



## Suitcase Series: Penelope Chilvers

By: [Sheena Bhattessa](#)

19th October 2022

Autumn is upon us, and for shoe lovers that can mean only one thing: boot season. How better to add some royal pedigree into our shoe-game than with Penelope Chilvers' selection of classic riding boots and western-style twists for the season ahead.

Penelope Chilvers became a household name for royal-lovers years ago. But where did it all begin? Childhood holidays in Girona are where she first came across rustic, handmade alpargatas. As an adult, she lived for a few years in Barcelona, as a painter and designer where she collaborated with artists and artisans. She's worked with woodturners, designed for the textile industry, and worked on projects including the restoration of the Picasso Museum. All the time, using her lunch breaks to ride in the national park of Collserola in the hills above the city – wearing her trusty, traditional Spanish riding boots.

She pursued the idea of bringing the Spanish riding boot to England, and commissioned a small number of traditional artisans in the hills of Spain to make the perfect equestrian boot – the Long Tassel boot – to her own specifications.

We take a walk in her boots...

### **What is the first trip you remember taking?**

My parents loved to travel, and my father did a lot of business in East Africa, setting up branches of Cooper Brothers (now PWC) when we were little. The first long-haul family holiday was to Kenya, to stay with his business partners on their farm in Laikipia. My first safari experience was to Little Governor's Camp in East Tsavo. I think this was where my love of travel was born. The safari travel industry has taken on a huge responsibility for our planet, and this is the kind of travel that interests me: understanding better how we can conserve our wilderness and fight climate change.

### **What's been your most memorable trip and why?**

Last year we went to Guatemala on an inspirational trip for next summer's collection. We stayed at three wonderful hotels: **Villa Bokeh**, in the beautiful old city of Antigua, **La Lancha**, owned by Francis Coppola on Lake Atitlan, and my favourite **Casa Polopó**, where we got to know local weavers and potters surrounding the beautiful lake of Atitlan. We met local bookmakers and young designers, and soaked up the ancient history. We're returning to Casa Polopó to shoot the collection that I designed out there, making it a 360% project.



### **Where or what is your escape?**

Gloucestershire. We moved out of London just before the pandemic, and love our local village life with its quiet, black skies. Our businesses pull us back to London some of the time, but I love to return to the country in between intense business trips and days in London with my team.

### **What's the biggest lesson you've taken from your travels?**

Pace change – adapt to the local timetable and travel slowly. Always pack a useful pair of boots for walking, and take a half empty suitcase. I love to shop when I'm travelling.

### **If I could go anywhere tomorrow I'd go to:**

The **Dorp Hotel in Cape Town**. Their drawing room murmurs with the juiciest conversations south of the equator.

### **How would you spend your ideal afternoon in your home city?**

I'd have a very long lunch with girlfriends at The Surprise in Chelsea. It's a very cosy place to be. It was recently designed by Isabella Worseley in a traditional London style, but with a contemporary feel.

### **What's your idea of a luxury holiday?**

**Kukutana** in Southern Spain is my kind of luxury. It's a family-owned farm house in protected parkland. It was once a hunting ground for the Spanish royal family, and is now home to the wild lynx. It's a home from home from the minute you arrive; a place where the rest of the world just melts away.

### **Where do you get your holiday inspiration?**

I find it hard to separate my work as a designer and my family life. But the two things that inspire a holiday for me are to explore the 3Cs: conservation, craftsmanship, and culture, and to spend time away with loved ones. I'm lucky that my family love the same things as me.

### **If you could sit next to anyone – dead or alive – who would it be?**

India Hicks. I've recently designed a collection with India that has been a huge success, selling out almost immediately. I've enjoyed this new professional friendship immensely. She's inspiring and also very funny. Dinner sitting beside her would be refreshing and fun, every time.

### **How do you recover from jet lag?**

I can't function for long without sleep, it's the cure for everything. I have no qualms taking sleeping medication for the short time needed to get back to normal life one day after travel.

**Your flight's delayed an hour and your phone's out of battery. How do you pass the time?**

That's easy! I find a good seat under the flight information and sketch out designs for a new collection as well as collecting all my thoughts in writing.

**Favourite hotel?**

**Riad El Fenn** in Marrakech.

**Favourite airline?**

I like the online flight service on American Airlines, where service comes with a smile and a gentle confident voice.

**What's on your travel playlist?**

I usually dip into a podcast like "How to Fail" by Elizabeth Day.

**Where next?**

To the Western Cape and North towards the Kalahari.

**What are your must-have travel picks?**

A good pair of our boots for walking, as well as our beautiful socks in lambswool. Our wool-lined Inuit slippers give a little cabin-chic luxury, if travelling to the cold or mountains. My new favourite face creams by Trinny London in their travel kit size to treat my skin. English teabags for emergencies. And I'd take a trip to the travel section at Daunt Books for a travel-themed book about wherever I'm going.

### **FIRST THING THAT COMES TO YOUR MIND...**

**Hand-luggage essential?**

Our lightweight canvas hold-all. The Nomad Bag.

**Packing: roll or fold?**

Fold.

**Inflight book or inflight film?**

Book.

**Music or podcasts?**

Podcasts.

**Time killer on a long-haul flight?**

I like to take the time to go through all the images on my phone. We take so many for inspiration, so it's nice to clear through them and remind myself of hidden gems that could still inspire future pieces.

**Holiday tippable of choice?**

Local wines – always local!

**Bucket list top destination?**

Sol y Luna in Peru, in the foothills of Machu Picchu.

**Best shopping gem found abroad?**

I once found a little leather notebook in a one-horse town in South Africa on the way to a shoot of our safari attire. It had the word 'THINK' gilded on the front. I plan to make it with our own Spanish artisans. The perfect gift for thinkers!

**Beach or City?**

Both.

**Ultimate holiday treat?**

I know it's cliché but sundowners at sunset, in a place faraway from civilisation. Somewhere you can feel a connection with life.