

# CALIFORNIA Apparel News

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## DESIGNER DEBUT

Graduating students from the Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising in Los Angeles displayed their design prowess in a runway show held at Barker Hangar in Santa Monica, Calif., as guests celebrated the achievements of the new designers. For more from the show, see page 6.

VOLKER CORELL

## AST Sportswear Takes Over Where American Apparel Left Off

By Deborah Belgum *Executive Editor*

When **American Apparel** went bankrupt and laid off some 3,500 employees last year, another company was waiting in the wings to take over the title of the largest vertically integrated T-shirt venture in the United States.

While not as large as American Apparel, **AST Sportswear** likes to boast that it does everything “from dirt to shirt” when making T-shirts and its other array of products. For several years, AST Sportswear concentrated on doing its cutting and sewing in-house, but it stepped into American Apparel’s shoes when it took over American Apparel’s knitting facility in Carson, Calif., and its dyeing and finishing facility in Hawthorne, Calif.

By adding those two facilities, AST Sportswear—a giant of a company in Orange County, Calif.—inherited the title of the largest vertically integrated T-shirt maker in the United States. But that, perhaps, is where the similarities stop.

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## Rodeo Drive Keeps Its Retail Luster With Recent Deal

By Andrew Asch *Retail Editor*

Vacancy is common for most retail streets under attack from e-commerce competitors, but not Rodeo Drive. There is hardly a vacant space on the hoity-toity retail shopping district in Beverly Hills, Calif. When real-estate news is made on the street, it makes a splash.

That was seen when the French luxury conglomerate **LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton Inc.** paid \$110 million for a two-story white building at 456 N. Rodeo Drive, next to a **Ralph Lauren** flagship. That puts the price for the 6,200-square-foot building at \$17,750 a square foot.

The Paris-headquartered entity is the parent company of some very high-end brands, including Louis Vuitton, **Givenchy**, **Christian Dior**, **Céline**, **Fendi** and **Marc Jacobs**. It already runs boutiques for six of its brands on the street, but the company hasn’t disclosed its plans for its recent acquisition.

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# Levi Strauss Shows Strong First-Quarter Revenue Gains

Levi Strauss & Co., that venerable denim brand founded in San Francisco in 1853, has been on a revenue roll recently as it diversifies its products and targets the international market for growth.

The company reported on April 10 that its first-quarter revenues jumped 22 percent from the same period last year to \$1.3 billion. How-

ever, the denim brand had a net loss of \$19 million due to a \$136-million provisional noncash tax change due to the recently enacted federal tax cut. But adjusted net income nearly doubled in the first quarter to \$117 million compared with last year.

"We had a great start to the year, and our strategies are clearly working," said Chip

Bergh, the company's president and chief executive.

The company predicts that 2018 revenues will grow by 6 percent to 8 percent, with a trade war and tariffs putting a damper on a more optimistic outlook. "Trade and tariffs could have significant short-term impacts," Bergh said.

The Levi's brand saw 17 percent sales growth in all categories while the **Dockers** brand declined slightly. For the lower-priced **Signature** and **Denizen** labels, revenues were up 30 percent in the first quarter as women's sales overtook men's.

The Levi's women's business jumped 28 percent, with skinny jeans and high-waisted silhouettes bestsellers.

Direct-to-consumer revenues—which include retail stores and e-commerce—grew 24 percent based on an expanding retail network as the company opened 22 stores during the first quarter with a total of 100 new stores planned for this year.

During the fourth quarter of last year, Levi's relaunched its store in the SoHo district of Manhattan. By the end of this year, it will open a new flagship store in New York City's Times Square neighborhood at 1535 Broadway, replacing the 10-year-old flagship store located at 1501 Broadway.

Last month, Levi's opened its first Latin American flagship store, located in the historic district of Mexico City on Madero Street.

Bergh said the company has been on a trajectory to offer more-diverse products, expand more into international markets and invest more in marketing and direct-to-consumer expansion. Offering women more tops to buy with graphic elements has been a winning strategy.

Revenues in the Americas—which include the United States and Latin America—were up 14 percent to \$657 million. "This is the best quarter the Americas region has seen in recent history," said Harmit Singh, the company's chief financial officer.

Europe was one of the hot spots with revenue in the first quarter jumping 46 percent over last year to \$453 million. "The business continues to go from strength to strength, driven by marketing," Singh said.

China made up less than 5 percent of Levi's revenues, but the company still has its eye on the market despite last year closing 150 of the unprofitable franchise retailers operating as stores within department stores.

The company is optimistic about the cost savings its new Project F.L.X. will deliver once it is fully operational on a global basis by 2020. Announced earlier this year, the program uses lasers instead of manual technology to fade jeans. Lasers can reduce the time it takes to distress a pair of blue jeans from two to three pairs an hour to 90 seconds a garment.

—Deborah Belgium

## Liberty Acquires Capsule Trade Show

Liberty Fashion & Lifestyle Fairs announced it acquired the **Capsule** trade show from **Reed Exhibitions** for an undisclosed amount.

Sam Ben-Avraham, Liberty's founder, said the acquisition would make for a stronger trade show business and pool resources for buyers.

"Bringing the Capsule show under the Liberty Fairs Fashion Group umbrella creates an even stronger platform for all of our shows. We are always thinking about the future, about what's coming, how we create the right thing to satisfy our core audience and also attract new eyes to what we are doing. Together we will have more opportunities to serve the fashion space and also build our network of influencers and experiment with some direct-to-consumer efforts," he said in a statement.

For several years, Liberty, which started out as a menswear trade show, and Capsule have exhibited adjacent to each other at the **Sands Expo and Convention Center** in Las Vegas. At the February show, Liberty, Capsule and Agenda collaborated on **Assembly**, a two-day conference with speakers and workshops. Agenda remains with Reed Exhibitions, which acquired Capsule in 2014 for an undisclosed amount.

Stephen Savage, Liberty's president, said

that select Capsule staff will join Liberty. For the time being, the entities will hold their scheduled shows. Capsule runs biannual shows in New York, Las Vegas and Paris. It discontinued a Los Angeles show, which last ran in March 2017. Liberty runs biannual shows in Las Vegas and New York City.

Capsule was created by New York-based consultancy **BPMW** in 2007 and stages 10 men's and women's shows annually in New York, Paris and Las Vegas. A Berlin edition was shuttered two years ago. Its focus has been on fashion-forward brands and a significant women's business.

Liberty started in 2013 as a menswear, denim and sportswear show. Vince Gonzales, a veteran Liberty exhibitor, said that putting the two shows under the same company would benefit both shows. "It will bring more foot traffic. It will bring together different kinds of buyers," he said.

Sharifa Murdock, a Liberty co-owner, said the shows will remain separate.

"With this acquisition, Liberty and Capsule will largely stay focused in their existing directions. Show goes can expect to see similar brands on the show floor as in seasons past," she said.—Andrew Asch

## Unifi Buys National Spinning Co.

**Unifi Inc.**, known for its synthetic and recycled yarns, has agreed to buy the dyed-yarn business and assets of **National Spinning Co.** Both are located in North Carolina.

The purchase is expected to enhance Unifi's position as a leading producer of dyed staple and filament yarn in the region and will add acrylic and wool products to the company's dyed-yarn portfolio. The transaction is expected to be completed in May.

National Spinning's dyed-yarn business, now located in Burlington, N.C., will be shifted to Unifi's dye house in Reidsville, N.C., where it will operate on a seven-day schedule. This allows the company to de-

liver on quick lead times and enhance the response to customers' needs.

National Spinning's sales, technical and operations personnel will join Unifi as employees, and the company will also extend employment to other National Spinning workers.

National Spinning was founded in 1921 with roots in worsted wool spinning and dyeing. After being a publicly traded company in the 1960s and 1970s, it became an employee-owned operation in the 1990s.

Unifi is known for its recycled performance fibers such as **Repreve** for clothing, shoes and home goods.—D.B.

## RETAIL SALES

### Easter Shopping Boosted March Sales

Retail sales for March faced some obstacles this year, but they came in better than expected.

Ken Perkins, president of Boston-based **Retail Metrics**, announced that U.S. retail sales rose 8.1 percent at the retailers followed by his company after he initially forecast that sales would rise only 5.5 percent.

Cold weather in March across much of the United States was bad news for retailers selling Spring clothes, Perkins said, but an early Easter came to the rescue. This year, Easter was celebrated on April 1, compared to last year, when it took place on April 16.

"The weather was a headwind, but the holiday was a stronger tailwind," said Jeff Van Sinderen, an analyst for financial services firm **B. Riley & Co.** He forecast that April numbers will decline because many shoppers wrapped up their shopping in March. Many retailers consider Easter business to be so significant to March and April sales that they encourage investors to count both months' results together.

One of the big winners for March sales was **Zumiez Inc.**, the mall-based action-sports retail chain. Its same-store sales increased 12.6 percent in March. Retail Metrics forecasted

that Zumiez's sales would rise 4.2 percent. Perkins noted that March results came at the end of 13 months of consecutive positive monthly comp gains.

Long-suffering value retailer **Cato Corp.** posted a 6 percent jump in March. John Cato,

#### March Retail Sales

	\$Sales (in millions)	% Change from yr. ago	Same-store sales % change
<b>The Buckle</b>	\$82.30	-5.2%	-1.1%
<b>Cato Corp.</b>	\$96.90	+4.0%	+6.0%
<b>L Brands Inc.</b>	\$1,020.00	+7.0%	+4.0%
<b>Zumiez Inc.</b>	\$82.30	+14.7%	+12.6%

Information from company reports

the retailer's chairman, president and chief executive officer, forecast that the holiday calendar shift would take away from April sales. "We expect April same-store sales to be in the high, negative single digits and the combined two months' same-store sales to be in the low negative single digits," he said in a statement.

**L Brands**, the parent company of **Victoria's Secret**, reported a 4 percent increase in same-store sales. Denim-focused retailer **The Buckle** posted a dip in same-store sales, -1.1 percent, for March.—A.A.

# Trade Shows

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# The World's Smallest Shoe Factory Introduced to FIDM Students

By Dorothy Crouch Associate Editor

Since its launch in 2003, shoe brand **Keen Footwear** has sought to change the market and become a force for good in the world. It is famous for its "Newport" sandal—an active footwear style designed with a reinforced toe—and it continues to search for new innovations.

Keen's most recent project has been working with **Uneekbot**, called "The World's Smallest Shoe Factory." Over a two-year period, the machine was developed by a 17-year-old engineer named Oscar Williamson and programmed by **House of Design**, a robotics system-integration company in Idaho.

At a cost of \$300,000 per machine, Keen invested in three Uneekbots—located in Japan and at the company's headquarters in Portland, Ore., with a third being built for the Netherlands location. On April 10, the

factured in sizes 5.5–9.5 for women and 8–12.5 for men.

Keen's executives are excited about Uneekbot's potential, but there are still some challenges. According to Brown, Keen's owner, Rory Fuerst, is known throughout the company as a leader who challenges his team and is fascinated by innovation in manufacturing. With a tentative goal of moving forward with new Uneekbot-manufactured designs within one year, Brown is realistic regarding the obstacles when working with the machine.

"If a cord is just twisted a little bit, the robots are very sensitive to the tension of the cords. So if the tension is not 100 percent correct, it could throw the machine off a little bit," he said.

The company produces its soles at a Keen-owned factory in

Brown explained. With the Uneekbot, Keen's team hopes to further automate the process to make shoes.

With the Uneekbot completing 80 percent of the shoe, the remaining 20 percent must be completed by hand. Despite the decrease in the amount of hands required to manufacture each pair of shoes, there will still be opportunities to increase jobs through finishing, machine maintenance and production management.

The Keen collaboration with FIDM started with Owen reaching out to arrange a Uneekbot stop at the campus. The tour has also included visits to the **University of California, San Diego; University of Southern California; University of California, Irvine; and Stanford.**

Eva Gilbert, who is FIDM's department chair for merchandising and marketing, believed her production-and-sourcing students would benefit from learning more about Keen's work with Uneekbot, which fits perfectly into their curriculum.

"They start out in the class taking a picture out of a magazine, and they have to source every component," she said. "They have to find the material, they have to find the labor, and they have to find the boxes and the bags and the hangers."

While Keen wanted to reveal its exciting new manufacturing venture through tours, the company also is interested in finding innovative college students. At stops along the tour, Keen is offering internships available only to students whom they meet during the company's campus visits. Ultimately, Keen will choose five to seven students to join its team during the summer of 2019.

The students who apply must design their own internships, outlining what they can bring to the company during their time at Keen. The internships will pay above minimum wage, with Keen covering housing costs.

In addition to the internship, Keen is hosting a design competition only for students of FIDM and **Pacific Northwest College of Art** in Portland. As

the Keen team explores its shoe-making possibilities with the Uneekbot, it wants students to think about how they would design products using the machine. The first-place winner will receive \$1,000 and a trip to the company's headquarters to present the design, with an \$800 second-place prize and \$400 for the third-place award, which also will include designs being showcased and promoted by Keen.

One of Keen's latest goals was to increase the recycling rate of its excess materials, which went from 55 percent to 84 percent after one month. As a company committed to producing minimal waste, Keen has found unique ways to partner with other organizations to reduce excess materials that would otherwise end up in a landfill.

"All this extra cord is donated," Owen said. "We found the **Girl Scouts** could take it and can use it for tying knots and practicing." ●



FIDM students observe the Uneekbot demonstration



Uneekbot creating a shoe



Keen Footwear's Scott Owen and FIDM's Eva Gilbert

Thailand. Its paracord is also made in Thailand, but the company's project manager, Scott Owen, revealed the goal

is to eventually find sources that are located within the vicinity of each robot and can provide materials to regional Keen locations.

"It's [Uneekbot] really here to showcase a minimalist design and really trying to utilize all the materials for the shoe and not have any waste," Brown said. "That is key regarding why we're using a robot. We're also trying to bring manufacturing back to the U.S."

One of Keen's most common shoe-manufacturing resources is its DESMA direct-attachment, injection-mold machine, which molds the shoe's outsole around an upper,



Uneekbot inside of its solar-powered trailer

company arrived at the **Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising** in downtown LA as part of its nationwide tour introducing Uneekbot to schools and companies aboard a solar-powered trailer.

"Ultimately what we would like to be able to do is have the machine in the store. The customer comes in, punches in the colors that they want, the size, the style and sits there and waits eight minutes for a pair of shoes," said Chris Brown, design director of outdoor performance for Keen Footwear. "It's like an automated vending machine."

The dual-arm robot is able to manufacture one pair of Uneek sandals in eight minutes by knitting paracord through a rubber sole. The Uneek slide sandal design being manufactured that day at FIDM will not be sold in stores, but the company is providing pairs for students to try. This exclusive tour style most closely resembles Uneek's "Monochrome," a men's design that retails at \$100 and also features a heel and side wing not found on the Uneekbot-created shoes manu-

# Gen Z Prefers '90s Brands in the Age of Instagram

This year, teens in the United States spent 38 percent of their shopping time at traditional department and specialty stores—down 3 percent from last year—while 19 percent of their shopping time was spent online compared with 17 percent last year. **Amazon.com** retained its position as the top online marketplace for teens.

Those were some of the findings from the 35th semi-annual "Taking Stock With Teens" survey, conducted by investment bank **Piper Jaffray**, which surveyed the spending habits of 6,000 members of Generation Z, whose average age was 16.

Piper Jaffray found that teens' overall spending since last fall increased 6 percent—but 2 percent when compared with spring 2017. Thirty-eight percent of teen spending is devoted to clothing, shoes and accessories. Video-game spending was up 14 percent from last year while beauty purchases grew 4 percent.

With an annual contribution of \$830 billion, Generation Z generates 7 percent of retail sales within the United States. Teenagers estimated their own spending at \$2,600 a year.

As the return to 1990s fashion continues, interest in athletic apparel and streetwear is also growing, evident in growth at brands that dominated that era, includ-

ing **Adidas**—now the third-favorite clothing brand; **Vans**—which stands as the No. 2 favorite footwear label; and **Champion**, which recently launched a sneaker line. In addition to these labels, streetwear brand **Supreme** secured the seventh-favorite apparel brand spot.

Though it retained the top position as the No. 1 favorite apparel brand, **Nike** experienced a decrease in mindshare, dropping to 23 percent from 31 percent in Spring 2017. With its move into the top three, Adidas doubled its mindshare from 3 percent to 6 percent as a top clothing brand. Despite Adidas's impressive position, Vans experienced an increase from 9 percent to 16 percent in the footwear category.

In addition to the decline of Nike, **Ralph Lauren** fell to number 12 in the survey, making this the first time the brand was not listed in the top ten since the study began in 2002.

While the report showed **Facebook** engagement stabilizing with 45 percent of those surveyed using the site within the past month, 83 percent of teens used **Snapchat** and 82 percent have been on **Instagram**. Teens admit that Instagram is the best method for branding.

Of the teens surveyed, 55 percent were male and 45 percent were female with an average household income of \$66,300.—D.C.

Top Clothing Brands		Top Handbag Brands	
1 Nike	23%	1 Michael Kors	28%
2 American Eagle	10%	2 Kate Spade	17%
3 Adidas	6%	3 Coach	14%
4 Forever 21	5%	4 Gucci	9%
5 Urban Outfitters	5%	5 Louis Vuitton	7%
Top Footwear Brands		Top Shopping Websites	
1 Nike	42%	1 Amazon	44%
2 Vans	16%	2 Nike	6%
3 Adidas	14%	3 American Eagle	4%
4 Converse	4%	4 Urban Outfitters	3%
5 DSW	3%	5 Forever 21	3%

SOURCE: PIPER JAFFRAY



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## SURF REPORT

# One Round of Surf M&A Over, Round Two Begins

Billabong International's last day of trading on the Australian Securities Exchange was April 9, bringing an end to a major round of acquisitions in the surfwear market.

Last month, Billabong shareholders approved a merger with **Boardriders Inc.**, the parent company of Billabong's former rival **Quiksilver**, headquartered in Huntington Beach, Calif.

The merger will create the world's leading action-sports company with sales to 7,000 wholesale customers in more than 110 countries, e-commerce in 35 countries and more than 630 retail stores in 28 countries, Boardriders said.

But the wave of surf acquisitions and mergers is not over with two major surf brands—**Volcom** and **Rip Curl**—up for sale.

On April 6, **Kering**, Volcom's parent company, announced it had started the process of selling the Costa Mesa, Calif.-headquartered brand, but there has been no word on a buyer yet.

Australian-headquartered brand **Rip Curl** reportedly has been exploring a sale since last year. Rumors reported in early April by the Australian media said that a Sydney-based family had acquired the brand. However, no one has stepped forward to confirm the story. Rip Curl runs a U.S. division in Costa Mesa.

This wave of acquiring surf brands hasn't been this active since eight years ago, when Billabong went on a buying spree, acquiring brands and retailers including **RVCA**, **Element**, **Dakine**, **Becker Surf & Sport**, **Sector 9** and **West 49**.

More than a decade ago, brands were sold for what many now consider inflated prices, said Joel Cooper, a career surf executive who currently works as chief executive officer of **Lost International** and serves as a senior adviser to the board of directors of the **Surf Industry Manufacturers Association**.

"History has shown that the surf market is cyclical," he said. The days of ridiculously high valuations are over. The days of gloom and doom are over, too."

While many Billabong shareholders felt the company's sale was lowballed at \$1.50 per share, Cooper said that the two surf rivals will be better sourced and capitalized under one roof.

In a February 20 research note previewing the Billabong sale, Jeff Harbaugh, an analyst on action-sports business, also forecast the two companies would save money from a merger. But that didn't mean pressure on the surf giants would be relieved overnight. "Certainly the synergies matter, and there will be some. The



A Volcom hoodie

question is whether the opportunities of two companies in the same tough market improve just because you put them together," wrote Harbaugh, president of **Jeff Harbaugh & Associates**.

Patrik Schmidle, president of market-research group **ActionWatch**, said the sales and consolidation of surf companies have been in the works for a while.

"Whenever you have a stagnant or declining market combined with a lack of differentiation, a lack of innovation and many brands competing for share in a shrinking market, that is a recipe for consolidation," he wrote in an email. "With declining sales numbers for many years in the core surf channel, the current wave of acquisitions has become somewhat inevitable."

But the surf category may continue to navigate choppy waters. "A key component to a strong surf market is a healthy core retail channel, and we are pretty far away from having that," he added.

But there are positive signs. In February, retailers followed by the ActionWatch panel saw positive year-over-year growth for the first time in a year. Many in the surf world hope that a new generation of people will develop an interest in surfing and surfwear, Schmidle said.

Positive factors include surfing will be an official sport in the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo, and ventures including **Kelly Slater Wave Co.** are hoping to build artificial-wave parks in areas that aren't near the ocean, popularizing the surf lifestyle in new territories.—*Andrew Asch*

## Calendar

**April 15**

**Fashion Market Northern California**  
San Mateo Event Center  
San Mateo, Calif.  
Through April 17

**April 19**

**Marcum Retail Symposium**  
JW Marriott  
Los Angeles

**April 22**

**Arizona Apparel, Accessories,**

**Shoes & Gift Show**

Phoenix Convention Center  
Phoenix  
Through April 24

**April 25**

**DG Expo Fabric & Trim Show**  
Dallas Market Center  
Dallas  
Through April 26

**April 26**

**2018 Graduation Fashion Show**  
Academy of Art University

San Francisco

**May 3**

**TPC's Spring Networking Event**  
Pez Cantina  
Los Angeles

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on [ApparelNews.net](http://ApparelNews.net).

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# LA Fashion's Next Generation From FIDM Shows Off Their Creations

By Dorothy Crouch Associate Editor

Shifting focus from aircraft to artistry, **Barker Hangar** in Santa Monica, Calif., was the scene of the **Debut Runway Show**, an annual event that allows selected graduating students from the **Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising** in downtown Los Angeles to showcase their collections.

The April 7 event was emceed by FIDM alumnus and fashion designer Nick Verreos.

The show began with a presentation of projects from seven students in the Advanced Theatre Costume Design program—Katie Chesne, Viviana Gil Barrios, Katherine Hoang, Melissa Karsh, Ethan Lieberman, Enrique Solana and Taylor York—who adhered to the theme of “Kings and Queens: Court Me!”

Models on the runway dressed in costumes inspired by “Camelot,” “The Three Musketeers,” Napoleon Bonaparte’s France and “King Lear” and acted out dramatic scenes that told stories from these tales as the video backdrop depicted enchanted forests and European landscapes.

Showcasing the collaborative work between students from the Fashion Design, Interior Design and Textile Design programs, Charing Styles revealed the work of 10 groups, each comprising one designer from the three departments. Using fabrics provided by **Textile Express**, each project featured textile, chair and fashion designs that were created by the students. Each chair design was made into a usable piece by a manufacturing partner, a group that included **Form + Function**, **Cisco Brothers**, **Wise Living Inc.**, **Magni Home Collection**, **Sardo Interior Services**, **Michael Taylor Designs Inc.**, **Vitality Furniture**, **Haute House**, **Janifer Janniere** and **Quintus**.

With a soundtrack that included “Boom Boom Room” by Totsy, Sofi Tukker’s “Best Friend,” “A Different Way” by DJ Snake and a reworked version of Marilyn Monroe’s “Diamonds Are a Girl’s Best Friend,” FIDM’s Advanced Study Fashion Design students unveiled bright, colorful sportswear; chic resortwear; playful children’s designs and elegant—yet modern—formalwear.

Naming his collection “Hello, Sailor,” FIDM Merit Scholarship recipient Taneë Prasert designed naval-inspired party and formalwear, including a knee-length, blue-and-white-striped sheath dress with an anchor appliqué in red sequins on the front, sparkling red epaulettes and a draped back.

FIDM Merit Scholarship recipient Ting Wang was inspired by the colors from within the **Museum of Ice Cream** to create her men’s and women’s sportswear line, which included hues of bright yellow and deep blue, as seen in her sparkling sapphire and white bias-cut tea-length dress with tulle underlay and

strapless sweetheart neckline.

For John and Victoria Hill Scholarship, Jerry Epstein Scholarship and Debut Scholarship recipient Charity Dahl, athleisure and comfort were the focus of her collection, which included a knee-length red patent-leather coat with round cutouts secured with grommets and a belted waist.

Focusing on knitwear, Emiko Terasaki, who received the Rose Morbit Bolognone Scholarship, wanted to generate a new appreciation for knit pieces, which inspired styles including a full-length A-line halter dress with a black-and-white wavy pattern at the bust and red, black, white and gray skirt.

Using the sunset to inspire her color scheme, FIDM Merit Scholarship recipient Aurora Ziqiao Luo created a line of childrenswear made for fun and comfort, such as a knee-length yellow sheath dress with a pig-face illustration, which she also made in her own size to wear as she walked down the runway with a little model who wore the chil-

dren’s version.

Presenting a luxury line of beachwear, Kiki Potterton—recipient of the Jack and Joan Bonholtzer Scholarship and Bob Mackie Scholarship—was inspired by her honeymoon in Jamaica, leading her to design pieces such as a black two-piece swimsuit with gold chain and beaded strand overlay in the back, paired with a black floor-length tulle-and-pearl-waisted walk-through skirt.

Inspired by wearable pieces for city life, Mia Conroy, who received a FIDM Merit Scholarship, relied on red, black and gray for pieces that included a plaid miniskirt paired with matching long-sleeved jacket that featured fringe detail at the elbows and was worn over a black turtleneck.

Using cream and navy hues that represented the sand and sky of the Middle East, Ali Jawad, who received the Jerry Epstein Scholarship and Karen Kane Scholarship, designed a line of menswear that included navy trousers with straight zippered pockets and a cream, double-vented full-length boxer-inspired robe with hood.

For Rodrigo Buntun Navarrete, a FIDM Merit Scholarship recipient, the buildings of New York City were the inspiration for his collection of women’s formalwear, such as a floor-length halter gown in steel blue with jeweled neckline and shimmering belted waist.

Planning a contemporary bridal line was the goal of **Guess** Scholarship recipient Genevieve Lake, whose collection—named “Joie de Vivre”—included a shimmering white halter top with plunging neckline paired with wide-leg trousers worn under a tea-length tuxedo jacket and top hat that featured a tulle veil accented with rhinestones and a large bow in the back. ●



Charity Dahl Taneë Prasert



Ali Jawad, Kiki Potterton, Charity Dahl, Taneë Prasert, Rodrigo Buntun Navarrete, Aurora Ziqiao Luo, Emiko Terasaki, Ting Wang, Mia Conroy, Genevieve Lake



Ali Jawad Aurora Ziqiao Luo



Emiko Terasaki



Rodrigo Buntun Navarrete



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## NEWS

### AST Sportswear *Continued from page 1*

Where American Apparel was loud and sexy with its raucous billboards and newspaper ads, AST Sportswear does no consumer advertising for its **Bayside** label of basic T-shirts, caps, aprons, tote bags, sweatshirts and safety wear.

Where American Apparel was constantly making headlines, AST Sportswear has been quietly growing, slowly moving as its headquarters in Anaheim kept growing until the company bought a large facility in Brea. What started out as four brothers working long hours, six days a week, is now a large enterprise with some 500 employees.

The company has been so under the radar that until last year it didn't even have any salespeople on staff besides the four brothers. That changed after it leased the former American Apparel facilities and acquired the machinery inside. "We thought, 'Let's think outside the box and grow more,'" said Abdul Rashid, chief operating officer and one of the four brothers who founded the company in 1995—at about the same time American Apparel opened its doors in Los Angeles in 1998. Oldest brother Mohammed is a manager; Ali, the next oldest, is the chief executive officer; and Omar, the youngest, is the chief financial officer. The four grew up in Diamond Bar, not far from Brea.

In the mid-1990s, the four brothers saw a big void in apparel companies that could quickly manufacture a blank T-shirt for private-label customers. This was when the North American Free Trade Agreement between the United States, Canada and Mexico had recently passed and many manufacturers were scurrying to Mexico to do production. "There was a void," recalled Abdul. "Everyone was leaving and going overseas. It was, for us, doing just-in-time delivery. People needed goods now."

The company started out small in a 2,000-square-foot warehouse space and offered one basic T-shirt—style 5100—in four colors.

A year after launching, the company



A Bayside booth at the recent Imprinted Sportswear Show in Long Beach



Mohammed, Ali, Abdul and Omar Rashid

aprons, safety wear, beanies, and totes. Fourteen new styles were added this year to pump up the fashion selection to 94 items. Basic T-shirts wholesale for about \$3 and above.

That first trade show garnered AST Sportswear enough orders and contacts that by 1997 the brothers moved to a 15,000-square-foot facility near what is now called **Angel Stadium of Anaheim**, where they added their own cut-and-sew center employing about 100 workers. "We wanted our own facility to maintain quality, and our volume was consistent," Abdul said.

The company kept growing and moved one more time, to Anaheim Hills, before acquiring in 2013 its 115,000-square-foot facility in Brea, which houses the company's offices, warehouse, distribution center and manufacturing facility with 300 workers. AST Sportswear also has a unionized sewing factory in Huntington Park, Calif., that employs 40 workers who make T-shirts for mostly labor unions, which want union-made apparel.

After taking over American Apparel's facilities two years ago, the company grew to 500 employees. While it may not be the largest cut-and-sew T-shirt operation in the United States, most people believe it is the largest vertically integrated operation of its kind in the United States, even though the company does not disclose its revenues.

"We have been a distributor of theirs for over 15 years, and they have grown phenomenally," said Bob Winget, president of **TSC Apparel** in Cincinnati. He is one of 12 distributors who sell the Bayside label. "They have such an incredible presence in that 'Made in the USA' category."

Scott Wilson, a Los Angeles apparel maker who has specialized in domestically made T-shirts, has watched AST Sportswear grow rapidly over the past few years. "When you combine all the elements they have in a vertical operation, they may be the largest [in the United States] but not when it comes to sewing. There are a few companies back East that have 500 to 600 sewing workers, but they are not vertical."

Today's AST Sportswear is a far cry from the beginning, when the four brothers were doing everything—from answering phones and taking orders to pasting mailing labels on 100 boxes at a time, loading trucks and making deliveries. "There is nothing we haven't done," Abdul said. "We were working 12, 14, 16 hours a day, six days a week. Whatever it took." ●



Scores of garment employees work in the Brea facility.

started its own T-shirt label, called **Bayside**. That same year, AST Sportswear attended its first trade show, the **Imprinted Sportswear Show** in Long Beach, Calif. In those days, everyone wore a suit to the show. These days, you'd get thrown out of the show if you showed up in a suit.

The four brothers—who were still the only employees—initially reserved a basic 10-by-10-foot booth for the show because that was all they could afford. Then Abdul decided they should make a splash. "We needed an image, I thought, if we were going to go out there," he said. "I went to a business in our complex. He built our booth and we did a payment plan."

The booth mushroomed into a 10-foot-by-30-foot space, which was an eye-catching burgundy with gold trim. "People came by the booth and said, 'Wow.' They thought we were a really big company," the COO said, recalling that the company's two-page fact sheet of products consisted mostly of long-sleeve and short-sleeve shirts. Today, the product lineup fills a 68-page booklet that has several styles, including raglan crew and tri-blend crew T-shirts, racerback tanks, polo shirts, sweatshirts, fleece vests and jackets,

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**Rodeo Drive** *Continued from page 1*

purchased on March 28.

The sale also made news because the previous owner, **Sterling Organization** of Palm Beach, Fla., bought it one day for \$55 million and the next day flipped it for \$110 million, according to a statement from the organization, which is not related to Los Angeles billionaire Donald Sterling.

After buying the property, Sterling approached LVMH about leasing the property. Instead, the company said it preferred to own it.

Jay Luchs, vice chairman of **Newmark Knight Frank**, who handled the deal, said the benefits of buying a building include knowing your rent won't rise or that you will not lose your lease. "They are in full control. They are the landlord. They can control their own destiny," Luchs said.



Rodeo Drive is one of the priciest shopping streets in the United States.

**Keeping the Golden Triangle golden**

While many may doubt the future of retail in general, Brian D. Kosoy, Sterling's president and chief executive officer, said it was crucial for luxury brands to be on the affluent shopping street, which marks the center of Beverly Hills' Golden Triangle. "In New York, luxury retailers have plenty of viable options where they can locate," Kosoy said. "On the West Coast, it's all about those three, high-value blocks of Rodeo Drive, where the world's premier luxury brands must have a presence by planting their flag. As a result, when a circumstance presents itself to acquire a Rodeo Drive property, you aggressively pursue it, regardless of the complications involved in getting a deal done."



LVMH acquired this building at 465 N. Rodeo Drive.



Tourists visiting Rodeo Drive

Space does not come cheap on Rodeo Drive. A square foot of commercial space on the street rents for \$50 to \$70 per month. The second most expensive retail space in the Los Angeles area is on the **Third Street Promenade** in Santa Monica, Calif., where retail rents average \$20 a month per square foot, Luchs said.

The LVMH acquisition may have made headlines, but it doesn't compare to **Chanel's** deal at the end of 2015 to buy the building it now occupies on the corner of Rodeo Drive and Brighton Way for \$152 million.

In August 2016, LVMH paid \$122 million for the **House of Bijan** building at 420 N. Rodeo Drive.

Finding a space on Rodeo is tough, said Kathy Gohari, president of the merchants group **Rodeo Drive Commit-**

**tee** and the general manager of the flagship for **Valentino**. "When flagship stores open on Rodeo, they don't really leave," she said. Stores may move to temporary quarters when the flagships are being remodeled.

Currently, there are a handful of spaces available on Rodeo Drive. The former **Hugo Boss** space, at 414 N. Rodeo Drive, is being split into two spaces. Also vacant is 449 N. Rodeo Drive, which formerly housed the **Paul & The Shark** menswear brand. The **Zadig & Voltaire** space at 465 Rodeo Drive is listed as available for sublease.

Rodeo Drive is a big attraction for tourists. Walk through the enclave and you'll hear people speaking in languages from every corner of the world. But there has been criticism that tourists and locals merely window-shop on the street

and make few purchases with the flagships serving as expensive billboards for major European fashion houses.

Retail analysts are divided on the business of flagships. Marshal Cohen, chief industry analyst of **The NPD Group**, said luxe flagship stores don't earn their keep with cash. "Flagships are not about making money but showcasing the brand. The money allocated to it often comes from the marketing budget, not the retail budget. Having a high-profile flagship at a prestigious location is one of the few ways brands can continue to showcase the essence of the brand and reinforce the full range of products not able to be displayed at retail partners," he said.

Michael Brown, a global strategy and management consultant, said marketing is a significant function of flagship stores, but it isn't the whole story.

"Retail location profitability is becoming increasingly more difficult to measure because purchases made online are often a result of a store visit. We call this the difference between 'value creation' [the visit] and 'value capture' [the sale transaction]. In a broad definition of profitability, the flagship's contribution can be measured and they can be profitable," he wrote in an email.

Selling expensive clothes can help the bottom line.

"Luxury retailers have the advantage of high price points, which facilitates profitability even when real estate comes at a high price," added Brown, who is a partner at **A.T. Kearney** and the author of "The Future of Shopping Centers."

Tyler Higgins, a director of global consultancy **AArete**, said it is crucial to

have space on Rodeo Drive because of the people who shop there. "Companies may assign a value to the intangibles of being on Rodeo around other luxury brands, but they are still able to make money. Why can they be unwavering in their price point? For starters, their target shoppers are not ones who browse **Amazon.com** looking for rock-bottom pricing but rather ones who want the bespoke treatment that these stores provide.

"Being able to shop on Rodeo Drive drives an air of exclusivity that these brands are seeking. This exclusivity drives up the ability for them to charge \$4,000, \$10,000, \$30,000 for bags, shoes and clothes. As long as tourists, along with other shoppers, continue to arrive, Rodeo Drive and the flagship stores will remain," Higgins said. ●

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