



Fashion and grooming: Men want to look good too, and Orange County shops are taking notice

December 11, 2015



Fine clothing, manicures and luxe watches are all part of a growing boom in retail aimed at the man of the house, a trend that runs against a sector traditionally focused on women.

The year saw a slew of men's shops arrive at malls and retail centers across the county as the economy regained steam and the Internet fueled the fashion interests of millennials and a sophisticated workforce.

"There's such a high percentage of affluent male workers (in parts of Orange County). In areas like this, you see more men's shops and less of them in less affluent areas," retail analyst Greg Stoffel said. "It is also an indication of changing demographics. Younger millennials tend to pamper themselves a bit more."

DJ Busch, a mall analyst for Newport Beach-based real estate tracker Green Street Advisors, added that while 75 percent of retail is still aimed at women, new options, including men's retailers, are being added at malls to "fill voids in the market right now."

Busch added that some men's retailers, such as Bonobos at Fashion Island, started online and "realized that having a physical space is important too."

"We've seen a trend of clicks to bricks," he said.

IN-PERSON EXPERIENCES

The men's retail trend has been growing among established brands, too.

TravisMathew opened at Fashion Island in 2014. The Huntington Beach-based brand started by selling golf wear at country clubs and resorts before expanding to big retailers like Nordstrom. It now has three brick-and-mortar stores and plans to open two or three a year for the next few years.

Chris Rosaasen, chief creative officer of the brand, said having physical stores gives the company more brand recognition as well as giving the consumer a personal experience.

"Consumers can come in and be educated on the product and have a great experience – a really personalized experience," he said. "With our store, people are able to come in and touch it and try it on and get the one-on-one experience of being here."

At Ease, a men's sportswear company, also has found customer experiences to be important.

"We have something unique which most don't, which is we have our own tailoring department, so we can tailor as the customer waits for their pants," company president Steve Knutson said.

That experience, he added, is what keeps people coming to his store instead of department stores.

OUT OF A RECESSION

The boom in men's retail can be partly attributed to the economy, which has been gaining traction since the Great Recession ended in 2009, Stoffel said.

At Ease has been in business for 24 years and at Crystal Cove Shopping Center for eight.

The company faltered during the recession, but has since seen business pick up as men become more in tune with fashion trends.

"Men are now more concerned about fashion. The advent of the Internet has brought the acceptance level up," Knutson said. "Less basics now. Men are much bolder, and they have wives who have an astute knowledge of what is going on in the fashion world and that translates to the men."

Garys, a menswear boutique at Fashion Island, has been open for more than 30 years and in 2013 expanded its presence at Fashion Island. Company president John Braeger said the brand is seeing growth of 5 percent to 10 percent a year.

Braeger attributed the growth both to the renewed economy and men caring more about their appearance.

Rosaasen at TravisMathew agreed.

"It's a little bit of coming out of a recession, but also trends changing and it becoming more popular for men to want to look good and having more disposable income," he said.

ONE STOP

Since Garys started, it has expanded its offerings and is now seeing men of all ages.

"Over the years we've become a one-stop shop for men ... We carry everything from suits to denim and make it really easy for men to do all their shopping in one place and not have to move around," Braeger said.

TravisMathew has expanded from a golf wear line to a lifestyle brand that sells more items. The company has discovered men at the store make an effort to look unique.

"Men are starting to care more about how they dress," Rosaasen said. "There's that 'metrosexual' tag word that's out there. But men are starting to care more about their personal appearance and don't want look like everyone else."

The brand now sells denim, woven items, outerwear and more. Most customers are 20- to 55-year-old men.

SALONS AND WATCHES

The retail resurgence isn't just about clothes.

A variety of watchmakers, such as A. Lange & Söhne at South Coast Plaza, have popped up in recent months, as have salon services aimed at men.

"Wherever there's money, there's a market for luxury watches," Stoffel said.

Braeger of Garys added that more accessories were being sold than before.

Along with fine duds, luxurious ways for men to pamper themselves are also increasing.

"Men are definitely demanding more luxury services," said Scott Fontana, co-owner of Cristophe Salon Newport Beach. "Most everything we are doing to women, men are doing also."

Images Luxury Nail Lounge, which made headlines earlier this year with its \$25,000 manicure, has a menu specifically catering to men at its three Orange County locations: two in Irvine and one in Newport Beach.

Tony Nguyen, general manager of Images, plans to open a salon specifically aimed at men next year.

"Some are intimidated to go to a nail salon full of women," he said. "There's a lot of men who do want this; we just have to create an environment for them to be comfortable to go in."

The salon will have the feel of a sports bar with games on TVs; it also will offer services such as hand massages and nail buffing.

"The concept has been around, but we want to be the first in O.C. to really make it successful and show men that it is OK to have this service. Men need to look good too, and groom and take care of themselves," Nguyen said.

18|8 Fine Men's Salon, a Laguna Niguel-based chain, has more than 400 locations either in operation or development. It offers such services as haircuts, shaves and manicures for men.

"Men are taking so much more pride in how they look, and men's grooming is changing," said Aliso Viejo resident Monica Harter, who took over the 18|8 in Lake Forest in May.

"It's exciting to be on the cutting edge while these changes are happening."

Images

LUXURY NAIL LOUNGE