



Madelyn Rygg

## Check 'em Out at WSA

MADELYN RYGG

### New in High-end Women's Footwear

#### Lacey K: Exotics for the Socialite



**Lacey K New York in lilac-glazed python, \$310**

We're always fascinated when people make extreme jumps from other careers into the shoe industry, and here's another one. New upscale women's brand Lacey K is the brainchild of Lacy Kirstein, former telecommunications techie and frustrated narrow-footed consumer. Kirstein had made a hobby of designing footwear, handbags and clothing from way back, but just for herself and friends. Then after a successful career in voice and data communications, and ready for a change of pace, she decided to launch that hobby into more. And she did.

Kirstein makes the conceptual designs of her strappy high-end sandals and sends them off to her engineer in Pisa. "He takes my 2D concepts and engineers them to my

specs," she says. They are built in a Tuscan factory that also builds a lot of Gucci sandals, and sources exotic materials from an Italian tannery. The skin of choice this season: python. "The tannery we're using can do glazing on the skins," explains Kirstein, "like a wash, in bronzy golds and coppery golds," that accentuate the materials for a truly elegant product.

Kirstein seems to know her target customer well: the high-status socialite who celebrates looking herself in the best of everything. Spring 2008 styles—all strappy sandals on 3-inch heels—include Paris, considered a "day shoe," shown here in gold python. She's added Svarovski crystals across the front strap of the Florence style, another python in a dark coppery gold tone. And New York is shown in a lilac-glazed python.

Well connected from her high-profile career, Kirstein is outfitting a "very high level celebrity" with a pair of shoes. Regardless how many promises we made to keep it confidential, she says simply, "...one of the world's biggest...I can't divulge because she doesn't have the shoes yet." Perhaps we'll know by WSA?

We couldn't help but ask whether Kirstein plans to branch out into handbags, those having been part of her early hobby. Her reply: "I'm having prototypes developed right now. The purses will be clutches and bagettes in matching materials with the shoes." Oh, and she's already implemented a stock program, carrying the "best sellers" in both narrow and medium.



**Lacey K Paris in gold python, \$375**

#### Fast Facts:

**Price Points:** \$250 kidskin through \$445 for exotics with ornamentation

**Sizes:** American 6.5 M, and 7-10 N and M

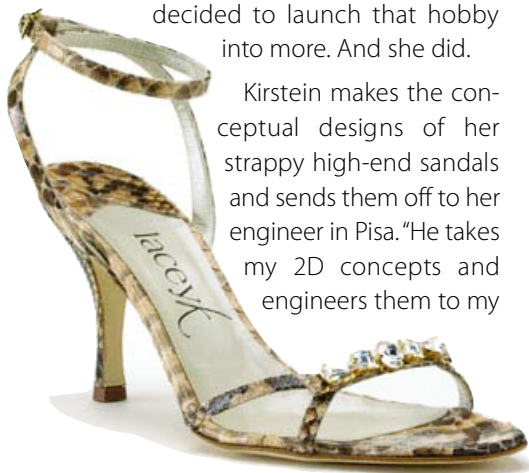
**Minimum order:** \$3,000. Write your own sizes.

**WSA Booth #:** The Collections, Suite 6108

**Fast Take:** She's new to shoe business, but we think she means business.

#### Nota Bene: Comfort and Class, and made in the U.S.A.

It's certainly rare to find a company moving production from overseas to the U.S., but that's exactly what Nota Bene has just done. Founder and President Jennifer Lovett Riggs



**Lacey K Florence in glazed python adorned with Svarovski crystals, \$385**



**Nota Bene's Amy in red patent leather**

# NOTA BENE<sup>®</sup>

SHOES FOR WOMEN



**Nota Bene's Eve:**  
tasteful luggage for the foot

launched her fashion comfort collection, engineered and built in Spain, in 2004. Now Nota Bene's first domestic-built shoes are rolling off the line for delivery.

Nota Bene, Latin for "mark well" (or "listen up" if your sales staff includes Millennials), tips us off that there are also some special features about the shoes that shouldn't be missed. Riggs set out to produce shoes for the active woman who wears dress shoes but truly wants fit and comfort. "We have a lot of senior corporate women, and moms who need to be dressed," says Riggs. "We're giving them shoes that really deliver on both beauty and comfort...not just lip service."

To mark well just a few features, none of Nota Bene's heels exceed 3 inches, and all are at least three-fourths of an inch wide at ground contact, with soles 33% thicker than industry standard soles. The shoes are engineered in ways designed to prevent damage and fatigue from the punishments of pavement. To achieve this, Riggs sought expert advice from orthopedic surgeons and podiatrists, and then engaged in "Testing, testing. We had Good House-

keeping testers—



**Nota Bene's Niobe:**  
strappy, backless and beaded

they found us, and I went ahead and did it." She adds, "We know it works"—the evidence is ecstatic repeat customers and positive feedback

And here's something else to mark: "We don't do [the line] in 'classic' seasons. We have core styles that work very well, and we [use] development to keep it fresh," Riggs notes. That said, new for Spring 2008 and *made in America* are Amy in red patent leather; Niobe, an ankle-strappy, low-heeled backless slide in beige, with very pretty turquoise bead treatment; and Eve, a simple but tasteful low sandal in a color called "luggage."

A big part of Riggs's business model is working with independents; she loves cooperative marketing, and her "sweet spot" is working with comfort retailers. When pressed about where they're manufacturing, Riggs clammed up, citing location as a trade secret, yet commenting that she's thrilled "it can still be done."

**Fast Facts:**  
**Price Points:** \$225-\$280  
**Margin:** Opportunities in the mid 50s  
**Sizes:** 6s with half sizes up to 9-1/2, whole sizes 10-12  
 Roomy in the toe-box. Hoping to do some wides soon.  
**Fast Take:** Discerning women will gladly note bene.

## Order Close to Season

### Koolaburra: Fashion Transcends Season

It's a treat to find manufacturers who are doing something a little different. Koolaburra is one, with its dramatically embellished boots displaying ethical themes like truth, honor, peace, and heart. Koolaburra is showing its sheepskin boots at August WSA, accepting late orders for Fall; they're also finding that, particularly with their Kettle Black line, many customers are finding the boots seasonless.



**Koolaburra's Peace Rocks (especially when embellished with Swarovski crystals), \$425**

"I think these boots are a fashion item that people are drawn to regardless of the season," confirms CEO Jeff Rawlings. He notes that other sheepskin boots are basically pigskin or cowhide, lined with wool interior. In that construction, the layers must be glued together, and the glue layer prevents the boot from breathing. Rather than line theirs, Koolaburra uses a single, high-quality, double-faced sheepskin—tanned outside, with the wool side in, which allows the boots to breathe. "That's what makes them wearable all year-round in southern California," Rawlings comments, relaying a story of a California retailer who ordered for February delivery and was reordering by March.

continued on page 6

## continued from page 5

Shown here are Peace & Harmony, new to the Kettle Black line for Fall 2007, and their latest, Peace Rocks with genuine Svarovski crystals, available for October 15 delivery.

Although Koolaburra has styles that tend toward men or women, the boots are basically unisex and marked in three sizes: Euro, Australian and U.S., from women's 4 through men's 17. Rawlings notes that Koolaburra is differentiating a little more as of late, introducing a line of men's boots this summer with Vibram soles and edgy leather uppers with embroidery. "The tall boots, in particular, are targeted at women, and we've recently taken some of Kettle Black line down to kids' sizes (kids' 5 to Junior 4)," he says.

Rawlings refers to the company as fighting "the authenticity battle.... We're the only company bringing in authentic Australian sheepskin boots, actually made in Australia." Founded by entrepreneur and long-time Australian goods importer Clifford Severn in 1991, Koolaburra embraces a philosophy of retailer support with a principle of not competing with its retail customers. This summer they're launching a program called Shopatron, wherein the company markets shoes directly to consumers on its web site but asks participating retailers to fill those orders.

### Fast Facts:

**Price Points:** \$400–\$425 adults; 140–\$150 kids

**Markups:** Almost 54%

**Low minimums:** 12 pairs, with single pair reorders

**Sizes:** Whole sizes only.

**Fast Take:** Stick to your principles.



Peace & Harmony from Koolaburra's Kettle Black Collection, \$400

## Just For Fun

### PF Flyers: It's All about the Materials

PF Flyers is a perfect case study in fresh uppers. While retaining classic PF Flyers lines and mood in many styles, the circa-1956 staples have been fabulously revived with highly evolved colors and materials.

PR/marketing rep Kristina Helb says "the brand has found out what its niche is and what it does best. We use texture as much as color to appeal to the young trendsetter who wants to seek out what's new in



PF Flyer Albin, in orange wrinkled Italian leather with patent toe cap, \$110



PF Flyer All American Lo Top Reissue, circa 1956 with 2008 colors: natural, black, green or navy canvas, \$60



PF Flyers are for men and women



**PF Flyers of the '50s: all-American staples**

the sneaker market. The customer is fashion-savvy and metropolitan, but also looking for chic comfort."

Helb points out that PF Flyers introduced "seasonal themes" in April of 2007, based on in-depth trend forecasting. The themes showcase the use of original materials and textures, such as Indian silk shantung, or wrinkled Italian leathers with subtle botanical prints.

PF Flyers has six new styles for the Spring 2008 season, themed "Wash-Down Luxe." Three of the new styles are women-specific, two are unisex, one men's. Key among them are the women's Ariel, an elegant peep-toe skimmer available in Indian shantung or floral print canvas. The men's Albin (shown), is an "evolved" classic sneaker on a modern last. The spring collection includes a unisex model, Crosskort, which is a return of the "mid-century tennis classic," with vintage PF logos and updated with unique stitch details and materials of the Wash-Down Luxe season.



**Ariel: PF Flyer's elegant skimmer**

**Fast Facts:**

**Price Points:** \$40 - \$140, depending on styles and materials

**Sizes:** Sizing on unisex styles is men's; subtract 1-1/2 sizes to adjust to women's.

**Fast Take:** A well-done retro

**Sanuk: Attention Outdoor Retailers**

Sanuk is in the surf business, but seems to be becoming more than that. Historically, the brand primarily produced novelty sandals, but as it gained more retailers, Sanuk branched out. Last year, it slapped deconstructed uppers on its sandal bottoms and called the results "Bare-foot Untechnology."

While all other athletic-oriented shoe manufacturers are boasting a multitude of technological features



**Usual Suspect, available in grey, brown, khaki and black nubuck, \$65**

for support, stability, and shock absorption, Sanuk is something of renegade, employing no real shoe components, no stiffeners, no shanks, no shocks. CEO Bob Rief says "Sanuk is of the opinion that many athletic shoe companies have gone over the top and protect the foot too much, making the foot and ankle actually become weaker" from not having to use their own muscles for strength and balance.

And Rief and company make it sound fun, starting with the name. "Sanuk," which is Thai for "happiness," is said to be part of their "brand DNA." New styles shown here are "Usual Suspect" in black nubuck and "Hey Jute" in moss canvas, with a braided jute accent.

Rief has been fascinated at the turns the brand has taken both inside and outside the surf channel. "It has been very difficult to sell shoes to women [in the surf market]," he acknowledges, adding that "we're the first brand to be able to do that." Outside the surf channel, Sanuk is becoming popular with both outdoor retailers and e-tailers. Rief believes that's because Sanuk's "technical customers"

are surfers, rock climbers, and X-gamers in the outdoor world, all interested in strengthening the feet and ankles. "But the shoes have a really funky look and turned out to be very fashionable," he adds. "Brad Pitt showed up in a pair about six months ago. We'd been selling some boutiques around Hollywood, but that brought on a flood of fashion-forward boutiques."

Sanuk has been in business seven seasons now and is proud to have built a solid history of fulfilling orders. Rief says candidly, "We really appreciate the support of the specialty retail community.

They're still owned and run by enthusiasts, entrepreneurs—not big retailers taking over. There are a group of retailers out there in the 'smart' channels that are very open to sensible but innovative product.

That's where our brand is."



**Hey Jute in moss, also available in khaki, \$55**

**Fast Facts:**

**Price Points:** \$55-\$75 guys; \$48-\$55 girls

**Sizing:** Full sizes, guys' 7-15; girls' 5-11. Also in kids' x-small to large.

**Minimums:** "We don't do minimums."

**WSA Booth #18214 LVCC**

**Fast Take:** If You Really Have to Wear Shoes...

**continued on page 8**

continued from page 7

And Don't Miss These Key New Styles – from vendors who support NSRA's independent retailers:

### Accessorize Your Shoes

#### Aravon's Kira

In black croc patent with contrast trim and interchangeable buckles



Price Point: \$135

WSA Booth #: 12234 LVCC

### Dress it up. Dress it down.

#### Ros Hommerson's Balm



Woven calf on 12/8 stacked heel...pretty.

Price Point: \$79-\$89

WSA Booth #: 447 LVCC

### Something a Lot More Comfortable

#### Naturalizer's Anion

A sleek, sporty casual, with interesting material combinations, stitching and cutouts



Price Point: \$69

WSA Booth #: 2800 LVCC NH

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#### Rieker ANTISTRESS Celia Criss-Cross



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Price Point: \$95

WSA Booth #: 10119 SH1

### Go Beyond Comfort

#### Quirelli Bioessence Ragno

Available for Fall 07, Quirelli's first real casual shoe,



WSA Booth #: The Collections, Suite 7131.■