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The Crush Builds as SoHo Revives

BY STEPHEN HEYMAN

On Nov. 9, about 700 people, some who had arrived as early as 4:30 a.m., lined up outside the American Eagle Outfitters flagship store at 599 Broadway for its grand opening.

One week earlier, the police had to restrain crowds at Dash, a new clothing boutique by the Kardashian sisters at 119 Spring Street.

And just before that, a tornado of fast-fashion devotees stormed Uniqlo's store on Lower Broadway, where there were hourlong waits for Jil Sander's second +J collection.



As anyone who has spent a recent weekend getting elbowed there knows, the shopping hordes have returned to SoHo.

Not a week goes by, it seems, without the arrival of a new flagship or buzz-generating boutique in this tourist-friendly district.

The last few months have seen more than 20 stores open —indie-cool boutiques like Wendy Nichol (147 Sullivan Street) and Realm (98 Greene Street), and global brands like Chanel (which renovated its boutique at 139 Spring Street), Moncler (90 Prince Street) and AllSaints Spitalfields (512 Broadway).

“There’s a new energy in the neighborhood,” said Julie Haus, a former magazine editor turned runway designer who opened her first boutique on 458 Broome Street in September. “Things tend to be moving toward Canal. There are lots of other independent

designers coming in. The spaces here lend themselves to the gallery-style look and feel, which we love.”

What a difference a year makes. In 2009, commercial real estate in SoHo was reeling, with one out of 10 shops in the retail-heavy stretch between West Broadway and Broadway vacant, according to real estate agents. Rental prices fell by as much as 30 percent from their pre-recession levels, according to Stephen Tarter of Tarter Stats O’Toole, a commercial real estate firm that specializes in SoHo and other neighborhoods downtown.



While rents were low, Mr. Tarter said, smart landlords resisted signing long-term leases, and instead invited in temporary tenants, which explains in part the recent vogue for pop-up shops.

The neighborhood has welcomed a revolving door of pop-ups since 2009, stores as varied as Gucci, Anna Sui for Target, Yohji Yamamoto, Under Armour, Piperlime, Zimmermann, Brides magazine and Blurb, a self-publishing upstart.

“I just got 10 calls this week for new pop-up shops,” Mr. Tarter said. “There’s no space anywhere. I’ve never seen a turnaround this quick.”

As the retail outlook improved, SoHo once again became a prime location for brands seeking a prestigious address and a high concentration of affluent, fashion-savvy shoppers. “With the designer tourist traffic, people are going to Isabel Marant and then they’re coming to us,” she said. “And Phillip Lim is right next door.”

One of the flashiest new arrivals to SoHo is Technogym, an Italian fitness-equipment company that sells \$10,000 treadmills and weight-trainers. The company toasted its sleek two-floor showroom at 70 Greene Street, complete with a vertical garden, with an opening party that was attended by Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

ALSO last month, two iconic footwear companies unveiled new New York locations: Dr. Martens, the British brand, opened a 2,000-square-foot space at 148 Spring Street, and Converse opened a 7,000-square-foot branch at 560 Broadway, with a huge American flag made from red, white and blue sneakers.

Not everyone considers the increased retail offerings a boon. Long-suffering residents say that the crush of shoppers has worsened.

“It’s hateful,” said Sean Sweeney, director of the SoHo Alliance, a residents’ advocacy group, who has lived in the neighborhood for 33 years. “Who wants to live in a

shopping mall? Who wants to burst through a phalanx of tourists who walk three or four abreast, as slowly as possible?"

Things may only get worse for Mr. Sweeney. Among the big-name fashion stores planning to open in SoHo next year are Diane Von Furstenberg (135 Wooster Street), Ralph Lauren (109 Prince Street), and Alexander Wang, who is opening his first boutique at 103 Grand Street, in a cast-iron storefront previously occupied by Yohji Yamamoto.

And then there are the mini-department stores. The outdoors chain Recreational Equipment Inc., better known as REI, plans a 39,000-square-foot space on three floors of the Puck Building at 295 Lafayette Street next fall.

And on West Broadway, Nordstrom will open an 11,000-square-foot concept store with an unusual conceit: all the profits will be donated to charity.

Realm, at 98 Greene Street, NYC, was leased by Faith Hope Consolo and Joseph Aquino of Prudential Douglas Elliman's Retail Group.
