

SHOWTIME /TRADE SHOW REPORTS



Class

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A LAID-BACK VIBE MAKES FOR ANOTHER FINE CLASS

Now in its fourth season, the *class* trade show, which ends its two-day run at the Santa Monica Civic Auditorium today, continues to grow without sacrificing its hipster charm or relaxed ambiance. This time around, *Class* creator Jason Bates strategically planned his show to run directly before the Las Vegas trade-show mayhem next week. This placement helped Bates attract even more international traffic in addition to the show's already loyal national buying power and department store regulars. The gathering of hip young labels and established gems has grown a full 10%, with nearly 110 exhibitors, and picked up a larger selection of footwear, bags and bath and beauty labels along the way.

Fjallraven backpacks, which are handed out upon entering the show, are a Swedish staple that outsells every other worldwide brand of rucksack. Started in the 1950s for school children whose knackered, sore backs needed a rest, the brand's Kanken style is now worn by a full 90% of Swedes.

Aside from the many international brands at *Class*, the mood is typically Southern Californian. For instance, the Original Penguin team, in addition to showing its spring 2010 display of suiting, cool swim trunks, vintage-inspired cotton linen shirts, lightweight hoodies and brand new selva denim, set up a small miniature golf course complete with a box of prizes. The four-hole course sits next to a ping-pong table and cheerful display of colorful, oversized beanbag-shaped puffs at the show's Fatboy lounge.

Toddland resurrected its photo op area. Last time around, buyers and press could pose with a burro. This season, it was a waverunner with a backdrop of a waterskiing, leather clad gang "chasing" from behind. Meanwhile, the label shared its infectious designs with glow-in-the-dark fanny packs, coveted burger or French fry wallets, pink squirrel spare buttons and unicorn belts. Every item comes complete with cheeky notes and old holiday photos with just the right sized pinch of sarcasm.

Newcomer Textile Junkies showed its linen, rayon tees, scarves

and vests that painted a unique silhouette that's feminine and tight in the right spots while remaining roomy and comfortable.

Affliction, which will be launching its men's line at Project, previewed a collection of gel print, embroidered and coated fabrics at Class. Spine ribbed leather jackets and double layered, subtle shadows play off its shirts, the graphic element adding to the label's contemporary line launch.

Oregon's Defyance performance fabrics and design has got wet weather down with what it calls "Happy Hour Style" knits and pima cotton/polyester blend hoodies that wick away moisture.

True to Los Angeles, there were a lot of tee shirt displays at Class but nearly every one had something unique to offer. Palmer Cash showcased artist-based designs such as flowers and elephants while retro brand Lightening Bolt brings back its faded, '70s graphic tees and vintage trunks and adds skinny cords, rompers and darling womenswear tops to the mix. Gypsy tanks and tees are embellished with oversized, floppy breast pockets. And Global Ghetto continues its work with six different anti-bacterial bamboo fabrics. Its soft yoga clothing and hooded sweaters melt into the body.

Lacoste footwear, in its Class debut, showed colorful striped sneakers, leather boating shoes and children's styles while Fred Perry displayed a bag selection alongside its consistently tasty shirt and sweater collection.

Pour La Victoire and little sister label Kelsi Dagger have a large choice of affordable, yet trendy wedges, laser-cut buttery sandals and flats with slightly elevated heels, which they believe will soon knock the gladiator style off its throne. L.A.M.B. footwear, Converse by John Varvatos and Donald J. Pliner rounded out the must-see shoe collections at the show.

Rock-n'-roll brand Freedman launched its Ben Harper-inspired menswear with retro guitar strap jacquard ribbon adornments on Western-style buttoned shirts. Formerly a custom only house, the line's first stab at ready-to-wear includes denim, plaids and corduroy.

Though a large percentage of the exhibitors at Class will go on to show in Vegas, many of them feel the LA market is not to be missed. Feral Childe, for instance, says its silk mesh layered prints and cute zipped hoodies get a better showing in Los Angeles where buyers are more relaxed, noshing from the passing snack carts and visiting the Osea Spa treatment area.

Indeed, the mood at Class is a welcome diversion, a world away from the stress and hassle of other trade shows.

—*Rebecca Paiement*