

# FN

102 WOMEN'S: RETAIL FN JANUARY 22, 2007

## Behind Closed Doors

Three high-end women's shoe boutiques give exclusivity new meaning with by-appointment-only hours. << By Michelle Baran

default, become personal shoppers, searching the market for key pieces their clients will love.

The format also lends itself to special events. All three shops host private shoe sale parties and other social gatherings as part of their unique business models: selling fewer, more expensive shoes to customers with deep pocketbooks and an affinity for footwear.

### MARKY

**Owner:** Marky Bielat

**Address:** 3919 N. Lincoln Ave., Chicago

**Square footage:** 1,000

**Brands:** Alberto Zago, Antonio Berardi, Baldinini, Caliste, Lario, Magrit, Missoni, Pura Lopez and Sandro Vicari.

Marky Bielat started selling shoes three years ago — but not in a store. Her entrance into the footwear industry began with visits to Italy, where she would buy luxe women's shoes wholesale in small quantities. Then, after returning home, she sold them to friends at house parties. Bielat had so much success

that she began posting new products and information on



### LINUS LOUNGE

**Owner:** Kristen Radakovich

**Address:** 2724 Routh St., Dallas

**Square footage:** 600

**Brands:** Barbara Bui, Nicholas Kirkwood, Rupert Sanderson, Ruthie Davis and Scorch Pattullo.

To Kristen Radakovich it seemed like all the best shoes were in London. She decided to change that by opening Linus Lounge in October. "It's a lounge," she said. "If you want to come in during the evening, I'll serve you a glass of wine. It's a more personalized shopping experience."

In a sleek second-floor apartment-like space, Radakovich presents under-the-radar British brands to Dallas gals willing to pay anywhere from \$160 to \$975 for a pair of shoes they'd be hard-pressed to see on anyone else in town. Clients range in age from 35 to 70 and are a mix of professional women and housewives. But how have those women

you-go retailer, but according to Shawna Spencer-Kendall, she has hit on something big with her recent decision to close the store several days a week for appointment-only business. Now the store hours are Wednesday through Saturday, 12-7 p.m., and by appointment only Sunday through Tuesday. "You have to become creative," said Spencer-Kendall, who opened her upscale men's and women's shoe store in 2001. "I had clients telling me what they wanted, and now I'm going directly to the factory. I'm making it happen."

Alise's specializes in Italian footwear ranging from \$89 to \$675, with the occasional specialty item going as high as \$1,200. Most of Spencer-Kendall's customers find out



about her business by word of mouth, but the retailer also builds her client list by going to and hosting events. She will also organize

private events at a client's home or in a separate space, and this August she plans on doing a four-day event at the Festival of Life in London.

Going forward, Spencer-Kendall would like to continue on the track she's on, bringing in even more exclusive, luxe product and possibly going completely to the appointment-only format.

