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SWAROVSKI

WWD ACCESSORIES

In the Mix

MARCOLIN COMPLETES VIVA INTEGRATION

MILAN — Following the acquisition of Viva International about a year ago, Italian eyewear powerhouse Marcolin Group has finalized the integration of the North American eyewear manufacturer, previously controlled by holding company HVHC Inc., into its American branch. Called Marcolin USA, this operates in all the North, Central and South American markets except for Brazil.

The integration involved all the departments, including product development, sales and operations.

As Marcolin USA chief executive officer Fabrizio Gamberini explained, the American arm set up a team with the goal of globally developing the brands in the company's portfolio.

The Viva acquisition added to Marcolin's stable some of the most popular eyewear labels in the American market, including Gant, Timberland, Cover Girl, Skechers and Guess. The latter represents the most-distributed brand in Viva's portfolio and is sold in 9,000 stores across the Americas.



Guess sunglasses.

"Marcolin was originally strong in the luxury business," said Gamberini, "so by acquiring Viva, we are expanding our presence in the middle segment of the market."

Swarovski is also posting outstanding performances. "Since the acquisition, the brand is experiencing a 121 percent growth compared to last year," said Gamberini, who listed investments

made by Marcolin and a larger sales force among the reasons for the brand's success across the U.S. Swarovski eyewear collections are available in most of the country's department stores, including Dillard's, Lord & Taylor, Von Maur, Saks Fifth Avenue and Bloomingdale's.

Currently, in the Americas, luxury brands account for 50 percent of



Swarovski sunglasses.

Marcolin USA's total business. Among the best-performing, high-end fashion brands, Gamberini cited Tom Ford, which continues its double-digit growth;

Balenciaga; Roberto Cavalli; Montblanc, and Dsquared2. In addition, starting in 2015, Marcolin will distribute the new Emilio Pucci eyewear line.

The sales teams of Marcolin USA and Viva International were also fused and organized into three divisions handling the distribution of different brands.

"Each division, which covers about 35 percent of the opticians in the

Americas, counts between 60 and 65 salespeople," Gamberini said, noting that most of Viva International's sales force has been incorporated in Marcolin USA, including two vice presidents. "The integration wasn't done in a perspective of mere acquisition, but we focused on the talent of the people in each role."

The acquisition of Viva, an operational part of the strategic business plan of Marcolin parent PAI Partners, a private equity firm, will help expand the Italian firm's optical business. While previously this accounted for 30 percent of Marcolin's business, now it represents 50 percent.

"The sunglasses business is very cyclical, while the optical side is much more constant," said Gamberini, pointing out that optical frames used to account for 90 percent of Viva International's total business.

In 2013, Marcolin and Viva International posted combined revenues of 345 million euros, or \$458 million at average exchange.

—ALESSANDRA TURRA

TIME TO SHEEN

KAVIAR GAUCHE HAS long been one to watch — and now the Berlin design duo known for edgy bridal and eveningwear has a timepiece of their very own, thanks to a collaboration with Casio's women's watch brand Sheen.

Alexandra Fischer-Roehler and Johanna Kuhl, who recently showed their spring collection during Paris Fashion Week, pulled inspiration from their signature blend of feminine cool and relaxed sexy glamour for the Sheen by Kaviar Gauche watch. The timepiece has a silver-and-white face and a laser-cut leather band with an open floral motif reminiscent of recent Kaviar Gauche designs. The white band has a stud fastener and is produced in Germany.

The Sheen by Kaviar Gauche watch is limited to 100 pieces, and will retail for 500 euros, or about \$641; Sheen models are generally priced between 100 and 300 euros (\$127 to \$382). The watch was launched in September, but is not yet on counter. Sales locations will be revealed soon — and the watch will be exclusive to Germany.

Casio's Sheen launched in Japan in 1999, added the U.K. at the end of 2012 and entered the rest of Europe in spring 2013.

This is Sheen's first designer collaboration. In the U.K., Sheen has so far looked for broader appeal, teaming up first with hit British reality TV show "The Only Way Is Essex,"

and more recently with girl group The Saturdays. Sheen has also used Claire Danes and Elisabetta Canalis in its campaigns.

Kaviar Gauche has previously collaborated with ArtDeco cosmetics, created a capsule collection for Zalando and designed a stylish diaper bag for Bugaboo.

—SUSAN STONE

Kaviar Gauche watch in collaboration with Casio's Sheen.



HAYDEN'S HANDBAGS

For Hayden Lasher, great-grandniece of Henri Bendel, fashion is in the genes. After a string of high-profile internships (Michael Kors, Marc by Marc Jacobs) and a job designing shoes and handbags for Oscar de la Renta, Lasher has branched out with her own line of handbags, in collaboration with Belgian Shoes.

Belgian Shoes, founded by Henri Bendel, is a 300-year-old company that produces just one style: a simple loafer embellished with a dainty bow. "It's an East Coast cult thing," Lasher said. "Basically, it's just this one style done in a million different colors and fabrics."

Lasher took Belgian's business model as inspiration for her own brand. "I grew up going to Belgian Shoes and always thought it was crazy that they didn't have bags," she said.

Lasher also produces a single design: a structured, top-handle bag offered in colors and materials that vary from season to season. Current options include red crocodile, black calf leather, white crocodile with black patent piping, and vanilla pebbled leather with pink lambskin piping. Each bag features Belgian's signature bow and includes an interior cell-phone pocket, zipper pocket and key ring. "I liked the idea that it was structured but still feminine and had the Belgian bow on it," she said.

The bags are manufactured in New York, using Italian leather. "We have two Italian master craftsmen here who are the only two in the city who can touch these bags," Lasher said.

Though her bags are a riff on Belgian Shoes, Lasher said the two companies work as connected but ultimately separate entities. Since launching in May, Lasher only recently enlisted the help of a p.r. firm, and otherwise runs the company from her Upper East Side apartment. "The more we grow and are on that track, the more I'll need help,"



Hayden Lasher handbags.



she said. "But right now, it's fun to wear all the hats."

She has kept production and retail distribution intentionally small for the time being. The collection is sold exclusively in Belgian Shoes' New York store and on Lasher's site, and each colorway is produced in limited quantities — about 25 for each style. The bags retail for \$1,500.

"It's about keeping the line special and exclusive," Lasher said. "You don't want to walk into a room and see 15 people carrying your bag."

Despite the "insider" nature of the brand, Lasher has managed to nab one famous fan: Taylor Swift.

"A friend of mine knew Taylor's stylist and sent a picture," she said. "They flipped for it, so I sent a bag over. Next thing I know, she's wearing it." The business is already feeling a boost since images of Swift hit the wires. "We did sell our first bag in Malaysia after that," Lasher said, noting that New York and London are the most popular cities for sales. "All of a sudden, we had all these global hits on our site."

As for reconnecting with her ancestry, Lasher doesn't sell at Bendel's — at least, not yet. "Henri Bendel is one of the great department store brands, and, especially for personal reasons, it would be fun to be a part of its history," she said, "but we are happy to bloom right where we are planted at Belgian Shoes."

—LAUREN MCCARTHY

Men's Snapshot

The men's accessories market is on a roll. The following data reflects sales for these men's categories in the 12 months ended in August, with growth compared to the same period a year ago. — DAVID YI

\$14.1 billion: Total men's accessories market, up 10%.

\$3.7 billion: Jewelry, up 12%.

\$3.2 billion: Watches, up 7%.

\$2 billion: Sunglasses, up 10%.

\$1.9 billion: Bags, up 24%.

\$1.6 billion: Other accessories, including knit gloves/mittens, leather gloves, belts and umbrellas, up 6%.

SOURCE: THE NPD GROUP