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New Shoe Store Ruia to Showcase Uncommon Brands

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Ruia Store
Photo By Robert Mitra

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Most shoe addicts would agree that one can never have enough footwear.

Starting Thursday, a shop called Ruia at 65 Mercer Street in Manhattan's SoHo neighborhood will feed that hunger with a mix of international designer brands that are not easily found — if

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they can be found at all — in the U.S.

Its 26-year-old owner, Kajal Ruia, an ex-Londoner, hunts down and selects the uncommon brands. It might seem like a bold move, considering the economy, but Ruia, a former finance-management trainee for Lloyds Banking Group, had lived in the U.S. before and decided this was the best place to begin, since it was harder to find some of the European labels.

She is confident that her business smarts, combined with her passion for shoes and hard-to-find designers, will be key to the shop's success.

"It sounds silly, but I'm trying to offer something different," Ruia explained. "It's all beautiful designers, and, apart from Missoni, I am the only place you can get them in New York."

For holiday, the boutique's offerings include six Italian designers, along with one each from London and Brazil. Most of the Italian collections are quintessentially so, with stilettos aplenty.

Baldan tends more toward evening, with bow-heeled metallic blue pumps and suede booties with a cutout ankle, while Dibrera offerings include vintage-looking quilted gray boots with a white feather pom-pom, among other styles. One of the standout Italians is Dora by Mi-Piaci, with suede numbers adorned with large buckles around the ankles and bowed platform pumps.

In addition to rain boots from Missoni, the other Italian brands include Twice boots and crystal-embellished pumps and shearling boots from Loriblu, which has the largest selection to choose from, along with a few bags.

There are also graphic wedges from Londoner Cleo B and chic everyday pumps and over-the-knee boots from Brazilian Luis Onofre that get a kick from subtle crystal embellishment on the heel. Each season, Ruia intends to keep some of the same designers but will also bring in new ones to freshen the look.

Architect Lacina Heitler designed the store in a feminine, neoclassical style, with shoes displayed on tables and dressers in place of built-in shelves. There's also a seating area upstairs, where customers and companions can relax with complimentary beverages served.

Ruia declined to project first-year sales, but sources estimate the store could generate \$300,000 in the first year. "I just want people to come in and enjoy it," said Ruia. "I want people to leave with a 'I had fun there'-type feel."

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