



Ancient Rome: Sandals with multi-straps rising high on the leg will be a popular trend in spring-summer 2009 and will feature prominently in Sigerson Morrison's second-line collection, Belle.

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Second line makes sense

As a high-end New York brand, Sigerson Morrison has unusual origins. Founded in 1991 by partners Kari Sigerson and Miranda Morrison, it started life in the Big Apple, but Ms Sigerson hails from the plains of Nebraska, and Ms Morrison from England. They met at the famous Fashion Institute of Technology on Seventh Avenue on the West Side of Manhattan (nicknamed Fashion Avenue) where both women had gone to study footwear design, and if their backgrounds were different, their views on the shoes they wanted to design had a lot more in common.

They sum up their design philosophy by saying that style, rather than fashion, is the key. In this age, with trends experts everywhere agreeing that there is no longer one 'look' that they can point to as being supremely in vogue, it may be that the Sigerson Morrison outlook is paradoxically fashionable, that a range that allows women to indulge their individual tastes—rather than the styles and colours the market has decided to favour in any given season—is more 'of the moment'. This is never straightforward, and there are plenty of elements in the collection that trends analysts could claim to have predicted (see below), while the two designers are

New York luxury label Sigerson Morrison has launched a second line, Belle, which it will bring to Europe for the first time in spring-summer 2009.

certainly taking steps to spread their ideas farther and wider, signing, for example, a new deal with major US retail group Target.

It's a far cry from the early days, when customers and admirers had to make their way to Mott Street on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, where the two designers opened their first store in 1995, followed by openings of other boutique stores in London in 1999, on Prince Street, Manhattan, in 2000, and Los Angeles and Tokyo in 2003. Over this timeframe, the network of independent high-end boutiques stocking the designers' exclusive, hand-crafted shoes also grew.

Bringing Belle by Sigerson Morrison to Europe is another part of the expansion plan, although the company has had a European presence for some time, including in famous stores such as Theresa in Munich and Harvey Nichols in

London, where first-line shoes start at around EUR 350 and rise to EUR 500. Belle is about opening up the glamour of the brand to a younger public, women who perhaps aspire to wear first-line shoes, but for now are very happy to have something in the Sigerson Morrison style for a couple of hundred euro less.

And showing that the spring-summer Belle collection for 2009 includes some elements that are in keeping with fashion, there are lots of wedged sandals, many with elements of a 'gladiator' look that enjoyed early popularity in New York City in the summer of 2008. There is an emphasis on metallic tones with, in many instances, rivets serving as an extra attraction, as well as a fastening. Other styles have multiple straps and buckles, emphasising the influence of Ancient Rome on this line. There are also black patent leather flat-thong sandals with a less obvious adjustable closure on the ankle strap. For more formal summer wear, there are patent leather round-toe ballet pumps and flats, some with art-deco style ornaments on the vamp.

Nanni Froehlich, from Germany but based in New York, has been working with the designers on the commercial side for many years. She confirms that any trends that do emerge are global now because of our internet-driven instant media. The only factor that affects this in a major way is, in her opinion, weather. Something that sells well in Italy or the Middle East or the south of France may work less well in Germany. And a shoe with more upper that proves popular in northern Europe would probably feel too much like a bootie in hotter markets.

However, Ms Froehlich feels that there is still something very special about New York City and says the advance popularity there of the gladiator sandal is proof. A buyer from Richmond, Virginia, told her recently that she liked those sandals very much, but that it would be next summer before she would be able to sell them in the more conservative south.

Something similar happened in the UK. Sandals that sold brilliantly in the

Harvey Nichols store in London proved to be slow movers in the luxury chain's Manchester store. "We had to ship all those shoes back to London," Ms Froehlich explains. "I think it may have been because no one in Manchester had heard of us, and people at our end of the market there seem to want to stick with the brands they know. In London it's different; more people know us there and, even if they do not, are prepared to try something different."

Speaking of something different, there is a range of fun sandals in three bright colours (orange, violet

and green) that has sneaked into the Belle collection by the back door. They're really a first-line product, Nanni Froehlich says. Made of rubber, they have an extended spiral section that goes all the way up the lower leg. She points out that there is also a leather version, a sumptuous product that is at the higher end of the Sigerson Morrison price-range. But because the rubber version retails at EUR120, the designers felt they could include it in this exciting second-line collection that will reach European shores with the return of warmer weather next year. 