

fashion ledge



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Bootlegs & Bloodshed

FASHION COUNTERFEITING POSES CLEAR AND PRESENT DANGER TO THE FASHION INDUSTRY
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With bootleg items running the gamut from faux designer watches and handbags to knockoffs of clothing brands such as Sean John, fashion counterfeiting is big business in New York's Chinatown and Chelsea neighborhoods. "Money spenders" can often find counterfeits, bootlegs and knockoffs in complex "wholesale-only" operations with James-Bond-style collapsible walls that safeguard secret areas stocked with illicit merchandise. Storekeepers often claim authenticity, although in one

case, jeans retailing at \$85 in reputable department stores were being sold for \$25. Some people buy knockoffs to ship overseas to help kin make a living. Hustlers often buy bootlegs downtown and sell them throughout the city.

"People want this stuff but don't have time to go looking for deals," says Mike, a vendor who sells clothing on the streets. When asked if he tells customers that his merchandise is authentic, Mike counters, "Nobody knows what's real anymore. You'll get 20 answers telling you to look at the letters, the logo, to pay

attention to the quality of cloth or whatever. Most cats can't afford the real stuff anyway, or don't want it if they can get a replica for cheaper. I sell quality stuff at good prices; that's all people want."

The U.S. Department of Commerce estimates that counterfeiting robs American businesses of close to \$25 billion annually. Additionally, the bootlegging business is becoming more violent, in part due to its cutthroat nature, but also because many of its machinations are believed to be mob-based. On January 5, a Lebanese immigrant