

Design Identity



An Interview with Steve Dumain,
Creative Director, Be & D

EDITORS' NOTE Upon graduating from the University of Vermont with a degree in International Business, Spanish, and Art, Steve Dumain lived and traveled in Europe and South America where he explored his fascination with fine art and sculpture. He returned to New York and established himself in the film industry as a gifted writer, producer, and talent manager. He then met fellow designer Be Inthavong and they co-founded Be & D at the kitchen table of a Greenpoint, Brooklyn loft. In 2009, Dumain was named sole Creative Director of Be & D.



Steve Dumain

COMPANY BRIEF Started in 2004, Be & D (www.beandd.com) is a manufacturer of handbags, shoes, belts and small leather accessories including wallets, key chains, and pouchettes. The collection is constructed from the finest premium leathers, exotic skins, and custom hardware. Be & D's handbags, belts, and small leather goods are made in their New York City Garment District Atelier. Be & D shoes, launched in 2007, were initially manufactured in Italy, and are now produced in Brazil. Be & D has also collaborated with ready-to-wear designers, including Ruffian, Doo.Ri, Rachel Roy, and (for Spring/Summer 2011) Costello Tagliapietra in developing accessories for their New York Fashion Week runway presentations. The collection is carried at luxury boutiques, department stores, and select online retailers worldwide including Saks Fifth Avenue, Harrods, Nordstrom, and Lane Crawford.

How did Be & D build brand awareness as an independently owned company whose principals had little to no luxury fashion background/experience?

In our business, strong, special, high-quality product and the right retail partners create the best possible launching pad for healthy brand awareness. This is supported and supplemented by the press. Be & D's first retail client was Bergdorf Goodman. We quickly had a great response from retail because we were making something that was considered to be very different than the other products in the stores at the time. While the product performed well on its own, we then were lucky to have achieved the love of many celebrities who actually purchased the product. Soon after, we began to

work domestically with major department stores and high-end boutiques.

I understood the importance of a global brand, rather than one only carried within the U.S. and Japan. We had our first international sales season during the 2005 Paris Fall Fashion Week. That season, the brand expanded throughout the world to the Middle East, Italy, France, the U.K., Germany, Asia, South Africa, Australia, and so on. Our strategy was to go with the most exclusive and reputable point of distribution first in each territory – the store that had the longest standing roots there.

What is the most important aspect in launching an independent luxury brand?

A clearly defined brand identity is paramount. Be & D's DNA is defined by its consistent, focused, and authentic design identity, strong value/price ratio, longevity in its product offerings, and exclusivity in its distribution. This ethos runs throughout each category and endeavor, thereby solidifying Be & D's standing in the marketplace and commitment to becoming a complete luxury lifestyle brand.

Are there plans for brand extensions?

Because of the independent look and feel of our products, the brand is a true lifestyle brand and we are treating it as such.

In the future, extension possibilities include: a men's collection, outerwear, fragrance, eyeglasses, soft goods, and eventually clothing.

Additionally, I have recently launched another brand with more accessible prices, completely independent from Be & D, which will debut on QVC in the fall. Named Roccatella, we will start with the handbag category and consider a move into footwear.

What is Be & D's target market?

The brand is targeted toward a sensibility rather than an age group. Fashion customers like the ability to own items with varied aesthetics, but we are approaching the customer who responds to quality with a fresh modern aesthetic. The woman who owns one of our products is confident in her decisions and doesn't need to own something made by one of the larger and more branded companies. She wants to be noticed for her taste rather than her ability to buy what every other woman owns.

How important is technology in all aspects of brand building?

We use the Internet and outlets like blogs, Facebook, and Twitter as a platform for

expressing the brand's vision and gaining customer awareness.

The impact of technology on design and production technologies in fibers, finishes, and production are constantly revolutionizing the fashion industry. Although our brand has an old world look and feel with modern appeal, we are constantly challenging ourselves to use new technologies and to improve upon our existing design and business model. We have recently updated our software to better integrate sales, marketing, design, and production. Materials are constantly being reinvented to make products that will stand out in a customer's wardrobe – and give them a reason to make new purchases. The days of people buying the same style again and again are over. I'm dedicated to being a step ahead of the fast-paced desires of our customers. In doing so, we must keep all of our functions and our aesthetics not only original, but ahead of the curve. People are now able to order luxury goods from their PDA's, and we need to be making product that can work with this model. Our online customer is now almost one third of our entire business.

What are your distribution channels?

We are distributed within top retailers in the U.S. and internationally. About half of our business is now balanced in the international market. Our shoe category is around 25 percent of the brand; belts and small leather goods make up somewhere between 5 and 10 percent and bags the balance; 30 percent of the goods go to online retailers.

We leverage our boutique business against our department store business and are pleased that neither outweighs the strength of the other.

Some of our biggest partners throughout the world are Harvey Nichols, Lane Crawford, and Saks Fifth Avenue.

We also sell thru our own Web site, and we will continue to put a focus on that.

What are your key priorities for the brand going forward?

The brand will continue to grow in the lifestyle arena and offer products that make sense to the DNA of our products and our customers. My goal is to be a luxury brand with one of the largest manufacturing of goods in the U.S., while growing the brands exportation. ●

Left to right: Big Spring black nubuck bag; Harvey grey shoe; Voight Rock shoe; Gable cognac bag