

The Australian Shoe Fair (ASF) is one of the most popular trade events on the calendar with next year's shoe fair looking set to be one of the biggest in the events history. We catch up with Marie Kinsella, managing director of the Australian Exhibitions and Conferences Pty. Ltd., about what we can expect from ASF 2011.



shoes: illey rose



marie kinsella



STEPPING IT UP

Last time you spoke to Apparel was in July 2009. Since then, how has the year been for the ASF as a show and what expansions have we seen come to fruition?

The Sydney 2010 fair, held alongside Fashion Exposed, was one of our strongest to date. Regular exhibitors, including Fujian Footwear, commented that the fair was terrific for their business in terms of branding and sales. The Melbourne 2010 fair was very positive both for past exhibitors and labels launching for the first time.

Exhibitors reported the show to be very successful especially in a difficult economic client with new business being written. In terms of developing trends, overall there has been a greater focus on foot health with an array of new products being launched in this area.

With preparations well underway for the Australian Shoe Fair next February, there are some noticeable companies returning after some time away. What has

reignited these companies to showcase and what are some of the new ideas being implemented into next year's schedule?

Some companies are seasonal exhibitors meaning that they only exhibit in Sydney for the Spring Summer Fair or only exhibit at the Melbourne fair as they focus on Autumn Winter collections. Another reason, as is the case with BDA Footwear, is that they have obtained new labels and want to launch them at the fair. Companies continue to support the fair because it gives them the opportunity to launch their new ranges, write orders, meet with existing clients and network with the industry. Many of our loyal exhibitors embrace the event as a key order writing opportunity which is very important to their business. We are well underway with preparations for the February fair and have just launched a series of retail workshops as part of the industry seminars to give visitors (and exhibitors) the opportunity to gain the valuable tools for

their business.

What can visitors to the next ASF expect to see?

Visitors will see at least 30 brands launched in to the Australian market for the first time as well as a comprehensive range of mens, womens, childrens and orthopaedic footwear. They can attend the Retail Workshops and Seminars with speakers providing first-hand knowledge and sharing their success stories.

What has been the general feedback from exhibitors and retailers with regards to being affected by the economic downturn, and has business since improved or will we be seeing a lot more caution?

There has been mixed feedback, many are doing well and report they have not been too affected, others have changed the way they do business by selling in smaller packs. Some are struggling because payment of their orders have been delayed. Overall I think business is improving but companies are still feeling the burden from the last couple of years and are treading carefully.

Has there been a good response from New Zealand businesses for the ASF next year?

We have the continued support from companies like Vita Pacific, Minx and we are excited about two new labels, Neat Feet and Josef Seibel who are exhibiting for the first time.

As the largest Australian owned and operated exhibition company, what is the AEC doing to develop young design talent, and how are younger start ups and small businesses benefitting from being involved with your trade events? Are we seeing any younger businesses at the ASF next year?

AEC recognises the importance of supporting next generation designers and providing a credible, industry-focused launch pad for them. To cater to this need, we have developed a number of emerging design competitions across our major trade events, Furnitex – (Vivid); Australian International Furniture Fair – (The Edge); and Fashion Exposed – (Debut) that celebrate new talent, while providing a showcase for their work, broad trade exposure and the important experience of designing to a brief and receiving invaluable feedback from industry. We have had great success from these competitions and see them as integral features of their related events.

Exhibitors such as Rockin Reptile who exhibited for the first time in 2009 have picked up stockists in Adelaide, Queensland, Melbourne and Perth. We

make it easy for exhibitors who can't afford to travel to interstate and remotely by bringing the buyers to them. So far, we have 10 new designer labels booked into the fair launching their ranges to the Australian market which is very exciting.

What international highlights will be on display at the ASF?

Five international exhibitors will be showcasing their labels in Sydney including companies based in Italy, Thailand and Malaysia as well as a leather footwear label called Basolys from Bali.

How is Australia's footwear manufacturing industry performing at the moment and what is the ASF doing to support local manufacturing? How realistic is it to locally manufacture footwear at a reasonable cost these days?

There are a number of long established Australian Manufacturers still operating and doing well while others are definitely struggling due to the influx of imported product. Market researcher IBISWorld has predicted better times ahead for the industry overall following the slump of the GFC. I believe the industry has started showing signs of recovery. The footwear industry is fairing better still than other retailing industries.

What major plans does AEC have for the forthcoming New Year?

AEC is preparing the launch of a new trade show, Premiere, a high end boutique apparel event to be held concurrently with Fashion Exposed and the Bags and Accessories Fair. Stay tuned as more info will be released in the next couple of weeks.

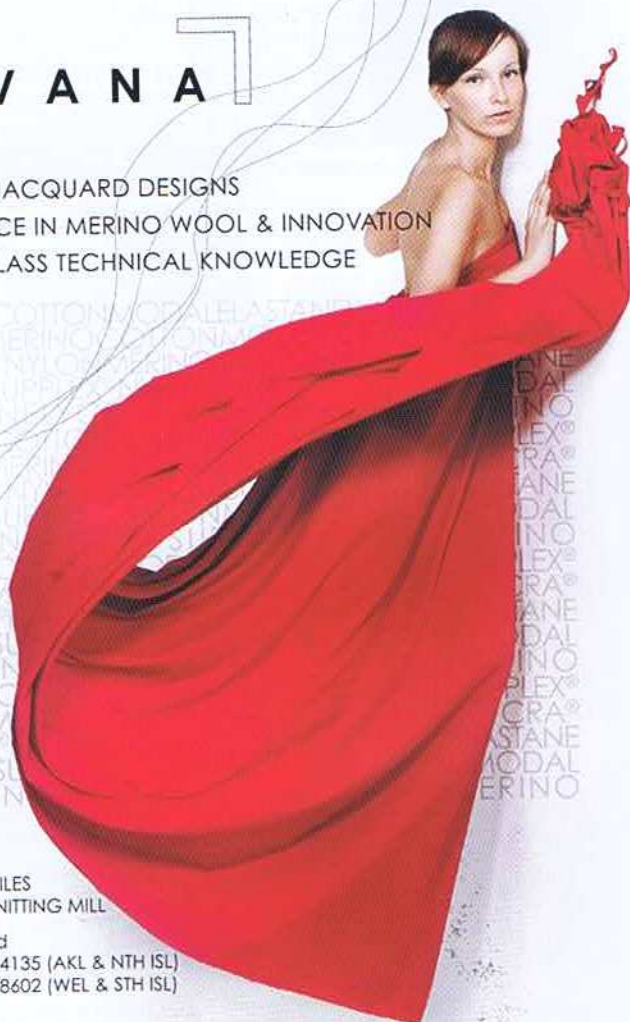
AUSTRALIAN SHOE FAIR RETURNS

The Australian Shoe Fair was developed in 2006 as a result of demand from suppliers and industry stakeholders for a high quality, industry operated and truly independent footwear Fair for the Australian market. The fair is now held twice a year; Sydney in February and Melbourne in August/September.

Hundreds of exciting new labels from emerging and established brands are launching at the Sydney 2011 Australian Shoe Fair. Visitors will have the unprecedented opportunity to preview new ranges in womens, mens and childrens shoes all very conveniently under-one-roof. Buyers from around Australia, New Zealand and the world will be welcomed to the Australian Shoe Fair, having established itself as the major buying fair for the footwear industry.

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