

POWER DESIGNERS



NEW YORK FAVORITES

Sports: Tennis in Central Park**Memory:** Sharing in Rod Laver's Grand Slam win at the US Open in 1969**Pizza:** Mario's pepperoni pizza in the Bronx**Radio Station:** 101 FM

Perfect Fit

"SHOES TELL YOU about a person—they speak to your personality," says shoe mogul Stuart Weitzman. "Look at Audrey Hepburn and Jackie Kennedy. They wore flats. You know what that said about them? That they were confident women."

For the past 23 years, Weitzman has been making women feel confident in his eponymous shoe line. His penchant for the unusual (think diamond-

encrusted sandals and cork stilettos) and attention to comfort make his shoes some of the world's most sought-after. "I listen to women," he explains. "They are my muses, so I focus on making great-looking shoes they can wear all the time."

Although the Long Island native comes from a family of shoe makers (his father and brother were partners at Mr. Seymour shoes), Weitzman was originally headed for Wall Street. But after his father passed away, his plans changed. "I asked my brother if I could try out the business for six months and that was it," he said. "I felt like I was working at my hobby, and I couldn't improve on that."

Each season Weitzman designs approximately 400 styles (this fall look for a new line of thigh-high boots), and whether he's reviewing pricing in his New York showroom or modifying patterns at the factory in Spain, he's involved in every detail. So after nearly 40 years in the business and thousands of shoe designs to his credit, does Weitzman have a favorite pair? "A favorite?" he asks. "That's like asking me to choose a favorite daughter."—JENNIFER WELBEL



Fresh Take

WHEN MOST PEOPLE think of the Ann Taylor brand, conservative work attire springs to mind. But thanks to the recent arrival of president of stores Christine Beauchamp, head of stores Mary Kay O'Connor-Wente and senior vice president of design Lisa Axelson, the 50-year-old label is getting a makeover.

The first Ann Taylor store opened in 1954 in New Haven, Connecticut, and for the next 15 years it was *the* place to shop for young women. "The brand had a young, fresh voice and catered to modern women," says Axelson. But unfortunately it failed to change with

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Boutique: Ludivine in the West Village ("It's great for pretty, girly French labels.")**Dress Shop:** Madame Matovu on 10th Street**Museum:** The Whitney**Neighborhood:** "In the spring and summer, it has to be Central Park! In the fall, it's the West Village."

the times, a fact reflected in the look of the clothing and in slow sales. "We became a wear-to-work brand but didn't evolve with how women wanted to work," she admits.

That's all about to change this month when the label debuts a completely revamped look. "We are redefining what women want with pieces that are modern, chic and feminine," explains Axelson. Expect to find versatile wardrobe staples that range from little black dresses to long boyfriend jackets.

Axelson's favorite items include a double-faced wool jacket and a gray leopard sheath dress.

Despite the challenge of changing people's perception of the brand, Axelson remains optimistic. "Ann Taylor has an amazing legacy, and I am excited to rejuvenate it," she says. "Now is our opportunity to learn from the customer—what we did great yesterday has to be even better tomorrow."—J.W.



A look from Ann Taylor's fall collection