The Salzburg Singers

NEW YORK — Pharrell Williams summed up Chanel’s Salzburg takes New York spectacular best: “This is so surreal.” The artist was rounding out his set at the post-show bash at the Park Avenue Armory on Tuesday night when he took a moment between songs to take it all in. “I can’t believe I’m here right now,” he said. He was joined onstage by his “Reincarnation” costar Cara Delevingne as the two belted out “CC The World,” the soundtrack written for the Karl Lagerfeld-lensed short, in front of an audience that included Beyoncé, Dakota Johnson and Lily Collins. For party coverage and a catch-up with Lagerfeld in Salzburg, see pages 8 to 12.

Men’s Summit Talks Growth

By WWD STAFF

NEW YORK — “Men are the new women.” That seemed to be the overriding theme running through the WWD Men’s Wear Summit, held at the Asia Society here last week.

The male consumer’s eagerness to embrace new fashion trends and shifts in silhouettes have transformed the business, impacting everything from traditional, classic luxury labels to activewear brands. This sea change is happening around the world, from Europe and the U.S. to Asia.

Top executives from all walks of the business offered insights on the challenges and opportunities of servicing this new customer. Topics discussed included:

- Targeting the $78.3 billion men’s market in China — the largest and most robust category in that country;
- Juggling how to make a mark at a major fashion label such as Calvin Klein while remaining true to its history;
- Zeroing in on the red-hot accessories market at Saks Fifth Avenue;
- Exploring the expansion from leather goods to men’s wear at Coach;
- Embracing innovation to enhance the customer experience at Under Armour;
- Breaking out of a women’s-only mentality at Lululemon.

For more on the Men’s Wear Summit, see pages 8 to 12.

AFTER BID REJECTED

For Simon and Macerich, Question Is: What’s Next?

By DAVID MOIN

EVEN THOUGH SIMON Property Group has withdrawn its $16.8 billion bid, that doesn’t mean the targeted Macerich Company is off the hook.

Investors will carefully watch for movement in Macerich’s stock, which on Wednesday fell 6.6 percent, or $5.60, to $78.73, after Simon’s last offer was rebuffed by the Macerich board. It’s an indication Wall Street isn’t happy about the outcome. Simon Property Group’s stock rose $2.33, or 1.2 percent, to $197.99.

Now Macerich must move deliberately to push up the stock price by increasing productivity at its properties and shedding those with little life, all to prove that rejecting Simon was the right decision for shareholders. “We realize that Macerich currently faces a disconnect between private market valuations and public market views — a situation we have seen before. Letting that disconnect persist is not an option, and we intend to act decisively to correct the situation,” Arthur Coppola, chairman and chief executive officer of Macerich, said late Tuesday night, just after the firm’s board unanimously rejected Simon’s takeover offer.

Coppola cited a “rigorous” business plan put forward last November, involving “recycling” out of lower growth assets; redeploying capital into highly productive assets; expansion and redevelopment projects under way; and identifying additional opportunities. Macerich has a goal of increasing operating margins by 4 percent over the next 18 to 24 months through property expense reductions, common area enhancements geared to boost revenues and expanding its outlet business.

“It’s pretty clear [Macerich] needs to prove they are as valuable as they think they are,” said a financial source who works with Simon.
Sequential Buys Majority Stake in Simpson

By LISA LOCKWOOD

JESSICA SIMPSON, the singer-reality TV star-designer whose fashion brand flourished under Camuto Group to the tune of $1 billion in retail sales, is cashing out.

Sequential Brands Group Inc., has signed a definitive agreement to acquire a majority stake in the Jessica Simpson Collection master license and other rights, for an undisclosed amount of cash and stock. Camuto, as her new business partner and will continue to own the balance of the equity interest.

According to sources, Sequential is looking to build Simpson’s empire into a $2 billion to $3 billion operation, with a focus on expanding globally.

Asked which categories she would still like to add, Simpson said, “It’s humbling to think that we now have 31 product categories in the collection. Together with my mom, Tina, and the rest of the JS team, we are always looking for new ways to reach our consumers. I have a passion for home design, so I’m excited to expand on our home and lifestyle offerings. I also look forward to further developing our digital commerce site and taking our brand all over the world.” She also said she looks forward to having Simpson’s design stores both in the U.S. and abroad “where I can dress a woman from head to toe, while offering her something completely different.”

Vincent Camuto, the late founder and chief executive officer of Camuto Group, who died Jan. 21, bought the master license for Jessica Simpson in 2005 for $15 million. With the new deal, Camuto’s master license for the Jessica Simpson Collection has been replaced with a new, long-term license to manufacture and distribute all of Simpson’s apparel, footwear, handbags and accessories, with the existing licensing agreements are expected to stay in place, such as Jeannewang with Jones Jeanswear, fragrance with Parlux Fragrances, kids’ apparel with Hazzard, and go-shoe brands with Trebbiano LLC. Several of the Camuto employees who market the Jessica Simpson Collection will continue to work with the brand.

Camuto engineered the growth of Simpson’s brand from footwear into a multigender celebrity business. Today, the brand has 31 product categories, including footwear, apparel, fragrance, fashion accessories, materniity apparel, girls’ clothing and a home line. The line is distributed through such retailers as Dillard’s, Macy’s, Belk, Lord & Taylor and Nordstrom, and has 2,000 points of distribution worldwide.

“I am thrilled to partner with Sequential Brands Group to continue the growth and integrity of the Jessica Simpson Collection,” Simpson said. “We are committed and looking forward to years of success with Jessica, and we would love to have Simpson’s collections, which will be a global, lifestyle brand.”

Shmidman is particularly looking forward to growing the business in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America. At present, the vast majority of Simpson’s business is done in the U.S. “We believe there are a number of emerging and natural markets” that would love to have Simpson’s collections, he said. “The opportunity of opportunity would be an e-commerce platform for Simpson, which doesn’t exist yet.”

Alex DeCielo, CEO of Camuto Group, said, “We are excited to work with Sequential and to continue working closely with Jessica and the Jessica Simpson brand. We have enjoyed many years of success with Jessica, and we are committed and looking forward to many years ahead.”

Sequential has received committed financing from Bank of America and GSO Capital Partners LP, an affiliate of Blackstone Group. The transaction, which is slated to close in 90 days, is expected to be immediately accretive. David Levity, a former executive vice chairman of Guess and president of Guess Men’s International, has been named chief executive officer of Simpson and advised her on valuation, intellectual property and licensing matters. Mitchell C. Littman of Littman Kroos LLP advised Simpson on corporate legal matters. The deal team that represented Sequential during the acquisition was led by Traugott & Wells LLP.

Sequential, a brand management organization, has $24 million in 2014, compared to $12.3 million a year ago. Net sales were $16.5 million in 2014.

Cruise collections are a moving target this season. Dior, which had planned to stage its show in Los Angeles on May 9, has decided on a new country and date.

Terry J. Lundgren saw its total compensation as Macy’s Inc.’s chairman and chief executive officer increase 37.1 percent to $16.5 million in 2014, PAGE 6

Even though Simplicity Group has withdrawn its $16.8 billion bid, that doesn’t mean the targeted Macenich Company is off the hook.

“We are honored to be able to welcome the Jessica Simpson Collection to our portfolio,” said David Leiby, executive chairman of Guess, the company that represented Sequential during the acquisition. Gibson Dunn advised Sequential on the transaction on behalf of Blackstone Group. The transaction was led by Tengram Capital Partners. Gibson Dunn represented Sequential during the acquisition.

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American Apparel's chief executive officer Paula Schneider will eliminate about 180 jobs in her bid to turn around the struggling Los Angeles-based firm, PAGE 7

Edward Lampert is raising yet another $2.5 billion in his bet on reinventing retailing and his struggling Sears Holdings Corp., PAGE 7

Even though Simon Property Group has withdrawn its $15.8 billion bid, that doesn’t mean the targeted Macenich Company is off the hook.

“Men are the new women,” was the prevailing theme running through the Men’s Wear Show, held at the Asia Society here last week.

Wealth, creativity and craft were on powerful on view at Chanel’s Métiers d’Art show at the Park Avenue Armory on Tuesday night, which hosted guests including Pharell and Beyoncé.

Cruise collections are a moving target this season. Dior, which had planned to stage its show in Los Angeles on May 9, has decided on a new country and date.

Beyoncé was among the big names doing the same show at the Chelsea Piers in Manhattan, during which she posed for three covers of O, The Oprah Magazine.

American Apparel chief executive officer Paula Schneider will eliminate about 180 jobs in her bid to turn around the struggling Los Angeles-based firm, PAGE 7

Edward Lampert is raising yet another $2.5 billion in his bet on reinventing retailing and his struggling Sears Holdings Corp., PAGE 7

Correction

Tiffany started making watches in 1847. The date was incorrect in a story on page 6, Wednesday.
WWD PLACES THE WORLD OF FASHION AT YOUR FINGERTIPS.
In concert, extreme doses of the three make for a mighty trinity of power, a post made possible undergirded by every other designer unapologetically (and understandably) at every other collection. The business part, I know, this was a restaging of the Métiers d’art individual artisan houses. “The appeal of this collection is very much tied to the uniqueness of the clothes that goes beyond the ordinary ready-to-wear, with this heightened sense of exclusivity that really sets Chanel apart.” Galantin added that customers are well informed on the special nature of Métiers d’art. “We have clients who love everything from the life of Coco, to the modernity that Karl is infusing into the collections,” he said. “They talk to their sales associates about the Métiers d’art individual artisan houses. They’ll know a Lesage embroidery is a special kind of embroidery.”

Given such local enthusiasm and the global attention these shows garner, it makes sense that the house would want to schedule second showings on a regular basis, but Pavlovsky said no such master plan is in the works. “Each time we have to improve, I need a kick in the ass,” he said. “I wake up not pleased with myself. It’s very funny, no?”

Yet he resists any inclination to indulge in gloom. There’s “no time for me to be disappointed because I have to start immediately again.” The minute the thing is over, the next one is due to arrive. A Chanel production is nothing but labor-intensive. In the past several years, Lagerfeld has taken to doing mega sets, essential, he said, in this day and age of global fashion. “You have to do your shows with the big sets today,” he said. “You have to give something visual. Because girls coming out on a runway — there’s nothing wrong, it’s interesting for people in fashion. But for the rest of the world who buys the nail polish, the lipstick for a global brand, it’s a problem to show something that looks [plain]. That’s our time. You have to give them a present. That’s my job, that’s why I’m here.”

“Fashion is about agility.” Lagerfeld couldn’t agree more. He keeps his thoughts on the future — the next collection and the next, sometimes waking up in the morning with plans for his next set fully formed in his head that he sketches out immediately. For Seoul, he decided to avoid too much reliance on history, noting, “For me, Korea is the world of the future.” Thus, he opted to show not in a location rich with ancient resonance but in a Zaha Hadid-designed museum. “I’m not doing a cultural thing — no, no, no, no. There may be a few influences but they are not used like a cultural homage to the country. This is in fact, futuristic.”

But pragmatist that he is, Lagerfeld’s not talking a space odyssey. To him, strewing in fashion means looking ahead six months. “Not even six months anymore,” he auto-corrected. “Now it’s three months-three months-three months.”

Though the pace should be exhausting, Lagerfeld never gives any outward sign of fatigue, either physical or creative. “It’s no problem for me because I have a strong voice,” he said. “There’s that super-human work ethic that drives him to turn out one Chanel extravaganza after another, many in remote parts of the world, and work in all kinds of outside projects, from his beloved perfume campaigns to the artistic direction of the upcoming Hyères Festival of Fashion and Photography. He wouldn’t have it any other way. “I spend time nowhere except where I’m working,” Lagerfeld said, lest one wonder if he’d take in a museum exhibit or Broadway show while in New York. “I’m not a tourist. It bores me. And I cannot walk in the streets. I don’t want to do selfies with 300 unknown people, you know?”
Chanel Gets Lucky

“Chanel!” Pharrell Williams said. “I can’t believe I’m here right now.”

Yes, it was so hard to believe Karl Lagerfeld staged a Chanel show in the middle of New York’s Upper East Side Tuesday night, even Pharrell was incredulous. He was speaking from a makeshift stage at the Park Avenue Armory after Lagerfeld sent down a labyrinthine runway—a parade of models that included Cara Delevingne, Kendall Jenner and Stella Tennant, showing off the work of the house’s Métiers d’Art companies.

Williams was part of the constellation of stars in attendance to witness the once-in-a-blue-moon event. Beyoncé, Julianne Moore and Dakota Johnson were among the others.

Kris Jenner, one of the first to arrive, came to New York from Los Angeles just for the occasion. “Only for Karl,” she said, installed in an armchair toward the entrance. “I missed the Salzburg show so I’m relieved I get to see it here.”

Most guests were still snaking through the gilded furniture trying to locate their seats. Johnson ended up on a settee in the center of the room, across from Lily Collins and Banks, both perched on an ivory pew. The ladies inevitably ended up discussing their Chanel wares. “I turned around the top and sashed it,” Collins said of her black satin crepe top from the spring collection. Johnson opted for a silver skirt suit from spring couture. “I feel like a first lady,” she said. Moore’s footwear caused quite a stir when she arrived. The heels—a black strappy sandal with a little Lucile heel—produced a headlights-type effect as the crowd parted, clearing the aisles to let her pass. “You can switch them on and off,” she said from her seat, demonstrating the party trick. “I think I’ll turn them off for the show if the lights go down.

Soon the lights did go down with one seat still empty. Then, Queen Bey emerged from backstage and was ushered to her throne next to Pharrell, cueing the show to begin.

“I love how he mixes the most unexpected pieces, the socks with the shorts and sequined blazer. Karl’s mind is like an explosion of ideas,” Collins said post-show as she made her way from the front row to the darkened salon where Williams was about to perform.

After working with Lagerfeld on a short film about the Métiers d’Art collection, Williams jumped at the chance to team with the designer again.

“I’m a fan. I’m like, a huge fan and it’s not often that as a fan you get a chance to work with someone you respect,” the singer said, wearing custom Chanel. “It’s just made for a really incredible yet educational experience. I learn so much from him. Whenever we work together, I get to ask him questions and he actually tells me and he’ll sketch things right in front of me. That man is as sharp as a pen.”

Williams teased future collaborations without giving away any trade secrets.

“We’ve done a couple of things together. One’s been revealed and a couple of others have not been yet,” he said.

The pair’s short film, for which Williams wrote an original song, played around 9 p.m. and the singer took the stage before a rabid crowd that included Beyoncé and Lagerfeld for a five-song set that consisted of “Come Get it Bae,” “Get Lucky” and, surprisingly given recent news, “Blurred Lines.” So much for that Marvin Gaye lawsuit.

— Erik Maza and Taylor Harris
OPRAH’S 15 YEARS: A small group of photographers, editors and other creative types had huddled around a large cardboard rectangle propped up on an easel, waiting for Oprah Winfrey to emerge from her green room, following a daylong shoot at Chelsea Piers in Manhattan, during which she posed for the covers of O, The Oprah Magazine.

Adam Glassman, O’s creative director, began pouring Champagne and sparkling wine into flutes, once a plainly clothed Winfrey quietly appeared on the scene, wearing a bright red evening dress, with white piping, dark blue jeans and off-white sneakers bearing sparkles on the toe box.

The occasion was the unveiling of O’s May cover, which marks the Hearst Magazines-owned title’s 15th year. The crew huddled around Winfrey, who gave a brief thank you toast, and then said: “I won’t say 15 more years. Fifteen more of dragging me out, I decide.”

She was then handed a drink and directed to look at the shrouded cardboard depicting the cover, promising “there’s a lot on it.” Winfrey gasped, feigning surprise, as the sheet was lifted. Glassman revealed a black and white image of Winfrey, wearing a black dress adorned with crystals. The cover’s “s” was also encrusted with crystals. (For those sensing a trend, the Swarovski crystals mark a 15th wedding anniversary.)

The chairman and chief executive officers of O’s Circle of Friends could win a copy of the magazine, which would both be signed by Winfrey and adorned with actual Swarovski crystals — more than 1,500 an issue to be exact. In order for those awards, which pay $1,000 a month to be part of the premier Circle, to be selected, they must write a short paragraph on “what makes the magazine unique,” O’s editorial staff will decide the winners.

The issue, which hits newsstands on April 14, includes 15 chapters or mini-sections that play on some of Winfrey’s mantas. For instance, one chapter is called “It’s Never Too Late,” and explores the career changes of successful women. L’Oreal launched the double ad flap that opens the cover. The issue, which is on sale, also features a 12-page hair guide sponsored by the L’Oreal brands Carol’s Daughter and Softsheen, as well as ads from Dior, J.C. Penney and Dove.

Close-up of the Swarovski Crystals on the limited-edition May issue.

Lucy Kaylin, O editor in chief, said there’s already a cover model coming into the works, but wouldn’t provide a timeline.

“Oprah is all in,” Kaylin said. explaining that Winfrey would still be in the magazine, just not always on the cover. “She’s in love with this magazine. She’s here for us. It’s only human and appropriate for magazines to change it, so we actually seriously considered it. We made the decision not to do it to now,” Winfrey said, referring to her self-effacing reaction from appearing on the magazine’s monthly covers.

Lucy Kaylin, O editor in chief, said there’s already a cover model coming into the works, but wouldn’t provide a timeline.

Lundgren’s Compensation Up 37.1%

By ARNOLD J. KARR

TERRY J. LUNDGREN SAW his total compensation as Macy’s Inc’s chairman and chief executive officer increase 37.1 percent to $16.5 million, and its cash portion grow by more than 20 percent, in 2014.

According to the company’s definitive proxy, released to the Securities and Exchange Commission Wednesday, Macy’s CEO is now paid $4.5 million more than the $12 million reported in the prior year as his cash bonus and stock and option awards increased.

His salary was unchanged at $1.6 million, but his cash bonus, or non-equity incentive plan compensation, rose 26.4 percent, to $2.6 million from $2.0 million in 2013. His other income more than doubled, to $233,000 from $98,000, with about half of the 2014 amount attributable to matching contributions by the company under its deferred compensation plan.

Lundgren is the only Macy’s executive permitted to make personal use of the company aircraft, and his other income includes $75,000 allotted for a personal use.

Jeff Gennette, named president of Macy’s last year, had total compensation of $4.3 million, 41.9 percent higher than in the previous year, driven by a 75 percent increase in his base salary.

In its filing, Macy’s noted that its comparable sales rose 0.7 percent, its fifth consecutive year of comp growth. The increase included sales from licensed departments, which were up 1.4 percent. Other metrics showed consistent improvement over the years, including net sales and adjusted EBIT as well as adjusted earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortization margin of 14 percent last year, return on invested capital of 22.4 percent, and adjusted earnings per share of $4.49.

CRUISE CONTROL: Cruise collections are a moving target this season. Dior, which had to stage its show in Los Angeles on May 9, has changed locations on a new country and date, WWD has learned. The cruise show is now slated for May 11 on the French Riviera not far from Cannes. Dior was yet to reveal the venue, but is said to have seized on an opportunity it couldn’t resist. It still puts the French house in close proximity to the global film elite of the Cannes Film Festival opening ceremony.

Other key destinations for cruise season this include Seoul on May 4 for Chanel and Palm Beach, Calif., on May 6 for Karl Lagerfeld. (See SOCHA)

KANYE AND DAMON, GET IN LINE: Kanye West and Damon Dash are going to have to follow procedure if they want to buy bankrupt e-tailer Karmaloop, as they say they do. Senior lender Comvest Capital in the site’s bankruptcy has been selected as the “stalking horse” to spur a bidding process for the company, which filed for Chapter 11 in Delaware last year.

In lieu of cash, Comvest has agreed to a $13 million credit bid. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in debt owed to the lender. 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The credit bid will be used to forgive $13 million in de
Sears Forges Ahead on REIT Plans, Enters Separate JV with GGP

By VICKI M. YOUNG

EDWARD LAMPERT is raising another $2.5 billion in new equity to finance the turnaround and restructuring of Sears. His investment vehicle, ESL Investments, will make an equity investment of $900 million, according to a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission on April 1. Sears Holdings Corp. shareholders will provide $1.6 billion in proceeds from a rights offering, and current management will provide $40 million in cash, according to the filing. ESL is majority-owned by Lenderfoot Capital, which is controlled by ESL’s managing member, Edward S. Lampert. The investment comes amid the company’s efforts to stabilize and improve operations and to refocus on its core retail business. ESL and the notice of the rights offering included in the April 1 filing indicate that the offer includes a subscription right in the form of a warrant to buy 386,826 shares of Sears common stock at a price of $2.50 per share. ESL Investment’s management and investment committee, which is responsible for approving investments made by ESL, are advised by ESL’s independent investment advisor, which is J. Famula & Associates. ESL is based in the Los Angeles area and has offices in New York, London, and Tokyo. ESL manages about $25 billion in assets. ESL is the largest owner of Sears and holds the majority of its shares. ESL has been accused of exploiting Sears’ financial difficulties for its own benefit. ESL is seeking to further reduce the value of its shares by selling more shares to the public. ESL has proposed a rights offering to increase the company’s capital structure and to allow ESL to sell more shares to the public at a lower price. ESL has already sold more than 50 million shares at a discount to the market price. ESL has said that it will use the proceeds of the rights offering to recapitalize the company and to improve its balance sheet. ESL has also said that it will use the proceeds to reduce its debt. ESL has been accused of engaging in unfair dealings with Sears and its former management. ESL has been sued by Sears shareholders and by the Securities and Exchange Commission. ESL has also been sued by the New York State Attorney General and by the Federal Trade Commission. ESL has denied all allegations of wrongdoing. ESL has said that its main goal is to improve Sears’ performance and to increase its value. ESL has said that it will use the proceeds of the rights offering to recapitalize the company and to improve its balance sheet. ESL has also said that it will use the proceeds to reduce its debt. ESL has been accused of engaging in unfair dealings with Sears and its former management. ESL has also been sued by the New York State Attorney General and by the Federal Trade Commission. ESL has denied all allegations of wrongdoing. ESL has said that its main goal is to improve Sears’ performance and to increase its value.
The New Dimension in Men’s

From design inspiration and social media strategies to innovation at retail, speakers at the annual Men’s Wear Summit took on a variety of topics.

AHMH

STUART VEVERS, COACH INC.

“I’ve always had a great passion for brands,” declared Coach’s Stuart Vevers to begin his presentation. A mere glance at the designer’s résumé would confirm that statement; on it he was to work for Bottega Veneta, Givenchy, Mulberry, Louis Vuitton, Loewe and, now, Coach, where Vevers has served as executive creative director since June 2013.

“Stuart Vevers, Coach Inc.”

“The soul and uniqueness in great fashion houses is what really excites me, and it’s what drew me to Coach,” Vevers said. “I think Coach is truly special as the American leather goods house, and interestingly, Coach actually began as a men’s brand, with a workshop of six craftspeople here in New York City in 1941. Almost 75 years later, my focus is to establish a fresh, new vision that explores what it is about the brand that is unique and has drawn customers around the world to Coach.”

Vevers described his vision for men’s wear as “easy, inherently cool, youthful and uncontrived.” Among his inspirations: the Beatrice Boys, the Kennedy boys, Steve McQueen and the imagery of Gus Van Sant. “I think of the Coach guy as solid; he’s not fragile,” said Vevers. “He wants to get dressed fast. He’s straightforward, but he wants to celebrate his character and individuality… It was important that [the collection] wasn’t a re-creation of the past or tied to traditional assumptions of what luxury men’s means, such as formality, somber color and the idea that an investment piece means, such as formality, somber color and that in itself can bring a new perspective on luxury.”

Interestingly enough, as one audience member pointed out, Vevers chose to debut his admittedly American-influenced men’s collection during London’s men’s fashion week last January. “People thought it was just because of my nationality and because I just wanted to go home, but up until recently New York hasn’t had a specific, men’s focused fashion week moment — obviously that is changing,” he explained. “I felt we had to take our selves out of context, to show something in a new environment. Sometimes when you go somewhere different, people are more curious, and I think that helped.”

So would he be showing in July during New York Fashion Week: Men’s? “To be confirmed.”

— LAUREN MCCARTHY

TOOD SNUDDER

Todd Snyder was unabashed about how abandoning his collegiate plan to become an architect allowed him to build a house of a different kind.

Having worked in the industry for 20-plus years at companies such as Ralph Lauren and at the designer, a three-time CFDA award nominee, ventured out on his own four years ago to launch his signature brand. “My dad always told me, ‘If you want to be the best, work for the best,’” he said. “For me, there was nothing better than Ralph Lauren. And when I met Mickey Drexler, there was nothing better than his vision and what he’s done. I started my own brand because I saw a real void in the marketplace. Throughout my career, I was able to shop the industry to see what was missing.”

Snyder said he aimed to build a brand around updated American classics such as a sweatshirt, chinos, “a great jean” and a suit — essentially the go-to items in his own closet. “But I wanted to reinvent that and update that. I felt that the American designer especially is always getting eclipsed by the Europeans,” he said. “J. Crew really showed me there’s a customer out there who wants great quality and something a little nicer; but that is still luxury.”

After internning at Ralph Lauren in 1992, a year later he joined J. Crew, where he taught himself how to sew, thanks in part to helping the company’s tailors during his off-hours. Underwear, hoodie designer labels, henley shirts, menswear — the designer had been the first to do once out on his own. “We’re trying to find a partner or a pop-up opportunity or something,” he said. “They want to know, ‘Who makes it? Why is it designed that way? Where do the vegetables come from? What was the name of the cow that was killed?’ The same thing has happened with men’s wear. They don’t just want to go to a department store. They want to know everything."

With a three-story multibrand store called The Townhouse up-and-running in Tokyo, Snyder plans to open three more stores in Japan through a partner there. Having seen how a three-month pop-up store with Champion in New York wound up being extended to 18 months, Snyder said he would like to eventually open a permanent New York store. But the city’s requisite 10-year lease, and six months’ rent in advance policy is too much of a financial burden for him to carry on his own. “We’re trying to find a partner or a pop-up opportunity or something,” he said.

Snyder, who is also working on a gray flannel version of Eames’ management chair, said the dominance of European designers remains a struggle for American designers both here and abroad. “I will say this to the retailers here: Everyone wants European brands right now [in the U.S.] and it’s the same thing in Europe. It’s really hard to open accounts there. The only exception is Japan. They love American fashion and they really embrace it.”

— ROSEMARY FEITELBERG
ITALO ZUCCHELLI, CALVIN KLEIN INC.

There was never a doubt in Italo Zucchelli’s mind that he would become a designer. And over the past 13 years at Calvin Klein, the men’s creative director of Calvin Klein Collection has taken the lessons he learned from the “god and goddess of minimalism” to make his own mark on the fashion industry.

Although Zucchelli dabbled with the idea of becoming an architect as a young man, “I knew fashion was my passion,” he said.

In the early Eighties in Italy, the fashion business was booming and he became fascinated with the proliferation of magazines in the market. He traveled to London and absorbed everything that was happening with street style and music, and there was no turning back. “There was a new energy and I knew I wanted to do something creative.” He cut his teeth at Romeo Gigli and then moved on to Jil Sander, where he got a call from Calvin Klein telling him that he wanted Zucchelli to work on his women’s collection design team.

“He’s a living legend and in my opinion, a genius,” Zucchelli said. “I worked with him for three years and learned a lot from him. He’s my mentor. He changed my life.”

Being able to work with Klein and Sander, two of the most famous for their minimalist designs, opened Zucchelli’s eyes. “It was interesting for me to see how the same aesthetic could be translated in a very European, conceptual, arty way from her and a very American, immediate, to-the-point way from him. There are a lot of similarities in that and what I was then expressing is different, and what I do is a mixture of both.”

With Calvin Klein aesthetic established, Zucchelli said he starts the design process each season by traveling to cities such as Tokyo, Los Angeles, Berlin or London. “I go to exhibitions, buy books, vintage, and I come back to my office and look at what we collected. We start to put together a concept of colors, theme, fabric inspiration. The use of innovative fabrics such as Neoprene or PVC in his designs has become one of his hallmarks.”

“I think fashion is supposed to move forward so the fascination I’ve always had with fabrics and materials can help push a new message,” he said. “Fabrics represent context and culture and that’s what I’m obsessed with innovation and that’s what the materials have always been for me. I like to put together something familiar with something slightly unfamiliar.” For example, offering a tuxedo jacket in Neoprene makes the piece “new and exciting but familiar at the same time.”

That familiarity is also evident in Zucchelli’s choice of faces for the brand — both on the runway and in its advertising.

“Calvin is legendary for casting,” he said. “So I do a lot of pre-casting before shows. Usually they’re not even models, they’re guys.” Often, these “guys” are almost “clones,” he said. “The Calvin Klein guy is strong, masculine, very American, and in my mind, America has always looked healthy, built, good-looking — and that’s what I look for when I cast my models.”

That strategy also holds true with celebrities, he said. “I like handsome guys like Bradley [Cooper] and Alex [Sharkgarden], people who can really represent what I do in the best way — the athleticism, the Americanism. But at the same time, I also like characters like Jared Leto.”

He also likes musicians. “Music has a cool factor, and if you want to enhance what you do, music is the most powerful way to do it,” he said. Recently, he designed the wardrobe for Drake’s tour and he’s also worked with Sam Smith — two divergently different artists who allow him to express different faces of the Calvin Klein brand.

“Trends and movements will pass and innovation is the most powerful way to do it.”

DESIGNING COOL-LOOKING STUFF ISN’T HARD, IT’S MUCH HARDER TO DESIGN PRODUCT THAT TRULY MAKES YOU BETTER.

Calling it the “new normal in athleisurewear,” Silbert said athletes today “think very differently about what they put on their bodies.”

And so Under Armour never loses sight of where it started. “We lead the brand with the idea that if something is close enough to where we need to go, Kevin [Plank] says we’re a new brand every six months. We’re still grounded in who we are, but we’re constantly changing.”

Silbert likened it to a car, saying immediately upon turning on the engine, the driver knows everything about the vehicle: whether it needs gas, service, the tire pressure, etc. “But we know nothing about our bodies. That’s not acceptable.” But connected fitness can change that.

“Trends and movements will come and go, Silbert added, “but because of the filter of performance and innovation, we will continue to lead the conversation all about the athlete and the athlete experience more and more every day.”

It’s about this authentic relationship that allows us to anticipate their ever-evolving needs. We like to say, because of innovation, designing cool-looking stuff isn’t hard, it’s much harder to design product that truly makes you better.”

Among the company’s most recent offerings that hit the bill are the NeoForm running shoe, which was manufactured in a bra factory instead of a footwear facility. Why? he asked. “Because people who make bras know how to focus on fit.”

But perhaps the most promising category is connected fitness, Silbert said.

“Five years ago, if I would have told you we’re going to make a T-shirt that regulates your core body temperature, measures your heart rate and tracks your workouts all at the same time, you probably would have called me crazy,” Silbert said. “We don’t think so.”

Although Under Armour continues to be focused on giving athletes the tools to improve their performance during competition, “what about after the game?” Silbert asked. Introducing products and tools that shorten the recovery time “will unlock an athlete’s true potential,” he said.

“Trends and movements will pass and innovation is the most powerful way to do it.”

“Trends and movements will come and go,” Silbert added, “but because of the filter of performance and innovation, we will continue to lead the conversation about what it means to be a modern athlete.”

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“There’s life before and after competition,” he said. “I don’t want to call this lifestyle, I want to call this life and our athletes are inviting us into the space from its performance category to its new mobile apps, Under Armour looks to these ‘game changers’ to continue to move forward.”

Silbert said over the past 1.5 years, the company has focused on “informational armour.” The company now has more than 400 employees dedicated to this area and has “built a community of over 137 million active users.” There are only five apps in the market today that can boast more than 500 million users, he said, and “they’re all in the social space — nobody is doing it in fitness space.”

But providing users with a combination of content, product and information “is going to unlock a whole new level of space.”

“We’re in the business of making shirts and shoes — and that will continue to be our core — it’s this relentless focus on innovation and pushing the boundaries of what is possible that will drive us and allow us to define what the future looks like,” he concluded.

— J.E.P.
ALEXANDRE MATTIUSSI, NICOLAS SANTI-WEIL, AMI ALEXANDRE MATTIUSSI

Friendship might not be a typical reference point for a fashion brand, but it's a theme that permeates Ami, an advanced contemporary men's wear label founded by Alexandre Mattiussi.

After spending his 20s hopping around the halls of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton — he started at Dior, moved to Givenchy and ended his stint at Marc Jacobs — Mattiussi was ready to create clothes for his friends that filled the gap between fast fashion and luxury. “I couldn’t afford the things I was designing,” Mattiussi said. “I wanted to bring this luxurious feeling into something more accessible.”

So in 2011, he launched Ami, which are his initials and also means friend in French. Nicolas Santi-Weil, Ami’s chief executive officer who had cofounded French contemporary brand The Kooples, joined the business in 2013. The two met through friends and Santi-Weil was drawn to the 34-year-old designer because he had a knack for business and a clear vision for the brand.

According to Mattiussi, that vision isn’t anything deep. “I try not to intellectualize it too much,” Mattiussi said. “When I think about my experience before, the way we were designing was sometimes not so right. It feels like the only thing that interests me is the way a guy is wearing his clothes.”

Instead of approaching each season with a theme, Mattiussi asks friends what they want to wear and then creates their ideal wardrobe. He plays with proportions and fabrics to produce modern men’s wear staples, which are made in Europe. Unlike the women’s market, which churns out dozens on a rotation, Mattiussi doesn’t feel the need to play that game. “I have the temptation to design more fashion pieces, but I feel like it’s not the right time to do it. The guy who is wearing Ami is not about being fashionable,” Mattiussi said.

“I DON’T SAY I’M THE BEST DESIGNER IN THE WORLD. I DON’T SAY I’M GOING TO REVOLUTIONIZE FASHION. I JUST SAY I HAVE IDEAS AND I WANT TO SHARE THEM WITH AS MANY PEOPLE AS I CAN.”

— ALEXANDRE MATTIUSSI

He also doesn’t play the celebrity game, although he was pleased when David Bowie wore an Ami trenchcoat in his 2013 music video “The Stars (Are Out Tonight).” “He’s still wearing it,” Mattiussi laughed. That same year, Mattiussi won the ANDAM Fashion Award. He was the first man’s wear designer in 25 years to receive the honor and he used the prize money, about $268,500, to stage his first runway show last February. The show, which replicated a snowy street in Paris, was a turning point for the brand.

“I wanted to put the story of my guys and my collection into something that’s very realistic. It feels like this is a reality, and I wanted to tell the story of a street in Paris during winter with the snow falling at the end. Although his fall show featured five women wearing Ami looks, Mattiussi said he has no plans to work on a women’s collection. Instead, he’s homing in on his men’s business coming from ready-to-wear and on his men’s collection, opening two more stores this year, one in London and another in Paris, and maintaining his 300 points of sale worldwide. Ami operates two stores in Paris and is sold globally at retailers including Barneys New York, Harrods, Galeries Lafayette and Saks Fifth Avenue. According to the brand, 80 percent of the brand’s business comes from outside of France.

While at The Kooples, Santi-Weil oversaw the opening of 350 stores, 100 of which were outside of France. Although Santi-Weil is taking this new approach, he said it’s important to open more stores. “Even if most of our business is abroad, to be able to open new ones is to be in direct contact with our clientele,” said Santi-Weil. “[We can] tell our own story and have the freedom to express ourselves.”

Another way to connect with this customer is through Instagram, a platform that Mattiussi frequently uses to tell his brand’s story and showcasing his friends wearing a red beanie — Mattiussi’s signature hat — on the app, it allows the designer to see how his customers interpret Ami product.

“This is the best window on what’s happening. Every day I have the chance to see someone wearing Ami. I feel like the success of the brand comes from the people who are wearing your clothes.”

Customers also communicate with Mattiussi on Instagram and send direct messages with design suggestions, which sometimes include altering silhouettes or producing pieces in additional colors. Mattiussi takes these comments seriously. “I have ideas, but I don’t say I’m the best designer in the world. I don’t say I’m going to revolutionize fashion. I just say I have ideas and I want to share them with as many people as I can.”

When Mattiussi and Santi-Weil were asked how big they wanted Ami to be, they were reticent to project its growth. “I can’t say it first. It’s just the beginning of the story, so I cannot give you a precise figure,” Santi-Weil said. “We do believe that there is a huge potential in this segment.”

— ARIA HUGHES

MASIMO CARONNA, BRUNELLO CUCINELLI

The heart and soul of its founder is woven through the fabric of every design offered by Brunello Cucinelli, and it’s his passion for quality and creativity that has created a successful luxury lifestyle brand.

“At the core, our brand is the vision of a very special individual — Brunello Cucinelli,” said Massimo Caronna, president of the company’s U.S. business. Caronna met the designer decades ago when Cucinelli was just creating women’s cashmere sweaters, but quickly saw the “vision of what the brand could eventually become one day.”

When attempting to build any brand, the most essential ingredient is product, he said. Starting with those sweaters in 30 colors in 1978, Cucinelli branched out into men’s wear in 1994, starting with sweaters and expanding into other categories, including sportswear, clothing, outerwear and accessories.

Today, men’s wear represents 40 percent of overall sales, which last year were $558.6 million, or $420 million, with 85 percent of the men’s business coming from ready-to-wear and 15 percent from accessories, he said. While the offering has evolved, one thing has remained the same: offering product with a “casual, chic” taste level that is ageless and sophisticated.

To accomplish this, Caronna said there are three key components: quality, creativity and visual merchandising.

Materials are purchased from the best mills in Biella, Italy, or, in the case of cashmere, Mongolia, and created by the company’s artisans in its hometown of Solomeo, Italy. In fact, Caronna said, 25 percent of the company is dedicated to quality control, ensuring that every piece adheres to the standards of the quality the brand stands for.

“On certain occasions, Cucinelli has created a "school of craft" in Solomeo where young people are trained in the art of tailoring. “The average age of our tailors is 60 or 65,” he said. “We had to make a clear decision what to do for the future.”

The school has turned into a nurturing success, with 1,300 students applying for 75 slots.

Turning to creativity, he said this “plays a major role” in men’s wear, and is defined by the details, whether that be the fit, the color or the styling.

Also important is visual merchandising, and Cucinelli employs 30 people in Italy and a dozen in the U.S. whose job is to visit the monobrand and multibrand stores that carry the collection to ensure consistency in the displays.

“Today, distribution is split evenly between monobrand and multibrand stores, he said. Among the retailers that carry the line in the U.S. are Saks Fifth Avenue, Neiman Marcus, Mario’s and Andriessen Morton, and over the years, these retailers have proven to be important ‘guardians of the brand,’ Caronna said. “North America has been a key market for us,” he said, noting the U.S. represents 34 percent of sales and is the brand’s largest market in Europe. It is 33 percent of sales and Italy is 18.7 percent.

The Far East is also important, he said. At the same time Cucinelli has been careful not to sell its brand in too many places around the world. “A high-quality product cannot be overdistributed,” he said.

By staying small, it allows the brand to maintain its culture and its close relationship with its founder.

— JEAN E. PALMIERI
RICHARD COHEN, TRINITY LTD.

China’s economy might be slowing — its growth rate for 2015 is expected to be 7 percent, which is the lowest it’s been in 11 years — but men’s wear continues to boom in the region, according to Richard Cohen, chief executive officer of Trinity Ltd., which owns men’s wear brands Gieves & Hawkes, Kent & Curwen and Cerruti 1881.

“China is the most exciting opportunity right now,” said Cohen, who joined Trinity in 2008 after serving as the senior vice president of business development at Saks Fifth Avenue.

According to MarketLine, men’s wear represents the largest category in China’s apparel sector, accounting for 43 percent of the business, or ¥73.3 billion. Women’s trails behind at 34 percent, followed by children’s, which makes up 23 percent of the apparel category.

Despite the robust men’s wear numbers, the area faces challenges. Cohen said over the years the Chinese customer has become much more discerning and the country’s lucrative gift culture no longer exists. But China’s rapid urbanization and growing middle class create an opportunity for brands.

Trinity currently has 390 stores in China across 65 cities, and its three brands generate ¥400 million in annual sales. He said the brands’ success in China, which has a population of 1.2 billion, has been predicated on the following: targeting globally, but thinking locally, being authentic and, most important, engaging the Chinese consumer via the Internet and their mobile phones.

“They don’t go to department stores, they go to their iPhones,” said Cohen.

Citing figures from the Fung Business Intelligence Centre, the executive said that in 2013, China surpassed the U.S. and became the world’s largest e-commerce market. The country’s e-commerce consumer base is 520 million people, which is more than double the U.S. e-commerce consumer base of 280 million, according to iResearch.

“Online shopping has just overtaken regular business. It’s like an express train and we can’t let go,” Cohen said.

As an example, Cohen said Trinity targeted the digital savvy Chinese consumer by sending SMS text messages to its core customers during the 2014 World Cup. If France won a game, customers could show their SMS text messages to store associates for a 10 percent discount. He and his team were amazed by the response.

Although this customer wants to be engaged on his mobile phone, Cohen said retailers must offer a service in order to gain their personal contact information. For example, Trinity obtains a shopper’s information by offering free ironing and home delivery service when customers purchase a shirt.

In addition to being big spenders domestically, Cohen said the Chinese will be traveling more and they expect the same brands they shop at home to be available abroad.

The China-United States Exchange Foundation said that 10 million Chinese will come to the U.S. in 2022 and each person will have $10,000 of disposable income. Cohen said Trinity, which currently has stores in London and Paris, plans on opening locations in the U.S. to target this customer.

“The Chinese are coming,” said Cohen. “You need a Mandarin or Cantonese speaking person in your stores,” he stressed.

THOMAS OTT, SAKS FIFTH AVENUE

In his two decades at Saks Fifth Avenue, Thomas Ott, senior vice president, general merchandise manager of men’s, gifts and home, has seen some dramatic changes in the men’s wear category.

The shifts range from tailored clothing’s rapid growth in the late Nineties when Saks was opening stores at a brisk pace in San Francisco, Florida and Houston to the popularity of casual Friday to the aftereffects of 9/11 when men started getting dressed up again for job interviews to the influence of European fashion and designer sportswear and then the recession, where business was off 35 percent for two years. Now under new ownership and leadership, Saks is expanding again in both the U.S. and Canada.

“At Saks, we were kind of stalled. It was great working with some super people at Saks, but we didn’t have money to keep up with the Joneses. We couldn’t do any expansion. When you’re a men’s department in a women’s store you don’t get a lot of capex [capital expenditures], so you’re fighting for all the dollars. That’s really refreshing now is it’s more entrepreneurial and we’re going to grow stores again,” said Ott.

In a conversation with Jean Palmieri, senior editor of WWD, Ott said that men are more interested in fashion today than they were in the past.

“We started the ‘Men are the new women.’ It’s a superexciting time. Men are well read, well versed and have an interest in fashion. There are a lot of great influences right now. The world of sports, the great basketball players are dressing so well. A lot of young musicians are dressing up. Guys in their 20s and early 30s are great for the industry,” added Ott. They’re very interested in fashion and they understand it.

Thinking back on his career, it’s probably one of the best generations of male dressers that I’ve seen,” said Ott.

One of fastest growing men’s categories at Saks is advanced contemporary, especially the young contemporary French brands. “Nobody wants to be the old fogey anymore,” he added. Ott said the classic businesses have updated their models, the way they shoot their models, and the fit is closer to the body. He said he is also looking to double his private label in the next two to three years.

Something that Saks has worked on the last few years is showing lifestyle dressing. “We’re integrating all the different parts of a how a guy dresses into each and every floor we cover in men’s.” Consequently, men’s accessories has been on fire the last two to three years. “In particular, leather goods are really driving it. Sunglasses is a super business. It’s very trend oriented. You’ve got to have the right belt to go with the right sneakers and the right shoes. Backpacks is, like, people now carry a backpack before. Also, fashion watches, with a little bit of color and a bigger dial.”

The changes showed that men’s only unit, but now has been absorbed into the main store. “You get a lot of guilt gifts. The woman spends $25,000 on the shoes and the bags, and they realize they need to buy at least a shirt and tie for Joe.” He recalled two husbands who came into the store with their wives, and they went to the bar in the men’s department to hang out. “They turned into socializing customers. One spent $60 and the other spent $50,000,” he said.

Turning to the new Saks store that will be opening in Brookfield Place in downtown Manhattan, he said, “New York will be a cluttered ball field. Everybody and their aunt and uncle will be here. Nordstrom, Neiman’s, Barneys and us.” The Saks store will be 85,000 square feet and will feature women’s and men’s. There will be a 12,000-square-foot men’s floor. He said that where the uptown renovation is more Art Deco styling, the downtown store will be more modern and updated. “I think it’s two different trading zones. I think it will offer us a different opportunity and different customer. As that area is revitalized it’s a whole new shopping customer.”

Asked how he views the competition downtown, Ott gave his perspective: “In men’s, we’re all a little different. We have a lot of vendors we share. We’re all headed in slightly different ways, and we’re not butting heads. Of our major competitors, one is all about luxury. They do luxury probably better than anybody. Where I start at $2,000, they may start at $3,000 or $4,000, and that’s great and God bless them. There’s another guy who’s very much about contemporary. They do a lot of really young fashion and they are really into denim. Another guy is super classic and hits it in the middle and they do nothing but business, and we’re really envy of that store and the volume that they do. They’re classic, and they’re great. Then there’s a real fashion and the fit is great and probably better than anybody. That’s kind of the landscape of our competitors and how we see it. We try to be a little more approachable. We’re playing in the contemporary zone and updated and modern. And that’s the landscape according to Tom.”

— LISA LOCKWOOD
Retail is about the experience. That was the message from a presentation by Ethan Song, cofounder, chief executive officer and creative director of Frank & Oak. According to Song, the apparel brand was started three years ago in Montreal. “We wanted to create cool clothes for regular people,” Song said. While the company is a fashion brand, it wasn’t just design houses that the company looked to emulate. “We looked at media companies as our reference,” Song said. “That focus gave Frank & Oak the vision of how to make the lives of its customers better,” the ceo said. According to Song, the company views itself as an “experience company.” By that he means Frank & Oak creates an experience that wants you to repeat. That experience, he said, is available on the site, the ability to buy products online and personal service, whether texting customer service or a personal stylist — all are powered by technology. Yet it’s the culture and content that changes monthly that pushes Frank & Oak more into the media realm, or at least that’s how the company views itself.

The monthly collections are available for a 60-day period, allowing for small product run-outs that tend to sell out in 45 days, Song said. And the monthly digital content, not to mention the style advice features, all help to improve the life of a Frank & Oak guy. Even mobile, whether its the payment services or ease in accessing the site’s online personal service, is an experience quotient.

Song advocated that people stop thinking of each option physically, mobile or desktop — as separate channels or screens. Digital content is available at the Frank & Oak stores, even at the recent location where half the store is a bar. The company also eschews beacon technology to help with self-checkout.

“We did the opposite,” Song said. “We empowered our stylists at the stores to know all about the customers whenever they buy. All the channels link to the core base,” Song said.

Asaria, whose firm provides retailers with in-hand technology to provide store associates with product, customer and store information to improve the customer experience, said, “We keep hearing of how shoppers have changed… Ninety percent of what’s happening in those stores. We’ve expanded the collection by 70 percent and we are able to track the sales of what’s happening in those stores. We’ve expanded the collection by 70 percent and we are able to track the sales of what’s happening in those stores.”

According to Asaria, it’s the simplest things that make a difference. “The future of retail is the store and the future of the experience quotient.” By that he means Frank & Oak's focus on providing the best customer service and personalization to keep customers coming back.

GIOVANNI MANNUCCI, BOGLIOLI

How do you build a powerful brand? It’s a complex question, but Giovanni Mannucci, president and chief executive officer of Italian men’s wear brand Boglioli, attended the panel and answered it in the most spiritual way possible.

Mannucci, who previously served as ceo of high-end men’s wear firm Isaia, is overseeing Boglioli’s expansion. The tailored clothing brand opened a Milan flagship last year. While it, too, is a private equity fund that owns all shares of the brand, completed the acquisition of about half of its current debt at merchant bank GS Capital Partners.

The executive, who joined Boglioli in 2013, used business philosophies and personal anecdotes to detail how he’s attempting to grow the brand, which was founded in early 1900 and is best known for its Kit Jacket.

According to Mannucci, brands should attempt to follow in the footsteps of the Apple iPhone and dominate a space instead of competing with other players. “They told us competition was a very good thing,” he said. “We are more competitive you, the better for the consumer. But if you are the entrepreneur and you are the guy that’s playing the game, you don’t want competition doing what you want to dominate the game.”

In order to succeed, he said, a company needs four things to succeed for brands — attention, criticism, haters, admiration — and likened it to the Kardashians brand trajectory.

“The first one is attention. Say, ‘Hey, I’m here.’ You are going to get the attention. Once you get the attention you are going to get criticism. Now criticism is good and Felix del Toro

Yes, real men practice yoga, but they also have fun. As Felix del Toro, senior vice president and head of men’s design for Lululemon Athletica, describes the typical Lululemon consumer, he works out five or six days a week and may do yoga once a week.

Del Toro recalled that when Lululemon Athletica was in the throes of developing its men’s business two years ago, one question that kept coming up was whether the brand name and the logo. “How can this be relevant for men when it’s specifically a women’s brand,” del Toro asked.

He said for omnichannel, consistency and continuity at every touchpoint is key. According to Asaria, it’s the simplicity in that drive the return on investment, such as sales associates having mobile capability to answer questions from customers. “The future of retail is the store and the future of the store is the associate,” Asaria concluded.

GREG PETRO, FIRST INSIGHT INC.

According to the data guy, men’s wear is a robust, growing business where retailers, vendors and brands could all be enjoying significantly higher margins.

That was the key takeaway from Greg Petro, president and chief executive officer of First Insight Inc. The data analytics company that markets a “complicated environment” where trends change fast, but growth is vigorous.

Petro said recent analytics suggest that men’s wear companies can be pricing product at significantly higher premiums. The market test was done at the Milan fashion shows earlier this year where First Insight engaged consumers using online games to gauge trend preferences for brands, designs and price points.

First Insight crunches 300,000 data points in the testing, and the results revealed that the top three preferred brands were: John Varvatos, Prada and Salvatore Ferragamo. The data analytics also showed that “by a big margin, people prefer coats without a belt versus coats with a belt,” Petro said, adding that the preferred colors were black, blue and brown — preferred by men in general.

And for men only, “oak/bloodpurple” and green/olive were tops. For women, gray and purple were winners. But it was the pricing front that was most intriguing, Petro said. On average, four of the five product categories tested could “bear a premium.”

“We found that products could have carried a higher price point — much higher,” Petro said, adding that with certain products, such as leather, the value proposition was much higher and could allow for transformation.

Long coats could have fetched an 11 percent premium while overcoats and casual jackets were up at 6 percent and premiums of 5 and 3 percent respectively.

“Men are also more willing to pay more than women,” Petro said, “and more com pared to the price women will pay for the same item,” Petro said.

ARIA HUGHES

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More importantly, Petro said recent analytics suggest that men’s wear companies can be pricing product at significantly higher premiums. The market test was done at the Milan fashion shows earlier this year where First Insight engaged consumers using online games to gauge trend preferences for brands, designs and price points.

First Insight crunches 300,000 data points in the testing, and the results revealed that the top three preferred brands were: John Varvatos, Prada and Salvatore Ferragamo. The data analytics also showed that “by a big margin, people prefer coats without a belt versus coats with a belt,” Petro said, adding that the preferred colors were black, blue and brown — preferred by men in general.

And for men only, “oak/bloodpurple” and green/olive were tops. For women, gray and purple were winners. But it was the pricing front that was most intriguing, Petro said. On average, four of the five product categories tested could “bear a premium.”

“We found that products could have carried a higher price point — much higher,” Petro said, adding that with certain products, such as leather, the value proposition was much higher and could allow for transformation.

Long coats could have fetched an 11 percent premium while overcoats and casual jackets were up at 6 percent and premiums of 5 and 3 percent respectively.

“Men are also more willing to pay more than women,” Petro said, “and more compared to the price women will pay for the same item,” Petro said.

ARIA HUGHES

GREG PETRO, FIRST INSIGHT INC.

According to the data guy, men’s wear is a robust, growing business where retailers, vendors and brands could all be enjoying significantly higher margins.

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