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TRADE SHOW REPORT

Immediates, Items and Price Drive L.A. Market

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Buyers are still placing orders closer to season, still considering prices carefully and still looking for the perfect items that will prompt consumers to spend. That was the word from the March 14-17 run of **Los Angeles Fashion Market**.

Retailers trekked between the many showroom buildings and temporary trade shows, including the **California Market Center**, **The New Mart**, the **Cooper Design Space**, the **Gerry Building**, the **Lady Liberty Building**, the **Academy Awards Building**, the **Primrose Building**, the **824 Building**, **Designers and Agents**, **Select**, **Focus**, **Transit** and the **L.A. Kids' Show**.

Market opened against a backdrop of grim international headlines, including the devastating earthquake in Japan and ongoing fighting in Libya and Bahrain. And while the U.S. economy is showing signs of recovery from the Great Recession, the road to recovery is proving to be a slow one. A jam-packed trade-show calendar and shifting market dates added to the challenges for showroom owners and reps heading into the Fall '11 market, typically one of the largest of the year.

Overall, most said they were satisfied with their results—some pleasantly so.

One Beverly Hills retailer summed up the current business climate:

"It is not perfect, [but] it is a better atmosphere," said Yasmine Farmanara of the **Avedon** boutique.

Timing is everything at CMC

Many showroom owners in the California Market Center reported good sales for the Fall 2011 Los Angeles Fashion Market.



Anna Catherine



Designers and Agents



Robert Rodriguez

CMC spokesperson Audrey Okulick said retailer traffic increased, but she declined to state by how much. "March is known to be one of our busier markets," she said.

Retailers reported to be shopping were majors **Bloomingdale's**, **Macy's** and **Nordstrom**; specialty stores **Kitson**, **Metropark** and **Betina Duncan at Fred Segal**; the **Wendy Foster** boutique in Santa Barbara, Calif.; e-commerce retailers **HauteLook** and **Revolve**; Canadian retailer **Libertine**; and Japanese retailers **Johns**, **Kai Lani** and **Kenex**.

Success at the market seemed to depend on timing. Peter Jacobson's **Creative Concepts** showroom handles European brands. The deadline to order his brands is late March. "It is now or never; most lines cut off in the next few days," he said.

Jacobson had not tallied up the market's sales. However, he believed this market would

be distinguished by quality, not quantity. "It feels like there were less people around, but orders were much bigger than average," Jacobson said.

For Michael Gae of the **Rep et Trois** showroom, the market's timing was entirely off. Most retailers are buying close to the season, so they are not interested in ordering Fall merchandise when they are still ordering for Spring. Many retailers also spent a good chunk of their budgets at the **MAGIC Marketplace**, which wrapped up a month beforehand. Gae said his sales were down 20 percent compared with the 2010 March market.

Jason Bates' **Derelict Showroom** reported a good market. Derelict is located in the CMC's Area 4, a new wing devoted to contemporary fashions and menswear, as well as streetwear and lifestyle. The wing debuted in October

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The Lady and the Sailor



Focus Apparel & Accessories Show



Select

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2010. “I think we are getting momentum on the floor. We got a lot of traffic,” Bates said.

If business was mixed for CMC showrooms, it also was mixed for their retail clients.

Avedon’s Farmanara said business is improving. “It is still sluggish,” she said. “Compared to 2009 and 2010, everything is going up; people are more positive.”

For **Greta**, another Beverly Hills boutique, the economy has improved, but Iris Riewer and Victoria Natkin-Goodman of the boutique thought the economy was still too turbulent. “We’re much more careful with what we buy,” Riewer said.

Business brisk at The New Mart

Exhibitors at The New Mart reported a brisk market that felt a little busier than previous markets. Strong traffic on Monday and Tuesday kept hallways and showrooms in the key contemporary showroom building busy with domestic and international retailers.

Megan Darling, vice president of sales at **Nanette Lepore**, said traffic was comparable to previous markets. Fall buys were the focus, Darling said, but she added that retailers were also looking to fill in with Immediate goods. Knits with open weaves and lightweight knit coats were winners for Nanette Lepore for Fall, as were blouses cut from silks in berry hues. “Buyers have been carefully optimistic,” she said.

Andy Drakeford, co-owner of the **88 Orange** and **Pulp by 88 Orange** brands, rented space in the **Mother** showroom in The New Mart and reported buyers who were less fixated on price, even though prices on some of her Fall 2011 offerings went up to accommodate skyrocketing cotton prices.

Quality driving buys at Cooper

Mona Sangkala, the Cooper building’s lease-

ing manager, said she was pleased with the weekday dates and that the building enjoyed an uptick in traffic over the same market last year. Buyers from **Saks**, **HauteLook**, **Wendy Foster**, **Stacey Todd**, **Dungarees**, **Traffic**, **Ron Herman**, **Intermix**, **Scoop**, **Neiman Marcus**, **Gilt Group**, **Amazon** and **Zappos** shopped the Cooper and The New Mart.

Price consciousness lingered but proved to be less of a hurdle than in past seasons, some exhibitors noted.

At **The News** showroom, buyers focused on quality. “If there’s a feeling of quality and specialness, then they’ll buy it. But it’s not like they’re just throwing money around,” said Jennifer Smith, a sales rep.

Anna Catherine, a new contemporary brand that debuted its showroom at the Cooper building during market, is counting on budget-minded buyers to grow its business. Trend-right pieces in fabrications of silk, leather, wool, alpaca and cotton are kept below \$200 wholesale, with many falling between \$30 and \$75. “Buyers are surprised by our price points,” said Linnie Huynh, the brand’s sales rep.

Marco Lebel, vice president of sales at **Robert Rodriguez**, a division of **The Jones Group**, reported a brisk market with buyers shopping pre-Fall and Fall collections. Clear winners were a trench coat cut from glove leather, tweed jackets embellished with faux fur and printed asymmetrical dresses. Kick-pleated, mid-length skirts and sheer blouses dripping in origami-like folds also earned orders.

“The trends have moved back to femininity, colors, texture and prints—exactly what Robert does well,” Lebel said, but he added that trends aren’t driving the brand’s success. “We worked hard to make this a strong market for us and to get buyers here. You can’t depend on walk-in traffic.”

D&A’s eclectic mix

The Designers and Agents trade show, held on The New Mart’s third floor, returned for Fall 2011 with an eclectic mix of brands. California brands including **The Lady & The Sailor**, **Fluxus**, **Calleen Cordero** and **Genetic Denim** shared space with **Gary Graham**, **Lauren Moffatt** and **Paul & Joe Sister**. International brands were also represented, with **Cecilia Prado** making its West Coast debut of its Brazilian cotton knitwear, wholesaling for \$100 to \$300. **Braez**, a Netherlands-based brand, showed jackets trimmed in shearling plus flowing silk tunics for \$113 to \$500.

D&A exhibitors reported steady traffic during the Monday-through-Wednesday run of a show traditionally held over a weekend. “We really like [the weekday dates]; they make sense,” said Ed Mandelbaum, co-founder of Designers and Agents. “We think retailers feel the same way.” In addition to domestic buyers from across the country, international buyers shopped the show, Mandelbaum said. Buyers from Japanese and Italian retailers were well-represented.

Buyers looked at Fall offerings but also showed high interest in Immediate, exhibitors said. That worked out great for **Beryll**, a Santa Monica, Calif.-based maker of leather jackets, T-shirts, handbags, eyewear and jewelry. “Our business model is 80 percent Immediate and 20 percent pre-orders,” said Petra Berg, Beryll’s co-owner.

At **The Lady & The Sailor**, a 2-year-old collection of knit tops and bottoms headquartered in Los Angeles, buyers cherry-picked the line, opting for items from a foundation collection of year-round offerings and select items from the Fall collection. “Buyers either want [product] really early or really far out,” said Brittany Correy, owner of **The Lady & The Sailor**, which also maintains a storefront in Beverly Hills.

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Trends at D&A ran the gamut from cool minimalism and color-blocking to ubiquitous Native American, heritage Americana and '70s glam. Fur popped up on everything from handbags to scarves, vests and slim jackets.

Gerry Building buzzing

A certain buzz permeated the Gerry Building, whose many showrooms were empty until there was a wave of occupancy early this year.

One of the newcomers was **Salt & Pepper Sales**, which moved over from the California Market Center with its line of better, updated womenswear labels including **Samuel Dong**, **Georgina Estefaria** and **Karen Klein**. Buyers were coming in and out of the showroom in a steady stream. "The market has been really good for us. We opened up some great doors," said Emmalena Bland, one of the showroom owners.

Bea Gorman, the other showroom owner, noted that retailers were being cautious in their spending and buying only what was allocated by their budgets. They were also placing orders closer to the season with deliveries for 4/30.

Down the hall, **Komarov**, a 15-year-old Los Angeles womenswear label, was also busy. "I have to say, in all the years I have been doing this, it has been incredible that everyone is buying and keeping their appointments," said Grace Castillo, the showroom sales manager.

She, too, noticed that buyers were very interested in **Immediates**, with delivery dates as early as 3/30. "I think everyone was so scared about buying that now they are out of things," she said. "It hasn't been a struggle to convince people to come into the showroom."

Buyers weren't as price resistant as she had expected, even though Komarov developed some nicely priced knits to appeal to retailers. But they weren't balking at higher prices if an item was different or exciting, such as paying \$145 wholesale for a bouclé jacket with an asymmetrical hem and zippered pockets. Komarov's wholesale prices range from \$49 to \$249.

At the **Neetu Malik Showroom**, also new to the Gerry Building, sales were brisk for its

six lines of better, updated womenswear. "It has been a great market," said Neetu Malik, the showroom's owner. She also noted that buyers were on the hunt for something new and different, which made them less cautious with their budgets. "I've seen little price resistance in the last two or three days," she said.

Order writing at the Lady Liberty

The high ceilings, well-worn hardwood floors and abundant light in this 1914 building have helped to attract a number of showrooms searching for large, loft-like spaces and an artsy feel.

During market, the showrooms had a lively mix of buyers serious about leaving paper. At **The Globe** showroom, which carries 23 temporary womenswear lines, the buyer traffic was nonstop, said Karen Spaulding, a sales executive at the showroom.

She thought traffic was helped by changes in the Los Angeles Fashion Market Week dates to Monday through Thursday instead of from Friday to Tuesday. Also, the Designers and Agents show at The New Mart started on a Monday instead of a Friday, bringing more buyers to the area at one time. "We also hit the ground running since we returned from showing in New York and were pounding the phones to make appointments," she said.

Buyers were still cautious but willing to bust out of their conservative mode if they saw something exciting and different. "If it is a beautiful piece, they will go high. But if it is a great item at a great price point, they are all over it," Spaulding said.

At **The Penthouse** showroom, Trey Alligood said buyers weren't as concerned about price as in the past. "Two years ago, it was 'Price point, price point, price point. I need lower price



Penelope & Coco

points," he said. Now, "people are spending more money if it is quality."

Good foot traffic, appointments at 824

Traffic picked up on the second day of market at the 824 Building, located a few doors north of the Ninth and Los Angeles street intersection.

"Yesterday and today have been good," said Emilie Cooke, one of four owners of **Room4-Agency**, a multiline showroom carrying men's and women's contemporary lines, including **Kanvis**, **Bren**, **Zak**, **Jacob Holston**, **Juma**, **Falling Whistles**; accessories line **Plush**; and shoe brand **Penelope & Coco**.

Cooke and business partners Jeannie Lawlor, Tiffany Troncin and Yves Spinelli opened Room4Agency in January, making this the showroom's first market in the building.

Cooke reported seeing buyers from **Tobi**, **Revolve** and **Shopbop**—"all the good ones," she said.

Also debuting at market was the AMH Showroom, owned by Andy Hori. The showroom carries a mix of casual-lifestyle brands, including **Beachlife by Rex**, **Hollywood and Vain**, **Liber**, **Urban Behavior** and **Kane and Unke**.

"There was a lot of foot traffic—which surprised me—and all of my appointments showed up," Hori said.

In addition to Room4 and AMH, the building is home to the **Sjobeck** corporate showroom, longtime tenant **T&A Showroom** and the **Connected Showroom**, which moved from the **Cooper Design Space**. (Accessories line **Old Stud** also operated its design studio in the building.)

Hori said he looked at several showroom buildings but settled on the 824 when he heard Connected had moved in.

"The Connected showroom anchored it," he said. "We have competing lines, but at the end of the day, everyone under this room is trying to make a name for the building." The showrooms in the building joined forces to put together a reception desk in the lobby where buyers could get a list of 824 showrooms and lines and drop off a business card. ●



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