

# The Boston Globe

Thursday, October 28, 2010



**STYLE**

## Converse steps up its game with retail store

A new concept for Newbury St.

By Christopher Muther  
GLOBE STAFF

Converse has been in business in Massachusetts for 102 years, evolving from the preferred shoe on parquet for old school NBA superstars to the official sneaker of the punk rock quartet the Ramones. In all that time, the North Reading-based company has never had an official retail store of its own — until now. Last week, Converse opened its first full-price retail shop, on Newbury Street.

The concept store, which attempts to marry the brand's history of heritage athletics and rock 'n' roll, opened in the former G Star space at 348 Newbury St. Restored wood from old high school bleachers decorates the walls and doubles as display shelves. Nearby, subway tile covers the wall as a tribute to the edgy New York punks who eventually adopted the Chuck Taylor high-top after it was seen less as



Converse's first official retail store will sell clothing, athletic shoes, and more; buyers will be able to customize their purchases.

an athletic shoe and more as a fashion statement.

"There are about 2,000 stores around the world that say 'Converse' on them, and we have licensed partners everywhere," said Dave Powers, vice president of global retail for Converse, which is headquartered in North Reading. "In the US we have 63 outlet stores, but they're outlets for liquidation. The Newbury Street store is a launching point

for us in a lot of ways. Nobody has seen this apparel before, and most of these shoe styles you can't find anywhere else in the United States."

It's a big step for a company that less than 10 years ago declared bankruptcy and was subsequently purchased by competitor Nike. Mike Tesler, a retail analyst and principal at Retail Concepts in Norwell, compares the opening of the Converse



PHOTOS BY WENDY MAEDA/GLOBE STAFF

concept store to the opening of Niketown in Newbury.

"Niketown is the perfect example of this type of store," Tesler said. "They're concept stores to give cachet and exposure to a brand. It's not looked at as a place to necessarily drive revenue. Newbury Street has an international clientele, and those shoppers will be exposed to Converse as the company wants them to experience it."

The store marks another first for Converse — the introduction of a full line of clothing. The company has been producing a line of low-cost clothing for Target and a high-end line for menswear with designer John Varvatos, but it has never produced its own line. The Newbury Street store will feature denim, tees, and jackets that combine the feel of high school gym class with a rock 'n' roll edge.

"We asked our core customers a lot of questions like 'What do you like about Converse?' 'How do you like to shop?' and we developed it all from there," says Powers. "One of the things that we find is that they're creative kids, but they're active kids and they're hard to pigeonhole. The most important thing we took away from our research is that we can't and we have no interest in dictating how they should dress or what they should wear."

The store has a station where shoppers can customize T-shirts, bags, even Chuck Taylors. They can scroll through more than 100 images on iPads located at the counter, choose the design, and then a "Customization Maestro" applies the design with the help of a mammoth ink jet printer. The garments or shoes are then

tossed into an oven. The process takes about 15 minutes, and shoppers can leave with customized goods the same day.

"We think everyone is an artist," Powers says. "The idea is that we're creative, our customer is creative, and we want to give them an outlet to express themselves."

Before Converse moved in, the space was stripped down to the original brick walls. Sneaker canvas is used as curtains in the dressing room and the stairs are covered with the same tread as the iconic Chuck Taylors. The second floor, which was being used as private studio space, was connected to the first floor, more than doubling the space from 1,800 square feet to about 4,000. Apparel is located on the first floor, while the second is filled with Converse styles such as Jack Purcell, Star Chevron, One Star, and Converse by John Varvatos.

"We'll have about 40 to 50 styles of footwear that will only be available at the Newbury Street store," says general merchandise manager Jonathan Tappan.

The store will be the first of several opening within the next year. A SoHo location will open in New York by the end of this year, and a handful of other East Coast locations will follow in 2011. At the moment, however, the focus is celebrating its hometown roots in Boston.

"Boston is kind of in your face here," Tappan says. "We want people to know that this is really where we're from, and we finally have a place to show that."

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### For the record

■ **Correction:** Because of an editing error, the name of Neil Berch, associate professor of political science at West Virginia University, was misspelled in a Page One story yesterday on the US Senate race in West Virginia.

■ **Correction:** Because of an editing error, a headline in yesterday's Metro section misstated the hometown of the man charged in a beating death in Lynn earlier this month. The suspect, Fernando Aristy, lives in Chelsea.

■ **Correction:** Because of incorrect information from Fairssearch.org, a story in yesterday's Business section about a coalition of online travel-services companies challenging Google

Inc.'s acquisition of ITA Software Inc. included an incorrect description of the relationship between ITA and Sabre Holdings, which runs Travelocity.com. Sabre Holdings is not an ITA customer.

■ **Correction:** Because of an editing error, the headquarters for Massachusetts-based Converse is misidentified in a story in today's "g" section. The company is located in North Andover.

*The Globe welcomes information about errors that call for corrections. Information may be sent to [comments@globe.com](mailto:comments@globe.com) or left in a telephone message at 617-929-8230. Other Globe contacts, B2.*