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+19
RAINBOOTS
COLORFUL COMBOS & SPLASHY STYLES
FLOOD THE SPRING MARKET



BEST

They're innovative. They're powerful. But most of all, they're kid-friendly. From cool brands to influential boutiques, *Footwear News* sizes up the hottest players shaping the children's market.

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MARKETPLACE

RAINBOOTS * BUZZ

HIGH & DRY

The spring '14 forecast calls for splashes of quilting, studding and equestrian buckles on classic wellies. Here, MULBERRY's rubber riding version, VALENTINO's Rockstud bootie and SALVATORE FERRAGAMO's patent style show the luxe side of rain-or-shine footwear.



PHOTO: THOMAS IANACCONE. UMBRELLA FROM LONGCHAMP

PUDDLE JUMPERS

Take cover in a variety of the season's most fashion-forward rainboots. Cheery colors brighten bleak days, city-friendly cropped versions and tall traditional wellies ensure storm alerts are tackled in style.

From top: HUNTER's dual-tone rainboot; ILSE JACOBSEN's laceup; AIGLE's lavender boot with buckle; CAPELLI NEW YORK's bubblegum-pink wellie

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PHOTOGRAPHED BY THOMAS IANNAZONE

Clockwise from left:
BURBERRY's tartan
style; BOGS' laceup;
TRETORN's rose-
gold pull-on; TOMMY
HILFIGER's forest-
green duck boot

Clockwise from top:
LE CHAMEAU's indigo wellie;
LA CANADIENNE's red boot;
PAJAR CANADA's quilted riding
style; DAV's red-trimmed
equestrian boot

Nomad's Land

One rainboot maker talks trends and challenges on tap for the contemporary business. BY JACQUELYN LEWIS

As rainboots continue to sell well in bold hues and new silhouettes, Nomad co-founder Pete Julienne said he expects the upward trajectory of the category to continue into spring '14, allowing his label's quirky, colorful offerings to

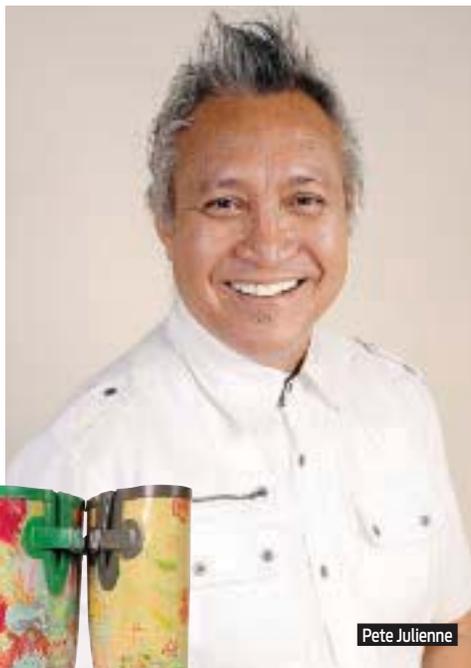
make a stylish splash.

"In past seasons, [rainboots] were a fashion statement, and then it dropped off a little bit, but now I see it coming back," said Julienne, who held account executive positions at N.Y.L.A., Seychelles and BestFit International Inc. prior to starting Brea, Calif.-based Nomad Footwear Inc. in 1997. "We're seeing a lot of [boutiques] now carrying rainboots, and a lot of retailers have been coming back to us."

Nomad reacts quickly to style trends, primarily through exploring novel prints and materials. A few of the brand's mainstays are its limited-edition artist series of galoshes with custom images from painter M. Nicole van Dam; its in-house developed prints; and Western-inspired rainboots. For fall, the label delved into mixing microfiber and knit materials with traditional PVC. For spring, it is working on a new process for pressing textures directly onto the boots' rubber outer surface, creating a fabric-like look.

Nomad rainboots, which are made in China and retail for \$69 and above, make up more than 60 percent of the firm's overall sales. (Other offerings include women's and kids' flip-flops, and casual contemporary flats, heels and wedges. The company also has a private-label division.) Styles are available at DSW, QVC and about 1,000 fashion-focused boutiques across the country.

While he is bullish about rainboots for the year ahead, Julienne said he also is rolling with the punches in an increasingly complex market. "Things happen so rapidly at the moderate price point that I always have to be on top of my game," said the executive, who serves as



Pete Julienne

Nomad's director of sales and marketing, and also oversees the creative side of the



Boots from Nomad's artist series

business. "You have to look at what high-end brands and lower-priced

ones are doing and find a balance between basic and fashion."

Here, Julienne discusses the challenges that come with manufacturing abroad, the advantage of staying small and why the rise of mobile shopping helps and hurts.

1 What are the most significant trends on the horizon for rainboots?

PJ: Last year, everyone was projecting [that spring '14] would be a lot more muted colors, but that didn't really happen, so a lot of [retailers] missed out on prints. All of a sudden, everything is in camo right now. You also are starting to see an old-school, vintage feel from the men's market translate into women's rainboots. At the

same time, going into 2014, we are going to stay very feminine, with florals and a lot of abstract prints. We are going to continue with very bright colors as well. And embellishments are big in the Southwest — a little bit of jewelry on the upper part of the boot.

2 Why do you prefer working with smaller shops over major department stores?

PJ: Our real focus has always been independents, and it always will be. It's a good opportunity. [Our retail partners] are mainly boutiques that carry clothes and shoes versus just shoe stores. They add the boots as accessories into the mix of clothing, which helps business quite a bit. We can offer big margins for our little independents, and that seems to work for everybody, especially in terms of keeping [inventory] fresh.

3 What is the largest shift in shopping habits you've observed during your decades in the industry?

PJ: The instant gratification on smartphones. One of the biggest complaints from my retailers is that people will come in, take a picture of the shoes and then go online and price shop. If they can't get it [at the lowest price] at that retail store, then boom, they're gone. That change is huge and it is getting worse as time goes on because of all the new apps showing who has this and who has that. To compete with that, I have to separate myself away from what the basic stores have. I have to have a print or a pattern that, when a customer tries to look it up, they can't find it anywhere else. You have to become really creative to have staying power.

4 Are there other challenges in the rainboot business right now?

PJ: The duty rate for rainboots [imported from China] is the biggest hurdle right now. [Maintaining our] price points has been very tough. A lot of people who were in our same price range are not there anymore because of that. Also, we are always trying to figure out new things and come up with new prints that will make something fresh in a market that has been oversaturated.

5 What's your read on the market going into 2014?

PJ: I don't see the rainboot business stopping. It's a perpetual item, and it's at a very consistent place right now. It's a basic that has been in existence since the 1800s, but you add some [novelty] to it and all of a sudden it turns into a fashion item. You've got to love that.