

INSIDER



TAKING THE FLOOR

Bloomingdale's is altering the playing field in New York again with a dramatically expanded shoe department in its flagship store.

By Nikara Johns

Bloomingdale's is reigniting the department store footwear wars. ➔ Last week, the retailer unveiled an expansive space at its 59th Street flagship — with more than 100 brands, 17 of which are new to the company. ➔ “We are here to win and re-establish ourselves,” said Jennifer Jones, operating vice president and DMM of women's shoes. ➔ Dubbed The Heart of Shoe York, the overhaul combines its original contemporary (second-floor) and designer (fourth-floor) levels into one 26,763-square-foot department on the fifth floor — double the size of the previous spaces. ➔ From luxury labels to athletic brands, the revamped space offers footwear across all categories, hitting a variety of price points. “We didn't want to just take what we had and move it up to a new floor. We amped [it] up,” Jones said. ➔ Shoes have been a centerpiece of the efforts by retailers like Bloomingdale's to fuel consumer excitement at a time when they are under pressure like never before.

Saks Fifth Avenue, for instance, has also been in the midst of redevelopment. In 2016, the retailer expanded its footprint with the launch of its 10022-Shoe standalone store in Greenwich, Conn.

Nordstrom is ready for its New York debut, with a men's standalone shop opening on April 12. Even more notable will be the debut of its first women's flagship next year.

So for Bloomingdale's, it was time to shake things up.

“It's a very strategic move to reanchor and re-exert themselves as a leader in the city in advance of Nordstrom's arrival,” said Steve Goldberg, president of The Grayson Co., a retail consulting firm. “They [are sending] a very clear message about their commitment to certain categories. The shoe business is a key touchstone, and it's important — not only from the fashion perspective but also [for reaching] its multiple demographic segments.”

With the renovation, Bloomingdale's has brought on new brands in the luxury market — including Brian Atwood, Givenchy, Oscar de la Renta, Sophia Webster and Tabitha Simmons — along with creating nine shop-in-shops in its designer shoe salon, including Jimmy Choo, Gucci, Dior and Chanel, among others.

“It's showing our customer that she has a lot of different choices and that we can service all of these different customers,” Erica Russo, Bloomingdale's VP of fashion direction, accessories and cosmetics, told FN. “It's also about the experience and shopping, and bringing that theateric back to retail and knowing that there's a place to go to find what you need and have a great time. That's what Bloomingdale's stands for.”

Along with a strong luxury

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Bloomingdale's' Erica Russo

assortment, the retailer has put an emphasis on its contemporary and fast-fashion business with brands like Aqua, a Bloomingdale's private-label ready-to-wear favorite that has now launched footwear.

There's also a place for emerging designers and smaller labels in the Showroom concept, which concentrates on that advanced contemporary category.

“[It's filling the] white space of price points that are lower than designer but higher than contemporary,” said Jones.

Russo added, “We felt compelled to create a space that celebrated emerging brands. It's about doing our research on who has the buzz and who is doing something different.”

In addition to bringing in an eclectic mix of brands, experience and personalization was a key part of the strategy.

For example, shoppers will have access to M.Gemi's fit shop, a novel concept for the brand and the retailer.

The made-in-Italy label, which operates primarily as a direct-to-consumer brand, partnered with

Bloomingdale's on a dedicated area within the floor.

“It was important for us to be able to have our own space with our own design,” said co-founder Maria Gangemi. “It's going to be an experience for clients to come. For me, it's really important that they are looking at the brand in a fresh new way.” In addition to offering core styles like pumps and loafers, M.Gemi plans to fuel excitement by offering a Monday drop — featuring at least one fresh style — every week.

Another way Bloomingdale's is looking to stand out is by offering footwear accessories in a dedicated space that includes a shoelace bar, sneaker cleaners and Fitbits.

Hickies, the no-tie elastic lacing system, is one product on offer. “The partnership is fitting, as Bloomingdale's seeks to improve the footwear experience at an individual level, and Hickies does that quite liter-

ally,” co-founder and CMO Mariquel Waingarten said. “As [the store] looks to showcase the rise of athleisure and athletic-influenced styles, our combination of convenience, performance and aesthetics will be the perfect fit for customers.”

After officially opening the space last week, Bloomingdale's is looking to lure consumers with designer appearances.

Throughout April, the retailer is also hosting meet and greets with standouts such as Sarah Jessica Parker, Brian Atwood and more.

“Working with Bloomingdale's really comes full-circle for me. My first job in New York City was selling sunglasses there,” said Atwood. “It's such an exciting time to be teaming up with the store.”

In celebration of the launch, the retailer tapped designers such as Gucci, Sam Edelman, Dior, SJP and Dolce Vita to create exclusive styles just for the 59th Street location. “The intention is to keep that momentum going with [exclusives],” added Jones.

Goldberg is confident the reimaged floor will help Bloomingdale's become a bigger footwear authority.

“The [shoe department] is a place where customer service, fashion, selection and assortment all converge. That's a great opportunity to engage the consumer because it is an experience,” said Goldberg. “They've built that platform in the beauty business for years, and this will extend that authority of customer service and engagement.” ■

