

the creeper its signature — elevating the classic with crepe soles and unexpected colorways, like powder pink or a polka-dot print. “More and more, men want their shoes to be a different touch in their outfit — not just a functional, nearly invisible piece,” said Guédon.

Adieu’s spring ’16 collection ranges from \$408 to \$530. All of the shoes are made in Portugal and France, with leathers sourced from Italy. The brand is stocked in more than 50 stores, including Colette, The Broken Arm, Lane Crawford and Jeffrey.

Diego Vanassibara

In 2011, during his final year of studies at the London College of Fashion, Diego Vanassibara was already plotting the idea for his label.

In January 2013, he debuted his collection during Men’s Fashion Week in London, introducing unconventional men’s dress shoes produced in Tuscany, Italy.

Vanassibara’s spring ’16 line, which retails from \$400 to \$850, has won over retailers that include Dover Street Market, L’Eclaireur in Paris and Joyce in Hong Kong.

“I was convinced that our brand could successfully fill the gap between classic and avant-garde styles,” said the now-32-year-old designer. “We embrace craftsmanship and artisanship in a contemporary way that is unique to us.”

Standout styles include laceup

dress shoes with metal staples, as well as feathered smoking slippers for an over-the-top touch. “My motivation lies in proposing new and original ideas in a wearable way,” he said. “My customers are definitely willing to take risks — the shoes that perform the best are the exciting ones.”

Achilles Ion Gabriel

“I like contemporary twists on classic styles,” said Achilles Ion Gabriel, who launched his Paris-based unisex brand for fall ’13. “I want the shoes to feel quite classic, but add something new.”

Made in Portugal and Spain, the designer’s shoes are produced in women’s sizes as well as men’s.

The spring ’16 collection retails from \$300 for sneakers to \$750 for boots, with highlights that include graphic elements, painted soles and contrasting leather straps.

“I have always loved clean art,” said Gabriel. “Some shapes and colors I don’t like, but I enjoy trying to make something out of them.”

The brand’s retailers include Dover Street Market, The Broken Arm and Harvey Nichols.

Gabriel hopes to continue appealing to the broad customer base that has already embraced the label. “There is quite a wide spectrum of people who wear [our] shoes,” he said. “I’ve seen teenage boys and girls wearing them — and also 50-year-old women.”

Bill Blass Aims For Comeback

The brand is determined to make a fresh start — and it isn’t taking a traditional route.

By Margaret Sutherland

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fter a six-season hiatus from the runway, the Bill Blass label is back, and with an entirely new business model.

Under the creative direction of Chris Benz, who also has his own brand, and longtime Macy’s EVP Stuart Goldblatt as president and CEO, the apparel and accessories line debuts exclusively on its own e-commerce site on Monday, Nov. 2. “It’s important to understand that this is just the start. People call it a reintroduction of the brand, but really we’re introducing a new Bill Blass,” Goldblatt said.

One of the keys to the collection is that it isn’t just an apparel launch but an entire lifestyle offering.

Footwear is a big part of the plan. Six styles, including heeled loafers, shearling-upper slip-ons, a signature sneaker and a bowling shoe, are designed in-house and produced by a small-order Chinese factory. They retail from \$248 to \$388.

It could be a smart strategy, since the twentysomething millennial audience Blass aims to appeal to probably hasn’t ever heard of the label, which was at its height in the 1980s through the ’90s. Founded in 1970 by Bill Blass, the label had seen its share of turmoil and turnover in the years after the namesake designer sold the company in 1999 for \$50 million. Blass died in 2002. In 2008, Peter and Bill Kim, owners of Peacock International Holdings, were able to purchase the brand for just \$10 million. The Peacock team shelved the business in 2012 to

start from scratch.

Peacock cleaned up the licenses and trademarks for Blass’ hundreds of products and extensions worldwide, with the new line shipping to 69 countries. And Benz and Goldblatt were hired to reintroduce Bill Blass to a new generation of shoppers. “There is such a rich and irreverent personality to the brand that it was exciting to continue this spirit for today’s global customers — a personality that for the most part is missing from the retail world today,” said Benz. “Bringing great product in upbeat, accessible fabrications and colors has always been a goal of mine, and Bill Blass is no different.”

Goldblatt said extensive research and focus groups helped the team reach their female young professional shopper, who takes risks with fashion but also emphasizes comfort.

While the landscape has changed extensively since Blass was in its heyday, Goldblatt and Benz are confident there’s room in the market for a contemporary price point with a colorful and playful aesthetic.

“Everyone talks about needing to [focus on] e-commerce and be seasonless and give up the runway shows, but we’re [one of the few that are] actually doing it, and it’s because we’re at ground zero and don’t have a base. We couldn’t do this if we were established,” said Goldblatt.

The CEO added that the goal is to build the Blass presence in select flagships in key markets and partner with high-end e-tailers.

A bowling shoe from the new line



Adieu laceup creeper, Diego Vanassibara stapled dress shoe, Achilles Ion Gabriel thick-soled laceup