

Maier N.Y. Unit Offers Expanded Line

By MARC KARIMZADEH

NEW YORK — The Tomas Maier lifestyle has come into sharp focus.

Last week, the designer quietly opened a boutique on the Upper East Side, his first in Manhattan, at 956 Madison Avenue between 75th and 76th streets. It showcases the designer's expanded collection, which includes an enhanced assortment of women's and men's ready-to-wear as well as accessories, many created in partnership with longtime friends and collaborators of Maier. The unveiling marks a significant milestone for the 17-year-old brand and its trajectory after Kering formed a venture with the designer, who is also creative director of Bottega Veneta, one of Kering's fastest-growing brands.

"We wanted to open here for a long time," Maier said on Friday morning. "In all the three stores we have had [Palm Beach, East Hampton and Miami, which has closed], we always had New York clients, so it was important to have a store in the city. Thanks to our joint venture, we are now able to do this."

The venue, featuring 2,800 square feet of selling space, was previously occupied by the DeLorenzo Gallery. The interior is modern yet warm, with oak display tables. Maier was keen to preserve many of the unit's original elements. "I always liked this store," he said of the unit, which dates back to 1925. "For me, it was important to keep the integrity and the details — such as the grilles, the metalwork, the door handles, the architectural elements — and then I started to look at the concept around that."

The two-story space, which comprises the main floor and a mezzanine, features the entire lifestyle concept. The ground floor is focused on wearable and home accessories, including a wall of one-of-a-kind rope mirrors, which can be custom-ordered, created by Paris-based Christian Astuguevieille. In addition to handbags and shoes, there are elegant semiprecious earrings from Osanna Visconti, the designer's close friend, as well as bold semiprecious beaded necklaces by Florian and hats by Mühlbauer, both from Vienna. There is also a display of Diptyque candles in three



The interior of Tomas Maier on Madison Avenue.

scents, each created in collaboration with the designer and priced at \$65.

"We worked together for so many years," Maier said of Diptyque. "I used to buy candles when I lived in their neighborhood [on Boulevard Saint Germain in the early Eighties]. I made three candles that are reminiscent of places where I spend time during the year: Maine, Montauk and Florida."

Maier is always interested in ways to bring logic to luxury: The interior, which he designed, has

central wood cabinets to store merchandise and inset glass vitrines to show off the goods.

"For me, it was very important that everything is in the store," Maier said. "I don't like to shop that much. When I convince myself to go shopping, to choose something is a pleasure, but it has to happen fast because time is always limited. So, I like that all the stock is always in the store. You don't have to go anywhere."

While this is Maier's first opening since the Kering deal,

there are more in the pipeline. He will open a shop-in-shop at Harrods in January and a second Manhattan store, located on Bleecker Street in the West Village, in April. The designer also plans to return to Miami next year.

Madison Avenue, he noted, "is giving more of the idea of the concept, but every store will be slightly different — it depends on the neighborhood. I always look for a store that has character."

Maier declined to disclose sales projections, but the Manhattan store represents his first year-round opportunity, as opposed to resort locations in Florida and the Hamptons.

This strip of Madison Avenue is changing. Roland Mouret is opening a few doors down, and Apple is moving into the former VBH space at 74th Street. Several row houses and town houses, adjacent to the Whitney Museum of American Art, are being redeveloped, rendering more potential for luxury retail.

"I think this is a fantastic neighborhood," Maier said. "For me, this neighborhood is right in the heart of the Upper East Side. I think that with the [Metropolitan Museum of Art] moving into the Whitney, there is going to be a huge advantage for the neighborhood. It will be very interesting."

Vita Fede Travels Own Path to Growth

By KHANH T.L. TRAN

LOS ANGELES — For Cynthia Sakai, the founder, owner and designer of accessories brand Vita Fede, the barometer for success can take many forms.

If she were to use Web analytics, a recent search for her five-year-old brand on Alibaba's e-commerce platform Taobao spews 23 pages of results, many of which Sakai claimed are counterfeit. Going by celebrity endorsements, she can point to the support of Nicole Richie, who, years earlier, funded Sakai's start-up when the starlet hired her catering company for a house party. Via social media, her \$1,565 choker lined with Akoya pearls sold out in 24 hours in late August, after Neiman Marcus posted a photo on its Instagram page. By annual revenue, her Los Angeles-based company, which employs 23 people locally and four in Florence and operates a showroom in Milan, generates sales of under \$50 million, according to industry estimates.

Sakai is on a path for growth. This holiday, she's branching out to \$295 velvet-lined jewelry pouches that are covered in rainbow-colored snakeskin. She's also revamping Vita Fede's Web site so customers can upload photos of themselves wearing the jewelry. By the end of next year, she anticipates standing in her first freestanding store, either in Los Angeles or New York, decorated in a modern but classic palette of black and gold. Then, in 2016, she may introduce handbags.

"We've been doubling our business each year," she said.

At 32, Sakai is already a serial fashion entrepreneur. She started her first accessories line, Girl Boy by Koco, in 2000 with tampon cases and makeup bags. Five years later, she represented contemporary clothing lines in her own showroom in downtown L.A. She concocted the concept for Vita Fede after another showroom owner gave her a snakeskin bracelet as a souvenir from a trip to Italy. Reasoning that she could turn the trinkets into a fashion

business, she hopped a plane to Italy to line up factories. In her first season, she sold 10,000 units of the \$55 bangles at retailers including Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdale's and Fred Segal.

In her collection for next spring, Sakai's offering \$450 bands that wrap fingers in ebony wood and pavé crystals, \$1,750 necklaces that dangle a tube of tiger's eye, mother-of-pearl and onyx and \$250 semicircle-shaped rings shaped that slip on just at the tip and accentuate the wearer's nail art with a row of crystals. She also makes sure not only to offer different sizes to fit both petite Asian customers and men but also, when plating the brass base, to use five times more precious metal than other costume jewelers.

"When I first launched the line, I never wore costume jewelry," Sakai said. "I wanted something I could mix with my fine jewelry, something that had a little trend but was classic and had quality."

Sakai stacks Vita Fede bracelets, rings and necklaces with her own delicate pieces, such as her grandmother's diamond bands that loop around one of her thumbs and a ring picked up at a Paris flea market. "I want to wear it the way real people wear it," she said. "It's not realistic to buy everything Vita Fede."

The urge to connect with customers helped Sakai to expand her business, primarily through technology and social media. She linked with influential bloggers early on and, unlike some competitors, never had to pay them to don her pieces.

She personally posts all the photos on the brand's Instagram feed and responds to the queries of her some 159,000 followers. This year, she broke into the nascent field of wearable technology with \$1,100 necklaces that embedded a flash drive in Swarovski crystals, hand-carved lapis, malachite and onyx.

"There will be more tech from Vita Fede," she said. "The higher your price point, you have to create fans. The social media plays a big part of it. Going forward, brand loyalty is really important for brands. Without that, we're not going to grow."



Olive wood and crystal ring from Vita Fede.

Flagship Reflects 'New' Bally

By SAMANTHA CONTI

LONDON — Bally has unveiled its first new store concept in two decades, a David Chipperfield-designed building on New Bond Street.

"Bond Street is the epicenter of London, and the right place to express

latter, customers can choose a specific shade and watch as their shoes are dyed in front of them.

On that floor, Bally is also offering a series of "therapies" such as shoe-shining — which is free to customers — waterproofing, and "glassage," which involves using eight layers of wax to create a mirror glaze on leather.

In tandem with the opening, Bally has introduced claret-colored branding with the name embossed on the front. It has also taken its e-commerce operations in-house and will be working with students from the London College of Fashion on determining the service culture of the future.

"There is a battery of services on offer. We want the customer experience to be memorable and unique," said de Narp during a walk-through. An opening cocktail and dinner are planned for Oct. 22.

The building's upper floors house the stockrooms, the marketing office and, in the future, will also be home to a shoe academy that will train future cobblers.

Chipperfield took his interior cues from the Bally archives, looking in particular at the collaboration between the brand and the modernist architect and designer Marcel Breuer in the Twenties. The walls, with their rounded edges, are covered in a textured American walnut timber and feature shelves that can easily be moved and removed, while brass counters are spare and linear. There are also "shoe walls" that feature small shoe-box-like shelves to be used for display or storage.

Staircases have leather-wrapped railings while their walls are lined with gray stone imported from Switzerland. The leather furniture all has a midcentury-modern vibe, while the textiles have a rugged, outdoorsy feel: Carpets are made from hemp, and the walls in the changing rooms are covered in thick felt.

The first floor of the Bally store will offer specialized shoe services.



the new Bally," said Frédéric de Narp, the company's chief executive officer. "Do you see that flag?" he said, pointing to a rippling claret-colored Bally standard flying high above the Mayfair street. "It's metal, and it never goes down."

Hopes are high for the 163-year-old Swiss luxury brand, which has undergone a sea change over the past year with the arrival of de Narp and design director Pablo Coppola and a new, more luxury-focused vision. It is the latest attempt to reinvent Bally, which has seen a string of ceo's and designers come and go over the last six years, ever since John A. Benckiser Holdings bought the brand from TPG. Benckiser also owns Jimmy Choo, Belstaff and Zagliani.

The Bally maison, located at 45-46 New Bond Street, spans 7,560 square feet, more than half of which is dedicated to retail.

The women's collection is on the ground floor, and men's wear is on the lower ground, while the first floor is for shoe services such as made-to-order and "made-to-color." For the