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Toe to Toe

Men's designers are using shape as a weapon this fall. While the ZEGNA S line (above) borrows a comfortable rounded toe from the athletic market, BOSS HUGO BOSS goes to extremes with a sleek, tapered toe version. For more on the great toe debate, see page 16.



NEWSPAPER

Made In Italy? Brands Consider Moving Offshore As Sales Fall Off

By STEPHANIE EPIRO

MILAN — Italy's legendary footwear industry has hit a bumpy patch in its economic road.

In recent months, brands here have suffered a substantial falloff in both sales and export levels. According to ANCI, the Italian National Footwear Association, Italian footwear sales fell by 3.2 percent in 2002, while exports sank 7.7 percent. Moreover, the number of pairs exported to the United States declined even more dramatically last year, by 19.4 percent, while their annual value fell 20.6 percent to \$1.12 billion from \$1.38 billion.

All told, the Italian leather, leather goods and footwear sector is worth some \$18.67 billion annually, with 80 percent of overall sales made on the foreign market.

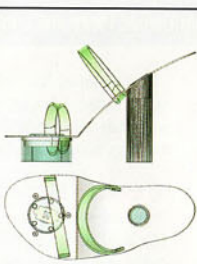
But while Italy's designers and execs blame the shrinking numbers on everything from their industry's small size to its cyclical nature, most acknowledge that the downturn has affected them.

For example, footwear sales at Gucci fell 4.1 percent last year, to \$204.9 million from \$214 million in 2001, despite a slight increase of 1.3 percent in the fourth quarter. At Casadei, while revenues held steady in 2002 at \$36.8 million, sales have slowed in the first quarter this year, according to Fabrizio Casadei, financial director. Casadei said he is not too worried

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Zakee Shariff's star-punched skimmers.



Sketch of the "Sensitive Shoe."



Tod's on London's Old Bond Street.



Lucille L'Italien hits stores for spring '04.

EUROPEAN EYE

Florence Girardier and Zakee Shariff debut new shoe lines, while Stella McCartney, Tod's and Hogan launch new stores.

Motherly Love

Swiss designer Florence Girardier was nowhere to be found at the most recent GDS, MICAM and Premiere Classe shows, and FN has learned why. She has halted production of her namesake shoe line and is instead designing shoes for new Spanish bridge line, Lucille L'Italien.

In January, Oscar Reguera, the former sales director of Spanish brand Alima, formed the Alicante-based footwear company, Natural Vision S.L., to produce the Lucille L'Italien line of women's shoes, which, he said, pays homage to his mother Lucille L'Italien. "As a child, I promised my mother that one day I would make a shoe collection bearing her name," said Reguera, explaining that his mother's recent death prompted him to act.

The 200-strong line of shoes will launch for spring '04, featuring pastel ballerinas and luxurious sandals, with detailing like buckles and floral embroidery. Each pair of shoes will retail for about \$150 and be presented in their own individual boxes, covered in a pretty floral print.

Lucille L'Italien will launch at Milan, Italy-based MICAM in September and at New York-based FFANY in December.

Starter Home

The latest trend at Gucci Group has come in the form of new London digs.

First, Alexander McQueen opened a store along Old Bond Street in March. Then, in April, Stella McCartney unveiled her flagship a few blocks over on Bruton Street in a meticulously restored four-story Georgian townhouse.

McCartney's new "home" pays special attention to her nonleather footwear line — which features canvas styles covered in gilt charms, as well as colorful high-heeled patent-esque pumps with Lucite inserts — by dedicating an entire room on the ground floor to shoes. "It is very important to me that this home represents all that inspires me," said McCartney. "Each detail has been chosen with love and each room should be an adventure."

Put It On, Take It Off

The accessorizing of accessories is one of the hottest trends this fall among Europe's cutting-edge designers. London-based fast-fashion retailer Shellys was ahead of the game, kicking off the trend for spring '03. The store is currently selling three colorful clip-on attachments — bows, butterflies and flowers — but only to customers who also buy a pair of Shellys' shoes.

Yves St. Laurent, Bruno Frisoni, Jimmy Choo and Olivia Morris are hot on the heels of Shellys. During YSL's fall runway

show, detachable cherries were prominently placed on one shoe, while Bruno Frisoni's show featured a stuffed mouse clipped onto its pumps. Five of Jimmy Choo's fall shoe styles are decorated with clip-on flowers, and different detachable accessories are a central feature of Olivia Morris' fall collection as well.

Morris told FN that she was inspired to use clip-ons after visiting her grandmother's house where she discovered vintage shoes accessorized with different pieces of jewelry. Morris then tried to source antique shoe jewelry for herself but found it difficult to find, so she decided to specially commission her own range of glitter bows, rhinestone spiders and safety pins. "You can purchase a pair of boots and shoes and turn them into several different looks just by accessorizing them differently," she said.

Seeing Stars

Zakee Shariff, one of London's hottest ready-to-wear designers, has added footwear to her repertoire.

Her first accessories collection, which also includes bags and hats, will debut this fall at stores such as London's Supra Girl and Tokyo's Dice & Dice.

The women's shoe line is made up of three styles — each features her signature punched star motif — that were produced in Portugal. Besides the tiny stars, special detailing includes intricate woven detailing and petal-style patchwork. "I decided to do shoes as I am crazy about them," Shariff, 31, told FN. "I've always wanted to do them in my collection but I was never able to make minimum orders. But as my label is more recognized now, I decided it was the perfect time to make my dream come true."

Della Valle is Moving In

There's action on every front at Diego Della Valle.

Last week, the Milan-based company opened a 5,920-sq.-ft. Tod's flagship store in Rome's Palazzo Ruspoli, located along the city's Via di Fontanella Borghese. The new store will eventually replace the Tod's store on Via Borgognona. Word has it that when it closes, the space will be given to one of the company's other brands.

In April, a 2,368-sq.-ft. Tod's store debuted on London's Old Bond Street, marking the city's third Tod's locale. The firm also announced that London's first Hogan store will open on Sloane Street by September. Other recent Tod's rollouts this year include stores in Brussels and Zurich.

Diego Della Valle is also expanding the reach of its men's and women's Fay clothing brand, which first launched in the 1980s. The line launched this spring in Italy, and will be made

available in other European countries for '04. A spokesperson for Fay told FN that the brand will then be introduced to stores in the U.S., Japan and the Far East within the next year and a half. Currently, there are no plans for Fay footwear.

Seeing Eye to Eye

A new accessories exhibition is headed to London.

Called "eye2eye," the show will take place at the Old Truman Brewery in East London from September 25-26, when buyers are in town for the London Runways.

Approximately 70-90 brands are expected, with 60 percent of the space allocated to footwear. Shoe companies that have already signed up for the event range from women's high fashion to street casual brands, including Eley Kishimoto, Luc Berjen, Jane Brown, YMC, Swear, Kitty Kallou and Palladium.

Eye2eye is the brainchild of Portuguese manufacturer Calzeus, Milan-based Italian distributor Nipi, and U.K.-based footwear consultants Ian Webster and Terrance Wong. "There is currently no such exhibition in London that effectively showcases footwear and accessories so there is a real gap in the market," said Terrance Wong, who explained that the exhibition will be divided into two visually distinct sectors: "Wink," which will showcase designer collections, and "Stare," which will feature the casual lines.

Getting to the Point

Dr. Jenny Tillotson, a research fellow at London's Central St. Martin's School of Art and Design, and designer Steve McIntyre have found a way to make the simple act of walking more worth their while.

Together, they have created the "Sensitive Shoe," which is built around the principles of reflexology. Specific areas of the insole have been built up to target pressure points along the heel and ball of the foot. A lighting system has been installed in the shoes, so that when pressure is applied, the specific spots light up.

"The shoe offers an emotional 'bath of light' experience so that the act of walking is healing," Tillotson told FN. "The ball of the foot touches on the solar plexus point, the center of emotional energy."

The Sensitive Shoe was developed as a prototype for research and is not intended for production. The shoe is a part of Tillotson's Scentsory Design initiative at St. Martin's School of Art and Design, in which she is exploring the symbiotic relationships between the senses and apparel. The shoe was unveiled last month at the User Mode Symposium held at London's Tate Modern museum.