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February 8, 2012

Angelo Galasso Takes Space at Plaza's Edwardian Room

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A view of The Plaza Hotel.

Photo By Courtesy Photo

Angelo Galasso is preparing to enter the retail fray in New York City.

The high-end men's designer, who operates stores in Milan, London and Moscow, has inked a deal to open a 4,720-square-foot store at the historic Edwardian Room at The Plaza hotel on 59th Street off Fifth Avenue. The store is expected to have a soft opening for select clients later this month, according to Richard S. Chera, principal of Crown Retail Services, which found the space for Galasso. He said Galasso had been looking at sites in the area for a while but was holding out for a special location. "The Edwardian Room is like a work of art," said Chera. "There are 10 huge panoramic picture windows overlooking Central Park." The location, which opened in 1907 as a men's-only cafe and has served royalty, presidents and world dignitaries over the years, is landmarked, so Chera said converting it into a retail space required some ingenuity. "It was a challenge. Ninety-five percent of the installations are free-floating fixtures because you can't put anything into the walls."

Galasso added: "Since The Plaza hotel is a heritage site, we presented a zero-impact project, which was immediately approved by the Plaza commission. We didn't change anything and Tuscan architect Mariquita Papi furnished the rooms in an 18th-century-inspired style."

He said opening a store in New York "is crucial for my brand's expansion" because it represents "one of the most important international fashion destinations. For my brand, which targets a high-end audience, New York represents an important occasion to test my collections. The fact that I chose to open a store at The Plaza hotel is linked to my desire to be unique and different. I don't like my stores to be lined up on a street with other brands,

although I had to do this in Milan, where it's fundamental to be on Via Montenapoleone."

Named by the Financial Times as "this generation's most inventive image maker," Galasso opened his first store, Interno 8, in 1990 and the business eventually grew to a chain of 80 shops. In 2004 he joined forces with former Formula 1 Renault team principal Flavio Briatore to create Billionaire Italian Couture, before branching out to create a line under his own name in London in 2009. "Moving to London 15 years ago, I mixed traditional Italian elegance with the eccentricity of cutting-edge British fashion," Galasso said. He said the New York store will offer his Polso Orologio shirts, a line inspired by Gianni Agnelli that have a special cutout at the cuff for a watch, as well as bespoke services. Suits will start at \$4,590 and Polso Orologio shirts from \$1,235. Jeans range from \$796 to \$9,289, belts are \$929 to \$6,635, watches are \$3,981 to \$10,616 and shoes are \$1,194 to \$15,923. "The price range is very high also because I'm a kind of maniac," Galasso said. "When I create something, I choose only the best in terms of materials and construction and I also pay huge attention to details."

He said there are plans for additional retail stores in the U.S., including a location on Rodeo Drive in Los Angeles in September; Bal Harbour, Fla., in January 2013, and Paris in September 2013. "All the stores, including New York, will have a room dedicated to the bespoke service, which is available for all product categories, from clothing and accessories to the interiors of cars and apartments," he said.

"My strategy is to open direct points of sale, because I think that wholesale chains tend to depersonalize brands in order to sell more products," Galasso added. "I don't want to be global, and since every man is different, I decided to create different store concepts and different collections for each country. In addition, my customers are used to traveling a lot, so I think they could get bored if they found the same products everywhere. I usually design about 500 pieces made to satisfy different demands, then I make a selection for each store depending on the specific requests coming from each market."

The retail component of The Plaza retail space has had its challenges since opening in 2008, but because Galasso is opening separate from the other stores, Chera believes the store will succeed. "It's been a blithering failure," said Chera of The Plaza's retail collection. "You didn't know from the street that there was retail there" and with all the well-known high-end shops in the neighborhood, "we didn't need more of the same. But Galasso is unique and has exterior signage that will overcome those problems. And he will feed off the half-a-billion-dollars worth of retail sales at the Apple store across the street."

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