NEWSPAPER 2ND CLASS

CALIFORNIA Apparel News

THE VOICE OF THE INDUSTRY FOR 72 YEARS

$2.99 VOLUME 73, NUMBER 15 APRIL 7–13, 2017

FALL FORECAST

Directives West broke down the trends for Fall/Winter 2017 at its April 3 runway show, held at the California Market Center during LA Majors Market. For more from the show, see page 7.

Re:Named kimono and pant, Moon River top

NORMAN ZELLER

BCBG Max Azria Starts Closing Stores After Filing for Bankruptcy Protection

By Deborah Belgum *Senior Editor*

BCBG Max Azria, the Los Angeles brand that filed for bankruptcy protection in late February, has begun to shutter more than half the stores it operates in the United States.

In bankruptcy filings, the venerated contemporary brand, which has been a major force in the Los Angeles fashion industry for nearly 30 years, said it was rejecting a number of store leases and closing 120 unprofitable stores that racked up $10 million in losses during fiscal 2016.

These stores made up 63 percent of BCBG's total losses from retail locations with negative contribution margins, the company said in U.S. Bankruptcy Court filings in New York.

Filing for bankruptcy protection is one way retailers can exit their store leases and is being used increasingly as retail chains such as **The Wet Seal**, **The Limited** and

➥ **BCBG** page 5

TRADE SHOW REPORT

LA Majors Drives Biz Despite Market Doldrums

By Andrew Asch *Retail Editor*

Meetings were held and orders placed during the April 3–5 run of **LA Majors Market** at the **California Market Center** showroom building in downtown Los Angeles, but a steady drumbeat of tough retail headlines underscored many conversations during the market.

Gordmans Stores Inc., a big player in the discount market, filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in early March. A few days before the Majors Market started, a subsidiary of **Stage Stores Inc.** made a deal to acquire at least 50 leases of Omaha-headquartered Gordmans.

Also in March, **Sears Holding Corp.** scrambled to calm investor fears when one of its Securities and Exchange Com-

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INSIDE

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Delta Apparel Sells Junkfood Clothing

Twelve years after buying Los Angeles–based **Junkfood Clothing Co.** for more than $22.5 million, **Delta Apparel** is selling the T-shirt brand for about $28 million to **JMJD Ventures**.

The sale includes $25 million in cash at closing, with promissory-note payments due between June 30, 2017, and March 30, 2018, for the remaining amount. The transaction does not include the sale of accounts receivable and certain other assets or the assumption of trade payable and certain other liabilities.

The $35 million total value of the company sold represents about 80 percent of Junkfood's revenue, or about $43 million. "The Junkfood brand has broadened its consumer reach and awareness and more than doubled its revenue since we acquired it in 2005," said Robert Humphreys, the chairman and chief executive of Delta Apparel, based in Greenville, S.C. "While we have enjoyed nurturing this brand over the years, the changing retail environment has made it more challenging to be a niche player in the licensed-graphics space. We are pleased to have the opportunity to sell Junkfood and further reduce our reliance on licensed properties. We expect to use the proceeds from the sale to lower our debt levels, continue our share-repurchase program and provide capital for further investments in strategic growth opportunities, including the **Salt Life** brand and [virtual art studio] **Art Gun**."

Net of selling expenses, Delta Apparel expects to realize a pre-tax gain of approximately $1 million on the sale.

Junkfood Clothing was started in 1998 by designers Natalie Grof and Blaine Halvorson, whose **Liquid Blaino Designs** did business as Junkfood Clothing, a T-shirt line started with nostalgic licenses such as **Twister**, **Candy Land** and **My Little Pony**. In recent years, Junkfood Clothing has acquired licenses.

At the time of the purchase in fiscal 2005, Junkfood Clothing had sales of approximately $27 million. Delta Apparel bought Junkfood with $20 million in cash, a $2.5 million seller promissory note and contingent payments with respect to each of the four fiscal years following closing, payable if certain performance targets were met.

Delta Apparel makes a variety of casual and athletic tops and bottoms, embellished and unembellished T-shirts, and fleece products. In fiscal 2016, the company had a net profit of $9 million on $425 million in revenues.

—Deborah Belgum

Velvet Acquired by $1.8 Billion Japanese Company

Los Angeles–based **Velvet LLC**, owner of the **Velvet by Graham and Spencer** label, has been acquired by **Adastria Co. Ltd.**, a $1.8 billion Japanese apparel company. Terms of the deal were not disclosed.

"Velvet is a distinguished brand in the U.S. contemporary market, and we are delighted to welcome Velvet to the Adastria group," said Masa Matsushita, Adastria's representative director and chief operating officer, in a company statement. "This latest acquisition allows us to establish a strategic presence in North America and in the world of contemporary fashion, as we seek to transform Adastria into a leading global apparel company."

Matsushita said Adastria has a track record of growing brands and businesses through the company's "strong value-chain management and brand-management strategy."

"We have strong expertise in retail operations with more than 1,400 retail stores and e-commerce operations throughout Japan and Asia," he said. "Working together with Velvet's management team, we will accelerate the brand's growth, especially in the direct-to consumer channels as we apply our expertise in retail and value-chain management."

This is Adastria's second U.S. apparel acquisition. Last year, the company acquired a minority interest in San Francisco–based **Marine Layer Inc.**

"Building upon our investments in Velvet and Marine Layer, we aim to strategically enhance our global brand portfolio moving forward," Matsushita said.

Founded in 1997, Velvet produces "modern, sophisticated staples with laid-back California attitude" for women and men. The company has eight U.S. retail stores and sells in premium department stores and high-end boutiques in the U.S. and overseas.

"This is a great opportunity for both companies," said Velvet cofounder and Chief Executive Officer Henry Hirschowitz. "Velvet will provide a solid platform for Adastria, allowing the company to expand its presence in the North American market. In addition, Velvet will greatly benefit from Adastria's extensive resources, which will enhance our product range and appeal in a greater way to our Velvet customer. Furthermore, with Adastria's knowledge in retail and online, we feel strongly that further opportunities for Velvet will materialize. We are extremely fortunate and honored to become part of the Adastria family of brands. The Velvet team is totally committed to making a meaningful contribution to Adastria Co. Ltd."

Hirschowitz founded Velvet with Jenny Graham in 1997 and they were later joined by Toni Spencer. The company has collaborated in the past with model Lily Aldridge and has another collaboration planned for summer with model Kirsty Hume.

Tokyo-based Adastria was founded in 1953. The publicly traded company operates 1,358 retail stores in Japan and 108 stores overseas and owns 21 brands, including apparel, lifestyle and restaurants.*—Alison A. Nieder*

Hudson Jeans Names New President

Starting April 10, Matthew Fior will take over as the new president of **Hudson Jeans**, based in Los Angeles.

The announcement was made by **Differential Brands Group**, whose portfolio of brands includes Hudson Jeans, **Robert Graham** and **SWIMS**.

Previously, Fior was the chief merchandising officer at Los Angeles–based **Lucky Brand** jeans, working to boost sales in the wholesale and retail arenas, expanding e-commerce and international sales by doing more licensing.

Fior will be working alongside Peter Kim, who founded the denim line in 2002 and is the chief executive officer. "We are thrilled to welcome Matthew Fior to Hudson Jeans. Matthew will oversee the day-to-day operations of Hudson Jeans while providing guidance and leadership for the brand's planned strategic growth, working alongside Peter Kim," said Michael Buckley, chief executive officer of Differential Brands Group.

Fior said he believes Hudson is ready to expand its brand beyond denim and become a true lifestyle collection. "I am thrilled to be joining the organization to spearhead the charge," he said.

Previously, Fior worked with other global brands including **Levi Strauss & Co.** and **Gap Inc.**

Barbara Cook was president of Hudson Jeans from 2013 to January 2016, when she became the chief executive of Miami-based accessories brand **Miansai**.*—D.B.*

Trina Turk Opens a New Store in Los Angeles

It has been a few years since Trina Turk had a store in Los Angeles.

But the contemporary designer—known for her bright colors synonymous with sunny California—has staked out a new outpost in the Larchmont Village neighborhood of Los Angeles, where an old-fashioned Main Street vibe permeates Larchmont Boulevard.

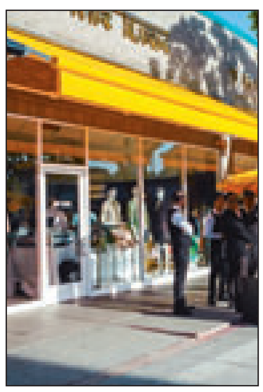
"I like the neighborhood and there is a lot of parking and foot traffic and it is centrally located," Turk said at the March 30 store opening, which was packed with friends, fashionistas and style followers. "I feel like our customer is on this street, where she is going to the nail and hair salons, the fitness studios, and restaurants here."

Bright yellow awnings announce the new Trina Turk store, which previously had been two separate stores—**Hans Custom Optik**, an optical store, and **Pickett Fences**, a childrenswear store. They both moved to other locations on the street.

Inside the store, there is plenty of space for the Trina Turk collection as well as its sister brand, **Mr. Turk**, designed by Turk's husband, Jonathan Skow, a photographer and stylist. Only five of the 12 Trina Turk stores carry the Mr. Turk line, which is for the man who wants to make a bold statement with his style. There are also spaces within spaces for men's and women's accessories and the recently added Trina Turk eyeglass and sunglass collection.

Turk worked with **Bestor Architecture**, which has designed other Trina Turk stores, including her flagship in Palm Springs, Calif.

Turk, whose Los Angeles company was launched in 1995, is a true believer in retail if it provides shoppers a reason to peek beyond the front door.



Outside the new store

Jonathan Skow and Trina Turk

The new 2,000-square-foot space comes nearly two years after she closed her LA outpost on West Third Street because parking had become impossible and traffic congestion was chipping away at sales of her self-named label.*—D.B.*

INDUSTRY FOCUS: FINANCE

How Are Finance People Handling the Weak Retail Market and Have They Adjusted Their Financing Rules for Clothing Manufacturers?

By Deborah Belgum *Senior Editor*

Every day the headlines are filled with news of venerated retail chains cutting back or going bankrupt. Even veteran designer **Ralph Lauren** is not immune to the shifting shopping patterns of consumers who are veering toward online sites to browse for merchandise.

As retailers start shrinking their footprints around the country, apparel manufacturers are wondering how to cope with this constricting retail landscape.

Should they produce less? Should they be more cautious when striking deals with stores, and how do they protect themselves from not getting paid?

Many rely on their factors to check out the financial health of the retailers who have placed orders with them. With so many retailers having a hard time getting shoppers through the doors, the *California Apparel News* asked factors and finance-industry experts this question:

Given that so many retailers are going through challenging times, how are you changing your evaluation of retailers to decide whether you will finance the accounts receivables held by your apparel manufacturing clients?

Mark Bienstock, Managing Director, Express Trade Capital

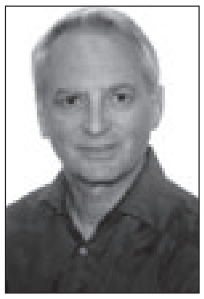
Sydnee Breuer, Executive Vice President, Rosenthal & Rosenthal

Gino Clark, Senior Vice President, Portfolio Manager, Western Region for Capital Business Credit

Rob Greenspan, President and Chief Executive, Greenspan Consult Inc.

Sunnie Kim, Chief Executive and President, Hana Financial

Robert Myers, Chief Commercial Officer, Republic Business Credit



Don Nunnari, Executive Vice President/Regional Manager, Merchant Factors

Dave Reza, Senior Vice President, Western Region, Milberg Factors

Ken Wengrod, President, FTC Commercial Corp.

Mark Bienstock, Managing Director, Express Trade Capital

The retail world as we knew it is over. If the retailer did not invest in an e-commerce portal early on in the cycle, the ability to play catch-up is drawing to a close.

Only those well-established discounters are the winners in the traditional bricks-and-mortar retail landscape. The shopping dynamic has changed from a mall-based experience to a smartphone point-and-click experience.

We are comfortable with the financially sound retailers or e-tailers that are at the forefront of providing the new-world shopping experience. The old world of how our grandparents and parents shopped is going away like the wind.

As a lender, you must be able to change your financing model with the times. Our financing team has positioned us to be able to react timely to any of our clients and prospects' specialized financing requests to satisfy the ever-changing landscape.

Sydnee Breuer, Executive Vice President, Rosenthal & Rosenthal

Many retailers are going through challenging times for sure, but we have not significantly changed our evaluation of them.

What many may perceive as changing is actually just a matter of more retailers struggling financially. This makes us request and look at more detailed information regarding their results and their projections.

For example, the same poor results posted for any given retailer in 2016/2017 would garner the same scrutiny if those results were posted in the boom years of retail.

Negative results are just that; there are just more retailers posting those poor results now than in the 1990s. Keep in mind that part of the equation on whether to finance the accounts receivables and/or additional support is the financial strength of our client and the people involved, taking into account the overall relationship.

Gino Clark, Senior Vice President, Portfolio Manager, Western Region for Capital Business Credit

Capital Business Credit has always taken a disciplined approach when it comes to making credit decisions regardless of market conditions.

This process analyzes a company's liquidity and capital structure. Does a company have enough liquidity to achieve its business plan and pay its bills within terms? Normally we would expect to see a liquidity cushion to mitigate unforeseen events such as last year's LA dock strike.

However, what has become increasingly important is the impact on revenue and gross margin mixes related to an accelerating shift to online retailing and fast retailing.

These trends, coupled with an overexpansion of bricks-and-mortar assets, require us to closely evaluate the ability of management to adopt to the changing landscape—expanding into online retail while potentially closing or revamping stores.

Adaptation to today's changing market conditions requires stockholder support, including the ability to secure new capital, management talent, focus and transparency. It is this type of analysis that makes the relationship between wholesalers/manufacturers and their financiers extremely important in today's economy.

Rob Greenspan, President and Chief Executive, Greenspan Consult Inc.

Many, many retailers have been going through rough times. Retailers have been fighting the online trends as well as the lack of shoppers going into bricks-and-mortar stores.

With the financial collapse of 2008/2009, many retailers just went out of business. Those that survived are to be congratulated, but that is not enough. They have to find a way to not only stay in business and make a profit but also be relevant to their customers.

When advising clients as to whether to take the order, putting goods into work and then ultimately shipping the goods has become a more relevant conversation. Long gone are the days of taking an order, even from a previously viable retailer and assuming it will be paid.

If you use a factor, you need to continue to consult with its retailer credit departments to make sure your customers are still being approved, are not going on a surcharge list or paying slow. All are signs of potential problems. If your factor isn't approving the orders, you should ask your advisers to check the credit community to see if others are still approving the customer or not.

If you find other factors are approving orders and your factor isn't, I suggest a face-to-face meeting to discuss your findings and to push your factor in the right direction to approve those orders. You might have to change factors if yours is not approving enough of your orders.

I have also seen many manufacturers turn to the insurance industry to obtain credit insurance policies for specific customers. In some cases, this might create additional costs to your company, but the policies will allow you to continue to ship your products with credit guarantees. These policies are not as easy to administer as having a factor, but it is manageable.

If credit for your customer is still unavailable, you should contact them about giving their credit card as payment. You can first check to see if the card is valid and there is room on the card for the amount of your order. You might want to consider that you will charge the card 50 percent before you put the goods into work and the balance before shipment.

All in all, the retail environment is challenging, to say the least. Protect yourself by doing your homework, check for alternative sources of credit protections and by staying active in knowing the credit status of your customers. Don't be afraid to ask for payment or credit cards up front. If they want and need your goods, they will pay upfront.

Sunnie Kim, Chief Executive and President, Hana Financial

The metrics of credit evaluation do not necessarily change because the current landscape is challenging. Yes, it is true that there are many retailers under pressure for a multitude of reasons—slumping sales, too many stores or disinterested consumers.

However, this is not a new phenomenon. Economic cycles have been the norm, as we have seen many retail collapses due to the great recession, the dot-com crash, the market bubble and high-interest-rate environments. The automatic reflex would be to tighten policy and become more conservative, but this does not necessarily help our clients nor does it address the overall problem on a macro level.

We are continuing to take the approach of evaluating each credit based upon its own merit in spite of the broader industry. Granted, there are many more accounts on our watch lists, and we are mindful of the need to react more quickly to certain results.

However, the industry will eventually right itself, and everyone will be working with an industry with fewer bricks-and-mortar stores and an increasing online presence.

Robert Myers, Chief Commercial Officer, Republic Business Credit

Factoring companies regularly review their retail customers through both challenging and fruitful cycles. Republic employs a dual strategy during challenging times, ensuring our clients have sufficient borrowing capability through their receivables and inventory as well as seasonal overadvances to support apparel manufacturers.

Typically, some retailers strongly outperform others. Therefore, Republic aims to help our clients understand retailers' unique situation so they can better plan their upcoming season. We review information beyond our extensive underwriting experiences, credit insurance and credit agencies during challenging times. Republic has a significant advantage with the ability to evaluate troubled retailers on a recourse factoring basis, where we can underwrite the available cash of a retailer beyond just their recent profit reports. Despite a retailer losing money, it is more important to understand who is funding the retailer (private equity, bank lenders) along with understanding their excess cash available and its projected duration.

Our company will support apparel manufacturers during challenging times with innovative, flexible and consistent funding solutions, despite what the media may dramatize as the "end of retail."

Finance *Continued from page 3*

Don Nunnari, Executive Vice President/ Regional Manager, Merchant Factors

"Old line" apparel factors have been evaluating the credit worthiness of retailers for many years in the United States.

During these years, the retailers have faced challenges and bankruptcies. Apparel factors continued to provide the expertise of evaluating the credit of the retailers and took the losses if the retailer failed to pay the invoices.

But like any for-profit business, factors have to constantly perfect their expertise and be paid for the risk.

The manufacturing client of the factor expects this level of service, and the factor works very hard to provide it.

I don't believe apparel factors are changing their core principles in evaluating the retailers. Due to mergers and consolidations of retailers, factors are faced with larger credit exposures to certain retailers.

Factors have to be creative to meet this challenge and provide credit coverage for their clients.

Factors in recent years have been imposing surcharges for higher-risk retailers to compensate for the risk. Not always welcomed by the client, most appreciate the fact they are getting their orders approved and financed.

Apparel factors also work directly with retailers to obtain credit information that allows the factor to credit approve and finance the accounts receivables of the manufacturing client to a greater extent than credit insurance companies.

Unlike credit insurance, apparel factors indemnify 100 percent of the factor guaranteed receivable.

Every apparel factor I've worked for was dedicated to evaluating and trying every means to guarantee the credit risk for the manufacturing client. That is what the client is paying for.

Dave Reza, Senior Vice President, Western Region, Milberg Factors

The challenges posed by the soft retail environment require analysis that uses traditional credit benchmarks (i.e., capital, working capital, cash flow, profitability with updated projections, future covenant compliance). We advance on both approved and nonapproved accounts receivables. Of course, nonapproved accounts bear more scrutiny when it comes to funding decisions. Questions such as Is the unapproved amount an overage on an otherwise good credit? Is it a declined account debtor? Is the unapproved amount a meaningful percentage of the total client accounts-receivable base? Could the underlying account debtor be in imminent danger of failure? A factor also has to understand the impact on our client if we cannot advance on the particular accounts receivables. These decisions are not typically black and white.

However, as a privately held factor, Milberg has the advantage of being able to make these decisions on a true "what's good for the client" basis without being encumbered by outside regulatory compliance requirements.

Ken Wengrod, President, FTC Commercial Corp.

Historically, the credit community has based its evaluations on the "five Cs" (character, capacity, capital, collateral and condition of the retailers).

There have been significant shifts in the retail landscape over the last several years. Consumers are purchasing more

Calendar

April 6

"PLM in Action" breakfast presentation by the California Fashion Assocation and Centric Software
Omni Hotel
Los Angeles

Student Fashion Show, presented by FCI
Arts District
Los Angeles

April 7

FIDM Debut Runway Show
Barker Hangar
Santa Monica, Calif.

"The Creative Response to Political Disruption"
Loyola Law School
Los Angeles

April 18

Première Vision Designs
Metropolitan Pavilion
New York
Through April 19

April 19

Kingpins
Westergasfabriek
Amsterdam
Through April 20

April 20

Graduation Show Preview
ArtCenter College of Design
Pasadena, Calif.

April 23

Fashion Market Northern California
San Mateo Event Center
San Mateo, Calif.
Through April 25

April 26

DG Expo Fabric & Trim Show
Crowne Plaza, Dallas Market Center
Dallas
Through April 27

April 27

The Professional Club's Networking Event
Pez Cantina
Los Angeles

Scholarship Awards Luncheon, presented by the California Fashion Foundation and the Textile Association of Los Angeles
California Market Center
Los Angeles

April 30

IFJAG
Stewart Hotel
New York
Through May 3

There's more on ApparelNews.net.

For calendar details and contact information, visit ApparelNews.net/calendar.

Submissions to the calendar should be faxed to the Calendar Editor at (213) 623-5707. Please include the event's name, date, time, location, admission price and contact information. The deadline for calendar submissions is the Tuesday prior to Friday publication. Inclusion in the calendar is subject to available space and the judgment of the editorial staff.

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and more online, and they need to find the merchandise to purchase instantly instead of waiting for it to hit the stores. Also, the recent rise of interest rates has significantly impacted those bricks-and-mortar retailers that overexpanded and burdened themselves with debt due to "cheap money." They are now facing the reality of survival. Many retailers lost their power branding by placing a higher emphasis on setting up off-price stores and lost their cachet on the way.

When premium-denim companies went through the same battle a few years ago, they lost their profits from the core business and eventually shifted their focus to the off-price business. Without a doubt, we will see further reduction of retailers over the next year.

We are experiencing a necessary cleansing in the retail environment. The retailers that have the ability to properly serve their individual markets and offer a more diverse merchandise selection to the consumers will be filtered through the process and survive the cleansing.

Knowing what we know, we will need to analyze additional information from these new retailers before we can make our credit evaluations. There are four Rs in retail ratings. In today's environment, it is critical to use all the Rs and have a strategic partnership with parties from all sides—consumer, retailers and even the suppliers.

Reality: Does the retailer even need to exist? Are they a dinosaur ready to be extinct? What demographics do they serve?

Research: Does the retailer appear to have a competitive edge over its competitors? Are they leaders or are they following the herd? It is imperative for the credit community to actually visit the stores and get a feeling about what's going on?

Reaching Out: Is the retailer reaching out to its customer with social media and carrying the proper merchandise that suits the local market?

Retaining Customers: Is the retailer able to maintain the loyal customer? Retailers can confuse the consumer by constantly switching suppliers. The product has to be consistent.

As to our view on financing the accounts receivables, we still look to the "five Cs" with a strong emphasis on character. How does the owner act when things get tough with their lender and their supply chain? No matter what the financial statements may appear, we may be taking a big risk if the owners don't have strong character.

Collateral of the client is just as important. The creditworthiness of our clients' customers do not automatically equal strong collateral. Big-chain stores with strong credit may have higher deductions and disputes/swapping compared to a smaller retailer with a lower credit score.

As a factor, we would rather support those astute clients who are in tune with the flux of the current market conditions and those who maximize their opportunities in such conditions. It is those businesses owners, who don't need to chase sales to support their overhead, that will do exceptionally well in this market. Their operations are lean and mean and when the market opportunity arises they can maximize their position. ●

NEWS

BCBG

Continued from page 1

American Apparel experience financial troubles after operating too many stores at a time when more shoppers were heading to e-commerce sites to make their purchases.

Most of the BCBG Max Azria stores being shuttered are stand-alone BCBG Max Azria and premium outlet stores, but a handful are **Hervé Leger** stores, a French brand acquired years ago by BCBG Max Azria. The company's 276 stores within stores will continue to operate, and 71 BCBG locations will remain open.

At the shuttered outposts, going-out-of-business sales will conclude on April 30 and are expected to generate $20 million in net revenues, court documents said. The liquidation sales are being conducted by **Hilco Merchant Resources** and **Gordon Brothers**.

In Southern California, BCBG Max Azria outposts destined for the boneyard include the BCBG and Hervé Leger stores on Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills as well as locations at **Del Amo Fashion Center** in Torrance, **Westside Pavilion** in West Los Angeles, **Glendale Galleria**, **The Shops at Mission Viejo**, **La Cumbre Plaza** in Santa Barbara and **Westfield Horton Plaza** in San Diego. A **BCBGeneration** store at the **Westfield Santa Anita** mall will also close. Fifty outlet stores—including five in Northern California—are scheduled for closure.

Southern California locations staying open include stores at the **Beverly Center**, **Santa Monica Place**, **Westfield Fashion Square** in Sherman Oaks, **Plaza El Segundo**, **Fashion Island** in Newport Beach and **Fashion Valley** in San Diego as well as the outlet store at the **Citadel Outlets** near Los Angeles.

BCBG Max Azria Group filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection on Feb. 28 with between $100 million and $500 million in assets and between $500 million and $1 billion in deficits.

As part of its turnaround plan, the company said it would close the bulk of its 191 stores in the United States and dozens of outposts in Europe and Asia.

In addition, the company, founded in 1989 by Max Azria, has been laying off scores of employees. Some 123 workers were let go last November and another 116 were given notice on March 13 that their layoffs would be effective on May 11.

One year ago, Max Azria was relieved of his duties as chief executive officer and replaced by interim CEO Marty Staff.

In early March, Lubov Azria, Max Azria's wife, was ousted as the chief creative officer and replaced by Bernd Kroeber, who had been the vice president of design for BCBGeneration—the company's label for younger consumers.

Max and Lubov Azria have filed a lawsuit against the fashion house, maintaining that Lubov was illegally dismissed and should have received a $7 million golden parachute payout. Lubov Azria's contract included an annual $2.15 million base salary, an $80,000-a-year wardrobe allowance, $3,000 a month for an automobile lease and an annual driver allowance of $50,000.

The Lubovs contend she signed an employment contract guaranteeing her long-time employment that was part of an out-of-court restructuring agreement in 2015 with investors, including affiliates of **Guggenheim Partners Investment Management**. The restructuring agreement reduced the Azrias' 100 percent ownership of the fashion house to 20 percent.

BCBG maintains it is not required to make a $7 million golden parachute payment to Lubov Azria and believes her dismissal was "consistent with the contract's language as well as the sound exercise of business judgment," the company said in court filings.

Guggenheim Partners and affiliates have outstanding loans of more than $324.4 million to BCBG Max Azria and now own 80 percent of the apparel company's common equity. ●

March Tough but Shows Silver Linings

Wall Street analysts saw a glass half full when March retail sales were reported.

Some companies reported double-digit declines in March. A silver lining in the news was that many companies beat Wall Street consensus on their sales performances. They showed improvements from the previous month's business.

Cato Corp., a Charlotte, N.C.–based discount retailer, posted a decline of 21 percent in March. John Cato, the retailer's president and chief executive officer, blamed a late Easter for the decline. "March sales were negatively impacted by the shift of Easter from March last year to April this year. Because of this shift, the best measure for performance is the combined sales for the two months," Cato said in a prepared statement. Easter falls on April 16 this year.

Ken Perkins, president of Boston-area retail analysts **Retail Metrics Inc.**, wrote in an April 6 note that Cato's March performance was actually an improvement from its 25 percent same-store-sales decline in February.

March Retail Sales

	$Sales (in millions)	% Change from yr. ago	Same-store sales % change
The Buckle	$86.80	-10.1%	-10.1%
Cato Corp.	$93.20	-22.0%	-21.0%
L Brands Inc.	$951.40	-7.0%	-10.0%
Zumiez Inc.	$71.70	+4.3%	+1.1%

Information from company reports

Perkins also found improvement in the same-store-sales results of the long-suffering mall retailer **The Buckle Inc.** It posted a same-store-sales decline of 10.1 percent in March. In February, it reported a 23 percent decline. Perkins noted that times remain tough for Buckle. March 2017 is the 21st month in a row of same-store-sales declines for the denim-focused retailer.

March business was not great for **L Brands Inc.**, the parent company for **Victoria's Secret**, **Pink** and **Henri Bendel**. It reported a same-store-sales decline of 10 percent. Perkins, of Retail Metrics, said it was an improvement over February, when L Brands posted a 13 percent decline.

Mall-based action-sports retailer **Zumiez Inc.** posted a same-store-sales increase of 1.1 percent in March. It missed a Wall Street consensus of a 2.8 percent gain, Perkins said. Adrienne Yih, an analyst for **Wolfe Research**, wrote in an April 6 note that Zumiez had its business right. "Average unit retail was up (year over year), indicating a healthy mix from more full-priced selling of apparel goods and less discounting overall for the month of March," Yih said.—*Andrew Asch*

Majors Market *Continued from page 1*

mission filings stated that the retailer had doubts about "the company's ability to continue as a going concern." Jason Hollar, Sears' chief financial officer, later released a statement that the retailer will remain a viable business.

In February, **The Wet Seal** filed for bankruptcy. **Gordon Brothers Group** won a bankruptcy auction for the Wet Seal name in March. Also in February, **Macy's Inc.** announced a 4 percent decline in fourth-quarter sales to $8.5 billion. Same-stores sales were down 2.7 percent during the quarter, which included the crucial holiday season.

Nonetheless, business continued at Majors Market. Buying teams from **Kohl's**, **Stein Mart**, **JC Penney**, **TJ Maxx**, **Ross Stores**, **Macy's**, **Charlotte Russe** and **Dillard's** shopped the market, according to Sue Bhanubandh, the CMC's vice president of leasing. Some showroom owners reportedly saw buying delegations from **Von Maur** and Las Vegas resorts such as **Paris Las Vegas Hotel & Casino**. New York brands **Dollhouse**, **Wallflower** and **Jessica Simpson** exhibited at the market along with Los Angeles–headquartered brands such as **A. Byer**, **YMI** and **Jerry Leigh**, said Brittany Carr, the CMC's director of trade shows and events.

Michael Godigian, vice president of YMI

Majors Market vendors described business as solid to good. However, vendors had to make their own market. "It is a focused market. It's just appointments," Steven Oshatz said. His New York–headquartered company **At Last Sportswear Inc.** showed its new line **Solutions**, which focuses on elevated knits such as "coatigans," or coats with a cardigan-sweater style.

"It was very solid as far as appointments," said David Vered, president of YMI. "The issue is that we are coming off of a soft March. It affected everybody."

However, he forecasted that new styles at the Majors Market will drive the fashion business. "What will drive the business is novelty denim. Basics will continue to do good business, but right now it is fashion, fashion, fashion. We are in a great cycle. It will help business," Vered said.

Showroom owner Alison Budow noticed less traffic at the Majors Market. "It's a different landscape; there are less retailers," she said.

But her **Alison Budow Sales** showroom made a trade-show debut of a new line during the market. **Violet Moon** is a juniors-related sportswear line. Much of the line is manufactured in Los Angeles. With features such as oil wash, mixed-media fabrics and directional prints, the line offers retail price points ranging from $24 to $49. Patricia Welman, a cofounder of Violet Moon, said that current retail strategies of carrying low inventory and lower average prices are not driving heavy retail traffic to bricks-and-mortar stores. There needs to be fashion newness, she said. "We need to give consumers something to buy," Welman said.

Steve Maiman of **Stony Apparel Inc.** said retailers continued to make solid orders. "It's been a consistent market. All of the customers are showing up with a great, going-forward attitude," Maiman said.

Sharon Koshet of the California Market Center's **Sharon Koshet Sales** said that market business was a case of the glass being half full instead of being half empty. "Many stores are continuing to do well," she said. "I'm excited about this year." Koshet has been working in the CMC for 40 years and runs two showrooms in the building. ●

NORMAN ZELLER

Kenneth Cole outfit | AGB sweater, Kaktus shirt, Matty M skirt | AKS shirt, Wild Blue jean | Jolt jacket, Penelope Project tee, Trixxi bralette, Wild Blue jean | Penelope Project sweatshirt and Unionbay jean | Good Luck Gem top and Be Bop pant | Wayf outfit | Ontwelfth sweatshirt, NYTT bralette, Blue Noir pant | Runway Global coat, Wayf bra top, Ontwelfth pant | Teez Her outfit | Band Crush/Just Found sweatshirt, A. Peach skirt | Jou Jou jacket, Jessica Simpson The Warm Up sports bra, Energie pant

Directives West Shines the Spotlight on Major Trends for Fall/Winter 2017

Sweaters with ruffled sleeves, high-waist jeans, graphic tees and long pullover sweaters are up-and-coming trends for clothes worn by juniors in search of fast-fashion merchandise this Fall/Winter season. Strong accent items will be hats and knit caps. Even berets will make a resurgence.

For the contemporary customer, key items center around trophy jackets in the form of dusters, kimonos or leather moto pieces. Tops with statement sleeves incorporating flounces, bell shapes and ruffles will also be important this Fall/Winter season while jumpsuits return with wider legs, modernized denim, textured wovens and silky fabrics.

In the world of better/moderate fashions, the femme blouse with choker necks, cutouts and lace- and mesh-inset accents will make an appearance on the style chart while crafted denim with embroidery, shadow patching, fraying, embellishments, studs and stones will be must-have items for the shopper who wants to update her blue-jeans wardrobe.

Those were just some of the looks seen on the runway at the April 3 trend forecast organized by buying office **Directives West**. The semiannual forecast, packed with buyers in town for the **LA Majors Market**, was held at the Fashion Theater at the **California Market Center**.

Shelda Hartwell-Hale, the company's vice president, introduced the trend show and told retailers and buyers they have to keep pressing forward "to innovate and be proactive, looking at all the developments happening in social influences."

She noted that technology is part of the conversation as well as staying in tune with customers' needs. "The consumer continues to evolve and we have to evolve with them," Hartwell-Hale said. Her advice for keeping in touch with shoppers was communication, engagement and experience.

The hourlong presentation featured 181 looks that spanned categories ranging from contemporary and misses to juniors and childrenswear.

Boho looks are still prevalent but this season—just add a dash of flower power to prints for dresses and skirts that will be as popular as ever.

Another popular trend for all age groups were faux furs in all kinds of silhouettes—vests, jackets and coats as well as trim on denim jackets and shoulder wraps.

Velvet was a principal fabric seen across the board in loungewear, pants and skirts. And denim was strong in all categories with skinny-leg jeans continuing to survive inroads from flare pants and baggy volumes showing up in several looks. Two-toned jeans and uneven hems have been worn by pioneer trendsetters, but they are becoming part of the mainstream look. A whole denim-on-denim trend is taking over with lots of denim coats and dresses over denim pants or denim jackets paired with denim pants.

With athleisure dominating the fashion headlines these days, there was a touch of the retro athletic style with striped track pants, fashion hoodies, skin-baring layers and oversized sweatshirts. Think bright colors, chevron touches and piping.

Edgy styles were highlighted in a category called "Rock Goddess." There are lots of reinvented leathers, high-shine fabrics such as gold and silver lamé seen in baseball jackets and bomber jackets, and shiny studs and embellishments on pants and tops.—*Deborah Belgum*

Bomber Jackets Down, Denim Up, Fields Says

The once-ubiquitous bomber jacket is trending down. Expect to see it overtaken by denim jackets and the military fatigue-like "utility" jackets.

That's one forecast of Fall 2017 juniors styles. The predictions came from the **Barbara Fields Buying Office**. Barbara Fields, the company's founder, ran a series of seminars on Fall '17 style in her office at the **California Market Center** showroom building in downtown Los Angeles. The seminars ran April 3–5.

Fields has been conducting trend-forecasting seminars for more than 30 years. But at the recent seminar series, she introduced a new way of breaking down a wide range of juniors fashions in her forecasts. She recommended dividing up store space with certain percentages devoted to styles in a certain category.

For denim bottoms, retailers should devote 25 percent of their denim space to destructed denim, for example; 15 percent to "butt lifter" denim; 10 percent to embroidery; and 10 percent to jeggings.

Fields distributed flyers bearing store percentage breakdowns. For woven tops, Fields recommended 15 percent of store space devoted to cold shoulder, or tops where fabric does not cover shoulders; 5 percent to woven tops featuring pleating; and 10 percent to velvet tops.

She also suggested reserving floor space for T-shirts, sweaters, activewear, jackets, skirts and dresses.

Among Fields' other fashion forecasts:

Barbara Fields speaks at her seminar for Fall '17 trends.

Denim with camouflage prints and denim featuring details such as zippers around the garment are forecast to be big sellers. Important colors for the season will be pink, mauve and gray. Lace fabric will be important. Tops and dresses with "lace-up" strips of fabric will be popular, as will be sweatshirts. Fields said that bodysuits are doing well in retail but their performance is nothing remarkable.

When asked on remedies for retail's current woes, Fields explained that trends are exhausted to the point of saturation. "Everyone is doing the same thing," she said.

To beat retail blues, she recommended the following: "Go for uniqueness. You've got to be fresh. You got to have the new," she said.

After a week of consulting, Fields will continue her quest for the new. On April 7, she traveled to London to resume her trend research.—*Andrew Asch*

LAmade Among Brands Selected for Target's LA25 Initiative

Fashion basics company **LAmade** was one of the brands selected to be featured in **Target**'s LA25 initiative. The company has created a collection called **LAmade for Target**, which will debut this month in 25 Southern California stores including Aliso Viejo, Anaheim Hills, Brea, Carson, Culver City, Culver City South, Irvine, Long Beach, Manhattan Beach, North Hollywood, Norwalk, Pasadena, Pasadena East, Rancho Santa Margarita, Redondo Beach, San Pedro, Seal Beach, Torrance, Tustin, Valencia, West Covina, West Hollywood, Westminster, Whittier and Woodland Hills.

To get the word out about the partnership, LAmade is working with several bloggers, including BE. By Brittaney Elise (@*brittaneyelise*), Stephanie Escobar (@*stephanieescobar_*), Hustle + Halcyon's Payton Sartain (@*paytonsartain*) and Kangthropologie's Linda Kang (@*kangthropologie*).

Target's LA25

The project is part of LA25, Target Corp.'s initiative to try out new "enhancements and innovations" to see their effect on consumer experience and sales. Target selected 25 Los Angeles–area stores as a test market for new in-store features. According to a company statement, "Consumers want a great in-store experience featuring the latest in on-demand shopping. That means fast access to products, helpful team members, and easy-to-use online and mobile options."

Changes include new, more-modern sales floors with fixtures and signage, with the front of the stores serving as a showcase for new products and trends.

Stores also added a Beauty Concierge and Baby Advisors to help answer questions about products. There are digital-service ambassadors to help customers use the company's digital channels, such as the Target mobile app and Cartwheel, as well as help with in-store pickups. In the Home department, Target styles products together in vignette settings to help shoppers imagine how the products will look at home.

Target is also looking at ways to use RFID (radio-frequency identification) technology to help consumers find the products quickly. And the store is exploring more pickup and delivery options such as curbside pickup.

—*Alison A. Nieder*

Pooltradeshow to Produce New York Shows

After a 16-year run as a one-city show, **Pooltradeshow** announced that it will produce a biannual New York show in addition to its Las Vegas shows.

Pool, owned by **UBM**, the trade-show company that also runs the sprawling Las Vegas shows **MAGIC** and **Project**, announced that Pool will produce trade shows May 7–9 at the **Jacob Javits Center** in New York City. Another show is scheduled for Sept. 17–19, said Jason Peskin, who was recently named Pool's show director.

"For years, brands have been asking us to do a New York show. The reason is because a lot of startup East Coast brands really want to be at Pool but sometimes don't have the capital to travel to Vegas. Or they just don't want to take the risk on a show outside their area," Peskin said.

"In New York, there has been no show quite like ours with regards to the combination of more-affordable turnkey booth packages, our coaching style of customer service and proximity to larger shows like **Accessorie Circuit** and **Coterie**." He forecast that 50 vendors would exhibit at the May show and 75 would exhibit at the September show.

Ronda Walker started Pool in 2001 in a Las Vegas hotel. The event was focused on emerging brands and was a satellite show to MAGIC. Pool's independent spirit captured attention of retailers and other trade-show producers. In August 2005, it was acquired by then MAGIC owner **Advanstar Communications Inc.** for $3 million.

—Andrew Asch

Upscale Offprice Show Boulevard Prêt-à-Sale Planning to Expand to Women's for Second Run

The inaugural run of **Boulevard Prêt-à-Sale**, the upscale off-price trade show, showcased a tightly curated mix of 70 upscale menswear brands and drew buyers from **Barneys New York**, **Bloomingdale's**, **Century 21**, **Tiger Trading**, **Harry Rosen**, **Steinmart**, **TJX Co.**, **Burlington**, **Ross Stores** and **Nordstrom Rack**.

The show was held March 21–23 in the glass-enclosed River Pavilion at the **Javits Center**, overlooking New York's Hudson River.

"We had three beautiful days. The sun was coming through the glass. We had a deejay playing jazz," said Arnold Zimberg, who founded the show with his brother Bruce Zimberg. "It was a wild, chill, beautiful experience. And everybody did a lot of business."

The two longtime apparel-industry veterans launched the show, which is produced by trade-show giant **Messe Frankfurt**, to serve an untapped niche in the market for high-end offprice merchandise.

"The purpose of the show is to introduce to exhibitors the retailers that they normally could not get on the phone or get an audience with," Bruce Zimberg said.

The ambiance at Boulevard Prêt-à-Sale was low-key but productive, Arnold Zimberg said.

"It's not the typical show where you see streams of people in aisles and you don't know if they're buyers or friends or bringing lunch," he said. "Because this show is invite-only, anybody walking around is a legitimate buyer. It's the type of a show that you can sit in your booth and all of a sudden Barneys walks in. Then Bloomingdale's. That's what this show was about."

The Zimbergs took care to select the right mix of exhibitors for the launch, which included **Daniel Hechter**, **J. Lindeberg**, **Robert Comstock**, **Michael Stars**, **Bill's Khakis**, **Pico Manufacturing**, **7 Diamonds**, **Jet Lag**, **Ballin**, **Mundi of Westport** accessories and **Grigio**, a shirting company from Italy.

The Zimbergs met with exhibitors before the show to determine what they hoped to get from the show. They did the same with key retailers. Armed with this information, the two made introductions and facilitated networking during the three-day trade show.

"[Some] exhibitors wanted to meet people like Barneys and Bloomingdale's. Others [wanted] see Burlington, TJ and Ross," Arnold Zimberg said. "You can't get those guys on the phone. But to see the owner of Century 21 at the show with his team, that means serious business."

Prêt-à-Sale will return to the Javits Center in the fall for an Oct. 17–19 run that will also include women's brands. The Zimbergs said they anticipate the show will remain exclusive with about 85 or 90 brands, primarily menswear with a selection of key women's sportswear labels as well.

"We want to have it manageable so all these brands can see all the attendees. Nobody gets lost," Arnold Zimberg said. "The future isn't to have a show open your doors and have a free-for-all. Those days are gone. This is the future of the business."—*Alison A. Nieder*

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