

WWD Retail

Urban Outfitters Debuts BHLDN Collection

by SHARON EDELSON

Posted TUESDAY FEBRUARY 8, 2011

From [WWD ISSUE 02/08/2011](#) [WWDSTYLE ISSUE 02/08/2011](#)

[Clip Print](#)



Urban Outfitters campus at the Navy Yard.

Photo By Kyle Ericksen

PHILADELPHIA — There's not a single Cinderella-style wedding gown in the Bhldn collection.

Bhldn, Urban Outfitters Inc.'s newest retail concept, is the firm's attempt to put its unique, slightly off-kilter stamp on the bridal business. Rather than traditional gowns, Bhldn is more likely to make a large, lopsided taffeta bow the focal point of a dress, give a wedding gown an unfinished hem or cover elaborate pearl-studded flowers with a sheer layer of tulle so only a hint of the decoration is visible.

There's also a design component featuring items with a do-it-yourself sensibility, such as flower garlands that look homemade but are already put together, as well as glassware, serving pieces, candelabras, cake toppers and lanterns. Many pieces are one of a kind or reproductions and share its sister chain Anthropologie's philosophy for singular discoveries and repurposed found items.

Bhldn will launch via an e-commerce site, appropriately, on Valentine's Day. "We built shipping costs into our model," said Kristin Norris, Bhldn's managing director, so customers feel they have nothing to lose by trying on a dress. Bhldn's first freestanding store is expected to follow in August. "We hope to finalize a location soon," Norris said, adding that cities with Anthropologie units are being considered. Bhldn will not be sold at Anthropologie.

About two to three Bhldn stores, between 3,000 and 4,000 square feet, will open in 2012. "At the moment, we're not planning to be as large as Anthropologie. Maybe we'll have 50 stores in the U.S. [in several] years, and by the time we get to 50, it will be 100," at which time the company will reevaluate the potential of the brand and possibly continue rolling out units.

The Web site will launch with apparel, accessories, lingerie, jewelry and shoes. Tabletop, cake pedestals, place cards and everything for decorating a venue will bow on

the site in May. Invitations, using letter press or engraving techniques, will be introduced next year with artists creating limited time collections. "This is a more intimate affair with under 100 guests," said Coralie Stanton, design director, of the type of wedding Bhldn is aimed at. "We kept thinking of weddings that are in less typical locations than the ballroom of a hotel. It's an elevated experience."



Looks from BHLDN.
Photo By: Kyle Ericksen



A look from BHLDN.

Photo By: Kyle Ericksen

To guide brides through the highs and lows of planning an event, a team of stylists will be only an e-mail away. The Web site will eventually become a clearing house for services such as photography, catering and florists. "I can see us getting involved with event planning, helping with the look and feel of a wedding," Norris said. "We're not going to be like J.Lo's [character] in 'The Wedding Planner.'"



Inside the BHLDN office space.

Photo By: Kyle Ericksen

"We've taken DNA from Anthropologie," Norris said. "I kind of think of Bhldn as the sophisticated older sister."

Bhldn wants to own not only the wedding, but the special occasion mantle. "We want to be about parties, all the parties in your life," Norris said, adding Bhldn will offer dresses and separates appropriate for bar mitzvahs and bat mitzvahs, engagement parties and anniversary celebrations.

While Bhldn was sired by Anthropologie, Urban decided to develop it as a freestanding brand. "We believe it has enough life of its own as a concept," Norris said. "Anthropologie is pretty

full. We're already looking at ways to expand Bhldn. Anthro's classifications are getting bigger, such as the accessories-only stores. And Anthropologie is still trying to expand shoes and jewelry."

Bhldn wedding gowns are priced from \$1,000 to \$4,000 and event dresses, \$200 to \$600. Accessories by James Coviello, Jennifer Behr and Yestadt Millinery feature vintage-inspired headpieces, veils and corsages made from feathers, jewels and tulle. There's a tasteful tiara, bohemian headband and enameled flower hair pins. Shoes, including peep-toe pumps and ankle-strap heels, come in saffron, bright green, pale pink and red, and are decorated with butterflies, feathers and vintage ribbons. A collection of wraps includes a feather bolero, a Hollywood-style cropped jacket with a bow, a puffer jacket with a rhinestone closure and a thick wool crafty-style crochet collar.

"We'll attract a bride who is looking to reflect her vision," said Norris. "She may be a more mature or sophisticated bride. Our customer skews slightly older, but she's still under 30."

"We're confident that we're filling in space that no one's filling in," Norris continued. "We're offering a take that's not out there. We have a lot of shorter dresses, lots of color and prints and no optic white dresses. Traditionally, people got married in churches. Now, they're getting married on beaches and mountain tops. We're building our assortment for the ultimate end use."

While Bhldn is full of quirky touches, surprising colors and fabrics that will expand the definition of bridal attire, the space is becoming increasingly crowded. Vera Wang's collection for David's Bridal launches this week, J.C. Penney Co. Inc. introduced Modern Bride fine jewelry departments in its stores and online and The Limited began offering on its Web site a small selection of bridal gowns. J. Crew successfully stepped into this arena by selling wedding gowns on its Web site, and last year

opened the J. Crew Bridal Boutique on Madison Avenue in New York.

Bhldn was conceptualized and nurtured at Building No. 15 of the Urban Outfitters campus at the Navy Yard. Urban occupies a cluster of buildings in the Navy Yard, which was shuttered by the U.S. Defense Department in 1995. Also known as "The Incubator," Building No. 15 is where new ideas are brainstormed, developed and, in some cases, green-lighted. Leifsdottir, a sophisticated, witty collection with an emphasis on details and dressmaker tailoring, along with Terrain, a contemporary local garden store, are housed at No. 15. Bhldn also resides in the building, one of many repurposed structures on the campus with exposed brick walls, wood plank floors and large windows through which natural light pours in.

Urban executives say the Navy Yard digs have contributed to employees' creativity and the company's ability to recruit talent. Building 543, the old Copper and Pipe Bending Shop, houses the cafeteria. Besides Shop 543, the main eatery, there are indoor gardens, koi ponds, a library, art gallery and Jharoka, a coffee bar with an Indian sandstone structure. A farmer's market visits several times a month and bands stop by to jam. There also are a gym, yoga studio and dog park.

On the second floor of Building No. 15, a golden retriever named Bella sat at the feet of her master, Lindsay Brooks, associate decorations buyer for Bhldn. Bella yawned contentedly while Brooks continued sorting through glittery dove cake toppers. "How can you have a bad day here?" she said.