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NEWSFRONT

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J. Crew Plans Men's-Only Store

Specialty store chain has found men prefer to shop in their own distinct environments

BY JEAN E. PALMIERI AND MAISIE WILHELM

NEW YORK — The merchant prince has turned his sights on men's wear.

Millard (Mickey) Drexler, chairman and CEO of J. Crew and one of the industry's most legendary figures, revealed that he's currently shopping for a location to open the company's first stand-alone men's store.

"We're taking a more-leadership role in men's wear," he told DNR last week. "We think it's an important opportunity in the marketplace. We've done it with women's wear and accessories, and we're trying to make the same impact in men's over the next year or so."

As a result, Drexler said he's "looking for a men's shop—a men's store is on our wish list."

Since joining the specialty store chain in 2003, Drexler has taken the company public and pushed the envelope in terms of merchandise, offering a range of price points and a varied assortment of casualwear with "a twist of dress." He has also spearheaded the opening of several



The spring 2008 collection is centered around the "15 items every man should have."

new concepts: Madewell, a women's wear chain, Crewcuts, for children's wear, and several smaller stores, each localized to fit the tastes of affluent locations such as the "J. Crew at-the-beach" in East Hampton, N.Y., Santa Barbara, Calif., and Naples, Fla., and J. Crew by-the-sea in Carmel, Calif.

Next on his agenda is men's wear. "We have no location yet, but we know we can articulate J. Crew Men's in its

own store and express it in its own environment."

He said the company has just started searching for a site and has no timetable on when the first store will open, although it won't be as soon as holiday. "We're looking for the right real estate, not just any real estate."

Drexler said the idea for a men's-only store arose from the success the company has had merchandising



Black and white dominate the collection, and cardigans are expected to be big.

Brooks Brothers Names President

NEW YORK — Brooks Brothers has a new member of its management team.

Diane Hamilton has joined the specialty store in the newly created position of president and chief operating officer. She will report to Claudio Del Vecchio, chairman and CEO of Brooks.

Hamilton was most recently a cofounder of the Lighthouse Retail Group, which focuses on corporate strategy, marketing, operations and business development. She has also served as managing director of Price Waterhouse Coopers' Strategic Change Practice and has held senior merchandising and operational positions with several leading

retailers, including May Department Stores and Marshalls.

She has also consulted with such diverse retailers as L.L. Bean, Barnes & Noble and Staples.

"Diane brings a wealth of experience in all areas of retail operations. I have known her for some time and I have seen the passion she has for the retail industry as well as for our company," Del Vecchio said in a statement. "I am confident that she will be a key contributor to the further growth and expansion of Brooks Brothers."

In her capacity as president and



Diane Hamilton

COO of Brooks, Hamilton will oversee all operational aspects of the business, including the full-price stores, factory outlets and direct division as well as areas such as supply chain, manufacturing and human resources. She will be based at Brooks Brothers' flagship store and corporate headquarters at 346 Madison Avenue here.

"I am personally thrilled to have the opportunity to help lead and protect such a wonderful legacy. Brooks Brothers is not just a company but a true American institution," Hamilton said. "Claudio has a very clear vision for the direction of this brand and I truly look forward to helping the company achieve these goals."

men's wear on separate floors in some of its larger stores. J. Crew operates 186 retail stores and 53 factory outlets, as well as catalogs and a Web site.

At the annual meeting this June, Drexler said the men's business at the J. Crew stores "has had a dramatic turnaround in the last year," and is successful in appealing to "a cool, quirky, casual guy."

Last week at the company's spring 2008 fashion preview, Drexler said he was "very excited" about the offerings for next year. "We see out there [in the market] people are paying a lot of money for their clothes. Ours are made in the best plants in the world with the finest quality, at a fraction of the price."

Although he knows that "men don't go as far out as women" in changing their wardrobes on a seasonal basis, he

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Cover photo by PASHA ANTONOV / Cotton cardigan and shorts by AND I, cotton shirt by HOMEROOM

J. Crew

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still believes the men's business at the company can be bigger. Toward that end, J. Crew will move to communicate more effectively with its male customers to further bolster sales. Men's wear currently accounts for around 20 percent of the company's annual volume of \$1.24 billion. "We're not changing the product as much, but paying more attention to how we can communicate more effectively. We need to do some other things to get it on a more-accelerated growth path."

For holiday, Drexler said he is not making any predictions on how business will fare. "It'll be as good as the goods are and, when they're good, we'll do as well as anyone. But I don't know how high the tide will be. It's more about product and the delivery of that product."

At the preview, Todd Snyder, men's design director, described the collection as "focused on the 15 best items every man wants and should have." That includes cardigans, the new Montauk chino, the classic broken-in chino in new fabrics—such as Easter-chick yellow or vintage seersucker—and a trench coat, among other items.

Overall, the cuts were tailored so the silhouette is "cleaner, more classic," Snyder said. Pants were slimmer and a bit shorter, evoking the 1950s cool of Paul Newman, especially when paired with white V-neck T's "like your grandfather wore," he added.

"We took typically 'fall' details, like tartans or black, and reworked them into spring." This translated



Paint-splattered pants for \$400 will be sold in limited editions.

into short-sleeved tartan dress shirts, faded black chinos that were "an instant classic—number-one best seller" when introduced last year—and cardigans in cotton cashmere.

White was infused throughout the collection, in crisp slacks and shorts, on a retro club collar and as a dressy linen blazer with metallic threads to add texture.

Snyder said, "We want to dress every guy, 18 to 80, from the beach to the wedding. This collection was sort of surf & turf, with clothes to wear at the beach in the Hamptons and at the country club for a more sophisticated look."

"Guys are starting to dress up a bit. You see them on the subway or downtown wearing ties and it's refreshing."

"Collector's items," a line of more lux-

urious garments at significantly higher price points, is aimed at the "ultimate connoisseur who appreciates quality and style." These limited-edition, hand-numbered pieces such as leather jackets and hand-detailed items, include drum-dyed leather belts, shawl-collar knit cardigans with metallic thread, hand-patched denim and pants playfully referred to in-house as "Jackson Pollock jeans," wiped by hand with white paint for a vintage feel.

The "Collector's items" will be sold in the catalog and online. When they were first offered for fall 2007, their success surprised the company.

"Guys are willing to maneuver online and not get embarrassed by shopping. I'll spend an hour online but not in a store," Snyder said.

The collection reverts to more classic looks from the 1950s. "We took the preppie, nerd look and made it hip," Snyder said, mentioning accessories such as the "engineer's" silk knit ties, real vintage straw hats and aviator sunglasses, made by eyewear company Selima, which are based on a military-issued model. Selima will also produce optical models for J. Crew.

A limited-edition swim line will be new for spring 2007, with trunks made from exclusive Italian Ratti prints, and cut slightly shorter and slimmer, as well as large canvas totes made from recycled beach chair fabric from the South of France.

Another notable collaboration is with English textile mill Thomas Mason, whose fine cotton will be used for J. Crew shirts in classic patterns. "At \$98, these are the best deal in the world," Snyder said.

Men.Style.com 'Upgrades' Site

NEW YORK — Men.Style.com is expanding beyond its core fashion coverage with a new feature called The Upgrader. The special section of the site delves into a wide range of luxury lifestyle products, ranging from cars, clothes and watches to cameras, bicycles, spirits, vacation destinations and top-flight airlines.

"We are an online resource for style-conscious men, and those men aren't just interested in clothes," said Dirk Standen, editor-in-chief of the CondéNet-owned site. "Expanding into full lifestyle coverage is a natural progression for us."

The Upgrader, whose tagline is "Better living through better stuff," went live last Wednesday and is accessed on Men.Style.com via a dedicated tab. Clicking on it brings the viewer to a landing page with a host of in-depth feature stories—on topics such as collectible autos, dream kitchens and hot young architects—and a series of "Hot Lists" of trendy new products.

The Hot Lists rank and describe the best offerings in categories like digital cameras, flat-screen televisions, city bikes and cell phones. An interactive feature allows readers to register their opinion on each item, which can then change its rank.

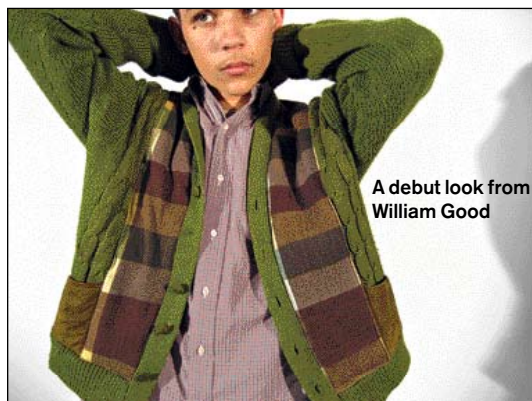
"Plenty of Web sites allow guys to research gadgets, but ours is curated for men with a deep interest in style," noted Standen. —DAVID LIPKE

Nick Graham's Goodwill Gesture

NEW YORK — Nick Graham, the eccentric entrepreneur best known for founding the cheeky Joe Boxer brand in 1985, is trying his hand at vintage apparel and accessories. The CEO of the 100 Minute Co. has teamed up with Goodwill Industries of San Francisco to launch William Good, a new line of repurposed apparel and accessories for men and women.

"We hope to build a sustainable national brand name that helps the environment, creates employment and generates profit," said Graham of his collaboration with the nonprofit organization that is dedicated to environmental stewardship as well as finding businesses that generate job opportunities.

The 600-piece collection of recycled shirts, suits, denim and accessories, which debuted last Monday at L.A. Fashion Week, is created from the 23 million pounds of apparel donated annually to Goodwill. Graham and his team of designers edit out desirable items, before reconstructing and redesigning the selected pieces. Embellishments, ranging from silkscreening to unique sewing patterns, are then applied to everything from shirts to denim.



A debut look from William Good

For spring 2008, Graham said he hopes to expand into men's suits, which were not included in the pilot holiday collection. "We'll tweak the lining and change the color and maybe take a sleeve off one jacket and put it on another," said Graham, who described the overall aesthetic as a mix of "eclectic" and "thrift-shop contemporary."

Retail price points range from \$15 to \$300 for the collection, which will go on sale Nov. 15 at

a William Good shop-in-shop at Goodwill's San Francisco store on Fillmore Street as well as online at Shopwilliamgood.com.

Deborah Alvarez-Rodriguez, CEO of Goodwill Industries of San Francisco, said similar William Good boutiques will likely pop up at other Goodwill outposts—including one in New York City's Chelsea neighborhood—and eventually non-Goodwill retailers. Alvarez-Rodriguez said she is in early exploration talks with "contemporary" retailers that cross gender lines. "We were not envisioning this as a boutique business, Nick and I envision big business," said Alvarez-Rodriguez. "We would love it to be sold in Europe and markets all over the world."

Graham and Alvarez-Rodriguez would not provide sales projections, but said that profits left over after expenses have been covered will be split 50/50 with both parties, honoring a commitment to continue to reinvest into William Good to build the fashion and social side of the business. "We really believe this is an important development in fashion, social mission and environmentalism," said Alvarez-Rodriguez. —GILLIAN KOENIG

PHOTO BY SARAH HACKETT