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Fashion Co-Op LA: 150 Indie Designers, 30 Miles from La La Land

 By **Kristopher Dukes**

June 08, 2005 @ 10:34 AM - Redondo Beach, Calif.

Nestled in barely-Los Angeles County, the Redondo Beach Aviation Center housed the eighth semi-annual Fashion Co-Op. A good forty minutes from the heart of Hollywood, the 5,000 shoppers and 150 vendors participating in the indie fashion event were far from citing location, location, location as the reason for attendance—instead were echoes about exposure, exposure, exposure.

E-boutique Label Los Angeles.com wanted some face-to-face and fitting room time with buyers. "Since we're online only, it's nice to interact with customers," said co-owner Emily Heintz. "Our indie denim that some people aren't familiar with, like Farmer and Oligo Tissew, sold really well this weekend. It's harder to sell those brands online because people don't know how they fit."

As happy as Label Los Angeles was to jump out of their dot-com box, luxury toy company Moncalin was ready to hop off the toy shelf and play with more than hip moms and tots - founder Karine Silverton cites apologetic boyfriends as some of her customers at Fashion Co-Op.

"We sold our stuffed toys to a diversified clientele, whether they were looking to decorate their bedroom or offer them to another adult or child as a gift," said Silverton. "We also attracted some guys who wanted to buy a cute gift to make up with their girlfriends or wives."

Similarly, designer Sharon Lim - of hand- and yoga-mat-bag line Slim NYC - flew from fashion capital New York to make West Coast contacts.

"I think these events provide fantastic exposure and feedback for indie designers," said Lim. "So much of getting started is building confidence and seeing whether or not there's a market for your designs. Events like Fashion Co-Op provide a safe, uncritical environment for designers to test the market, and also commune with fellow designers."

And communing gets friendlier when fair trade is involved.

"Ironically," said Lim, "most of my sales at Fashion Co-Op were to neighboring designers." Between sample-selling to enthused consumers, Lim swapped nearby vendor Marlene Salcido - of womenswear Prospect 44 - a gold fanny-pack purse for a tube top.

"The great thing about LA is that there are so many young indie designers and we're all very supportive of each other, sending clients and stores to other designers," said designer Jacqui Chazen. "I'd heard how great Fashion Co-Op was and it turned out, in just one day, to exceed every other sample sale I've done."

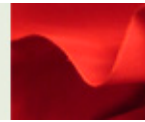
Slashed prices and friendly vendors aren't necessarily the only thing moving merch. Chazen's line of silk-scarf wrap watches - tagged with her same name, Jacqui Chazen Designs - shared a table with framed pictures of her celebrity fans, like J. Lo Hewitt and Teri Hatcher. And handmade jewelry line Emory K. Holiday's booth included only the essentials: beautiful bangles, earrings, promo postcards - and a copy of Lindsey Lohan wearing Emory K. Holiday in Life & Style.

30 miles isn't so far away from La La Land after all.

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