

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Manolo Blahnik CEO: Women buy for love, men buy for learning experience

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Manolo Blahnik is not interested in doing sneakers. Image credit: Manolo Blahnik

By SARAH JONES

MADRID – While men and women are both passionate about footwear, their perspectives and reasons for buying are different, according to the CEO of Manolo Blahnik.

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During a panel at the FT Business of Luxury Summit on May 20 moderated by the publication's fashion editor Jo Ellison, the leaders of three footwear labels discussed where the market is headed, from the rise of the sneaker to the importance of social media in marketing. For the panelists, finding a balance between commerciality and creativity is key.

"The difference between men and women is: women buy for love, men buy for the learning experience and how something is made — how a watch is made, how a shoe is made, more so than women," said Kristina Blahnik, CEO of **Manolo Blahnik**. "Women just look at an object and immediately fall in love.

"Our male customer base, which is increasing day by day, is very passionate and very colorful," she said.

Footwear first

Ms. Blahnik, who is the niece of shoe designer Manolo Blahnik, has been in her role for the last decade. During that time, she has grown the business by balancing the commercial and the creative.

The brand is not trend-driven, and instead has a cultural positioning that has developed throughout roughly 50 years.

While the sneaker has become a key product for luxury brands, Manolo Blahnik will not be joining the wave. Instead, the company focuses on providing comfort in more elegant styles.

Fabrizio Viti, the creative director/cofounder of **Fabrizio Viti** and style director of shoes at Louis Vuitton, worked with Nicolas Ghesquière to develop the brand's shoes, including its hit Archlight sneaker ([see story](#)).

Mr. Viti struck out on his own, enabling him to share his own vision. Being independent is a different experience than working at a large house, where his designs were in support of a particular character for a runway show and he had to design for a lot of different women.

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The shoe that steals the spotlight... // The Loren Pump
available at @fortyfiveten @thewebster and fabrizioviti.com

A post shared by Fabrizio Viti (@fabrizioviti) on May 11, 2019...

Instagram post from Fabrizio Viti

Being independent also means having a hand in more of the process. Mr. Viti also focuses on keeping his shoes to a particular price point, while trying to not have that cost consciousness drive his creative direction.

Ms. Blahnik similarly tries to prevent price from impacting her uncle's designs, saying that she "protects" him from it.

Luisa Krogmann founded **ayede** after seeing an opening for a more mid-market priced footwear label. The label launched outside of the typical fashion seasons in October, and was a sellout in a handful of weeks.

Aeyde uses data to drive design, as Ms. Krogmann briefs the creative team on who the client is.

The brand is direct-to-consumer, and its main marketing tool is Instagram, with 40 percent of revenues coming from social media.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Make it snake. Make it SIGNE. - SIGNE in multi python
#makeitayde

A post shared by aeydē (@thisisaeyde) on Apr 2, 2019 at 10...

Instagram post from Aeyde

Influencers are a key force for the footwear category, but sometimes social media engages an audience that cannot currently afford to buy luxury shoes.

Mr. Viti also noted that having a line of influencers wearing the same handbag and shoes in the front row at a fashion show can feel very commercial.

Sneaker status

Sports footwear is on point to become a major component of the luxury shoe market, according to research from Fashionbi.

The subsegment of the footwear industry has seen a 7 percent compound annual growth rate, which is leading the entire footwear industry. This will likely continue to trend upward with demand and sales rising ([see story](#)).

However, not all luxury brands are buying into sneakers.

"Like Manolo didn't see platforms in the early 21st century as the thing to do because he felt that they were disproportionate to the shape of the women, he doesn't feel that the sneaker category is something that is right for him," Ms. Blahnik said. "And I think what we pride ourselves in is comfort. I think that's why the sneaker has come in—it's comfortable and you can run around in it."

"Now I would argue that our shoes have always for 50 years, the obsession is to create beautiful comfort," she said. "I think sneakers are a very important part of the footwear category for every brand from luxury to entry-level. I think it is good to see that the trend is starting to go back to elegance and beauty."

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