

Class Trade Show Debuts in L.A.

BY ANDREW HARMON
Mar. 10, 2008

SANTA MONICA, Calif. — In an attempt to inject competition into the established West Coast trade show scene, Los Angeles showroom impresario Jason Bates last week debuted Class, a show that spanned contemporary sportswear, organic lines and fashion streetwear.

With 115 exhibitors—less than what the show had originally predicted—Class' eco-friendly fall 2008 show was scheduled two weeks prior to the L.A. Fashion Market Fall '08 show. A second installment is planned for Aug. 18 to 20, five days before Project Las Vegas.

The timing is no accident. Bates, who owns the Derelict showroom in downtown L.A., told DNR he conceived Class in part as an alternative to shows located downtown and in Las Vegas, where hotel room rates during major conventions have risen dramatically over the past few years. His previous trade show experience includes Coconuts & Bananas in Honolulu, which launched in 2004. Several major brands that exhibit at Bates' Hawaii show were in attendance, including Triple Five Soul and Original Penguin.

"Living in Venice, and driving past this space for years, I realized that this is where we should do a show," Bates said of Class's home at Santa Monica Civic Auditorium. "It's a convenient location and it's right by the beach." Bates said he intends to grow the show, but doesn't aspire to the mammoth proportions of his Vegas counterparts.

Many sought-after buyers attending Class were flown in on the show's dime. Others came mainly from the surrounding area and included Lisa Kline and buyers from Fred Segal. "Attendance was okay. All the people we flew in were very pleased, though foot traffic was mediocre," Bates said.

Exhibitors interviewed agreed that buyers were scarce, though most said they were pleased with overall business, given the infancy of the show.

Men's wear dominated at Class, with a mix of homegrown sportswear lines like Apolis Activism, retro T-shirt lines like MVP and fashion power brands, both incipient (WeSC) and well-established (Diesel).

Preppy attire and military-inspired garb were staples and materialized into single garments from brands like Five Four, which showed its second season of wool outerwear cross-pollinated with both M-65 and varsity jacket details (retail is \$240). Variations on a shirt placket were also in heavy rotation: Arnold Zimberg featured strips of soft velvet down its casual button-fronts, while Orthodox used a double placket on a shirt to give its wearer two fit options: slim or slouchy.

In its third season, Orange County-based Idol Radec departed a notch from its golfwear roots with a broader sportswear collection suited for a blue-blooded, Ivy League campus. Co-designer Nick Thomas said the brand sought out finer fabrics for a "country club couture" look for fall, which included a \$350 plaid vest in English wool, skinny ties in vintage fabrics, and a \$525 shrunken blazer in fine cotton twill with satin lining and brass nautical buttons. The expanded line also introduced a high-collar, double-breasted peacoat and a cotton twill pant with darts placed at the knees for a slimmer leg.

New premium T-shirt lines included Friend Or Foe, created by Eric Sorensen, a former men's designer at Modern Amusement. The collection features creative use of water-staining and other distressing techniques on classic album imagery from Chet Baker, Isaac Hayes and Miles Davis.

Operations, an outerwear-centered line with its own Soho boutique, showed heavy peacoats, double-breasted vests and vintage-inspired workwear pieces with surprising color pops. A \$645 hunting jacket made of brushed Italian cotton featured a blinding shade of hunter's orange peeking through the pockets, and narrow leather trim on the cuffs, lapels and hemline. A wool jacket based on a vintage 1940s shooting blazer from Spain was also a standout. "All of these pieces were originally designed for a specific job or task," said Operations cofounder Michael Leen. "So we always respect the original blueprints of the jackets."

Linda Loudermilk impressed with her latest collection of sustainable (and expensive) garments, made from fabrics like bamboo fiber, hemp and mud-dyed cotton that approximates the look of leather. Seacell, a soft fiber derived from seaweed, was used effectively for a long-sleeved shirt with a raised argyle pattern. The high point of the line was a \$900 hemp/satin navy blazer with a faint shine and tone-on-tone, diagonal stitch patterns traversing the lapels.



EMAIL THIS ARTICLE

PRINT THIS ARTICLE

Sign up for the DNR
Newsletter:

Enter your e-mail

SIGN UP