

Paris Women's Fashion Week: September – October 2018

By Paul Alger and Laurian Davies

Paris Women's Fashion Week is UKFT's largest international event, which this year saw 220 British designers showing at four tradeshows, 24 independent multi-brand showrooms and over 45 independent locations around Paris. 58 companies exhibited with grants from the Department for International Trade secured by UKFT.

This season's British group was smaller than last year, as some companies have cut back on their wholesale activities or frozen their investments until there is greater clarity over the UK's trading relationship with the EU and the rest of the world following Brexit. Some designers have also begun concentrating more on their B2C budgets in the last year, although we are already seeing some switching back as they come to understand that they need a balance of both B2B and B2C to build a brand.

The number of British exhibitors at the trade shows was 60 this season, down on last year, but the number of designers showing at independent multi-brand showrooms was up to well over 110. For the past six seasons we have seen the showrooms lure brands away from some of the tradeshows but this trend has slowed somewhat as companies begin to understand that although the showrooms offer a more intimate feel, tighter edit for buyers and personalised service, the tradeshows offer higher visibility for new brands to promote themselves and make new contacts.

The major shows (Première Classe, Tranoi, Woman Paris and Vendôme Luxury) have reduced the number of brands in some areas and have concentrated on a warmer welcome and better services for exhibitors and buyers.

This edition of Paris Women's Fashion Week was marked by a feeling of greater optimism than we have seen at the two previous editions. The showrooms reported that there were similar numbers of buyer and press appointments and the brands, generally, confirmed that buyers had been slightly more upbeat. The tradeshow footfall was also up with a number of exhibitors reporting that they had seen buyers they had not seen for some seasons.

The British exhibitors felt that there was a slight decrease in buyers from Japan and the US and an increase in numbers from Europe (excluding the UK), South Korea and China. Some exhibitors referred to the continuing shift of budgets towards pre-collections, specifically for women's ready-to-wear, although this did not affect all parts of the group equally. Some ethical/sustainable fashion brands also commented that they saw more interest than in the past for organic/sustainable production.

As usual, companies were grateful for the grant support from the Department for International Trade, organised by UKFT. James of Papermen commented: "We were delighted to receive a TAP grant from DIT through UKFT to show in Paris this September.

Having this support is crucial for our business. It enables smaller brands to access markets that they may have not been able to reach before.”

Fiona from Belize stressed the importance of being committed to the market at the right time and for the long term: “For fashion sales to a global boutique high-end market, exhibiting in Paris two (or more) times a year is essential to the visibility and growth of any brand; large or small. Being here has helped us to understand the market place. Although social media plays an important role in enabling us to be “found” by buyers, it is essential to meet your buyers face to face and understand their needs. That is why we are here.”

The Tradeshow:

The main trade fairs reported good business and an increased footfall compared with March and the previous September. Although the aisles were less packed than they used to be, the main international buyers were present although no official figures are released by any of the trade shows.

The **Première Classe Tuileries** designer accessories show was joined by the new **Première Classe Dressing** showcase featuring ready to wear collections which used to show at Paris sur Mode on the Place de la Concorde.

Maxine at Maxine Shoes at Première Classe Tuileries commented: “After a slower start, Première Classe improved over the weekend. Overall the response was very good although we did have a few appointments cancelled. Now fingers crossed for some final orders in the next few days!”

Most of the Première Classe exhibitors said they had seen their regular accounts and some new ones. Lesley of Stephen Jones reported they had had a “fantastic show” with both established and new customers placing orders. The other milliners were also pleased with the show.

Harvy of Harvy Santos said: “We had a good start from the first day of Première Classe as the tents were very busy with visitors, from all over the world. I have seen my usual buyers from Japan, the US, Germany and the UK, who have placed orders at the show. I have also met new buyers from Japan, Spain and China. Usually there is a battalion of Japanese buyers roaming around with their assistants (from big department stores); I have not seen much of them this time round but apparently they came!”

Exhibitors also liked the new Première Classe App. Harvy continued: “The great innovation this season was the new Première Classe App which connects exhibitors to buyers and press who are at the show. This gave me the opportunity to send last minute invitations to targeted stores/buyers and make appointments on the spot! I think this is a really good new tool as connecting with buyers is always tricky.”

However, the news in the Tuileries was not all positive, especially in the new “**Exposed**” show, co-organised by lingerie show organisers Eurovet in the same tents. UKFT’s impression was that the addition of a new lingerie and beachwear show late in the season and inside a show dedicated to accessories and jewellery was not a good alignment. *Première Classe*’s traditional buyers were unlikely to be attracted by the “Exposed” exhibitors and a number of lingerie and beachwear buyers were very nearly excluded from the show as the accreditation team did not know who they were. The UK exhibitors said they had to negotiate for several of them to be allowed through security.

Georgia of Everae was especially disappointed in “Exposed”: “To be honest it was not a great show either for established or new business. Footfall for our products was low compared with other shows. Buyers didn’t look at other brands apart from visiting appointments they already stock with, there was a lot of competition and there are many competing events going on over Paris.”

Tranoi also condensed and revitalised its offer this season. The Carrousel and Bourse locations were largely the same as usual, but the British Fashion Council’s LondonSHOWrooms occupied the whole of the Tranoi Week location at rue de la Roquette, near Bastille. Tranoi also launched an exciting new concept designed to bring order to Paris’s fractured showroom calendar. Tranoi Richelieu, at 60 rue de Richelieu brought together a number of large multi-brand showrooms which used to show elsewhere in Paris on their own, including Elisa Gaito showroom from Milan. Representatives of Elisa Gaito, working with UK brand 57 London, said they were delighted with the new concept and that they had seen an increase in buyers, including from Japan, China and the Middle East.

Woman Paris on Place Vendôme was also very positive. This season the event was in one building and the organisers chose to consolidate brands on two floors. Buyers were obliged to start their visit in the basement and then continue to the ground floor. There was a noticeable buzz at the show with companies including Niro Wang, Pyrus and (ki:ts) reporting better business than at the previous two shows.

The Showrooms:

For a number of seasons, the showrooms have been riding the crest of the Paris Fashion Week wave. This season, attendance at most of the showrooms was reported to be positive but it was noticeable that the independent pop-up showrooms, which used to fill Rue du Vertbois, Rue Chapon and other parts of the **West Marais** remained empty. It was only a few seasons ago that every large part of this retail and gallery space in the West Marais would have been filled with new brands looking to connect with buyers and press during fashion week.

Part of the reason for this chance could be the move of one or two of the larger showrooms such as Tomorrow Ltd (formerly Rue de Lappe near Bastille) to the West of Paris, closer to Etoile in the 8th arrondissement. Another reason could be that some of the very small new

brands which used to take over these spaces on an individual basis have been priced out of the market or are looking at other ways to enter the market (as buyers have been more reluctant to engage with new brands unless they are being supported by an established showroom).

The main **East Marais** showrooms were busy: Polly King, Four Marketing, Touba, The Alphabet, Paper Mache Tiger, D/Ark, Awaykin, The Bridge, AQ Market etc. All of them reported that they had good appointments lined up, especially over the weekend. Those buyers which had been through were reported to have been looking for a mixture of established and new brands.

Bobbin at Story MFG said of the company's experience with **Awaykin**: "This was our first women's main show and for us it was a really great experience. The lion's share of our visits were from Western stores — It was a little different to our menswear shows where we generally see Japanese and South Korean customers booking most appointments. "

Also at Awaykin was ELV Denim. Anna said: "This has been a valuable showroom experience which has seen my sales increase in America and we have opened a new territory in Hong Kong. There was also great interest from other buyers for whom it was their first introduction to the brand."

Fanni from By Varga, first timers at **AQ Market** showroom, said: "We had an amazing time in Paris. As a new exhibitor, I was very nervous at the beginning, but as the week went on I got really good feedback and a positive response from potential clients. It was interesting and useful to see what the buyers are looking for."

Kiren Passi of newcomer Kiren Passi said: "This was my first season and I found it very helpful to get in front of key International buyers through the AQ Market showroom."

Another first timer at AQ Showroom, Chloe Marlow of Marlow London said: "The experience exceeded our expectations. We saw buyers from all over the world. Although the buyers were cautious about engaging with new brands, it was an incredible opportunity to network, gain feedback and be on their radar."

Still in the Marais, Steven Tai of Steven Tai at **The Alphabet** showroom said: "Our ss19 showroom in Paris was very positive and we have had a good season. We saw buyers, from Malaysia, Singapore, UK, and Japan, all of whom have made selections which we expect to turn into confirmed orders. The economic outlook seems to be more positive than before although, with Brexit around the corner, many UK designers expressed concerns about our trading conditions in the future."

Lorna of Stelar at AQ Market said: " The showroom was a great opportunity to introduce the brand and our launch collection to a wide range of international buyers. We had very positive feedback and traction from our target demographic. We had a lot of interest from

concept stores and retailers interested in sustainability and we are in discussions with several buyers which we hope will turn into confirmed orders.”

Always popular with international buyers, **Polly King Showroom** was busy throughout the week. Áine of House of Holland, a regular exhibitor, said: “We had a great Paris Fashion Week. We saw all our existing customers and met some great new ones. I would say overall it was a quieter Paris with less buyers than usual but we still met with great quality buyers and have secured interest for pre-fall.”

For the past two seasons we have seen an increase in the number of showrooms setting up or relocating from the Marais to the luxurious **1st and 8th arrondissements in Western Paris**. One possible reason for this is that this is likely to be closer to the parts of town where most international buyers often stay when in Paris. Another reason is that this part of town has a luxurious feel to it, especially important for luxury and eveningwear brands.

The showrooms in western Paris were very busy: Tomorrow Ltd, Riccardo Grassi, Rainbowwave, Claret Showroom, The Jewellery Showroom and Indigofera. The showroom owners all said that they were impressed with the quality and quantity of buyers coming through with no reluctance to commit to appointments. One or two of the showrooms commented that rental prices were even higher in this part of town than in the Marais but they still believed that it was right to stay in this area.

Alex at Horn Please, launching his unisex range to womenswear buyers at **Indigofera** showroom, said: “We met major buyers from the UK and the rest of Europe, the Middle East, Asia and the US. Budgets for new brands seemed fairly tight - although a number of retailers are definitely interested in discovering and launching new and exciting brands as part of their overall label mix.”

Fiona at Belize was very pleased with the number and level of contacts made this season at Tomorrow Ltd showroom: “We had a good market. Repetition is key to building trust in new relationship so we are committed and will be back.”

The UKFT Brits in Paris info stand was as usual in Tranoi Carrousel du Louvre and was busy throughout with potential exhibitors doing their research and needing direction on which exhibitions and showrooms might be right for their collections. Several of the larger designer brands visited to seek UKFT’s views and advice on the potential impact of Brexit on their business.

On the stand, UKFT showed the season’s Brits in Paris video – featuring collections from over 100 UK designers and brands – this, as usual, was keenly watched by buyers, agents and potential exhibitors. UKFT’s Brits in Paris map was popular with buyers and press. This was distributed from the info stand and at all the main tradeshow and showrooms.

The UKFT team returned from Paris a little tired but happy that the shows has gone better than expected. Laurian Davies said: “After two tricky editions of Paris Fashion Week, there

was a real buzz at most of the shows and showrooms we have seen. I am not saying that this was the same for every exhibitor but I came away with the impression that the market has begun to rally, at least for now”.

Paul Alger said: “With Brexit around the corner, at a time when many of the orders placed here will be delivered around the time when the UK is expected to leave the EU, most businesses are still extremely worried about the impact of Brexit on their business and we have had a lot of requests for UKFT’s Brexit Checklist”.

For information on how to show at the March edition of Paris Women’s Fashion Week or for a copy of the UKFT Brexit Checklist, email: laurian.davies@ukft.org or paul.alger@ukft.org