



# Fashionable feat

Creating fashionable footwear, not too edgy or even classic, with something for everyone, is the Dune London promise for consumers worldwide, with a bit of bling added for its Middle East patrons, reports **Rupkatha Bhowmick**

**F**or Dune London, one of the UK's most successful footwear and accessories brands, the Middle East is its second largest market outside its home country. That's reason enough to deliver on our promises to consumers in the region," says Angela Chiu, international brand manager, Dune London. "Our shoes are fashionable, not too edgy, nor even classic. There's something for everyone, our core audience being fashion-aware women in the 25-to-40 year age-group," she adds.

"Footwear is a dynamic market globally so we're literally on our toes all year round scouting for catchy fashion trends. That's the creative side. The other side is craftsmanship and technology. Ensuring style and comfort is a long process. We work with shoemakers and factories

across the world to get the right mix in creating our fashion statements," Chiu explains.

## Spring/Summer 2015 collection

Market savviness means ensuring newness in-store through all seasons. "Our weekly intake is five-to-six styles but our major drops take place after sale periods, which usher in our fashion cycles – spring/summer and autumn/winter. We begin work on these collections six-to-eight months ahead of their launch to remain in sync with fashion trends. Embellishment remains a strong trend in women's footwear this season while tumbled leather and suede dominate the men's range. Fur was a big

draw last season but we're experimenting with cloth materials now. We've also added rose gold, a hue that's attracting attention this season," she elaborates.

"We're not limited to shoes alone. We have created bags in metallic hues, which works very well in the Middle East. Similarly, street styles are becoming major influences. People travel extensively these days and are aware of fashion trends and styles from Copenhagen to Asia, so they keep experimenting with their look. It isn't any different with footwear. That's why we have the 'global' consumer in mind when we design our collections. That's important if we wish to remain relevant in the market," Chiu points out.

"Our spring/summer 2015 collection focuses on three trends in women's

**Dune London – key highlights**

Concept	Dune London
Year of establishment	1992
First store	Kings Road, London in 1993
Global presence	75 locations – the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Libya, Estonia, the Philippines, South Africa & India
Stores in the UAE	17
Largest store globally	Dune London, Mall of the Emirates (over 2,000sqft)



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international brand manager,  
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footwear: colour crush, summer fade and neutral. Colour crush means bright, saturated colours – flamingo pink and electric blue. The colours are tonal, a pink shoe having a pink in-sole and heels. It’s the street and the way women wear their clothes and accessories being the inspiration. We’ve also infused metallic elements, the dominating texture being reptilian,” Chiu explains.

Summer fade is all about sunset colours inspired from the 1970s, with more chunky heels, platforms and espadrilles highlighting the easy, casual yet glamorous lifestyle. The dominating hues include burgundy, burnt orange, savanna brown and other sunset colours.

Finally, it’s the flawless neutral trend that takes chic in everyday dressing to the next level. The range incorporates a lot of linen, showcasing a military look, the collection including a lot of flats, sandals that are going pointy this season with a neutral colour palette in which faded silver is the key hue.

**High growth categories**

Dune London is known for its dressy shoes, but its casual range is also doing well, accounting for almost 50% of its collection. Some of the designs in the collection cater specifically to regional consumer tastes, which shouldn’t come as a surprise considering the Middle East market is important for the brand. “We started customising in a small way, beginning with colour palletes – maybe a different colour wave or even a different style altogether. That led to introducing some bling elements in our casual collections, which are growing in size and demand. We’ve added glitter and embellishments to our espadrilles as well and our casual flip flops are also doing well. In fact, we’re making this category

special for the regional market with our dressy casuals,” Chiu elaborates.

“Surprisingly, flat sandals are witnessing high uptake even though women in the region have a fetish for high heels. Boots also sell well.

However, we mostly stick to ankle boot styles with a small range of high ankle, fashion boots that are different from the functional high ankle boots in London,” she adds.

Accessories account for 20% of the brand’s sales, with ladies accessories doing particularly well. The category witnessed 30% sales growth in the UK in 2014. “The growth has been astounding. We’ve allocated dedicated space in-store to showcase our range of handbags, purses and small accessories such as belts, scarves and sunglasses. Our main focus is on handbags, including day and evening bags. We introduced a few premium, leather handbags this season to create unity with our shoes. Then there’s our perfume range in the UK which we are yet to launch in the Middle East,” Chiu says.

**Strengthening ties, expanding presence**

Dune London has been in the region for over a decade now in partnership with the Dubai-based Apparel Group. “They are our first international partners and the UAE is our first international market. Our partnership has strengthened over the years largely because our expectations are in sync. Apparel has a direct link with regional consumers so they give us the required exposure with constructive feedback and we’re able to add richness to their portfolio. It really is a win-win proposition,” Chiu asserts.

Dune London currently has 25 stores in the region – in Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the UAE; Saudi Arabia; Kuwait; Qatar; Bahrain; and Libya, with Libya being the only market not under the Apparel franchise. The brand has a two-pronged expansion strategy – increasing the store count first, while Iran is a region it aspires to move into. “Beyond the region, we’ve just launched Dune London in the US, starting initially with an e-commerce platform to gauge consumer reaction that’s been quite positive. We have expansion plans into Southeast Asia, New Zealand and Australia as well,” she reveals.

**Rebranding brings in double-digit footfall**

The brand undertakes new initiatives from time-to-time to attract consumer attention. “A couple of years back we went in for a rebranding initiative – from Dune to Dune London –the end goal being to communicate the modern, aspirational traits of the brand to consumers. It was a successful initiative both regionally and globally,” Chiu avers.

The rebranding exercise included redesigning its stores. “The new design showcased our signature reverse catwalk. For example, our biggest outlet at Mall of the Emirates is spacious, clutter-free yet chic and youthful. We used marble for the flooring, while maximising shelf space to ensure clear visibility. The rebranding increased footfall by 30% and our other new and refurbished stores are also witnessing double-digit growth,” she concludes. ■