Cindy_Says.qxd 20/1/09 8:06 am Page 2





# *Cindy says: Detail is everything*

Cindy Traub has been in the shoe selling business for 35 years and believes she knows exactly what customers and retailers want when it comes to footwear. Having dreamed of setting up her own business for many years, Ms Traub established Cindy Says in 2004. Shortly after this, Cindy Says Couture was set up. According to Ms Traub, the brand was immediately picked up by major US stores such as Nordstrom. In September the company appeared at Modacalzado in Madrid to present its latest footwear range.

When Ms Traub was setting up the company, her aim was to create a line that would put a smile on the faces of the women wearing the shoes. The motto behind the brand is: "Give a girl the correct shoes and she can conquer the world". In order to achieve this, the idea was to "target haute couture at a more affordable price", offering a luxury-style selection of shoes with a practical price tag. Ms Traub's motives were also clear in terms of her relationships with retailers. "I know the exact challenges retailers are facing. I speak their language!" she says.

## *Expect the unexpected*

The new collection was extensive and offered huge variety. One of the most prominent styles was the wedge, which appears to be sticking around for another season. According to Ms Traub, the bohemian look and 1970's styles have come back, although she points out that the style has become more "sophisticated bohemian". One example of this is the shoes in the range featuring patchwork designs. There has also been a shift in terms of colour. Neon colours have softened, with natural blues and lavender proving particularly popular. This was in keeping with other exhibitors' collections at the show, where purple really dominated.

One of the important elements of the Cindy Says range is "the unexpected", according to Ms Traub. This includes shoes with unusual finishes, for example natural leathers combined with shiny sequins. "We like to surprise our customers and give them something that will get a reaction from others on the street," she says. "We like to make shoes that put a smile on people's faces." In order to do this, the materials used must be right. According to Ms Traub,

Cindy_Says.qxd 20/1/09 8:06 am Page 3



materials are sourced from all over the world. She reveals that the leather comes from Italy and Brazil and that the shoes are put together in "small Chinese boutique factories". She adds that these factories are run by Italians or Brazilians "because they know how to make shoes".

## Variations on an old theme

Ms Traub claims that, while the Cindy Says shoes are "very unique", they are deliberately not too "off-the-wall", which can sometimes put customers off. She says that the shoes are designed with all types of women in mind so that no one feels excluded. "It's about a certain mindset," she says, adding that the collection should appeal to girls in their 20s as well as to their mothers. The most important thing to bear in mind when it comes to the brand, as far as she is concerned, is attention to detail. The reason for this is that there is no such thing as an entirely new silhouette. "Everything has been done before," she says. Therefore, the real challenge is to redesign old styles with new themes, patterns and accessories to make them look different and, most importantly, to fit with modern trends.

This is also key when it comes to supplying shoes for clothing boutiques. Ms Traub points out that if a shoe manufacturer produces a range that is out of keeping with the apparel items—whether in terms of colour or style—the shoes are unlikely to sell well. "A lot of clothing boutiques carry shoes so we have to work with them time-wise," she says.

## Keeping up with demand

And it is no good simply sticking to a single type of footwear. According to Ms Traub all different styles, for example flats, sandals, boots and dress shoes, must be offered. "Very few women wear only one look," she points out. Most women need shoes for work, shoes for walking to work, shoes for the evening and so on. So it is important either to provide shoes that can accommodate all the woman's needs—which is no mean feat—or to offer her each type of shoe she needs to go about her daily life. If the designer is unable to cater for these demands, he or she will not succeed, implies Ms Traub.



Taking this one step further, she touches on the importance of understanding exactly who your buyers are, and what their needs are.

Cindy_Says.qxd 20/1/09 8:06 am Page 4



"It is really important to meet demand from different markets," says Ms Traub. She explains that not only does this change all the time, it can change from one region to another, and even from one store to another. In turn, this has an impact on pricing and the materials used to make the footwear. While most of the shoes in the Cindy Says and Cindy Says Couture ranges are made using nappa and hair calf, cow and horse leather, synthetics are used in combination with leather in some models in order to keep prices lower.

Ms Traub claims the ability to offer shoes at different price levels is another way of meeting demand from different segments. She believes it is important to allow people to shop according to their budgets without finding themselves excluded by sky-high prices or put off by low prices. "We buy to make ourselves feel better, whether we go to Harrods or discount stores," she says. Therefore, offering shoes with a broader range of prices opens the brand up to a wider audience.

## *Taking advantage*

This may be particularly important in the current financial climate. With many high street stores suffering because of a loss of consumer confidence, many manufacturers and retailers are having to rethink their strategies when it comes to keeping sales alive. Despite this, the footwear industry could be one of the only sectors that may actually stand to benefit from the credit crunch, if Ms Traub is right. "What do women do when we feel bad? We go shopping!," she says, adding that shoes are often top of the list in these circumstances. She also claims another plus point is that, while people may now have to cut down on holidays abroad, or big-ticket items such as cars, they will always need to buy shoes.

The key here is to diversify according to the market atmosphere, ensuring that the footwear produced ticks all the right boxes. This is no small order: it must fit with retailer's clothing ranges and modern trends; it must appeal to different types of consumer; and it must have a suitable price tag. But most importantly, each pair of shoes must bring a smile to the wearer's face; make her feel like a conqueror; and invoke a surprised and positive reaction when the shoes are on the customer's feet.

