

# WWD FRIDAY



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## Meatpacking Magnet

**NEW YORK** — The Hotel Gansevoort could be to the Meatpacking District what a major league-size baseball diamond was to an Iowa cornfield.

Retailers see the hotel, which opened on Wednesday at 18 Ninth Avenue, as a field of dreams that will bring affluent customers to the neighborhood's cobblestone streets.

With only a 400-square-foot retail space, which has been leased to Henry Beguelin for its first New York store, the hotel is hardly a retail mecca. A spa is planned for the lower level.

The real draw will be Ono, a 15,000-square-foot restaurant concept from Jeffrey Chodorow, whose centerpiece will be a wood-fired grill. Ono is scheduled to open in May, when Beguelin will also open. Other amenities include a rooftop pool with an underwater light and sound system, Plunge Bar, VIP roof area and private party room.

Until now, one of the Meatpacking District's foremost challenges has been establishing itself — a far-flung neighborhood with no direct public transportation — as a retail hub. Restaurants such as Pastis and Lotus have helped. Rents are between \$70 and \$100 per square foot, according to brokers and landlords in the area.

Paul Nicoletti, who with his wife, Cristina, owns Henry Beguelin boutiques in the U.S., said his search for space centered on two locations in the Meatpacking District, West 14th Street and the Gansevoort.

"The hotel space is quite small and it's going to be difficult to merchandise," he said. "We're not going to be able to show everything in our product range. Had we gone anywhere else we would have been able to open a flagship with every product we make," including belts, shoes, bags, apparel and furniture. The hotel proposition, nonetheless, appealed to Nicoletti.

In deference to Jeffrey New York's owner Jeffrey Kalinsky, who has been buying Henry Beguelin for 20 years — since his days as a buyer at Barneys New York — Nicoletti said everything in the new boutique will be specific to the location. The col-

lection is also sold at Linda Dresner and Bergdorf Goodman here.

"We have so much respect for Jeffrey," Nicoletti said. "He found out we were opening our own boutique a few days ago, so it's a little sensitive right now. We're optimistic he will continue to buy the brand, especially since he pioneered this neighborhood. We'll give him exclusives."

The hotel was originally planning to lease the ground floor retail space to a spa. Kim Mogull, the broker who represented the hotel, convinced its owners to move the spa to the lower level. "Retail is the highest and best use for the space," said Mogull, who is president of the real estate firm bearing her name. She also leased spaces to Dernier Cri and Scoop on Washington Street.

Rich Meilman, who said his family controls one-third of the retail square footage on West 14th Street between Ninth and Tenth Avenues, said his tenants are anticipating the added foot traffic the hotel will bring.

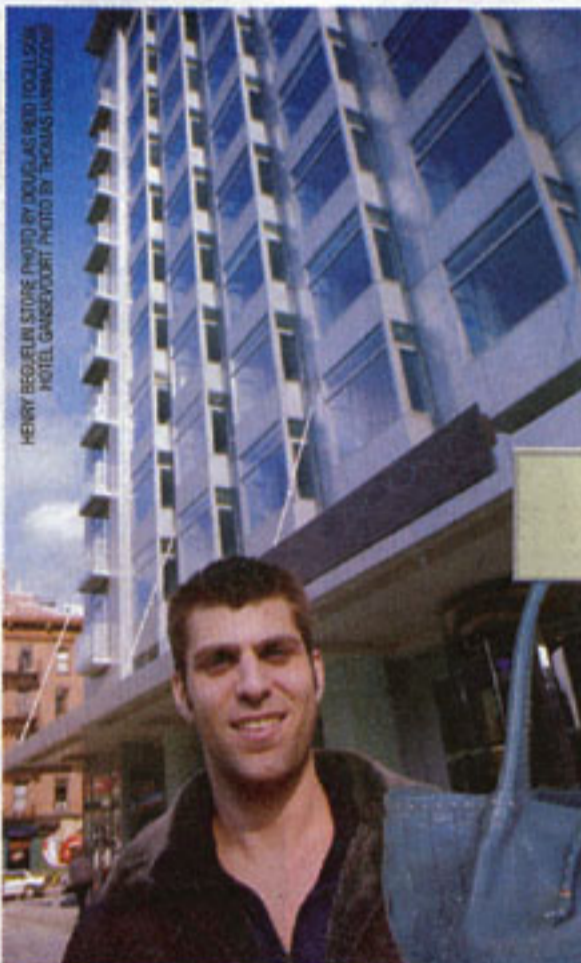
In addition to boutiques such as Carlos Miele, Stella McCartney, Alexander McQueen and La Perla, Meilman recently signed a lease with Poleci, a Los Angeles-based collection founded by two sisters. The 5,000-square-foot store will be in the former J. Lanclani Patisserie at 414 West 14th Street.

It will be the company's first store here, and only its second store in the U.S. The existing store is on Robertson Boulevard in Los Angeles.

While there have been reports of sluggish sales at some of the neighborhood's designer boutiques, Meilman said Bodum, a housewares tenant, is exceeding expectations. While everybody wants to make money, Meilman said sales aren't the only objective for his tenants.

"One of the designers wanted a very big store and I asked him how he'd pay for it," Meilman said. "He told me that if he had to pay for advertising it would cost as much as the rent on the store. He wasn't too worried about it."

— Sharon Edelson



HENRY BEGUELIN STORE (PHOTO BY JONAS ASKEG) LOCAL SPA HOTEL GANSEVOORT (PHOTO BY THOMAS HANAUZON)

Clockwise from above: Hotel developer Michael Achenbaum; the Henry Beguelin store in Chicago and Beguelin handbags.



### Storefront



## Vegas Headliner

**LOS ANGELES** — Eddie Rodriguez, designer of the Wilke-Rodriguez men's wear collection, recently admitted that the last thing the market needs is another chain.

Guess what? He's launching a chain anyway. Bankrolled by the parent of Wilke-Rodriguez, the Men's Wearhouse in Houston, Rodriguez is opening a moderately priced, mall-based contemporary women's and men's concept under his own name.

Six Eddie Rodriguez stores will be tested by the end of June. The first opened on Feb. 19 at the Fashion Show Mall in Las Vegas. The remaining stores will bow in San Diego, Boca Raton, Fla., Miami, Austin, Tex., and here.

"The only reason to start a retail venture is if you have something new to say," said the New York-based designer, who was born in Cuba and raised in Miami.

Of course, Rodriguez believes he has a unique message for consumers. While not the only Latin-influenced apparel brand on the market — there's Kmart's Thalia, for example — Rodriguez said nothing else reflects an exotic locale with most garments priced under \$100.

While the line is sexy and feminine with chiffon, sheer treatments and stretch fabrics, the silhouettes are restrained.

"We didn't intend to produce theater clothes," Rodriguez said, adding that he drew inspiration from the styles his mother and aunts wore in the Fifties and Sixties in Varadero Beach, Cuba.

Some 10 collections will be produced each year. "It was a big challenge to develop product for a broader audience with our design standards. These are clothes for

real women that live in the real world." There's a silk chiffon flamenco dress in blue and lemonade yellow for \$128, a cotton chiffon asymmetrical dance skirt for \$68 and a green tropical print V-shirt with center tie for \$68. Accessories include shoes, bags, belts and sunglasses. Menswear consists of "guayabera" linen shirts, Pima cotton sweaters, jeans and chinos.

Stores, which range in size between 3,000 and 3,500 square feet, contain elements of pre-Castro Cuba and Mexican and Spanish architecture. Rodriguez said the stores should do \$400 to \$600 a square foot in first-year sales.

Inspired by a church in Havana, Rodriguez painted the ceilings robin's-egg blue and truffle brown. There are distressed wood confessional-style lattice screens, green slatted doors, bamboo shades and Moroccan tile floors. Cashwraps were inspired by a Havana bar with tin-tiled ceilings and chandeliers. Latino salsa music is pumped throughout the store and the scent of Cuban coffee billows from the coffee bar.

Leather couches, stools, consoles, vases, candles and books — all for sale — are strategically placed throughout the store to make customers feel right at home. For signage and logos the designer chose a bold shade of Tabasco red.

Rodriguez said he's not necessarily going after a Hispanic customer. "It's really about creating a concept that's inclusive not exclusive," he said. "I'm a true Cuban-American. Sometimes I listen to salsa music, sometimes to the Rolling Stones. I wanted to pull from my own experience and a culture of which I'm very proud."

Rodriguez declined to say how big the chain could ultimately be. "We're going to explore every market where we feel we have a chance to succeed," he said, noting that New York, Chicago and Boston are among the next cities on his list.

Despite the fact that he's launching a chain in an uncertain economy, some experts feel he has a shot.

"There are signs that the economy is partially on the mend," said Adrienne Tennant, an analyst at Wedbush Morgan Securities. "You have some issues with consumer confidence and job growth being lower than expected, but all in all this looks like it could potentially be a good year for retailers."

— Kristin Young



Left: Eddie Rodriguez's fashion has a Latin beat; the first store opened in Las Vegas at the Fashion Show Mall.



PHOTOS BY ROBERT C. MORAWIENSKI