

IN-STORE

Saks bets on service, amenities for 2016 Canadian debut

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Image from Saks' "I Left My Heart in Toronto" campaign

By JEN KING

Department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue is working on making a good first impression as it enters the Canadian retail landscape.

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Saks' first department stores in Canada will be located in Toronto's Eaton Centre and Sherway Gardens, both of which have opening dates slated for February 2016. As anticipation mounts and opening day approaches, Saks has unveiled the plans for its Canadian debut to differentiate its stores from retailers already established in the market.

"Saks' corporate parent, Hudson Bay Company, has perhaps the best knowledge of the Canadian retail marketplace via its 90 Hudson Bay department stores, Canada's leading department store founded in 1670," said Marie Driscoll, CEO and chief consultant of Driscoll Advisors, New York. "This inside track to the Canadian market and the Canadian consumer is a powerful advantage for Saks.

"Entering Canada focused on services with renowned beauty and food services and the launch of its personal shopping and styling service, The Fifth Avenue Club, as well as the extensive designer brands that Saks will offer, including 10022-SHOE, will mark a first in a luxury retail opening in Canada and bound to create excitement, drive store traffic and set Saks apart in the market," she said.

Ms. Driscoll is not affiliated with Saks, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Saks did not respond by press deadline.

New in town

Now owned by Canadian retailer Hudson's Bay Company, Saks will enter the market with a bevy of in-store services and amenities that are likely to attract local and visiting consumers to its new locations.

The new Saks locations will boast a number of luxurious offerings, such as an extensive selection of women's designer ready-to-wear, a designer handbag array and beauty counters stocked with high-end brands. The men's department will include a made-to-measure lounge.

Also, the Saks outposts in Canada will feature the retailer's signature designer shoe salon, 10022-SHOE, where an extensive selection of designer footwear will be available.

Beyond standard retail offerings, both stores will introduce The Fifth Avenue Club, a personal shopping and styling

service. Members will have access to expert personal shoppers, who will offer attention curated to the needs of a specific consumer, along with a private suite and refreshments, among other perks.



Torrance Coombs and Alyssa Campanella for Saks Canada

The Personal Shopping Experience will also be introduced in Toronto. This mobile shopping service brings a consumer's personal shopper to her home or office in a Saks-branded Mercedes-Benz. The shopper will arrive with curated merchandise and styling amenities such as beauty consultations and tailoring.

Boosting service further, Saks' Toronto location will have a John Barrett hair and beauty salon. John Barrett only recently became the in-store salon and spa partner of Saks, making this relationship an integral part of the retailer's efforts in Canada.

Additionally, Saks will position its stores as destinations, rather just than a department store, through two culinary options within both the Toronto locations.

The stores will include a Saks Food Hall by Pusateri's Fine Food where international foods will be served and prepared. The other is a fine dining option put forth by Oliver & Bonacini, one of Canada's leading restaurant, events and catering companies that will create a unique culinary concept for each store.

"Fine and casual dining continue to grow in popularity as consumers seek experiences over mere products, thus Saks decision to open with two leading eateries will attract Canada's epicureans, who will hopefully become Saks fashion shoppers too," Ms. Driscoll said. "It is a smart and timely strategy that increases the potential touchpoints for Saks in this new geography."

Furthering its appeal, Saks has partnered with The National Ballet of Canada, beginning with the 2015/16 season. The National Ballet of Canada opens this November with a production of "The Winter's Tale" by Christopher Wheeldon.

"Toronto has a discerning luxury customer and Saks Fifth Avenue is excited to serve this new market," said Stephane Ledoux, regional vice president of Saks Fifth Avenue Canada, in a statement. "Saks Fifth Avenue will be a premier shopping destination in the area, offering an elevated experience unrivaled by any other. I am very passionate about this opportunity and look forward to bringing Saks Fifth Avenue to Canada."

Moving north

Saks has spent a significant amount of time promoting its newest ventures in Canada.

The department store chain teased the upcoming opening of its first Canadian locations by capturing a long-

distance love affair that crosses borders.

"I Left My Heart in Toronto" shows a romantic meet-up between bicoastal American blogger Alyssa Campanella and her Toronto-dwelling actor boyfriend Torrance Coombs in his hometown. As Saks prepares for the opening of two new stores in Toronto, showing Canada affection on its channels will likely resonate with its new potential consumers to the north ([see story](#)).

Saks' Eaton Centre at Queen Street store is expected to open on Feb. 18, followed by Sherway Gardens a week later on Feb. 25.

Opening in Canada was a logical step for a retailer originating in the United States because the majority of Canadians live within 100 miles of the border. With lower sales tax and more retailers, Canadians are increasingly crossing the border for shopping excursions, but as more and more retailers open storefronts this may change ([see story](#)).

"Canada's luxury consumers are likely to be delighted if the execution is smooth," Ms. Driscoll said. "Access to the best of New York curated fashion along with superior services and fine dining in a showcase store design is the stuff dreams are made of.

"Saks is bringing the magic and theatre back to retail, a must to compete for today's time starved digitally-overloaded consumer," she said.

Final Take

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