



Manolo Blahnik

Star Power

Lights, camera, action. Footwear is taking the spotlight for the upcoming documentary "God Save My Shoes," featuring a handful of hot designers, includ-

ing Christian Louboutin, Manolo Blahnik, Pierre Hardy and Walter Steiger. "I do rather enjoy talking in front of a camera, especially when the people interviewing me are amusing," Blahnik said of his time on set. "Manolo's bustling energy was something, [and] seeing Christian Louboutin designing a shoe from beginning to end was quite exhilarating," said the film's writer and director, Julie Benasra. Celebs such as Fergie, Kelly Rowland and Dita Von Teese also make cameos in the film, which is slated to launch during an event at Paris Fashion Week in September and on Canal Plus TV. "Shoes are the one accessory that crystallizes desire, compulsive behavior and sometimes obsession," said producer Thierry Daher. But according to Blahnik, the reason women are fixated on footwear is quite simple. "I guess it has something to do with sex and heels," he quipped.

Royal Affair

Beatrix Ong is having a royal moment. As a British designer, she's certainly no stranger to the scene, but after her recent appointment as Member of the Order of the British Empire, Ong finally had time with the Queen herself. "I was in absolute awe of her," the designer said of meeting her majesty at the award presentation earlier this month. "She was warm, friendly and disarmingly beautiful." Ong said her spring '12 line ties in



Beatrix Ong

well with the royal theme, including some low-platform sandals. "They're more ladylike and perfect for those summer parties and tea at the Palace," she said. "But naughty enough to perhaps snag [Prince] Harry."

Friends Forever

What are friends for? Dave Ortiz of New York sneaker shop Dave's Quality Meat has been absent from the retail scene for many months,

but his long-awaited new skate and bike shop, Dave's Wear House, is soft launching this week. And Ortiz said longtime pal Elijah Wood — in-town doing promos for his new FX series, "Wilfred" — could be the first guest in the in-store studio, a glassed-in back room where Ortiz plans to interview skate, BMX and celebrity friends. But the retailer has more plans for his actor friend when off the air. "I'll have him sweeping floors," Ortiz joked.

Luxe Looks

FN Platform is getting a taste of luxury. Starting with its August edition, the Las Vegas trade show will add a new section, Black Diamond, to showcase about 20 high-end designer brands, including Jerome Rousseau, Marc by Marc Jacobs, Pollini and Missoni. "I've always been known for the luxury portion, and we're at a point where we are ready to embrace it," said VP of footwear Leslie Galin. "This section will showcase the up-and-coming designer brands and tried-and-true favorites." Galin also hinted to *Spy* that the new space will attract some major names. (Snooki made the rounds in February, while Paris Hilton walked the show floor in 2010.) "It will definitely be a star-studded event," she said — *With contributions from Natasha Bodily and Jennifer Ernst Beaudry*

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Elijah Wood

The selling floor at Schuh



Genesco Picks Up UK Schuh Stores

BY MICHELLE TAY

NEW YORK — The second cross-Atlantic footwear merger of the year is getting high praise.

Genesco Inc.'s acquisition of U.K. retailer Schuh Group Ltd. gives the company a chance to step up its global presence, analysts said last week.

"It looks like a match made in heaven," said Scott Krasik, an analyst at BB&T Capital Markets. "After you grow [Schuh] in the U.K., you can take it to the [European] continent as well."

Susquehanna Financial analyst Christopher Svezia also applauded the move. "There's not a ton of growth left in the domestic marketplace," he said. "Schuh is basically a Journeys in the U.K. It's a very complementary business accretive to [Genesco's] earnings and expands its global retail footprint."

Nashville, Tenn.-based Genesco last Thursday sealed the deal, paying a total of 125 million pounds, or \$199.8 million at current exchange, which is broken down into three payments: the first 100 million pounds upfront, then a 15 million pound installment payable in three years and the last 10 million pounds the year after that.

Robert Dennis, president and CEO of Genesco, said Schuh gives the firm a sizable retail presence in the U.K. and Ireland, and is in line with plans for international expansion. (Journeys already operates three doors in Canada and hopes to reach 100.)

"This [deal] establishes a presence across the pond from which we could someday contemplate further opportunities in Europe," Dennis said in a conference call with analysts. "By expanding our footprint to the U.K., we gain more visibility into footwear trends from both sides of the Atlantic, become more important to our common vendors and create new growth opportunities."

According to Jim Estepa, SVP of Genesco and president and CEO of its retail group, the firm plans to double the size of Schuh in the U.K. over the next four to five years by upping the store count to between 100 and 120. Schuh, founded in 1981 and headquartered in Scotland, currently operates 59 stores in the U.K. and Ireland, and has one of Britain's largest online shoe merchants, Schuh.co.uk.

"There's no doubt that the buying power of both the businesses together will give us the opportunity to enhance the sales of the brands that we share. We'll look at special make-ups and collaborations for the brands sold in both Journeys and Schuh stores," Estepa said, adding that over time there will be opportunity in the U.K. for Lids, Johnston & Murphy and other Genesco brands.

As part of the deal, Schuh's leadership team, including managing director Colin Temple and finance director Mark Crutchley, will stay on to head the company. For the fiscal year ended March 27, 2011, Schuh generated net sales of roughly 164 million pounds, or \$261.7 million, with an operating margin above 9 percent.

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