

RETAIL

Saks leans into menswear for interpretation of New Luxury

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Saks Fifth Avenue's new menswear shoe department. Image credit: Saks Fifth Avenue

By BRIELLE JAEKEL

Department store chain Saks Fifth Avenue is pushing even further with its strategy to reevaluate the in-store shopping experience while also heightening menswear offerings with a new male shoe department.

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As Saks opens its luxury men's shoe destination in its New York flagship, the store proceeds forward with its extensive and ongoing Grand Renovation. The new opening, which Saks says is one of the largest luxury shoe departments dedicated to men's footwear in the world, exhibits the true growth in demand and brand interest in menswear.

"Menswear is a category that a number of retailers and brands are looking to include in their assortment," said Kimmie Smith, cofounder, creative director and stylist at **Athleisure Mag**, New York. "Specifically, footwear as an accessory allows for brands to test out an area of interests in terms of formal wear, streetwear, casual, etc.

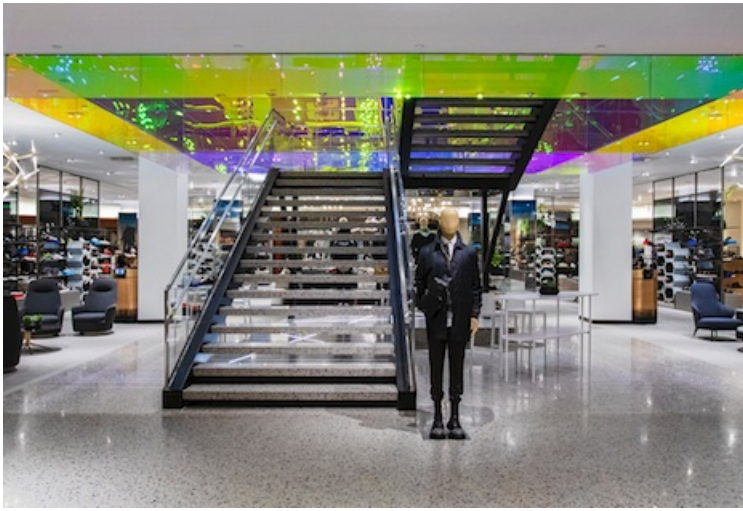
"As an accessory, it's an area where people enjoy purchasing a number of items in order to create dynamic looks," she said. "From a fashion perspective, it also allows a number of designers to be included that may not be carried at Saks on the apparel side and is a great way to test the market."

Ms. Smith is not affiliated with Saks but agreed to comment as an industry expert. **Saks** was reached for comment.

Men's fashion in retail revolution

More than 2,000 individual products and 160 exclusive styles make up Saks' new men's footwear destination on Fifth Avenue.

Luxury retailers and brands are rethinking their approach to menswear as the sector expands. Men's fashion week is now growing all over the world, in addition to brands branching out with their own men's lines in previously untouched sectors such as cosmetics and swimwear.



The men's shoe destination focuses on luxury. Image credit: Saks

Fashion labels such as Prada have even combined men's and women's collections in fashion shows and marketing.

The new men's footwear department at Saks more centrally locates the male shoes together within an 8,000-square-foot space.

Saks is featuring 60 different brands in the area, with 15 being new to the department store. Featured brands include Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga, Brunello Cucinelli, Burberry, Celine, Common Projects, Dior, Fendi, Givenchy, Gucci, John Lobb, Off-White, Pierre Corthay, Prada, Saint Laurent, Santoni, Salvatore Ferragamo, Valentino and Versace.

As the role of the physical store has changed, Saks knows that consumers are looking for more of a shopping destination. These shoppers are oftentimes more knowledgeable than store associates thanks to digital research.

Therefore, Saks is introducing 30 men's footwear Style Advisors with deep knowledge on the subject to strengthen personalization during the shopping experience. Men's footwear is one of the sectors where advisors armed with extensive knowledge are needed the most, as sneaker fandom elicits some of the most well informed consumers.

In addition to sneakers and streetwear, the footwear destination also includes made-to-measure dress shoes and boots.



Saks is one of many retailers heightening men's. Image credit: Saks

A statement from Saks chief merchant Tracie Margolies says that the department store is focusing on personalization to bring in what it believes is a strategy for the "new luxury."

The department will also include services such as lace personalization, leather shoe shining and repair stations in addition to various in-store events.

The New Luxury

Saks Fifth Avenue concluded another recent phase of its flagship renovation process as part of the initiative to build this "New Luxury" shopping experience, focusing on product assortment, a new form of heightened service and exclusive offerings.

The department store started off its new main floor opening with a series of more than 100 exclusives developed with brand partners to celebrate its emphasis on product. In addition to a one-of-a-kind escalator as a focal piece, Saks' flagship location also grabs attention with its impressive handbag selection ([see story](#)).

At the same time, in yet another sign of the tumult in retail and only two years after its opening, Saks Fifth Avenue closed its 86,000-square-foot department store for women in the swanky Lower Manhattan Brookfield Place mall.

The Jan. 5 closure of the woman's store did not affect the Saks men's store that opened in February in another part of the Brookfield Place complex. However, it is a sign that the way women shop for luxury products has changed, whatever the official line is ([see story](#)).

"Like many retailers, everyone is looking at how they can bring customers in as a means to diversify their assortment," Ms. Smith said. "Footwear allows retailers to reach out to tried and true brands as well as to create shop-in-shops, pop-ups, etc. where newer or smaller designers can also be included, which enhances their cachet."

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