



NEWSFRONT

# Gant Plans New Look Under Maus Frères

New creative director Brian Rennie aims to make recently renamed Gant Collection more luxurious

BY CONSTANCE HAISMA-KWOK

**HONG KONG** — The new owners of Gant and its recently appointed creative director are planning an evolution for the brand globally.

When Brian Rennie joined Gant as creative director in September 2007, from German design house Escada, he told his bosses that he would need six months to get to know the brand, understand the system and evaluate future steps. Now that those six months have passed, Rennie is ready to put his stamp on the brand.

While Rennie is a fan of Gant's American East Coast look, he feels it's time for the brand to move on. "Preppy is great and preppy can be sexy, but sportsweat is not about logos and numbers," he said during a recent trip to Hong Kong. Instead, he envisions a design direction for

Gant that is more akin to Michael Kors than New Haven, Conn., where the brand was founded. "New Haven isn't the most inspiring place, but Stockholm is. It's a cutting-edge and cool city. Now it is our inspiration," he said, adding that while Gant was "born in America," it was "raised European."

Gant was founded in 1949 and became one of the world's biggest makers of men's shirts, but has since been sold to numerous European firms, notably to Sweden-based Gant AB in 1999 (at the time called Pyramid Sportswear). Recently, Swiss firm Maus Frères acquired a 95.6 percent stake in Gant.

Rennie said that among his very



Brian Rennie

first tasks will be the renaming of the three brands Gant currently produces. The main line, formerly Elliot Gant, will now be known as Gant Collection. "I see it as more aspirational, more luxurious," said Rennie, who admitted that price points will be higher. "It's about introducing tighter, more fashionable fits for men and women," said

Rennie who will show his first collection for Gant during Stockholm's spring/summer '09 Fashion Week. "The main collection is where we make the most money. Eighty percent of our business is there," he said. Gant sales for 2007 totaled 800 million euros, or \$1.17 billion, at the current exchange rate.

Rennie said he will also change Gant's other lines, Rugger and Gant New Haven. "There's been too much cannibalization. I see that having

three collections lets you pursue more ideas," he said.

In Asia, outside Mainland China, Gant's stores are operated by Branded Lifestyle, the retail arm of Li & Fung Group. Adam Koo, regional managing director for Branded Lifestyle, said the two companies have been working together for about a year and a half.

Branded Lifestyle opened two Gant stores in Hong Kong in the last year, each in highly trafficked malls—Times Square in Causeway Bay and Cityplaza in Taikoo Shing. Both are on Hong Kong Island and there are plans to open another three stores here.

Gant is also looking at China, which Rennie calls "a big opportunity for us." He said the company plans to open four to five stores in Mainland China "in the next couple of years." One advantage that Gant has in China is its men's wear tradition. Men's, alongside women's handbags, is providing many brands with successful introductions into the Chinese market.

PHOTO BY GARETH JONES

## New Web Site Corners Online Designer Market

**NEW YORK** — Top men's designer brands have a new online home.

Called Thecorner.com, the site is operated by Yoox Group, parent company of online fashion retailer Yoox.com. It went live in the U.S. and Europe last week and, according to Federico Marchetti, CEO and Founder of Yoox Group, is "a high-end, online department store," selling current season fashion by top brands including Givenchy, Etro, Marc Jacobs, Viktor & Rolf, Rykiel Homme and Hussein Chalayan.

Thecorner.com is organized by brand, with each label creating a personalized space on its "corner" of the Web site. Thecorner.com provides a boxy, grid-like layout in black, white and gray as the background.

"We're bringing together a variety of brands all under the same roof," showcasing each in its own corner," Marchetti said. Some brands, like Hussein Chalayan, have chosen Yoox Group to be its sole e-commerce outlet for on-season goods. Other brands, such as Raf Simons, will be added to the site beginning this summer, according to spokespeople at Thecorner.com and Raf Simons.

For now, the site sells only men's wear. "We launched men's first because our research of their online shopping



habits over the last eight years shows that they are much quicker to buy and have a higher sell-through than women," Marchetti explained.

Later this year, women's wear will be added, he said, and the site will also launch in Japan.

Yoox Services will power the Web site, providing customer service and facilitating shipping and returns. Yoox Services was launched in 2006 to run monobrand online flagship stores for labels such as Marni, Emporio Armani and Diesel, following the success of Yoox.com, which had sales of \$100 million in 2006 (69 million euros). Sales for the Italian company in 2007 have not been disclosed and the company is preparing for an IPO. Growth last year was 35 to 40 percent, according to a company spokesperson.

—MAISIE WILHELM

## The Real Deal: Truly Organic

**ATLANTA** — Eco-friendly apparel purists need look no further. Truly Organic, a completely organic and chemical-free contemporary line, is launching at stores this spring.

The collection of tops and bottoms for men and women uses organic cotton and plant-based dyes from sources that include turmeric, onion, indigo and pomegranate. In fact, the company said, the dye effluent from the method used by its fabric manufacturer, India-based Aura Herbal Wear, can be used to irrigate agricultural crops.

"The process we're using to dye the fabrics is no different from what was done for thousands and thousands of years," said Paul Weinstein, president of Tenfold Organic Textiles, the Seattle-based parent company of Truly Organic. "But we're going about it differently." Aura Herbal Wear, he explained, can produce volume. "If you want to have an impact, you have to find a way to get [organic textiles] into more people's hands."

The men's spring 2008 line is comprised of five tops, including long-sleeved dress shirts in six colors and in a stripe, a chambray and a check, as well as T-shirts. The fall 2008 collection will be bigger, and will include corduroy and twill chino pants, screenprinted T-shirts and woven shirts, and two jackets—a poplin-lined corduroy twill and a hooded, heavy cotton twill. Retail prices range from \$39 to \$92 for men's shirts, \$169 to \$189 for the jackets and \$98 for the pants. Truly Organic is also adding piece-dyed and garment-dyed product for fall. Spring product started shipping March 1 to boutiques, and Truly Organic also has online distribution in the U.S. and Canada.

The dyes meet Global Organic Textile Standards (GOTS) for wet and light fastness, and Truly Organic is also certified fair trade.

Weinstein said his inspiration for Truly Organic came from his sister, Leah, a quilter living in Canada who started experimenting with natural dyes a few years ago. "It didn't make sense to her to use chemical dyes with organic cotton," Weinstein said.

"I'm seeing the growth of organic [fibers] in apparel, but there's virtually no one using organic dyes," he said. "They're using eco-friendly or low-impact dyes, but it's still chemical." —BRENDA LLOYD