

Bally Rallies

The Swiss brand's new team is overhauling the label with a fresh focus on footwear, a bigger push into women's and buzzier branding.

BY JOCELYN ANDERSON

Frédéric de Narp and Pablo Coppola

Get ready for an all-new Bally. Changes that have been taking place at the brand over the past few months culminate with a major unveiling in September, when Bally plans to open a flagship in London offering the first product by recently hired design director Pablo Coppola, coupled with new branding, packaging and logo. A revamped e-commerce site will debut at the same time.

It's all part of a plan orchestrated by CEO Frédéric de Narp, who started at Bally in November. With 23 years of international luxury retail

experience, he most recently led the successful turnaround of Harry Winston Inc. and intends to do the same with Bally, which has been challenged in a crowded high-end market.

"We are extremely well positioned to re-enter the world of fashion and luxury at this moment," said de Narp. "Bally is the only Swiss luxury accessory brand in existence, and therefore we benefit from a very strong [position]."

The 163-year-old label, owned by Labelux Group since 2008, has a goal to double the business and reach \$1 billion in sales in the next five to seven years. Such a comeback requires a new

vision for the heritage brand that recently has become better known for its men's products than its women's collection.

Enter de Narp. The Frenchman took over the position last filled by Berndt Hauptkorn, who left in 2011. De Narp promptly promoted Coppola to design director from accessories design director, a position he'd held since last fall. (Creative directors Michael Herz and Graeme Fidler exited the firm last year. They succeeded Brian Atwood, who was with the label from 2007 to 2010).

The first order of business, the CEO said, was to lay the groundwork for a major rehaul: build

Fall '14 women's accessories



a new team, put in face time in the marketplace and develop an original brand story. Much of the latter will come from the design direction created by Coppola.

"The idea for [the fall '14] collection was a palette cleanser," said Coppola, a native of Buenos Aires, Argentina, who previously worked for Tom Ford, Alexander McQueen, Christian Dior, Burberry and Céline. "We wanted to take these fashion elements and clean [them up]. We did an essential wardrobe of pieces: our tote, the pump, the stacked heel, the perfect bootie, a trench. Every season we are going to build on it."

Going back to basics also meant focusing on what Bally does best: footwear. In fact, de Narp said, he'd like to see the category make up half of sales, with accessories following at 35 percent and ready-to-wear at 15 percent. Ready-to-wear will become less dominant, though Ami designer Alexandre Mattiussi was recently tapped to create a capsule line, presented in January.

"It's quite interesting because I worked in many places before this where it was [all about] ready-to-wear, with accessories as an afterthought," said Coppola. "This time, we did it the opposite. It was my private revenge."

The plan also calls for boosting the women's business. Currently split 70 percent men's to 30 percent women's, the brand would like the two categories to be more evenly divided.

"If you give attention to women and [put] more design into our collections with a true savoir faire, I'm confident we can legitimately talk to women and to men in a very stylish way," said de Narp.

Also for fall, Coppola created a mix that includes super-luxe exotic product as well as more commercial, entry-level price points.

Bally's new direction appears first in the fall '14 campaign, overseen by Fabien Baron, creative director of Baron & Baron Inc., a brand growth firm whose clients have included Balenciaga,

Burberry and Hugo Boss.

And, of course, the London store debut in September should provide plenty of buzz. The Bond Street space, designed by British architect Sir David Chipperfield, will cover more than 4,400 square feet over three floors and include a made-to-order component.

"We want this moment to be a complete experience, 360 degrees," said de Narp. "We want to change the culture to [one that is] client-centric rather than product-centric, which is what it is most of the time in the industry. This is all about creating an experience and making sure whenever the client

encounters the Bally brand, they have a memorable experience."

Additional retail concepts have already rolled out under de Narp's purview in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia; Kuwait City; and Frankfurt, Germany, among others. Altogether, Bally runs 160 branded stores, as well as additional outposts.

But right now, the main focus is on rebuilding the business in the U.S. and Europe. The task, de Narp said, is to continue to serve Bally's still-loyal clientele in China while centering attention on the Western world.

"The greatest challenge is not to be known, but to bring this brand top of mind," de Narp said. "Awareness and preference in a market that is very crowded — [that is the goal]. In Europe and America, they have in the last 10 or 20 years been lured by other brands."

It's a tall order and one that has the industry talking.

Robert Burke, chairman and CEO of retail and luxury goods consultancy Robert Burke Associates in New York, said the brand is ready for rebirth.

"The Bally name has a great heritage and it's certainly not tarnished in any way. It just got dusty," he said, adding that for comebacks, first

impressions can be lasting. "Always when a brand relaunches, no matter the brand, the first statement it makes is the most important and has to be something very distinctive."

For his part, Coppola said, uniqueness is a top priority. "If you want a driver, you probably go to Tod's, and a sexy high heel with a red sole, that's Louboutin," he said. "We need to find out what we are going to be about. That's the challenge."

Men's sneakers are the sweet spot for Saks Fifth Avenue, which carries Bally's main collection and its higher-end Scribe line in 18 doors, said Eric Jennings, VP and men's fashion director.

"It's such an interesting story — the Swiss design on a lot of their shoes — so there's great potential, given the aesthetic, the heritage and where they want to take the brand in terms of elevating it," said Jennings.

"Truth be told, they've gone through a lot of changes in the last few years," he added. "There have been a lot of leadership changes, design changes, so they need to show some stability going forward, and I believe they are on the right track."

To reach his goals, de Narp said wholesale will be another big focus as the label looks to rebuild. While the men's accessories continue to be offered at such American department stores as Saks, Neiman Marcus and Bloomingdale's, women's product now will come into play more. Additional markets targeted for wholesale growth include Europe, Japan and Latin America.

Looking ahead, both de Narp and Coppola said they will make better use of Bally's vast archive and shoe museum in Schönenwerd, Switzerland. The archive especially represents untapped potential, housing not only every shoe style Bally has ever made — including what the brand touts as the world's first pump, created in 1890 — but also old prints, patterns and materials.

Coppola already has visited twice and used the inspiration on materials. He took the grain of the leather on a men's shoe from the 1930s and replicated it for a women's bag. "It's not a one-dimensional representative of the archives," he said. "The idea was to make it really contemporary and fresh."

De Narp said he is confident he has the right ingredients for success. "We enter this turnaround phase of the brand now," the CEO said. "The entire experience will be renewed and presented very soon. It's on the move."



A head-to-toe men's look from Bally for fall '14