

Talbots Ups Fashion Ante

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Looks from Talbots' fall lineup.
Photo By Kyle Ericksen



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In its self-professed, ongoing evolution away from “your grandmother’s Talbots,” as chief marketing officer Lori Wagner put it, the retailer took its fall collection in a different direction. Much of the lineup, described as “country-club chic” by chief creative officer Michael Smaldone, could be classified as updated classics with an emphasis on sophisticated outerwear, such as a trim, tailored double-breasted coat in gray and secretary skirts done in bright pops of color. But not content to stay in safe, staple territory, Smaldone also included ample doses of animal prints, on cardigans, sheath dresses and a swingy three-quarter-length coat, as well as a full accessories line of chunky, on-trend jewelry, laceless leather oxfords and croc-embossed handbags.

If such fashion-driven fare stands in contrast to the Talbots of yore, that’s exactly the point. Since joining the company two years ago, Smaldone has been tasked with restoring a design focus to the retailer, which has spent millions of dollars trying to revamp its admittedly stale image. “The brand lost its relevance,” said Smaldone, who noted the recent introduction of two new pant fits was one major initiative, which continues with a big denim push for fall.

Still, as much as Talbots wants to take a more stylish stance, it does not want to alienate its loyal customer base, which Wagner describes as fortysomething women who are partial to American sportswear. Thus, for every trend piece, such as knit riding pants or a leather bomber, there’s a classic, as in printed tie-neck blouses and cropped jeans.

Prices, too, have stayed within Talbots’ accessible range: Pants run from \$59.50 to \$129, and jackets and coats, from \$99 for a blazer to \$480 for a camel version, with a few pieces that push the limits, such as a black shearling piece, priced at \$1,400.