Wonder years
At an age when most young boys are busy with friends, having fun or tapping technology on networking websites, 19-year-old Samit Shah and Himansh Kumbhari have used their talent for setting up a firm, Toe 2 Head, a shoe customising outlet. It all started in December 2007 when Shah was sitting idle at home and to kill time he decided to paint his white sports shoes. At the New Year’s party, my friends saw my shoes, they loved the design and they wanted me to work on their shoes as well. This made me think that I can make a career out of it,” says Shah.

Foot work
Soon Shah’s friend Himansh Kumbhari also joined him and the duo started operating in Pune and Mumbai. Currently, the two of them are studying liberal arts at the Foundation for Liberal and Management Education in Pune.

Boosting factor
Elaborating on the response and the outputs from the venture, Kumbhari says, “We did not expect that what we started as a time-pass activity could turn into a profit-making venture. But the response we got was more than expected and encouraged us to give our 100 per cent. We work on 5-10 pairs a month and charge Rs 2000-3000 per pair, depending on the design.”

In-order
The orders that they get are mainly from college students or parents who want to gift unique shoes to their children. Besides, they have already finished an order from Muscat and are in finalising terms on an export order for Canada. They use special waterproof paint, which they get from Spain. However, bulk orders are not what they are looking for. Explains Kumbhari, “We want to work with different colours and experiment with various designs. With bulk orders, you have to stick to one design and there is no scope for creativity. Also, such orders consume a lot of time and being students, we cannot ignore our studies.”

Challenges
One challenge that they faced initially was the high charges. Kumbhari says, “We are very different from other shoe customising companies. We are specialised and give personalised designs. Art has got its value and if people really like our work they will pay for it, immaterial of whether it costs Rs 2,000 or Rs 20,000.”

Fun time
Apart from work and studies, both of them have keen interest for sports. While Shah loves football, music and adventure, Kumbhari loves to catch up with friends during weekends and is also fond of football and polo.

GARIMA MISHRA

Two nineteen-year-olds move beyond books to set up a customised shoe store with a difference

Balancing act
Both Shah and Kumbhari make sure that they strike a balance between studies and business. Says Shah, “We usually work during the nights and attend classes in the afternoon.”

Future ahead
“Once we are finished with our course, we will start taking bulk orders also. Till now, we have been operating from Pune and Mumbai, but now we also plan to expand our designing horizons to shirts, bags, caps and so on as well. So we are thinking of opening a studio. Also we are working on various ideas to promote our firm, which include setting up a website of the company as well,” says Shah.

Words of wisdom
They feel that there is no age limit on thinking big. “If you are young and have a dream, go for it. Since age is on your side, you have nothing to lose. One should always give his dream its due chance of pursuance, no matter whether he or she succeeds or falls in the end,” they say.