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NEWS

TRADE SHOW REPORT

Immediates Gain Ground at L.A. Fashion Market

By Andrew Asch and Erin Barajas

The first **Los Angeles Fashion Market** of 2011 brought slow but solid business that gave showroom owners hope that this will be a good year for sales.

This early fashion market, which ran Jan. 17-20, always falls right before February's **MAGIC Marketplace** in Las Vegas. That means many store buyers hold back in January and travel to Nevada to see the latest collections. But there were enough buyers perusing the showrooms at the **California Market Center**, **Cooper Design Space**, **Gerry Building**, **Lady Liberty** building and **The New Mart** to keep people happy.

Four satellite shows also took place. The CMC debuted **Select**, a new contemporary trade show that ran at the Fashion Theater in the CMC's main lobby. In the CMC's 13th-floor Penthouse, **Focus**, for new and emerging labels, and **Transit**, for shoes, were held. **Designers and Agents**, a boutique trade show for contemporary brands, took up its usual space at The New Mart.

Several big-name retailers stopped by the CMC. Those included **Fred Segal**; **Kitson**; **Nordstrom**; **Marshall Retail Group**, which builds boutiques for casinos; **Dillard's**; **Zappos**; **Macy's**; **Polkadots & Moonbeams**; and **Weathervane for Men**, as well as international retailers such as **Magpie** of Tokyo.

That helped CMC showroom owners such as Michael Gae, co-owner of the **Rep Et Trois** showroom, who forecast his business would be "fair."

Almost every retailer he encountered was interested in making orders for "Immediate" deliveries. "It was slow. Traffic was light," Gae said. "But business was positive."

Liza Stewart, owner of the **Liza Stewart** showroom at the CMC, said much of the January show's business is from Southern California boutique buyers, who treat it as a regional show.

Stewart forecast her showroom sales would climb 35 percent compared with one year ago.

Boutiques that visited included **Pierre La Fond** and **A Tropical Affair**, both located in Santa Barbara, Calif. Also shopping were **RevolveClothing**, an e-commerce emporium headquartered in Cerritos, Calif., and **Want** of Toronto.

Cautious consumers

Despite a holiday season of solid sales, many retailers and consumers were not willing to take chances in their purchases. Retailer Fred Levine said Southern California's balmy January weather was giving his seven **M.Fredric** stores, based in Agoura Hills, Calif., a boost in business. "But I'm not comfortable in taking risks yet. The consumer is still very nervous," he said. But he sees flared and bell-bottom jeans being strong for spring.

Diane Merrick, owner of the **Diane Merrick** boutique in Los Angeles, said her market buys hovered around items that continue to be popular at her store: cashmere sweaters and jeans.

She believes the January market is slow because retailers have invested already in Spring fashions. And they are also holding on to their dollars until the Feb. 13-16 run of the **MAGIC Marketplace** and its satellite shows, such as **Project**. "Everybody was waiting for Project. I'm saving my dollars," she said.

More Focus

The CMC produced the **Focus** trade show with 37 new and emerging brands exhibiting.

The January event marked the fourth time Los Angeles label **Ximena Valero** exhibited. Traffic seemed light, Ximena Valero, the label's designer and co-owner, said. "It's a slow show, but bigger buyers come. So it's worth it," she



SELECT DEBUT: Carol Ai of fashion label Ai for Ai said business was good at the debut Select trade show.

noted.

Focus also drew new exhibitors such as **50 Dresses**, based in Los Angeles, and veteran labels such as **Levante USA**, a Brooklyn, N.Y.-based sock and legwear company. Cassandra Aaron, a San Francisco account executive for the label, agreed that traffic was light at **Focus**.

Also at CMC was the new **Select** trade show, which opened to positive reviews. The CMC produced the contemporary fashion and accessories event in the building's Fashion Theater after **ENK International** in November said it would close its **Brighte Cos.** show, a contemporary fashion and accessories event.

The first **Select** show had 30 lines exhibiting, according to the CMC. That made it smaller than **Brighte**, said Mark Schulman, vice president of sales for New York-based line **Zoa**.

He had exhibited **Zoa** at all of the **Brightes**. "It's pretty much the same traffic," he said. However, he noted there seemed to be a more diverse group of boutiques shopping **Select**.

The co-owners of Los Angeles label **Ai for Ai** said they opened new accounts at **Select**. "First day was slow. Second day was great. I'm happy with the turnout," Carol Ai said.

"It would have been nice if there had been more people, but with this economy, we had no expectations," said her sister and business partner, Elizabeth Ai.

The New Mart

Christian Wicks, president of the Los Angeles-based **Defiance USA** label, said the January market traditionally is a challenge but

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there's always a sale to be made. "January is a tough month," he said. "[Retailers] are sold out, though. They need new product."

He forecast sales for Defiance USA's showroom would increase 20 percent over last January, when his company only had a temporary showroom at The New Mart for its labels, including **English Laundry**, **Fender** and **DaVinci of California**.

He credited the increase in business to Defiance USA opening a permanent showroom in The New Mart in November. The showroom's first official market was the January market.

An improving economy also allowed retailers to breathe a little easier. "Before, they were tiptoeing around. They did not know which way the market was going to move," Wicks said.

Over at the **Hudson** showroom, the premium-denim label found about 30 percent of retailers were requesting **Immediates**, said Ricky Chan, Hudson's men's West Coast salesperson. But he said it was tougher to get some **Immediates**. "We're keeping a slim inventory. That's why we're asking [retailers] to make orders now. If they just take notes, there's no guaranteeing that they are going to get their orders," Chan said.

Cooper Design Space

Immediates were a priority for many buyers shopping at the Cooper Design Space even though showrooms were offering Summer, pre-Fall and even a few Fall collections.

Mona Sangkala, the building's leasing director, reported positive traffic for the building, but showrooms weren't expecting much from the January fashion market. "So, even though we had appointments, everyone who walked through the door was a welcome surprise," said Nicole Wolensky of the **Standard Showroom**. "It was a better market than last market."

Diana Romero-Oh, an account executive with **Halston**, said buyers reported a strong holiday and came to market looking for fun, colorful pieces rather than the safer items they'd been leaning toward in the past.

Lefties Showroom co-owner Ellen Cope greeted buyers with a cast of new brands, including **Ani Lee**, a new contemporary line featuring vintage prints for Fall. Buyers, however, gravitated toward Summer buys, focusing on well-priced gauzy cotton gowns and brightly colored caftans. "The holidays were pretty good, but January is always tough," Cope said. "There's a lull, and I think they're being affected by it."

One bright spot: Online retailers, judging by the frequency of their reorders, are doing well, Cope said.

Drea Patino of the **Addison + Crescent** showroom said traffic was light, with some of the local biggies stopping by, such as **Ron Herman** and **Nordstrom**. "But others—like **Intermix**, **Shopbop** and **Saks**—didn't come out for this market," Patino said.



FOCUS BIZ: At Focus trade show, Colleen Noud, pictured left, takes retailers Heather Smith and Dennis Radford of Canadian store The Yellow Door through the Ximena Valero collection.



DEFIANT ONE: Christian Wicks, president of Defiance USA, said most retailers were looking for **Immediate** orders during the show. His showroom is in The New Mart.



IN THE BAG: Ethnic bags were a hit for **JP & Mattie** at D&A.

It is to be expected. "Most brands don't have anything new for this market—and for us, what is new will still be here for the March market," she said.

Lady Liberty and Gerry

The Gerry Building boasted a groundswell of new showrooms this market, with 11 new show-

rooms opening in time to greet buyers.

Emmalena Bland, owner of **Salt & Pepper Sales**, said appointments and walk-ins made for a successful market. Bland, who represents seven women's brands and showed **Immediates** through Fall, said it wasn't just local buyers who shopped the show. "I have someone here right now from Massachusetts, for example," she said.

On the top of buyers' shopping lists were "exciting" pieces, Bland reported. "They're looking for something different, something a little more interesting. They're stepping away from safe. It's a good sign."

Miriam Ojeda of the **Miriam Ojeda Showroom** agreed. "Buyers want more fun now. They're seeing that even if something is expensive, if the quality is there, shoppers will pay the price," she said.

Showrooms at the Lady Liberty building reported a light market. Still, there was plenty of newness to be found.

The **Park** showroom debuted a new women-only showroom and a handful of new lines, including **PB1930**, a denim collection, and **Fairground**, an Australian brand that is making its way stateside.

The **Penthouse Showroom** showed **Madison Park Collective**, a new line of novelty and vintage-inspired premium denim for men and women.

"This isn't a basics line," said Trey Alligood, co-owner of the collection and the showroom. Wholesaling for \$67 to \$113, the collection began delivering men's goods in October. The women's collection will launch next month.

Designers and Agents

A concise show of 29 brands, the **Designers and Agents** show at The New Mart was quiet but optimistic. Mary Ann Piazza, the show's production manager, said attendance at D&A was on par with the same show last year. "This is an interim market, and not many designers have Summer collections. With the Fall season just around the corner, brands are busy [preparing for that]," she said.

Lori Jacobs, whose eponymous showroom represents the **Ever** women's brand across the country, said the show didn't disappoint. "It's not busy, but it is a good show. We made appointments, and we picked up a few new accounts," she said. The line, which showed Summer and pre-Fall collections, earned buys with loose cotton knits, shorts and rompers. Most buyers at the show weren't quite ready for Fall but responded well to a capsule of pre-Fall pleated skirts in varying lengths.

JP & Mattie, a longtime D&A exhibitor, reported a good show, with its ethnic, textile-heavy handbags landing at the top of its best-sellers list.

Other exhibitors at the boutique trade show included **Habitual**, **Fluxus**, **Genetic Denim**, **Alpinestars** by **Denise Focil** and **Letarte**. ●