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## Revamping a Designer Floor at Barneys



The new luxe dressing room area.



Barneys' newly renovated 2nd floor.



By Anamaria Wilson

NEW YORK — Barneys New York's newly renovated second floor is already causing quite a stir. On an unassuming Tuesday morning, a bevy of shoppers carrying Birkins and customized Goyard totes and wearing everything from Pucci to Prada were tearing through the store checking out designer offerings from Lanvin, Rochas and Narciso Rodriguez.

The floor, which previously housed Chelsea Passage (the home department) along with baby, is now a study in luxe minimalist chic with glossy amber-colored resin floors, caramel-colored ultrasuede modular seats, and theatrical lighting — a departure from the harsh lights found in many stores. Yet the most noteworthy addition is an expansive, opulent dressing-room area with a lounge-like atmosphere. Mirrored doors, chocolate velvet banquettes, coffee-colored ultrasuede drapes, a mini refrigerator (to keep the champagne chilled, of course) and a telephone round out the grand appeal of the dressing rooms.

“We felt that this was kind of a new philosophy in fitting rooms,” noted Howard Socol, the store's chairman, president and chief executive officer. “We view it as kind of a contemporary club that people can feel very comfortable in.”

Judging by the number of shoppers barking orders at the sales people and trucking back and forth to find more merchandise to try on, the new look was working.

“This is like 1964 New York. It's glamorous perfection,” gushed Abbe Weiss, a graphic designer and avid Barneys shopper, as she stepped into the fitting room area. The crowd also included Mellody Hobson, a recent profilee in *Vogue* who is president and ceo of Chicago-based investment management firm Ariel Capital, and a financial contributor to “Good Morning America.”

“One of the most important things for us conceptually was to incorporate the idea of hospitality,” said Thomas F. Burns of Consolidated Design Studios Ltd., the firm that conceived the new floor. “We wanted to create a VIP lounge where customers could come hang out and bring their laptop, bring friends and spend some time in a comfortable, warm



Sales associate Faustin Messan ringing up a sizable order.

environment, where they can order champagne from Fred's — bring back that high level of service that Barneys used to be even more about.”

The designer offerings on the floor, each of which exists in its own designated niche, feature Isabel Toledo, Revillon, Jean Paul Gaultier, Azzedine Alaïa, Nina Ricci, Boudicca and Lanvin. There is also an extensive selection of vintage gowns from socialite Lynn Ban's private collection. They include everything from a vintage Halston goddess dress from the Seventies to a Vivienne Westwood couture gown from the Eighties.

“All these vendors are very close to our aesthetic belief at Barneys, and also, they aren't widely distributed,” said Julie Gilhart, vice president and fashion director of Barneys New York. “We're learning that, when something is everywhere, the appeal of luxury goes down for our customers. I think that these designers represent some of the best ideas in creating that new luxury.

“Azzedine Alaïa is the master of luxury in the way he reinterprets it,” added Gilhart. “He's been good since the beginning and he just gets better. Then there's the juxtaposition of Lanvin and Rochas, who are redefining a new type of luxury for who they see as their customers. Layer on top of that Rick Owens for Revillon, who is creating a new aesthetic of luxury using fur as his focus. Isabel Toledo does beautiful clothing with a very luxurious hand, but has a very unique sensibility of style. Lynn Ban has a beautiful collection of vintage evening that perfectly complements the other evening we have in the store, and you know what — vintage is luxurious.”

The renovation of the 7,000-square-foot second floor is just a part of the company's continuing plan to better the store's overall aesthetic as well as shifting vendor placement. Three years ago, Barneys relocated Fred's to the ninth floor and later expanded accessories and cosmetics. Now, Chelsea Passage joins Fred's on the ninth floor. “Moving Chelsea Passage, we increased its space by 50 percent and it gave us the opportunity to develop a whole new designer floor, which is something you don't get a chance to do very often,” said Socol.

“It's all about making the shopping experience better for our customers, growing sales [and] continuing to lead the customer with very exciting merchandise and visual offerings.”

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