

Britain's fashion industry is alive and kicking

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*Abraham for
Christina Stambolian
for D.P. Designs*

*Schubiger for
Murray Arbeid*



BRITAIN'S FASHION INDUSTRY IS ALIVE AND KICKING

Despite all the gloom coming from this country in respect of the currently depressed state of the British textile and clothing industry as a whole, all one can say is that if the recently held London Fashion Week is anything to go by, then the situation is not nearly as bad as one is made to believe.

It is true that closures, redundancies and slimming-down processes have had to be carried out in the past and, sadly, are still taking place. This has meant that owing to the downturn in trading, high interest rates and the strong pound, not only were some well-known fashion houses affected by this situation but also well-loved designers had to drop out.

The larger mass producing companies bear the brunt of the burden, whilst smaller, top end of the trade fashion firms can be more flexible because they produce in smaller quantities and are generally more likely to be able to cope. In some cases, they can even report a record turnover and are therefore quite happy with the way things are going for them in these difficult times.

However, where the collections and deliveries are right and the goods are what the customers want, bearing in mind that this is now a buyers' and no longer a sellers' market, business, so it seems, is still to be found on the British home market and in exports.

Britain's popular and talented designers never give up. Even though some were temporarily missing from the London fashion scene, such as Bill Gibb, Benny Ong, Yuki and Jane Cattlin, they came bouncing back again, giving proof of their enthusiasm and ability to weather the storms.

Bill Gibb now designs special capsule collections exclusively for Harrods and for other individual shops in England and although he told me that he

cannot as yet afford to use Swiss materials again, the future looks promising because the new project is growing. Designer Adrian Cartmell, who like Bill Gibb has had bad luck with backers in the past, is now designing a new collection for the Crocodile group of shops. Jane Cattlin who had to drop out last season, was back on the fashion scene in October with a collection of dresses and separates in cotton, jersey and silk for spring/summer 1981. Benny Ong told me that he now designs two collections so that "everybody gets good value for their money", meaning that one collection is more upmarket, aimed at the home market, the other is slightly lower priced and export orientated. Both feature late day, casual and formal evening wear.

So in addition to these designers fighting their way back to fashion fame, there are others who have been getting on steadily and can luckily report good progress from one season to the next. This category comprises well-known and well-established houses whose designs are aimed at their traditional customers. They produce elegant clothes in beautiful, high quality fabrics which they know that their customers will buy because they are exactly what elegant women nowadays long to wear, namely investment or so called "long-life" clothes without exaggerations, whether day, afternoon or evening dresses. They are styled to feel comfortable and look good. Important and much sought after in London were interchangeable garments which can be put together in different combinations for different occasions and worn over and over again.

The London Fashion Week is a diversified event which can be rather confusing for buyers coming to the capital for the first time. It might therefore be useful and serve as a guideline for future fashion

week visitors to know in advance where they can find what, and to have information on the various London showings and venues.

From October 21st-25th 1980, over 300 exhibitors showed spring/summer 1981 collections at the *London Fashion Exhibition at Olympia*. Of this total number, over 250 exhibitors were Britain's successful mass market producers, the rest were divided into four different sections: "The Designer Hall" for high quality, large production designer/manufacturers, "The Individual Clothes Show", with 18 different young designers, "The Covent Garden Designers", who made their first appearance at Olympia and another new group of 12 small to medium avant-garde firms who call themselves "The Exhibitionists" and whose ranges appeal to similar young markets.

A very congenial atmosphere prevailed at the **first Mainseason Exhibition**, held from October 22nd-25th 1980 with over 90 up-market exhibitors, at London's new exhibition Centre in Kensington High Street. Among the exhibitors in this well appointed hall were names well-known to Swiss fabric producers. Among them, Susan Small, Annie Gough, John Bates, Lesley Sandra, Paul Howie at Dereta, Ross Bergo and Annette Harvey, designer and director of the Hartnell ready-to-wear operation, operating from the Bruton Street address of the late Sir Norman Hartnell's salon. Annette Harvey was this year the first ever designer from Britain to be awarded the "Intermoda" fashion prize which was presented to her in Switzerland. In her current collection she used Swiss silk georgette with hand embroidery and prints for dress and jacket ensembles. Very effective are the large silk embroidery motifs on her mohair jackets.



*Schlaepfer
for Salvador*



*Schlaepfer
for Murray Arbeid*



*Forster Willi
for Christina Stambolian
for D.P. Designs*



*Abraham for
Bellville Sassoon*



*Abraham for
Gina Fratini*

*Mettler
for Dorville
at Michel Geary*



Other London Fashion Week venues from October 23rd–26th 1980 were the Hotel Inter-Continental, the Park Lane Hotel and the nearby Inn on the Park Hotel, where the **Designer Collections** were shown. Among the exhibitors at the Inn on the Park Hotel were top names like Murray Arbeid, Salvador, Roland Klein, Salmon and Green, Chris Clyne, Belleville Sassoon, Benny Ong and Juliet Dunn.

In addition, top designers Janice Wainwright, John Bates, Jean Muir, Christina Stambolian, Zandra Rhodes and others, held their own fashion shows at various hotels. Ready-to-wear houses such as Co-jana, Frank Usher and Jaeger, presented their collections in their own showrooms in town.

Major trends emerging from London Fashion Week revolve around the sporty, casual theme with pleated, plaid skirts, coordinated with jackets, blazers and reversible blousons, trousers, jeans, baggy jodhpurs and shorts of various lengths, jungle printed T-shirts, sun-faded pastel coloured sweatshirts and knitwear. In contrast to active sportswear are the feminine, easy summer outfits, ranging from day to evening, with two-piece ensembles very much to the fore. Lots of frills, flounced skirts and tops, in short and long styles, brightly coloured bold print designs and glitter effects.

Colours in the sportswear area for spring/summer 1981 include bronze, sand, ecru, banana, khaki, saffron, earthy and spicy shades, cinnamon, paprika red, Wedgewood blue, coral, palm green and pine-apple; jeans are bleached or in solid dye colours. For day to evening wear, there are sophisticated pastels, tinted neutrals, bronze/peach/tan and black colour combinations, bright jewel colours on white or black grounds, silver and gold glitter effects.

Fabrics. Natural fibres are in the foreground in cotton, voile, poplin and piqué. Very popular for

summer 1981 are linen-look striped cotton, glazed cotton, cotton jersey, pure silk crêpe de chine, printed or embroidered chiffon, pure silk georgette, shantung and permanently pleated fabrics.

Prints are bold jungle designs, large stylised or mini florals and shadow to deckchair stripes and Madras checks. There are a great many coordinated prints, i.e. stripes and spots, or stripes and checks on silk.

Overseas buyers come to London to look for good value for money in casual, easy day clothes, for original knitwear which is very good in the designer area and to buy late day and evening garments which are in shorter supply elsewhere and are therefore much sought after from British firms.

Typical Swiss fabric choices in the London spring/summer 1981 collections are: *Mettler*, St. Gall, bright shadow striped cotton, floral printed voile, floral/stripe combination printed cotton, "Silver", a heavier cotton quality and single cotton jersey, all seen in the excellent collection of "hot weather" styles of day into evening wear by Dorville at Michael Geary. His models from shirtwaist to long swirling evening dresses are beautifully made and unlined for easy wear, except for those sold to Switzerland, "for the Swiss always want everything lined". Striped cotton seersucker and checked cotton appeared in the Jaeger collection. Their own colour theme for spring 1981 is mustard, pink, sage and lavender, and for summer dark mustard, burnt pink, dark sage, dark lavender, camel, stone and navy. Crepon structured cotton with a flock effect, overprinted with a multicoloured check design, was effectively and successfully used in a set of 12 designs by Chris Clyne. This designer who had not used Swiss cloths for some time because of price, was very pleased with the "fresh and marvellous" appearance of her choice in *Mettler* fabrics. *Forster Willi*, St. Gall, large motif allover embroidery on net

was used for a cream coloured coat over matching plain dress (Christina Stambolian for D.P. Designs). *Schubiger's* woven check silk organza (Murray Arbeid). *Abraham*, Zürich, printed pure silk crêpe de chine and silk organza were used for delicate evening dresses by Christina Stambolian for D.P. Designs. Linenlook cotton, printed cotton voile and fine striped silk crêpe de chine, also beautiful border printed crêpe de chine (Dorville at Michael Geary). Jersey (Murray Arbeid), floral printed pure silk crêpe de chine (Belleville Sassoon), a striped and spotted pure silk crêpe de chine (Janice Wainwright). The fine pinstripe fabric used by Janice for a two-piece suit in a short and long version, with bias cut blouse. Taffeta shantung for a ballgown (Gina Fratini). Quality "Sandra", black spot silk, overprinted in red/white floral design, was made into four attractive models by Jaques Azagury, a newcomer to the Inn on the Park designer group. *Fischbacher*, St. Gall, mini print on 100% cotton jersey looked very good made up in a group of six different mix-and-match garments, designed by Pauline Melbye at Susan Small. *Stünzi*, Horgen, "Flamingo", was chosen for a shirt-waister by Annie Gough, now at Susan Small. *Schlaepfer*, St. Gall, sequin embroidered chiffon (Murray Arbeid), black and silver sequin embroidered jacket over jersey dress made into an elegant, eye-catching ensemble by Lesley Sandra who also used toning embroidery on a banana coloured jersey two-piece. Checkerboard sequin embroidery, teamed with pleated and silk ribbon banded silk crêpe de chine (Salvador).

GRETA SITEK

*Mettler for
Chris Clyne*



*Mettler
for Jaeger*

*Abraham for
Janice Wainwright*



*Stünzi for
Annie Gough
at Susan Small*

