

In Grand Style

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Stepping off of the sidewalk on New York's Fifth Avenue and 58th Street and into Bergdorf Goodman there's something indescribable about the experience. You notice its elegance immediately; its antique white walls, a rather enormous, yet somehow strangely delicate, chandelier, the soft lighting. The atmosphere isn't at all a surprise, given the subtle grace and style of the building's beaux arts exterior.

Handbags fill a room, some in glass casings-Tom Ford, Valentino, Roger Vivier and more at every turn. The art deco-ness of the place becomes more prominent the further you venture, like up the escalator that's lined with mirrored walls and silver-cupped lamps, all in perfect symmetry. Its intimacy is very appealing, as if you are the most important person in the room; an ear bended to listen to your heart's desires at a moment's notice. There's a nostalgia about the place, not the faded kind. The kind that makes you feel like this is a place that has lived. And it's still going.

That's confirmed just outside the cafe on the seventh floor. The images lining the walls outside of the restaurant give a smidgen, an inkling to the life Bergdorf's has led: a black and white snapshot of Jackie Kennedy with JFK at their inaugural ball (her gown was selected from the store); the Maharajah of Jaipur; and more recently a photo of J-Lo flanked by-who'd remember with her center stage?

Equally eye-catching are the prices. A pair of Christian Louboutin suede shoes-an orange number with a nice heel and gold loops down the front go for \$1,595. That Roger Vivier handbag, black and compact, a mere \$2,125. Charbonnel & Walker bon bons in the sweets shop-\$75 a box. An antlered umbrella stand goes for \$2,200. And what about that fetching yellow Fendi invert pleated sheath dress? A bargain at \$1,850.

Bergdorf's, as it is affectionately referred to the world over, has been a fashion mecca for over a century; this year marks its 111th anniversary. The high-end luxury goods store, as we know, embodies grace, elegance and style. But, its true spirit lies in entrepreneurship; the classic story of making it in New York. Its enduring legacy, probably more visible, is the discovery of fashion talent that have made designers household names. Among them: Halston and Michael Kors.

In September, the documentary, Scatter My Ashes at Bergdorf's will debut; a vibrant recountal of its beginnings and middle (no end in sight). The department store was founded in 1899 by Herman Bergdorf. He later partnered with Edwin Goodman, creating the store as Bergdorf and Goodman. In 1903, Bergdorf sold his stake and the Goodman's now had sole ownership. The original store that still stands on the west side of Fifth Avenue and 58th Street opened in 1928 as Bergdorf Goodman. Andrew Goodman, Edwin's son, is credited with turning the fashion store into one of the most elegant and lucrative shopping addresses on The Avenue in the 50s and 60s. Goodman sold control of the department store to Carter Hawley Hale Stores in 1972, although the family remains its landlord today.

The film focuses a great deal on Bergdorf's iconic place in American history; its brand remaining strong through so much change, both internal and external. It also depicts the store's position within the cultural landscape-and, of course, where it's headed. Fashion's biggest names are attached; over 175 interviews were conducted in New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Milan. A sampling: Armani, Karl Lagerfeld, the Olsen Twins, Tory Burch, Joan Rivers, Rachel Zoe, Sylvia Fendi, Candice Bergen, Diane von Furstenburg, Manolo Blahnik, Christian Lubuton, Vera Wang, Jason Wu and Anna Wintour.

The family office world is steeped far into it; among the reasons: it is largely financed by single family offices, a group of roughly 17 private investors. The film raised about \$650,000 by its rough cut editing process. But, also, Denver, Colo.-based Andy Malloy, managing director of Monument Capital, is an ex-family office executive. He has spent 30 years in the investments and wealth management businesses. Malloy served as senior managing director and CIO of the New York-based multi family office TAG Associates from 1992 to 2002. Digging deeper, Malloy's full name is Andrew Thomas Goodman Malloy. He is the first grandchild of the Goodman family. Goodman is a senior executive producer and part owner of the production company. Doc Film 4 BG LLC, which owns the rights to the movie.

Scatter My Ashes at Bergdorf's has resulted from many happy accidents. Malloy introduced to writer/director Matthew Miele through a mutual friend, Chris Walker. Miele has served as writer, producer and director on several films, both narrative and documentary, including *Symphony for a Suicide*, *Eavesdrop* and *Everything's Jake*. At the time that he got acquainted with Malloy, New York's Miele was writing a screenplay about a window dresser at Bergdorf Goodman. He gave Malloy a treatment for the script; the story taking place in 1957. Malloy gave it a stamp of approval, though he laughingly says he pointed out to Miele that the scene where Andrew Goodman throws people out of his office, barking at everyone in sight: "The first thing I told Matt was 'just so you know I don't think my grandfather ever raised his voice to anyone.'" Malloy speaks affectionately about his grandfather, for whom he was named. "I was named after Pop and he was such a big part of my life. He was kind of my idol," says Malloy."

Malloy, still having muscle as the store's landlord, introduced him to Jim Gold, chairman of Neiman Marcus (which is now the brand that owns Bergdorf Goodman), the head of publicity, Mallory Andrews, a few young designers he has helped in their careers and a couple of salespeople he has known through the course of his life, particularly as a teen working at Bergdorf Goodman. Miele began meeting others, like David Battane, who runs the human resources department at the store and also the resident historian, as well as decorators and window dressers. Then he started meeting designers like Michael Kors and Isaac Mizrahi.

He phoned Malloy two months later telling him to forget the treatment, pitching a documentary instead. Malloy remembers the conversation, asking the writer/director why. Miele's response? According to Malloy, he said: "People talk about this place not like it's a physical store. They talk about it like it's a person. They talk about it like it's an animate individual that helped them create who they are today; their entire career."

Malloy asked him for a business proposal and from there, the movie(and deal)-making began.

For Miele, the process of discovery has remained a constant. While still working on the screenplay, and after Malloy started making introductions for him, he asked the Bergdorf Goodman powers that be if they had an archive because Miele wanted to do more research on the store.

"They said they didn't have one. That to me was pretty remarkable," he recalls. A century old and practically all that existed were some collected photographs scattered about. "So that's when we really started talking about this whole concept of the documentary," he adds. Through the fact that fashion documentaries are pretty hot at the moment, he adds, pointing to *The Last Emperor*, the recent documentary on Valentino that did very well; the *Sex and the City* ladies and their mark on fashion; Miele, Malloy and other gathering for the party deemed the project commercially viable.

Relentless in his pursuit, Miele uncovered many interesting facts, like the site originally housed the Vanderbilt mansion, but that was torn down and Edwin Goodman helped to construct the building

Bergdorf's resides in. He discovered that Herman Bergdorf was a tailor in New York and eventually hired Edwin as an apprentice. Edwin ended up buying out Bergdorf in 1903 for \$15,000 and they maintained the name because at that time, through Herman Bergdorf's previous endeavors, quality was associated with the name. But, Miele points out that Bergdorf was really only around for a couple of years and the Goodman's were really the ones to have built the business as it known today.

There are other interesting tidbits, like the title, which is based on a New Yorker cartoon of two ladies sitting presumably in the store's luxurious café when one says to the other: "I want my ashes scattered at Bergdorf's." The cartoon was allegedly based on a true account of a woman who, in her will, requested this act to take place.

And the fact that over a million and a half pair of eyes peer at Bergdorf's world famous windows per week; that's .

"I would pretty much say it's the most viewed show in the world," says Miele, adding: "the windows point to as spectacle and soul of the store."

Walking by this month, those million and a half pairs will see Prada through a Surrealist's eyes. One window is simple and striking: a gigantic pair of fulsome white lips; an elephantine ear; a mannequin donning a sleek black dress with a "hot wheels" car down the back. Yellow shoes with red flames shoot out from the heel.

Interestingly, this very thing; this spectacle, is how Michael Kors was discovered. The film discusses how he was dressing a window at the time with his own clothes when he "got made."

This is one of the greatest contributions Bergdorf's has made to the fashion industry; it's talent for finding designers and turning them onto the world. As Malloy puts it: "What Matt really did, from my perspective, was to really take this 111 year old institution and show it's relevance today. And he sees how relevant Bergdorf's is to today's young designers."

There are countless other stories of designers who were discovered-or were working at Bergdorf's-and found their path to fashion greatness as a result. When asked how he feels about the Bergdorf Goodman legacy-as it was Malloy's great-grandfather Edwin who pioneered this scouting talent and the ready-to-wear-off-the-rack way of shopping, he refers to the entire filmmaking experience as "exciting" and "emotional."

Malloy's says the business is in his blood, though he ultimately chose to follow a different path for himself, fondly (and humorously) recalling a piece of advice given to him by family friend, Franny Santangelo, when he was 24, working his way up the ranks at Bergdorf's (Malloy started in the stock room at the behest of his grandfather).

"Franny said to me one day, 'you know, Andy, selling stocks is the same thing, but you make much more money and you don't have to work six days a week,'" he says with a laugh.

That conversation resulted in Santangelo getting Malloy an interview with Ace Greenberg, the legendary CEO of Bear Stearns. Malloy had no idea who he was prior to his arrival at the 55 Water Street address. He got a job as a trader with the firm shortly after.

"I knew this, I was making \$8,000 a year at Bergdorf's, there was no commission in those days and I was working six days a week. I had just gotten offered \$10,000 a year to be an assistant buyer by the then

CEO of Bergdorf's, Ira Neimark. He was 'my rabbi' at the time, as they say. He wanted to groom me. I told him I had just gotten offered \$15,000 plus going to school at night for finance at NYU, which I wanted to do, plus commissions. I asked him what I should do. He said in this business, you just gotta do your time. Wall Street is a lot like sports. If you're really good at something, whether you are 17 years old or 25 it doesn't make any difference. So Wall Street really takes talented people and doesn't have a preconceived notion that you have to spend four years in this part of the business, three more years in this part, that kind of thing. And retail is very much that way. So I went to Bear Sterns. And the story I tell is literally true, I couldn't afford the clothes at my family's store. The next year, I don't mind saying I went back to Bergdorf's and actually bought a watch that I had seen and been eyeing. I couldn't even look to afford it, it was \$1200, which was a lot of money. Of course I cut a deal with Claude Arpels and got it for \$700 bucks but that was still money I still would never have been able to make at Bergdorf's," he says, chuckling.

The values of working hard and working your way to the top remain strong for Malloy-and the Bergdorf Goodman legacy.

Says Miele: "It started as a mom and pop shop and not only has it flourished as a business, but it becomes an American institution. It's few and far between what companies can claim that. You could point to Coca Cola. You could probably point to something like Heinz Ketchup or even Tiffany's. Bergdorf Goodman fits right in there. And what's special about it even more is it's retained a one store mentality; meaning despite the fact that it's now married into the Neiman Marcus group it's a one-store, one-experience and one-city phenomenon. I wanted to really explore that, I wanted to know what makes it tick, who the people are behind it; how it is carried over from family ownership, corporate ownership and what those values are they are holding onto that sustain it and continue to cater to the specific client who is willing to spend that kind of money and willing to treat it as a trophy for its success. One of the things that the interviewees are repeatedly saying about it; from celebrities, to clients, to designers to brass at Bergdorf's all the way down to the man who turns the lights on and off at night is they all point to it being aspirational. They point to it as entrepreneurship."

But, throughout all of the interviews, Miele discovered another theme or two when asked about why the store has been so hugely successful. One clear thread is that its employees still believe that it's that relationship that takes precedence over anything else. That it's not about if somebody buys something or not. If they want to have a relationship with that person it's not about the sale, it's about fostering some sort of connection with whomever they are waiting on.

What they also pointed to was Bergdorf Goodman's impeccable service.

"It has nothing to do with making people feel like they are in a home, or the kind of clothes they carry the prices they have that make them feel like [they belong to a special] club. It's the service; one that doesn't discriminate," says Miele.

Malloy fondly remembers a "just Post-Depression era story" told to him by his grandfather. It involved a woman who walked into the fur department, who, by all visual accounts, was a bag lady, scuffed up and all, carrying a couple of huge torn bags. She sidles up to the most expensive fur coat in the establishment, a floor length sable coat, which at the time had a price tag of \$10,000. By today's standards, it would cost in the vicinity of \$500,000 and up. Andrew Goodman good-naturedly tried to usher her out the door, eyeing a couple of familiar customers who seemed displeased at the woman's presence. The woman persisted, repeatedly asking for the cost of certain coats, particularly keen on the sable. Still politely trying to get rid of the woman, he watched as two more ladies entered the room and left soon after at the sight of the "poor wretch." Unable to rid the store of her, he calls security, still treating her very gently.

Finally, the woman says “I really want to buy this coat”, puts one of her unsavory bags on the floor and starts pulling out wads of cash, handing it to Goodman. She bought the coat.

“That was his lesson to me about never judging a book by its cover,” says Malloy.

When asked what the film actually means to him, Malloy said his original thought was that this was going to be a nice legacy for his children; for them to understand the history of their family, but also see Bergdorf Goodman in a modern sense.

But, what he found, to which he credits Miele for, is the story goes well beyond simply that his great grandfather was a tailor and built this business and now it’s an iconic store.

“It really kind of transcends that,” says Malloy.

Montreal, Canada-based Iris Wagner, founder and executive producer of Memoirs Productions-a company that creates personalized video documentaries for wealthy families, notes that maintaining family values often helps a business to succeed for the long term.

“I think this film will capture that,” she says.

Wagner serves as a producer on the project. She describes her experiences with clients.

“When we work with longstanding family businesses, the first thing we do is to extract the corporate ethical will; being the mission, the vision, and the values of the founders of the business or whatever generation is the eldest now, running it. Many of them talk about the history of the company. [As an example:] ‘Well, my great grandfather who started this business always said treat your employees like family and you’ll never have problems with your employees-and your business will flourish. Passing that along to the grandchildren ensures that the business will maintain that critical element (of treating employees like family), and see a business continue for generations to come,’” says Wagner.

The film, formally about a year in the making, fulfills its mandate to document all that is Bergdorf Goodman. Its own future is bright. Scatter My Ashes at Bergdorf’s will be released in September during Fashion Week in New York, Paris, and Milan, says New York’s Stephen McCarthy, SVP of KCG Capital Advisors, a single family office and foundation. He is an investor in the film. McCarthy says subsequent to that there is an idea of a road show to half a dozen Neiman Marcus centers, like Chicago, Los Angeles and Miami. During the winter holiday season there are plans for a DVD release.

There are many ensuing discussions with major film distributors as well.

McCarthy notes that what he finds interesting is that as a result of opening the film up to families (family investors), “as we go out and talk about the story, more and more families are interested in what the film is about, ‘how are you involved, how can you make money on it, and is there something behind it,’” he says. “At this stage, we are in discussions with another iconic brand that may come to fruition so there may be another investment opportunity. Because what is evolving; there is a need for corporate commercial documentaries that hasn’t been tapped, to a degree...So I think we are trying to break a little ground in developing a niche of the documentary world that is hybrid corporate commercial but tells a story as a marketing component.”

And Miele says there is the possibility of a television docu series. He says Bergdorf Goodman has been approached by several channels at networks over the years regarding proposals about opening up their doors to a reality show of some sort.

“And now I think they are finally ready to do that because I have so many hours of footage from these [well known fashion] people. We probably have a good seven or eight episodes of raw material already,” he says.

McCarthy adds that a lot of the extra footage can be used in various ways, whether it goes to film schools or to fashion institutes. There are ways of producing vignettes for each of the different schools.

“It’s inspirational in a way,” says McCarthy.

‘Fitting’ indeed.