorrell:** My website is. Sorrell Do Design. [00:50:00] So do design is a website address, just like.com. Don't try to put.com after it. It's Sorrell, S-O-R-R-E-L-L. Do design, and then on Instagram. It's crell custom boots.

**Dan Dissinger:** Hmm, absolutely. And I, I encourage everyone to go and look at, it's really amazing because like, and you, all the links I'll put definitely in the show notes and people that join a newsletter, you'll have it as well.

But definitely go look at what, uh, Lisa's doing and, and you know, think about it as like something that craft is so important. What gives you that joy as much as like this gives you that joy and, you know, um, this has been such a great conversation. So happy that we had it. I, I'm looking forward to maybe a follow up episode.

We could do some talk about something else too. I'm, I'm,

**Lisa Sorrell:** I would, I would love that. I truly enjoy speaking and teaching and so this is, this is a great time for me.

**Dan Dissinger:** Oh, and I wanna say this. I remember, I think, you know, don't worry about the [00:51:00] scholastic world. You know what you're talking about. And I, we said this at that dinner and I was a member.

I was like, this is something people. Would find so interesting and I, you know, encourage you to go into that work and not worry about like the academic world because like the world is way wider than the academic world, any academic world. I, I appreciate that

**Lisa Sorrell:** and I, I'm learning that, I've been doing research for this book and I've enjoyed it so much.

And, um. I'm an independent scholar, but I'm a scholar.

**Dan Dissinger:** Absolutely. Exactly. And we, and I, we all look forward to when that comes out because I, it, it will be, uh, a, a thing, a book that is, you know, definitely, um, waiting to be written and you're someone to bring it.

**Lisa Sorrell:** And, and I'm sure more things will be discovered.

I hope so. Yeah. I hope there's things out there that I haven't found that will be discovered, but I hope if nothing else, maybe I can provide a foundation

**Dan Dissinger:** for other

**Lisa Sorrell:** people to go on and do [00:52:00] further research.

**Dan Dissinger:** Absolutely. Oh, that would be so great. That's so great. Thank you so much. I appreciate this. Thank you so much.

And everyone, please, uh, you know, listen, share, um, and if you wanna watch it, watch on Substack and share it there too. And join. Everything that has to do writing remix and we will see you on the next episode. Alright, bye bye. Excellent.