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Bucking the trend

Dov Charney pontificates on why American Apparel is still turning a profit

Presented by



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Handout

An extra-deep V-neck to help you get through the recession?

Hey, it's no joke. Amid all the retail black clouds, it's been found there is one company that is packing some sunshine, and that company is American Apparel. Founded by Montreal madman Dov Charney, the purveyor of basics for hipsters posted a 3% increase in December sales -- this, at a time when supposed competitors such as Abercrombie & Fitch and the Gap were posting double-digit declines.

"Not only have American Apparel's existing stores been remarkably resilient in the downturn, but the company has also been investing heavily in an ambitious retail expansion," Women's Wear Daily reported yesterday, pointing out that the brand's door count now lies at 260 stores in 19 countries.

Charney, who's a little bit Duddy Kravitz and a lot Daddy-O, has made plenty of headlines over the years for both charges of indecorous behaviour in his personal life and for his Michael Moore-level of in-your-face politics. Indubitably, he now has a theory about why American Apparel is conceivably recession-proof.

Its focus, he reckons, is on youthful, city-dwellers. His Los Angeles-based brand, he tells WWD, "is dealing with metropolitan adults. Our customers are educated, sophisticated, creative types who adapt to economic dislocation. They don't own cars. They don't own stocks. They probably don't have a lot of dependents. They don't have a lot of savings, but they probably don't have a lot of debt, either."

But the brand does keep moving. Although the stores are mostly known for their '80s-evoking sexy-fit wares -- leggings, anyone? -- there have been roll-outs of late for everything from acid-washed jeans to classic oxford shirts and even pea coats. And next on Charney's eye-of-the-zeitgeist?

"I'm desperate," he says, "to make a cool men's pant."

SCENE! HEARD! SCOLDED!

Meanwhile, I See, I Hear:

That Canadian flag-bearer Adam van Koeverden brought along some lucky, lucky shoes, if not also smelly ones (but in a lucky sort of way) to Ron White's 13th Annual Shoe Drive for the Homeless event, held last week at The Manulife. They were the very shoes that the great rower wore when he climbed the Olympic podium in Beijing last summer!

Among those also seen out and about for the annual launch put on by the Toronto foot-man: singer Suzie McNeil, Broadway sensation Louise Pitre, Billie from Virgin Radio, Dina Pugliese from the morning tube and designer David Dixon.

And Also:

That Steve Nash is throwing a party at the Gardiner Museum in Toronto

this weekend, and it's designed to wave away those January blues. The first annual, perhaps inevitably-named, Nash Bash is a coproduction between the basketball star's own foundation and the Toronto-based organization Athletes for Africa.

Word has it that a swirl of both Canadian athletes and entertainers will be on hand to launch Football for Good--a new, "sustainable social business that brings academy football, cultural programs and leadership training to regions ravaged by war." See athletesforafrica.com for more information

WHAT SHINAN IS WATCHING

Like so many others, I was watching the

Golden Globes the other night from the comfort of my couch. And my prevailing observation? Kate Winslet was way, way, way too excited getting that second of her two GGs.

What ever happened to that beautiful insouciance that the Brits are so good at? Why, oh why, couldn't she have been just a little, tiny bit more blase, and a little less Halle? I mean, Kate, dear Kate, this wasn't the Noble Peach Prize, or even your wedding! It was the stepsister awards to the Oscars, put on by a hack organization so dubious that nobody is really able to explain who they even are.

Yes, the moment, the emotion, the love-shower of one's peers. But if you gave so much up for this, Kate, what will you have left to give up come Oscar time?