

Class Moves to a New Time and Place



HEAD OF CLASS: Class partners Jason Bates and Hanna Diös

by Andrew Asch, Retail Editor
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Class Trade Show makes its Hollywood debut.



PRE-VEGAS: LASC's Don Zuidema, left, checks out the Toddland booth with the label's owner, Todd Masters. Zuidema said he wrapped up some pre-MAGIC business at Class.

The **Class Trade Show**, the menswear and denim event held twice a year, shook things up this time.

Instead of being held at the **Santa Monica Civic Auditorium** in Santa Monica, Calif., where it had taken place since 2007, the seasoned trade show moved to the 30,000-square-foot **Siren Studios** complex, a group of buildings in Hollywood that serves as a photography studio and events space at the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Gower Street.

And instead of being held after **MAGIC Marketplace** and the other satellite trade shows in Las Vegas, Class took place on Feb. 10–11, a few days before Feb. 13, when thousands descended on the gambling mecca to take part in the country's largest apparel trade event.

The Class shakeup resulted in fewer vendors and buyers. Exhibitor participation dropped more than 50 percent, with only 73 booths being occupied, compared with 150 last year, said Jason Bates, the founder and a partner in the show. Attendance dipped to 350 buyers this season from 700 buyers last year. The declines were blamed on Class being scheduled too close to MAGIC as well as the show's new location, which had a smaller exhibition space than the Santa Monica setting. It also took place on the same weekend as the **Grammy Awards**, when many retailers count on selling goods to out-of-town visitors.

“Many people were busy in their stores and couldn’t get out,” Bates said. “But all the right people came to the show.”

Hanna Diös, a partner in the Class Trade Show, forecast attendance and vendor participation would bounce back at Class’ next show, which is scheduled for May 12–13. More exhibition space will be open at Siren Studios, and no other fashion trade shows are scheduled that week.

Better boutiques shopping the recent show included **Alpha Man** of West Hollywood, Calif.; **American Rag** in Los Angeles; **Belmont Army** of Chicago; **Bryan Lee** of Santa Barbara, Calif.; **Convert** of Berkeley, Calif.; **Fred Segal** in Los Angeles and Santa Monica; **The Industry** of Seattle; **Jay Wolf** of West Hollywood; **LASC**, also of West Hollywood; **Lost & Found** of Los Angeles; and **Universal Gear** of New York.

Don Zuidema, co-owner of LASC, preferred the new location because it was a 10-minute drive from his store. Because he wrote some orders at Class, he was able to lessen his MAGIC workload, he said. However, he felt there were not many new looks at the show. “People are still playing it a little safe,” Zuidema said. “They’re focusing on what was strong in the last season and developing it.” If a certain style of jeans sold well in the last season, labels are making that silhouette of jeans but in a new style, such as a chino pant, he said.

Dale Rhodes of surf line **O’Quinn** of Huntington Beach, Calif., said he opened six new accounts at the show. “It was solid boutique business. You need these boutiques for visibility,” he said.

Rhodes said the new Class location was an improvement over the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium because there was better lighting. Instead of one big concert-hall floor, the show was spaced out in different rooms, inviting retailers to fully explore each environment.

The quality of retailer also impressed Todd Masters, founder of Newport Beach, Calif.–based label **Toddland**, which sells many of its styles at **Urban Outfitters**. “Everyone here was worth selling,” he said. “There was no riffraff at the show, crappy accounts or people who want to knock off your line.”

However, he preferred the larger Santa Monica space because he thought retailers were more comfortable with traveling around a concert-hall floor rather than wandering the separate floors of a photography studio.

Many vendors, such as Sheila Hill, found Class to be a crucial dress rehearsal for the Las Vegas trade shows. “It was about hanging the collection and seeing what we would look like before **Project**,” said Hill, president of **Launch USA International**, which represents lines such as **Sfizio** and **Beatrice B**.

While Class focuses on menswear and denim, contemporary womenswear lines debuted at the show. Taking a bow was Los Angeles–based **GG Collective**, which was designed by Beatrice Guapo, formerly of contemporary line **Fluxus**, another Los Angeles–based line. She said women’s fashions were not an afterthought at the show. “We still had the same exposure and support compared to men’s,” Guapo said.

For the Class show in May, management might be working with the City of Los Angeles to help organize the next **Fashion’s Night Out**, which typically takes place in September. The city is thinking about taking a booth to register retailers interested in participating in the event, Bates said.