Scoop x Pure has strong show as exclusivity, unique twists are top of the agenda

By Sandra Halliday - 14 February 2022

The second (and last) edition of the combined Scoop x Pure last week showed that buyers’ appetites for physical events remain strong after two years in which they were cancelled, delayed or made digital-only.
Both Scoop and Pure will be solo shows in July and the crowds pouring through the doors from Scoop x Pure’s opening time on day one suggested the industry will be happy to get back to almost-normality in the months ahead.

The success of this month’s event at London’s Truman Brewery highlighted the buoyancy of the independents sector that has come through the pandemic with renewed confidence, and the lasting appeal of premium fashion for affluent consumers who’ve also made it through with their finances largely intact.

Most of the exhibitors we spoke to were there to see indie boutiques and the event certainly attracted them. Visitors came from all over the UK and Ireland, including The Place London, The Snooty Fox, Fran and Jane, Velvet and Rose, Willow and Wolf, Collen and Clare, Anne Furbank, Aria, Biscuit, The Dressing Room, Pamela Schiffer, Press, Sunday Best, Leaf, Katherine Bird, and Roxtons. Big names such as Anthropologie, Fenwick, John Lewis, and ASOS also attended.

The show was big on new exhibitors making the most of the relative exclusivity of their offer that should appeal to those stores’ clients, with more than one exhibitor highlighting their exclusive (often self-woven) materials and eye-catching details.

LABELS TO WATCH

Gil Agencies was relaunching the premium French Arche footwear brand at the show and also introducing the still-new premium Korean brand 4CCCCees. And Gil’s Gerard Levy was surprisingly upbeat after what has been a bruising two years for the footwear sector.

“Things aren’t what they were,” he said. “But I can see some positivity. We’re actually much more positive now than we were two years ago before the pandemic”.

A problem is the lack of retail shoe shops remaining in the market, so he’s mainly working with ready-to-wear stores, and those stores are in a good place.
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“When shops say it’s OK, that means it’s good,” he said. “It’s interesting that of all the clients I had none of them went under [in the pandemic]. I think it’s the time for the independent. Department stores are struggling, but the connection between the customer and the independent has become much stronger”.

The company certainly had a strong offer at the show with the two brands hitting that sweet spot between the comfort consumers at all price levels are seeking and the style that makes the pieces stand out from the crowd. For Arche that means a contemporary edge while 4CCCCees is more sports-urban.

One show newcomer — SJC London (or Simon James Cathcart) — had an interesting story to tell, especially as the event marked its entry into womenswear. The previously-menswear-only label has a quirky approach that combines vintage style with exclusivity — such as hand-woven fabrics.

Cathcart was treating his presence at the show very much as an experiment to test the waters.

He moved into womenswear despite the menswear business still thriving as he said that “men are really conservative and hard to dress. Women are a lot more brave and ambitious. They know what they want and I think that’s easier to deal with”.

The company had a reasonably good pandemic as he said “consumers were buying stuff that they couldn’t even wear when they were bored and at home”.

That’s encouraging given that the general perception is that anyone specialising in smart, tailored pieces saw their businesses tanking amid lockdowns and work-from-home mandates.
But based on the resurgence of the independent boutique sector post-pandemic, he’s clearly chosen a good time to enter the women’s market. So what’s on offer? As mentioned, it’s a mix of vintage-influenced pieces such as coat and skirt suits, fine-gauge knits and other daywear with a focus on exclusive materials and details.

It feeds into the trend that sees affluent women prepared to pay hefty prices for their fashion but expecting a lot in return, especially in terms of uniqueness.

That’s something Georgia Crossley of GeeGee collection is also exploiting. Her brand majors on the appeal of statement pieces with exclusivity via hand-made pieces that also feature hand-woven fabrics.

A long-time fashion insider who started interning at Alexander McQueen then moved into the wider industry (include working for brands at the factory end in China), she’s seen the market at multiple levels and knows what she wants.

“I wanted to bring back the whole Made in England thing. To move away from fast-fashion”, she said. “I’m keeping
it sustainable and ethical”.

The working life pause during the pandemic gave her that time to launch her brand and has resulted in a bold mix of superficially traditional but really quite surprising tweedy jackets and separates in striking prints with plenty of sparkle and details like irregular fringing.

It’s a mix that Crossley said has gone down well with working women in their late 20s and 30s and the younger “festival-going Shoreditch” kind of shopper.

LET’S GET PHYSICAL

Also showing for the first time was agency Self Service and commercial director Natalie Millard told us that once the company has followed up on the many contacts made there, the event looks likely to have exceeded its expectations.

“It was great to re-connect with our clients after so much time remotely selling, as well as meeting new ones”, she said. “It was really a friendly show. We spoke to a real variety of buyers from around UK, Scotland, Ireland”.

The company targets EMEA with brands represents mainly from the US and Australia. “We make it as easy as possible for our customers to buy brands they wouldn’t normally see”, she said. The company has only just taken on LA-based Electric & Rose, for instance, with its LA lifestyle outlook seeming to be making an impact.

Millard told us that the last few years have been “a roller-coaster. You couldn’t’ second-guess it. One minute everyone wants leisure, then everyone wants dresses. We’ve had to be quite agile and learned to adapt”.

The decision to debut at Scoop x Pure was partly due to its specific focus on independents, which are key for Self Service’s basket of brands that also include C/Meo, Pasduchas, Keepsake, Freedom Moses, WAFG, Elliott and Finders Keepers.

“We’d heard it’s really busy,” Millard explained. “Lots of independents are doing well and people are shopping more locally. People want unique pieces from brands that nobody else has got. I had a client earlier looking at Elliott, which is occasionwear, who was saying how people want unique things. Independents really bring that”
Elliatt, which is occasionwear, who was saying how people want unique things. Independents really bring that.

But the company was also there simply to take advantage of the return of physical events. “We want to connect with people again. And to connect with products. I’ve done so many Zoom appointments over the past few years. Trying to communicate fabric on a Zoom appointment just kills me!”

Meanwhile, another newcomer, agency Red Alert, was there to boost its premium-to-luxury womenswear business that currently makes up only around 30% of its turnover. The company handles labels like Moon Boot, Von Dutch and Mackage but the focus here was denim label Tramarossa and sports brand Diadora.

Red Alert’s Jordan Eckersley told us that with Italian label Tramarossa the company has “built up the business fantastically well in menswear but wanted to expand our ladieswear business because we know that denim is growing”.

The brand focuses on high-end materials and technical innovation and its USP is personalisation — jeans can be customised with the wearer’s initials in metal.

“Since lockdown we noticed that denim sales have grown massively”, he said. And that doesn’t seem to be slowing down, with Eckersley suggesting it could be consumers renewing their wardrobes if they’ve put on a few lockdown pounds!

And as well as denim, it’s interesting that even with the move towards dressing-up post-lockdowns, the company has noticed “the casual business is still growing”. This perhaps suggests a more permanent change in the way women dress, due to the seismic shifts of the pandemic.

That also means showing sports shoe and clothing label Diadora at Scoop made sense. The company said it’s been “opening up some amazing accounts and Selfridges are on board already”. It sees huge potential for the brand, given its strength in Europe and premium positioning.

And while launching a higher-end brand might seem like bold step at a time when inflation is running rampant and consumer belts are tightening, the company said there’s still plenty of money around for certain demographics.
The youth obsession that drives many brands isn’t for this company. Eckersley said the slightly older consumer is “what we like, they're the ones who've got money”.

And the same goes for the stores they patronise. As other exhibitors mentioned, independents came through the pandemic in relatively good health. And the company was at the show to reach out to these directly.

“We’re interested in the more developed accounts, the people who can afford to pay and have been around for long time. They know what they're doing. They have their loyal customers who spend a lot of money with them over the year. That's what we're looking for and that's why we're here”, Eckersley explained.

It all suggests that the signs are good for next season’s solo Scoop show. But it will be interesting to see what happens at July’s Pure London, with its broader price spread. That will give us a much clearer picture of how the industry as a whole is faring.

By Sandra Halliday

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