

Desk Set

Nota Bene is hoping to make the climb up the corporate ladder a comfortable one.

Barbara Schneider-Levy, Comfort Editor
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Jennifer Lovitt Riggs never planned on getting involved in the shoe industry, but repeated blisters and aching soles eventually set her on new mission.

The founder of the new women's fashion-comfort brand Nota Bene told Footwear News that at her former position as a management consultant in Washington, D.C., she noticed how the shoes of her male co-workers looked good—and comfortable—with their suits. Women, meanwhile, were walking to and from the office in, “silly sneakers and carrying their pretty shoes,” she said.

“I thought I could do better than that,” Riggs said, and soon she began laying the groundwork for a collection of tailored, feminine looks that would skillfully marry comfort and style. The line, which debuted at the February 2004 WSA, hit stores for a pre-fall '04 launch in April.

Nota Bene's target customers are not necessarily professionals, but have an active lifestyle and like to dress up, said Riggs. “They're not looking for trendy styles, but something beautiful they can trust to wear all day. It's an attitude. They want to look beautiful if they're working, and they want to be able to move.” In fact, Riggs coined the brand's tag line, “Beauty in Motion” to convey the continuous comfort and wearability of the line, with Nota Bene—which means “take note” in Latin—reinforcing the idea.

Riggs tapped footwear veterans to help execute her concept: Peter Chiara, the line's designer and director of sourcing, whose background includes buying, merchandising, and design; Erv Shames, a former Stride Rite executive; and Lynn Miller, a former Candie's executive, were brought on to serve as consultants.



Celeste

Before Nota Bene launched, Riggs headed to Spain with Chiara to secure factories capable of incorporating the brand's signature comfort features into a collection of sophisticated pumps, sandals and boots (\$185 to \$250 retail) in addition to coordinating a bag collection (\$300).

The shoes' comfort features include full Poron footbeds for shock absorption, leather linings for breathability and slightly thicker leather soles that offer longer wear and added



Rosalind

protection from the elements. But the real point of difference, noted Riggs, are the collection's accommodating toe boxes, designed to hold the foot without lateral compression, helping prevent blisters and worse.

The fall '04 collection includes 30 styles, ranging from the Emma, a chisel-toe pump, to the Vivian, a tapered-toe style with tassel trim. Seven lasts are offered, including round and tapered toes. In addition, five heel shapes are available, with the bulk of the collection at 2 ½ inches.

Moving into spring '05, 25 new styles will be added to the line, including pumps in soft pastels such as pale yellow, lavender, mint and blush pink, and in materials including leather, nubuck and linen. Supporting the company's commitment to comfort, Nota Bene will add AA and D widths to its current B width, with all widths in full and half sizes, from 36 to 42.

To better service independent retailers—the main focus of Nota Bene's distribution—the company currently offers an in-stock program of nine SKUs, with plans to expand the offering for spring.. But the real difference is its make-up program that allows retailers to do special orders for as small as 24 pairs. “We encourage small retailers to customize the line,” said Chiara. “We encourage them to get creative.”

One of the independents who has come on board is Winter Park, FL-based Shoooz on Park Avenue. Co-owner Jill Biege said she decided to try the line after repeated requests from her customers for shoes that were comfortable, but suitable for the office.

“Nota Bene fills a niche for shoes that are a little faster and more sophisticated,” said Biege, who ordered the Katherine, a buckle pump; the Lauren, a moc-toe pump; and the Rosalind, a ghille style, for fall. “Women in Winter Park don't want to be frumpy. They want to be sophisticated when they go to work.”

Audrey



