

FFANY Buyers Find Freshness



Inside the Nine West booth

BY KRISTEN HENNING

NEW YORK — While price hikes are a concern for most retailers, the initial outlook for spring '12 is bright.

Buyers at last week's FFANY show here were optimistic about the spring offerings, naming bold colors and wedges as strong trends.

Brooke Barwart, DMM of shoes and accessories at Pipeline.com, said footwear sales for 2012 could grow in the double digits over 2011.

"We're definitely increasing our buy," said Barwart. "We're really optimistic because we're seeing a lot of newness in terms of colors and silhouettes, which were lacking a bit this past spring."

Danny Wasserman, owner of New York-based Tip Top Shoes, agreed that the fresh merchandise should

make for a successful season.

"There is a lot of good product out there, you just have to be very selective. [There is] an abundance of color, [including] turquoise and aqua," he said, adding that wedges and espadrilles are poised to be standout trends.

While they were upbeat about new trends, many retailers are still concerned about how price hikes will affect consumer spending.

Boston-based Shoebuy.com has

been closely monitoring the sourcing situation in Asia, said VP of merchandising Megan Moser. "As a retailer, we want to keep a close eye on everything that's happening in China with manufacturing and where that's going to take our prices."

Perry Mahan, owner of Philadelphia-based Shoetique, agreed that costs are a concern, but he still expects to have a strong spring season in 2012. "I'm worried about rising prices, but as long as we counteract that with rising sales, [the store] should be fine," said Mahan. "[Consumers] are ready to shop."

"People are sick of hearing how bad the economy is," added Kelley Heuisler, owner of Baltimore-based Poppy & Stella Heuisler, which is increasing its buy by 15 percent from last year. "Especially with shoes, you get people saying, 'We didn't take a vacation or buy a car this year, [so] I'm buying shoes.'" — *With contributions from Alexa Pizzi and Michelle Toy*

Compass Retailers Reload for Spring

BY GERALD FLORES

NEW YORK — Footwear buyers might be shifting their focus to spring '12, but many are hunting for the styles that sold well this past season.

Wedges, boat shoes and clogs were still at the top of many lists at last week's Compass show. And the vintage trend continued to resonate.

Here, four retailers weigh in on their best bets for next spring.

John Holden, COO, Benjamin Lovell Shoes, Philadelphia

Hot list: Vintage Shoe Co., Bass
Key trends: "Definitely Americana, classic vintage looks, wedges and color-blocking will drive business. People are trying to simplify a lot of styles and go back to basics."

Overall forecast: "I'm hoping and planning for a 10 percent sales increase. I don't think it's going to be great, but we're trying to build

[business] up slowly again."

Shah Hamad, head buyer, Maxxis.com, Fashionstake.com

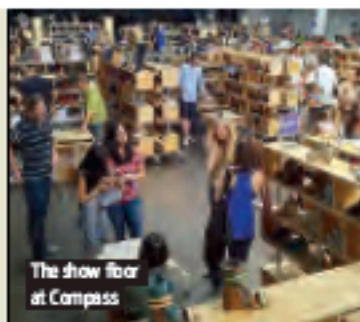
Hot list: 80%20, Swims, Creative Recreation

Key trends: "We're seeing a lot of chunky heels, clogs and 1970s-inspired shoes. The androgynous look for women is continuing. We're not really seeing a new go-to shoe, and a lot of the same trends [from this spring] are continuing. It's more about updating existing inventory with similar products."

Overall forecast: Small sales increase. "Luckily, our website is for girls in college who may not be focusing as much on the [economy] as on what they're wearing."

Peter Agati, shoe buyer, Paul Stuart, New York

Hot list: Eastland, Florsheim by Duckie Brown



The show floor at Compass

Key trends: "Boat shoes, casual moccasin looks and saddle shoes with that Americana feel are looking good."
Overall forecast: "Business is on the way back. People are tired of being in the doldrums."

Steve Silver, owner, Next, Cleveland
Hot list: Timberland Boot Co., Wolverine, Walk-Over

Key trends: "It's still very much a vintage world out there right now. I don't see that changing."

Overall forecast: "We're having a great year so far, so I hope it carries into the fall." — *With contributions from Natasha Bodily*



Footwear News Unveils New Site

BY JENNIE BELL

NEW YORK — Footwearnews.com received a big makeover last week.

The website, online home to Footwear News magazine, was relaunched as part of the larger revamp of sister site WWD.com.

Among the latest features are breaking news on every page, enhanced photo search capabilities and a clean, user-friendly design that emphasizes bold artwork.

FN's site also has introduced new sub-channels to help readers access information faster and find the news most relevant to their businesses.

Articles are now organized according to Business, Retail, Fashion, Markets and People.

"The goal is to deliver breaking news more quickly and expand our online coverage with more eye-catching visuals — all in a new, easier-to-navigate format," said FN Editorial Director Michael Atmore.

This move follows a redesign of the print publication that emphasized more cohesive packaging, long-form journalism and lush fashion photography.

STAFF PROMOTIONS

Katie Abel has been named Global News Director of FN. In addition to continuing to lead the news team, Abel, who has worked on the magazine for 10 years, will be charged with furthering international coverage, broadening Web content and spearheading special projects.