

Hadid in Hong Kong for Stuart Weitzman Opening

By PAYAL UTTAM

HONG KONG — Zaha Hadid was in Hong Kong Friday to fete the opening of her Stuart Weitzman concept boutique. More than 300 fans swarmed around the futuristic store in Hong Kong's IFC mall for a glimpse of the architect. Hadid arrived at the cocktail party clad in all black with electric blue Prada ankle boots and a metallic cape by Mary Katrantzou. On her wrist was a large latticed cuff she designed for Caspita.

A self-confessed shoe aficionado, Hadid says she's long been familiar with the Weitzman brand. "Actually, I have Stuart Weitzman shoes from maybe 25 or 30 years ago, completely clear ones I bought from New York and I love them. They are still sitting on my table after all these years," she said.

The Hong Kong flagship marks the architect's second collaboration with the New York-based women's footwear label, which opened its first concept store in Milan during fashion week last year. "They are part of the same family but they are not identical," said Hadid of the two boutiques.

Composed of a clean palette of gray and white, the Hong Kong store features glossy, curvilinear forms characteristic of the architect's designs. "It's a small, compact space, so it's really about making fluid interiors," Hadid said. "Other than the design, [it's about] the elevation: the desk, the shelving, the seating, so it's [creating] a whole world from that space."

At about 970-square-feet, the cave-like store is filled with curved walls that swoop down from the ceiling at dramatic angles. Sculptural display units made of fiberglass with a rose gold trim are perched in the center along with cleverly integrated latex foam seating.

Since kick-starting her career in Hong



The Zaha Hadid-designed Stuart Weitzman boutique at IFC mall has a futuristic look.

Kong with the design of The Peak leisure club (an unrealized building) in 1982, the architect has had a soft spot for the city. "I love Hong Kong. I come here quite often, at least every other year," she said. "We just opened two days ago the [Hong Kong] Polytechnic University's school of design and we opened a design museum in Seoul. So it's been a very design-oriented trip."

Asked what's next, Hadid replied, "We are doing a lot of work in China, we are doing a project in New York on the High Line and we are doing a project in Miami, a tower." She's also been working on an opera set for the Los Angeles Philharmonic's production of "Così fan tutte" with costumes designed by Hussein Chalayan, which opens in May.

Hadid added that she intends to col-

laborate with Stuart Weitzman on more boutiques. The brand is planning a global rollout of seven concept stores designed by the architect, with a Rome boutique slated for August followed by a shop-in-shop in Harrods in London in September. By the end of the year, the company will open a Beijing store in Shin Kong Place. In 2015, it hopes to cut the ribbon on stores on Madison Avenue in New York, Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles and Rue Saint-Honoré in Paris, as well as a space in Dubai. Weitzman also is eyeing a location in Ginza, Tokyo.

"The goal is to pick the fashion epicenters of the world and open up these stores," said Stuart Weitzman chief executive officer Wayne Kulkin. "But we want to limit it to eight or nine. What makes it

interesting is that it's not going to be all over the place."

Kulkin explained that alongside strong product lines and marketing campaigns, store architecture is becoming increasingly important. "If you want to get her off the iPad and into the store, you have to create an environment that is different," he said of their customers. "Zaha always seems to be at the forefront of breaking every architectural rule. She comes up with these structures that are really quite amazing."

Asia has become a major focus for the brand of late. "Five years ago if you asked me, I would say Asia is a wonderful market but it's a follower market. Now, Asia is the leading market," said Kulkin.

On April 1, the brand will launch an e-commerce site in Hong Kong in partnership with Pedder Group, followed by a site in China in September. According to Kulkin, e-commerce is the biggest growth engine for the company, and it represents about 35 percent of total business in the U.S.

"We think in three years, the China e-commerce business will be a bigger platform than any place in the world," he added. "Right now it is tremendous, but it's really based off discounting and promotion. We think there will be a major change due to social media, where people will become very accepting of buying luxury online."

This year the brand plans to open another seven stores in China and about 15 more in 2015, the ceo said. Next month it will open a store in Mongolia and one will bow in India this fall.

Asked how the brand, which generates \$300 million in its global retail and wholesale business, is faring in China's current economic climate, Kulkin's reply was optimistic: "I think we are beating the trend. We know from our competitors that there has been a slowdown in luxury but our business is better than ever."

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