



## The luxury market in N.Y.C. has many looks in 2010

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It doesn't take a crystal ball to figure out there have been tangible gains in consumer confidence since fourth quarter 2009. According to the most recent Beige Book report, our local economy, i.e., New York Tri-State area, there is a "general sense of optimism about the outlook for 2010." Retailers are rejoicing that the end is in sight.

Of the retail businesses tracked by Thomson Reuters Data, 62% posted "better-than-expected" sales results for stores open at least a year in December-the most important month for new stores-and the best showing since April 2008.

A couple weeks ago, market research firm Unity Marketing announced a "marked improvement in consumer sentiment among affluent consumers." It went on to say that since the beginning of the year, the Luxury Consumption Index (LCI), measuring consumer confidence in the ranks of those earning in the top 20% of household incomes, indicated that levels were comparable to September 2007-just before the recession. Adding, "affluent consumers are more optimistic about their own financial situation."

That same Unity Marketing survey also indicated that among affluent consumers, the most active ones were either young or ultra-affluent. The balance comprise baby boomers, who seem to be temporarily on the sidelines, opting for frugality for the moment.

But astute designers knowing they have significant markets and demographics to capture, between the youthful buyers and super-rich, are wasting no time in finding locations around the city to kick off 2010. JNBY, created by Chinese fashion students, tested the retail waters with a pop-up store in SoHo and will be opening a permanent location in the neighborhood shortly. Bowery Bazaar (52 East 4th St.) is re-branding itself as Boutiques on the Bowery.

Another pop-up turned permanent is Variazioni, which tried out its first Upper East Side location at 1043 Third Ave. last year before making the space a permanent commitment in January. It's the seventh store for the super hip retailer, which is known as a one-stop-shop for hip styles and such hard-to-find labels as Joe's Jeans, Rock & Republic, Kier + J and Hudson Jeans.

Meanwhile, British men's apparel designer Grahame Fowler has opened at 138 West 10th St. Krizia will move from Madison Ave. to West 14th St., near Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen and Diane von Furstenburg. Sloane rejuvenates vintage apparel with a sexy flair in the former 1929 location at Mott and Broome Sts. There are still more luxurious looks on the 2010 horizon, too, and construction is literally booming all along Madison Ave.

To look great, you have to feel great and one of the best ways is "spa-ing." In late January, I was a guest on Dr. Lori Sokol's radio show "Juggling Act" on AM 1490 WGCH out of Greenwich, CT, where the topic was coping measures that reduce stress. One way for me is shopping, of course, but another equally effective mode of relaxation is going to a spa. And I'm not alone: elegant day spas where fabulous facials and massages are available 24/7 have become a very active retail

category.

Spas are very democratic; nearly everyone can afford an hour of relaxation, if not an entire day of bliss. It's only in the past decade or so that midtown Manhattan has become a center for chic day spas catering to the needs of business people, such as Bliss at 19 East 57th St., Townhouse at 9 East 56th St. and Spa Chakra at 663 Fifth Ave. Fine hotels have traditionally offered amenities, including massages, hair styling, etc. However, the current culture has produced increasingly lavish versions, such as cutting edge and even more lavish versions such as the Spa at Mandarin Hotel in Time Warner Center, with its "Heat Experience" rooms and orchid-infused treatment rooms, highlighted by some of the city's most gorgeous views.

Luxury is making a comeback in 2010, with new fashion debuts on Madison Ave., in SoHo and throughout Meatpacking, NoHo and Greenwich Village. For those who believe inner beauty is directly connected to outer beauty, there are also dozens of recent entries into personal-pampering categories. In keeping with the current consumer ethos, spa-ing and many of the new fashions arriving on the scene are decidedly not ostentatious. Subtlety may be the most important luxury look of 2010.

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