

MOMA, Mia and the Club Life

FN introduces an ongoing series of conversations with personalities in the news.

59 Minutes With Brenda Rosenberg

By DEIRDRE MCKAY

BLOOMFIELD HILLS, Mich. — If you haven't heard already, Mia is hot, riding high on an assortment of fast-fashion trends that span the worlds of hip hop, grunge and other styles that make it a brand of choice for junior sophisticates.

But fast fashion, by definition, is a fast and fickle business: so last year the New Castle, De- based company brought on a woman with the background and wherewithal to keep up. Up till her Mia appointment, Brenda Rosenberg, named to the newly created post of design and marketing director, was the style editor of *Detroit Monthly Magazine*. Prior to that, she was a vice president of fashion and marketing at Burdines, in Florida, and has worked for Federated/Allied Corp., New York.

Rosenberg's stand on Mia's fashion direction is true to the company's commitment to the money-making trends, but she is not afraid to make them accessible. "We looked carefully at where Mia was having successes, and have tried to expand to a larger audience," she explained. "I really feel there are a lot more women out there, regardless of age, that want

what's new and trendy. So we expanded into more pumps, larger groups for working women and more evening shoes — club shoes."

For retailers wondering "What will the Rosenberg touch be at Mia?" FN discovered part of the answer by asking her to rifle through her desk objects. Atop the 18th-century French desk there lies an English inkwell set. A pair of Chanel bracelet cuffs stand proud, their jeweled Maltese crosses symbolizing their former owner, the late fashion editor Diana Vreeland. The cuffs, which Rosenberg mailed at a Sotheby's auction, reflect both their posthumous and current owners as hunters and gatherers of fashion.

She described her fashion proclivities as "eclectic — everything from Versace to Armani to Lagerfeld, and on the quieter side, Jill Sanders and Ralph Lauren, and I mix it up with vintage. I'm very adventurous in the way I dress. I have my outfit for the business deal of \$1 million or more, and then my seductive, night-off clothes."

But of the bigger picture of fashion inspiration, she said, "I've been the great watcher of the runways and the streets. The street attitudes are as diversified as you find them. It's casual, then you turn around and it's club looks. With the media we have today, fashion can happen everywhere at

the same time. I listen to Pearl Jam in the afternoon and Bach at night. I wouldn't think of missing a rock concert or (not) flying into New York for the Matisse exhibit at MOMA — I saw it twice.

"People have greater needs, and their wardrobes are much more diverse than five years ago. I'm trying to figure out how to make high-heeled sexy shoes comfortable. This is my goal in life!"

Rosenberg, who is based in Bloomfield, Mich., said her current task is to unify the company's look — including new logos, labels and packaging. Last week she was wrapping up Mia's first color retail catalog. "For every grouping of shoes we've got an inspiration from a different part of the world," she said. "It's like an amusing trip." The catalog's selection of vignettes links Mia's outdoorsy shoes with Telluride, Colo. The tagline reads: "The women of Telluride avoid paved streets and souvenir shops."

Mia is traveling a successful road. The collection has doubled since Rosenberg came on board, and has around 75 different styles of mostly Brazilian-made shoes. Sales, said Mia president Richard Strauss, tripled in 1992 over '91.

Strauss, who started Mia around 1975 as a Swedish-clog importer and sold 25,000 clogs a week in the wooden shoe's heyday, said clogs now make up just 10-15 percent of Mia's total business. Today's business includes officer boots, anklewraps, man-tailoreds, clogs, Western looks and vintage styles. At Shoe-Inn, Fort Lee, N.J., a five-store independent, Mia sales increased 15-20 percent each season since last year according to store president Bill Lawson.

Although tight-lipped on sales figures, Strauss was forthright on Rosenberg. He hired her because "there is tremendous need for more women in our industry." Specifically, he gave gold stars to her retail background and...mysterious depth. Of her diverse talents, he offered: "We keep discovering new things about her."

