



NEWSFRONT

Bringing Soho to the Midwest

New concept, Soho 119, will blend designer apparel with vinotherapy spa and wine and mozzarella café

BY JEAN E. PALMIERI

NEW YORK—The trio behind Deegie's Carma, a specialty store for young adults that opened this March in Kansas City, Kan., is at it again.

This time, its new concept is Soho 119, an "experiential retail destination" that will offer designer merchandise for men and women along with a vinotherapy spa, café and mozzarella bar, and art gallery.

The 12,000-square-foot store, which will have 10,000 square feet of selling space, is scheduled to open in Leawood, Kan., in early August.

Both Soho 119 and Deegie's are the creations of Three Wildcats LLC, a private fashion retail concept company founded in 2006 by John Wilson, CEO, formerly with Vestments, Ferragamo and Nordstrom; Carmela Spinelli, chief creative officer and former associate chair of fashion design at Parsons; and David Hulshof, CFO.

"Ironically, this was the original concept," Wilson said in an interview last week at the Rockefeller Center offices of Gensler, its store-design firm. "But Deegie's opened first."

Soho 119 will target what Wilson called "tier two markets—the 15 to



50 largest cities without a Neiman Marcus or a Barneys. We know these people are buying fashion, but they now have to travel to the large cities. We're going to give them the right environment with the right vendor matrix and a unique and exciting place to shop."

The store will feature just over 2,800 square feet of men's wear on the right side of the main entrance. "We've made a very strong commit-

ment to men's," Wilson said. "It's front and center and will have its own color theme. It's not going to be a men's area in a girls' store."

The mix will offer "a bell curve of prices," he said, ranging from upper bridge to a gold range to designer. Top labels will include Polo Ralph Lauren's Black Label; Jaz, the new Joseph Abboud-designed label that the store will carry exclusively in that market; Hickey Freeman and hickey; Malo; Gran Sasso; Hugo Boss Black and Red labels; Rag & Bone; and Jack Black grooming products.

"And we haven't lost our commitment to emerging designers," added Spinelli, mentioning Sonia Yoon and Benjamin Clyburn of Bensoni, whose work will be offered in the store. She said the mix, in both men's and women's, is "curated and edited" and will change over time as the market dictates. "It's a living thing."

In addition to apparel, the store will feature a vinotherapy spa that will offer skincare products and treatments based on the by-products of grapes and the wine-making process. Massages, facials and even a MedSpa for injectables will be available. The spa will have its own "speakeasy style" entrance in the rear of the store for privacy. Attached to the spa will be The Restaurant, which will serve wine, cheese, dried meats and some hot and cold entrees, similar to cafés found in Italy. "It will have a lingering atmosphere," Spinelli said.

Lance Boge, a principal with Gensler, said the store will have a metal warehouse-style awning at the entrance and a "boulevard" that leads down the center of the store. On the

sides of the boulevard will be intimate spaces delineated by 10-foot screens and wood-and-ceramic floor tiles, giving the feel of a series of shops.

The store will be a "transformable space" that can be used for special events. It will feature "rich, warm and elegant" materials, such as "rough stone next to carpet next to rusted steel."

Overall, Spinelli said, the store is "New York translated for the Midwest."

The trio is currently "in conversations with various developers" to find sites for an additional two to three Soho 119 units a year. The cities they're eyeing are Sacramento, Calif.; Tulsa, Okla.; Austin, Texas; and Louisville, Ky., plus other cities where the primary competition would be smaller independent stores and not national chains.

Hulshof said starting in the Midwest is the right strategy. Leawood is a wealthy suburb of Kansas City with an average household income of \$200,000 and significant disposable income in a concentrated area.

Wilson admitted that the current economic climate may not be the best for launching a new concept, but the target customer for the business is "more resistant to the downward pressure of the market. We're offering experiential elements that will give them a reason to come." Hulshof added: "This concept is so unique and developers are looking two years out, so it's a buyer's market."

He said Deegie's has "performed competently" since its debut this spring and the trio still believes it can be expanded nationally. The next location should be announced within 90 days. "Unlike Soho 119, this can go anywhere—New York, Miami, Chicago, L.A.," Wilson said.

Saks Steps Out in New Ads

NEW YORK—Saks Fifth Avenue broke with tradition for its fall advertising insert for *GQ* magazine.

The upscale retailer hired photographer Arthur Elgort to shoot the eight-page spread that will be featured in the September issue.

"This is very different than what we've done in the past," said Terron Schaefer, senior vice-president of marketing. "But we have such a wide assortment that we felt it would be great to do something a little bit unusual."

So instead of targeting the more-traditional vendors, Saks will highlight advanced designer merchandise from DSquared, Prada, Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana, Alexander McQueen and others. It will include nine models of various ages and ethnicities, and the shots will be focused on the apparel. "It all starts with the clothes," he said.

Additionally, Schaefer said, Elgort has "agreed to lend his name to the piece" and will sign each of the images in the insert. The credits for the designers will be in the same hand, he noted.

"We think it turned out great," Schaefer said. "Arthur captured a lot of energy and vitality." —JEAN E. PALMIERI



Looks from the *GQ* insert