

Fifi and Ally recruits top banker ahead of growth push

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FIFI and Ally, the designer retailer based in Glasgow, has underlined its growth ambitions by recruiting one of Scotland's best-known bankers to its board.

Brian Johnston, former head of corporate banking at Bank of Scotland, has become a non-executive director of Fifi and Ally ahead of a growth push which could see the firm open its first outlets in London this year.

Owned jointly by retail property expert Fiona Hamilton and her art designer cousin Alison Fielding, Fifi and Ally is a showcase for designer goods ranging from clothes to ceramics produced by niche operators across the world.

The store opened only 18 months ago, at a time when many felt the retail market had peaked. However, trading has gone well enough that directors are confident the formula pioneered in Scotland can be rolled out elsewhere.

The expansion drive will start with the opening of a wine bar and delicatessen on Wellington Street in Glasgow city centre in the summer.

Hamilton and Fielding are negotiating with agents for two sites in London and are thinking about cities like Birmingham. In the longer term the company might open as many as 10 outlets.

Johnston said he was confident there was a big opportunity for Fifi and Ally to roll out in fashion centres like London, where people were increasing spending on branded products.

He said Fifi and Ally fitted well in a portfolio of roles at fast-growing entrepreneurial businesses which he has built up since last year when he left Bank of Scotland after 34 years.

Johnston also has non-executive roles at SK Chase, which produces and sells gift vouchers online for hotels such as Gleneagles, Blackwood Distillers of Shetland and Manorlane the housebuilder.

In addition, Johnston is a consultant to the law firm Brodies and the investment bank Noble Grossart.

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