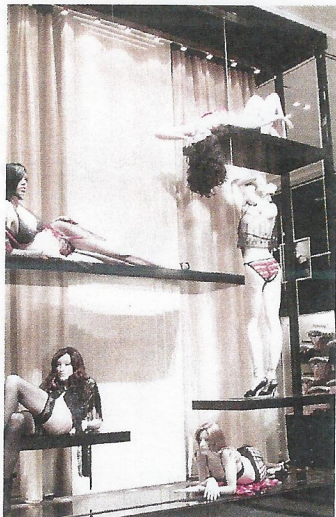


STYLE FILE

L.A. SHOWS, SELFRIDGES SLOWS, HARVEY NICKS GROWS AND OTHER NEWS FROM THE FASHION FRONT. **BY CHANTAL GORDON**



Un-Limited Possibilities

Changes are afoot for all of the Limited Brands—comprising Express, Limited, Bath and Body Works and Victoria's Secret—as the company attempts to recover from the closing of 1,700 stores in the past eight years. Among the major strategic changes for the retailer: adding third-party brands to Victoria's Secret and BBW; reducing the incessant price promotions and staging fewer sales with more impact, and generating hype around store openings. "If we can control brands through our channels it is an interesting proposition for Victoria's Secret," said ceo Les Wexner during Limited's 2003 analyst update in Columbus, Ohio, where the \$9.4-billion specialty retailer is based. "The notion of being close to the customer means you are close to your competitors and close to ideas."



L.A. Looks

The designers who made the biggest splash during L.A. fashion week tapped into quintessential California: sun, sand, starlets and rock 'n' roll. It was fast times at the Corey Lynn Calter show, as neon colors electrified off-the-shoulder tops, exuberant prints and Roller Derby shorts. If Calter's show was a pool party in Malibu, then Bao Tranchi's collection was a dark alley behind The Roxy on Sunset Strip. Tranchi's vampire vixen offerings were firmly anchored by corseting and meticulous touches of leather and velvet. Hot designer Louis Verdad, meanwhile, showcased the sexy sophistication of the Forties. Hollywood bombshells such as Rita Hayworth and Dolores del Rio inspired Verdad's cinematic trenches, swingy skirts, high-waisted pants and blood-red nails.



Red Light, Green Light

As one British chain makes plans to roam, another is remaining decidedly close to home. Harvey Nichols has announced that it will open a 60,000-square-foot store in Hong Kong in 2005, just as Selfridges has put the kibosh on three planned rollouts in Bristol, Leeds and Newcastle. The former's newest expansion, which will cost up to \$15 million, will open at the Landmark, Hong Kong's high-end shopping hub. Selfridges, on the other hand, has "new, slightly different investment priorities," according to a spokeswoman, as a result of its recent acquisition by retail magnate Galen Weston. "The core strategy remains the same—to make every Selfridges an innovative, dramatic place to shop, but the focus is now to build upon, and update, those stores that already exist." Although its high street rival is scaling back, Harvey Nichols has no intention of slowing down—Charles M. Jayson, president and ceo of parent company Dickson North America, has even hinted of hitting U.S. shores, noting, "Harvey Nichols has worldwide appeal and we'll be exploring all continents and major cities."



Tech Tops Trends

Teens today are choosing geek over chic. Bored by fashion trends, teens are dialing back their apparel purchases to buy sleek gadgets like cell phones and MP3 players. So says the NPD Group, which found that last year teens spent 13.8 percent less on apparel in favor of Sony, Apple and Nokia gadgets. Some clothing labels have adopted an "if-you-can't-beat-'em-join-'em" strategy. Baby Phat and Roxy introduced branded cell phones, while next spring Hot Kiss will release Smart Skin, a cell phone cover with a personalized info chip.