



Class Trade Show Catches Post-Las Vegas Business

by Andrew Asch, Retail Editor

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For Jason Bates, the most lucrative business takes place at the last minute.

It's the reason why he schedules **Class Trade Show** shortly after high-profile industry events such as the **Project Global Trade Show**. "This is prime time," said Bates, show director and chief executive of the biannual Class. "Buyers are waiting later and later to order. They're hoping to find out what's trending during the season."

Business was reported to be good at menswear-focused Class, which is now in its third year and was held at the **Santa Monica Civic Auditorium** in Santa Monica, Calif., Feb. 27–28.

The show's scheduling was an issue for some retailers and vendors.

The sold-out show fell just after the Project Global Trade Show, which was held

Feb. 16–18 in Las Vegas, and **Coterie**, which was held Feb. 21–23 in New York—and a few weeks before the March 19–23 **Los Angeles Fashion Market**.



AFTER THE SHOW: Class show director Jason Bates was interviewed after the show closed.

Premium-denim brand **Agave** reported doing good business, according to Kraig Kalinich, southwest sales manager for Agave. “[Some retailers] are trying to figure out the purpose of the show,” Kalinich said. “But when they are here, they love it.”

The show’s timing mystified Fred Levine, co-owner of Agoura Hills, Calif.–based boutique chain **M.Fredric**. “Scheduling is awful! It’s right after **MAGIC** and **Coterie**!” Levine wrote in an e-mail. But, he added, the show is convenient for Southern California retailers, who can leisurely review brands. “I miss a lot at Project just because of the sheer volume of exhibitors that show.” At Class, he placed orders for French footwear label **Palladium**.

For David Jaskey, founder of retailer **Incognito** of Royal Oak, Mich, trade show dates are unimportant. “I’m scouting at trade shows. I follow up with sales reps in their showrooms, where there are no distractions and total focus,” he said. However, at Class, Jaskey did write orders for **MG Black Label**, **Original Penguin** and **Kill City**.

Sold-out show

Booth space at Class was sold out, with 40 percent of the show’s 150 booths sold 30 days before the show. The show offered a new emphasis in premium denim, thanks to Johnny Pinto, a brand-relations executive with a specialty in denim who joined the Class team in January.

Leading jeans labels **Earnest Sewn**, **Paige Premium Denim**, **J Brand**, **Rock & Republic**, **Hudson** and Agave exhibited at the show for the first time. Contemporary brands **Ever** and Original Penguin as well as novelty lines **Toddland** and **RVCA X Cobrasnake** also ran booths at Class.

Bates reported 1,200 people visited the show and 700 of those attending were retailers. Among them were some of California’s leading specialty boutiques, including **American Rag**, **Fred Segal Santa Monica**, **M.Fredric** and **Traffic**.

Also shopping the show were boutiques from outside the Golden State, including Seattle boutiques **Blackbird** and Kuhlman; **Lizard Lounge** of Portland, Ore.; **Hub** in Scottsdale, Ariz.; **Akira** in Chicago; and **Pitkin County Dry Goods** in Aspen, Colo.

The show's business was good, said Chris Josol, a vendor.

"We saw clients we did not see at **Agenda** or **MAGIC**, and they were all the right buyers," said Josol, managing partner of the Los Angeles-based **722 Figueroa** showroom, which represented their brands **SLVDR**, **Huffer**, **Keep** and **Ateliers Arthur** at the show. It was 722 Figueroa's third time selling at Class. Josol estimated that his sales increased slightly compared with the February 2009 show.

One fashion label, **Christy's Hats**, estimated sales climbed 30 percent from their show at Class last February. New York-based **The Avalon Group** represents U.K. brand **Fred Perry** and exhibited at Class for the first time. Avalon President Jon D. Kalupa said business was very good. "The quality of orders exceeded my expectations. People were more willing to buy across a range of product," Kalupa said.

Setting the scene

Class is intended to be a market for premium shops, and Bates served a hip forum to do business. The event's Saturday-night party featured a performance by **Edward Sharpe and The Magnetic Zeros**, a band that will play top rock festivals **Coachella** and **Bonnaroo** this year. Food was served by **Gram and Papa's**, a popular restaurant in downtown Los Angeles.

Class also is a place for experimentation. At the next show, which is scheduled to run Aug. 31–Sept. 1., Bates will devote a section of his menswear show to swimwear, which will specifically offer 30 different women's designer bikini labels.