

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers visit <http://www.djreprints.com>.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/ralph-lauren-takes-to-the-street-for-fashion-week-show-1473794635>

LIFE

Ralph Lauren Takes to the Street for Fashion Week Show

Models showcase designs in glass structure built outside Madison Avenue store; guests can buy the runway looks afterward



Workers, police and prep crews work on the glass structure being built outside Ralph Lauren's flagship women's store at Madison Avenue and 72nd Street, where it will hold its New York Fashion Week show Wednesday. Guests will be able to view the fall looks, then buy them inside the store afterward. *PHOTO: ALLISON SCOTT/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

By **RAY A. SMITH**

Sept. 13, 2016 3:23 p.m. ET

On Wednesday night, a bunch of well-dressed women will stop traffic on New York's Madison Avenue.

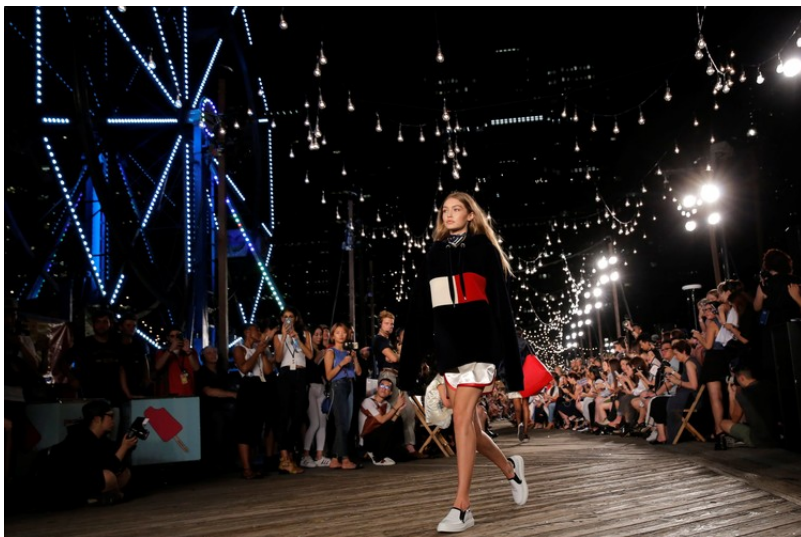
In the can-you-top-this stakes of New York Fashion Week stunts, Ralph Lauren is nearly shutting down one block of Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side to host the label's latest women's runway show. The block, between 71st and 72nd streets, is home to Mr. Lauren's flagship women's store on the left, its men's store on the right, and children's store.

Models will emerge from the women's store to sashay down Madison Avenue in a giant glass-enclosed tent. Immediately after, the women's store will be open to guests and customers, who will be able to buy anything from the collection that was just shown. The move makes Ralph Lauren the largest American brand to make an entire runway collection immediately available to shoppers, part of a growing industry trend to close the monthslong gap between when clothes are shown and when they arrive in stores.

Ralph Lauren's use of its store comes as designers increasingly seek far-flung or unusual locations in an effort to stand out, surprise jaded fashion editors and generate images that will break through the clutter when shared on social media. Tom Ford held his show at the space that formerly housed the Four Seasons restaurant. Tommy Hilfiger Franklin D. Roosevelt Four Freedoms Park on Roosevelt Island.

Designers Go Off the Beaten Path for Fashion Shows »

Designers such as Tommy Hilfiger, Thakoon and Ralph Lauren are using New York City's streets, institutions and skylines as backdrops for their fashion shows during New York Fashion Week this September



1 of 9

“We have a team who were looking for a place to do the show, looking to see what is going to cause some excitement,” Mr. Lauren said. “Well, I’ve got two stores opposite each other on Madison Avenue and a another store, a children’s store. That, 72nd and Madison, is Ralph Lauren.”

Ralph Lauren is expecting hundreds of guests at the show, which means that stretch of Madison Avenue will be closed for at least two hours. While teams of people were trying to get the collection ready in time not just for the show but to be sold in stores, other teams were holding meetings with city officials over the past few months to get Ralph

Lauren's idea approved. The company initially had to request permission to stage the event on Madison Avenue from the Mayor's Office of Citywide Event Coordination and Management, making the case the show would be beneficial to the city and boost business.

Then Ralph Lauren representatives and the fashion show production team had to get numerous permits from the city, including one from the Department of Buildings to erect the tent. They needed one from the police department for no parking signs and amplified sound, specifically the music that will play during the show. The cost: \$25,000 to \$66,000 a day for a large or extra large event, according to the CECM's website.

During Tuesday morning's rush hour, construction crews and deliveries for the event were creating car and people congestion on the Madison Avenue corner.



Traffic was heavy on Madison Avenue on Tuesday morning as preparations were under way for Ralph Lauren's New York Fashion Week fall show. He built a glass structure for the event that extends into the street. *PHOTO: ALLISON SCOTT/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

CECM officials discussed Ralph Lauren's idea with the community board and the Business Improvement District to assess the impact. The company and CECM coordinated with the New York Police Department, counterterrorism officials and the Department of Transportation to sort out logistics, like making sure buses and other traffic could still use Madison Avenue in the days leading up to the show. People familiar with the situation said the decision was made easier by the fact that no other stores are located on that block. The other neighbor is a church, to which Ralph Lauren representatives reached out to explain the concept and discuss the impact.

The glass-enclosed tent was custom-designed and built for Ralph Lauren, even custom-colored to match the architecture of 888 Madison Ave. The audience will sit on padded bleachers. The public can peer through to catch glimpses of the show.

The nearly 50-year-old clothing and accessories brand, known for its aspirational aristocratic aesthetic, is considered part of the fabric of New York City, from its Bronx-born founder to its longtime association with the Upper East Side, where its stores have been for several years. More recently, Mr. Lauren's popular Polo Bar restaurant in midtown has become one of the city's most sought-after reservations. "There's no better runway for iconic brands like Ralph Lauren than the streets of New York City," said deputy Mayor Alicia Glen, who is expected to attend the show.



The facade of Ralph Lauren's flagship women's store on Madison Avenue and 72nd Street in New York. PHOTO: RALPH LAUREN

Ralph Lauren had traditionally held his runway shows the last Thursday morning of fashion week in an event space downtown in New York that the label transformed into a stately and elegant room. "We didn't want to do the same show," Mr. Lauren said. The location was kept under wraps to invited guests until Monday and Mr. Lauren relished the idea that recipients would be intrigued by the new venue and new time. "Isn't that exciting? It's not 'oh, I've seen that before.' The ultimate goal is stimulation."

Holding the show at the women's store seals the connection between collections and their immediate consumability. Since last week, designers have been showing their collections for clothes that will be in stores next spring, as is custom. But this week, several designers including Tom Ford, Tommy Hilfiger, Thakoon, and Rebecca Minkoff have shown collections for this fall, and made those clothes immediately available for purchase after the show—what the industry is referring to as a see-now, buy-now strategy.

Ralph Lauren plans to show a fall collection Wednesday, even though the label already held a runway show for fall in February. Mr. Lauren explained he designed two fall collections.



An artist rendering of the Ralph Lauren structure being built on Madison Avenue. PHOTO: RALPH LAUREN

The company started focusing on a see-now, buy-now show after Stefan Larsson became chief executive last November.

Mr. Larsson, a veteran of fast-fashion retailer H&M and a former global president at Gap's Old Navy, is trying to turn around the brand, which had been struggling since 2014. One of his goals was to cut production times by six months. "The world has changed," Mr. Larsson said. "The average consumer has access to the runways and all the information on a scale that they've never had. They don't want to wait six months to buy what they see."

Ralph Lauren had the support of Anna Wintour, editor in chief of Vogue, whose October issue features a handful of the looks being shown by Ralph Lauren on Wednesday. The move is significant as the industry has fretted over how fashion magazines would cover in-season runway shows.

"His idea of now making his runway collections immediately available is classic Ralph," Ms. Wintour, who is also Condé Nast's artistic director, said in an emailed statement. "It's bold and forward-thinking yet it's also very personal; connecting directly with those who matter to him the most—the people who wear his clothes." Ms. Wintour also made some phone calls and voiced Vogue's support to city officials about shutting down Madison Ave. for the show.

Write to Ray A. Smith at ray.smith@wsj.com

Copyright 2014 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com.