

BUSINESS

Who said Minnesotans don't flaunt their wealth? Nordstrom MOA adds rare luxury boutiques

A top-to-bottom remodeling took most of a year at one of the megamall's original anchors.

By John Ewoldt (<http://www.startribune.com/john-ewoldt/10644811/>) Star Tribune |

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Nordstrom Mall of America shoppers, breathe easy again.

The dust has settled, barricades are down and floor plans are back in place. The top-to-bottom remodeling of the 227,000-square-foot store is virtually completed.

And now the store — an anchor at the mall since its opening in 1992 — includes some luxury boutiques that only a few other Nordstrom stores in the country have.

Italian designer Brunello Cucinelli added separate men's and women's salons on the first and second floors. A Dior boutique joined Chanel and Gucci on the second floor.

"This is really good news for shoppers," said Beth Perro-Jarvis of the Ginger marketing firm in Minneapolis. "There aren't many department stores today delivering the level of service and merchandise as Nordstrom. The Mall of America store is a top-tier store."

The Nordstrom upgrade is a nod to serious luxury at a mall that has stumbled as of late to expand offerings for high rollers. In 2015, Mall of America announced that it would add a \$325 million project called the Collections at MOA, which it billed as "a new and vibrant high-end shopping district." That concept never got off the ground, however, and [has since been replaced with plans for a water park](http://www.startribune.com/bloomington-sets-water-park-tax-plan-in-motion/564872702/) (<http://www.startribune.com/bloomington-sets-water-park-tax-plan-in-motion/564872702/>).

With the men's Cucinelli space, Nordstrom becomes one of only a handful of retailers in the country to carry the designer's full line of offerings, including shoes and boots. A brown suede leather jacket on sale in the space is \$5,295.

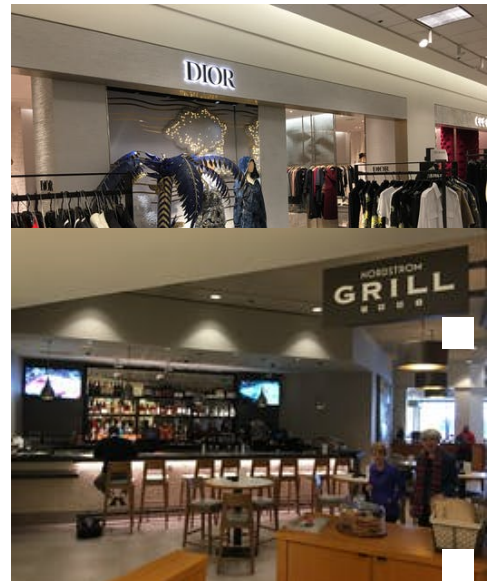
Upstairs in the new Dior boutique, a women's not-so-basic black dress retails for \$5,200. The accessories department also will add Dior and Lele Sadoughi handbags.

"It's beautiful," said shopper Jane Velani of Edina as she left the store on Thursday. "It feels more modern and clean. With the designer boutiques added, it's become more of a destination store."

One of the most noticeable overhauls is in the cosmetics department. Seven new brands have been added, including Fresh, Too Faced, Amorepacific and Byredo. The rows of glass counters that required salespeople for assistance have mostly been banished so customers can explore on their own.

But the self-service trend that Sephora started hasn't reduced staffing. Beauty stylists and concierges, as Nordstrom calls its sales staff, remain easily within reach.

The change drew a mixed review from shopper Kristine Botelho of Arden Hills. "It feels tight in here with all the counters gone, but there's more selection," she said.



The restaurant at the Nordstrom store in the Mall of America was given a new look and menu, similar to the one in its store at Ridgedale

And the customer service for which Nordstrom is famous? “It’s still insanely good,” she said as she hugged the cosmetics salesperson she had just met.

The Marketplace Cafe on third floor, now called Nordstrom Grill Restaurant & Bar, was updated to look like the restaurant that’s in Nordstrom’s smaller store at Ridgedale Center in Minnetonka. Counter ordering has been replaced with sit-down service and a new bar. The menu keeps favorites such as tomato basil soup and adds signature dishes such as halibut and chips, crab bisque soup, cilantro lime shrimp and white chocolate bread pudding.

Nordstrom did its last major remodeling of the Mall of America store in 2004, a spokesman said. Since then, individual departments have been refreshed over the years.

“Retailers can see sales increases of 2 percent to 5 percent in the year after a remodel,” said Sanford Stein, a Twin Cities-based retail trend forecaster and founder of Retail Speak on LinkedIn. “They realize that constant change is essential.”

Nordstrom opened its second full-line department store in the Twin Cities at Ridgedale in 2015. This year, the Seattle-based department store opened a highly touted flagship in New York City and a store in Norwalk, Conn. It also closed six full-line locations, more than it has in the past.

“Nordstrom is not without its challenges,” Stein said. “But they’re a survivor. They’ve maintained so much of what a department store used to be with a high level of service and quality merchandise.”

Nordstrom operates 381 stores in 40 states, including 116 full-line stores in the U.S., Canada and Puerto Rico and 249 Nordstrom Rack outlet stores.

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