

Varvatos Bolsters Star USA Line

By JOCELYN ANDERSON

NEW YORK — Hoping to build on the success of Star USA footwear, John Varvatos will launch accessories under that brand for fall '10.

The Star USA accessories collection will encompass men's belts, bags, small leather goods and key chains, many incorporating leather details and studding from the brand's established look. The collection has been licensed to New York-based Cipriani Accessories, which also produces merchandise for Michael Kors, Calvin Klein, Lacoste and Guess.

"We've been doing the Collection and Star USA all ourselves," John Varvatos told *Footwear News*. "But we knew that if we really wanted the accessories to have great price and quality at the same time, we needed to be with somebody who had the core competency to be able to do it."

Star USA accessories will be made in China and aimed at luxury department stores that already carry the brand, such as Neiman Marcus, Bloomingdale's and Nordstrom. They will also be carried in John Varvatos stores. Price points range from \$65 to \$550, with bags starting at \$150.

"We're putting together a combination where we have the Varvatos aesthetic and have great value for the customer," said Evan Mittman, CEO of Cipriani.

Star USA, Varvatos' lower-priced collection aimed at a youthful, rock 'n' roll customer, bowed footwear in fall '09.

Though the shoes just hit shelves in September, Varvatos said the results have been impressive, with some styles getting weekly sell-throughs of 13 percent to 33 percent.

"We were sold out. We had no inventory," the designer said. "It's great because everyone is reordering in a big way. We opened pre-fall about a month ago, and it's been unbelievable for us."

As a result, the company has expanded inventory levels going forward, especially for key styles. Varvatos said Star USA footwear is the fastest-growing category for the company. He added that the brand is projected to increase by 40 percent this year, not including footwear. And footwear, he said, should balloon as much as 300 percent in 2010.

Retailers too are pleased with the Star USA footwear debut. "The John Varvatos Star USA shoe launch was fantastic,"



At left: A new Star USA bag from designer John Varvatos.

said Dan Leppo, operating VP and DMM for men's dress furnishings, men's shoes, electronics and Polo sportswear at Bloomingdale's. "[Varvatos] offered amazing fashion and quality at the top of bridge pricing to reach a broader consumer base. We have always been bullish on all John's businesses and see great expansion potential for shoes in 2010."

Now going into his label's 10th year, Varvatos said the company has seen success in other areas too. Last September, John Varvatos bowed its first e-commerce site, and footwear is already the No. 1 category on the site in total dollars, at about 42 percent of sales (with Converse figures included). The site bowed in North America and recently opened up globally.

Though Varvatos said the economy has hurt high-end footwear, his label's increased offerings in shoes and accessories could bring more growth in the future. "Down the road, we're going to be opening up footwear and accessories stores," said Varvatos. "There's no doubt about it."