

OR Buyers Go Boots and Barefoot

By JENNIFER ERNST BEAUDRY

SALT LAKE CITY — Expect boots to be the big story again next winter, retailers said at the Outdoor Retailer show, held Jan. 20-23 in Salt Lake City.

Lexi Wornson, owner of Des Moines, Iowa-based Back Country, said she was seeking to expand her SKU count of men's cold-weather styles, as well as true performance boots for women. "A lot of the women's styles we've seen are insulated but aren't meant for wet, icy conditions," she said.

While women's knee-high boots have been big for New Orleans-based chain Massey's Professional Outfitters, the retailer is staying cautious on the category for fall '11, according to owner Mike Massey.

"We haven't veered off course and picked up anything fashiony; we've been a little gun-shy," he said. "But Keen and Patagonia and Merrell — those have done extremely well for us, with excellent sell-throughs."

For fall '11, Massey said the retailer would consider adding retro-athletic and skate styles, and possibly bring in new brands. "We'll expand into fringe vendors we think are really cool," he said, citing Tretorn, Saucony and Chrome Footwear as possibilities.

Newer labels also made a splash at the winter show.

Adidas brought its outdoor collection to the U.S. for the first time through longtime distribution partner Agron.

According to Greg Thomsen, managing director of Adidas Outdoor, the brand was encouraged by buyer reaction to the line, which has been available globally since 2009.



Buyer attendance rose 11 percent at the winter show, which had a record square footage.

"We're very, very happy with the response," he said, noting that the company is on track to reach its goal of 500 doors in the U.S. for launch.

Backcountry.com buyer Chris Dunn said the site was looking with interest at Adidas' launch collection, particularly its tech-focused Terrex line. And the site will stock the brand's early-delivery boat shoes in June. "The colors were great. We thought it was really strong," he said.

Minimal running brand Altra was another new player at OR. Founder Golden Harper said the show had been a good one for the label, which offers men's and women's trail, road and all-purpose styles at \$90 to \$100.

"We wrote an order in the first few hours of the show for twice as much as our expenses for our trip," he said.

While they were shopping primarily for fall merchandise, many retailers said they were excited about the upcoming spring season, when they predict the barefoot or minimal category will really take off.

At Boston-based City Sports, Brian Trask, footwear category manager, said he anticipated the category would get a boost from new entrants, including Reebok's new Reeflex product. Barefoot has a "nice little momentum," he said. "It's nice to see other players in the game."

Brattleboro, Vt.-based Sam's Outdoor Outfitter has not played in the minimal space, but that will change for spring, footwear buyer Frank Gibbons said. The store is bringing in Vibram FiveFingers and minimal styles from existing vendors New Bal-

ance, Merrell and Saucony.

Backcountry.com's Dunn said the site would stock minimal styles from Merrell, New Balance, Saucony and Inov-8.

"It makes sense for our customer. It's such a performance thing," he said. And while Dunn said he hoped to add Vibram's FiveFingers to the mix, it might not happen until next year, when the market could see some slippage. "[Barefoot] is peaking this year. It might diminish by next year," he said.

Backcountry also is betting on the running category as a whole in 2011. The site began carrying road-running product last month, with a focus on niche vendors such as Karhu and Newton.

Retailers at Bread & Butter Warm Up to Winter

By JENNIFER WIEBKING

BERLIN — It's clear that many American buyers are focusing on functional cold-weather styles for next season, and the story was much the same in Europe at the recent Bread & Butter show.

"Next fall looks quite practical," said Susanne Herlt, owner of Look Schuhe, a footwear retailer from Kiel, Germany. Herlt was particularly interested in sheepskin-lined boots at the show. "I've seen a lot more winter-appropriate styles than last year this time."

Robert Dostert, Palladium's sales manager for Germany and Austria, concurred. "Heavy boots are the No. 1 trend so far. But to appeal to buyers they must be both fashionable and functional," he said. "They basically need to be fur-lined and waterproof."

Hefty constructions also raised interest among footwear buyers from other European countries.

Ivo Keulen, shoe buyer for Men at Work, which has more than 50 locations across The Netherlands and Belgium, was looking for hiking boots with thick soles and chunky profiles.

"Contrast is very important for fall. So far, I've seen lots of eyelet details and bright laces," he said.

At Ellesse and Lacoste, for example, red laces popped on black and brown leather hiking boots.

Rugged boots also appealed to Sybille Steindl, a buyer for three Zurich-based stores, including shoe shop Monsieur Dubois.

"There were great robust styles at Bread & Butter this time, although I'm starting to think the show is growing too big," she noted.

Color was another big story at this season's show.

Emu, for instance, updated its sheepskin boot range for fall, offering its signature mini, low and half boots in 10 different hues. "The category of sheepskin boots is very strong at the moment," explained Andy Knowles, Emu's European CEO. "So consumers are looking for the next step, which is why we introduced more shades."

"Color is definitely a trend," said Claes Winterfeldt, buying director at Sportamore, a Sweden-based e-tailer that has focused on the active market since opening last May. "We're actually selling fewer and fewer black and white sneakers."

New launches at the show included Cheap Monday's first full men's and women's shoe collection featuring chunky wedge soles, and Melissa's shiny plastic rainboots with fur-covered legs.



Clockwise from top: A look from Ellesse; Palladium's fur-lined boot; a laced Red wing style.