



UKFT Report

Who's Next Paris including Première Classe

8-11 September 2017

Who's Next Paris, which includes the first edition of the acclaimed accessories exhibition Première Classe, is the main international commercial womenswear and accessories trade show. It also features a number of unisex, homeware and gift collections, as well as some menswear lines. The show is divided into sections ("univers" in French), each with their own focus and appeal, from Private and Studio for tailored essentials, through Trendy with contemporary collections and Urban for denim and streetwear, going to main Première Classe accessories area, which also houses fashion solution related businesses and ending with Fame, which is intended as a designer space catering for more boutique, directional brands, albeit with a commercial price point. Taking place in late January and early September every year, this show is often referred to as the 'first edition' to distinguish it from the Paris Women's Designer Fashion Week shows (PFW), which are effectively the 'second edition'.

Whilst the new September dates (previously the show used to take place in July) are generally more popular with mainstream RTW companies, the September Who's Next and Première Classe are now little more than three weeks apart from Paris Women's Fashion Week and the main second edition of Première Classe and Paris sur Mode. Most international buyers cannot travel to Paris twice in three weeks, so inevitably they choose: the commercial collections tend to sell in early September but the higher-priced Designer collections usually do better during PFW. The situation is further complicated, however, by the fact that some Designers are obliged to commit to the first edition of Première Classe in the hope of securing space at the later edition. This practice is alien to UK exhibitors - it is technically illegal in the UK - and continues to be the subject of much discussion. It is also worth mentioning many of the designer womenswear collections, which traditionally showed at Who's Next also now look to the earlier "Pre-Collections" shows and showrooms, alongside Paris Men's Fashion Week in mid-January and June. The market demographic of Who's Next and its buyer behaviour is changing and there is a lot more tradeshow and showroom competition in the market.

In September, the proximity of the two shows poses a real challenge to all involved especially the buyers and the brands. As the wholesale market shrinks and repositions itself, the organisers will need to revisit the dates and concepts for future editions. The challenge for Paris as a city and Who's Next as a show is how to adapt this hugely important event, reinforcing the commercial first edition and making the second edition more appealing to buyers. The current positioning of both shows may serve the organisers well commercially but the offer as a whole needs to adapt and keep up. UKFT remains committed to supporting the show organisers as they implement the changes and it is evident that the show planners

have made a number of positive changes within the show, including layout and flow which have met with general satisfaction from buyers and most of the exhibitors.

One way in which the organisers are catering to changes in the industry, as well as customer behaviour, is the creation of a new 'Eco' area by the main entrance of the show, in collaboration with the sustainability-focused festival We Love Green. Selected eco conscious brands can sell their products directly to the consumers, or on a cash and carry basis and whilst it currently features predominantly French businesses, we are following this initiative with interest especially as UKFT has been lobbying for the reintroduction of an ethical fashion section or train in the show for many years.

The UK Group

The UK was well represented at the show with 60 brands exhibiting. 15 of the brands were supported with Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP) grants from the Department of International Trade, organised by UKFT. The group was spread evenly across RTW, jewellery and accessories including scarves, bags as well as footwear. The recruitment of the group was conducted by UKFT in close collaboration with the show organisers and their UK agent. UKFT as always remained deeply involved in the process, answering queries from the brands, DIT (Department for International Trade) and show organisers as well as assisting with and facilitating last minute changes (to stand positioning, collections selections etc.)

Buyer Traffic and Trends:

The organisers' official post-event release paints an optimistic picture, highlighting an increase in visitor numbers, this year's totalling 42,122, a +10.1% rise compared to the previous September edition. This result is particularly positive as the previous edition has seen numbers drop by 7%. Furthermore the organisers reported an increase of 28% in the number of visitors spending two and more days at the show, which they attribute to the improvement in the offer (including selection of participating brands) and better services for the buyers.

The show remains very much dominated by the domestic market with 65% of all visitors coming from France but there an increase in the international presence, which had fallen to as low as 30% in previous years. UKFT very much hopes that the show will be able to reach 40% international visitors in the near future. Italy remains in the lead, after France, followed by Spain, Belgium, Japan and the UK. Some of the UK brands reported that they had seen an increase in major US stores.

For the first time UKFT opted not to take up a stand, choosing instead to focus its energies on spending more time supporting and visiting exhibitors and distributing UKFT's promotional material including a list of all UK exhibitors with their websites to buyers and press. UKFT had also circulated these details to major US and Japanese stores including Ships Tokyo, Galeries Lafayette Paris and Beijing, ASOS and Barneys Japan and to Lambert & Associates and Mint Paris.

The RTW and accessories sections seemed equally busy throughout. Some of the regular exhibitors, especially some of the more commercial brands such as Star Mela, Anouk/Grewal and Charli London enjoyed particular success, with constant and orders.

Emin and Paul, who have always found the show great for sales, had their most successful show to date. Jumper 1234 reported great interest from the Asian markets, with orders confirmed both during and after the show, and increased interest from local buyers. Emily and Fin, who have exhibited previously, were delighted to secure an order from a major Parisian department store. Most of the newcomers made new contacts and some received initial orders despite having been previously unknown to the buyers.

As always the buyers were looking for great, competitively priced fashion and accessories, however it was also evident that buyers were looking closely for a story behind the brands they selected and that CSR and environmental issues are coming to the fore.

In Première Classe, the commercial jewellers were particularly busy. Métier by Tom Foolery said they had secured good business, especially as this was their very first show. Big Metal once again reported a fairly successful show and would be looking to return next season. Estella Bartlett saw regular customers as well as retailers they had been trying to see for a while.

The jewellery designers were also fairly upbeat. Little Rotters had had a great response. Melissa McArthur was visited by a major Japanese retailer but said that not all their regular buyers had been onto the stand. Newgate Watches was one of the busiest stands with a constant flow of visitors.

There were many scarf collections at the show. Carrie Elizabeth was disappointed with traffic at the show but most were generally satisfied with their experience. Newcomer Bianca Elgar made a number of valuable contacts with a few good orders. Pranella and Kapre reported steady traffic translating to sales, however they also pointed out that they had to be very wary of visitors secretly taking pictures of their merchandise which usually means that they may want to replicate the designs.

Exhibitor comments

Janan Leo of Cocorose London

“I felt Premiere Classe this season had taken a step in the right direction. For a good few years now, I felt that it lacked its vibrancy and energy. This season, I felt the climate has changed and there was a buzz and a feeling of excitement. The brands doing well had a very clear product offer and identity so buyers were almost able to categorise and justify their buying. I definitely saw a bounce back of customers from the South East Asian markets. Overall, I felt that the show has regained some of its 'joie de vivre', with more optimism from both visiting buyers and exhibitors.”

Hamad Khilji of D & X London

“We were pleased with our first time exhibiting at Premiere Classe Who's Next in Paris. As a new brand to the show, we got a good reaction and picked up a number of international customers. A number from Europe but also South Africa & the USA”.

Matt Rowley of Jayley Collection

“We had a successful show at Who's Next Paris, increasing on our results from last September. We achieved this through a mixture of returning customers, and opening a

number of new accounts. As always, the show attracted customers from all over Europe, as well as a noticeable number of American clients.”

James Lakeland of James Lakeland

“Who’s Next is still one of the most exciting dates in the fashion calendar as Paris is always key in fashion trends and newness. The show is 4 days long but would benefit from being shorter. Ideally two days, maximum three. This would concentrate footfall, make it busier and create a much needed buzz. This year we saw new clients from Spain, the Netherlands and the USA. There needs to be a more exciting offer for stores, online businesses and department stores to attend. Who’s Next in Paris has to re - create this buzz where everyone gets excited and can’t wait to attend.”

Charlie of Industrial Jewellery

“The atmosphere is great, especially with the outside space including food vendors and music. We had a good range of clients visiting from Europe and further afield although we did expect more clients from Asia. The range of exhibitors was of a high standard and a really eclectic mix of styles. In spite of a difficult set up, overall we really enjoyed the show and will be back next year.”

Bianca Elgar of Bianca Elgar

“We have enjoyed taking part in both Premiere Classe shows, at Who’s Next and in the Tuileries this season, both shows are beautifully curated and attended by quality international buyers with a taste for "something different". Although we didn't get the footfall we'd hoped for at either edition, visitors understood and reacted to our collection in a way they have not in the UK – especially in the second edition.”

For information about exhibiting in Paris, contact paul.alger@ukft.org