

Alexander's: A New Image for 59th St.

By CHARLOTTE CURTIS

IF George Farkas had owned the Bloomingdale's on the corner of 59th Street and Lexington Avenue, he says he would not have allowed another department store to be built across the street.

"I'd have bought the land and built a big apartment building," the retail merchant said last week. "I wouldn't want a competitor so close."

Bloomingdale's did not acquire the land, as anyone who ventures into the neighborhood quickly learns. Mr. Farkas, chairman of Alexander's Department Stores, Inc., did.

And in a few weeks the latest of the cash-and-carry palaces that Mr. Farkas named for his father will open its doors to the public—determined to bask in the glory of what the chain's founder calls "a strong fashion image."

"High fashion," he said, cradling his chin in a cupped hand, "is merchandising by good designers here and abroad. It's originals, not copies, and expensive ready-to-wear. Sometimes, it's trend-setting things people can't afford to buy."

That settled, the Brooklyn-raised Mr. Farkas went on to say that an image was necessary to the making of money these days and that as far as he's concerned, "It's virtually impossible to create a fashion image outside Manhattan."

Not Enough High Fashion

By this, he apparently does not mean that shoppers at his six other stores (two in the Bronx, one each in Queens, White Plains, Paramus, N. J., and Milford, Conn.) are not chic. It's just that they do not buy enough high fashion.

"Not enough high fashion to pay for the trips to Paris and the imported fashions," he said, rolling his blue eyes upwards. "I know. I've lived in the suburbs. We've made a lot of progress, but we still have a long way to go. We had to come in from the suburbs."

The new Alexander's, the biggest department store to be built in Manhattan since Saks Fifth Avenue was erected in 1924, is a windowless ("Windows serve no useful purpose") \$20 million structure hung with new Hanovarian glass chandeliers ("I think people are going to want to buy them") and walled in part inside with black marble.

"When I saw that marble, I said, 'Is this what we really want, or do we need more color?' I think it's beautiful," Mr. Farkas

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said, seeming to have answered his own question.

The 63-year-old empire-builder is equally enamored of the white marble slabs that line the store's exterior, the gaudy neon pink, yellow and green plastic display decorations in some of the departments, and the antique carved-wood Spanish doors in the private executive suite he will share with his son, Alexander, the chain's president.

"My personal taste is very conservative," Mr. Farkas said. "I have my clothes made. I wear pure white in Jamaica—never a color."

Will Have Couture Copies

The quest for a fashion image Mr. Farkas intends to create "regardless of cost" includes a trip to Paris. He expects to buy from the couture houses—which is what he does for his other stores—have the clothes copied, and then sell the copies in his store.

"We'll never be the first with the copies," he said. "You can't turn them out in two weeks. But when we have them, we will have them. There won't be any waiting around for orders."

On that note, the merchant, who had been prowling around his new store, headed for one of the still immobile electric stairways, ran down a flight and disappeared into his office. He was in a hurry to get to Paris.