

Kickers Unveils U.S. Plan

By ELISA ANNISS

LONDON — French footwear brand Kickers is making a return stateside.

The label will launch a children's line and some women's product at The WSA Show this week. The move is part of a larger growth strategy by the brand's Fougères, France-based owner, Groupe Royer, to expand into more global markets, including India, the Middle East, South Africa and Japan.

"We are starting with mostly children's because it contains the DNA of the brand," said Jean-François Bru, GM of Kickers, adding that target retail accounts include Garnet Hill and Nordstrom. If the launch is successful, he added, Kickers plans to expand the offering to include men's for fall '10.

At WSA, the brand will offer 40 to 45

styles retailing from \$59 for kids' product to \$99 for women's.

As part of the new venture, Groupe Royer — which also owns Stéphane Kélian, Patrick Cox and Paul & Joe Sister — is forming a new company called Kickers



A style from the new line.

USA, which will be headquartered in New Hyde Park, N.Y.

The U.S. arm of Pentland Group Plc, the U.K. licensee for Kickers, is assisting Groupe Royer with back-office operations, including logistics and shipping, but Kickers USA will employ its own

management team to direct its sales and strategy.

Created by Daniel Raufaste in 1970, Kickers became easily recognizable among consumers because of its engraved eyelets, crepe sole and label sewn onto the upper with the tagline "the original jeans boot."

While it has had limited distribution in the U.S. in the past, it is widely available in Europe. In the U.K., for example, it has more than 500 points of sale including Kurt Geiger, Barratts and Office.

A number of retailers said they looked forward to seeing what the brand had to offer.

"I'm excited to hear they're coming back," said Roz Viemeister, owner of New York-based Shoofly, who said she would definitely consider adding Kickers to her product mix.

Buyers Seek Spring Deals At NY Shows

By JOCELYN ANDERSON

NEW YORK — Retailers made the rounds at a number of boutique trade shows in New York last week, finding fresh looks for spring and more vendors ready to make deals.

Project, Capsule and Collective were all held at different venues in town. Menswear show MRket also debuted in New York, adding to its usual Las Vegas appearance.

Overall, retailers said they were encouraged by spring, although many were employing new strategies.

"We'll be buying differently for spring," said Liz Fodera, footwear buyer at Bloomingdale's. "It will be very product important. I've walked into lines that blow my mind, so we will buy a lot into those. I've walked into other lines that are not as strong, so we will not go as deep there."

The difficult economy also led vendors to make shifts in pricing, retailers said.

"Sometimes it works better to wait," said Bruce Julian of Bruce Julian Clothier, in Charlotte, N.C. "I saw one [collection] at the last show [in February] and decided to wait. I bought [the same things] now for much less. The vendors are becoming more retail friendly."

Kevin Reardon and Mark Ambrogi, co-owners of Franco's in Richmond, Va., bought 25 percent to 30 percent less for fall. Going into spring, they said they were already buying a bit more, thanks to deals with vendors.

"They are definitely more sensitive to price. In some cases, we are buying things for 25 percent to 60 percent less than what we saw it for before," said Ambrogi. "I guess they're cutting back, or they're going to have fewer profits."

Brother and sister team Chimney Lhamo and Mig Mar attended Project and Capsule looking for items for their four stores in Brooklyn, N.Y., which include the women's boutique Pema and soon-to-open men's shop ID. They have also taken a closer look at pricing, as consumers have shown more restraint when buying.

"We've definitely gone cheaper than we used to sell," said Mar. "And for [ID], we're looking for nothing super-high-end in shoes — most will retail in the \$200 range. That way we will survive."

Titan, Bebe Team Up for Relaunch

By WAYNE NIEMI

LOS ANGELES — Bebe is back as a wholesale footwear brand and has partnered with Titan Industries to reintroduce the line for spring '10.

"It's a major step in the execution of our accessory strategy, which is geared toward building a global brand presence," said Sophie Rietdyk, VP of global licensing, acquisitions and strategic planning for Bebe.

In 2005, after a seven-year agreement with Huntington Beach, Calif.-based Titan to produce the shoe line, the company decided to only sell footwear exclusively in Bebe branded stores.

"We stopped selling to other channels as we felt it was diluting our brand and compromising our brand positioning," said Bebe Chairman and CEO Manny Mashouf.

Though Titan has continued to produce the private-label line for Bebe over the past several years, Titan CEO



Sketches from the spring '10 Bebe collection.

Joe Ouaknine said he is excited to reintroduce the brand to the wholesale market on a global basis.

"We started Titan for the purpose of making shoes for Bebe, so it's like coming home," he said. "It was the biggest business we've ever had, and we haven't matched it with any of our individual brands. We have a lot of great expectations, and our goals are set very high."

"When we terminated the license, we promised Joe Ouaknine that, if we were

to license the classification again, we would try to do it together," said Mashouf.

However, Ouaknine said so much time had passed that he had given up hope for the deal. "But [Manny] made good on his word," he said.

The new shoes will be similar to the earlier, fashion-forward heels

that were sold for \$89 to \$169, said Ouaknine. "Bebe is known for high heels and sexy shoes, and that's what we're going to do," he said. "It's iconic."

While no retailers have yet seen the new spring '10 line, debuting this week at The WSA Show, Ouaknine said he sees the brand as a department store label sitting in Nordstrom and Macy's.

He also said Titan would continue to produce exclusive styles for Bebe stores. "It's another opportunity for us to make shoes for them again," he said.