

Pitti Uomo June 2018 Report

UKFT took another record-breaking 107 British menswear, footwear and accessories brands to Pitti Uomo in Florence, the world's most important international menswear trade fair. UK designer Craig Green was this year's guest designer, underlining the importance of British designers and brands to the international calendar and Pitti Uomo

Whilst there was a drop in Italian visitors this year, in line with UKFT's expectations, the international presence was again up season on season with 19,100 buyers and over 30,000 visitors. There was a strong international presence (+/- 8,400 international buyers) which was especially important for the UK brands.

Germany continued to lead the international buyer ranking and there were notable increases from the United States (+23%), the United Kingdom (+6%), the Netherlands (+13%), France (+7%) and Canada (+12%), with consistent growth also from younger markets like Hong Kong (+45%) and India (+30%). Disappointingly there was a slight drop in numbers from Japan, Spain, China and Switzerland. The top 20 countries in terms of attendance were: Germany (922 buyers), Japan (757), United Kingdom (539), Spain (529), Netherlands (490), France (389), China (372), United States (340), Turkey (293), Switzerland (268), South Korea (236), Belgium (231), Austria (167), Portugal (167), Russia (166), Greece (146), Sweden (122), Denmark (121), Hong Kong (101) and Poland (97).

The Italian presence was down by at least 2.5%, partially reflecting the seismic changes affecting the Italian market, with the Italian mood being downbeat and many Italian visitors looking for their "next opportunity." Italian agents remained despondent and even those which might be willing to consider new UK brands were nervous about the uncertainties of Brexit affecting stability of supply and pricing. Other markets too are not immune to the negativity in the market as trading conditions are exceedingly tough but the better buyers continue to meet their regular suppliers and research new brands.

At this edition of Pitti Uomo, Social Media was very much at the fore, again reflecting the shift from printed to online media. The show generated more than 35,000 posts and 7 million interactions and comments. Instagram generated 97% of the interactions; the most popular hashtag was #PittiUomo with 29,000 mentions (*Data source: Launchmetrics*). UKFT's own #britsinflorence was popular with some of the younger UK exhibitors. UKFT was pleased to meet David Gray of the Grey Fox Blog who visited a large number of the UK stands and attended the DIT China Networking Reception whilst, at the same time working with luxury accessories brand Ettinger, in the Piano Attico.

There were a number of interesting new features at the Fortezza da Basso, such as the new I GO OUT (another inspired piece of *Itlish*) section for outdoor style, featuring UK brands Christopher Raeburn and Griffin. The new design and layout of OPEN was also very well received and featured UK brands Twisk Shoes and Simpson London. Most parts of the show were well attended, especially on the second and third days of the show.

UKFT had a stand in Salone M in the basement of the central pavilion, built by www.bobblehat.co where we were visited by buyers, exhibitors, press and other contacts. We were especially pleased to see a number of Italian and Japanese agents and some familiar Japanese department stores. UKFT's #britsinflorence exhibitor list and press material were on the stand and in the Press Office and there was a videoloop of images shown on the stand which can also be seen at www.ukft.org

DIT China hosted a reception for the British exhibitors and Chinese buyers on the first evening of the show. Bigger and better than the first reception last year, the majority of the British brands attended and more and more of them have adopted the DIT China WeChat app. Another event is planned in January 2019.

In spite of the challenges of Brexit, overall, the British exhibitors were pleased with the show. Most of the exhibitors were there to meet and sell to the big internationals, especially Japan, the USA, Germany, South Korea, Scandinavia, Russia, the Middle East and China. The market is challenging and some of the exhibitors noticed that buyers were more reluctant than usual to place orders there and then. Whilst US and Canadian buyers were generally more upbeat than at the previous edition, the Japanese and Chinese were being much more cautious. The South Koreans were positive. Russian and CIS buyers were said to be generally quietly confident whilst in Europe there was a mixed reaction: Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands were generally upbeat whilst Italian retailers were very definitely showing signs of stress. Turkish buyers as well as those from Greece and Israel were very much in evidence but the Middle Eastern buyers remain cautious. EU buyers were asking for reassurance of stable price and supply from UK brands but most brands had followed UKFT's advice and given this issue thought in advance.

The organisers' preoccupation with the (probably underreported) downturn in the Italian turnout is understandable, but Pitti Uomo ceased to be primarily about the Italian market over 10 years ago. British companies still have good Italian agents and business and there are some worldclass stores in Italy (most of which also pay their bills!) but it is the high quality international audience and business which keeps the Brits coming back.

The following comments were made by some of the UK brands:

Tommy Pau Han Lin of 1x1 Studio (showing for the first time with support from UKFT and a grant from DIT):

“We were very impressed by Pitti Uomo as first-time exhibitors. There was so much traffic and we received positive feedback on our SS19 collection. The show is curated like a theme park so it’s really exciting to walk around and see the world of international menswear in one place!”

Allon Zloof of Tom Smarte (UKFT member and regular exhibitor in the Pop Up stores section of the Central Pavilion):

“Pitti Uomo proved, as usual, to be a very important show for Tom Smarte. We met all our key customers from around the world, although there were fewer new customers. We had more US buyers visiting us than ever before, confirming that this should continue to be an increasingly important market for our products.”

Maurice Greig of Hardy & Parsons (returning exhibitor in the Pop Up stores area):

Pitti Uomo was very good for us. We saw the same number of visitors as previous editions but took more orders with new customers, particularly from the US. Pitti Uomo is definitely the best international tradeshow for our brand!”

Bill Leach of John Smedley (regular exhibitor in l’Altro Uomo and UKFT member) said: This was another good Pitti Uomo for John Smedley. After a slow start, days two and three were much better attended and we were exceptionally busy on the stand. Overall, sales were similar to that which we achieved in SS18 but the key difference for us this season was a marked increase in Prestige buyers. We saw the great and the good from across Europe, Japan, the US and Canada. On the down side however, Scandinavian buyer numbers were notably down”.

Finally, Paul Alger, international business director at UKFT commented: “Once again, the menswear season has got off to a very good start at Pitti Uomo. We continue to work with the organisers to bring to Florence the best and most representative assortment of British menswear, footwear and accessories and, once again, the buyers loved it!” He continued: “As the UK prepares to leave the UK, Pitti Uomo remains the platform of choice for most British menswear brands to show their collections to the world. This is where they can have essential conversations and meetings which will help them trade with the EU and the rest of the world even after Brexit. We are here to stay!”