



Dressing the ladies confidently

Jacques Vert is a master of the art of coordinating women's wear from head to toe for every occasion. The British fashion brand brings its dress sense to the mid-to-high market in Dubai as a first step to expanding its footprint across the Middle East in partnership with Debenhams and Alshaya. **Rupkatha Bhowmick** reports

Jacques Vert calls it occasionwear. The British fashion retailer, which has recently ventured into the Middle East lists 35 occasions its loyal customers demand the brand dress them for. "That's what our research shows. From cruise parties to attending Queen Elizabeth's garden parties, from weddings and celebratory dinners to racing and tea parties, our creations are the choice of women with a busy social calendar," says Teresa Tideman, CEO of Jacques Vert. "It's the heart of our

concept, to dress a lady confidently from head to toe, from hats to dresses to shoes, everything well-coordinated," she adds.

It's fulfilling but it raises the bar for the brand, Tideman points out, which is why Jacques Vert has added several designers to its team over the past 18 months in its pursuit of excellence, the most prominent being Rachel Trevor-Morgan, milliner to the queen of England.

"We spend a huge amount of time to develop our timeless and unique hand-printed

classics, ensuring the fabrics match and the colours blend. Our in-house designers pay close attention to detailing – from lace-work and laser-cutting to beading and stitching," she elaborates.

The label was launched in 1977 by two London tailors Jack Cynamon and Alan Green who combined their names and added a French twist. It's part of the Jacques Vert Group, which has a stable of equally popular and elegant outerwear brands, beginning with Windsmoor in 1933 and including Eastex, Planet, Dash,

Colebrooke by Windsmoor, Precis Petite and Kaliko.

Sitting in the mid-to-high market range, the brand has curated a portfolio that includes luxury lace tops, chic dresses, longline jackets, high-waisted palazzo pants and chic boleros. That's not all. It also offers an exclusive range of elegantly structured headwear in different colours, accented with beading, feathers, flowers and delicate netting.

"Dresses are our bestsellers in the home market. But the trend is separates, which are seeing rising demand

in the UK as well as other markets where we're present. It's still early days in the Middle East, but we've seen this category doing very well here too. It's probably because mix-and-match gives a sense of freedom and the versatility to dress smart yet be comfortable. Women find it exciting to coordinate and buy three different items," Tideman proclaims.

Jacques Vert chose to enter the GCC leveraging the shop-in-shop format, locating itself within another British department store Debenhams through an exclusive regional partnership with the Kuwait-based retail group MH Alshaya, the first point-of-entry being the Debenhams store in Dubai's City Centre Mirdif, followed by the one in The Avenues Mall in Kuwait.



Teresa Tideman, Rachel Trevor-Morgan and Mark Aldridge

Insights into the fashion market

Polarisation at different levels:

- Value fashion players like Primark are doing an amazing job in terms of bringing quick fashion to the market at affordable price points, while ensuring good quality.
- There are the likes of Zara offering fashion and style to a set audience, doing a good job from the price point of view as well.
- Then there are product specialists at the top-end of the market targeting a specific niche like occasion wear.

Competition at different levels:

- Fashion brands positioned at the mid-market level will see increasing competition.
- E-commerce has been witnessing double-digit growth that's set to grow. With barriers to e-commerce slowly fading, this channel will pose competition to bricks-and-mortar operations.

"It's a proud moment to launch the concept here within Debenhams' outlets. The department store is one of our closest partners in the UK with a strong distribution network. Debenhams has grown its footprint in the Middle East through Alshaya and that will surely work in our favour as well. It made sense to launch Jacques Vert in the region with a partner we've known and are comfortable working with. Also, the kind of gravitas Alshaya has as a retail group is something we'd like to leverage," explains Tideman.

"Like in the UK, we've added a specialist edge, enhancing Debenhams already rich collections from designer brands. For us, the first step was to bring the brand and its sophisticated core collections to the region. We'll now focus on listening to and learning from



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our customers here, gradually customising selections for them," she shares.

Jacques Vert's Spring/Summer 2015 collection includes versatile separates and dresses in luxurious fabrics such as lavish laces, easy-care crepes, chiffons and satins. It also includes hats, fascinators and headbands as well as matching footwear in a range of styles from sling-backs to peep toes.

"Retail is an interesting sector where you sell something every day, generating insightful customer

feedback. We'll use such constructive data to gauge whether separates will do well here or longer gowns," Tideman adds.

Being a new entrant to the region, Jacques Vert has chosen its location prudently. City Centre Mirdif has a huge catchment community that will give the brand an understanding of the local market. "We wanted to set up our first store within a mall that's more representative in nature, giving us an idea about local consumer tastes. Dubai has some huge destination malls but we're aware tourists won't walk into a Jacques Vert store to buy occasionwear. It's the local population that will buy from us. That's why we were keen to place our brand in the right location, reaching out to the right people," Tideman concludes. ■