

# MERCH MADNESS

**Merchandising your** store for the fashion crowd requires a trend-obsessed mindset, a willingness to change (your cases), and a way with props

**BY MICHELE MEYER**

**You've already claimed** your region's fine jewelry consumers. Wouldn't you like to lure that lucrative yet fickle shopper, the fashionista?

After all, price is no object when she's on the prowl—which is to say always—for the latest and greatest. It's no exaggeration to suggest that she'll sacrifice anything—budget, space... Who cares if she has to store Manolo Blahnik stilettos in her oven and Alexis Bittar shoulder-dusters in her bathroom?

Nor should you. Follow our merchandising guidelines, erring on the side of fashion-forward, and she's yours for the taking.

#### **KEEP UP WITH THE TRENDS**

Choosing to be a la mode is easy. Succeeding is another. Even designers look to stylists to propose spiked collars, Lucite bangles, or cursive gold necklaces—all flaunted last year on runways.





18k gold pavé click  
Soubidou leather  
bracelet; **£5280**  
**(\$8,840)**; Tateossian,  
London; 44-207-384-  
8336; [tateossian.com](http://tateossian.com)



Tateossian Industrial  
Gears cufflinks in  
gunmetal blue;  
**£250 (\$420)**



Robert Tateossian  
(second from r.)  
entertains editors  
during London's  
men's fashion week.

It's essential to consider not only accessories and styling when you display your jewels, but also colors, silhouettes, materials, and moods. How many trends will stick? "You need to know the beats of the moment before you can choose whether to adopt or ignore them," says Robert Tateossian, managing director of Tateossian, a brick-and-mortar boutique and jewelry line in London.

Ideally, you're as fortunate as Tateossian, who soaks in the atmosphere and buzz of the fashion scene in person. Not only does he meet with Italian-brand creative directors to review their seasonal "mood boards," he also attends a half-dozen runway shows per year.

Catwalk and trade show dates—and designer contacts—are posted on [ModemOnline.com](http://ModemOnline.com), often a year in advance. Make a point to attend at least one major event every year—the inspiration you gather for your store will pay off in dividends.

If you can't land on runways, view the latest collections on [Style.com](http://Style.com), at no charge. Wares appear half a year before hitting stores—grouped by season, designer, and look.

With more than 500 designers strutting their stuff each season, you may feel as confused and vulnerable as a bikini-clad beekeeper armed with just a jeweler's loupe. Better your odds by looking to the pros: fashion trend forecasters. Among the most respected are The Doneger Group ([doneger.com](http://doneger.com)), Stylesight ([stylesight.com](http://stylesight.com)), ESP Trendlab ([esptrendlab.com](http://esptrendlab.com)), Fashion Snoops ([fashionsnoops.com](http://fashionsnoops.com)), Trendstop ([trendstop.com](http://trendstop.com)), Trend Union ([trendunion.com](http://trendunion.com)), and WGSN ([wgsn.com](http://wgsn.com)). Color consultants also can guide you to the best hues to complement your sensibility, via Pantone ([pantone.com](http://pantone.com)) or Color Association of the United States ([colorassociation.com](http://colorassociation.com)).

"We cut through the clutter," says Leslie Harrington, Ph.D., CAUS executive director. The Color Association charges \$750 annually for twice-yearly reports and access to the website's blogs. Online-only access costs \$250. The association can refer color experts, who generally charge \$150–\$300 an hour. Pantone's rates start at \$1,000.

#### CHANGE YOUR WINDOWS—OFTEN

You've heard the *Project Runway* adage: In fashion, one day you're in, the next day you're out. Fad-fueled buyers expect not only your stock to change constantly, but also your windows and cases. Tateossian of London revamps at least monthly, Fragments in New York City's SoHo every six weeks, and Lugano Diamonds in Newport Beach, Calif., every quarter.

"You've got to be current, relevant, and never kitschy," says Tateossian. "Customers won't stop and shop if you've got a refresh of what everyone else is doing. We go all out with unusual materials and props."

During Wimbledon his windows sprouted a lush grass field. Another time, he scattered one-of-a-kind rubies and

(P. 205) GETTY IMAGES





New York City's Fragments is renowned for its fashion and fine mix.

**"Creating shops within shops is the new thing."**

—GLENN SOKOLI, MERCHANDISING EXPERT



**Are your windows strong enough to stop shoppers in their tracks?**

sapphires among faux dinosaur bones and meteorites. At Valentine's Day, Tateossian courted glass gazers with the chic mirror effect of scarlet Perspex, rather than hearts and roses.

Within weeks, he'd spurned romance for all things mechanical, with moving parts of tourbillon watches and other gadgets exposed to highlight his skeleton watch faces and cufflinks. "We reinforce our strong message within our store's cabinetry, posters, and postcards."

One thing never changes: "Bright hues always attract," Tateossian says. "Acid oranges and acid greens don't really sell, but they draw a lot of attention to windows. The customer might come in because they saw something in bright orange—but they'll wind up buying something in black or brown."

Janet Goldman, founder and CEO of Fragments, similarly skews to strong hues: coral, turquoise, and cheerful shades that link unexpected groupings of costume and fine jewelry. "You don't want it to be one-note. Customers like to get new ideas. We all do."

#### USE THE ELEMENT OF SURPRISE

Look past the windows. Glenn Sokoli, a showroom visual merchandiser and adjunct assistant professor of visual presentation at New York City's Fashion Institute of Technology, suggests covering traditional collars and pads with runway-inspired fabrics: "It's an inexpensive way to stay on trend."

Leave velvet underground, opting instead for unexpected materials: "We use organic and artistic things, like large wooden logs for a forest theme," says Lugano Diamonds owner and CEO Moti Ferder.

You never know what will land in Sokoli-styled cases: tabletop and home furnishings, including vases, picture frames, bowls, and even towel hooks and sculptures. Once, he wrapped watches around pewter-colored drinking cups turned on their sides. Little did Sokoli's luxury merchant client—or its patrons—know where he bought the cups: Bed Bath & Beyond. Other times, he plunders HomeGoods and Pier 1 Imports for wonders.

"You've got to know first what you'll display before you

buy props," he says. "My choices were inspired by the texture and color of the watches. The pewter was masculine, which fit the merchandise and the store's persona."

As with sales, multiples attract. "It's beautiful if you drape necklaces over three vases, wine, or perfume bottles of different heights," Sokoli says. "Be eclectic: They're even cooler mixed with T- and bracelet bars. Just don't go crazy with too many props!"

One was enough for Brooklyn, N.Y., designer Alexis Bittar, whose animal instinct spurred him to plant a huge taxidermic brown bear—visible from the street—in his first shop almost a decade ago. "I loved the playfulness and juxtaposition of this creature in this delicate setting of a 1950s boudoir from a Hitchcock film," Bittar says.

Today, neon green coyotes, fluorescent yellow buffalo, and color-striped zebras rotate among his 11 boutiques (and counting). But Bittar notes customers' and his own reactions. "I have weird mixed feelings about putting jewelry on animals," he says. "I just want to respect the animal."

And he's learned to rein in the more creative taxidermy efforts. "We had a bear with a warthog head and people freaked out," he recalls.

#### CREATE A STORE WITHIN A STORE

No man is an island, but a trend could—and perhaps should—be. "Creating shops within shops is the new thing at department stores," Sokoli says. "Why not make it work for you?"

You should not only highlight a single theme, but also make the shop homey, with open displays, mirrors, ottomans, benches, or comfy loungers. "It becomes a place the person is drawn to," Sokoli says. "You've made shopping easy and less intimidating."

Should you stock your island with trendy purses, scarves, shoes, or candles? The jewelry jury's out on this one.

Tateossian just added travel wallets and business card holders. If those sell well, he might add iPad covers and smartphone cases, all targeting males. "We have the [sales] numbers to produce it wholesale," Tateossian says. "If we succeed, we'll fold in women's accessories."

In contrast, Fragments' Goldman would rather gift than sell candles to her most loyal clients. "You can't be everything for everyone," she says. "If you were a fine restaurant and wanted to bring in different things, you wouldn't sell hot dogs. That's not why your customers come."

#### IN WITH THE NEW, STAY WITH THE OLD

Expand your horizons—to a point. Sure, it's hot, but costume jewelry shouldn't be a sharp departure from your fine jewelry selection. "Oversized jewelry is a major trend, but it's completely not me," Tateossian says. "So I choose to ignore it."

Goldman considers her most loyal clientele and what they'd be willing to wear on vacation. But rather than dabble, she buys deep (18 to 24 SKUs) from a few diverse lines: Dana Kellin's semiprecious stones, Suzanne Kalan's colorful classics, and Kismet by Milka's edgier wire and feather ear cuffs.

Goldman hews to not only stronger hues—"they bring in a younger, trendier customer"—but also shapes. "Take a risk: Buy 'attractors,' showy pieces that draw attention even if they might not sell. Make sure you love it so much, you're almost upset when it sells because you didn't get to keep it!" she says. "The funny thing is, often it's the first thing that sells." ■

WOMAN: ALAMY