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Year-End Review: New York's Retail Stars

BY MARIANNE WILSON

This time of the year invariably brings with it a flurry of "Best of" and "Top 10" lists. In the spirit of the season, here are the top stores of the year from New York City's reigning retail maven, **Faith Hope Consolo**, chairman of Prudential Douglas Elliman's Retail Leasing, Marketing & Sales Division. Consolo may be a fashionista, but she is no retail snob. Her picks run the gamut from luxe locations to value players to "statement" stores. Here's the rundown (with her comments):

Ralph Lauren Mansions: Dividing his lines into two restored mansions on the Upper East Side, Ralph provides his signature classic American feel to 867 Madison (the Rhinelanders Mansions, which he restored in the 1980s, while women and the home are outfitted at the newly refurbished 888, with grand salons and statement staircases. (867 Madison Avenue -- 888 Madison Avenue)

Hermes Men's Store: Thank you, Don Draper! Elegant menswear is back, and the ultra-luxe label spared no expense to provide an elegant setting for ties, suits, shirts, and shoes. Beautifully presented and now a headquarters for men's style. (690 Madison Avenue)



Dior: First, the store had the most attractive construction facade I've ever seen -- an outsized Dior purse. When the facade came down a few days ago, though, it unveiled one of the most beautiful stores I've ever seen. Floral ceiling reliefs and couches give the impression of a home you've dropped in on rather than a gigantic retailer. (21 East 57th Street)

Nordstrom: Continuing value's domination of the 14th Street shopping district, this was also Nordstrom's first foray into Manhattan (finally!). And it's paved the way for a full-line Nordstrom to come to the West Side, and a charity shop to open downtown. (60 East 14th Street)

Target: Why should the outer boroughs and 'burbs get all the bargains? The expansion of Marshall's and TJ Maxx also give us urban dwellers the same value advantages of our suburban siblings. About time! (517 East 117th Street)

Hollister: I'm not exactly its target customer, but its storefront -- video screens with a live feed of the Pacific Ocean could change how other stores attract shoppers. Plus, who doesn't like to look at pounding surf? (666 Fifth Ave.)

Forever 21: The Times Square flagship (and a Fifth Avenue pop-up) is a fabulous visit to fun fast fashion -- with New York City cabs as decoration! This has helped re-establish Times Square as a retail destination. (1515 Broadway)

Marc Jacobs: Everywhere on Bleecker Street
Okay, maybe not everywhere, and it is a little controversial, but Jacobs' new stores (BookMarc, Marc Jacobs, LittleMarc, Marc by Marc Jacobs) are essentially creating a new department store in the Village.

Michael Kors: Kors, too, is expanding around the town, with signature and Lifestyle stores. Next up is Fifth Avenue at 20th Street. (667 Madison Avenue - 790 Madison Avenue - 974 Madison Avenue - 101 Prince Street - 384 Bleecker Street)

Limelight Marketplace: Converting a church-turned-notorious-disco into a retail center is a brave gamble. Time will tell whether this "Festival of Shops" and eateries will work. But I give them credit for trying -- and laud them for preserving so many architectural details of the 19th century church. (47 West 20th Street)

And one I'm looking forward to:

Uniqlo - 666 Fifth Avenue

No, it's not open yet -- but it's also the largest lease in the history of New York City (\$300 million for 15 years), so it's an important vote of confidence in the continuing vitality of retail -- and a symbol of Fifth Avenue's egalitarian retail offerings. And it wasn't even my deal!

