

'Class' Trade Show to Debut in L.A.

Jason Bates and Keith Cokes organize upscale trade show set to bow in Santa Monica next spring

BY DAVID LIPKE

NEW YORK — A new trade show targeting designer, contemporary and premium denim brands and buyers is slated to debut in Los Angeles next spring. Called Class, the dual-gender show will be staged at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium—once home to the Academy Awards—from March 1-3.

Class is being organized by Jason Bates, owner of the L.A.-based showroom Derelict, and Keith Cokes, a sales veteran of Ted Baker. The duo also have two unnamed, silent partners who are providing financial backing for the venture.

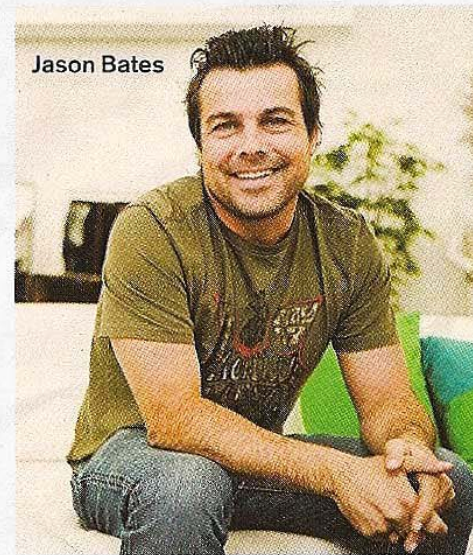
"We think there is a demand for a well-orchestrated trade show in Los Angeles, with the right level of sophistication for designer brands and trendy streetwear labels," said Bates. "There hasn't been a trade show like this in L.A. since MAGIC left years ago. Going to Las Vegas is a huge expense for a lot of people, so we want to create something local—

right here in Santa Monica, which is the birthplace of the surging contemporary designer fashion movement."

The Class debut comes as the West Coast Exclusive, also staged in L.A., is in flux, following its purchase by Business Journals Inc. That company has not decided whether or not to continue with the L.A. edition or focus its resources on the much larger Exclusive show in Las Vegas, according to Larry Hymes, sales director for both shows.

Bates is aiming for 200 to 300 brands for Class, and he pledges to never go over that number. "We want to curate a high-end show with integrity," he explained, rattling off a list of vendors that have expressed at least preliminary interest in participating in the first show. These include John Varvatos, Corpus, Bureau, Generra, Fred Perry, Ever, Original Penguin, William Rast, Hudson Clothing, Avalon Group, Namaste Showroom, Atlas Group and MK Sportswear.

Building a successful trade show



from scratch is a tall order, but Bates and Cokes have extensive contacts in the industry. Also, Bates already runs a small existing trade show, called Coconuts and Bananas, in Honolulu that targets Hawaiian retailers. That show, which debuted in 2004, will next be held Nov. 15-16, with about 30 brands, including Triple Five Soul, WeSC, Fred Perry, Goorin headwear and Ambiguous Clothing.

Prior to opening Derelict—which reps Bread Denim, Orthodox, WeSC, Initium Eyewear, J. Fold wallets, Revolve T-shirts, and True Love and False Idols—Bates worked for a party planning and event production company that organized movie premieres for blockbusters like *The English Patient*. "Event planning is in my blood," he noted.

An eight-by-10-foot booth at Class will cost \$4,000 for the first show next spring, and Bates expects to raise prices by \$500 each successive season.

In order to help drum up buyers for the debut, Class will cover the travel expenses of 100 top retailers—who will be chosen in consultation with the show's vendors.

While Class is likely to attract a fair number of California brands, Bates and Cokes are aiming to make the show as international in scope as possible, and are flying to Scandinavia, Brazil, Japan and Australia to personally recruit participants.