Eye Contact

Guerlain is aiming to boost its U.S. color cosmetics business with Le 2 de Guerlain, a $35 mascara it will launch here in March and globally in April. The high-tech formula incorporates a medical polymer and custom-designed brushes. In the U.S., it will be available in about 300 specialty store doors and could do $3 million in sales in its first year on counter. For more, see page 4.

No End to the Excess: Couture Houses Say The Party Plays On

By Miles Socha

PARIS — Never mind mounting economic woes: The possibility of rain soaking clients’ heels ranks as a bigger worry than recession as couture houses here get ready for another high-fashion week.

“The trend of ‘super luxury’ is good,” said Sidney Toledano, president of Christian Dior, which posted “very strong double-digit growth” in couture sales last year. “It’s been an excellent year for haute couture and I’m optimistic for the coming years.”

Bruno Pavlovsky, Chanel’s president of fashion, concurred, calling 2007 Chanel’s best year in couture ever.

See Paris, Page 13
By Sharon Edelson

LAS VEGAS — Barneys New York arrived here Thursday with its usual style and wit and another trait not commonly associated with the retailer — flamboyance.

“There’s more glitter here,” said creative director Simon Doonan. “There was a conscious desire by us to inject a little flamboyance into the store.”

And, while Barneys may be known for its affinity for the color black, the Las Vegas store is alive with brightly colored apparel and accessories.

The store will carry plenty of directional designers. “It’s going to be fun to introduce Marni and Dries Van Noten to Las Vegas,” Doonan said. “It’s going to feel very fresh and new. The subtlety and craft of fashion really differentiates us.”

The 81,000-square-foot store is Barneys’ first in Vegas. “This has been a long process,” said Howard Socol, chairman and chief executive officer, during an interview in one of the store’s personal shopping suites. “We were invited to go to a lot of different places. We wanted the right location.”

The Palazzo, a $2 billion stand-alone resort developed by the Las Vegas Sands Corp., has rolled out the welcome mat for Barneys. Signage throughout the casino directs people to the store and there are signs showing the way to Barneys at the Grand Canal Shoppes at the Venetian, the Palazzo’s sister property.

Part of the appeal of the site for Barneys was the fact that the store would have its own street entrance with valet parking. “To see Barneys New York from Las Vegas Boulevard is great,” Socol said, noting Barneys is the only fashion retailer with its own facade on the Strip.

The facade, sheathed in glass, has a spiral pattern made up of hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades and was designed by artist John Paul Philippe, whose work is found elsewhere in the store, and includes the backlit line drawings that are used to decorate the cosmetics cases on the main floor.

The Foundation beauty area features two Frederic Malle scent chambers, which Doonan calls “our ‘Beam me up, Scottie,’ columns,” noting they allow Malle’s exclusive scents to be sampled in a “completely untainted environment.”

Accessories include Givenchy, the Barneys New York collection, Lanvin, Henri Cuir and Miu Miu. A separate Valextra shop sells the Italian brand’s leather goods.

Jeffrey Hutchinson, who designed the store, said, “Barneys doesn’t do cookie-cutter stores.” The focal point is a grand elliptical staircase. “The materials are very sophisticated,” he said. “We used a lighter palette, oak, teak and yacca wood. Some of the fixtures are sculptural, almost Giacometti-like.”

Barneys is particularly bullish on the jewelry business, as evidenced by the amount of space given over to the category. In addition to a large selection of fine jewelry on the ground floor featuring designers such as Linda Lee Johnson and Cathy Waterman, a jewelry mezzanine offers Frederica Rettore, Lucifer Vir Honestus, Rene Lewis and Sharon Khazzam. “If you’re a Russian oligarch, you can come up here with your wife or girlfriend for privacy,” observed Doonan.

“The jewelry assortment reaches a lot of different levels,” said Socol. “We’ve added some zest.”

Barneys’ characteristic wit and humor greets customers on the second floor, where a large giraffe made out of jeans stands sentry in front of the Co-op. Here, designers such as Diane von Furstenberg, Marc by Marc Jacobs, Alexander Wang and Helmut Lang can be found along with Rogan, Mayle and Loomstate for Barneys New York.

“Turn the corner and there’s Pucci and Fabucci,” said Doonan. “Designers include Lanvin, Marni, Balenciaga, Giles Deacon, Vionnet, Prada, Stella McCartney and Fendi. There’s also L’Wren, Burberry Prorsum and Nina Ricci. Fashion runs the gamut from a white leather and lace Jean Paul Gaultier jacket, for $5,495, to a Proenza Schouler beaded dress, $7,500.”

The shoe department “might be our biggest ever,” said Doonan. It features the
Saks' Off 5th in Growth Mode

By David Moin

NEW YORK — Expansion is back on at Off 5th. The Off 5th outlet chain, a division of Saks Inc., has developed a prototype that will make its debut in the new Off 5th unit at International in Orlando, Fla., in mid-April. The 26,400-square-foot outlet will replace the existing 21,800-square-foot unit in the same mall. Over the next 60 days, three or four new locations will be unveiled as leases get finalized, and sites for additional locations are being scouted around the country, Robert Wallstrom, president of Off 5th, told WWD. “Over time, we believe there is meaningful new store growth opportunity for Off 5th, and we look forward to expanding this new format into other markets...” said Wallstrom. “Productivity is absolutely part of the goal.”

Off 5th, currently operating 48 outlets in 23 states, last year generated volume of just under $400 million. Merchandise includes labels sold at Saks Fifth Avenue and other high-end stores, as well as Saks’ private label. Discounts start at 30 percent off, but go as high as 90 percent off. “We want to be known as an elegance goods. Wallstrom described the prototype as a “very open, clean, modern loft environment.” It’s also brighter and uncluttered compared with the older generation of outlets, and has one consistent hard-surface floor throughout. Fixtures are on casters so there’s flexibility in the merchandising and easier movement through the store. In comparison, the existing outlets have the feel of an old department store with a lot of small rooms and different floor surfaces, Wallstrom observed. He said that when you visit other outlets, like those of Coach, Polo, J. Crew or Brooks Brothers, they reflect the regular-priced stores. “The customer is looking for an discount from the parent brands.” He wants Off 5th to better reflect the image of Saks Fifth Avenue. The prototype will help with the expansion because it’s a selling point to developers.

Around the country, some Off 5ths will be totally renovated to the new look and others will incorporate various elements of the upgrade.

Off 5th was last in expansion mode in the mid-Nineties until around 2000. Despite the slowdown, Wallstrom said Off 5th has always been profitable. The majority of stores are in outlet centers, while some are in strip centers or mixed-use centers. The new prototype is also suitable for lifestyle centers.

“We have really dug into customer demographics. We now have a better understanding of this business model than we did 10 years ago,” Wallstrom said. “We realize that customers shopping Off 5th are different customers than those who shop our full-line stores. Off 5th is an opportunity to pick up another category. We believe that Off 5th is a different brand.”

Between 80 and 90 percent of the labels found in Off 5th are also found in the Saks Fifth Avenue regular-priced stores; 10 to 20 percent are brands not carried at Saks and could be from competitors. The outlets also sell some private label.