

Browsing the racks of Barneys New York with Simon Doonan

WHEN I first heard that they were opening a Barneys New York in San Francisco, I was filled with excited bewilderment.

The extent of my Barneys knowledge did not go beyond their Web site and an episode of “Will & Grace” where Grace spastically shopped at a sample sale. The store was also a frequent guest on “Sex and the City.” Even when I was in New York for fashion week, I didn’t have time to pop my head into the Manhattan flagship store.

Barneys to me was a sartorial fantasyland where high-society types frolicked in fields of expensive high-end clothing among waterfalls of champagne and orchards of caviar. That is only partly true.

Before the San Francisco store opened last week, I had the privilege of getting a personalized tour from Simon Doonan, creative director of Barneys New York.

Besides being the creative mind behind the beautiful artistry of Barneys, Doonan is a columnist for the New York Observer and is often seen on VH1 giving his tongue-in-cheek commentary on pop culture-infused shows such as “I Love the ‘80s.”



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Doonan reminded me of an English lit professor whose dandy accent unapologetically criticized your work with abrasive charm.

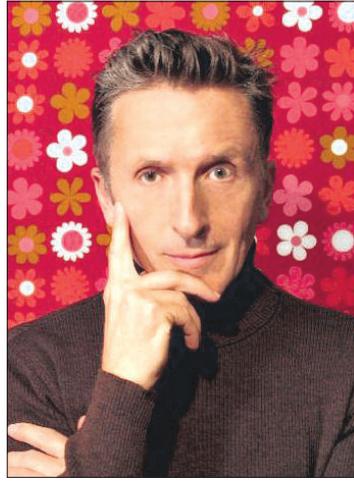
Doonan is a petite man with a big personality. The word “groovy” is commonplace in his vernacular and he isn’t afraid to speak his mind. From the moment I shook his hand, I knew this would be fun.

“Let’s make our way from the top of the store and work our way down,” Doonan said. “Afterwards we can get a tea — I am unbelievably thirsty!”

We started off with the most sartorial floor: men’s tailored clothing.

As Doonan educated me on the ultra-debonair Italian-based label Battistoni, the sight of so many finely tailored suits and Prada shoes made me drool.

“We have all the finest labels



SIMON SAYS: Simon Doonan, creative director of Barneys New York, gives us a personalized tour of the new San Francisco store.

here: Armani, Zegna, Isaia,” Doonan playfully bragged. “Some of them you can’t find anywhere else.”

The next stop was the men’s co-op a floor down.

“This floor is more for you,” Doonan said with a smile. “It has all these youthful labels: Band of Outsiders, Theory and Rag & Bone.”

As I looked around, Doonan was 100 percent correct. This floor caters to males in the 25-to-34 age bracket, but he sug-

gested I act fast to see if I saw something I liked.

“Now’s the perfect time to shop for guys like us” — he was referring to our small statures. “All the small sizes tend to go first. I already pulled aside a couple of things for myself like this lovely APC jacket.”

As he showed me the military-style banded collar jacket by the French-based label he set aside for himself, I saw a 3.1 Phillip Lim chunky knit double-button cardigan I fell in love with when I saw it on the New York Fashion Week Fall ‘07 runway.

I looked at the price tag and thought, “Maybe I should wait for the sample sale.”

When we reached the women’s floors, I saw labels I don’t usually see anywhere else: Rodarte, Derek Lam and Stella McCartney. On the women’s co-op floor, I saw a most eye-catching display: a towering mannequin draped in a ballooning gown fashioned out of high-end denim.

“The co-op is like an experimental place for us,” Doonan said.

By experimental, I gathered he meant “trendy and funky.” Much like the men’s co-op, the women’s co-op features youthful collections that prob-

ably can be seen on glossy tabloid divas like Paris and the Olsen twins.

I was bombarded by more luxury as we spiraled down to the lower levels: a modernized Marie Antoinette personalized shopping area, Louboutin heels, Nina Ricci gowns, Theory suits — I was on luxury overload.

On the main floor, Doonan showed me a collection of Val-extra leather goods (Victoria Beckham loves them). They are discreet, clean, simple and nothing like those gigantic ornate bags you see today.

He showed me Barneys’ exclusive collection of Kazuko jewelry. The metaphysical stones in vibrant colors are intricately encased in freeform wirework that is organic and beautiful.

My nose even got a workout when I was introduced to fragrance connoisseur Frederic Malle and his Editions de Parfums. I was even lucky enough to be the first to test out their “smell columns” — a tube that you stick your head in to experience the full glory of the scents.

I was also introduced to Eddie Roschi co-founder of Le Labo, a luxury-meets-science fragrance company that allows you to make customized scents.

After our romp through the store, Doonan and I sat down for a spot of tea at a nearby

bakery that he referred to as “bijou.”

As he nursed his cup of Earl Grey, he continued to make me a follower of the Barneys New York religion.

“We want every store to feel like an owner-operated store,” he said. “We do not want to feel like a chain.”

Although the “emporium of elegance” has some price tags that can break the bank, its loyalty to emerging designers plays to their humble attitude.

There was also a genuine sense of mom-and-pop synergy when we walked through the store. Everyone seemed to be on an equal playing field as Doonan greeted everyone from the carpenters to salespeople by their first names. It was a team spirit that I never garnered from any other store.

This was great, but I wondered why it took so long for Barneys to get to the Bay Area.

“Timing is everything,” Doonan said. “San Francisco has been on the card for about three or four years.”

Now that it is here, everyone can rejoice.

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