A shoe including a releasable attachment system on the exposed surfaces of the shoe upper. A ornamental cover is shaped to fit the shoe upper and has a mating attachment system on its lower surface. A kit may contain a number of covers of various colors and/or carrying various ornamental designs or patterns or elements such as colored beads. By changing the covers, the appearance of the shoe can be completely changed. Shoes may be of the flip-flop or sandal type in which the uppers are formed primarily of strap or ribbon shaped members.
SHOE WITH INTERCHANGEABLE UPPER

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

[0004] The present invention relates to shoes with ornamental or decorative uppers and more particularly to a shoe system in which the ornamentation is interchangeable or replaceable.

[0005] Shoes have served the obvious useful purpose of protecting feet for thousands of years. This is still the primary function of the sole of a shoe. However, essentially all shoes also serve a decorative purpose. Shoe uppers are available in numerous colors and finishes to match or accent clothing. Various decorative or ornamental items, e.g. bows, buckles, monograms, etc. have been attached to shoe uppers to add to the ornamental purpose of shoe uppers.

[0006] In many cases, the cost of shoes is determined more by the ornamental character of the shoe than its ability to protect feet. The ornamental appearance of a shoe desirably matches or accents clothing worn by the user. Many people have numerous sets of clothes so that they may wear different outfits each day of the week. In addition, people normally have different sets of clothes for work, recreation and formal events. They may want different shoes for each of the outfits. However, purchasing separate shoes for each set of clothing obviously increases the cost of the various outfits.

[0007] It would be desirable to provide a shoe system which allows the user to change the overall decorative or ornamental appearance of shoes instead of having to purchase separate shoes to obtain a different ornamental appearance.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0008] A shoe system according to the present invention includes an upper having an exposed surface including one part of a releasable attachment system. The shoe system also includes an ornamental upper cover which includes a second part of the releasable attachment system. The cover is sized and shaped to substantially cover the visible or exposed surfaces of the shoe upper when attached to the upper.

[0009] In one embodiment, the shoe system is a sandal type of shoe having an upper comprising one or more straps. Each strap includes one part of a releasable attachment system. The shoe system includes one or more ornamental upper covers, each including a second part of a releasable attachment system adapted for attaching to the strap attachment surface.

[0010] The shoe system of the present invention may be in the form of a kit including a pair of shoes having uppers including one part of a releasable attachment system and a plurality of ornamental upper covers adapted for releasable attachment to the shoe uppers.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0011] FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a shoe of the flip-flop type, according to the present invention.

[0012] FIG. 2 is a cross sectional view of the upper portion of the shoe of FIG. 1.

[0013] FIG. 3 is a perspective view of a shoe of the sandal type, according to the present invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0014] In describing the present invention, the word “upper” is used in its ordinary meanings as both a noun and an adjective. As a noun, the word upper means the top part of a shoe above the sole and insole, if there is one. As an adjective, the word upper means the top or higher part or surface of an element when that element is in its normal position.

[0015] With reference to FIG. 1, there is illustrated a shoe 10 according to one preferred embodiment of the present invention. The shoe 10 is of the flip-flop or thong type having a molded foam elastomer sole 12. The upper 14 of this type of shoe generally comprises a pair of straps 16 and 18. Each strap 16, 18 has one end connected at the toe end of the shoe to a connecting strap 20 which is connected to the sole 12 at a position to fit between toes of the user. The other end of each strap 16 and 18 is connected to the sides of the sole 12 at 22 and 24 respectively.

[0016] Ornamental covers 26 and 28 are provided for each of the straps 16 and 18 respectively. Cover 28 is illustrated completely installed onto and covering the top or visible surface of strap 18. The cover 26 is shown partially attached to the strap 16. In this illustration, each cover 26, 28 carries a plurality of ornamental beads 30. Alternatively, the covers may comprise various woven materials with any desirable color, pattern, floral decoration or ornamental design. For example, the covers may be any available decorative ribbon. They may also be made of molded plastic with any desirable decorative or ornamental design. If made of a molded material like plastic, the covers are preferably flexible and/or shaped to fit feet.

[0017] For purposes of the present invention, references to ornamentation or ornamental elements refers to any and all visible characteristics of the upper surfaces of upper covers discussed herein. These terms may refer to the color, texture, pattern, decoration or design of the cover upper surface. Also included are physically separate elements such as the beads discussed above which may be attached to the covers. Ornamentation includes any combination of such characteristics or elements. For example, the covers may have a shiny finish, of red color and may have white beads attached. The covers may have a fuzzy surface, e.g. imitation fur, with a black and white color pattern.

[0018] The covers 26, 28 preferably have the same shape and dimensions as the straps 16, and 18 to which they may be attached. With the proper shape and dimensions, the covers 26, 28 will completely cover the straps 16, 18. The covers 26, 28 may be two separate pieces or may be attached
to each other at the toe end 14. It is expected that by attaching the covers 26, 28 with the proper angle to match the straps 16, 18, a better fit of the covers 26, 28 to the straps 16, 18 can be achieved. Thus, when the covers 26, and 28 are attached to the shoe uppers 16, 18, the primary visible appearance of the shoe 10 is the ornamentation of the upper surface of the covers 26, 28. The user’s foot covers most of the sole 12. While the connecting strap 20 may be considered part of the shoe 10 upper, it is not covered by covers 26, 28. Nevertheless, the upper of this embodiment is considered to be substantially covered.

[0019] FIG. 2 is a cross sectional illustration of strap 18 and cover 28 showing one attachment system for attaching the cover 28 to the strap 18. In this embodiment, a hook and loop type fastener system 32 is used to releasably attach the cover 28 to the strap 18. One portion 34 of the attachment system 32 is attached to the cover 28. The other portion 36 of the attachment system 32 is attached to the strap 18. Attachment of the portion 34 to the cover 28 and the portion 32 to the strap 18 may be by an adhesive or by stitching or by any other suitable means. When the portions 34 and 36 are placed in contact, they firmly, but releasably hold the cover 28 on the strap 18.

[0020] While the attachment system 32 is illustrated as the hook and loop type, it is understood that other releasable attachment systems may be used if desired. For example, a series of snaps may be attached to the cover 28 and strap 26. The hook and loop strap fastener system can provide continuous fastener function over the entire exposed surface of the shoe upper. While preferred, this is not considered essential. The point type fastener function provided by snaps should provide sufficiently uniform fastener function if snaps are appropriately spaced along the straps 16, 18. In similar fashion, the hook and loop system need not cover the entire upper surface of the shoe upper, so long as a sufficient area is covered to uniformly hold the cover 28 on the strap 18.

[0021] Other suitable releasable attachment systems include hook and eye systems, clips, clasps or any of the numerous separable fasteners which are used for clothing. Magnetic attachments would also be suitable. For example, separate small magnets may be incorporated into the covers 26 and 28 and matching magnets or magnetic metal pieces may be incorporated into the straps 16 and 18. Flexible magnetic materials may be used, particularly if a continuous strip attachment system is desired.

[0022] While the attachment system 32 is illustrated as comprising separate portions 34 and 36, it is apparent that the portions 34 and 36 may be integral parts of the strap 18 and cover 28. The portions 34 and 36 of a hook and loop system are normally available in ribbon or strip form with a fabric backing. A fabric-backed strip 36 may replace the entire strap 18. Likewise, ornamental beads 30 may be attached directly to another fastener ribbon 34. Ornamental patterns may be woven into the fastener strips or printed directly on the strips.

[0023] With reference to FIG. 3, there is illustrated a sandal type shoe 40 according to the present invention. Sandal 40 may include a leather sole 42 and a leather or man made insole 44. The upper of sandal 40 comprises a single strap 46 extending across the sole 42 at the instep. The ends of strap 46 may typically be attached to the sole 42 by being positioned between the sole 42 and insole 44 when the insole 44 is attached to the sole 42. A cover 48 is shown attached to and covering the upper or exposed surface of strap 46. In this embodiment, the cover 48 is shown as carrying an ornamental pattern.

[0024] The cover 48 may carry decorative or ornamental elements such as any of those illustrated or described with reference to the covers 26 and 28 of FIG. 1. The cover 48 may be attached to the strap 46 in the same manner as illustrated or described with reference to FIG. 2.

[0025] With reference to both FIGS. 1 and 2, it can be seen that a shoe system or kit according to the present invention may include a single pair of shoes and a plurality of covers for the shoe uppers. The upper covers cover essentially the entire exposed or visible portion of the shoes 10, i.e., the shoe upper, when the shoes are in use. That is, the wearer’s foot covers most of the sole of the shoe and essentially only the upper cover is visible or exposed. As a result, the appearance or ornamental character of the shoes 10, 40 can be changed completely by removing one set of covers and replacing them with another. For example, with a kit having seven upper covers, an apparently different pair of shoes can be worn each day of the week. In order to provide a customer with the most flexibility in wardrobe design, it may be desirable to offer the shoes and the upper covers as separate items. That is, after a customer has purchased the shoes of the present invention, he or she may purchase additional upper covers to change the appearance of the previously purchased shoes.

[0026] It is apparent that the present invention is applicable to shoe types other than the flip-flop type of FIG. 1 or the sandal type of FIG. 3. For example, the width of the strap 46 of FIG. 3 may be increased or expanded to cover more or all of the toe region of the shoe. If the entire toe region is covered, the shoe is often referred to as a mule. Matching covers according to the present invention may be provided to provide changeable ornamentation for such shoes.

[0027] In other types of sandals, small strips may be added to the main structural strap such as the strap 46 shown in FIG. 3. Such small strips may be in the shape of latticework or basket weave over the toe portion to provide a decorative appearance or may be positioned around the heel of the shoe. In such sandals it may be desirable to provide interchangeable decorative covers for only the main straps. Such covers would substantially cover the shoe upper and would change the primary visual appearance of the shoes.

[0028] In order to provide more choices in wardrobe design, it is desirable to provide a variety of sole types and colors for the customer. Generally, the sole 12 of FIG. 1 may be of a neutral color such as black, gray or white. Soles of each of these colors may be made available along with a plurality of upper covers with various ornamentation. Any of the covers may be used on any of the shoes to provide a further variety of visual impressions.

[0029] In the preferred embodiments, the upper covers are shaped and sized to substantially cover the shoe upper. The covers of the present invention need not cover the entire shoe upper, but should cover enough so that the visual impression of the shoe is controlled or defined by the ornamentation of the cover. The covers of the present
invention can be formed of a number of physically separate parts. For example, in FIG. 1, the two covers 26, 28 need not be connected to each other. The covers 26, 28 could be further subdivided into shorter segments which could then be mixed and matched to form a variety of ornamental patterns or combinations when applied to the shoe uppers. For example, each segment could be short enough to carry one or two of the beads 30 shown in FIG. 1 or other decorative elements. With a variety of such segments carrying a variety of decorative elements, the covers may be assembled in a wide variety of combinations, similar to a charm bracelet. Some portions of the shoe upper, e.g. straps 16, 18, could be exposed between such segments and such spacing may provide a different ornamental impression.

What I claim as my invention is:

1. A shoe system comprising:

   a shoe upper having an upper surface comprising, at least partially, one part of a releasable attachment system, and

   a cover having substantially the same dimensions of said shoe upper, said cover having a lower surface comprising, at least partially, a second part of a releasable attachment system.

2. A shoe system according to claim 1, further comprising:

   an ornamental element carried on an upper surface of said cover.

3. A shoe system according to claim 2, wherein:

   said ornamental element comprises a design printed onto said cover.

4. A shoe system according to claim 2, wherein:

   said cover comprises a woven material; and

   said ornamental element comprises a design woven into said cover.

5. A shoe system according to claim 2, wherein:

   said ornamental element comprises a molded element attached to said cover.

6. A shoe system according to claim 1, wherein:

   said releasable attachment system comprises a hook and loop type attachment system.

7. A shoe system according to claim 1, wherein:

   the upper surface of said shoe upper is substantially covered by said attachment system.

8. A shoe system according to claim 1, wherein:

   said attachment system is a two part hook and loop system, with a first part attached to the upper surface of said shoe upper and a second part attached to the lower surface of said cover.

9. A shoe system according to claim 1, wherein:

   said shoe system comprises a flip-flop type shoe having a sole and two straps, said two straps each having a first end joined together and attached to the sole at a toe end of the sole, and each having a second end attached to the sides of said sole between said toe end and a heel end of said sole.

10. A shoe system according to claim 1, wherein:

    said shoe system comprises a sandal type shoe having a sole and one strap, said strap having two ends attached to the sides of said sole at an instep portion of said sole.

11. A kit comprising:

    a pair of shoes, each shoe having an upper having an upper surface comprising, at least partially, one part of a releasable attachment system, and

    a plurality of covers each having substantially the same dimensions of said shoe uppers, said covers having lower surfaces comprising, at least partially, a second part of a releasable attachment system.

12. A kit according to claim 11, further comprising:

   ornamental elements carried on upper surfaces of said covers.

13. A kit according to claim 12, wherein:

    said ornamental elements comprise designs printed onto said covers.

14. A kit according to claim 12, wherein:

    said covers comprise a woven material and

    said ornamental elements comprise a design woven into said covers.

15. A kit according to claim 12, wherein:

    said ornamental elements comprise molded elements attached to said covers.

16. A kit according to claim 11, wherein:

    said releasable attachment system comprises a hook and loop type attachment system.

17. A shoe system according to claim 11, wherein:

    the upper surfaces of said shoe uppers are substantially covered by said attachment system.

18. A kit according to claim 11, wherein:

    said attachment system is a two part hook and loop system, with a first part attached to the upper surfaces of said shoe uppers and a second part attached to the lower surfaces of said covers.

19. A kit according to claim 11, wherein:

    said shoes comprise flip-flop type shoes each having a sole and two straps, said two straps each having a first end joined together and attached to the sole at a toe end of the sole, and each strap having a second end attached to the sides of said sole between said toe end and a heel end of said sole.

20. A kit according to claim 11, wherein:

    said shoes comprise sandal type shoes each having a sole and one strap, said strap having two ends attached to the sides of said sole at an instep portion of said sole.

21. A shoe system comprising:

    a shoe upper having an upper surface comprising, at least partially, one part of a releasable attachment system, and
a upper cover comprising a plurality of decorative segments which, when assembled, have about the same dimensions of said shoe upper, said cover segments each having a lower surface comprising, at least partially, a second part of a releasable attachment system.

22. A shoe system comprising:

a shoe upper having an upper surface comprising, at least partially, one part of a releasable attachment system, and

a upper cover comprising a plurality of decorative segments each having a lower surface comprising a second part of a releasable attachment system, said upper cover segments sized and shaped so that, when attached to said shoe upper, said segments define the visual appearance of said shoe upper.