

RETAIL

Bergdorf Goodman's Designers Off Duty series going strong after a year

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Designer Michael Kors and Bergdorf Goodman fashion director Linda Fargo hosted a game of Pictionary as part of Bergdorf's Designers Off Duty program. Image courtesy of Bergdorf Goodman

By DIANNA DILWORTH

Bergdorf Goodman's Designers Off Duty series has been underway for almost a year, and the program is proving that affluent consumers seek deeper experiences and connections to the brands that they patronize.

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Designers Off Duty is designed to go beyond a traditional meet-and-greet event and pull back the curtain to show off the lesser known hobbies and talents of designers within the Bergdorf Goodman roster. These events allow shoppers to participate and interact with designers in meaningful and memorable ways that could lead to loyalty in the long run.

"The series came about through our personal relationships with the brands and designers we carry at Bergdorf Goodman," said Yumi Shin, chief merchant at Bergdorf Goodman, New York. "Through spending time with them, we learned about their unique interests and talents outside of the design space.

"We thought it would be wonderful to share these with the BG community and came up with the concept as a way to extend this expression of creativity in an intimate and personal setting," she said.

"Our goal is to give our designers an outlet to share something they love and to create an opportunity to build a deeper connection with our clients."

U.S. department store chain Neiman Marcus owns **Bergdorf Goodman**, which along with Saks Fifth Avenue, Bloomingdale's and newly arrived New York rival Nordstrom vie for customer attention in the affluent retail market segment.



Designer Joseph Altuzarra taught a knitting class for Bergdorf Goodman's Designers Off Duty program. Image courtesy of Bergdorf Goodman

Stick to knitting

The ongoing series is held in the department store's newly renovated Eighth Floor event space.

Last month designer Joseph Altuzarra and his mother Karen hosted a knitting class where guests made their own bookmarks.

Mr. Altuzarra and his mother shared their techniques. Snacks were served and Altuzarra's **Cuff Bag** was available for sale exclusively. The relaxed event drew affluent consumers to visit the store to socialize and unwind.

At another event, Michael Kors hosted a game of Pictionary alongside Bergdorf Goodman fashion director Linda Fargo.

Proenza Schouler's Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez taught a mixology class around the holidays.

Just as hotels and cruises have seen a demand in experiences from affluent consumers looking for more meaningful ways to spend their time off, department stores are also feeling the pressure to do something more than simply sell new products.

"These events deepen our relationships with our customers, designers, and we use social media as a platform to share these events with our broader audience, delivering experiences only available at BG," Ms. Shin said.

"Designers Off Duty takes guests beyond the traditional personal appearance and showcases the unique hidden talents and hobbies of designers within the Bergdorf Goodman catalog," she said.

"By inviting customers and special guests behind the curtain into the worlds of their favorite designers, Bergdorf Goodman is able to offer unparalleled access in a special setting."



Proenza Schouler's Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez taught a mixology class for Bergdorf Goodman's Designers Off Duty program. Image courtesy of Bergdorf Goodman

Hi, buy

Since the program launched last April, the retailer has hosted about one or two events per quarter. There is no set schedule.

The program targets customers, brand partners and luminaries in the fashion industry.

"The selection process has been incredibly organic," Ms. Shin said. "As we learned about some of our designers' personal passions, we reached out to invite them to participate.

"As the series gained traction, several designers contacted us proactively and expressed interest," she said.

Since the events are quite intimate, the marketing is exclusive. The retailer does targeted outreach to clients who are known for purchasing the featured brand.

"The participating designers also invite their friends and supporters," Ms. Shin said. "We do cover the events on our social media platforms in order to share them with a broader audience."

As retailers compete against ecommerce sales, delivering one-of-a-kind department store experiences is a savvy way to deliver old-school luxury in a new and modern way.

"At Bergdorf Goodman, we are committed to consistently creating magic for our customers," Ms. Shin said.

"This is evident via our distinctive curation of product, our best-in-class service, and a program of personalized luxury experiences," she said.

"The Designers Off Duty series is one of the many ways we offer our customers unique experiential offerings they won't find anywhere else."

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