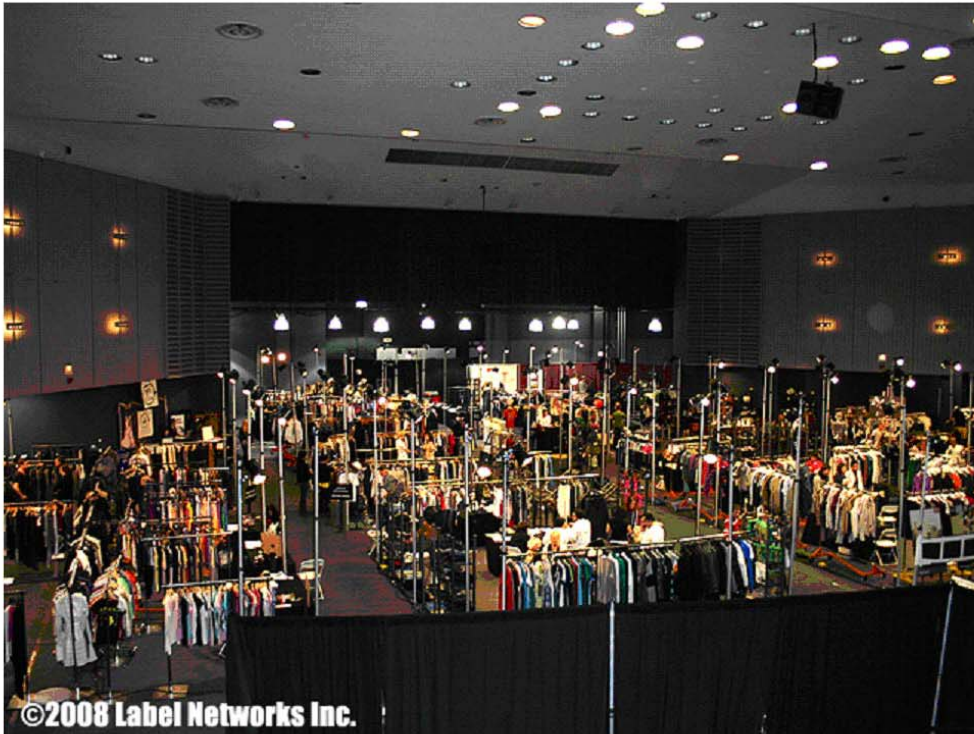




FASHION

Class Trade Show Debut Attracts Top Denim, Contemporary, Street Couture Labels + Buyers in a Unique "Green" Showcase that's Bringing Back the "Trade Show" to Los Angeles—Label Networks Review

By Kathleen Gaspérini
Photos by Tom Wallace



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Class Trade Show had an excellent debut March 1-3 in the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium with top brands in denim and contemporary fashion such as **Nudie Jeans, Earnest Sewn, WeSC, Ted Baker, Timberland Boot Company, Fred Perry, Triple 5 Soul, Edun, and Evisu** showcasing their collections and attracting buyers from American Rag, Nordstrom's, Macy's, Fred Segal, Kitson, Next, among many others. The brainchild of Jason Bates, the director of the showroom Derelict, one of the first in the Cooper Building in downtown LA, took the concept of bringing back the trade show to LA and made it happen, thanks to hard work and 2 private investors.



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"It took us at least 3 years to make this happen," explained Jason Bates in an exclusive interview with Label Networks TV. "People are tired of going to MAGIC and spending so much money on booth spaces, travel, and it's difficult to get work done in many of the large-scale trade fairs. MAGIC started in Los Angeles—we should bring back the trade show to this city with something that's fresh. We had ideas for creating a revitalizing and inspiring experience."

Many people we talked to at MAGIC in Vegas a week before Class said the same thing. That the timing was right for a trade show back in Los Angeles. In addition, many top trends in denim, contemporary, and street fashion are coming from the City of Angeles—which is why so many brands tend to venture to LA right after Vegas—as well as follow-up on orders taken from top retailers and emerging boutiques in the city.

What was unique about Class, other than their intimate environment and attention to details with sand, rock, and cactus installations, and plenty of interesting seating areas which were conducive for writing orders and getting business done, was that it had a seriously green initiative. Outside tents were powered by Green Power Generators, carpeting was made of 38% recycled fibers, signage which was incredibly cool and interesting made from reused signs; and on site, for \$9.76 a person, you could re-tract your carbon footprint through the non-profit True Offsets created by Rock 'n Renew Foundation. The food was organic packed in eco-friendly packaging; they served organic varieties of saki and mojitas; staff T-shirts were from recycled Coke bottles sponsored by Re-Volve, WeSC, and RetroSport; filter water stations by I Love My H₂O were everywhere; and 3,000 organic bananas were donated by Dole. To top it off, the show was in walking distance of the main hotels the Viceroy and Sheraton, and the beach. And at the Viceroy, buyers and brands could sign up for free spa treatments by Exhale, mindbodyspa.

While the first morning was a bit slow, the afternoon picked up on the first day and into the second. As Robert Rosenthal, the buyer for street fashion and contemporary for Next stores out of Cleveland explained, "This show is easier to work than MAGIC. I find myself simply shaking hands and making the necessary meet and greets at MAGIC whereas here, it's contained and I can shop it well and get work done. But then walk back to my hotel without waiting for a cab and get a free spa."

If one had to compare, Class featured more upscale street fashion than say, the South Hall at MAGIC, and was closer to a smaller version of Project (or Bread & Butter) than anything else. To have Evisu as the first booth you see when walking in was a signal that this was going to be a cool show, but not too elusive with a mix of brands such as Steele across the way with their plaid shirts and full wool zip coats for young men. Diesel shoes showcased, along with the launch of Timberland Boot Company and their premium footwear collection which gained high marks for classic and contemporary designs. Edun from Ireland and New York was on hand featuring their fair trade collection, as well as eco-friendly T-shirt brand Re-Volve, and the women's eco-friendly collection Linda Loudermilk.

One of our favorite areas was in an off-shoot section that featured brands such as Idol Radec and their excellent collection of jackets, fitted suits, and an amazing new flannel "Thurston" shirt in red lumberjack plaid and a peacock of heavy dak wool. Nudie jeans was also located in this area with their full collection of denim as well as a new brand that featured white bikes called Soss. The creator of Soss also makes wool skinny ties and page boy caps, which created an interesting fashion installation in the middle of the area. Exhibitors and buyers were also free to ride several of the Soss white bikes around the show.

Evening events included an opening night blowing mixer at nearby lanes, and a Heal the Bay benefit dinner on the next night—all within walking distance from the trade show, hotels, and beach.

Overall, as Jason described, "I'm hoping that Class will become a forum that both exhibitors and buyers will look forward to attending." In many ways, this show could be the next direction of trade shows, moving back to locations where inspiration started and in an atmosphere that's natural, relaxed, and yet quite classy. With Class trade show dates for August scheduled a few days before MAGIC, Class will most likely attract buyers and brands to their show at the very least, as a preview, before heading to the madness of the Vegas trade shows—and perhaps eventually, making the trip to Vegas less necessary.



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