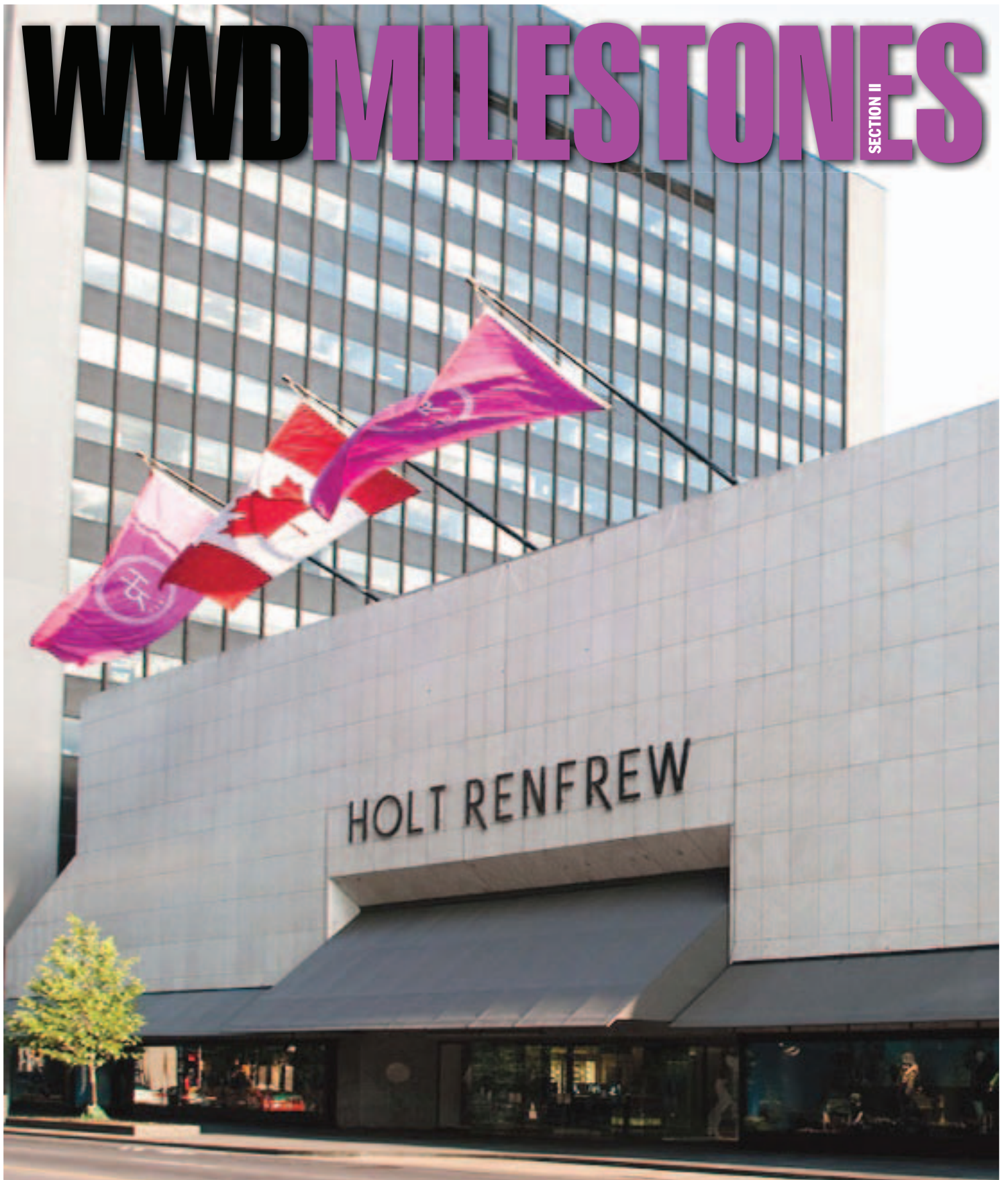


WWD MILESTONES

SECTION II



MARKING 175 YEARS

With its roots in hats and furs, Holt Renfrew has built a luxury emporium spanning Canada that has survived and thrived since 1837.

SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

History Book

A trans-Canadian journey spanning 175 years. By David Moin

LIKE ANY retailer with longevity, Holt Renfrew has had its share of twists and turns, ups and downs, ownership changes, image transformations, product and store expansions, and early in its 175-year history, a revolving door of partners.



Modeling furs at the Sherbrooke Street store in Montreal, circa 1950.

But a string of ambitious and visionary businessmen — among them W. Galen Weston, Alvin J. Walker, Len Shavick and the enterprising young Irish merchant William Samuel Henderson who founded the store in 1837 — kept Holt Renfrew a step ahead of the competition through most of its history.

The story begins in spring 1834,

when Henderson arrived at Quebec City with a shipment of caps and hats that sold out quickly, encouraging him to cross the ocean again and again to replenish until he decided to set up permanent shop in 1837, the year Queen Victoria took the throne in England.

"It's remarkable how long this company has survived. The company always met the needs of its customers. It was responsive and very customer-focused," observed Derrick Clements, the archivist for the Weston family, which owns the Selfridges Group Ltd., comprising Holt Renfrew, Selfridges in London, De Bijenkorf in the Netherlands and Brown Thomas in Ireland, and is said to control about 200 companies including Canada's largest food retailer, Loblaw's, and fashion brand Joe Fresh.

On the 11th floor of the Weston Centre in Toronto, in a prosaic storage area housing the Weston archives, Clements has arranged a colorful array of articles from Holt's storied past: a turn-of-the-century top hat that a customer presented to Weston in the Sixties; a flag marking Queen Victoria's Jubilee; Diet Coke bottles commemorating Holt Renfrew's 175th birthday this year; decades-old photos of a dog sled team that appeared at the front of the store for a promotion in 1926 and one with Sophia Loren getting a private viewing of Holt's best furs, as



George R. Renfrew with his granddaughter, Olga, in 1895.

well as medallions commemorating Holt Renfrew as the official furrier of England's royal family.

There are documents, memorabilia, newspaper and magazine clips from the past. Yet for the soft-spoken Clements, who has a master's degree in information from the University of Toronto, there's just not enough.

"I wish there was more. Very few companies keep proper records. Maybe banks do. They are more inclined to keep meticulous records considering their whole business is based on records." But generally, it's merely "a hodgepodge" of the corporate history that survives, he said.

In the summer of 2000, Clements was hired by the Westons to better organize and maintain the corporate records and keep the history of the Weston holdings alive.

"We try to collect ephemera and the memorabilia associated with events and anything especially of a graphical nature that's of importance," he said. "There is more of an effort now."

After a few minutes chatting with



John H. Holt, circa 1900.

Clements, the story of Holt Renfrew and why it's lasted so long in an industry so beset by consolidation, unfolds. Of course, it helped that the store never went bankrupt and stood out across a vast Canadian landscape with a small field of retail competition. However, Clements emphasizes Holt's leadership and the personalities behind the business as being integral to its longevity and prosperity.

Interestingly, they're not necessarily "master merchants" or retail showmen, the kind of leaders typically associated with great fashion retailers in America, in the tradition of such late and great merchants as Stanley Marcus of Neiman Marcus or Marvin Traub of Bloomingdale's. Instead, Holt's executive tree sprouted leaders with savvy

(Continued on page 4)



Alvin J. Walker with the couture buying team in Paris, circa Fifties.

Through the Years

1834

In spring 1834, William Samuel Henderson, a young Irish merchant, arrives in Quebec City with a shipment of caps and hats. The merchandise sells out quickly and Henderson, in 1837, sets up shop in the city. First known as William Ashton & Co., Henderson renames the shop after himself.

1860

Henderson eventually sells the business to his brother. By the 1860s, the Buade Street store in Upper Town has become a well-known local landmark. Partners in the business have come and gone, and the store is now known as Renfrew & Marcou. The retailer shows some flair for merchandising, hanging furs in its store windows to attract the attention of passersby. John Holt, in 1867, buys out Henderson's remaining interest.

1883

As ownership changes, so, too, does the name. By the time the Fathers of Confederation sign on the dotted line in 1867, the business has become G.R. Renfrew & Co. In 1883, admirers of Sir John A. Macdonald decide he deserves a more stylish coat — one fit for the country's first prime minister. They purchase it from G.R. Renfrew in Quebec City. Macdonald wears the new overcoat when he has his portrait taken at an Ottawa photographer's studio.

1886

Queen Victoria inspects the company's display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition in London and purchases a fur muff and several other items. So impressed is Victoria that she issues a Royal Warrant appointing G.R. Renfrew & Co. as Furriers in Ordinary to Her Majesty. This would mark the

beginning of a succession of royal endorsements issued by members of the British royal family that would include Queen Alexandra, King George V and the Prince of Wales, who would later abdicate the throne and become the Duke of Windsor.

1890

The company begins issuing illustrated mail-order catalogues of its merchandise with instructions for consumers on how to properly measure themselves to ensure a well-fitting garment.

1897

Now located in Toronto as well as Quebec City, the company joins the British Empire in celebrating the Diamond Jubilee marking Queen Victoria's 60th anniversary on the throne. The retailer displays the flag commemorating the event, and on the reverse of the flag is stamped "G.R. Renfrew Toronto," still legible today. George Richard Renfrew dies that year. His son, Allen E. Renfrew, becomes a junior partner.

1909

By the turn of the century, the company has become Holt, Renfrew & Co. In 1909, a joint stock structure is adopted and it becomes a "limited" company.

1919

Allen E. Renfrew is named president. Upon his death, Renfrew would be succeeded by Senator Lorne Webster.

1910

Holt Renfrew establishes its first store in Montreal on St. Catherine Street. In Winnipeg, that same year, it sets up shop near Canada's "coldest street corner," Portage and Main. And it relocates its Toronto store to a larger site at the corner of Yonge and Adelaide streets.

1915

John H. Holt dies in Quebec City.

1925

The Holt Renfrew catalogue, a mainstay of the fashionably

dressed woman, touts the "thoroughly new styles" of the flapper era and "unusually stylish models" of its latest lines.

1930s

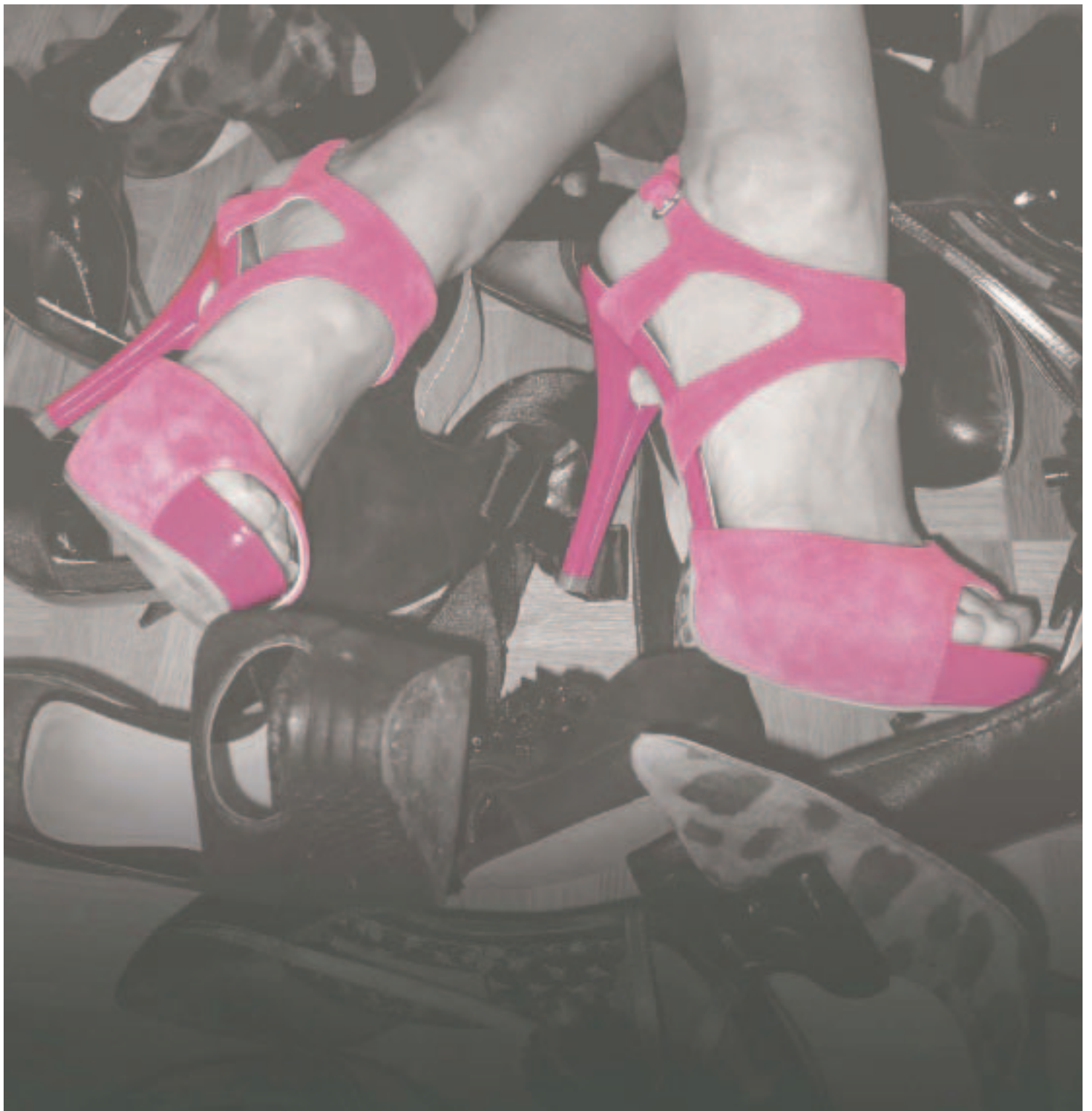
Holt remains headquartered at Quebec City until the late Thirties, when the head office is moved to Montreal. In the meantime, the Quebec City store on Buade Street in Upper Town continues to attract lots of attention — with a little help from the Holt Renfrew dog team.

1937

Holt Renfrew celebrates 100 years with the opening of a store at Sherway Gardens in downtown Montreal. The streamlined Art Deco building designed by architects Ross and Macdonald is meant to convey luxury and good taste.

1942

Beginning in 1942, Holt Renfrew opens stores in Ottawa, Hamilton (1945), Edmonton (1950) and



Cadillac Fairview congratulates Holt Renfrew on

175

years of setting itself apart from the rest



WWD MILESTONES

History Book

(Continued from page 2) business sense and a vision for keeping one or two steps in front of its competitors.

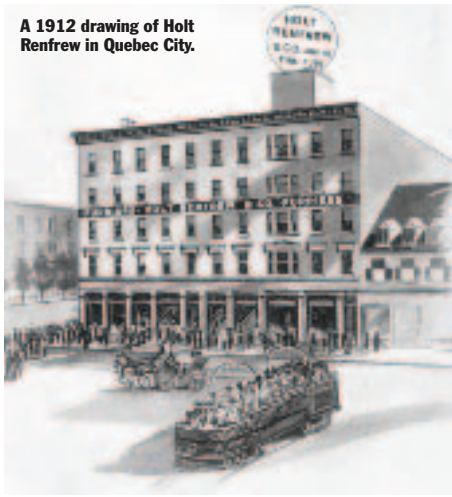
The name Holt Renfrew comes from G.R. Renfrew and John H. Holt, two businessmen who rose up through the ranks to run the company, when it was built upon an owner-management model. Hard-working employees over time could earn partnerships, and because the company was small, there was greater opportunity for individuals to rise in standing. As partners came and went, the name changed every few years or decades.

In the early days, Holt Renfrew was really a furrier, with the company's first fur catalogue dating back to 1851, which Clements believes has disappeared. He noted the catalogue of 1891 is the earliest that still exists. "It's pretty graphically simple, though the cover is somewhat lavish for 1890, with colored graphics. It was intended for mail-order purposes. It was not very big, five inches across, six or seven inches tall, and maybe a dozen pages. It's a fur catalogue. Catalogues were probably all the rage back then."

In the Twenties, the company shifted to a broader apparel assortment and at one time had a glove company. Other accessories were certainly sold, and there are old photographs depicting Holt Renfrew in Montreal selling golf apparel in the late Twenties or early Thirties.

George Richard Renfrew was born in Quebec in 1831, the son of a grocer. Though little is known about his early life or education, around 1854 Renfrew, along with another young businessman, V.H. Marcou, were sent to Quebec City to manage the busi-

A 1912 drawing of Holt Renfrew in Quebec City.



ness. John Henderson of Montreal, who had taken over the company from his brother, Holt founder William S. Henderson, wanted them there.

According to Clements, things must have gone well for Renfrew and the business, because in 1862, the company became Henderson, Renfrew & Co. After Henderson's retirement, the name changed again, as did the partners, this time to Renfrew & Marcou. Eventually, Marcou retired as well, and the business became G.R. Renfrew & Co. Under Renfrew, the firm prospered and expanded with a store in Toronto.

According to some historical reports, Renfrew created a merchandise display at the Colonial and Indian Exhibition of 1886 in England, where Queen Victoria bought a fur muff, among other items, and was so impressed that she presented Renfrew with a Royal Warrant as "Furriers in Ordinary to Her Majesty."

Renfrew, who apparently also had business interests in textile manufacturing and utilities, died in 1897.

John Henderson Holt was born in Quebec in 1850. A cousin of George Richard Renfrew, he started at the bottom of the business and worked his way up. The archives indicate that Holt joined Henderson, Renfrew & Co. in 1857 as a clerk, and bought a partnership in 1860. In 1867, Holt bought out Henderson's remaining interest. He became president in 1900 and the company was renamed Holt Renfrew & Co. Ltd. in 1908.

According to records, in 1909, Holt Renfrew became a joint stock company with the stock closely held by company executives. After earlier expansions by other leaders, Holt grew the company by adding stores in Montreal and Winnipeg. He became a widely respected businessman and philanthropist, and actively managed the company until 1919, a few years before his death.

Renfrew was succeeded by Lorne Webster, who was born in Quebec City in 1871 and was a well-known businessman and politician. Webster explored the possibility of selling the company but sought the advice of a young New York furrier with a strong retail reputation, Alvin J. Walker.

Walker's report, according to historical records, impressed Webster to such a degree that he hired Walker as a vice president, and soon Walker became pivotal in elevating Holt Renfrew's fashion appeal.

When Webster died in 1941, Walker became president and stepped up the expansion by opening branches in Ottawa, Hamilton, Edmonton, London and Calgary in the Forties and early Fifties. Several shops in some of Canada's grande dame hotels were created but have since been closed. In those same postwar years, Walker headed the company's couture buying team on regular trips to leading fashion houses in Paris, New York, London, Rome, Brussels, Madrid, Florence and Milan.

"In the post-World War II years, Holt Renfrew moved into couture," Clements said. "The store became an early Canadian adopter of Christian Dior. It was a very important step in that postwar period. Other Canadian retailers were trying to do much the same, trying to get a bit of that couture. Holt was under Alvin J. Walker then, and he was successful in bringing Dior

(Continued on page 6)



A dog sled team appeared for a promotion at the Quebec City store in 1926.

Through the Years

Calgary and London (1953). Units in Hamilton and London subsequently close, but Holt Renfrew's expansion across Canada continues for the next two decades.

1947

Christian Dior's feminine "New Look" is all the rage, and Holt Renfrew signs a contract to sell Dior couture in Canada. The same year, Princess Elizabeth marries Prince Philip in Westminster Abbey. Canada's official wedding gift is a fur coat, designed by Holt Renfrew. Alvin J. Walker, Holt's president, flies to London to carry samples and take measurements for the future monarch.

1950

In the postwar years, Walker heads

the retailer's couture buying team, taking regular trips to the leading fashion houses in Paris, New York, London, Rome, Brussels, Madrid, Florence and Milan in search of the latest in fashion. After Walker retires, his son-in-law, Leonard Shavick, becomes president.

1955

Holt Renfrew becomes the exclusive retailer of Dior in Canada, hosting the designer, who shows his latest styles at the new Bloor Street store in Toronto with its facade of blue glass and metal. The designer, who flies models from Paris and New York to Toronto for the show, says, "Canadians should not be envious of any other country when it comes to fashion," according to the Globe

and Mail, Oct. 28, 1955.

1960

Miss Renfrew, a clothing line for the young, working woman on a budget who nonetheless wants to dress fashionably, is introduced. The ready-to-wear line is featured in Miss Renfrew departments in all of the retailer's stores. Holt Renfrew is bought in 1965 by New York-based CIT Financial and resold in 1972 to West Coast retail chain Carter Hawley Hale.

1970

Holt provides a runway for such up-and-coming designers as Marc Bohan, Christian Dior's creative assistant. Bohan in 1970 is Holt Renfrew's guest of honor as the retailer celebrates its two-decades-long association with the House of Dior.

1975

Holt Renfrew sets up shop in

Vancouver with a store on Granville Street at the Pacific Centre. The opening is kicked off with an ad campaign, "H.R. in Vancouver."

1978

Sophia Loren takes some time out from making the movie "Angela" to do some shopping at Holt in Montreal. Along with her is Christian Dior designer Frédéric Castet, while Holt Renfrew president Leonard Shavick plays host.

1979

Holt Renfrew unveils its new flagship at 50 Bloor Street West in Toronto. With almost 100,000 square feet, it becomes a retail landmark along Canada's premier fashion strip.

1986

W. Galen Weston and family acquire Holt Renfrew. Weston and his wife, Hilary, hire retail designer Naomi Leff to oversee a wave of

renovations and store openings. New designers and exclusive brands are introduced. Giorgio Armani and Yves Saint Laurent unveil boutiques at the Toronto flagship and Montreal branch.

1992

In January, Holt names three executives to high posts. Hilary Weston becomes deputy chairman, Michael J.B. Brickell, vice chairman and ceo, and Joel Rath, president and chief operating officer.

1997

The retailer says it will boost selling space by 25 percent with the downtown Toronto, Montreal and Calgary stores all undergoing expansions, and a major makeover for the Holt at the Yorkdale Shopping Centre in Toronto. Chanel opens a boutique in Montreal, and Hermès unveils an in-store shop in Vancouver.

j'adore
Dior



DIOR CONGRATULATES HOLT RENFREW
ON 175 BEAUTIFUL YEARS

WWD MILESTONES

History Book

(Continued from page 4)
to Canada. A number of years later, in 1951, the contract became exclusive.”

In the book “Couture and Commerce” by Alexandra Palmer, there’s a quote from Christian Dior about Walker: “He had no previous experience in the fashion world, but I liked him and felt complete confidence in him from the start. His role was to provide my castles in the air with a solid foundation.”

Business improved and Walker had another brainstorm — move the Montreal store on St. Catherine Street to Sherbrooke Street, a sophisticated location close to the Ritz-Carlton hotel. In 1937, to mark the 100th anniversary of the business, the move was made. Holt Renfrew in Montreal relocated to a stone building with a streamlined Art Deco modern design. It was indeed a bold move to make during

the Depression, which underscores Walker’s intuitive sense for the business. Walker himself was not flamboyant or boisterous, which Canadians wouldn’t be comfortable. Yet as Clements suggested, “He seemed to have a sense that the company had to differentiate from other retailers.”

Walker’s son-in-law, Len Shavick, eventually took over the business. “He was another solid businessman who had a good sense of how the fashion industry was evolving,” Clements said. “He was also not flamboyant, but he seems to have been a careful caretaker of the business and moved the company forward in terms of the fashion it offered. He was a good steward of the company.”

Shavick also oversaw the establishment of the Toronto flagship at 50 Bloor Street West, which opened with 100,000 square feet and quickly became a retail landmark.

Holt Renfrew entered a less illustrious period in the Sixties and Seventies, when it was owned by CIT Financial Corp. and subsequently, Carter Hawley Hale, a former retail conglomerate that was based in Los Angeles. However, in 1986 the Weston family purchased the business from CHH, and the renaissance began. Weston invested heavily to restore Holt’s position as Canada’s leading luxury emporium and to fuel growth in a country with a small population of around 26 million at the time, yet where the largest cities, principally Toronto, were getting increasingly cosmopolitan and international in flavor. (Canada’s population is currently about 34 million.)

The Weston family has taken a long-term view of the business, investing for the future and not for immediate returns by spurring renovations and expansions and introducing fashion boutiques. At one time, the well-known store designer Naomi Leff was brought in to design new interiors and boutiques, including spaces for Calvin Klein and Giorgio Armani. An upscale Holt Renfrew magazine called Point of View was launched in 1987, renamed Hols in 2000, and eventually split into separate men’s and women’s editions.

In 2005, the chain launched another

rebranding exercise and a new logo in a strategy led by Alannah Weston, the daughter of Galen Weston. Other changes included the return of children’s wear to the store, taking ownership of the shoe business, which had been leased, and the construction of new and larger stores in Vancouver and Calgary.

Over the last two decades, presidents have come and gone more rapidly than in the past, including Michael Brickell, Joel Rath, Andrew Jennings and Caryn Lerner, reflecting the more turbulent character of the retail industry in the modern era. They all contributed to expansions, renovations and image and service upgrades.

Mark Derbyshire has been running Holt Renfrew as president since January 2010 and was previously Weston’s chief talent officer. Derbyshire, working with the Westons and the board, first drew up a five-year plan. He spent his first couple of years returning the company to the fundamentals, with a renewed focus on the customer, motivating sales associates to know more about their clients and the products in the store, and strengthening partnerships with vendors. With a new foundation for the business in place, the stage has been set for moving the company forward with its most aggressive agenda of square footage expansion, as well as innovative retail concepts to raise the profile and better satisfy vendors and shoppers.

Behind the scenes, it’s still the Westons setting the direction.

“They are experienced retailers,” Clements said. “When they took over in 1986, they quickly moved the company forward, changing the retail environment, beginning a process of rejuvenation and major renovations. They had a keen sense that the retail business had changed and Holt had to move forward to still be a fashion leader. Mrs. Hilary Weston [W. Galen’s wife] was deeply involved in the direction of the company in terms of design and fashion. The Westons were very much interested and have been involved in terms of bringing in new designers and international names.”



Sophia Loren does some private shopping in 1978 with Dior designer Frédéric Castet.



Princess Elizabeth wears a mink coat from Holt Renfrew, Canada’s wedding gift for her marriage in 1947 to Prince Philip.

Through the Years

1999
Andrew R. Jennings is tapped as president and managing director, with the aim of making Holt “one of the world’s great fashion and lifestyle stores.”

2002
Holt’s “Viva Italia” promotion, a 40-day festival of fashion, design and performing arts from the Mediterranean peninsula, is held at the Bloor Street flagship, attracting Sophia Loren, Roberto Cavalli and Laudomia Pucci — not to mention a fleet of Vespas.

2003
In February, the retailer hires Club

Monaco founder Joseph Mimran to head its private-label business. In March, Holt challenges 20 designers, including Marc Jacobs, Rebecca Taylor, Diane von Furstenberg and Barbara Bui, to custom design a jacket that epitomizes the spirit of contemporary fashion. In July, Holt closes its suburban Rockland shopping center in Montreal to concentrate on its downtown Sherway Gardens unit. The retailer’s Sixties-themed “Flick” gala in September coincides with the Toronto International Film Festival and spurs a series of promotions celebrating the love affair between fashion and film.

2004
Caryn Lerner, former president and chief marketing officer of Escada, succeeds Jennings, who joins Saks Fifth Avenue as president and chief merchandising officer. Holt Renfrew and Vanity Fair present “Vinyl,” a hot-pink, style-in-the-groove, monthlong celebration of music and fashion.

2005
A 3,000-square-foot designer department called the couture room opens in the Montreal store featuring Chanel, Giorgio Armani, Prada, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana and Valentino.

2007
After more than three decades at Vancouver’s Pacific Centre mall, a new 137,000-square-foot Holt

Renfrew store opens on Dunsmuir Street in that city, representing twice the space of the original location.

2009
An expanded Holt Renfrew in Calgary reopens, while the Toronto unit gets a makeover.

2010
Mark Derbyshire becomes president of Holt Renfrew. That year, designers such as Alexander Wang, Donna Karan and Oscar de la Renta make appearances at the company’s stores.

2011
Holt reveals plans for a store in Yorkdale, Toronto. The retailer, which is reportedly approaching \$800 million in revenues, begins

the festivities for its 175th birthday, kicking off across Canada in September with a parade of designer appearances, pop-up shops and special Hot@175 merchandise.

2012
Holt Renfrew budgets \$300 million for its largest expansion ever, which will increase floor space by 40 percent in its stores across Canada by 2015. The Yorkdale Shopping Centre unit in Toronto will double in size to 120,000 square feet. Other expansion plans could include the Vancouver flagship and a facelift for the Bloor Street store. In September, a new contemporary retail concept, hr2, is announced as a lower-priced alternative to Holt Renfrew’s luxury stores.

— SHARON EDELSON



DAVID YURMAN

CONGRATULATES HOLT RENFREW ON 175 YEARS OF INSPIRED RETAILING

SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

Holt Raises the Luxury Ante

President Mark Derbyshire discusses turning the business around, connecting with consumers and tightening ties to vendors. By David Moin

MARK DERBYSHIRE, the president of Holt Renfrew, thinks there's been a huge misconception about the retailer: That Canada's only luxury chain has been on easy street, with no Barneys New York, Saks Fifth Avenue or Neiman Marcus in its backyard to contend with.

"Mark," they say. "You don't have any competition." But I say I do. I've always had competition. Just look out the window," Derbyshire said, pointing westward down Bloor Street. "You see a lot of my brands right down the street. Prada, Gucci, Chanel — they're all out there."

So are Louis Vuitton, Hugo Boss and Hermès. Nordstrom is on its way to Canada, too, and will open in fall 2014 in Calgary's Chinook Centre, and subsequently in Ottawa's Rideau Centre, the Pacific Centre in Vancouver and Sherway Gardens in Toronto. Nordstrom envisions nine full-line stores and 12 to 15 Rack outlets in Canada. There are rumors that Bloomingdale's has been eyeing Canada, as well. "We are seeing a surge, but I don't think it's anything too new," Derbyshire said.

During an interview at Holt's 60 Bloor Street headquarters, Derbyshire made a simple, though often unrealized point. Those shopping Holt Renfrew, typi-

“We really have a good understanding of our markets, the subtleties of our markets and the subtleties of our customers.”

— MARK DERBYSHIRE

cally affluent and cosmopolitan, are also shopping Saks and Bergdorf Goodman in New York, Harrods in London, Lane Crawford in Asia, or Galeries Lafayette in Paris. The Holt Renfrew customer is international and travels frequently, Derbyshire pointed out. So Holt Renfrew feels competition, even from afar, and monitors it closely. "When Saks breaks sale, it certainly does affect our customer," Derbyshire said. "Competition makes us good. Competition makes us better. We really have a good understanding of our markets, the subtleties of our markets and the subtleties of our customers."

He said the evidence is in the numbers and that Holt's been turned around since the recession. EBIT, or earnings before interest and taxes, in 2010 was double that of the previous best year. Holt had even more profit in 2011, and 2012 will be even better than last year, Derbyshire said. Volume for Holt Renfrew, which operates nine luxury stores, one outlet and a private shopping suite where personal shoppers pull merchandise from various stores for customers, is approaching \$800 million. Revenues rose 21 percent through 2010 and 2011.

Holt could reach \$1 billion in sales by 2015, sources said, and in the years ahead will be lifted by its three-year, \$300 million expansion program, calling for a 40 percent increase in square footage through renovations and relocations, and a secondary chain launching next year, called hr2, which will sell contemporary designer merchandise. It's believed that other new concepts are on the drawing board, as Holt embarks on an aggressive growth phase to meet the rising competition.

However, Holt officials maintain that the growth strategies, revealed in recent weeks, reflect seasons of deep analysis, learning about the strengths and weaknesses of the company, leading to the restoration of some fundamental retail best practices. A "foundation" for growth was built.

"We set a five-year strategy and really articulated what we had to do," said Derbyshire, who joined Holt as president in January 2010 after serving as chief talent officer for the Selfridges Group Ltd., which



Mark Derbyshire

PHOTO BY CHRIS NICOLLIS

includes Holt, Selfridges in London, Brown Thomas in Ireland, Ogilvy in Montreal and De Bijenkorf in The Netherlands. "We took a very long-term view. We looked at the store experience, the product assortments, at the brands and the pricing. We had 16 price promotions in 2009 that we cut down to six in 2010 and dropped it to four this year. We really focused on a full-price selling model."

In addition, efforts were made to better understand the needs of each of Holt's nine luxury stores, and refine the buy. For example, in Vancouver, a progressive city with gray, depressing weather, it was determined that color, brights, jewelry and a bit more bling, had to be showcased better to uplift the clientele, whereas in Montreal, European styling to reflect that city's attitude and culture has been the ticket.

When the Vancouver store first opened, there was skepticism that the city was too casual for Holt Renfrew. Yet the location, said Derbyshire, is now

"neck-in-neck" with the Bloor Street flagship as the chain's top volume store. To further refine the buy, buyers and sales associates are "thinking and acting differently, working closer together," Derbyshire said, in a shift in the culture. "Our buyers are spending more time in the shops to see the reactions of shoppers. The buyers still buy, and the sellers still sell, but if we get together as a team, focus more on the customer, we'll buy more of what the customer wants."

Derbyshire knew Holt had a history of focusing on products and how stores appeared but he keeps on learning. He's talked to hundreds of employees, vendors and customers to uncover opportunities for improvement. He's famous for showing up in the Bloor Street flagship at 6:30 a.m., for more fact-finding. "The visual team is working. There are products going onto the floor, and I look at the people in the kitchen preparing the food. I am amazed at the energy, even when

(Continued on page 10)

A man with long hair and a beard, wearing a brown corduroy three-piece suit, stands on a wooden balcony. He is looking out over a vast mountain range under a soft, hazy sky at sunset or sunrise. The scene is captured in a cinematic, high-quality style.

Ermenegildo Zegna

*Congratulations Holt Renfrew
on 175 years of unparalleled
Passion for Excellence.*

SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

Derbyshire's Five-Year Plan

{Continued from page 8}

we are closed." He's also conducted focus groups, and has made it a habit to have lunch with a customer or two every week.

He learned employees were not fully engaged, though they wanted to be, and customers liked the store but liked it best when there was a sale, or for special occasion purchases. He learned that customers increasingly wanted what's new, and that smaller, more frequent deliveries would be beneficial. And when such deliveries don't materialize, it becomes "a matter of visual standards and focusing on what is here and presenting it differently." He also learned that vendors thought Holt could be a stronger partner.

"The first three years were about simplifying and getting the house in order. It was infrastructure, logistics, how to get close to the customer," Derbyshire recalled. "We were not talking about growth. We had to build a better foundation. We needed to focus on the customer."

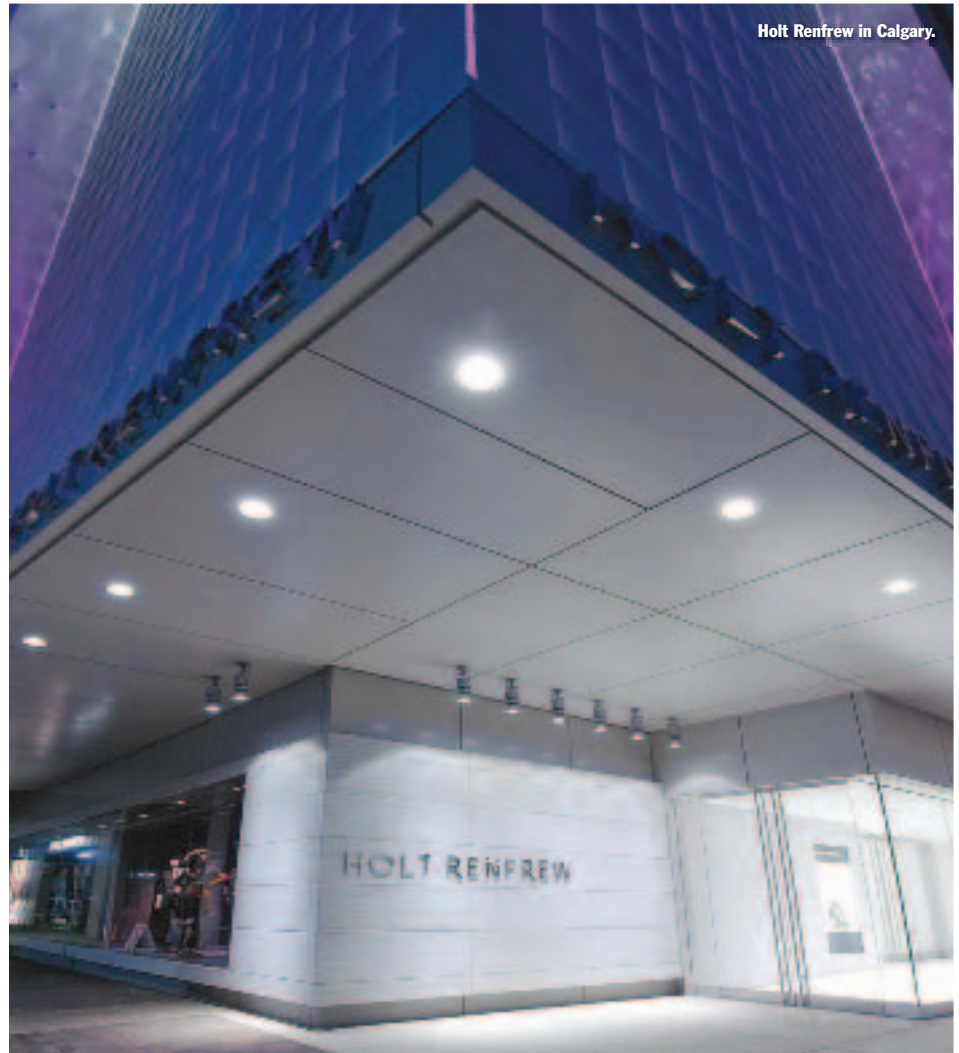
It became clear things had to change, and Derbyshire and the team had to make it happen.

In September 2010, Derbyshire launched the "president's bet" whereby sales associates received \$100 if they hit their plan by the end of the year, and \$500 if they hit it a month early. All non-sales employees were also eligible, if their teams or stores hit their targets, marking the first time many of them had a chance for a bonus. There were no losers. If someone missed their goal, they had to donate some time to charity. One year, the winners went to Las Vegas. The next round of winners will go to New York, for a trip combining pleasure with business, be that a Broadway show and visits to showrooms.

Derbyshire said Holt's sales associates have immersed themselves in product knowledge to better understand brands. They've traveled to the New York, Milan and Paris markets, and vendors come to Canada. There's more of a back and forth, which Derbyshire said brings greater understanding of the products, which leads to a more authentic store experience that customers relate to. In 2009, Holt had 56 associates who were \$1 million sellers. Now there are at least twice that number.

To better partner with vendors, Derbyshire said, he established a "big-bets" strategy, identifying brands that could be bigger volume contributors and could double their business with the store in the next three years. Three- and five-year plans with the brands, such as Saint Laurent, Prada, Tom Ford, Hugo Boss, Gucci and Burberry have been developed, rethinking how each is presented, where they are located, the advertising and marketing as well as the volume objectives. "Big bets" encompass certain categories, such as shoes and leather goods, while Holt also has prospects for men's wear, particularly tailored clothes.

Holt began supporting causes near and dear to vendors. Instead of asking them to help Holt raise money, the retailer offered to help them raise money. "We flipped it," Derbyshire said. It's a uniform approach, whereby Holt sells 10,000 units of an exclusive, designer-made item, priced \$50, covers its costs and donates



Holt Renfrew in Calgary.

the profits to the designer's charity of choice. The items get played up on the Web site, in the stores and with designer appearances. Holt to date has raised between \$500,000 and \$600,000 on these cause-related campaigns.

"Our philosophy is all about relationships — relationships with employees, relationships with vendors and relationships with customers," Derbyshire said. "Customers don't come to us to buy a handbag or a dress. Customers come to us because they want to feel great. We sell feeling great."

In March, Holt will unveil a 30,000-square-foot store called hr2 in Montreal's Quartier DIX30 shopping center. It's geared to "fill a void in the Canadian market." A second location is planned for Ontario early next

year. The company expects to open hr2 stores across the country, probably around nine. Officials said hr2 will not carry any of the same merchandise sold at Holt Renfrew stores, though the new retail division will be stocked with lower-priced or secondary labels from many of the same designers and brands that supply Holt Renfrew with their top-priced lines. Officials are not ready yet to disclose the vendor matrix.

"Holt Renfrew has always been about style, luxury, an extraordinary shopping experience. Hr2 will be no different but will enable us to reach markets that we have not been able to serve," Derbyshire said.

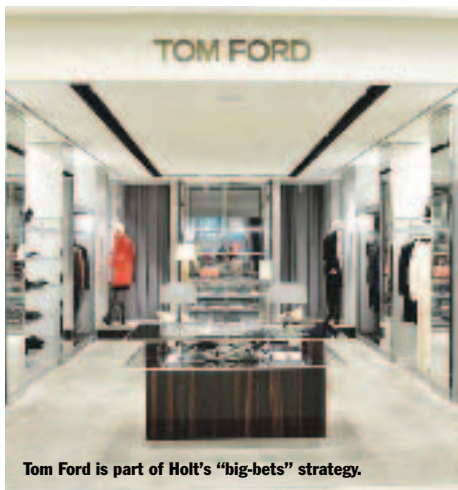
In an even bigger growth maneuver, the Holt luxury chain intends to increase its square footage by 40 percent by the end of 2015 by enlarging, renovating or relocating existing stores. All stores will be affected, though the store count will be unchanged. In the first leg of the expansion journey, Holt Renfrew in the Yorkdale Shopping Centre in Toronto will double its space to 120,000 square feet by August 2013. Derbyshire said the store, which is rather unremarkable now save for its location in one of North America's most productive shopping malls, will be "spectacular and a real showcase for many of the world's luxury brands," with a grand atrium, a second floor that did not exist before and a host of new retail merchandising concepts, even one that's kind of a throwback, a cobbler for men's shoes. Derbyshire wouldn't discuss details on other locations being overhauled, though executives have acknowledged the Vancouver site could be enlarged and that discussions are under way with landlords controlling the various properties that comprise the Bloor Street flagship.

Within the context of its 175-year history, "This is a very exciting time for us," Derbyshire said. Then again, "Holt Renfrew has always been a very special place in the hearts of Canadians.

"I remember as a kid, you came here to get good clothes. We used to look in the windows and see people inside and they all looked good. There was always this energy."



Oscar de la Renta showcased at the Bloor Street flagship.



Tom Ford is part of Holt's "big-bets" strategy.

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SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

Party Time

An array of products and events marked the 175th. By David Moyn

FOR ITS 175th anniversary celebration in September, Holt Renfrew went all out with a wave of appearances by designers and celebrities, including Sir Elton John at the Bloor Street flagship, a street party in Toronto, a 12-minute film tribute to the store (in 3-D) on the flagship facade, a stepped-up awards program for employees and a slew of commemorative products from designers, in Holt's signature magenta.

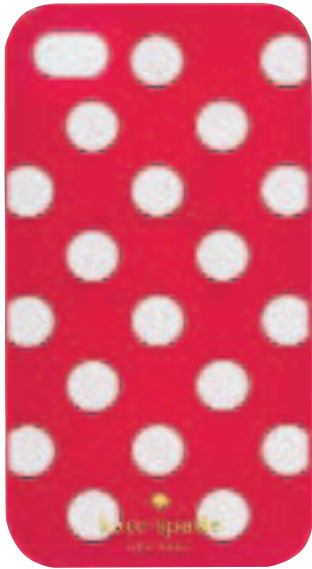
"We approached our key vendors to share in the celebration and create unique and exclusive products. They became keepsakes," said Pat Di Bratto, Holt's senior vice president of buying and merchandising.

To attract an audience across a spectrum of demographics, the range of exclusives was wide, from a \$16,800 David Yurman mixed colored stone necklace and Max Mara \$3,840 ostrich handbag, to Kate Spade iPhone cases, priced at

\$40, and Diet Coke at \$7 for a six-pack. Christian Louboutin went on the edge, creating a "trash" shoe adorned with pencil shavings, tickets to runway shows, business cards, metro cards and other things likely to be otherwise discarded. "He did 50 pairs. Every one was different," Di Bratto said.

There were also suede pumps from Manolo Blahnik, dresses from Alice + Olivia and Roberto Cavalli, canvas totes from Michael Kors, and a Giorgio Armani lipstick. Holt dispatched a pop-up truck to travel across Canada from Quebec to Vancouver: "Most of the product development took six months, but we talked to vendors a year in advance," Di Bratto said. "We were selective in our approach. We didn't want to overquantify." Basically, the commemorative product was a sellout, though officials said some Diet Cokes can still be purchased.

A bag from Michael Kors.



iPhone cases by Kate Spade.



An anniversary Coke six-pack.



Christian Louboutin shoes.



A crowd waited for Michael Kors at the Bloor Street flagship.

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SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

Prototype of the Future

Holt Renfrew's Yorkdale store is getting a total overhaul as "the beta-test" for the luxury chain. By David Moin

FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT, and Holt Renfrew is hoping for a really good one with its store in the Yorkdale Shopping Centre in Toronto.

It's undergoing a complete overhaul, doubling its size over the next year and representing the first leg of a three-year, \$300 million journey to upgrade and expand all nine units in the Holt Renfrew fleet. The chainwide program calls for renovations, relocations and a 40 percent increase in square footage, but no increase in the store count.

"Yorkdale is the beta-test store for the other stores," said Natalie Penno, vice president of operations.

Standing next to a scale model of the Yorkdale prototype, Penno explained that the store is being re-created from a standard department-store format to a series of specialty stores contained within a much bigger box that will house some never-before-seen concepts that could be cloned to other Holt locations.

"It's not a traditional racetrack layout," said Penno. "Every department will have its own personality and become a place of discovery."

"The format is new. It is innovative. But we've mitigated the risk, because it's based on things we've done before, and it's based on listening to customers," said Holt Renfrew's president Mark Derbyshire. "It reflects what employees and what our vendors want to see, and at the very heart of it all, it's what our customers want."

A rendering of the next generation store design.



“Every department will have its own personality and become a place of discovery.”

— NATALIE PENNO



PHOTO BY GEORGE PIMENTEL/HOLT RENFREW

Among the most dramatic elements of the Yorkdale prototype:

- Space overall will double to 120,000 square feet from 60,000 square feet. Holt is creating a 22,000-square-foot second level out of a former food court and converting a parking lot into a selling area.

- A two-story facade [rare for mall retailing] with a 30-foot-high glass wall by the entrance flanked by two 30-foot-by-15-foot video walls for fashion shows and live feeds. The frontage widens to 600 feet from 300 feet for a clear view of the grand staircase, creating a theatrical and spacious ambience.

- Prada, Chanel, Gucci and Louis Vuitton will have their own entrances.

- Footwear will quadruple to almost 10,000 square feet, with a shoe hall spotlighting Gucci, Jimmy Choo, Prada and Stuart Weitzman, and a Christian Louboutin "apartment" modeled after the Louboutin space in Selfridges.

- Leather goods will at least double its space to about 10,000 square feet; jewelry and watches will triple their space. Leather goods and women's shoes are "dominant areas," with front-and-center positioning in the store, Derbyshire noted.

On Friday, a reenvisioned men's floor with 18,000 square feet compared with the old 11,000-square-foot setting, makes its debut, giving shoppers a taste of things to come. Like leather goods and women's shoes, men's wear is an area of great focus and opportunity for Holt Renfrew, which is apparent from an innovative feature within men's called the Lounge. Far from being a place to just kick back while the spouse combs the store, the 4,000-square-foot Lounge, said Penno, is "experiential," offering a variety of men's services.

There's a grooming area, where you can get a shave, a made-to-measure shop for customizing the fit and details of garments, a wet bar and a men's assortment that will change on a monthly basis and be highly "curated" to showcase the latest and coolest styles so men can see a sampling of what's in the store and get some quick shopping ideas. "The Lounge will be very directional and very approachable," Penno said. Elsewhere in men's, there will be six hard shops including the first Paul Smith shop-in-shop and shops for Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana, Giorgio Armani, Burberry and Ralph Lauren.

With women's as well, Holt is thinking out of the box. A 7,000-square-foot contemporary department will, for the first time, integrate men's and women's merchandise from Rag & Bone, Vince, Burberry Brit and Marc by Marc Jacobs, among other labels. Holt Renfrew executives have concluded that based on statistical evidence, focus groups and their own observations, 85 percent of the time in contemporary sportswear, men's purchases are influenced by women. "We're seeing a real crossover in contemporary," Derbyshire said.

There will also be integration of men's and women's products in sunglasses, jewelry and watches with such brands as Tag Heuer, David Yurman and Links of London. On the other hand, the merchandise remains segregated in designer, where women mostly shop without men by their sides, Derbyshire said.

The women's floor overall, said Penno, won't read as if you are walking into a lineup of designer shops, and will instead have an open format for

(Continued on page 16)



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CONGRATULATIONS ON 175 YEARS

WWD MILESTONES

Prototype Of the Future



Renderings of the new store design.

(Continued from page 14)

flexibility so the team can quickly change the merchandise depending on sales results, trends and arrivals. There will be a new designer apparel department introducing labels including Prada, Stella McCartney, Pucci, Comme des Garçons, Isabel Marant and Kenzo.

Cosmetics will double in space to 10,000 square feet and feature a beauty bar where the beauty experts aren't tied to any brands and will be "unbiased" in recommending beauty regimens and products, Derbyshire said. There will also be a brow bar, manicures, blowouts,

a Chanel shop for fragrance and beauty, and an Hermès fragrance shop.

The store is being staged with a series of launches as construction on different departments gets completed, leading to the grand reopening in the fall of 2013. The renovation work on the Yorkdale store, which was built in 1964, began last July.

"We have been progressing at a very fast cadence," Penno said, despite the apparent complexities of creating an elevated shopping experience. "There is an enterprising spirit that lives in this company," added Derbyshire.

Designers Weigh In

A stream of store appearances and events has forged a bond between makers and merchant. By Rosemary Feitelberg

WITH A LOYAL following of American and European shoppers, Holt Renfrew has also cultivated devotees among designers.

As the retailer celebrates its 175th, a number of top-shelf American brands talked up what they see as the company's strengths. Whether relatively new to the retailer or a long-established partner, companies pledged their allegiance to the Canadian-based store.

Holt Renfrew had the foresight to pick Tory Burch in 2005, at a time when the designer label was still establishing itself as a lifestyle concept with multiple product categories, including ready-to-wear, handbags, shoes and jewelry. Brigitte Kleine, president of

Tory Burch LLC, said, "Holt Renfrew was one of our first international accounts in 2005, and they have been a fantastic partner from Day One."

The high-end store was also one of the first international accounts for Elie Tahari, who has had more than a 30-year history with Holt Renfrew. More recently, his company has worked with a dedicated specialist team there for 12 years.

"Holt Renfrew is the best in the business in terms of incorporating designers' visions of their collection and translating that to the consumer on the selling floor," he said. "They are a top retailer in Canada with stores still reaching record sales with such a loyal customer following."

Besides the skilled sales staff, Tahari noted how the store's decor appeals to customers on another level.

"The modern architecture incorporated with the unique styles from various vendors truly makes this the ultimate store for designers to house and showcase their collections," he said. "Beyond product, their entire retail team is well-versed on the newest trends as well as classic designs. More importantly, they help



Elie Tahari



Jeff Rudes of J Brand.

create that ultraluxe atmosphere."

The designer continued, "The Elie Tahari/Holt Renfrew consumer is all about luxury — she wants to look sophisticated and feminine. We've had great success in dressing women in luxurious, modern pieces to wear to the office and for a weekend out. She finds the versatility in the garments and has a true appreciation for the quality of workmanship of each piece within the collection."

Arnie Gale, J Brand's president of sales, described the retailer as "one of the most prestigious department stores globally."

J Brand's presence in the store has grown over the years.

"We began selling to Holt Renfrew back in 2005. Our presence in women's denim...continues to grow strong. We launched women's ready-to-wear last spring and we are seeing healthy consumer acceptance for this product," Gale said. "We recently launched men's denim and we are already seeing great results, as like we saw in the early days

of building women's."

As for how the Canadian shopper differs from American ones, he said, "The Canadian shopper is sophisticated and similarly aligned with the American shopper. In some instances, they are looking for more fashion."

Gale also noted that the turnout was "sensational" for a recent in-store event that showcased the rtw and denim collections. "And consumer awareness was increased to another level."

Jonathan Saven, president of Splendid, said, "Holt Renfrew is known for housing the world's most prestigious brands and innovative designers."

Like other labels sold by the specialty store, he said Holt Renfrew's wealth of brands and designer labels is one of its greater strengths. "Holt Renfrew's attention to internationally known brands, both established and up-and-coming, is second to none," Saven said. "Its well-curated assortment makes Holt Renfrew a shopping destination with far-reaching appeal."

Tory Burch feed bags were made for a charity event.





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WWD MILESTONES

Designer Game Plan

An expanded assortment of top designer names is integral to the store's strategy. By Jean E. Palmieri

UPSCALE DESIGNER brands will be the linchpin of Holt Renfrew's aggressive expansion plan.

As the department store chain ramps up to add 40 percent more square footage to its network of stores by 2015, the merchandising team is working to upgrade and expand the assortment as well. The culmination of that work will be front and center when the Yorkdale store renovation is unveiled in August. That store, which will double in size to more than 120,000 square feet, will offer a slew of new designer brands in women's and men's apparel and footwear, as well as a number of what the company is calling "innovative luxury encounters."

"We're really in a growth mode," said Pat Di Bratto, senior vice president of buying and merchandising and the chief architect of these elevated initiatives. "We've had two consecutive record-breaking profitable years in a row, and we're expecting a third."

As chief merchant, she said, "I've been working with our team over the past two years to redefine our assortment." That includes "delisting 22 brands" that the store had carried in the past in favor of others, including Gucci, Prada, Alexander McQueen, Dolce & Gabbana, Etro, Stella McCartney, Pucci, Comme des Garçons, Isabel Marant and Kenzo, among others.

A new focus on products with exclusive or limited distribution at Holt stores is also part of the equation.

"We're redefining our brand portfolio," Di Bratto said. "We're cognizant of our luxury positioning and have established a strategy for our large, core vendors to be profitable in our stores."

Vendors are already reaping the benefits — sales of Givenchy Homme are up 285 percent, Canali has risen 218 percent and Gucci 56 percent. And the plan going forward is to double the business over a three-year period with about 20 key brands, including Saint Laurent, Tom Ford, Ferragamo, Rag & Bone, Christian Louboutin, Hugo Boss, Brunello Cucinelli, David Yurman, Jo Malone, Crème de la Mer and Sisley.

The men's business, which currently accounts for 16 percent of sales but is expected to grow to 20 percent, is among the focus areas. Di Bratto said that in the past Holt had viewed the category "through a women's lens. But we're repositioning and managing it from a man's sensibility."

Besides an expanded assortment and its own dedicated entrance, the Yorkdale store will open a grooming and men's lounge, or "den," as Di Bratto called it, where guys can explore skin-care offerings in private and get a shave. Additionally, dressing rooms have been enlarged with lay tables, a hidden wet bar and interactive toys. "We're trying to gain a point of differentiation," she said.

Key brands will include McQueen, Thomas Pink, Dolce & Gabbana and — exclusive with Holt outside their own stores — Etro, Gucci, Prada and Armani. Givenchy and Dsquared2 will be introduced at Yorkdale along with a Ralph Lauren shop and the first Paul Smith in-store shop in North America. The men's lounge will also offer a dedicated made-to-measure area — a red-hot category that is underdeveloped at Holt — and the staff devoted to men's will be doubled. There will be multi-



Pat Di Bratto

media merchandising walls and curated monthly collections featuring must-haves for men in a variety of categories.

Once they venture out of the men's den, they can stroll through a new 7,000-square-foot "shared shopping" department, where Holt will be merchandising contemporary brands such as Burberry Brit, Rag & Bone, Vince and other labels aimed at a younger customer. "It's a modern way to shop," Di Bratto said. "When we observed shopping patterns, we found that the 18- to 34-year-olds shop in packs. So we decided to give them an incredible shared experience."

Men's and women's wear will be merchandised together, and the shared shopping area will also offer some new exclusive products, including Zadig & Voltaire and Reiss.

The women's area will be full of designer names like Tom Ford, which is exclusive in Canada, Saint Laurent, Alexander McQueen, Dolce & Gabbana (exclusive), Victoria Beckham (exclusive), Celine, Chloé, Stella McCartney, Lanvin, Balenciaga (exclusive), The Row, Marni, Dries Van Noten, Rick Owens, Oscar de la Renta, Donna Karan (exclusive) and others.

Designers in apparel and accessories will also be given a home with Tabitha Simmons, Peter Pilotto, Altuzarra, MSGM, Kenzo, Acne, Carven, Victoria by Victoria Beckham and Comme des Garçons, being offered exclusively at the store. And the personal-shopping area is being tripled in size.

Footwear is also getting a major boost in Yorkdale. The women's shoe department, which has been experiencing double-digit growth, will expand to almost 10,000 square feet — more than four times its current size — and will feature a shoe hall offering brands such as Gucci, Jimmy Choo, Christian Louboutin, Prada and Stuart Weitzman.

"We're positioning ourselves to dominate in the luxury fashion footwear business in Canada," she said.

The shoe hall will also feature "cob-

technology in skin care, it's difficult for customers to navigate through everything," Di Bratto said. "This will have a more holistic point of view and there's no fee or obligation to purchase."

The beauty hall will also offer "pampering" experiences such as hair blow-outs, nail stations and eyebrow styling. Photo stations will capture how makeovers were done, allowing customers to e-mail the finished result to themselves or share it on social networks.

Many of the initiatives showcased in Yorkdale will roll out to Holt's other regional stores in varying degrees, she said, depending upon the size and location of the unit. Each store is slated to be expanded and updated, with some completely rebuilt, but because the company has only nine full-line stores, it allows for true "personalization and localization of the assortments. As an



Victoria Beckham's line is exclusive to Holt Renfrew in Canada.

bler-inspired shoe care," complete with shoe shines and minor repairs. Several of the brands, including Gucci, Jimmy Choo and Prada, will be housed in distinct "environments," she noted. It will also offer the first Christian Louboutin "apartment" in North America.

"There will be a lot of personality as you walk through," she said.

"Traditionally, when you enter a store, you walk into the beauty department, but in Yorkdale, it will be leather goods." That category, too, is seen as a growth opportunity for the chain and will be expanded by two and a half times at Yorkdale. Additionally, the space devoted to jewelry and watches will be tripled, and there will be a private room for consultations and sales, as well as new brands such as Tag Heuer.

Not to be outdone, the beauty department is also getting a facelift. The new beauty hall will also have its own entrance and skin-care consultants will be employed that are not specific to any brand but who will work with customers to choose the right products for their needs. "With all the new

organization, we want to ensure that we're nimble and can make adjustments to ensure we're relevant today and in the future."

She said the core Holt Renfrew customer is 35 to 50 years old and loyal to the store but 18- to 34-year-olds are key to the future. "That's the fastest-growing segment of our customer portfolio," she said, noting that was the reason for the creation of the shared shopping department.

Despite the loyalty of its customer, Di Bratto acknowledged that Holt Renfrew faces some tough competition from luxury retailers in the U.S. and around the world. "We deal with the world stage," Di Bratto said, "whether that's south of the border or e-commerce. Our customers are well-traveled, so we're focused on making them feel great in our store and giving them a reason to come back."

"We're building the store of the future," she continued. "People come to our stores to look good and feel good, and we build relationships with our clients. After all, we've known this customer for 175 years."

PHOTOS BY GEORGE EMMETTEL FOR HOLT RENFREW



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WWD MILESTONES

Director's Cut

For 25 years, Barbara Atkin has spearheaded Holt Renfrew's fashion point of view. By Marc Karimzadeh

THE WAY BARBARA ATKIN sees it, the role of a fashion director is a lot like that of a teacher. Both, she said, require bringing "huge thought processes" and "a vision" to the table.

That Holt Renfrew's vice president of fashion direction would use such an analogy is no coincidence. Prior to her career in fashion, Atkin was a teacher in Canada's public school system — mainly in primary schools working with children of recent immigrants and helping them ease the transition and acclimatization to the new culture.

"Fashion," Atkin said, "was just always a love. It's interesting how your career takes you on one road, but your passion takes you where you really need to be."

That passion got a real jolt in the late Seventies, when Atkin met Canadian designer Wayne Clark at a party. She was instantly fascinated, so much so that she decided to invest in the business.

"Through that, I slowly left teaching and started running a showroom company," she said. "I had many designers working for me over the years and sold them to many retailers. Holt Renfrew was one of them."

Holt eventually bought the business from Atkin.

When the Weston family bought Holt Renfrew in 1986, it was looking to further develop the retailer and tap into new customers, and executives at the retailer singled out Atkin as the perfect target shopper.

"Smart retailers get into the heart and soul of who their customer is," she related. "They identified me as a customer that they wanted to attract, and before I knew it, they coerced me, very nicely, to come and work for them."

Atkin recalled the early conversations precisely. "I said, 'To do what?' They wanted me to give them a point of view; first, to understand the customer — me being that customer — and then, to tell them about the things that I loved. What did I like about shopping? What were the experiences? What made me want to stay in the store longer?"

"I never grew up thinking that one day, I was going to be a fashion director," she added, a certain nonchalance peppering her voice. "I don't think I even knew that role existed."

Twenty-five years later, Atkin is considered the ultimate industry veteran: a well-known personality in the Canadian fashion scene and beyond, and a tour de force who works closely with designers from New York, Paris and Milan. Her point of view keeps Holt Renfrew at the forefront

of fashion trends. It's a mandate she took on practically from Day One.

"I was looking at that customer worldwide, understanding what that customer wanted, and what the best retail stores in the world were offering beyond product," she said. "I never stopped thinking like a customer. The day great retailers stop focusing on the customer is the day they disappear. I looked at social change, and understanding the connection between social change and business opportunity, I took each trend and translated it into strategic merchandising themes."

"I think that came from my teaching background," she added.

Atkin stressed that she doesn't look at Holt Renfrew just within the context of Canada's retailing scene. She always measures the luxury chain against the global competition — Neiman Marcus, Bergdorf Goodman, Selfridges or Lane Crawford.

"You need to have a point of view — how are we going to buy it differently from others? What do our customers like?" she asked. "We're all fighting

for the same collections worldwide, and we want to benchmark ourselves against the best in the world. Retail landscapes can become a bit homogenized with the same collections everywhere, so bringing in newness constantly has become so important to us."

Personal appearances are one area Atkin considers key. Oscar de la Renta, Michael Kors, Stella McCartney, and Peter Pilotto are among the designers who have come to Canada for a visit. "They are the superstar, and the customer wants to touch and feel and say that they met that designer," she noted. "When we launched Alexander Wang in our store, we couldn't believe the lines that went all the way through the store and outside on to the street."

That particular experience was an "eye-opener" in more ways than one.

"We saw how he was democratizing fashion and speaking to a whole new customer, which was another trigger that said, 'The world of designer is changing,'" she observed.

These days, Atkin keeps a close watch on emerging talent via World Design Lab, an



"The day great retailers stop focusing on the customer is the day they disappear."

— BARBARA ATKIN

area at the retailer that is an incubator for emerging talent from around the world. It has been the jumping-off point for designers like Wang and Joseph Altuzarra, and often serves as an entry for local designers like Toronto label Greta Constantine.

While there is no specific department earmarked for Canadian designers — "I don't like to merchandise by nationality," Atkin said — Holt supports local talent in various ways. The retailer is a sponsor of Toronto Fashion Week, and its team also attends Montreal Fashion Week to stay on the pulse of Canada's fashion scene.

Often, Atkin works directly with Canadian designers for several seasons before presenting them to the store's buying team.

"Before it gets to the buyer, I have to be really happy with that collection," she explained. "This means I'm working with the designers by having them understand what merchandises well on the floor; by looking at fit and how they can round out their collections. We work on pricing and help them identify who their customer is, and where they see their collections merchandised in the store."

As for future evolution, Atkin offers a number of ideas. "I'm looking at the notion of gender, the blurring of gender, and how a young guy and girl shop," she said. "We have traditionally merchandised our stores with men's on one side and women's on the other. To me, the contemporary world is about shopping as a social activity — so we are going to build a shared shopping area. Our new contemporary world

will be a mix of guys and girls, together in one area."

Keeping the store's personal touch intact also remains paramount with new developments.

"We speak to our customers on a daily basis," Atkin said, recalling several special customer surprises she and her team cooked up for top clients. "In Vancouver, for example, we have a customer who absolutely adores and collects jewelry. In May, we flew her with her personal shopper to meet with one of her favorite jewelry designers, in that designer's home and studio, and she did the most beautiful one-of-a-kind piece. In Calgary, the boyfriend of one of our top customers wanted us to surprise his girlfriend with a present. We created an experience and set up a whole trip to Paris — she had never been — to hook up with me there. It was Alber Elbaz's 10th anniversary at Lanvin. A limo picked her up and she joined me at the fashion show and after party."

While these extravaganzas aren't exactly a regular gift-with-purchase, Atkin said it's that close rapport she and her team cultivate with customers that adds a certain something extra to Holt Renfrew.

"We know that at the end of the day, those customers can buy things anywhere in the world, whether it's online or any store, yet they choose to spend their time and money with us," she said. "When you have a customer who trusts you so much that they come to you for your suggestions, you know you've really won them over. And you've really won the title of the leading luxury retailer in Canada."



The World Design Lab area for emerging talent.



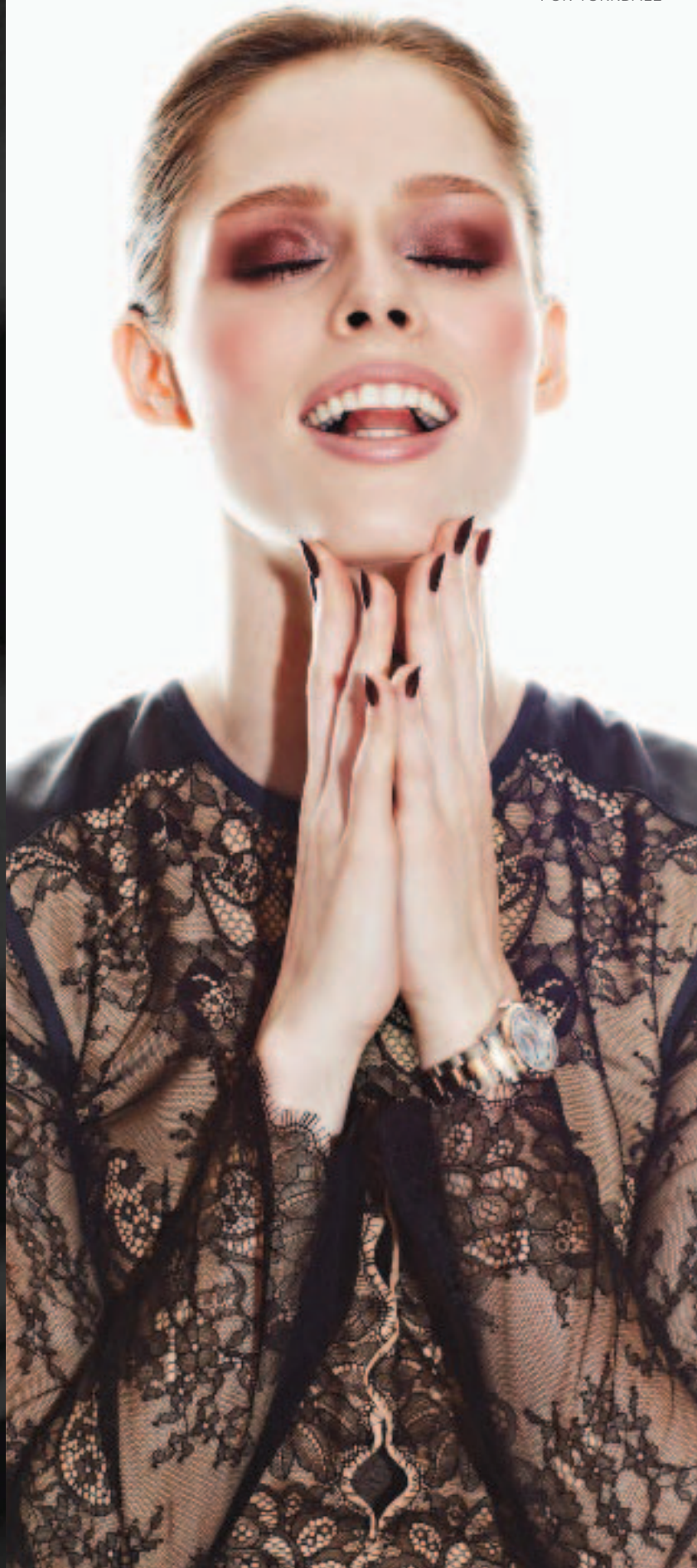
Oscar de la Renta visits in 2010.



Alexander Wang at Holt in 2010.

WANG AND DE LA RENTA PHOTOS BY GEORGE PIMENTEL FOR HOLT RENFREW

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SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

The Contemporary Bet

Holt aims at a younger demographic with a new concept. By David Moin

AT HR2, HOLT Renfrew's upcoming secondary chain, there's a clear mission: capture the contemporary market in Canada before the competition does.

Yet hr2's leader and vice president, Heather Arts, says there's been no rush to pounce.

"Hr2 is something we've been looking at for over two years internally. It's not just a reaction to the expansion of all the competition from the U.S.," said Arts, who was previously Holt's vice president of special projects. "We've identified an opportunity with ven-

divisions to tap the contemporary business. Barneys has its Co-op, and Neiman's has Cusp, though neither has entered Canada yet. But J. Crew has already moved in and Nordstrom, which has a large contemporary business, will enter the market in fall 2014 with a store in Calgary and visions of up to nine full-line stores throughout the country. The Hudson's Bay Co. is also spending big on modernizing and contemporizing; designer boutiques are slowly filtering into urban areas, and Intermix has already made a move

shipments.

■ Buying, operations and planning teams have been created, separate from the Holt Renfrew team.

■ Hr2 will not carry any of the same merchandise sold at Holt Renfrew stores, though the new retail division will be stocked with lower-priced or secondary labels from many of the same designers and brands that supply Holt Renfrew with their top-priced lines. There will, however, be a strong association with Holt Renfrew considering signs and logos will say hr2 with Holt Renfrew underneath. Hr2 shopping bags will have the same white and magenta coloring but in reverse from Holt's.

■ The stores will be designed to be contemporary, clean and minimal, so the merchandise stands out.

"The decor down to the fixtures, and the ambience, will be totally different from what's out there," Arts added, citing such design elements as a polished concrete floor, a 20-foot long runway of mannequins, sculptural lighting resembling mobiles, digital signage (as opposed to banners or paper signs) and an "inspirational wall" that could feature art installations.

■ Flexibility on the selling floor to frequently adjust the displays rather than having hard shops. Hr2 will receive daily deliveries as product will be expected to move fairly quickly. "We will be out more frequently in the market



distance" from Holt Renfrew stores to help reach a new customer, though she expects Holt Renfrew customers will shop hr2 as well.

Hr2's target customer will be predominantly female, 25 and older, "who really appreciates great brands, maybe aspires to luxury brands. But hr2 will be providing more affordable and attainable fashions, and could lead to her shopping at Holt Renfrew as well," Arts said.

"One difference between ourselves and the people we are competing against is that we are going to have merchandisers based in the stores [three per store] to maintain the look and feel and constant flow of product, so it maintains our standards, so sales people can focus on working with the customers. These individuals will learn and share certain practices with our team at Holt Renfrew."

With the hr2 windows, "We are going to do something a little different visually, working with Chicago-based Bruce Mau visual firm, which helped design the logo, signage and packaging. "Signage will be digital, with not a lot of print. We are not going to clutter the front with a lot of signage."

Hr2 will make its debut in March with a 30,000-square-foot store in Montreal's Quartier DIX30 shopping center. Another location is planned for Ontario early next year.

"We are committed to this concept and pretty confident it will succeed, so we are looking beyond those," Arts said. However, once the first two units open, "Give us some time to catch our breath [for tweaking the stores] before we go forward."

The company expects to open hr2 stores across the country and about the same amount as Holt Renfrew. "We see ourselves as a national chain by the end of 2015. There is still a lot of great real estate out there. There's a lot of development and growth," Arts said. "We are pretty open to different types of locations," from malls to street locations to lifestyle centers.

An hr2 Web site is not currently in the works, though "it's something potentially down the road," Arts added.

Hr2 pricing, she said, will emphasize "great brands at great value.... Consumers will understand the value they are getting. What you see on the ticket will be the out-the-door price. We are not going to be screaming '40 percent off,'" though there will be end-of-season sales, and normal markdowns. The advertising will be more institutional and "won't be screaming out brand names."

Asked if she felt anxious at all about the project, Arts replied, "It's definitely one of the highlights of my career. My experience has really focused on starting up businesses."

She noted she was with Winners as a senior vice president and general merchandise manager when that business started up in the Eighties, and was also part of the team that started up Lowe's in Canada, as a merchandising director.

"I am not nervous," Arts said. "Maybe the night before we open, I will think differently."

A rendering of the hr2 contemporary concept.



dors. They've got so much product. Holt Renfrew can't carry it all under its roof. There is nothing like hr2 in Canada at all. It represents a great opportunity to grow with vendors with whom we have great relationships already."

Arts said that even though retailing in Canada has ignited with newcomers from the U.S., there's still a gaping

hole across the border.

Asked how hr2 will be different from U.S. chains such as Co-op or Cusp, Arts replied: "The contemporary part will be similar. The difference will be the experience when you come into the store." Janson Goldstein, the architectural and design firm, which has worked with Holt Renfrew in the past, has developed "a wonderful concept" that will romance the product, particularly with the way hr2 plans to "curate" the product, Arts said.

As for the challenges of launching a new retail division, Arts replied, "At the moment, there really aren't any. Our vendors have been very receptive. They trust us to get it right. We will display them carefully, at a very high level."

In the rundown of hr2, Arts said the plan is for:

■ 25,000 to 30,000 square-foot settings selling women's, men's, accessories, fashion and costume jewelry; footwear; handbags and leather goods. Women's will represent about 50 percent of the volume; men's, 20 percent; with footwear, accessories and jewelry representing the remaining 30 percent.

■ Merchandising will be head-to-toe, and more by casual and career lifestyles and evening merchandise.

■ Space will be devoted to seasonal themes, brand highlights and daily

Heather Arts



"Hr2 is something we've been looking at for over two years internally. It's not just a reaction to the expansion of all the competition from the U.S."

— HEATHER ARTS

hole in the contemporary market that hr2 intends to fill. In addition, while women's ready-to-wear at most stores has generally been weak, the contemporary sportswear component is performing well and growing.

Neiman Marcus and Barneys New York years ago launched secondary



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SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

On a Youth Click

Holt Renfrew kicked up its digital presence this past year with a blog launch and a host of initiatives on various social platforms. By Rachel Strugatz

FOR A 175-year-old, Holt Renfrew navigates social media like a teenager.

The retailer has spent the past year carefully building its social media presence, with a primary goal of reaching a younger demographic.

E- and m-commerce remain less of a focus for Canada's leading luxury retailer, which wants to make sure its digital message is in line with its overall mission: providing customers with an extraordinary experience.

"Our whole marketing strategy is integrated across all channels — from digital to social media to print," said Holt's senior vice president of sales and marketing, Alix Box.

Active on platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram and its blog, Holts Muse, manager of social media content Brittany Barkwell added that the retailer uses these platforms to translate the physical shopping experience online, "create an extra world on the digital platforms" and drive foot traffic in-store.

"We always want to be current and relevant, and [this means] getting on board with new platforms — but in a way that fits in with our marketing strategy," Barkwell said.

Box reinforced that it's all about welding this to the in-store experience.

"That is our differentiator. We work hard to make sure that we're

in Toronto that took place Sept. 6. The store's overall messaging for the milestone was slightly retro, with a nod to the retailer's rich history, but also to "assert our strong fashion leadership going forward."

The element of the celebration that was most geared toward the social space was a Holt Renfrew pop-up truck that drove across the country selling Hot@175 sweatshirts, hitting each of the nine cities where the retailer has a store. According to Barkwell, seven designers and artists were commissioned to design sweatshirts that featured their own interpretation of what it means to be Hot@175. The campaign was promoted on social media through Twitter, Facebook and Instagram with the hashtag #HoltPopUp with updates throughout, and each designer appeared in a corresponding video that was shared across various digital media, as well.

"The staff that traveled said that the people who came [to the pop-up truck] heard about it through social media. It was a great test to see how this reaches our customers of a younger demographic. It really drove them to the trucks and got them shopping," Barkwell said, adding that shoppers who purchased from any of the trucks received an additional promotion to drive traffic back to the store.



Holt Renfrew's exclusive Missoni bears photographed in Milan (left) and in Vancouver.



and in its first month the blog saw 45,000 hits. Since then, Holts Muse has continued to partner with leading bloggers, including Emily Schuman of Cupcakes and Cashmere, as well as designers like Victoria Beckham (whose video interview received 28,000 hits on YouTube), Tabitha Simmons, Rachel Zoe, Rag & Bone's David Neville and Marcus Wainwright, Bruno Frisconi and Aerin Lauder.

Most recently, Holt Renfrew worked on a charitable partnership with Missoni and OrphanAid Africa that featured two stuffed animals — a bear and elephant — were created in the brand's signature zigzag print which hit stores and holtrenfrew.com Nov. 1.

Margherita Missoni visited the retailer's Bloor Street location in Toronto last week to kick off sales of the \$50 limited-edition toys, with all net proceeds going to OrphanAid Africa. The goal is to raise \$100,000.

The campaign — which includes in-store elements, print, video, the Missoni event and online components — features a Facebook contest in which the winner is eligible to win a signed stuffed animal and \$350 worth of Missoni accessories.

There's even a guerrilla element that started in Milan during fashion week when the store's vice president of fashion direction, Barbara Atkin, started taking pictures of the Missoni bear engaged in classic Italian activities (like perched atop a Vespa), chronicling the trip back to Canada. Since then, the store has posted images of the bear at various Canadian landmarks, such as the Ironworks building in Vancouver's Gastown area, Mount Royal in Montreal, the CN Tower and the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto. Barkwell added that consumers have started doing the same with the bear and posting the photos.

When asked which social media platform garners the most engagement with fans, Barkwell insists there is no one leader. Different types of content are promoted on different channels — for instance, while Instagram might be best for promoting product as it arrives in-store because of the platform's visual properties, Facebook is more suited for sharing blog and editorial content.

"That's part of our marketing strategy — using different platforms for different purposes to create the overall experience. That's a way that we distinguish ourselves. We have a very integrated approach, and we try to incorporate social media into public relations and traditional marketing channels," Barkwell said, adding that its Web site holtrenfrew.com — which gets about 300,000 visits a month — has a portion on the site that directs readers to its blog.

This month, the retailer appointed Lisa Tant to a new fashion editor role. As part of the marketing division, the former editor of Canadian fashion magazine Flare will focus heavily on collaborating with social media programs.

Holt Renfrew was one of the earlier retailers to embrace bloggers. Its first blogger project dates to 2009, when the retailer rolled out a national campaign with windows celebrating bloggers like The Sartorialist's Scott Schuman, Garance Dore, Jane Aldridge, Bryanboy and Tommy Ton (who once worked at the Bloor Street store). Schuman hosted a party in honor of this campaign at the store, where his work was exhibited, and he also spoke at a cocktail event.

Despite a strong digital presence and an early adoption of the blogosphere, though, Holt Renfrew is still neither e-commerce nor m-commerce enabled. Box maintains that its sister retailer — U.K.-based Selfridges — has taken the lead with e-commerce plans and no update was available at press time.

Holtrenfrew.com did see a complete overhaul in mid-August, when a slew of features was implemented. Besides the ability to post richer content, more than 1,000 products across numerous categories were launched on its digital flagship, something Box contends wasn't possible on the old site. Consumers also have access to robust product catalogues, alternate product views, designer look books and videos and integration to blog content and the Holt Style Guide.

"The bottom line is that it gives customers more to look at and see our breadth and depth of assortment and find what they want," Box said. "It's a great window-shopping experience, which was our goal."

holts muse



Holt Renfrew's blog, Holts Muse.

focused on the customer and speaking to them the way they want to be spoken to — whether it's digital or in-store," Box explained.

Detailing the store's multipronged approach, Box said the program, which was put in motion in early September for the store's 175th anniversary, features an online and social media campaign, Hot@175. It integrated all aspects of digital, print, visual, events and in-store, including a street party

From Aug. 24 to Sept. 30, the #HoltPopUp hashtag reached more than 50,000 Twitter users and 80,000 Facebook users. The posts relating to the trucks on holtsmuse.com garnered more than 10,000 unique page views.

Barkwell said the store really wanted to create a lot of buzz upon the launch of the Holts Muse blog last November. The retailer tapped blogger Leandra Medine of the Man Repeller to host a party at the Toronto store,



TODS.COM

SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

In the Family

Holt parent Selfridges Group is part of the vast holdings of the Weston family that include fashion, food and more. By Julia Neel

THE SELFRIDGES Group is owned by British-born Canadian billionaire W. Galen Weston, and his wife, Hilary, and holds in its portfolio four luxury department store groups: British chain Selfridges, Brown Thomas in Ireland, Holt Renfrew in Canada and De Bijenkorf in the Netherlands, as well as Ogilvy in Montreal.

W. Galen is the grandson of George Weston, a Canadian baker who built Canada's biggest bakery business. Upon his death, his son, W. Garfield Weston, took up the reins of George Weston Ltd. and began a program of expansion and acquisition. In the Thirties, during the Depression, Garfield secured funding to expand into the U.K. and was soon reporting sales equal to the Canadian parent company. Within a few years, Garfield had acquired a string of British bakeries, trading under the Allied Bakeries banner, and he moved his family to England in 1935.

Meanwhile, the U.S. operations were growing stronger. Garfield remained in Britain during World War II, even sitting as a member of Parliament for a time.

W. Galen Weston was born in 1940 and moved with his parents back to Canada in 1945. He watched as his father's business expanded globally, acquiring subsidiaries from Rhodesia to Australia, and worked in many of them. In 1961, at the age of 21 and after studying business administration at the University of Western Ontario, W. Galen moved to Ireland and set up a grocery store, Powers, with his own money — his father had put him to work at a young age.

In Ireland, W. Galen saw a major opportunity for growth and his instinct was right: by 1965, Powers had expanded into a six-store grocery chain. He went on to acquire a discount chain, Penneys, and a grocery competitor. He purchased an interest in department store Brown Thomas in 1971, eventually acquiring full ownership in 1984. He married Hilary Frayne, an Irish fashion model, in 1966 and together they have built the retail Weston empire.

The Weston family controls about 200 companies, including Canada's largest supermarket chain, Loblaws, and President's Choice brands, a variety of grocery and household products, and services, and the Joe Fresh contemporary fashion brand.

Here's a look at Selfridges Group's other fashion retail properties.

BROWN THOMAS

The original and first Brown Thomas store was opened on Grafton Street in Dublin by haberdashers and general drapers Hugh Brown and James Thomas in 1859. The company was bought by Selfridges founder Harry Gordon Selfridge in 1919 and it operated as a branch of Selfridge Provincial Stores until 1933, when it was sold to John McGuire, who had made his name at Cerys — another Dublin department store. The company was listed on the Irish Stock Exchange in the Sixties, Weston bought his first share in the company in 1971 and he bought it out in 1983. In 1991, the company bought out the Switzer Group, which included stores in Cork, Galway, Limerick and Dublin. In 1994, Brown Thomas sold its original store to Marks & Spencer and took over what was the M&S store on Grafton Street.

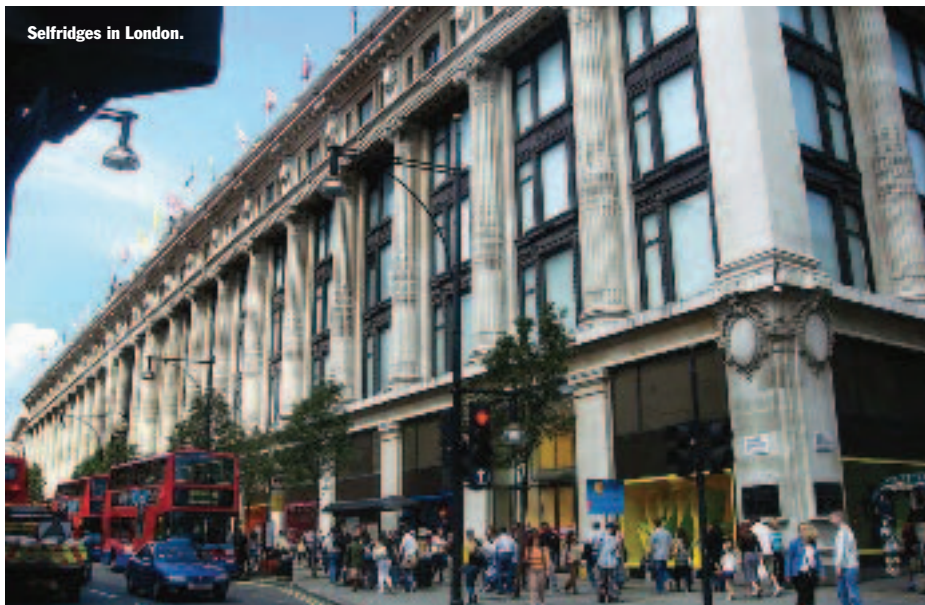
In 1998, the company opened the first BT2 boutique, which stocks contemporary and diffusion brands including COS, Etoile by Isabel Marant and Sandro. The shop became home to Ireland's largest denim bar. There are now three BT2 stores in Dublin.

By 2000, all of the previous Switzer Group stores were rebranded as Brown Thomas. Since 2005, all four of the stores have been refurbished and stock luxury and designer brands including women's wear from Celine, Stella McCartney, Mary Katrantzou and Christian Louboutin, as well as men's wear, beauty and home goods.

SELRIDGES

Situated on Oxford Street, the London megalith that is Selfridges was founded by Henry — Harry to his friends — Gordon Selfridge, son of a small-town storekeeper. He worked his way up through the ranks of Chicago retailer Marshall Field & Co., innovating by lighting the store at night and opening a

(Continued on page 28)



Selfridges in London.



Brown Thomas in Ireland.



De Bijenkorf in Amsterdam.



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SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

(Continued from page 26)

restaurant where ladies could lunch unchaperoned. Selfridge is also credited with coining the phrase, "The customer is always right."

He came into a lot of money when he married into the Buckingham family and in 1906 he traveled to London with his wife, Rosalie. He was wholly unimpressed with the city's shopping scene, so he invested 400,000 pounds (which is equivalent to \$64 million, current U.S.) and built Selfridges at the less fashionable end of Oxford Street in 1909. Selfridge's innovative approach to retailing saw him put planes and controversial tango dancers on display, making shopping entertaining. He was the first to establish a beauty department on the ground floor — cleverly masking the smell of manure from horse-drawn carriages — and he opened a pet shop and what was at the time the world's biggest bookshop.

He ran the store until he retired in 1940, when he took on the role of president. He died in 1947 and four years later, the business was sold to Lewis' of Liverpool for 3.4 million pounds (equal to about \$153 million, current U.S.).

Selfridges changed hands again in 1965, when Charles Clore's British Shoe Corp. won control in a takeover for 63 million pounds (\$1.77 billion, current U.S.).

Sears Holdings created a 94 million pound (\$274 million, current U.S.) redevelopment program for Selfridges in 1992, which saw a dramatic revival under the leadership of former chief executive officer Vittorio Radice.

Radice installed the atrium escalators and made the iconic yellow bags covetable items in their own right.

In 1998, Selfridges was demerged from the Sears Group and floated on the London Stock Exchange. Stores opened in Trafford Park, Manchester, in 1998, followed by the Manchester Exchange Square store in 2002. In 2003, the Birmingham store opened.

Shortly after the opening of the Birmingham store, Selfridges was acquired for 600 million pounds (\$966 million, current U.S.) by the Westons, who put a stop on expansion plans, choosing to focus instead



W. Galen Weston and his wife Hilary with Elton John and David Furnish.

on developing their existing stores.

Galen Weston's daughter, Alannah, was appointed creative director in 2004 and on her watch, the store opened what was at the time the world's largest men's and women's shoe departments, and launched the new Women's Designer Galleries and a dedicated men's designer space. She also presided over the opening of Wonder Room, a nearly 20,000-square-foot space selling luxury jewelry, watches and gifts, and Ultralounge, a permanent arts and exhibition space.

In 2012, Selfridges was voted World's Best Department Store at the Global Summit of Department Stores for the second time and, in the year ended Jan. 31, 2012, operating profits rose 5 percent with more than 1 billion pounds (\$1.6 billion) in sales.

DE BIJENKORF

Like the Selfridges Group's other holdings, De Bijenkorf has a long history. It was founded by Simon Philip Goudsmit in 1870 and occupies a historic building on Dam Square in the heart of Amsterdam.

Spread over five floors, the store — and its 11 other branches — stock Dutch and international la-

bels including Armani, Louis Vuitton, Burberry and Hermès, as well as beauty, accessories, home goods, toys and home entertainment offerings.

In November 2010, a deal announcing the purchase of Dutch department store chain De Bijenkorf was announced, marking the group's first foray into mainland Europe. At the time, the Selfridges Group said total turnover for Selfridges, Holt Renfrew, Brown Thomas and the new Dutch acquisition would be about 2 billion pounds, or \$3.2 billion at 2010 exchange rates.

The group also added that the Dutch acquisition was part of a strategy to own and operate premier luxury stores in select markets.

OGILVY

Founded in 1866, the La Maison Ogilvy specialty store in Montreal houses distinctive boutiques, many of the world's top fashion designers, and upscale accessories and sophisticated gifts. In 2011, Selfridges bought Ogilvy for around \$100 million. Besides its fashion offerings, Ogilvy is known for its 60-year tradition of a bagpiper playing for visitors at the store every day at lunchtime.

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SECTION II

WWD MILESTONES

Mixing Merch and Philanthropy

Finding many ways to give back and create buzz. By David Moin

IT'S A TYPICAL morning meeting at Holt Renfrew's Bloor Street flagship before the doors swing open to shoppers, and 150 sales associates are getting the skinny on the early spring arrivals to the selling floor.

Akris, Celine, Marc Jacobs — they're all in, said store manager Jody Minuk. But the commercial appeal turns charitable when she cited the zigzag-patterned Missoni bears and elephants that also just arrived. They're Christmas gifts, priced at \$50, to support OrphanAid Africa, which helps orphans and vulnerable children in Ghana.

"When you are thinking about everything you are selling, these should be natural add-ons," Minuk stressed.

Then she introduced Margherita Missoni, heiress to the Missoni fashion house founded by her grandparents, who thanked the Holt team for supporting OrphanAid Africa, the cause she has embraced for the past decade, since she was 20 and spent a month in Ghana witnessing firsthand the suffering of the children.

At her public appearance in the store later to launch the products and sign autographs, Missoni praised the "extremely professional" in-store and social-media campaign Holt has created to promote the elephants and bears,

choice, leading to a product sold at a very attainable price," said Alexandra Weston, director of brand strategy for Holt Renfrew. "It builds a deeper relationship with the vendor, and customers of all demographics can have a piece of this."

In August, Sir Elton John and David Furnish appeared at the Bloor Street flagship when they launched limited-edition scented candles to benefit the Elton John AIDS Foundation.

In April, Holt and Tory Burch partnered on \$50 totes to benefit the FEED Foundation, cofounded by Lauren Bush Lauren to combat child hunger, and the Tory Burch Foundation, which provides economic opportunities to women and their families in the U.S.

Last fall, Holt sold exclusive Marc by Marc Jacobs nylon shoulder-strap totes, priced at \$48, to support VisionSpring, a charity providing low-cost eyeglasses in the developing world. Canada Goose once designed merino wool, fleeced-lined toques to support Polar Bears International, and Michael Michael Kors created leopard-print scarves to support the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation.



Alexandra Weston

Holt's cause-related designer exclusives.



Margherita Missoni meets her fans at the Bloor Street flagship.

which she described as "trans-generational gifts, for any age."

This is just the latest chapter in Holt's ongoing, two-year-old program of offering \$50 exclusives created by top designers to support charities of their choice. Holt donates \$100,000 to the charities and only keeps enough of the revenues to cover costs.

The products are multipurpose — they are used as tools to raise funds and bring designers and celebrities into the store to spotlight charities and draw crowds, as well as to enable shoppers to buy something exclusive and feel good knowing that they're helping to support a cause.

With designers, "We form a collaboration to highlight a charity of their

"We've always had a lot of great initiatives going on," Weston said. "We've always supported United Way. But when I came on board over a year ago, I really saw a need to create a consistent, concise platform, for all the stores and for the [brand] messaging to stand on. It was a little bit here and there."

Holt now has "a streamlined strategy that feeds into the ethos of the brand," Weston said. "It came about by listening to what our employees, our customers and our vendors care about. It sounds cheesy, but we've become one big happy family."

Weston is the wife of Galen Weston, who runs Loblaws and is the son of W. Galen Weston, chairman of Selfridges Group Ltd., the holding

company for Holt, Selfridges in the U.K. and Brown Thomas in Ireland. Alexandra Weston works directly with Holt's president, Mark Derbyshire.

"My job encompasses looking at the business, determining where there are gaps and holes and where we see opportunities," Weston explained.

Supporting charities and bringing social issues to the fore is "a big part of what I am focusing on and what we believe in as a brand. We are all about making customers and employees feel great. I saw there was an opportunity to expand upon that element and really reach out, and to enhance our corporate reputation at the same time. It's become more and more important to the next generation of customers, employees and vendors. We are working on building programs for amazing causes. There are a lot of other things coming down the pipeline," and not too far in the future.

Without going into great detail, Weston did tip her hand on a project happening for next spring. It revolves around an in-store-shop concept featuring a "well-curated assortment of exceptional products," exceptional in the way they are manufactured, she explained — through artisans, or by utilizing materials that are renewable or organic. The shop will change constantly, and Weston believes it will represent "a new and fresh way to look at retail" with a concept that's "simple, young, chic and gallerylike, highlighting products and the stories behind them."

For spring, three pop-up shops will be created, about 250 to 300 square feet each, as "a teaser to get this concept out to the market" and a prelude to permanent 450-square-foot shops at Holt's flagships in Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver and Calgary.

"They won't always be about charities," Weston said. "They could highlight a culture or a craft, artisans," from anywhere around the world. "We are having a great time scouring the globe for the coolest, most fashionable products."

As a precursor to the shops, Holt has begun selling in its holiday shops Cornelia Guest handbags made from recycled fabrics that resemble leather.

The working name for the concept is "The Green Room" to evoke ecology, and for where actors stay before they're about to appear on stage or live TV shows. Events and exhibits are seen happening in Holt's Green Room.

"The Green Room will allow us to speak to a new generation of consumers who want to know where product is from, and who care about who makes it," Weston said. "For this generation, it's expected. It's something that should always be front and center. For the older demographic, it may not be second nature, but it's something they are embracing."



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