

# Southern Retailers ID Hot Fall Trends

At the Atlanta Shoe Market, the big women's stories ranged from hefty hikers to retro heels. **By Jennie Bell**

**R**etailers in the Southeast are looking ahead to the coming months with optimism after an unseasonably warm winter disrupted normal shopping trends last year.

"It was 85 here at Christmas," recalled Jamie Turner, manager of the family-footwear store Norris Shoes in Douglas, Ga. "Sales weren't great because of the weather. We still have some cold-weather product sitting around."

For women's boutique Shoefly in Homewood, Ala., unpredictable temperatures presented an extra challenge for the storeowners. "It made it hard to stay on top of trends," said co-owner Meg Roebuck. "We bought a lot of tall boots last year, but then everyone wanted booties."

In response, Shoefly was shopping the Atlanta Shoe Market last month, looking for more booties and wedge styles for fall '16. Roebuck said some of the strongest brands on her wish list are OTBT, Dolce Vita,



Atlanta Shoe Market

Sam Edelman and Seychelles.

Across the women's category, booties are shaping up to be a major story for the fall season, updated with elements such as hardware, fringe and mixed materials.

Heidi Wood, women's buyer for Tops for Shoes in Asheville, N.C., also noted that the Chelsea silhouette was an especially big player. "I think every brand had one this time. At one point we had to say, 'No more Chelseas,'" joked Wood.

She also pointed to a masculine trend happening in the women's category. "I'm into this rough boot look for girls," Wood said. "Woolrich has these great vintage-looking hikers with flannel woven accents. Taylor Swift was seen wearing them recently. And Timberland is making a comeback. They're taking back some of their distribution and making some styles more exclusive. Their wheat-colored boot is going to do really well."

On the flip side, brands were also showing a feminine aesthetic, according to Allie Bailey, head of marketing and promotions for the Head Over Heels boutique in Macon, Ga. "I loved all the color-blocking and retro, 1970s heels and shapes," she said, citing strong presentations at Seychelles

and Chinese Laundry.

The shoe and accessory boutique, which caters to women of all ages with trendy fashion-forward picks, also branched out with a new type of product. "Our clientele tends to like neutral colors and styles, but we decided to try some sporty sneakers from Butterfly Twists," said Bailey.

Generally, buyers seemed pleased with the fall offerings. Most predicted strong selling in 2016, despite some market pressures and uncertainty surrounding the coming 2016 presidential election. "We're aware of our shoppers'

concerns, so we're being picky about the product we bring into our store, focusing on specialty, must-have items," said Wood. "She might not be out there buying a car or expensive jewelry, but she can always afford a great pair of shoes."

Abigail Lignugaris, owner of Sole Shoes & Accessories boutique in Atlanta, said she is also watching several macroeconomic factors, but is hoping that a few will actually work in her favor this season. "We're excited about the outlook for spring," Lignugaris said. "With parts of the economy looking good and gas prices extremely low, this leaves more disposable income for those wanting to spend more on apparel and shoes."

**"Timberland is making a comeback. ... Their wheat-colored boot is going to do really well."**

Heidi Wood

## Back To Basics At Sole Commerce

Taking a nod from the past season, retailers at the New York show are homing in on safe bets.



Buyers at Sole Commerce

As more consumers gravitate toward essentials when it comes to their footwear choices, retailers at Sole Commerce in New York said they were keeping their buys focused and safe this year. Athletic styles and a range of boots — from over-the-knee to booties — were at the top of their lists.

Roseleen D'Souza, a buyer for Holt Renfrew, said she was keeping her list limited to double-duty shoes and athleisure styles. Since sneakers were her biggest seller last season, D'Souza said she would stock up on those for back to school once again. Regarding particular labels, the buyer was confident popular brands Ash and Vince would be winners again.

"We are trying to keep buys fo-

cused and don't try to go too deep into one particular trend," D'Souza said. "We want to have things that keep the customer interested but don't want to give them too much to pick from."

D'Souza also said she was looking at investing in more cold-weather styles this year. For that, offerings by Ugg Australia and Australia Luxe would be her go-to picks.

Thanks in part to celebrity and brand collaborations such as Adidas and Kanye West's Yeezy Boost collection and the Puma and Rihanna project, buyers for Nordstrom Rack and Haute Look said that street-ready sneakers as opposed to trainers are expected to be top sellers for fall.

In addition to the continued

momentum in athleisure, the buyers said that fashion styles like over-the-knee and mid-calf boots are going to be important, especially in stretch leathers and suede.

Similarly, Marcell Nager of Mixed in Concord, N.C., said her buys were focused on classic boots and booties this year. "We're looking for the over-the-knee boot, a low-heel ankle boot and great classic pump that has a chunky heel," she said.

Prompted by a growing expectation for comfort by even the most fashion-focused shoppers, Adam Lussier, owner of independent women's boutique Zanna in Amherst, Mass., hit Sole Commerce in search of shoes that would give his customers the best of both worlds.

"We are turning to chunkier bases and higher heel heights," he said. "We are looking at [buying] more brand variety and less regulars. Considering the sales bar was set so low [the past couple of years], I would expect an increase for fall '16."

Outside of New York City, Marsha Gross, buyer at Clutch in Larchmont, N.Y., said her boutique was sticking with more accessible trends, including colored shoes and fringe touches.

"I was looking at how people were dressed when I was getting on the train this morning — and it's still pretty basic when you get outside the city," said Gross. —Margaret Sutherland with contributions from Kristen Henning

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