

...plaid and velvet ensembles, ...sued with a list of each child's size ...me tips on their personal style from ...I tried to find holiday wear that ...and classic and cool. Boys are proba- ...existent to dispense with, and of ...there is much less to choose from ...t comes to holiday clothes—most ...are offering a classic blue blazer, ...g from a high-priced version at ...Brothers (51%) to more modesty ...ones on sale at Kohl's from \$29.99. ...Shopping online at CWD.com, ...I came across a less-formal idea for ...old Wilson: a three-piece ensemble ...dark-green cable-knit sweater vest ...in red and white over a Scottish ...satin-down Oxford shirt and bell ...by Flapdoodles.

Critics Welgh In: Our panel of parents and kids judges some of the latest clothes from five major retailers

JUNIOR BANKER

With its men's cashmere sweater saving well, Brooks Brothers introduced a version for boys this year that can run up to \$299.

FASHION PLATE

Known for their Brooks Brothers

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I picked up a denim skirt trimmed with two layers of plaid taffeta in green and purple with a bright-green sweater to top it off at \$25.99 each. Two-year-old Kate got a dress in green-and-red taffeta plaid with a sleeveless black velvet bodice (53.50) paired with a black wicker shrug with a velvet bow (\$33.99). The Gap now has some special promotions and sales on holiday wear.

At the feverishly packed Ralph Lauren kids boutique on Madison Avenue, I instinctively grabbed the only size 4T remaining in the taffeta skirt and blouse displayed on the mannequin before an equally determined granny could snap it up. Now all I have to do is figure out which of the several darlings will wear that size in my family will love it as much as I do.

RETAILING

Sit Right Down—and Shop Can sofas and credenzas save department stores?



All Home. At Nordstrom's Seattle, the "Apartment" is designed to appeal to young shoppers.

By AMY CHOICEK

THIS HOLIDAY season, department stores want you to take a load off. In an effort to shed their image as nightmarish places to shop post-Thanksgiving, department stores across the country are putting in plush sofas, plasma TVs and even refrigerators stocked with water.

Bloomingdale's has new credenzas and lounges in its stores, while New York's Bergdorf Goodman is trying a retro approach, with a martini/wine bar on a clothing floor and vintage furniture and records in the department devoted to the Marc by Marc Jacobs brand. New at Nordstrom: "Girlfriend Rooms," with couches, curtains and an area where five friends can try on clothes together.

This step-up from the chairs typically used by exhausted husbands in part of a broader attempt to lure back the growing number of shoppers who have over the past decade become loyal to smaller specialty stores. This year, only 12% of shoppers surveyed in Deltotte's annual holiday retail survey say department stores are their favorite places to shop during this season, compared with nearly half of respondents in 1985.

For Ruth Parman, the couches add up to more fun—and a bigger bill. Last week, she went to Nordstrom with a budget of \$398 and ended up spending \$165. "I'm sure we stayed longer and shopped more because of the seating-area options," says the 38-year-old publicist in Las Vegas.

But department stores have problems that are more fundamental than the lack of comfortable places to sit, some industry experts say. Many shoppers find them less convenient and harder to navigate than specialty stores and even big stand-alone discounters.

And, of course, department stores would need an awful lot of couches to accommodate this weekend's shoppers—up to 130 million people, according

to the National Retail Federation.

When Federated Department Stores decided to revamp the image of its Bloomingdale's stores two years ago, the company asked consumers what they wanted. Comfortable seating ranked high, even beating out larger fitting rooms. The company says its recent facelift is responding with more furniture, rugs, artwork and better lighting. Fitting rooms at new stores have been expanded by up to four square feet.

In its midtown Manhattan store, Bloomingdale's has added a living room to one fitting area, with sofas, throw pillows, chairs and a credenza. In the San Francisco store scheduled to open next year, shoppers will have lounges with desks and floor lamps on every floor, instead of the standard lounges attached to restrooms. "It's exhilarating to go shopping," says Shm D'Napoli, vice president of store design at Bloomingdale's.

In its two newest stores, in San Antonio and Dallas, Nordstrom has screened off bedroom-size areas with drapes and seating for three to five women. The Seattle-based retailer hopes these Girlfriend Rooms will appeal to women who like to shop in groups. Its new stores in Texas and Irvine, Calif., are testing the "Apartment," a space for teenage girls, with bright couches, a plasma TV playing music videos, funky floor lamps, teen fashion magazines and mirrors. The intention, says Dave Lindsay, vice president of store planning at Nordstrom, is to tap into the intimacy of a boutique: "It's trying to make each person's area an extension of their lifestyle."

But even the plushiest of sofas and roomiest of fitting rooms won't get some shoppers into stores this season. Mary Roberts, a 31-year-old office manager in Seattle, says she had enough of the zoo she found last week at several department stores. She now plans to do the bulk of her holiday shopping online. "I'm just not in the mood to fight the crowds this year," Ms. Roberts says.

GLOBAL DESIGN

Scandinavian Style

■ A visit to the Modernity store in Stockholm is like a crash course in modern design, with museum-quality work by the best-known Scandinavian designers, including Alvar Aalto, Eero Saarinen, Arne Jacobsen, Verner Panton and Tomas Nilsson-Hilbo, plus a few outliers, such as American Ray and Charles Eames and Scotman Charles and Ganna Lamppu. The man behind this store devoted to a mid-20th-century Scandinavian furniture, ceramics and glass line is Danish, Swedish, Norwegian or Finnish. He's Scottish. Andrew Duncanson opened Modernity in the Old Town in 1998; in 2003 he moved to more spacious premises in the swanky Ostermalm neighborhood (Stallgratan 6, Stockholm; 46-8-20-80-83 info@modernity.se). Close by are two other shops for fans of Scandinavian style: Asplund (Stallgratan 32; 46-8-662-2284), which sells new pieces by mostly Swedish designers, and Ganna Lamppu (Ostergatan 35; 46-8-611-9833), which lives up to its name, Old Lamps.—Stephen Whitehead



▲ Grand Prix chair, in beech and teak, designed by Arne Jacobsen in 1957, soon the grand prize at the Milan Triennale. \$684 at Modernity

▼ An extra-large lamp by Danish designer Poul Henningsen was commissioned for a bank in Copenhagen in the late 1920s. \$8,080 at Modernity



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