



Ranch at the Rim Marks Its First-Year Anniversary

After just one year of operation, this new San Antonio retailer takes its place in the history books as top seller of the Lucchese Anniversary Boots

By Carol Gustafson

BY NOW, YOU'VE PROBABLY HEARD about the Lucchese Limited Edition Anniversary Boots. Created in honor of the venerable manufacturer's 125th anniversary in 2008, the boots are hand-tooled, hand-painted and made with American belly alligator. Each pair is signed and numbered by the boot maker and delivered in a custom-made leather carrying case.

To ensure authenticity, the company includes a numbered certificate with each pair. Retail price of the boots is exactly \$12,500.

Lucchese vowed to produce just 125 pairs of their Anniversary Boots, reserving the first and last pairs made, and releasing the remaining 123 pairs to their dealers to be sold to the public. When the last pair is complete, Lucchese will retire the patterns and turn the page on this intriguing chapter in its long, colorful history.



SELLING A PIECE OF HISTORY

Fewer than 40 retailers across the country were lucky enough to sell a pair or even two of these boots last year. A handful of very fortunate stores

sold four, five, even six pairs. One retailer—only one—sold an astonishing nine pairs of the Lucchese Anniversary Boots in 2008. That retailer was Benjamin Peña of Ranch at the Rim in San Antonio, Texas.

When asked about his singular accomplishment, Peña was quick to deflect any praise and give credit where he believes credit is due; first, to his wife and store co-owner, Selena Peña, then to his staff, and finally, most importantly, to God. "It was a special moment for a special boot and I was just blessed to have the opportunity to be involved," replies Peña simply.

Fred King, marketing director at Lucchese, is more effusive in his appraisal of Peña's achievement. "Mr. Peña has a great talent for serving people. They recognize that he's a genuine guy who really knows what he's talking about and who truly wants to assist his customers."

King goes on to describe how Peña, on his own initiative, picked up the tab to fly two customers to the Lucchese plant in El Paso for a tour of the facility and a personalized fitting with the boot maker. In a couple of other instances, King says Peña paid to bring Lucchese boot makers to clients' homes or offices for fittings and measurements.

"He's a model retailer," says King. "As an owner/operator, he knows that every person who walks in his store contributes to his very livelihood and he treats them with great respect. People who are fortunate enough to spend some time with Mr. Peña can learn many valuable lessons."

NEW STORE, SAME VALUES

The Peñas' accomplishment becomes even more remarkable when you learn that Ranch at the Rim opened one year ago in mid-March, meaning that the store sold the Lucchese Anniversary Boots over the course of just nine months, rather than 12.

Though new to the San Antonio area, Benjamin and Selena Peña have more than 30 years of combined experience as owners and operators of The Boot Jack, located in the border-town of McAllen, Texas. A successful operation in its own right, The Boot Jack was named Stetson Retailer of the Year in 2007. While The Boot Jack and Ranch at the Rim couldn't be more different in terms of customer base and product mix, the Peñas' desire is the same at both stores: to treat each person, whether customer or employee, with the utmost respect.

Just 125 pair of these \$12,500 Lucchese Anniversary Boots will be made before the pattern is retired; Ranch at the Rim has sold nine pair.

That attitude comes through loud and clear in the couple's actions. For example, the Peñas use formal titles—Mr., Miss, Ms. and Mrs.—to address customers and employees alike. “Blame my parents,” says Benjamin Peña with a smile. “Whether it's the 20-year-old employee I taught in Sunday school or the retired 70-year-old shopping in my store, it's a way of showing my respect.”

A FRIENDLY WELCOME

Ranch at the Rim sits at the entrance of The Rim, San Antonio's newest, 150-acre power-shopping center, anchored by Bass Pro Shops. Located on the site of an old rock quarry, The Rim serves the rapidly growing, affluent northwest side of San Antonio and the nearby Hill Country.

The Peñas want to make customers feel welcomed even before they walk through the front doors of the store. Though the exterior design was dictated in large part by the mall developer, the Peñas managed to introduce the Western theme with landscaping materials such as split-rail fencing and a prominently displayed sculpture of a praying cowboy at the front entrance.

Inside, the store boasts 10,000 square feet of selling space. Rich earth tones and stained-concrete floors are used throughout and, with a nod to the old quarry, the rock trim used on the exterior is carried inside.

Benjamin Peña says the unified fixtures they chose are his favorite things in the store. “I never liked the mishmash of having various styles and vendor-supplied fixtures in a store. Here, everything works together, from the walls down to the waterfalls and floor displays.”

TAILORING A PRODUCT MIX

When it comes to their merchandise mix, the Peñas' aim is deceptively simple. “We want to have and react to what the customer wants,” says Benjamin Peña.

In the beginning, the Peñas relied on their sales reps for advice on product assortment. After opening, they listened to their customers and then tweaked the merchandise lineup accordingly. Benjamin Peña credits his wife, Selena, with shouldering the biggest challenge of getting the stores' apparel and accessories mix just right.

Today, Ranch at the Rim customers will find a Texas-sized collection of Western wear to suit their needs, from traditional to trendy. In addition to Lucchese, the store stocks boots from the likes of Ariat and Old Gringo plus the latest lines from Stubbs, Rockmount, Scully, Schaefer and more. The store is known for its distinctive accessories from Bohlin, Rafter N Gems and Rocki Gorman. It also features such up-and-coming designers as Two Bar West and Marrika Nakk.

IT TAKES PASSION

“Even when you pour millions of dollars into store



design and inventory, if the equation ends there, you'll struggle,” says Peña. “It takes the passion that an owner/operator brings to the floor to make it all a success.” Peña and his wife are at the store almost every day of the week, arriving early to do the paperwork and then spending the rest of their day on the sales floor.


Peña says his primary job is to “support” his staff as they sell. “They might ask for my help in advising a boot customer on a good style to wear with a suit. I can work alongside my employee through the process.”

This collaborative selling style allows Peña to spread himself further and work with a number of customers at any given time. That's important as he continues to build clientele for the new store. Using the team-based technique, Peña can also more easily pass on his 15 years of selling expertise to employees, further ensuring success for his store.

A PLACE IN HISTORY

The story of the Lucchese Anniversary Boots will end with Ranch at the Rim. Fred King of Lucchese confirms that the No. 1 boot in the series will remain with Lucchese, in the company's historical archives. The 125th pair in the collection will be inscribed with Benjamin Peña's name and presented to him by Lucchese in recognition of his 2008 accomplishment.

It's quite an honor, Peña humbly admits. “If were up to me, I'd put the boots on display in my store, but the folks at Lucchese are encouraging me to wear and enjoy them. I'll have to think about that.”

That's a nice choice to have. Whatever the decision, thanks to the success Ranch at the Rim had with the Lucchese boots, Benjamin and Selena Peña have earned their place in the history books. 

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resources

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A Texas-sized 10,000 square feet, Ranch at the Rim's unified décor houses everything from traditional to trendy.