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SARAH ELLEN

LEGAL

As New Workplace Rules Go Into Effect, SB 62 Is Introduced

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

As 2020 ended, the California legislature started on a new round of bills for the 2021–2022 session, which includes SB 62, a bill that could change the way garment workers are compensated.

Co-sponsored by the downtown Los Angeles **Garment Worker Center**, a labor-advocate group, the Garment Worker Protection Act was introduced Dec. 7 by State Senator María Elena Durazo, a Democrat who represents East Los Angeles and areas around downtown L.A. SB 62 would outlaw piece-rate work, a traditional way garment workers have been compensated. In its place it would require companies to pay minimum wage. The bill also seeks to expand retailers' liability for unpaid wages owed to sewers employed by

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Where fashion gets down to businessSM



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FINANCE

Businesses Chart Next Steps After Stimulus Bill Is Approved

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

After months of wrangling, Congress passed a \$900 billion COVID-19-relief stimulus bill on Dec. 21, and President Trump signed it into law on Dec. 27. The stimulus plan includes \$600 checks to be sent to individuals earning less than \$75,000 annually and a second round of Payment Protection Plan funds for small businesses.

Jack Kleinhenz, chief economist for the **National Retail Federation** trade group, said that the stimulus would have a significant impact on the economy. "We expect retail-sales spending to see a boost from the new round of stimulus," Kleinhenz said in comments released on Jan. 4. "Consumers responded quickly to last spring's stimulus checks, and distribution of the new checks will come at a critical time that will

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Emerald Acquires PlumRiver, Creator of the Elastic Suite Platform

The business-to-business platform builder **Emerald Holdings, Inc.**, announced its acquisition of the business-to-business e-commerce and digital-merchandising solutions provider **PlumRiver** to cultivate its software-as-a-service technology. The State College, Penn.-headquartered PlumRiver, through its Elastic Suite platform, allows brands and retail buyers to streamline wholesale buying.

“Over the course of 2020, we launched many digital-product offerings focused on customer engagement, new-customer acquisition and delivering high-value customer solutions. From our customers’ feedback, the highest value of these needs is clearly centered on the transaction between buyer and seller,” Brian Field, Emerald’s chief operating officer, said. “Through our acquisition of PlumRiver and the Elastic platform, we now have the capability to offer a full spectrum of bundled solutions to our customers—from product discovery and lead-generation to transaction—across both in-person, face-to-face events as well as year-round, digital opportunities.”

Through its new digital-commerce capabilities, Emerald will provide greater transactional functionality, affording enterprise-level integration with brands’ ERP systems. These



Emerald Holdings, Inc.’s acquisition of e-commerce and digital merchandising-solutions company PlumRiver will extend the business-to-business platform builder’s events reach for its extensive show portfolio, which includes Surf Expo, whose January 2020 edition is shown above featuring Pukka, Inc.

changes will afford more-efficient order management, real-time inventory monitoring and product merchandising. As a show producer that hosts more than 140 events each year, including **Outdoor Retailer**, **Surf Expo**, **Active Collective** and **Swim Collective**, Emerald will be able to expand its audience. Emerald President and Chief Executive Officer Hervé Sedky sees this addition to Emerald as an important step in its evolution.

“The acquisition of PlumRiver is a natural extension of our live-events business; we can now offer a complementary, year-round interaction and transaction platform. PlumRiver’s technology is already used by world-class clients and will foster increased engagement between Emerald and our customers. Importantly, the Elastic B2B eCommerce SaaS solution is expected to strengthen our existing live events, expanding both their relevance and growth profile while also bringing an additive subscription-based revenue stream to Emerald.”

As a web-based applications provider that specializes in tools that serve manufacturers and wholesalers within specialty-retail market segments such as the outdoor, surf, footwear, apparel, cycling and sporting-goods categories, PlumRiver is a solid fit for Emerald. The move was welcomed by John Marchione, the company’s co-founder.

“We are thrilled to join Emerald to bring our innovative, market-driven solutions and efficiencies to thousands of brands and retailers across the globe in a rapidly expanding B2B digital economy,” Marchione said. “We are equally excited for the many new opportunities for our team members.”

—Dorothy Crouch

Platinum Equity Takes Controlling Stake in Mad Engine

It was announced on Jan. 4 that **Platinum Equity**, a Los Angeles-headquartered investment firm, acquired a controlling stake in **Mad Engine**, a San Diego-based apparel and accessories company that designs, produces and distributes licensed, branded and private-label products.

The announcement did not disclose the terms of the deal; however, it noted that Mad

Engine’s existing shareholders would continue to hold “meaningful equity interest.” Current Mad Engine management will continue to run the company.

Faizan Bakali, Mad Engine’s president and chief operating officer, said that the deal would give his company a crucial base of support.

“Platinum has a lot of experience working



Mad Engine (pictured) found a new investor in Platinum Equity, a Los Angeles firm that recently acquired a controlling stake in the San Diego-headquartered apparel and accessories company.

with businesses like ours and will provide us strategic, financial and operational support, enabling us to pursue an ambitious new phase of growth and expansion,” Bakali said. “This partnership with Platinum gives us tremendous strength as we continue to serve our retailers, licensor partners and, ultimately, the end consumer.”

Platinum Equity Partner Jacob Kotzubei said that Mad Engine is ready for a new phase of growth.

“The company is a well-established, scalable platform operating in a highly fragmented industry, which creates a perfect opportunity to continue investing in and growing the business. We have great respect for everything Mad Engine has accomplished, and our team is excited to help maximize the company’s potential.”

The deal comes a few years after Mad Engine’s buying spree, in which it acquired several prominent apparel companies and brands. In May 2018, Mad Engine acquired **Neff Headwear**, an 18-year-old skateboard and snowboard headwear company whose goods had been sold at retailers such as **Zumiez**. The same year, it also acquired **Mighty Fine**, a Los Angeles-headquartered brand that primarily makes kids’ and juniors clothing.

In 2017, Mad Engine acquired the Orange County, Calif., streetwear brand **Lifted Research Group**. The pioneering streetwear brand has been sold at prominent specialty retailers such as **Tilly’s**, **Zumiez** and **Dillard’s**. During the same year, it also acquired **Xtreme Worldwide Inc.**, which focuses on private label and licensed apparel.

—Andrew Asch

Inside the Industry

Avery Dennison Corp., a Glendale, Calif.-headquartered global materials science and manufacturing company, announced Jan. 4 that it had acquired **ACPO**, an Oak Harbor, Ohio-headquartered manufacturer of products for the label and flexible-packaging markets, said Mitch Butler, Avery Dennison’s chairman, president and chief executive officer. “By adding ACPO’s well-regarded and complementary overlaminated product, we are increasing our product portfolio and adding even more value for our customers,” Butler said.

Monique Lhuillier, a prominent Los Angeles-headquartered fashion house, announced Dec. 29 in an Instagram post that it would stop using fur products by the end of 2021. “This year, we have stopped producing all products using animal fur. We pledge to focus on innovation by using faux fur that is sustainably made and sourced while maintaining a rich and luxurious quality,” the brand announced. After Thanksgiving 2020, the Animal Defense League Southern California group conducted protests at a Monique Lhuillier store in Los Angeles, according to a statement from its ally group, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Tommy Hilfiger announced Jan. 6 that it was seeking applications for the third edition of the Tommy Hilfiger Fashion Frontier Challenge. Its third edition will focus on Black, indigenous and people of color, said brand founder and namesake Tommy Hilfiger. “This year, we want to showcase an even more-diverse range of perspectives, ideas and communities by supporting BIPOC entrepreneurs. We have a responsibility to drive change across the fashion landscape,” Hilfiger said. Proposals should be submitted to a website run by PVH, Hilfiger’s parent company, at <https://responsibility.pvh.com/tommy/fashion-frontier-challenge/> by the submission deadline of March 8.

Kingpins, a prominent denim trade show, will develop more online shows in addition to in-person shows in 2021. The announcement came in the trade show’s End of Year letter penned by Andrew Olah, the trade show’s founder. Olah wrote that Kingpins would produce physical shows in China, Amsterdam and New York City in fall 2021. It would also produce an online show for the U.S. market in February and a virtual trade show for Amsterdam and Europe in April. “Our online shows should not end once physical shows return. We love the idea of digital information and the challenge to find new and inspiring individuals to share their stories or their products or inventions,” Olah wrote.

Tukatech, a Los Angeles-headquartered fashion-technology company, announced Jan. 4 that it would offer first-time users one free month of any Tukatech software system, as well as complimentary use of the company’s self-paced software-training courses. The offer is part of the company’s shift from software subscriptions to a monthly auto-renewal model. Chris Walia, Tukatech’s chief operations officer, said that his clients prefer cloud-based license subscriptions to physical software keys. “We see new TUKAcad and TUKA3D DE Visualizer subscribers every day. Software subscriptions in the apparel industry will be the norm, even after the pandemic,” he said.



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With Holiday Sales Up, Now Retailers Must Strategize for 2021

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

Initial reports from the 2020 holiday season were recently released, and retail sales experienced growth during a year fraught with challenges. Retail sales charted from Oct. 11 to Dec. 24 grew 3 percent, according to **Mastercard SpendingPulse**, which researches consumer spending on the **Mastercard** payments network.

Mastercard SpendingPulse found that predictions of a big e-commerce surge came true as COVID-19 pandemic restrictions reduced crowds from shopping at malls and on retail streets. The report showed that e-commerce sales increased 49 percent and that e-commerce was 19.7 percent of overall sales during the holiday season.

Apparel retailers experienced an overall decline of 19.1 percent in business compared to the 2019 holiday season; however, apparel e-commerce sales grew by 15.7 percent. Department stores experienced an overall sales decline of 10.2 percent and online sales growth of 3.3 percent.

While predictions of an e-commerce surge came to fruition during 2020, the changes to traditional holiday retail were jarring, said Steve Sadove, senior adviser for Mastercard and former chief executive officer and chairman of **Saks Incorporated**.

"American consumers turned the holiday season on its head, redefining 'home for the holidays' in a uniquely 2020 way. They shopped from home for the home, leading to record e-commerce growth," Sadove said.

Now that the books are closing on holiday business, retail analysts have advised businesses and consumers to prepare for more changes. Analysts are trying to figure out what shape retail will take in a post-pandemic world.

If one thing is for certain, there will be a myriad of channels for consumers to shop. One channel that experienced tremendous growth during 2020 is BOPIS/buy online, pickup in store, which enjoyed 82 percent growth in 2020, said Inna Kuznetsova, chief executive officer of market researcher **1010data**.

Afterpay, an e-payments company that allows consumers to buy goods and pay for them on a layaway plan, said in a



Regulations on crowd size at local malls, such as The Grove—shown on the left—and The Bloc—shown on the right, was helped by curbside and in-store pickup and consumers wanting to absorb a little of the holiday spirit. Still, e-commerce ruled the season.



Jan. 4 statement that holiday business was good. Its customers' average basket size, or number of items sold in a single purchase, increased 30 percent compared to the 2019 holiday season.

Retail on social media also made if not a splash a ripple during the past year. Expect this channel to grow, said Tyler Higgins, retail practice lead and managing director at the global consulting firm **AArete**.

"Sales outlets will continue to expand in 2021 from historic bricks-and-mortar stores and store websites into channels such as social media. We expect a boom in sales through **TikTok**, **Instagram** and similar platforms that have already become strong sales channels," Higgins said.

Also expect more omni-channel retail, said Katie Thomas, who leads the **Kearney Consumer Institute**.

"2021 is going to be a year in flux. Even with the vaccine it'll be a slow migration back to some sense of stability. I'm not convinced when I hear that people will never go back to the stores now that they're used to the delivery option. It's not delivery or the store, it's delivery and the store," she said. "There is a challenge retailers will have to be thinking about with online shopping, which is harder to get in the basket—shoppers following off a list versus making impulse purchases in-store. Obviously, there's all sorts of data and algorithms with complimentary offerings and so on, but I think from a

consumer perspective we still haven't quite figured out how to position online retail."

When pandemic restrictions are eased, retailers will be pressed to serve consumers by running bricks-and-mortar spaces and managing digital footprints, said Syama Meagher, CEO of the **Scaling Retail** consultancy. It will be more expensive to run a business in a post-pandemic world because businesses will have to support a number of different channels to serve customers.

Meagher recommended that smaller retailers focus on and excel in one digital channel as they reactivate physical retail.

"A lot of people started with **Pinterest** and **Facebook** and tried to be everywhere. I'd double down on a very specific channel and also start to incorporate a safe 'In Real Life' pop-up activation," she said.

Retailers will also have to rethink what products they merchandise.

"We're entering into a new wave of consumer behavior," Meagher said. "One of the major questions retailers should ask: 'Is our existing product assortment ready to capture the pocketbooks of consumers today?' Brands must ask if they are catering to a 2021 lifestyle. Everything is up in the air. People are working from home. Lots of parents found themselves serving as their kids' teachers. A lot of people are cash-strapped." ●

LEGAL

New Laws *Continued from page 1*

subcontractors who produce apparel sold at the retailers' stores. A similar bill, SB 1399, made its way through the California legislature during the last legislative session, but it ran out of time in September, when a constitutionally mandated deadline for a vote on new bills elapsed.

A minimum-wage increase took place Jan. 1. Workers at businesses with 25 employees or less will be paid a minimum of \$12 per hour and \$13 for employers with 26 employees or more. It's the latest step from a 2016 bill that was signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown. The law requires incremental \$1 increases at the start of every year until Jan 1, 2023, when all California employees will be required to pay a minimum wage of \$15 per hour.

California employers will have to follow new laws passed by the California state legislature during the last legislative session. The laws reflect some of the big issues of the past year—the COVID-19 pandemic, inclusivity and the definition of what makes a worker an employee.

AB 685 gave new enforcement tools to fight the COVID-19 pandemic to the government agency Cal/OSHA, the California division of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. The new law allows for citations for serious violations of COVID-19 protocols to be issued at a faster pace than in the past. The law also requires employers to notify all employees about possible exposure to COVID-19 if an outbreak occurred at the employee's workplace. AB 685 also requires employers to notify local public-health departments of outbreaks.

From Jan. 1, 2021, to Jan. 1, 2023, Cal/OSHA can issue an order shutting down an entire worksite or specific worksite area that exposes employees to an imminent COVID-19 risk.



Garment Worker Center members demonstrate for SB1399 in downtown Los Angeles on May 14, 2020.

Cal/OSHA can also issue citations for serious violations related to COVID-19 without giving employers a 15-day notice before issuing the order.

The state legislature also passed SB 1159, a related bill. The new law gives a green light for employees to receive workers' compensation benefits for COVID-19 outbreaks. However, the law requires that employees exhaust other safety nets before requesting workers' comp, such as COVID-19-related sick-leave benefits. Those requesting the disability benefits also have to meet certain certification requirements before receiving temporary disability benefits.

AB 979 requires publicly traded companies with principal executive offices located in California to include people from underrepresented ethnic groups on their boards. For example,

if a company with a California address for principal executive offices has nine or more directors on its board, the company must have a minimum of three directors from underrepresented groups. If the number of company's board of directors ranges from four to eight persons, the company is required to have a minimum of two directors from underrepresented groups. If a company employs less than four directors, the company is required to have a minimum of one director from an underrepresented group. The California Secretary of State may impose fines of \$100,000–\$300,000 for violating this law.

AB2257 was a final chapter of one of the biggest business and politics stories in 2020; defining who is a full-time worker, and who is an independent contractor or gig worker. In 2019, Gov. Newsom signed AB5 extending the classification of worker to gig workers, and meant that people once considered independent contractors were entitled to benefits such as health insurance.

In November, California voters approved Proposition 22 which required a great number of exceptions to AB5. Exceptions include those working freelance journalists and musicians who will continue to be classified as independent contractors. According to a blog by attorneys Eric Lloyd, Scott P. Mallery and Kerry Friedrichs from the Seyfarth Shaw LLP firm, businesses not given an exemption by AB2557, such as trucking, will lobby for additional exemptions.

The California Family Rights Act was expanded. Under SB 1383, every employer with five or more employees is required to honor a request by an employee to take up to 12 workweeks of unpaid, protected leave during a 12-month period to bond with a new child. The law also was extended to requests from employees to care for themselves, a child, parent, grandparent, sibling, spouse or domestic partner. ●

Show-in-a-Box by Preface Provides Tactile Experience for Virtual Textile Event

By Dorothy Crouch *Managing Editor*

After a few years hosting a boutique-style textile show in New York, Preface launched its Los Angeles edition early in 2020 during January L.A. Market Week to a responsive group of attendees who were seeking a more-intimate fabric event. Since then, Betsy Franjola, founder of BFF Studio and Preface, began to cultivate a fresh approach to events during the COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. By thinking outside the trade-show floor, Franjola developed a concept by thinking inside the box.

“We launched the Show-in-a-Box concept for Fall/Winter 2020, so that was late July and early August when we shipped out the boxes for that season,” Franjola explained. “Everybody else was going online and doing virtual things. That is fine for some, but this is fabric. You really have to touch it.”

Due to the nature of the segment that Preface represents for fiber, yarns and textiles—and its boutique approach to trade events—the new offering had to reflect a tactile experience through which meaningful connections between mills and brands are made. Despite hosting the event online, Preface provides boxes in a complimentary version and a premium \$500 version that are available through prefaceshow.com, with virtual workshops that utilize the materials provided in the package. Franjola is looking forward to hosting this second virtual event, which is slated for Feb. 8–11, as partner and client feedback from the previous edition was excellent.

“They were thrilled they had those tools they needed to continue to design because everyone was stuck at home,” Franjola explained. “They had fabrics. Then we had the webinar series where they could go online so they could learn something new. We also had a really good response to the color palettes and trend guide.”

Fabric partners for this edition’s box include Los Angeles’ **Laguna Enviro Fabrics**; **Meho Silk**, based in Hangzhou, China; Hong Kong’s **Chaintex**; Shouguang, China’s **Charming Textiles**; **Vefa Shanghai**; Taiwan’s **Union Line**; and **Mimaki USA**. For Fall/Winter 2021, Preface hopes to expand into sweater yarns.

“What we try to achieve is having something for everyone. We break the boxes down into three categories. When you order, you pick women’s ready-to-wear, which is a more-dressy aesthetic,” Franjola explained. “Then we have a women’s casual, which is more cotton based, knits and things that aren’t glossy and shiny. We also have a men’s category, so we try to hone the mill selections so they fit and feel customized for the customer.”

While the Preface mission remains to serve as a place to inspire the industry’s brands and artists in an intimate setting, bigger names are also supporting the initiative. The **Bombas** sock company has ordered a box, as has the Los Angeles activewear brand

Fabletics, which participated during the last edition, adding a natural-dye workshop to its schedule during the show. **Lands’ End** also expressed interest in participating again following a successful group workshop for its team that was held during the last edition.

“The workshops—you can buy them separately or two are included in the premium box. All the supplies are included, and it depends if we do a group specifically for a brand—then we’ll do a virtual live presenta-



The Preface Show-in-a-Box includes textile samples, workshop supplies and gifting to afford a more-tactile experience for designers and brands in the fabric, yarn and sourcing virtual-events category.

tion. For everyone else, it’s a virtual presentation that has been filmed,” Franjola said. “We also have the cocktail hour this time around.”

Preface’s webinar schedule for its Show-in-a-Box includes conversations centered on topics such as “Certifiably Sustainable,” a discussion with Ruth Kelly of **Warp & Weft** and co-founder of **SAACHS**; Six Cheung, owner of **Chaintex**; and Ben Galfini, the founder of **Outsider**. “A Color Story” will include commentary from Mimaki’s Victoria Harris, who will explore how to organize a color story through palettes and digital printing, and a “Founders Forum,” where brand founders will share their tales of how they successfully launched their companies. Remaining committed to its immersive experience, Preface will also host workshops including a screen-printing session hosted by textile artist Kelly Marie Conder and a bundle-dyeing workshop that will illustrate the process of utilizing dried plants and flowers to dye a Meho Silk scarf, hosted by Jessica Unsell of **Wild Fire Water**. Wrapping up the event will be a cocktail segment featuring mixologist Pablo Moix, who will craft libations to close out the Preface Show-in-a-Box.

These workshops and webinars reflect Preface’s longstanding commitment to sustainability. For Franjola, the event remains a resource to simplify this process of cultivating ecological responsibility in fashion.

“It’s easy for people to get overwhelmed or turned off by the amount of information you seemingly need now to become sustainable,” Franjola said. “One of the things we always talk about is that there is something for everyone in that world, whether you want to focus on recycled as a message, biodegradable, natural fibers, chemical management—there are all these different roads you can go down and take a minute to figure out your brand and what would resonate most with your customer.” ●

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Swiminista Ready to Roll Out New Collection for Post-COVID-19 World

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

Andréa Bernholtz, founder of the Calabasas, Calif., **Swiminista** brand of women's swimwear, forecasted a post-pandemic boom as she prepared to roll out the second collection of her brand's collaboration line The House of Christian Lacroix x Swiminista. After more than 10 months of pandemic restrictions, she projected that many consumers are going to make up for lost time when they make expeditions to beaches, resorts and gatherings at pools once stay-at-home orders are lifted or substantially rolled back, she said.

"I think by March or April people will be coming out of this cocoon that we've been in. People will want to appreciate Southern California's warm environment, and they'll want to seize the day," Bernholtz said. Economists at the **UCLA Anderson School of Management** last month released a forecast that said the U.S. economy should rebound and grow by 6 percent in the second quarter of 2021.

By that time, the second collection of The House of Christian Lacroix x Swiminista should be available on Bernholtz's direct-to-consumer site, *swiminista.com*, and at the e-boutique *shoplisakline.com*, as well as at the bricks-and-mortar boutique **Body & Sol**, located in Los Angeles' Tarzana neighborhood.

The second drop of The House of Christian Lacroix x Swiminista will feature new floral prints designed by the Paris-headquartered **Christian Lacroix**. The more-than-30-year-old fashion house has cultivated a reputation for clothing with a dramatic flair, such as short, puffball skirts, as well as for unique rose prints.

The upcoming collection's prints have an art-gallery look to them, according to Bernholtz. "It has a sophisticated approach. There is so much depth and layers to these prints," she said. She also noted that the French fashion house's prints would appeal to California sensibilities. They offer bright colors, which have been a significant part of the California swimwear look for decades.

Core retail price points for the collaboration collection and other Swiminista styles range from \$150 to \$250. The brand's other print styles come in a proprietary leopard print that Bernholtz designed. Silhouettes feature one-piece suits and bikinis with bandeau tops, triangle tops and rash guards. In



Swiminista focuses on durable, sustainable fabrics, adjustable straps and hardware to provide the right fit for bustier women who previously did not have a lot of fashionable choices.

March, Swiminista's Christian Lacroix collaboration will introduce sizes for girls. Girls' swimsuits have been a growing feature of the Swiminista line. The brand rolled out mother-daughter suits in its Mommy and Me Collection, which was unveiled in November.

Bernholtz started Swiminista in 2019 after gaining notice for co-founding the denim and fashion line **Rock & Republic**, which she left after **VF Corp.** acquired the label for \$57 million in 2011. Swiminista also runs design studios in Laguna Beach, Calif., and Hawaii. The line was intended to be a label for fashionistas looking for swimwear, hence the inspiration for the line's name, she said. The brand would focus on luxurious sustainable fabrics. It also would focus on a niche that the swim market has often failed to grasp—making swimwear for busty women. The line's tops are made in sizes up to DD. Bernholtz designs the swim tops and suits with durable fabrics, adjustable straps and hardware to help the wearer make the best fit for herself, Bernholtz said.

Jennifer Lewis, the owner of Body & Sol, said that Swiminista has made a splash in her shop, which has been in business since 1996, because it offers colorful prints for those

women who often are not offered as many swimwear choices, she said. Lewis also said that Swiminista's fabric has been a selling point.

"Someone who is heavier requires more support," Lewis said. "Swimwear gets stretched out up to one whole size in the water and from wear and tear. So swimwear's sewing and lining are important." Fabric needs to be durable for anyone who wants a swimsuit to last beyond a few times wearing it, she said.

While doing business during the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging, Bernholtz said the period has given her the opportunity to rethink how she works with her customers. During 2020, the brand relaunched its website. It also sought to improve the brand's online fit guide, which can be found on *swiminista.com*. Shoppers input details regarding their bra and jeans sizes into the guide, and the guide suggests a Swiminista fit.

"Sizing can be all over the place," Bernholtz said. "This guide takes a personalized approach. It takes the guesswork out of it." The brand also offers a "Try at Home" option. It will deliver several sizes of a suit to a customer, who then chooses which size fits best. ●

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Swim Line Zonarch Jumps Waves to Make Debut

By Andrew Asch Retail Editor

For years, Geneviève Andre de la Porte dreamed of bringing a sustainable, direct-to-consumer swimwear brand to market. She was originally scheduled to unveil Zonarch in March, but as state and local governments issued stay-at-home orders she thought it prudent to postpone the launch date, not the least because her sources for regenerated nylon fabrics had to close their factories, and other factories she worked with shifted gears to making personal protective equipment.

On Dec. 15, the Belgian-born designer and entrepreneur unveiled **Zonarch**, a Newport Beach, Calif.-headquartered swimwear brand on her direct-to-consumer website, *zonarch.com*, with the reasoning that in the past decade swimwear has increasingly become considered a seasonless category.

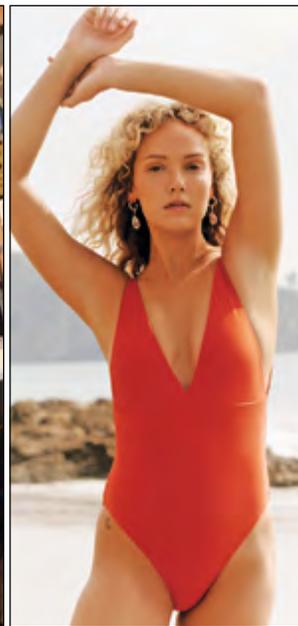
"You can wait for the next best moment," she said. "But you wonder what you are waiting for. I saw an opportunity in launching now. To simply go ahead and start getting feedback from customers, which so far has been overwhelmingly positive. Once the high season does come, you have developed a groundswell of customer relationships and have worked every day to get better and stronger as a business to serve your customers as best as possible," she said.

Some time in the future, she hopes to wholesale Zonarch to physical boutiques and to high-end, digitally native retailers. However, she intended the new swimwear brand to be primarily a direct-to-consumer venture that would present an alternative.

Most swimwear, like most apparel, is manufactured overseas. Zonarch is made in California by workers who are compensated with a fair wage, Andre de la Porte said, using recycled nylon manufactured in Vietnam. Retail price points range from \$124 for one-pieces to \$144 for bikini sets, which she says is 50 percent less than competing contemporary swimwear brands. She raised a seed round of funding from friends and family to finance the venture.

Looks include the Joan bikini set—a triangle top and bottom that can be adjusted to fit the wearer's coverage preference. The Stevie rash guard and the long-sleeve Banks one-piece feature design elements such as thin contrast piping.

Zonarch's one-pieces also feature the Holiday silhouette



ZONARCH

A made-in-California brand, Zonarch recently debuted a new collection in December, seeing the opportunity to fulfill the seasonless appeal of swimwear.

with a V-neckline and the Yoko one-piece with a square neckline. The suits come in prints as well as solids in lilac, black and burnt red.

Andre de la Porte also plans on offering a generous return plan and will personally serve as *zonarch.com*'s style consultant and conduct **Zoom** sessions with those looking for help with fit.

Growing up in Antwerp, Belgium, Andre de la Porte spent years making amateur sketches for swimwear. As a youth, she trained to be a competitive gymnast and spent time in America vacationing with members of her family who lived in the Pacific Northwest. She became an aficionado of surf and skate culture and fell in love with the California sun, which led her to attend college at **Chapman University** in Southern California.

Inspiration for her brand's name comes from her Belgium and California roots. Zon is the word for sun in Flemish, one of the official languages of Belgium. Arch is for curves in design. Together, the two words tell the story of human curves under the sun, she said.

In college, she served as an e-commerce director for the swim brand **Mikoh** and later the açai foods company **Sam-bazon**, where she worked in digital marketing and became inspired by the brand's drive to be successful but also work to support different causes.

Andre de la Porte said that she would give proceeds from her sales to groups including the **American Civil Liberties Union, 1% for the Planet and Room to Read**.

In upcoming seasons, she plans to roll out sustainable men's swim lines as well as apparel and accessories. ●

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Goodbye 2020. Hello 2021!

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SARAH ELLEN

For her Spring/Summer 2021 collection, Nathalia Gaviria chose one of her favorite patterns—plaid—but also spoke to Victorian romance with a message of caution regarding environmental threats.

NEWS

Fashion Medical-Scrubs Label FIGS Hires New CFO

FIGS, a fashion medical-scrubs label headquartered in Santa Monica, Calif., gained notice for selling stylish medical uniforms to healthcare professionals with a direct-to-consumer model. In the past few years, it has also rolled out fashion label-style media campaigns that featured prominent billboard ads for its products in trendy Los Angeles neighborhoods.

On Jan. 6, it was announced that Jeffrey Lawrence, who helped to develop and also helmed the digital business for Domino's Pizza, would join FIGS as its new chief financial officer. Lawrence worked at the Ann Arbor, Mich.-based Domino's for 20 years and left the company last summer.

Said FIGS Co-Chief Executive Officer Trina Spear, "Over his 20 years at Domino's, Jeff helped completely transform the company and disrupt the entire pizza industry. Domino's did that by improving the customer experience, investing in technology and expanding globally. That is exactly what we are doing at FIGS as we revolutionize a really antiquated industry, not only through products that healthcare workers love but also through a customer-friendly e-commerce platform."

Lawrence said that he looked forward to working in a new field.



Jeffrey Lawrence

Trina Spear

"I am incredibly proud to join a purpose-driven, innovative, digitally native company that celebrates healthcare professionals in everything it does," Lawrence said. "It is an honor to be part of such a great team that truly lives their values every day. I am very excited by the opportunities ahead of us to continue to drive value for all of our stakeholders, including those that serve others," Lawrence said.

FIGS recently expanded into activewear, outerwear, accessories and limited-edition collaborations with New Balance. Spear said that the label would be considering mounting a campaign for an initial public offering in the next two years. Spear started the company in 2013 with Heather Hasson, the label's co-CEO.—Andrew Asch

Nathalia Gaviria's Romantic Apocalypse Vision Reflected in NG Gold SS 2021

Designing fashion during a most-peculiar year led Nathalia Gaviria to remain true to her design formula, through which she revisited one of her first design loves—plaid—for her NG Gold Spring/Summer 2021 collection. While mulling over how to reapproach this classic fashion favorite, Gaviria could not ignore the current state of the world as concerns stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental responsibility and the link between these issues increasingly became part of everyday life.

"[Plaid] immediately took me to punk, but I didn't want it to be a punk collection and I don't think it translates to punk, but that was the initial inspiration," Gaviria explained. "Fun things that you could do in 2020 all have to do with being at the park, being outdoors or being at the lake. The fact that we can't do these things without a mask—it all became a bit of an apocalyptic mix."

Searching for simplicity within an environment of chaos, Gaviria reflected on an uncomplicated era well before technology. Within this reconnection to simpler times, the Los Angeles designer decided to send an ecological message through a short film and campaign directed by Juan Falla, with photography by Sarah Ellen, which features models who are enjoying the seemingly beautiful, serene outdoors but must remain protected against pollutive destruction. Maintaining a local presence, Gaviria's team shot the campaign at Ernest Debs Park located in northeast Los Angeles' Montecito Hills neighborhood.

"It's many things. It feels a little nostalgic. A lot of the pieces are inspired by the Victorian era. I was trying to mix that—a nostalgia for the past when you could enjoy everything and it was simpler without technology, and the fact that right now we have to use our mask," Gaviria explained. "It's becoming very bad. I was trying to make a statement as far as ecology. That is why at the end of the film she is breathing through a lace mask but breathing from the tree directly."

Known for designs that uniquely blend el-

egance with playfulness, refinement with rock 'n' roll and her younger years with her current lifestyle, Gaviria typically creates pieces that are meant to allow clients to have fun with their garments. Blending her beloved plaid woollens with denim, chiffon, leather and lace, Gaviria introduces a fresh take on these crossbar patterns. The designer's Mona jacket is a fully embroidered piece adorned with pearls, crystals and taffeta flowers, featuring an image of the "Mona Lisa." Romantic, sheer baby-doll dresses and lacy short skirts with

long trains evoke a surreal point of view on classic romance, while a pearl-spike-and-crystal bejeweled bright-white bodysuit with lace train complemented by a gas mask comprising the same details illustrates that the planet is becoming a beautiful disaster.

"Throughout the entire shoot, we tried to have details that are protesting against things that are affecting our environment," Gaviria explained. "For example, he is fishing on a beautiful lake, but he is fishing a plastic mask out of the pond. Or they are having a picnic but the fruits have worms and flies, but the worms are made out of crystal."

For this collection's inspiration, Gaviria credits her daughter, who—at 12 years old—has become increasingly aware of environmental issues and is influencing her mother to become more responsible. During the creation of this latest collection, which Gaviria says is the smallest she has ever released, she remained dedicated to designing a capsule that reflects her fashion vision yet that is less wasteful and sends a message through her artistry.

"This is the world we are leaving to our kids. My daughter is so concerned about everything, and she has every right. Look at her reality. I was thinking it would be nice to be part of the solution and awakening," Gaviria said. "Even though I am not an ecologist, or an activist, and I am part of a fashion industry that wastes and we are part of the problem, this is the time we need to reconsider what we do. Make it very special, smaller and less wasteful."—Dorothy Crouch



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Fashion-Tech Startup StyleScan Aims to Disrupt Fashion Photography

By Andrew Asch *Retail Editor*

After two years in development, the Los Angeles–headquartered fashion-technology startup **StyleScan** will officially emerge from stealth mode and make a debut in the business-to-business market, said Larissa Posner, the company’s founder.

StyleScan has started a round of pre-Series A funding, Posner said. Upcoming funding will help support the growth of her company, which is based on StyleScan’s proprietary technology. It uses machine learning to create what Posner called a visualization AI service. “The plan is nothing less than the disruption of catalog photography,” Posner said.

To start working with StyleScan, a brand takes photos of its models and sends them to StyleScan. StyleScan then uses its algorithms to dress the models.

“We call it ‘augmented apparel try-on.’ We can infinitely dress them [the models] in any outfits we have digitized,” Posner said of StyleScan. “Displayed in 3D, the garments can be shown on a carousel of diverse models. Best of all, the models need to be shot only once and the fashions are rendered, not photographed. Everything becomes much more flexible.”

One of StyleScan’s points of difference is image quality, Posner said. “Other companies use **Adobe Photoshop** to dress models, and their models wind up looking like paper dolls. We, on the other hand, use our technology to convey human forms, different rotations and a variety of poses. Our final image is indistinguishable from a traditional photograph.”

Posner and her colleagues recently coined another name for their proprietary technology—VAL, or visualization algorithm. “VAL can dress you. VAL can style you. VAL can appropriately render a clothing sample on anyone, whether it’s a model or an influencer or eventually a consumer,” Posner said.

Part of this service will offer brands the capability to run 3D product previews on their e-commerce websites. In the future, StyleScan plans to roll out video to accompany the 3D images.

StyleScan’s offices are located in the **Avenue Six Studios**, a production house in Los Angeles’ Van Nuys neighborhood. The company is staffed by mathematicians and engineers who worked on Wall Street and in Silicon Valley, in addition to fashion experts.

In mid-2021, StyleScan will roll out a consumer service-through which consumers will be able to upload a photograph



Top: StyleScan’s photo-realistic technology uses “augmented apparel try-on” to fit any body to any brand. Bottom: From left, Michelle Bass, vice president of sales; Larissa Posner, founder/ chief executive officer, Galina Sobolev, chief marketing officer.

of themselves into a brand’s platform that makes use of StyleScan technology. With the technology, consumers will get an accurate view of what they would look like in a brand’s

clothing. StyleScan is currently testing the consumer program with fashion influencers who post photographs of themselves in clothing from a variety of brands on social media.

Posner worked as a fashion model in New York during her late teens and early 20s. She later worked as a registered investment adviser for hedge funds in Los Angeles and New York. She maintains residences in both areas.

When working in Manhattan in 2018, she rarely had time to shop for clothes despite every major brand maintaining a retail presence in the city. She also grew frustrated with e-commerce shopping and the guesswork it took to figure out how a garment would look on her.

“I put my investment adviser hat on,” Posner said. “I approached my stock market gurus and I said, ‘You use all of this technology to predict stock prices, and it gets better every day. Is there a way to deploy some of these techniques so I could see a garment in 3D? I’d also like to see it on diverse models and potentially see it on me.’”

Her technology colleagues thought it was an interesting premise. They started working on it with computer-visualization gurus after Posner funded a round of research and development. She became so invested in the possibilities that she earned a certificate in machine learning from the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology** in 2019. Posner also sought and gained support from angel investors. The venture met with further approval when it was named as a finalist in early 2020 for **The New York Fashion Tech Lab** business-development platform to support women-led companies.

Recently, StyleScan has been adding staff. In early December, Spencer Moore, a senior design director for the **John Varvatos** brand, officially joined the company as a partner. He will be handling StyleScan’s creative direction and act as a liaison between StyleScan’s technology team and the fashion business.

StyleScan’s chief marketing officer is Galina Sobolev, founder of the Los Angeles–headquartered contemporary line **Single**, which Sobolev continues to helm. Posner once attended a runway show for Single and later became an avid fan of the brand. Sobolev said she had been frustrated by software marketed to fashion businesses that had no sense of what fashion workers wanted.

“It’s not just a group of techies,” Sobolev said. “Nor are we a bunch of stylists who know nothing about true fit or true garment construction or how a garment should look on a consumer. Rather, we are seasoned fashion professionals, and with the aid of high-tech innovators we are bringing a lot to the game. ●

FINANCE

Stimulus *Continued from page 1*

help carry 2020’s momentum into 2021.”

However, he cautioned against thinking that the economy was out of trouble. “The coming year might be just as eventful, as the economic recovery faces many uncertainties. Recoveries do not proceed in a straight line, and the prospects for volatility over the next few months are high. Nonetheless, just like the old **Timex**-watch commercials, the economy takes a licking but keeps on ticking,” Kleinhenz said.

In his comments, Kleinhenz also noted that the stimulus was well timed. The first quarter of the year is typically weak for the economy, with or without a pandemic. Stimulus funds and the possibility of wide distribution of COVID-19 vaccines could help put the economy on the road to recovery.

Kleinhenz’s comments were made in the January issue of the NRF’s *Monthly Economic Review*, which anticipated that consumers would likely continue a 2020 trend of spending on big-ticket, home-related items such as appliances and furniture.

The \$600 checks to individuals will be released before the second round of PPP loans, said Tom Waldman, a shareholder for **Stradling Yocca Carlson & Rauth**, a law firm headquartered in Newport Beach, Calif. Waldman anticipated new guidance on the bill would be released in the next two to four weeks. “We’re in a wait-and-see mode to see how round two of the PPP loans will be implemented and when loans will be funded,” Waldman said.

He also anticipated that a greater number of banks would participate than did in round one. Businesses interested in applying for funds can contact larger banks as well as local



While the maximum loan amount for PPP funding was reduced from \$10 million to \$2 million, it may be much easier for small businesses to apply for aid packages up to \$150,000.

banks and banks in low-income neighborhoods. Businesses in low-income neighborhoods can receive a target allocation.

Rules have changed for PPP funding. The maximum loan amount was reduced from \$10 million to \$2 million, but it may be much easier for small businesses to apply for aid packages up to \$150,000.

Retail trade groups cheered the stimulus as a lifeline for many businesses but not without some reservations.

Steve Lamar, president and CEO of the **American Ap-**

parel & Footwear Association, said in December, “COVID-19 has wreaked havoc on our world and created an economic crisis unlike any previous. While this new bill provides essential aid, it is only a down payment on what the American economy needs to make it to the other side. The job is not done, and more work will be needed in 2021.”

Michael Hanson, senior executive vice president of public affairs for the **Retail Industry Leaders Association**, also in December called the bill an important first step to economic recovery. Hanson noted that retailers are part of the campaign to keep consumers safe. “We encourage all Americans to join us in continuing common-sense practices to keep themselves and others safe—wear a mask in public spaces and stores, practice responsible distancing and avoid large crowds; practice good hygiene at all times,” he said.

The AAFA has served as a member of the COVID Relief Now coalition, a campaign sponsored by 300 public- and private-sector groups. It recently released a member survey that predicted severe outcomes for businesses and local governments if federal relief was not issued. Without aid,

the survey found that 95 percent of private-sector respondents said that their businesses would face serious challenges or were worried that there was a distinct possibility that their businesses would have to shutter their doors.

Congress also recently clarified tax questions coming from the first round of PPP funding. New legislation establishes that funds from the first PPP round in 2020 were not taxable income; therefore, many businesses will be able to count on some tax relief in 2021, Waldman said. ●

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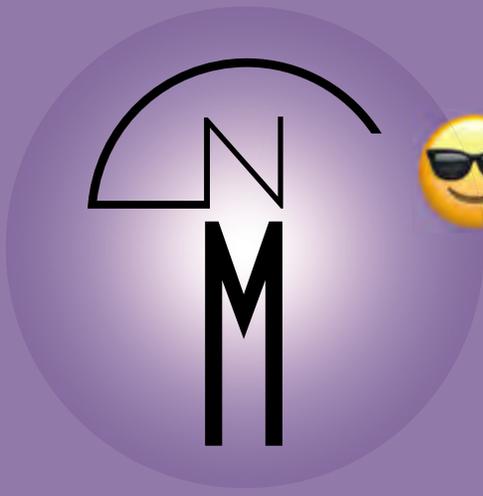


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