



## **UKFT REPORT**

### **Who's Next Paris, including Première Classe**

**2-5 September 2016**

#### **Background:**

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 includes a very small number of unisex and menswear collections, mainly in the Trendy section. Scheduled 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'.

For the second time in a number of years, the Who's Next Spring Summer collections reverted to early September. Previously and for a number of years, they had taken place in July, a move which was hugely unpopular with French buyers because it clashed with the main 'Sale' weekends. However, September is also tricky as it falls on the 'grande rentrée' weekend when French families traditionally travel home from the summer holidays.

Whilst the new dates are popular with mainstream RTW companies, the September Who's Next and Première Classe are now little more than three weeks apart from the main second edition of Première Classe and Paris sur Mode during PFW. 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 and continues to be the subject of much discussion.

The proximity of the two show dates is a constant headache for exhibitors and buyers, if not for the show organisers! As the industry becomes increasingly based more on multi-channel, the chances are that the show organisers will have to revisit their dates and concepts again and reinforce the differentiation between the commercial shows and pre-collections earlier in the season and the designer shows later in the season. This may currently be in their commercial interests but the sector is changing fast. This edition of Who's Next and Première Classe was the first sign that this was happening and generally visitors were pleased with the look and layout of the show.

## **The UK Group:**

There was a strong showing from the UK at this event with 80 brands represented. Of these, 24 were supported with Tradeshow Access Programme (TAP) grants from the Department of International Trade (formerly known as UK Trade & Investment). The group was made up of one third RTW and two thirds accessories, primarily jewellery, scarves, handbags and footwear. The group was recruited by UKFT in close collaboration with the show organisers. UKFT remained involved at all stages especially since there were a number of last minute changes this season.

## **Buyer Traffic and Trends:**

The organisers' official post-event release was generally upbeat but was honest enough to report that 38,258 visitors came to the show. There was a drop of 7% compared with September 2015 (-8.2% in the number of French and, reassuringly, -5.4% international). This drop was expected and was very much in line with current market trends and the organisers are to be commended, on this occasion, for their candour in releasing the figures. Not all show organisers do this and many others are not always believed when they do. The figures seem to be in line with the overall mood from the UK exhibitors.

The organisers also point to a number of stars. Scandinavia was up with Sweden (+11%) and Denmark (+16.9%) being especially busy. The south of Europe was less positive, especially in Italy (-8.3%), Spain (-5.7%). The US reported a much appreciated increase (+13.3%), China (+8.1% and Korea (+1.2%) made up for a small drop in the number of Japanese visitors (-3%). These figures are especially reassuring as these same markets had seen drops in January as a result of the Paris terrorist attacks. If this trend continues, it would appear these markets are once again happy to visit Paris.

On the UKFT information stand which distributed UK exhibitor lists to buyers, we saw our usual Japanese and international groups and some new buyers from China. The UK's Liberty were reported to be at the show, as were Anthropologie, Urban Outfitters and most of the key internationals.

In general terms, the RTW sections of Who's Next felt busier and buzzier than the Première Classe accessories show. James Lakeland who returned to Who's Next after a long absence was delighted with orders from a number of key internationals including Spain and the USA. Newcomers Pink Flame made a number of new and exciting contacts which the brand expects will turn into confirmed orders. Menswear designer Mai Gidah said he had seen a good number of new contacts. Star Mela, another 'value' brand, was mobbed throughout most of the show. As an overall theme, buyers were looking for great fashion at low prices and were placing orders on the spot.

In Première Classe, the jewellery section outperformed the rest of the show. Here again, buyers were looking for value. Big Metal performed exceptionally well thanks to a low price point and an exceptional stand position, leaving some of the adjacent higher-priced collections to complain that they would not be able to compete with such low prices in the show and that they might reconsider showing at the show next season. As a sign of the times, the organisers had also created a special Indian area of cheaper but well presented accessories, which was popular with buyers. Overall, the show was well presented but some

of the rows were truncated. Rows C and G were not contiguous and the worst affected. This is a basic error and makes life extremely difficult for buyers and exhibitors alike.

Sweetlime reported a good show with buyers responding well to the colours, inspired and reinvigorated by its new roots in St Ives, Cornwall. UK shoe riser brand Shooz'up was busy during most of the show. Antonello Tedde with original handmade bags from Italy also reported a great show with buyers returning to 'quality and originality' and being willing to pay for the real thing rather than the inferior cheap imitations (which were also present). Similarly, Isabella Queen showing luxury handbags lovingly Made in the UK had an exceptionally good first-timer response. The Jackson Twins reported an excellent show, having seen all their regular customers and making new contacts. On the other hand, Phio Myo, selling high-priced designer shows was very disappointed.

The scarf market is still showing significant signs of oversupply. The show had **a lot** of scarves and most of them were digitally printed. There were some great collections at the show but there were also some very cheap ranges which ought not to have been there. At the quality end of the market, newcomer Celia Gould said she had received an encouraging response.

Other parts of the show were also showing signs of oversupply. Whilst there were some very good handbags in the show, there were also some disappointing and uninspiring ones. The organisers are battling to have something to offer at all price points but some of the better designers will be put off the show if they cannot compete.

### **Quotes from exhibitors:**

#### **Isabelle Ugochukwu of Isabella Queen:**

"I was repeatedly told before I went that buyers like to see people several times before they place an order but this was not true for me as I came away with one firm order and two in progress. Having a product made in Britain with quality Italian leather really makes a difference. It was a good show for us but we prepared leaving no stone unturned."

"Good quality look books, postcards, business cards and promotional giveaways are key and if brands can afford it, they should purchase the 'Aloha Scan' app which enables you to scan buyers badges to get all their information on a spreadsheet."

#### **Nancy Rose of Nancy Rose:**

"It was a great experience for me and a fantastic opportunity to meet buyers from all over the world. The jewellery "Steles" were slightly off the beaten track and there was nowhere to store personal belongings or paperwork at the show. Not all buyers were looking for my higher pricepoint but I received a nice order from Belgium.

#### **Chrissy and Soulla of Pink Flame:**

"This was our first time at the show and there were a few problems. We had a last minute stand location change which impacted on our ability to promote our presence at the show. If we decide to go back, we would definitely want to be in the "Trendy" section which is more in line with our collection. However, we gained an initial contract from a New York based retail

chain of 16 stores and had interest from Nice, Paris, Slovakia, Ireland, Greece, Cyprus, Monaco, Corsica, Spain, The Caribbean (St Maarten), Dubai and Kuwait”.

**Hila Karni of Industrial Jewellery:**

“Paris continues to be our most international show with high profile buyers from all over the world. Foot fall was impressive and we came out with a selection of great orders and contacts”

For details on applying for the next edition of Who’s Next, 20-23 January 2017 email [laurian.davies@ukft.org](mailto:laurian.davies@ukft.org) and visit [www.whosnext.com](http://www.whosnext.com) .

Paul Alger, September 2016