



COZY UP

EMU DESIGNER BETH LEACH

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When the temperature plummets and the days get shorter, few things are more comforting than tucking frigid feet into super warm, cozy sheepskin boots. Emu Australia wants to keep your tootsies toasty this winter, and cute to boot. Beth Leach, a member of Emu's U.S. design team, works with a team of designers in the U.S., Australia, and Europe to create snuggly footwear that is as attractive as it is functional.

"Emu is all about bringing edgy fashion to the beach," says Beth, "but we're also about casual footwear that everyone is going to want to wear." When envisioning the perfect boot, she thinks of what would match her own personality and lifestyle—the kind of footwear she herself would wear. "Emu definitely has a fashion-forward, young, comfortable look," she says, "but it's still going to be something you can wear hiking in the mountains or bring to the beach if you're getting out of the ocean after a surf."

Because Emu owns and controls every aspect of their operations—from tanning the sheepskin to distributing its relaxing footwear around the globe—their price tags remain relatively low, which is a welcome change in a world of pricey shoes. They must be doing something right, because Emu is now considered the premier sheepskin boot manufacturer, based in the U.S., Europe, and Australia.

Despite the distance between Emu's global offices, Beth feels like they're one big family.

"You don't usually see such a collaborative effort from four different countries [Australia, U.S., Europe, and Canada] to make one design," says the Southern California-based designer. The worldwide design team collaborated to create basic boots in natural colors such as black, sand, and chocolate, and more popular looks in lavender and pink are included in this winter's line. Beth's favorite for this season is the funky, slouched "Hip" boot.

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As a self-described T-shirt-and-jeans girl, she cites Betsey Johnson as a favorite designer and checks Elle.com often to keep up on current trends. Raised in Michigan, she kept a close eye on the New York City fashion world while working in suburban Detroit boutiques. Three years ago, she made the move to Southern California, and hasn't looked back

since. "I've definitely transformed into a typical California beach girl," says the fashion maven.

Like any true California girl, Beth enjoys quality time at the ocean. "It feels like home to me," says Beth, who likes to run on the beach and camp with friends in Mexico. "There's a serenity and a calmness that, I think, helps you live in the moment and I've just found that I'm really happy there."

Of course, being a California girl also means learning how to surf, which Beth has been doing for the past several seasons. "It's definitely going to be a hobby of mine that I'll take on and hopefully pass along to my future generations," she says.

We're guessing that after she steps out of the surf, there will be a pair of comfy Emu boots waiting for her. ●