



LUXURY, LABELS & LEVINSON

SAKS CALLS ATTENTION TO STYLISH REVAMPS AND NEW VP GENERAL MANAGER

Saks Fifth Avenue has always had an expertise in luxury – think Valentino dresses, Chloé handbags and Christian Louboutin heels – but with a new vice president-general manager at the Somerset Collection store, and added shops that more than just dabble in the grandeur, Saks is rededicating itself to showing customers the finer things in life.

MOVING TO THE MITTEN

A newcomer to the mitten state, Ina Levinson has been with Saks Fifth Avenue for more than just a few years. She started her career with the company in Pittsburgh as an intern while she finished a degree in business and marketing.

“I was really thinking about financial banking to be honest with you, but I always had this fashion bug,” Levinson recalls. “Saks was very flexible with me, and let me work whenever I could. I learned a lot about the business at an early age.”

Upon graduation, Levinson was offered a job in the cosmetics area where she gradually began to work her way up in the company, achieving positions such as sportswear manager, assistant general manager, and general manager. She was eventually promoted to vice president and general manager of a larger volume store in Beachwood, Ohio, and most recently came to the Troy location with the same title but in a much larger market.

“It’s been a really great career for me. I’ve learned a lot about different cities and communities. I personally love the Midwest because everyone is so friendly,” Levinson says. “It’s an easy community to segue yourself into, and people are just really very gracious.”

As a hardworking woman in the retail fashion industry, Levinson knows the ins-and-outs of this year’s fall trends and high-fashion style. For handbags, Levinson says the trends spread across the board, but the must-have piece this year is an oversized clutch with the practical but stylish crossbody bag falling in second.

“In terms of the rest of the store, it’s all about separates this year,” Levinson says. “Last year it was the year of the dress. This year, we take the dress and we accessorize it.”

Levinson also suggests experimenting with different textures

and adding pops of color that speak to the season, but also work for you. Her personal fashion favorite? Jewelry, which is perhaps one of the easiest ways to enhance a look or take it from work to play and then to cocktail.

“If you leave the house without jewelry, it’s like leaving the house without your shoes on,” Levinson says. “To me, it’s just the finishing touch to any outfit.”

And while the metro Detroit fashion scene might not compare to New York or Los Angeles, many Midwest fashionistas have a fresh eye when it comes to trends and developing a personal style.

“This is my first year in Michigan, and I call it the ‘Beverly Hills of the Midwest.’ I think this area is so dressed up and so super fashionable – I’m impressed,” Levinson says.

SAKS GETS SOCIAL

As with many companies, social media is becoming a huge part of Saks in terms of presenting the store and its merchandise. With picture-focused apps like Instagram, sales associates and managers can connect with customers in a visual way.

“Customers have really been receptive to receiving the look – the jacket, the dress, the skirt, the shoes, the bag. It’s this whole collection of ‘what might work for me,’” Levinson explains.

Through social media, customers are able to see a trend or full look in a new way. At first glance, a customer might not think those straight-cut leather pants can work for them, but with a short explanation of how to layer the complete look it becomes a little more possible.

“I think that all the associates are very thoughtful about making sure that they are gracious and that they have the customer’s best interest at heart,” Levinson says.

Saks, after all, remains a store that delivers customer service above and beyond what is expected. Levinson says she also acknowledges the importance of her own customer interactions because she can’t be effective in the office if she doesn’t know the customer and his or her shopping needs.

“We’re very much about the community and servicing the community in a way in which they feel that we are user friendly, and that kind of segues into our renovations because it’s really about how this market has supported us as a store and how we want to give back in terms of bringing them all the best merchandise we can,” Levinson says.

MORE SHOPS, MORE STYLE, MORE SERVICE

“As people in this community drive by the outside of the building, they see Saks Fifth Avenue, but what has changed? You know, have you seen us lately?” Levinson says. “We continue to look for newness that we can bring to this community because we do want to be that favorite store.”

Saks started their renovations in 2012 by opening state-of-the-art Louis Vuitton, Stella McCartney and Brunello Cucinelli shops. But perhaps one of their most anticipated renovations was 10022 (one-double O-two-two) SHOE, a designer shoe department that launched six years ago at its flagship store in New York.

The reason behind the name? It’s the largest designer shoe department in the city, so it requires its own New York zip code. The Somerset Saks is one of only a handful of other stores in the company that has this footprint, which opened last year in September.


“As stores become large enough to carry all that merchandise and have a customer base that it makes sense to – customers feeling much more on the fashionable side of things and who love all those fashion shoes – it made sense that the Troy market would (be chosen) and be able to house that amount of designer shoes,” Levinson explains.

This year, Saks opened their Saint Laurent and Givenchy handbag shops featuring the latest handbag styles, which will correlate well with the Gucci and Céline handbag shops come December. And, well-timed for holiday shopping, Saks will open a CHANEL handbag shop, a CHANEL Beauté shop and a ready-to-wear shop.

Last but not least, Saks opened a Kilian fragrance boutique just in time to update your perfume inventory for fall.

“Kilian is exclusive for us, and it really segues into a lot of the other fragrances that we have, but to have our own shop we’ll really be able to build on that brand,” Levinson says.

With the addition of these new shops, Saks will continue to be the destination for high-end luxury. Saks customers expect that designer-brand presence, and Levinson wants to be able to promise that to the customer.

“We understand what you’re looking for, and we want you to find it here,” Levinson says. “We don’t want you to have a good experience; we want you to have a memorable one.”  — Audrey LaForest

CHECK OUT ONE OF SEVERAL NEW DESIGNER HANDBAG SHOPS AT SAKS AND GRAB A SUPER TRENDY CLUTCH OR CROSS BODY THAT WORKS WITH ANY ENSEMBLE.

