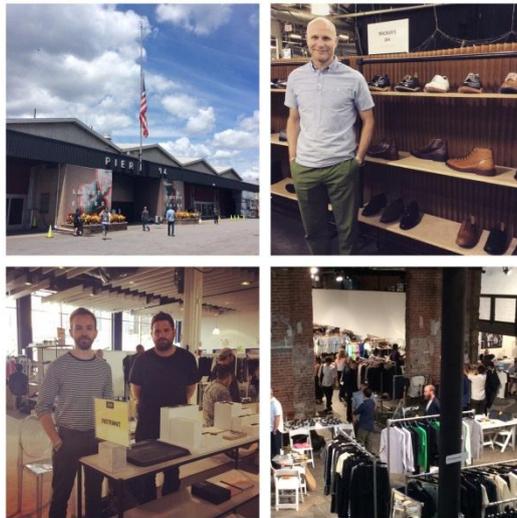




**New York Men's Fashion Week & Market Week
10-19 July 2016**



Men's Fashion Week in New York is a loose term covering a number of shows which take place in New York, organised by separate and competing companies. For the third time, it also included a series of catwalk shows under the banner of 'New York Men's Fashion Week'. This new Men's Fashion Week was partly inspired by the growth of the UK's London Collections: Men. However, long before this, July has always been the time when national and international brands have converged in New York to sell. For most of this time, MRket (originally created by MR Magazine) and Project were the main trade shows. Between them they effectively set what the industry has come to recognise as the 'New York Men's Market Week' in January and July. Traditionally, this week is three weeks before the Las Vegas Men's Market week.

As New York's menswear scene has developed, a number of new organisers have entered the market including: Capsule (based in the USA but owned by Reed Exhibitions in the UK), Project (owned by UBM, new owners of the MRket show and MR Magazine), MAN (organised by MAN Paris) and the newest addition Liberty. The Designer's Collective show created by ENK Productions many years back was effectively taken over by Project when the menswear shows shifted some years ago.

Like the womenswear equivalents later in the season, these shows are not linked to the catwalk or runway programme. Whilst the shows primarily target the affluent US and Canadian markets - there are no similar events in Canada - there is also a sizeable and growing Japanese buyer interest in the shows, especially at Man, Capsule and Liberty and even some UK retailers now travel to the shows.

This edition of New York Fashion Week and Market Week were marked by two important changes. Firstly, the surprise acquisition by UBM (a large UK show organiser) of the MRket show, bringing it into the same family as Project. MRket and Project have been bitter rivals for the hearts and minds of buyers and exhibitors. The bringing together of these two shows creates the potential for new synergies for New York Men's Market Week. Secondly, following the perception last season that some buyers were interested in the new earlier New York Fashion Week dateline, Liberty, Capsule and Man decided to change their dates to run a week earlier than usual, from 10th to 12th of July. This left MRket and Project on their usual 17th to 19th July dateline. In the run up to the shows, there was much debate on the logic of the move. According to the CFDA, the New York Men's Fashion Week visitor base is made up of only 14% buyers. This would tend to support MRket's and Project's assertion that the serious US buyers would be in town for the main Market Week. Either way, the splitting of the dates would have an important impact on all the shows and the exhibitors wondered whether the change of dates would benefit any or none of the shows.

Overall, all of the shows felt quieter than usual in terms of footfall. Whilst local and international independent buyers and press and those attracted by the catwalk shows did visit the exhibitions between 10th and 12th July, the larger US-wide heavy hitters largely did not. Some said they would attend the Las Vegas shows (which are all on the same dates) but the vast majority of the larger stores visited MRket and Project in New York, also visiting some of the showrooms in town. For the larger store groups, the second week is still the venue of choice and almost all of them were seen at the shows and at the MR Magazine Awards on 18th July – one of the most important dates in the menswear calendar.

MRKET

MRket is the mainstream menswear show, launched by the owners of MR Magazine in an attempt to bring the industry together under one roof. With the sale of the show and the magazine to UBM in 2016, the show now comes under the same ownership as Project, uniting the Javits Center menswear offer with a common entrance policy. In New York, MRket is by far the larger of the two shows but in Las Vegas Project is the larger of the two shows.

MRket is home to the largest concentration of UK mainstream and classic brands including: Edward Green, Drake's, Barbour, Tateossian, Crombie, the Oxford Shirt Company, Codis Maya, Alan Paine and Penrose. This season, supported and encouraged by UKFT, the organisers created a very popular and well located British group. At the same time there was also a very well located and, as always, very heavily funded Italian section at the show.

Jim McHenry of US menswear agency The Bird Dog Group, a huge supporter of UK brands at the show reported that the show had been extremely positive, saying "We've been busy!".

Harry Flynn representing Alan Paine reported: "Brisk business with our lighter pieces of knitwear and polos. Our woven shirts are doing particularly well in the US market at the moment".

Hamish Lauder of The Oxford Shirt Company also had a good show, commenting: “We have seen good quality buyers here. The buyers have come onto the stand and have written”.

Second-timers Banvard and James were also pleased, stating: “We are very happy. We have opened a number of new accounts here. We always knew that we would have to invest for a few seasons but we have had a huge increase on last January and will be back again next season!”

Huw Griffith-Jones representing Fox Umbrellas also said: “The layout of the show is considerably improved. The show is more open and looks fresher and the location of the British group is much better”.

Hilary Freeman of British footwear brand Edward Green said: “We were really pleased with the fair and the timing of MRket is good: all of the buyers we wanted to see were back from Europe and we saw several in their offices prior to as well as after the fair. We were also delighted with the new British group location. The new juxtaposition of MRket and Project was very successful with buyers, who can now walk freely between the shows”.

PROJECT

Project is a contemporary menswear show alongside MRket at the Javits Center. It has a good number of progressive UK brands including John Smedley, Private White VC, Hardy Amies, Lavenham, Derek Rose, Sanders and Troubadour Goods. The show also benefits from a common entrance policy with MRket. There are a lot of larger brands here, including French Connection and Ted Baker, as there are at Liberty, but the smaller collections also feel at home.

Abel Samet of Troubadour Goods said: "Troubadour has written a lot of new and existing accounts at Project. This is an important market for us and the US market is picking up for us”.

MAN

Based in Chelsea, this is a small but well curated show organised by MAN Paris. Brands include YMC, Kestin Hare, Several, The Garbstore, North Sea Clothing, Universal Works, Les Basics and Folk and a number of European and US brands. The brands featured are all carefully selected designer casualwear brands with an emphasis on quality products and design, rather than large brands. Of the earlier shows, MAN probably benefitted from the early dates more than Capsule and Project. Its unique appeal to experimental buyers from Japan and even the UK seemed to have helped.

Kestin Hare said: "New York was really good for us, as the strong dollar compared with the weak the pound has given us a competitive edge. We now offer great product at a good price and it is all manufactured in the UK - just what export buyers want."

He continued: "As the UK prepares for Brexit, it is essential that the UK government prioritise training in manufacturing. As a country we need to invest in education and skills and make it cool to work in manufacturing again."

CAPSULE

Capsule is one of the newer generation of New York shows. It is organised by a US company now owned by UK exhibition organiser Reed, although it remains completely autonomous.

Capsule NY, as in Europe, has a broadly based contemporary and casual selection of brands with Peir Wu, a group of designers from Tomorrow Ltd (Christopher Raeburn, Markus Lupfer and UTCOO) and Maharishi. There has been some to-ing and fro-ing of brands between Capsule and Liberty, who remain on friendly terms and agreed the new dates and location between them, but the jewel in the crown is very much the high end Tomorrow Ltd group. Whilst footfall was down overall, there were some interesting buyers at the show but the US heavy-hitters were thought not to have visited.

Ross Baynham of Instrmnt commented: We found Capsule Paris and New York very useful as we always do – New York in particular this time around. We caught up with a number of current buyers and also met quite a few stores we had our eye on and who are now placing orders. Networking in general was strong - not just with buyers but with other brands who we may work with in future”.

LIBERTY

Liberty is still the new kid on the block. It remains an interesting juxtaposition of denim and heritage brands, including the UK's Grenfell and Anglo Union but is also has a number of UK and international designers curated by UK-based agency Toubia (including Phoebe English, Dent de Man and Quilp). As with Capsule, many of the mainstream heavy-hitters were not thought to have visited but those who did make it to the show were good quality and looking for interesting new products. There were a number of buyers from Japan and Korea.

Nick Cook of Boardies said: “Overall the show was positive as we saw a number of independent stores that placed immediate orders at the show. The US market represents a big opportunity for Boardies and we expect to be back next year”.

John Preston of Anglo Union was less positive: “We were very disappointed with the number of visitors to the show. In January we had the problem of the heavy snowfall but this time the footfall was not much better”.

However, Mark Boswell at Indian Motorcyle was more positive: “This was our first Liberty show launching the Indian Motorcycle 1901 brand. While the traffic did seem light, particularly on the Sunday and Tuesday, we received a very good response from the buyers we had made appointments with and there was also passing traffic. It was an encouraging first step. We would of course have liked to have seen higher levels of footfall but we are confident we can reach additional buyers at the Las Vegas event in August”.

Overall Footfall and Business

Whilst the organisers of the New York shows do not publish attendance figures and are fiercely competitive, the general feeling from UK and other exhibitors was that the shows had suffered as a result of the decision to split the show dates. MAN suffered less than most as it is less dependent on larger US stores, with the exception of Barneys.

There are some important trends in the market which are worth referencing. There was much talk in New York about the increasingly casual trend in menswear and the effect of this on the formal men's suit and tie business. Indeed, MR Magazine quoted a piece in the NY Times during the show suggesting the death of the tie. Whilst this was not borne out by the experience of some of the UK exhibitors, who pointed out that they had done good business at the shows, it was obvious that the Italian suit manufacturers were suffering and that interest had switched from ties to pocket squares, scarves and other accessories. Whilst this could be a temporary phenomenon, many commentators pointed to a fundamental shift in the menswear market, away from formalwear to more casual collections. This is an important shift as the formal and preppy looks have always driven the US menswear retail.

At the same time, the US market is going through challenging times. As always in a Presidential Election year, consumers have been delaying major purchases and there is growing concern about the domestic and global outlook, made worse by the terrorist attacks in Paris and Nice and, indeed, the market's response to Brexit. Many US department stores and independents are said to be in great difficulty. Interestingly, many have been comparatively slow to use online as a way of making up shortfalls in Bricks and Mortar sales. Rather than looking for new products, enhanced consumer experiences and other channels to reach new customers, many stores are playing the price game until they know how the world will look in 2017. Experience tells us that immediately after the Presidential elections there should be a mini-boom but this could be put on hold if the world outlook does not improve.

A number of US buyers were reported for the first time to be requesting flexibility to pay their bills in sterling with some even offering to pay early. The reason for this, as UKFT had predicted, was to mitigate the risk of currency fluctuation and take advantage of the weakness of the British pound following the Brexit. Unlike in Europe, there is a growing feeling that Brexit might potentially be good for Britain with some suggesting that a closer working arrangement between the English-speaking countries of the world could be a good thing. This could be facilitated by delays in the CETA FTA between Canada and the EU with some already suggesting that there might be potential for a post-Brexit FTA between the UK and the US.

Paul Alger of UKFT said: "Following the UK's Brexit vote, it is more important than ever that UK companies invest time and energy in the US market. UKFT believes that 2017 should be a good year for UK exporters to the USA and is pressing the UK government to do more to support us in this market."

For information on exhibiting at the New York shows and to enquire about grants available, email paul.alger@ukft.org.