

Premiere Classe Emphasizes Sustainable Designs

The accessories trade show put a new emphasis on heritage craftsmanship and eco-friendly designs.

By [Devorah Lauter](#) on October 13, 2019

PARIS — Sustainability, traditional craftsmanship and traceability were key focuses of both buyers and exhibitors at the 30th anniversary edition of accessories trade show *Première Classe* held here.

The 1.618 agency was invited to showcase 15 of its sustainable fashion and lifestyle brands, including a range of products from luxury Italian sneakers made of corn and recycled plastic by Yatay, to unmotorized treadmills by Sprintbok and electric, foldable scooters by Ujet. The newly founded Gooders platform was also invited with its selection of eco-friendly brands with missions for social improvement, such as with the zero-dividends label “I Was a Sari,” which trains and employs women in Mumbai’s slums to make accessories from upcycled saris.

An exhibition marking the 30th anniversary of the show included commissioned pieces from designers who have marked “accessory history,” such as Stephen Jones, who contributed a velvety, veil-like scarf. The pop-up store Face to Face was open to the general public, showcasing several local, emerging brands like the floral-inspired French jewelry label Marie Gold. Swimwear was also included in a section titled “Exposed,” as well as collections from young designers and former winners of the Festival International de Mode, de Photographie et d’Accessoires de mode a Hyères, which were available for purchase for the first time. They included unusual jewelry experiments by Vanessa Schindler and Cécile Gray, and sculptural straw woven bags by Ines Bressand.

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“I love it that you can see they’re really pushing new artists emerging through the market, who are learning how to work within this new eco-fashion system, which is more sustainable, and much more vibrant. And I love that they’re pushing for new talent, and French brands made in France,” said Jill Donnelly, owner of Baby & Company in Seattle.

Commenting on the show’s wider range of offerings, Donnelly said, “It’s interesting that even the trade shows have figured out how to be more interactive and experiential, so that it’s nice for the buyers and I appreciate the effort.”

“It was a great salon. Better than previous seasons. I found new things. It was very fruitful,” said women’s buyer Laetitia Vangindertael for the 20-store European chain Bellerose. She discovered Trovelore, and their “sublime” insect brooches made in India by San Francisco-based designers. She also liked the new Brazilian bathing suit brand Serpentina, which plants a tree in the Amazon forest for every sold bathing suit.

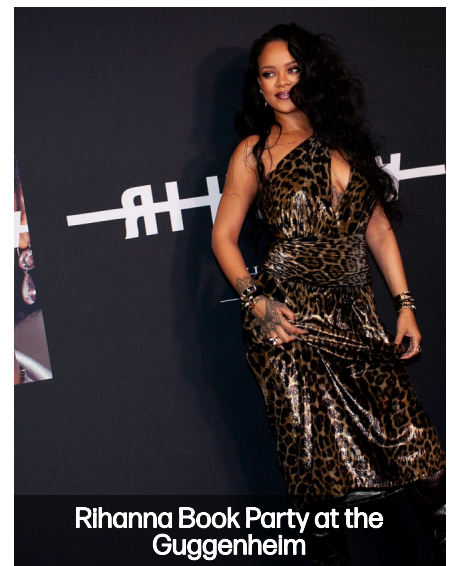
“Those are the kinds of initiatives we like. We are very sensitive to the environmental movement, and our customers are asking for more of it,” she said, adding that business has been expanding, and her budget is up. “I think people are looking for color and cheerful things,” she said. Trends she spotted included a lot of tie-dye, and African prints.

Buyers tended to say their businesses have been doing relatively well, despite a complicated market environment and apprehension over news of a looming recession, in addition to Brexit.

“I keep seeing in the news about the coming recession, and that we’re slowing down the global economy, so that scares me a bit, but so far so good,” said Eva Folch, for Folklorious resortwear stores in Mallorca, Spain.

Sarah Burton, head buyer for fashion and beauty at Fortnum & Mason, London, said, “We’re expecting November will be a bit more uncertain with Brexit, and I think international customers may be more reticent to travel. We don’t know what the borders will be like. But at the moment with the pound being slightly down, we’ve seen a lot of internationals come and take advantage of that. So we’re not sure what the impact will be at this point.”

Burton said their accessories-focused store is benefiting from continued, growing interest in the category. “There’s still definitely a movement for people not investing in clothing as



much, while accessories are easier,” she said, attributing the store’s strong growth to “people buying things with a longer view in mind,” and an interest in providence and slower fashion of higher quality. Fine jewelry has been a top seller for the company, with, “a lot of self-purchase, which has been interesting, with women buying things for themselves, rather than gifting, which is definitely about a sense of being more independent,” she said.

With Paris notably hurt by repeated “yellow vest” protests, Nathalie Friedlander, cofounder of Brand Bazar in the French capital, said that the boutique nevertheless had a good year, “despite all the problems that everyone else had. We fought hard, and invested a lot,” she said. Things that have been working for her boutique include long dresses for every season, a lot of cashmere, and mixing of unusual prints. “We try to have colors. It doesn’t sell when it’s too first degree, too simple, too obvious.” She said that for the first time in a while, pale shades of lavenders have been popular.

About the show’s eco-focus, Folch said, “I’ve seen a lot of upcycling, which I really like, and it resonates more and more with consumers, who are really enjoying it more and asking a lot of questions about how things are made.” She liked upcycled rugs used to make the Moroccan Babouche slippers by Calla at Gooders, and noticed more experimentation with materials across the board.

“Sustainability is huge, trend wise,” agreed Abby Yozell, founder of Boston-based Choix. Yozell liked “I was a Sari,” because “I love textiles, and the necklaces could be super chic, because they don’t have any hardware on them. They’re very elegant, and the colors are so jewel-like. And I love that people who are unemployed are being employed. There’s a good story there.”

Other show trends included strong French craftsmanship in all categories; woven straw bags and hats; pearls, shells, and feathers in jewelry; ribbon-like scarves inside hats, and in terms of colors, neon pops, of which buyers tended to say they preferred less.

Marina Anouilh, owner of Marina Anouilh Showroom, a concept store in Gstaad, Switzerland, said she was extremely enthusiastic about the new and unusual designers she’d discovered. She pointed to the capsule-designed, handmade shoes by artist Laurence Mosneron Dupin, for Dotz, a sustainable socially conscious new shoe maker from Brazil.



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The emphasis put on sustainability and craftsmanship at the spring/summer 2020 edition meant that the show “is really a turning point, where we’re seeing Première Classe brought back to its strong positioning,” said Frédéric Maus, general director of WSN Developpement, the trade show’s parent company.

Maus said this edition represented changes he has implemented since taking the helm of the show and sister salon, Who’s Next, at a time when trade shows everywhere have struggled to maintain relevance.

“More than ever, we are a reflection of new creativity, and not just in products, but in everything that is being done well right now in the fashion industry. For me, this is the culmination of 1.5 years of restructuring and rebranding, and dedicated work from our team and myself,” said Maus. The show saw a 14.5 percent rise in buyer attendance, and 23 percent of visitors said they discovered the event for the first time, 15 percent more than the previous year. Out of 400 accessory brands, and 50 ready-to-wear, 125 new labels were exhibited.

Some highlights from the show:

Brand: I was a Sari.

Designer: Designer collective led by founder Stefano Funari

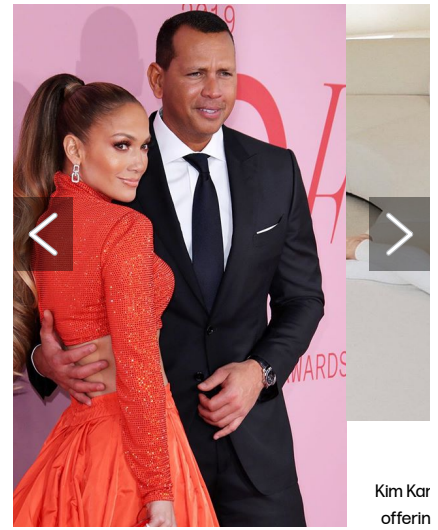
Background: About 100 women make the products for this zero-dividends company, which range from clutches, tote bags, fanny-packs, and jewelry, to kimonos, all made from upcycled saris. Bright, jewel-like colors are often paired with embroidered detailing. The company has begun working recently with Gucci on creating more contemporary products. Embroidery and sewing is taught to unskilled, unemployed women, and the workshop is located “in the slums of Mumbai.” In September, the company won the Green Carpet Fashion Awards (GCFA) in Responsible Disruption.

Prices are kept low in order to employ more women, and profits are reinvested in measures to help underprivileged women as well as developing the brand.

Retail prices: Earrings start at about \$5.50.

Brand: Amédée

Designer: Déborah Berger



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Background: This year-old French brand makes fine-knit merino scarves in Italy and France, printed in colorful motifs. All products can be easily traced with a barcode scan, so that consumers understand the sustainable, and fair treatment behind the organic, traditional methods which go into each piece. Art Deco prints were a highlight for this collection.

Retail prices: \$98 to \$275

Brand: Cécile Gray

Designer: Cécile Gray

Background: This young French designer was one of 10 finalists at the 2018 Hyères festival, in the accessories category, and the winner of the Prix du Publique. A former architect, Gray went back to school to develop her project for clothing-like jewelry. She uses an architectural process in creating forms, much like sculptures that can be worn. She laboriously manipulates golden-colored wire steel mesh almost as if it were fabric, in a slow process that can take about 150 hours for a large piece. She hopes to develop her concept further so that she can make products out of gold, in order to last a lifetime. The current collection includes seven “clothing-jewels.”

Retail prices: Average is about \$3,300 for steel, and \$9,900 for gold pieces.

Brand: Marie Gold

Designers: Stefani Martini and Sébastien Martini

Background: For this inaugural collection of handmade, Parisian jewelry, the Martini duo drew inspiration from nature, specifically flowers and other foliage, as well as a Seventies, Flower Power spirit, to create feminine, sensual and contemporary pieces mostly in 24k gold-plated French brass.

Retail prices: \$65 to over \$220 for more elaborate pieces.