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## metropolis

US label Theory has evolved from an upscale sportswear company to a global contemporary clothing brand, writes **Aoife Tunney**

**'I** have just been in Ireland for a few days of golf. We took a helicopter around and I thought it was an amazing country," says Andrew Rosen, chairman of US sportswear company Theory.

Two years have passed between this and Rosen's first visit to Ireland, when he launched his fashion brand here. During that time, he says, sales in Ireland have grown fourfold.

The firm's upscale sportswear is the fastest-growing brand in the fashionable Saks department store on New York's Fifth Avenue. Now Rosen is going head-to-head with the mainstream clothing designers.

"Sportswear is the fastest-growing segment in retail around the world. Theory was around before Juicy Couture brought sportswear into the realm of everyday wear, but now the opportunities in contemporary retail are enormous," says Rosen.

"There is a great attention to design and fashion in the sports market. The customer has evolved so much, and makes much more demands of her clothes. I want to give the customer what she needs, not what she already has.

"Our customers are willing to stretch in terms of price in return for quality, designer element and sophistication."

To this end, Rosen has employed a new team of designers, including Istvan Francor, a designer with Donna Karan and Cerruti in New York, and others from the Diesel and Ralph Lauren stables.

Their remit is to make contemporary clothes that are luxurious but comfortable. "There is a simplicity to the clothes; they all involve some use of Lycra, meaning they have a great fit," says Rosen.

Rosen was raised in Boston and moved to New York when he was 20 years old. He worked with his father, who was the original licensee for Calvin Klein Jeans.

Within 15 years he had progressed from his job overseeing his father's fabric fac-

the position of division president at Calvin Klein.

"My sensibility for classic clothes comes from my experience with my father's company. I learned from working in the factories and warehouses how to cut patterns and actually make the clothes," he says.

Rosen quit the fashion house in the late 1990s and joined forces with former business partner, Elic Tuhari. The pair began making individual sportswear pieces under the Theory label in 1997.

"I didn't think in my wildest imagination that the business would turn into what it has. Everyone thought I was crazy, because I went from running big businesses like Calvin Klein and Anne Klein to starting a small business," he says. "I had two kids and I wanted to raise them. I was making clothes that excited me and were received very well, so the business grew rapidly.

"In the first year we made \$6 million and in the second, \$20 million. I never thought about the volume I was selling - I wanted to stand for something that was consistent with my philosophy, and it just worked well."

In 2003, Rosen and Tuhari sold a large part of the brand to two Japanese companies, Link International and Fast Retailing.

Tuhari then sold his entire stake in the company, while Rosen held on to 11 per cent of his share.

Rather than put resources into an advertising and marketing blitz (Rosen only hired a PR person last year) he has led his company with the belief that quality makes its mark, and asserts that the business is more a word-of-mouth success.

This has certainly paid off as he is poised to expand into wear-to-work with modern career clothes.

Dresswear, or partywear, is another market to be targeted by the company. Like the sportswear, Rosen says it will be simply designed and concentrate on "shape, feel and sophistication".



Andrew Rosen

**W**ith this fresh injection of design on board, the brand is set to exceed \$400 million this year in combined retail and wholesale sales worldwide.

Theory has 15 stores in the US and 50 in the Far East. In Europe, Theory is available in Brown Thomas in Dublin, in Le Bon Marché in Paris, and in Selfridges and Harvey Nichols in London.



The upscale sportswear company is now branching out into wear-to-work clothes

## SPORTING SUCCESS



European sales contribute €15 million to the company's turnover, and Rosen hopes to expand this to around €50 million in the next two years.

As the new autumn/winter range arrives in Dublin next week, Theory's retail space in Brown Thomas is set to double this year to facilitate the expanding clothes business. A further six Theory shops will open worldwide this year.

"My inspiration was always to look at companies like Louis Vuitton, Gucci, and Prada and see how they lead in a global market place.

"I wanted to develop a distribution pattern that didn't rely on any one country. I wanted to duplicate my clothes throughout the world.

"I wanted to be the leader in the marketplace of contemporary clothing, as Gucci and Prada are in the designer

marketplace."

A large part of Rosen's rhetoric focuses on the versatility of his fashions.

"I believe if we keep our strong core of aesthetic we will continue to expand around the world. I have seen so many companies sticking to that one idea and never moving from it. That is not my philosophy - I have a solid vision, but it is an evolving one."

Rosen plans scent, beauty and menswear lines in the future. "Accessories are another opportunity for our future, but we will strategically and conservatively expand in the area as we develop our platform first."