Take cover with spring’s sudden storm of rubber boots — from cool grunge to classics. Here, Däv and L.L. Bean rework herringbone hunting Wellies.

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SNEAKERHEAD ISSUE FOR THE FANATICS & FULL-FLEDGED SNEAKER JUNKIES

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ON THE COVER
On both models: John Varvatos waistcoats, BCBGeneration shorts, WXZ headpieces. Photographed by RODOLFO MARTINEZ
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BROTHER VELLIES

SHOE OF THE YEAR
ADIDAS YEEZY BOOST
BY KANYE WEST

MARKETER OF THE YEAR
CHRISTIAN LOUBOUTIN

COLLABORATION OF THE YEAR
PHARRELL WILLIAMS
FOR TIMBERLAND

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Men’s Club

Meet five rising talents in the high-end men’s market who are making waves with their bold designs.

By Christian Allaire

Shoes, from top: Hood By Air Altitude boot, Achilles Ion Gabriel two-tone boot, Diego Vanassibara laceup brogue, Adieu zip-front boot, Artselab Velcro-strap sneaker.

Designers, from top: Giuliano Balestra, Benjamin Caron and Isabelle Guédon, Shayne Oliver, Diego Vanassibara, Achilles Ion Gabriel.

PHOTOS: SHOES: GEORGE CHINSEE; DESIGNERS: COURTESY OF BRANDS
The men's market has been on the upswing for several seasons, and for spring ’16, designers are pushing the limits like never before — forgoing classic shoe styles for more experimental collections.

The newness began on the men’s runways in New York, London, Milan and Paris. On top of a genderless focus at Gucci and Saint Laurent — those shows featured models of both sexes — the spring runways saw a more directional offering of accessories.

The industry excitement has allowed a fresh crop of emerging footwear brands to thrive as well.

“There has been a change in the way men shop,” said Stephanie Moor, men’s buyer at Level Shoe District, which recently expanded its men’s floor. “It’s clear that there is a growing male archetype looking for styles that have a contemporary twist as [they] become more educated about fashion and are not afraid to stand out with their footwear choices.”

“Not only do we choose to market the runway ready-to-wear, but we curate the collections to uncover the next runaway success story in footwear,” added Tom Kalenderian, EVP and GMM of men’s and Chelsea’s Passage at Barneys New York.

Here, FN puts the spotlight on five rising stars who are poised to shake up the men’s market.

**Hood By Air**

Since debuting Hood By Air in 2006, designer Shayne Oliver has extended the brand’s signature genderless focus into a growing shoe business.

The excitement was evident at the label’s spring ’16 runway show, which featured models of both sexes wearing laceup heeled sandals with the word “Air” etched into the leather on the sides.

“Hood By Air was launched because there was something missing — this is the driving force behind the brand,” said Oliver. “If you look at each collection, it will tell you what I didn’t see at the particular time.”

While men’s heels are nowhere near the norm — yet — Hood By Air’s high-heeled shoes will be available at Barneys New York, proving that retailers are embracing riskier buys.

Hood By Air’s spring collection will also feature four footwear styles that are made in Italy, ranging in price from $600 to $800, with each produced in both men’s and women’s sizes.

A new signature for the designer? The Avalanche boot, a modern riff on a hiker with unexpected details like cut-outs or a glittered upper. “It was inspired by strength — physically and mentally,” Oliver said. “I like a bit of sex placed in there also.”

**Artselab**

Bucking the retro trend, Artselab isn’t recycling old silhouettes. Instead, the Italian brand offers architectural sneaker shapes finished with cutout leathers and flatform soles.

Founder and designer Giuliano Balestra creates his collection, which debuted in 2013, in the Sant’Elpidio a Mare footwear district of Italy. “We launched with the aim of creating a brand that would combine creativity, craftsmanship and ‘Made in Italy’ quality,” said Balestra.

The brand’s spring ’16 collection ranges from $440 to $663 and is sold at retailers such as Luisa Via Roma, Antonioli, L’Eclaireur and Politix.

Though the sneaker scene continues to get more crowded, Artselab aims to stand out in the marketplace with its handmade viewpoint.

“This heritage is missing in the market — a shoe that becomes real through the hands of artisans,” said Balestra. “That’s why we decided to make sure that this practice will not be lost.”

**Adieu**

After launching for the fall ’14 season, Adieu co-founders Benjamin Caron and Isabelle Guédon evolved their unisex shoe line out of a never-ending search for refined punk wear.

“It was an old dream,” said Guédon. “When we were teenagers, Benjamin was a nice, dressed-up punk and was always disappointed by his creepers, so he was obsessively redesigning them in his school books.”

Now, the Paris-based brand has made
Bill Blass Aims For Comeback

The brand is determined to make a fresh start — and it isn’t taking a traditional route.

By Margaret Sutherlin

After a six-season hiatus from the runway, the Bill Blass label is back, and with an entirely new business model.

Under the creative direction of Chris Benz, who also has his own brand, and longtime Macy’s EVP Stuart Goldblatt as president and CEO, the apparel and accessories line debuts exclusively on its own e-commerce site on Monday, Nov. 2.

“It’s important to understand that this is just the start. People call it a reintroduction of the brand, but really we’re introducing a new Bill Blass,” Goldblatt said.

One of the keys to the collection is that it isn’t just an apparel launch but an entire lifestyle offering.

Footwear is a big part of the plan. Six styles, including heeled loafers, shearling-upper slip-ons, a signature sneaker and a bowling shoe, are designed in-house and produced by a small-order Chinese factory. They retail from $248 to $388.

It could be a smart strategy, since the twentysomething millennial audience Blass aims to appeal to probably hasn’t ever heard of the label, which was at its height in the 1980s through the ’90s. Founded in 1970 by Bill Blass, the label had seen its share of turmoil and turnover in the years after the namesake designer sold the company in 1999 for $50 million. Blass died in 2002. In 2008, Peter and Bill Kim, owners of Peacock International Holdings, were able to purchase the brand for just $10 million. The Peacock team shelved the business in 2012 to start from scratch.

Peacock cleaned up the licenses and trademarks for Blass’ hundreds of products and extensions worldwide, with the new line shipping to 69 countries. And Benz and Goldblatt were hired to reintroduce Bill Blass to a new generation of shoppers. “There is such a rich and irreverent personality to the brand that it was exciting to continue this spirit for today’s global customers — a personality that for the most part is missing from the retail world today,” said Benz. “Bringing great product in upbeat, accessible fabrications and colors has always been a goal of mine, and Bill Blass is no different.”

Goldblatt said extensive research and focus groups helped the team reach their female young professional shopper, who takes risks with fashion but also emphasizes comfort.

While the landscape has changed extensively since Blass was in its heyday, Goldblatt and Benz are confident there’s room in the market for a contemporary price point with a colorful and playful aesthetic.

“Everyone talks about needing to [focus on] e-commerce and be seasonless and give up the runway shows, but we’re [one of the few that are] actually doing it, and it’s because we’re at ground zero and don’t have a base. We couldn’t do this if we were established,” said Goldblatt.

The CEO added that the goal is to build the Blass presence in select flagships in key markets and partner with high-end e-tailers.
Shoe Gems

The '80s are back — with all the standout style to match.

“Jem and the Holograms” may be getting mixed reviews, but there are some standout shoe moments in the big-screen adaptation of the 1980s cult cartoon series. Here, Spy goes behind the scenes with costume designer Soyon An.

How would you describe the fashion on set?

“Young, fun, and colorful. I incorporated black accents to bring out the edge and take away the bubblegum feeling, which could have been too much with the costumes and what Jem is thought to be in our memories. But watching the cartoons as research and thinking back through my own memories ... Jem and the Holograms were an all-girl rock band that were super-fabulous and stylish, and I wanted to bring that to this live-action version. It’s not your stereotypical ‘80s neon fashion.”

What are some of the key shoe brands used in the film?

“Dr. Martens, Nike, Coye Nokes, Rebecca Minkoff and Nasty Gal.”

What does Aubrey Peeples [who plays Jem] pick for the stage?

“Mostly Jeffrey Campbell and Steve Madden.”

Any favorite moments on set?

“I loved the style-makeover montage. Behind the scenes, it was as crazy and fun as it was portrayed in the film. Just seeing all the girls have fun trying on different outfits, hairstyles and makeup backstage was a blast. Also, Juliette Lewis brought so much laughter on and off camera.”

Royal Style

The Duchess of Cambridge had another big week — and she took Jimmy Choo along for the ride. Kate Middleton wore the brand to two charity events (for more, see page 34), a black tie dinner and the London premiere of “Spectre,” the latest James Bond release. “Being British, I feel incredibly proud when the Duchess of Cambridge wears Jimmy Choo at her official engagements,” said Creative Director Sandra Choi. “Her beauty, style and glamour bring a touch of magic that’s uplifting.” Choi said it would be hard to choose a favorite Duchess look, but her “Spectre” ensemble was a standout. “The floor-length gown was dreamy and elegant.”

Spotted

Naomie Harris, rocking Sophia Webster in Berlin. The “Spectre” star had lots of big red carpet moments last week, including a photocall where she donned the designer’s Dulcie Tartan Red sandals.

Spring Soirée

To celebrate their spring collection, Freda Salvador’s Cristina Palomo-Nelson and Megan Papay swooped into NYC from San Francisco to host a buzzy dinner. Held at a butterfly-and-flower-strewn private event space, 58 Gansevoort (the fashion crowd’s spot du jour), the co-designers admitted that they’re trying to spend more facetime in the Big Apple. “It’s tricky because we travel so much to the factories in Spain. But it’s great to be here and see everybody all at once,” said Papay. Palomo-Nelson agreed that it’s high time for cheers. Business continues to be on the uptick for the contemporary label, she said, adding: “We cannot keep our off-white leather brogues and boots in stock fast enough.” California cool, indeed.

What’s Cooking?

Celebrity chef Donatella Arpaia can rattle off the names of shoe designers as easily as she does her specialty dishes. Arpaia, co-owner of New York eateries Prova and Kefi, said that unlike most chefs, she opts for a pair of sneakers in the kitchen instead of clogs. While her go-to comfort brand these days is Rockport, her designer faves include Brian Atwood, Jimmy Choo, Stuart Weitzman and Valentino. Arpaia’s most-loved pair: Tom Ford gold python strappy sandals. “They were a gift from my husband and are to die for,” she said.
The Lowdown On Q3’s Slowdown

A series of challenges took a toll on footwear players — and analysts said the landscape might get even more complicated.

By Sheena Butler-Young

Despite a healthy consumer backdrop going into the third quarter, shoe companies grappled with ongoing currency pressures, unseasonable weather, inventory challenges and “overreaction” on the part of investors following earnings releases.

On the heels of Q3 reports, Skechers, VF Corp. and Under Armour shouldered significant stock declines. But market watchers remained mostly upbeat on the companies and almost unanimously called the sell-offs an overreaction.

The Inventory Controversy

Wolverine World Wide Inc. was the first to unveil its financials for the quarter, and though the firm’s numbers were mostly in line with forecasts, market watchers were concerned about the company’s slowing domestic businesses, elevated inventories and continuously flat revenues at Sperry.

“Inventory was up 6 percent in Q3, versus an anticipated sales decline of low- to mid-single digits in Q4,” noted Sterne Agee CRT analyst Sam Poser. “Management expects inventory levels to be up by high single digits at the end of the year and remain high through at least 1Q16. Companies that hold off on markdowns often end up shooting themselves in the foot [as] sales and margins are likely to be damaged.”

Under Armour Inc. and Skechers USA Inc. also experienced slower momentum and sluggish investors may have misunderstood reports of higher inventories.

Citi Research analyst Kate McShane also found the firm’s explanation of high inventories to be sound. “As the broader inventory backup at U.S. wholesale is worked down ahead of holiday, a cleaner retail environment should open up more shelf space for Skechers at wholesale in Q4 and beyond at the expense of underperforming brands and private labels,” McShane wrote.

VF Corp., which reported on Oct. 23, saw its inventories increase 12 percent during Q3, “one of the fastest growth rates we have seen in several years,” McShane said.

“However, management attributed a good portion of that to an increase in direct-to-consumer door count year-over-year,” explained McShane. “In addition, retailers asked for product to set their floors later in the year. By the end of the year, management is guiding inventories to be in-line.”

Last week’s strong Steve Madden report also revealed a 20 percent rise in inventory levels, but most of that was due to acquisitions, insiders said.

More broadly, Van Sinderen and CL King & Associates analyst Steven Marotta said inventory issues experienced by Wolverine and others are a consequence of an industrywide sales downshift.

“Warmer weather and/or a lackluster consumer led to a slow pace of sales through September and some of October,” Marotta said.

The Currency Chronicles

While shoe companies often pride themselves on their global growth goals, many are now feeling the adverse effects of international exposure.

For VF Corp. — whose North Face, Timberland and Vans brands have enjoyed a large and favorable reception globally — currency pressures have stretched on for at least the past two quarters.

In Q3, the firm continued to see significant differences between reported revenues and its currency-neutral figures. Currency-neutral sales for Vans were up 10 percent, while reported sales inch ed up just 2 percent. Revenue at Timberland gained 21 percent on a currency-neutral basis but only 11 percent on a reported basis.

Wolverine tackled similar FX challenges. During its Q3 conference call, Blake Krueger, the firm’s chairman, CEO and president, acknowledged that the strong U.S. dollar “put pressure on the cost of footwear” and that the firm protected gross margins by “selectively increasing prices” in international markets.

Van Sinderen said he expects shoe companies to continue to face strains from slipping product demand and unseasonable weather. “The generally slow business of the last couple of months will create some pressure into Q4,” Van Sinderen noted. “We expect a highly promotional holiday, with heavy discounting in some categories. That said, some companies will still perform relatively well. There are some new fashion drivers, and the active/athleisure business is not going away anytime soon.”
Or shine. The newest Wellies and rubber boots capture the spring '16 woman’s ready-for-anything attitude. Coupled with abbreviated outerwear, the look is a new take on taking cover.

Photographed by Rodolfo Martinez

Fashion Director:
Mosha Lundström Halbert

Assistant Fashion Editor:
Christian Allaire
VALENTINO Rockstud boots. Fendi coat. La Perla top, bra and shorts. DR. MARTENS Drench laceup boot. Christopher Kane coat. Prabal Gurung slip dress.
SLOGGERS poppy-print boots. EFM by Donad Duncan coat. WXYZ headpieces on both models. CIRCUS BY SAM EDELMAN transparent laceup boots. Tanya Taylor coat.
Hedi Slimane waded into Glastonbury territory when he sent luxe rainboots down Saint Laurent’s spring ’16 runway in Paris. Inspired by festival dressing, the Wellies were elevated with black sequins or floral embroidery. Kate Moss would definitely approve.
When Samuel Bistrian received his first pair of rainboots at the age of 6, it was a game-changer for the Romania native, who grew up in a small, impoverished village. The hand-me-down boots allowed him to safely play outdoors regardless of the weather.

Now 33 and living in Dallas, the founder of Roma Boots is committed to giving other underprivileged children the same freedom by providing them with a free pair of new boots.

“Rainboots are more practical, functional and sanitary than other footwear,” said Bistrian, who launched the brand five years ago. “They transformed my life, and it’s come full circle.”

Roma — the Spanish word for “love” spelled backwards — is modeled after Toms Shoes’ buy-one, give-one platform. Prior to launching Roma Boots, Bistrian was a manager in the fur department at Neiman Marcus, where he met Toms’ Blake Mycoskie, who was doing a personal appearance at the store.

Inspired by the experience, Bistrian left his job in 2007 to focus on his Roma venture, financing the company by selling his personal possessions, including his car. He then borrowed money from siblings and an uncle to raise an additional $100,000 to send the first shipment of 1,000 boots to kids in need in Romania, before even a single order was placed by consumers. Today, Bistrian has two partners who control 25 percent of the brand.

Roma Boots has grown quickly, registering a 500 percent uptick in sales in 2014 over 2013, with expectations for an additional 300 percent rise in 2015.

“People are interested [in supporting you] if you truly do what you say,” said Bistrian. The sales jumps are also due in large part to the company’s move from a strictly e-commerce model to the addition of wholesale distribution.

To introduce the line to retailers, Bistrian exhibited the collection at FN Platform in February 2014, where he garnered orders for at-once delivery. Today, the brand has a roster of 400 accounts, including Nordstrom, as well as smaller specialty stores.

Roma Boots has received the support of a number of independent retailers, including Heller’s Shoes in Mt. Kisco, NY, which introduced the line in spring ’15. According to assistant buyer Alyssa Iacovello, con-
3 QUESTIONS FOR SADIE ROBERTSON

What’s the best part about designing?
“The most amazing thing is knowing it’s about more than just cute shoes. The boots are going to help kids in need.”

Do you have a favorite look in the line?
“I love the florals, but since my favorite color is maroon, it’s the tall maroon laceup.”

How will you style the boots?
“I like to have fun with them, so overalls are my favorite thing to tie them with.”
On Parker’s first assignment, she covered a winter storm in Washington, D.C. — without waterproof boots.

On Parker’s first assignment, she covered a winter storm in Washington, D.C. — without waterproof boots.
Prints are packing a whimsical punch in the kids’ rainboot market this season. From fun fish motifs for boys to fanciful florals for girls, these playful looks are sure to make a great splash.

**SPRING TREND**

Fishflips’ nautical boot with cartoon giant squid

Two-tone floral-print pull-on by Aigle

Sherbet-colored lightweight boot from Native

Kamik’s retro-inspired polka-dot design

Hatley’s fireman-inspired style with shark motif

On model: Joules goes head-to-toe floral in a water-friendly jacket and boots.
City Slickers

When clouds rolled into Manhattan last week, commuters came prepared with footwear that could withstand the elements. Donning colorful and classic boots from brands like Hunter, Däv and Joules, these locals proved that a rainy day can’t dampen their personal style.

PHOTOS: THOMAS IANNACCONE

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Rob Moehring
The Pacific Northwest is the ideal place for Washington Shoe Co. to create its collection of Chooka rainboots.

By Barbara Schneider-Levy

loudy skies never put a damper on Rob Moehring’s day. The president of Washington Shoe Co., maker of Chooka women’s rainboots, always welcomes a storm. For the spring ’16 collection, in particular, Moehring looked to the clouds for a palette of cool gray tones, adding a pop of vibrance with color-blocked accents on the boots’ heel counters and goring. “[The color is] not overwhelming, but instead adds pizzazz,” he said. Similarly, spring’s patterns are more sophisticated, including watercolor poppies and charming owl prints set against a natural backdrop. To gather design ideas, Moehring said he’s been spending time in vintage shops. “You get the sense of age that gives things another dimension.” He also pays homage to nearby Seattle by featuring a photo print of the city on the shaft of a novelty boot, trimmed with the colors of local sports teams. But, added Moehring, “At the end of the day, the big [story] is about more elegant looks in solid colors with a satin finish.”

“I’m an old version of a mall rat, hanging out at Neiman Marcus to get a sense of where [fashion is] going.”

Washington Shoe Co. began making rainboots in 1891, during the Alaska gold rush.
How I got into shoes:
I fell into the business through a friend of a friend who knew the SVP of human resources at Clarks. The company was merging its Bostonian and Clarks offices, and I was hired to move the executives and hire support staff. With no way to [advance], I began looking for another job. Clarks’ then-president, Tom Austin, [encouraged me to stay] by offering me a sales position in Florida with the promise of eventually moving me into a sales-management position.

My approach to leadership:
Treat people with the proper respect, keep communication channels open, involve [employees] in business decisions and give them ownership of what they’re doing.

The secret to motivating others:
It’s seeing things from their side. However, it’s also about motivating [people outside] the company — such as vendors and retailers. It’s getting them excited about what everyone’s doing. You need to understand where others are coming from, as well as what you’d like to accomplish.

Developing a corporate culture:
We focus on people, product and service. Next, it’s how we treat [our staff] and how we service our customer base. You have to get your [core values] across so people understand them. It’s about being passionate, having fun and being involved.

Our hiring method:
We’re a small company, so I try to meet everyone being interviewed. You want to make sure they fit into the corporate culture. It’s less about experience and more about attitude. People who are excited, passionate and interesting are the ones who thrive in everything they do.

My personal mentors:
First was Bill Thorpe, co-owner of a sports facility where I worked after college. He was a Wharton School graduate and also ran a tugboat business, where he worked with longshoremen. He taught me to treat people with respect, regardless of their [background] or education. Next is current Rockport Group CEO Bob Infantino, [who I worked with at Clarks]. He taught me [the importance] of having people who can perform and love what they do.

Proudest accomplishment:
It’s a wonderful thing to bring people into a company as it becomes successful. In some cases, they meet their future [spouses], build their careers, then move on to something else in the industry. It’s about creating an environment where people thrive, raise a family and send their kids to college.

The biggest change I’ve seen in the industry:
Sourcing issues. Shoemaking is labor-intensive, so you have to find countries that can support that cost to stay competitive. Everyone is looking for the next big breakthrough in sourcing and manufacturing. But I don’t think it’s going to happen soon since China is still the major player.

Looking to the next generation:
My son Thomas runs the Earth Origins business. I tried talking him out of it, but having worked at The Tannery in Boston during college, then hanging around with me and Bob Infantino, the shoe business got into his blood.

The president of Earth Inc. reflects on his long career and how energy and enthusiasm are the blueprint for success.

By Barbara Schneider-Levy

Gary Champion

After college, Champion briefly played in the International Hockey League.

LEADER’S CIRCLE
Three essential insights from Gary Champion.

THE KEY TO SUCCESS:
“It’s all about relationships — that’s 80 percent of being successful. The relationships you build and the passion you take with you pays off in the long run.”

LATE-NIGHT WORRY
“I think about the people who are entrusting me with this company. I have 140 [employees] in China and 55 in the U.S. I want to give them the same opportunities Bob Infantino gave me at Clarks.”

JOB SWAP
“I’d like to trade places with Donald Trump. The ride he’s on now has to be thrilling.”
Chelsea Jones likes a challenge. After leaving a job in finance to launch fashion-comfort shoe brand Ciel Bleu in 2013, the entrepreneur has taken the next step by opening a store in Chicago.

Chelsea Jones Studio debuted in September in an 850-sq.-ft. space on Clark Street in the city’s trendy Lincoln Park neighborhood.

Jones, whose contemporary lifestyle collection is built on an athletic-inspired comfort technology, said she saw an opportunity to expand her wholesale and e-commerce businesses with a brick-and-mortar store that stocks the entire Ciel Bleu collection.

“I [realized] there was so much value in speaking directly to customers about their needs,” said Jones, who designed the store’s interior herself, even laying the floor tiles with her husband and business partner, Hans Rasmussen.

The do-it-yourselfer opted to keep things simple, with metal and glass shelving units lined up along the store’s painted brick wall, plus a compact seating area for customer try-ons.

While hunting for a site, Jones homed in on the upscale Lincoln Park community, which is populated by her target customers: professional women and young moms. Though other established footwear retailers are also in the area, including Lori’s Shoes and V-Italia, Jones said they are able to comfortably co-exist. “There are just enough shoe stores, but not an oversaturation,” she said.

In addition to operating her own shop, Jones continues to wholesale to retailers, including stores in Chicago. She told Footwear News that cannibalizing sales from partners isn’t a huge concern because her store enhances brand recognition to drive revenue at fellow retailers.

To acquaint consumers with her new shop, Jones plans to host monthly in-store events and has been building relationships with hotel concierges and the local Chamber of Commerce.

In addition, the Ciel Bleu brand continues to develop its direct connection with consumers via social media.
Aerosoles’ new CEO is fine-tuning the brand by optimizing omnichannel and marketing opportunities.

By Barbara Schneider-Levy

What will fuel new growth at Aerosoles?
Omnichannel retail. Our consumer is not thinking about [whether] she’s an online, retail or catalog shopper. She’s experiencing a brand in many ways. Our objective is not to delineate between [these channels], but to create a continuous loop that’s easy for her, no matter where she’s [finding] the brand. We’re trying to drive retail, wholesale and dot-com revenue to allow the consumer to purchase the brand however she wants.

Are you changing how you communicate with customers?
Historically, our marketing has been primarily through our catalog and stores. We haven’t done a lot of digital or direct-to-consumer. But it’s something we’re looking at. Right now, we’re determining who our target consumer is. When she comes to the brand, how do we create a conversation with her? [We launched an] ad campaign in New York for fall ’15 with the tagline “Fashion that feels good,” which was [designed] to support both our own stores and wholesale customers. It was an energy driver to test different marketing options and see how the consumer responds.

How do you plan to balance wholesale and owned retail?
I’ll continue to look at our store portfolio and, where it makes sense, have both outlets and full-price locations. We want to make sure we’re creating the right in-store environment — it’s one of our best advertising elements. Hopefully, our stores operate as a brand ambassador. However, our objective also is to grow with our wholesale customers and make sure our presentations there are just as strong.

Aerosoles is known for accessible prices as well as comfort.

Has this affected consumer perception of the brand? [Our] prices are too low relative to what consumers expect today. We need to provide value, but the question is how much of a gap there needs to be. When a brand is strong in certain markets, we should be able to command a [better price]. If product is priced too low, the consumer doesn’t realize how good it is. We may raise prices on existing product, but not radically. We have to find the right value that we — and our retailers — can support.

What about the look of the shoes — will Aerosoles tip more toward style or comfort?
Our view is to look at the occasions in a woman’s life, as opposed to [just delivering] technology. If she’s at work, how do we make her [life] better in terms of how she looks and feels? How can she get around the office faster? If she’s at a cocktail party or dancing, how do we make sure that experience is enhanced? Nike is an example — its foundation is performance, but it first makes product relevant, fashionable and exciting.

The High Gloss nude sandal for spring ’16

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BRAND SHAWN NEVILLE

5 QUESTIONS

The High Gloss nude sandal for spring ’16
Dr. Scholl’s is taking a step back in time for its spring offering. “In this digital age, consumers are looking for something real and authentic,” said Katie Moore, design director for the iconic brand. “We resurrected our Original Exercise sandal for the updated Enya, interpreting its signature buckle on a large scale.” Moore also continued the craftsman theme on uppers with an engineered macramé that looks like it has been done by hand. The color story is a simple one, too. Moore used aged photos of the desert for a palette of bright sky blues juxtaposed against warm sands and tans, making the most of the scheme through materials that include summer suede with patent. “It’s a soft-and-matte shine duality that plays through the entire line,” she said. And since great ideas often come from the street, Moore people-watched in St. Louis, where she lives. “There are some cool pockets, such as the eclectic Delmar Loop, or the zoo is good for finding everyday people.”

Katie Moore

Old blends with new in Dr. Scholl’s latest collection of vintage-inspired styles.

By Barbara Schneider-Levy

“There’s a 1970s vibe to the line in terms of color and material, but the [silhouettes] are clean and modern.”

Photos: Moore, Enya sandal: Courtesy of brand; Exercise sandal: Getty Images; Blueberry Hill: Courtesy of company; All others: Shutterstock

In the 1960s, the Original Exercise sandal was worn by models Jean Shrimpton and Twiggy.
Building Blocks
Though based in Brooklyn, N.Y., the Inkkas brand is known for shoes and accessories made with materials created by artisans in countries such as Guatemala and Peru. This month, the label launched a Kickstarter campaign to raise $40,000 to support growth on a more local scale. The funds will be used to establish a permanent brick-and-mortar store at the company's headquarters in the trendy neighborhood of Greenpoint. Currently, Inkkas operates a weekend pop-up shop at the location.

Fired Up
Westlake Village, Calif.-based biomechanical footwear brand Abeo is appealing to comfort-driven foodies by signing as its brand ambassador celebrity chef Anne Burrell, host of Food Network’s “Worst Cooks in America.” Burrell will be shod in the brand’s clog designs, which sport kitchen-friendly SureGrip slip-resistant outsoles. Inside, the clogs feature Abeo’s proprietary B.I.O. and 24/7 proprietary comfort systems. The collection is available now at The Walking Company stores, as well as independent and specialty shops.

Double Dipping
Following this fall’s launch of women’s brand Soft Comfort, Camtrade, based in Boxborough, Mass., is adding sister label Secret Celebrity for spring. While Soft Comfort offers mainstream looks retailing from $39 to $49, Secret Celebrity targets a younger, more fashion-forward customer, with prices of $49 to $69. The collection features sandals on cork-wrapped wedges and footbeds with arch support. Set to deliver in February, the line will be available through e-tailers and independents.

Pop In
Just in time for the holiday season, Emu Australia, based in Grand Rapids, Mich., is debuting its first U.S. store this month: a 300-sq.-ft. pop-up shop inside the OC Mix Shopping Center in Costa Mesa, Calif. Opened in partnership with area retailer Gear Co-op, the petite boutique will showcase Emu’s women’s and children’s collections. It will be open daily through the end of January.
Kate Middleton, in Jimmy Choo Gilbert pumps, took part in a “Wellie wanging” competition with Prince William and Prince Harry at a BAFTA screening of “Shaun the Sheep: The Farmer’s Llamas” in London last Monday. The trio, who attended with children from charities they work with, were up for anything — even a contest that had them throwing Wellington boots at props from the movie.
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