

0.5 UP
CLOSE

THE NEXT STAGE

Livie & Luca takes big steps forward by entering the women's category and tackling sustainability.

By Jennie Bell

Like many brands in the shoe industry, Livie & Luca has faced significant challenges this year amid the extreme fluctuations in children's retail. But for CEO and founder Mitzi Rivas, the only option was to respond with innovation. "We just decided that we are a niche business," she said. "By homing in our purpose and what we do well, a lot of clarity has come from that and direction for our future."

Rivas noted the brand, founded in 2005, saw its wholesale business shrink this past year. So her team set about strengthening its direct-to-consumer channels and dabbling in new sales avenues, such as livestream shopping. And it has been busy expanding its product assortment.

In August, the label will debut a capsule collection of women's ballet flats developed with today's lifestyle in mind, emphasizing comfort and versatility for moms.

While Livie & Luca has dabbled in the women's category in the past, Rivas said this new launch comes with a strong intent. "We co-design our products with families and children," she said. "After getting to know these moms — what they value, what they're craving — I just felt like, gosh, I want to be their cup of chamomile tea. I want them to know that we've got them."

To build the women's line, director of product Emily Pierdinock-Hagen delved into the company's biomechanical learnings from years of crafting kids' footwear. "The shoe needed to be lightweight, soft and mold around the foot," said Pierdinock-Hagen. "It's fairly deconstructed and done in a soft leather, so it adapts to the foot over time."

The ballet flat will debut in three colorways that will be available exclusively on the brand's website for \$128 to \$132, with more color options enroute for spring '22. And Livie & Luca aims to introduce other silhouettes next fall.

"We're taking it slowly so that we can gather insights from the customer," said Pierdinock-Hagen.

Meanwhile, the brand also has embraced the sustainability movement, rethinking its product, presentation and operations. Rivas recalled there were many questions at the outset. "We knew that it's our responsibility to do this, but how can we do it our way? How do we still maintain what makes our brand us?" she said.

To start, Livie & Luca introduced the eco-conscious ReJoy Collection in spring '21. The sneaker line launched with three patterns, and a fourth is being added for fall '21. All the shoes are vegan and feature organic and recycled materials. They retail for \$59 to \$69 on the brand's site and at brick-and-mortar stores, like Sikes Children's Shoes in Homewood, Ala.

Sikes GM Cindy Weninger said the sneakers stand out for their aesthetics even more than the sustainable aspect. "We occasionally get customers who come in asking for vegan products, but it's the look of shoes that matters most to our customers," she said.

Additionally, Livie & Luca reworked its shoeboxes to incorporate recycled content, reduce the carbon footprint and encourage reuse. "My favorite part is that the boxes have a coloring map on the inside," Pierdinock-Hagen said, adding that the boxes can be shipped without any extra packaging, and fold-down handles eliminate the need for shopping bags.

Moving forward, Livie & Luca is exploring other ways to incorporate environmentally friendly materials into the core collection, with the goal to ultimately address the full lifecycle of all its products. "Every season new information comes up. It's ever changing and always evolving," said Pierdinock-Hagen. ■



Vegan kids' sneakers from Livie & Luca's ReJoy Collection



Back-to-school sales are expected to rise 5.5% YOY

06 DATA
POINTS

BRIGHTER BTS

Sales during the important back-to-school season are poised to bounce back from the pandemic-related lows seen last year, thanks largely to expectations that children will return to schools in person and will need wardrobe updates and school supplies. Below are four things to know about the upcoming fall season.

Target and Walmart will take the majority share of in-store shoppers. Amazon will be the winner for online sales, according to the report.

NEW THREADS

Apparel is the largest category consumers will spend on, at **60%** of dollars spent, while **24%** of dollars will be spent on basic school supplies like backpacks, notebooks and pens, said Shopkick. Consumers who plan to spend more on BTS purchases reported that they will do so because they didn't spend as much last year while children were at home completing school work remotely.

EXTRA TIME

The NPD Group Inc. recently noted that the BTS shopping season could be "drawn out" because many school districts do not start their year until after Labor Day, which is **Sept. 6**. Some districts, however, begin as early as **Aug. 2**. "Depending on how the June promotions play out, we could see both an early and a late boost this year," said Beth Goldstein, accessories and footwear industry analyst at NPD. — Meredith Derby Berg

BEST YEAR
EVER

Mastercard Spending Pulse forecast that sales in stores and online could increase **5.5%** year over year from July 15 to Sept. 6. And even when compared with 2019 levels, spending is predicted to be up **6.9%**. Apparel sales are expected to jump **78.2%** year-over-year, according to Mastercard, and department stores should see a **25.3%** boost from 2020.

IN-STORE
RULES

Plenty of shoppers plan to venture out to stores, according to a Shopkick survey: **92%** of participants said they will go to stores, compared with **66%** from last fall, and big-box retailers like