



Bell's

A behind-the-scenes peek at apparel selection

When you step into Bell's in Old Town Winchester, what you see – the coats, pants, suits, hats, scarves, handbags, ties, shoes, jewelry – are a conscientious compilation of hundreds of thoughtful hours spent, hand-selecting each piece.

Six to eight times a year, the Shendow family visits New York City for buying trips for the various seasons. The buying process for Spring/Summer 2015 began the end of July 2014 and the search for Fall/Winter 2015 commenced in

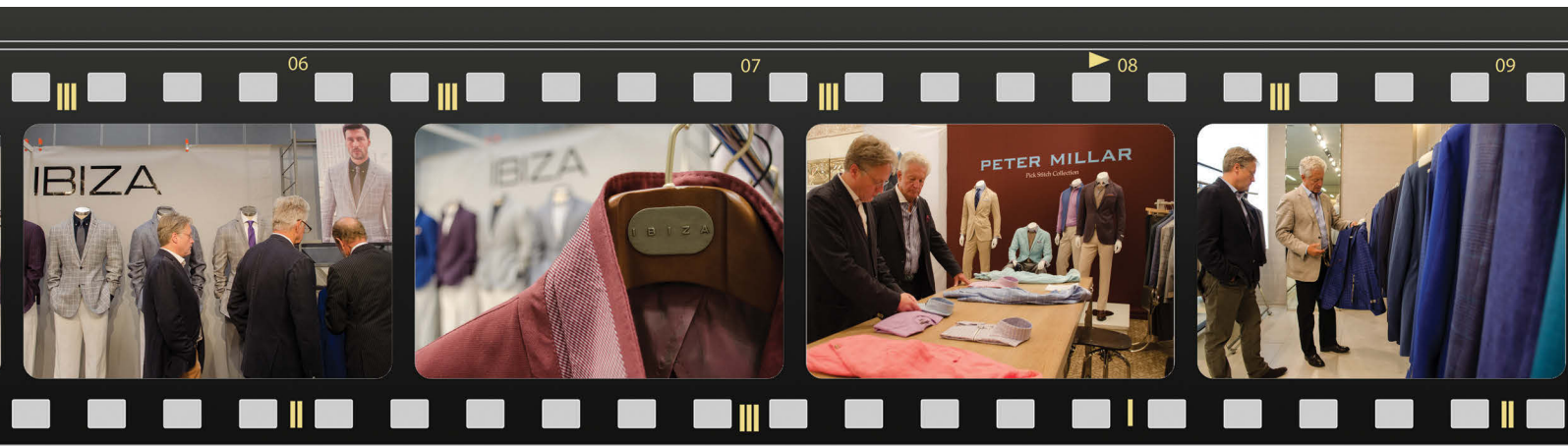
January 2015 — almost nine months in advance of the actual wearing season.

Irvin, Sarah, Scott and Stephen attend the apparel shows where manufacturers from around the world set up booths at the Jacob Javits Center for buyers to view their offerings. Additionally, they traverse Manhattan, visiting showrooms of certain designers who have a permanent showroom: Robert Graham, Canali, Tommy Bahama, Hickey Freeman, Zanella and Carmen Marc Valvo to name a few.

What follows is a brief behind-the-scenes look at a recent trip to New York in July of 2014 – for the Spring/Summer (s/s) 2015 men's apparel market.

Irvin, Stephen and Sarah went to New York early on a Wednesday to visit showrooms throughout the city. By Friday evening, 27 different showroom appointments had been conducted, with manufacturers like Jack Victor, Hickey Freeman, Canali, To Boot and Boglioli.

“The goal, as always, is to sift through the offerings, selecting





unique pieces — that when combined with the best of other manufacturers — will present our clients with a unique, cohesive, original collection,” says Stephen.

On Saturday, Scott took the train up to NYC while Stephen and Sarah headed home to Winchester — not everyone can be away at the same time. Sunday was the first day of the MRket show, so they headed there the next morning to meet with casualwear manufacturers, Cooper Jones, Left Coast Tee, Bill’s Khakis, Flynt and leather good makers Will Leather.

“Some of the Italian and foreign resources do not have showroom representation in the U.S.,” explains Scott. “They only come twice a year for the MRket show. We have

appointments with the ones we want to see, but also leave some free time in our schedule to make new discoveries and to find newness in market direction.”

That afternoon they headed over to the Robert Graham showroom. Robert Graham’s colorful and unique shirt designs are represented in their showroom – which doesn’t disappoint – it’s like walking into a tropical paradise with its beach theme. As in any meeting, they sit down with their rep who shows each of Robert Graham’s shirts for Spring/Summer 2015. Irvin and Scott make decisions on each shirt, and the ones receiving an “ok” are set aside on a rack for further inspection and final selection. Out of the 70+ shirts shown, they initially

selected 25, and further edited down to 12. These chosen shirts would arrive at Bell’s seven months later in February. The fabric mills have to first produce and then deliver the fabric to the manufacturer and at that point the manufacturing begins. This accounts for the lag time associated with unique products. After many more appointments both at MRket and in showrooms, the men’s buying trip for s/s 2015 wraps up on Monday evening and it’s time to head back to Winchester. But the buying process is far from over – now the real work begins.

“All fabric swatches of potential purchases are laid out on two 4’ x 8’ work tables along with notes, model charts and worksheets showing prices and sizes available,” explains Irvin.





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“After examining any videos or photos taken of items while in New York and after an in-depth conversation with Stephen and Scott, the selection is made and the orders written based on previous open-to-buy information.”

The scope of the ladies' industry is much larger than the men's: more categories, more options, more choices, more vendors, and it moves fast.

Sarah Shendow, owner of Bell's Ladies, recently returned from Coterie in New York City, to buy apparel for the Fall 2015 season. The marketplace is held in the Javits Center, and it takes up the entire building — 3 levels, 1.8 million square feet. She attends this particular show twice a year, but visits other smaller shows and showrooms for mid-season buying. “I try to have a flow of merchandise coming in, so that there is something new hitting the floor adding interest to what we already have,” says Sarah.

At this most recent show, there were several thousand vendors or “booths” where buyers met with representatives who showed their

new lines. Sarah says that buyers have limited time to view the offerings and make notes, before the next appointment arrives and she moves to another booth.

Like the men's market, her husband Irvin, and sons Scott and Stephen attend, the ladies apparel market isn't a one-stop-shop; she also visits showrooms of designers who have a permanent location in NYC. This means her schedule while in New York is a hectic one, often moving all over the city. “A typical day begins at 8:30 in the morning with a showroom appointment, and then the Javits Center for another day. Sometimes there will be a showroom appointment after that,” she said. The day after the shows is spent with appointments in showrooms.

How does a buyer navigate the marketplace? Here's what Sarah recommends:

Plan ahead to see the most important vendors to your store. That means locating the vendors at the show you wish to see, so you can work as efficiently as possible and not waste time navigating the large venue. Make



appointments as necessary at the show and in the showrooms in NYC. Save some time to walk areas of the show to look for new ideas.

“When you go to market you go to see what is new and exciting, that will entice your customer to come to see your offerings for the new season. You are looking for styles, fabrics and colors. You are looking at the big picture,” explains Sarah.

“When you narrow it down for your own clientele, you have to stay in the parameters of what you want your store to be. There isn’t any store that can be ‘everything to everyone.’”

Once the trip is complete, the work now begins, as all of the notes and the photos have to be reviewed and decisions made on what to buy. What category? Vendor? Style? Fabric? Color? Size? Delivery? The choices have to relate to the marketing plan for the category, and the category must relate to the total marketing plan for the season.

What’s on the horizon for Fall 2015? Sarah reports that neutrals and beautiful pops of color, along with clean, architectural lines on garments are among the trends. Luxurious fabrics, interesting designs, and luscious color will make Fall 2015 spectacular.

