

Class Reports Steady Buying, Relaxed Atmosphere

By Andrew Asch
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The **Class** trade show earned some high grades from retailers when it made a crucial change in schedule.

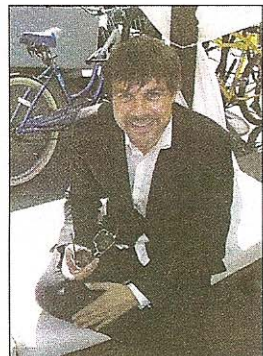
The Santa Monica, Calif.-based contemporary and designer show was held Aug. 19-20 at the **Santa Monica Civic Auditorium**. It opened a few days before a slew of giant Las Vegas trade events, including the **Project Global Trade Show** and the **MAGIC Marketplace**.

When **Class** debuted last March, it was scheduled a couple of weeks after **MAGIC** and **Project** wrapped up their February shows. Most retailers had already spent much of their budgets for Spring and Summer collections at those trade events.

The new schedule made a big difference in buying for **Randy Brewer**, general manager for the influential **Villains** boutiques in San Francisco. "This time, it was before **Project**, and there was a lot to do," **Brewer** said. He estimated that he wrote orders for more than 20 brands at **Class**. He also said he would continue to shop for his three San Francisco stores at **Project**. **Class** primarily focuses on menswear, but it also devotes some space to women's fashions, footwear, beauty and homewares.

The show might have also been called "School's Out for Summer." With recreational activities offered such as surf lessons, bowling and spa treat-

ments, **Class** emphasized a relaxed atmosphere. More than 750 retailers dropped by the event, according to **Jason Bates**, the show's chief executive. Buyers shopping the show included representatives from Los Angeles boutiques **Lisa Kline**, **Traffic**, **Planet Blue** and **Fred Segal**. Other **Class** attendees included representatives from the **Bill Hallman Boutique** in Atlanta; **Blake** of Portland, Ore.; **Chrome** of Oklahoma City, Okla.; and national retailers **Nordstrom**, **Dillard's** and **Macy's**.



EARLY BIRD: Jason Bates, chief executive officer of the **Class** trade show, produced the contemporary and designer show a few days before the **MAGIC Marketplace**.

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There were 106 vendors at the show, compared with 79 at the March show, **Bates** said. He also owns the 6-year-old **Derilicte Showroom** in the **Cooper Design Space** in downtown Los Angeles. His showroom works with many of the retailers that attended the event, but **Bates** said there was no conflict of interest in staging the trade show. "They don't have to do the show," **Bates** said of the buyers. "They choose to come here."

Vendors reported being

pleased by the easygoing pace of the trade show. "It was small but important," said **Anna Kenney**, a designer of Los Angeles-based surf fashion brand **Hot Tuna**. She primarily showed her label's Spring 2009 women's fashions "This is a good show to find retailers who don't go to [surf/skate/swim trade show **Action Sports Retailer Trade Expo** in San Diego] and who do not want to go to Vegas."

For **Eric Jennings**, brand director of New York-based menswear brand **Hickey**, **Class** offered a less-hecktic pace that allowed for more in-depth meetings with West Coast boutiques.

Vendors exhibiting included established brands such as surf- and skate-inspired labels **RVCA** of Costa Mesa, Calif.; **Ever**, based in Los Angeles; and **Quiksilver Ltd.** There also was U.K.-based suit and contemporary brand **Ted Baker** and knits label **Vince**. Other exhibitors were new contemporary label **District 81-3**, up-and-coming Long

Beach, Calif.-based menswear label **Matte Black** and Japanese jeans label **Kunna**.

Mark Mothersbaugh of pioneering new wave rock band **Devo** also exhibited at the show. He was selling his new product—rugs featuring his artwork, which would be familiar to any **Devo** fan. **Villains'** **Brewer** said he purchased some of the rugs for his stores.

Class seems to have come at the right time for retailers looking for alternatives to increasing travel costs, said **Michael Paradise**, co-owner of denim store **The Stronghold**, located in Los Angeles' Venice neighborhood. "Regional shows and regional markets will become more important," **Paradise** said.

The next **Class** show is scheduled for Feb. 2-3, 2009, **Bates** said. It will be held again at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium, and it will expand all the show's categories, including women's and bath and beauty products. ■