

RETAIL

Mr Porter consults customer insights to develop private label

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Mr P. offers the Mr Porter customer classics. Image courtesy of Mr Porter, photo by Stefan Heinrichs

By SARAH JONES

Online menswear retailer Mr Porter is expanding its efforts from selling to designing with the launch of an in-house label.

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At its debut, the Mr Porter produced Mr P. collection features an array of ready-to-wear "core staples," such as knitwear and T-shirts. Mr Porter's launch hits on a larger trend in retail, as a growing number of retailers seek to develop private label brands that offer a point of view.

"As an online destination for men's styles with strong editorial content, the brand knows what men are looking for and not finding, or buying (and returning) and the brand has fashion authority," said Marie Driscoll, a consultant at [Driscoll Advisors](#), New York.

"A house brand can combine the consumer learnings with its fashion point-of-view and develop a nice business in addition to the branded product offered," she said. "Mr Porter may have identified white space in its assortmentproduct searched for on the site that customers aren't finding and they are creating to meet this demand."

Ms. Driscoll is not affiliated with [Mr Porter](#), but agreed to comment as an industry expert. [Mr Porter](#) was reached for comment.

Meeting Mr P.

Available through Mr Porter from Nov. 7, the first Mr P. capsule collection was inspired by the "School of London" artists during the 1960s. This group, which includes David Hockney and Francis Bacon, is connected by a shared focus on figurative painting.

The 53 pieces in the launch collection include 24 Essential styles that will be available year-round and 29 items that are seasonal. Mr Porter produced much of the collection in Italy, with some pieces made in Portugal and selvedge denim manufactured in Japan.

Wool and cashmere blend overcoats, Oxford shirts, and sweaters are among the classic designs intended to stand the test of time. Prices range from \$75 to \$1,120.



Mr P. lookbook image. Image courtesy of Mr Porter, photo by Stefan Heinrichs

Mr P. was also informed by studying the consumer shopping habits and feedback from the more than 600,000 customers over Mr Porter's seven years in business.

Following this launch, Mr Porter will release five Mr P. capsules each year, with upcoming releases in February and April. Starting with next fall, the in-house brand will expand its offerings to footwear and accessories.

"At Mr Porter, we are first and foremost product people," said Toby Bateman, managing director of Mr Porter, in a statement. "This passion for quality, uniqueness, style and versatility has been the backbone to developing our business for the past seven years.

"The launch of Mr P. has therefore been quite organic for us; we felt there was a space in our mix of 400-plus brands for something that could present a unique take on wardrobe classics and also present regular capsules of more trend- and seasonal-driven pieces throughout the year," he said. "We like to think we have an unparalleled view of the male wardrobe, garnering the combined knowledge of our buyers and editors, and Mr P. is ultimately the result of that: smart details, easy pieces and enduring style."

To promote the Mr P label, Mr Porter has started a dedicated Instagram account @MrP. Following its launch on Oct. 20, the @MrP handle counted more than 6,000 followers after only four days of posts, showing that there is demand and interest from Mr Porter's consumers ([see story](#)).

The retailer also debuted a digital campaign to market the premiere Mr P. collection, leveraging its editorial content capabilities. Dubbed "Mr P. My Way," the campaign features a series of interviews with men in varied fields, who speak of their work and their wardrobes.

London-based artist Tomo Campbell, for instance, is pictured wearing a corduroy suit in his studio as he discusses suiting up for occasions that do not require formality. Parisian chef James Henry, on the other hand, picks pieces that can transition from the kitchen to a concert.

Mr P. My Way - Mr Tomo Campbell

Writer Michael Salu and architect Mathias Mentze also describe how their personal styles are reflective of their

interests and chosen professions.

Owning it

Mr Porter is following in the footsteps of other retailers that have leveraged their brand recognition and perspective into product development. Department store chains such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Barneys New York have in-house lines that feature similarly timeless styles at more accessible price points than many of the other brands they carry.

While positioned as a complement rather than a direct competitor to other brands in-stock, these in-house brands have the potential to put pressure on the brands they retail.

"Retailers' own brands compete with other brands and can create dissonance in the retailer/brand relationship," Ms. Driscoll said. "The portfolio of brands along with the curated point-of-view Mr Porter provides is the value proposition of the site. This can be diluted over time if the Mr P. assortment is too similar to the branded product.

"Retailers have greater inventory risk, with less recourse with their own brands, which can lead to markdowns for liquidity that creates pricing pressure for other brands," she said.

Beyond the luxury world, private label launches have picked up, with new releases from mass retailers such as Jet.com, Target and Amazon. Per a report from [Bloomberg](#), retailers have changed their strategies around private label, turning these in-house lines into brands themselves rather than generic, cheaper alternatives.

Luxury retailer Saks Fifth Avenue brought its branded product development beyond its own channels through a partnership with United, helping to elevate the airline's Polaris business class service with custom bedding ([see story](#)).

Owning a brand also gives stores creative control over how they market designs.

For instance, department store chain Barneys New York gave a student photographer real-world fashion shoot experience through a new competition.

Rufus Barkley, a senior at the School of Visual Arts, won the Barneys New York Foundation's first Perfect Shot competition, earning him the chance to shoot a digital look book for the Barneys New York Collection. Education is one of the pillars of Barneys' eponymous charitable foundation, as the retailer looks to be a force in nurturing the fashion industry's next generation of talents ([see story](#)).

"Retailers can be successful with their own brands if they follow the basic economic equation of supply and demand," Ms. Driscoll said. "Keep supply lower than demand and chase goods if necessary and at the same time manage the brand for the long-term, avoiding promotions that cheapen their own product brand and ultimately the retail brand as well."