

FIG Opens Up

By Faye Mussleman

DALLAS — Fashion Industry Gallery has expanded for the third time since its opening in 2004, and is extending its outreach with new lines and enhanced customer services.

Since January, FIG has picked up six new contemporary vendors and leased all five permanent showrooms on the second floor. Jennifer Lazarus Sales, which moved over from the Dallas Market Center, features Joe's Jeans and C&C California; L'Atelier reps True Religion, and Joanne Fiske shows Juicy Couture and Castle Starr. The Select showroom, with locations in New York and Los Angeles, expanded to Dallas with 13 lines, including raw 7, Salvage and Made U Look. The Elizabeth French and Circle 5 shared showroom, which includes Beth Bowley, Christopher Fisher, B with G and Joomi Joolz, moved up from the first floor, doubling its size, and French Connection moved from Dallas Market Center into the vacated space. In August, Aire will relocate from the California Market Center to a first-floor gallery at FIG, showing as Ella Moss and Splendid.

"The building's 47 permanent galleries are 100 percent leased, and we have 15,000 square feet of beautiful temporary space to house our ever-expanding Shop show," said Shelli Mers, director of FIG. Temporary space is 75 to 100 percent booked, depending on individual shows, and March and October are the largest markets, she said.

To service and broaden its customer base, FIG has hired a new retail development manager, Ashley Gage, who held a similar position for decorative accessories at the Dallas Market Center.

Gage will travel across FIG's 10-state buying region, calling on the market's current specialty store customers and scouting out new stores that may not be aware of the boutique venue. "We have a tradition of Southern hospitality and customer service, and there's no better way to promote that than with personal visits," said Mers.

With a 38 percent increase in traffic at its June show, FIG is definitely building its reputation in the industry, she said. "It's a matter of awareness. More people are finding out about FIG, and our great lines and strong exhibitors are attracting them. Exhibitors were very excited about the business written in June."

While FIG maintains its focus on contemporary women's apparel, it is adding more bridge and accessories lines, and making a special effort to grow its men's business. "A lot of women's stores are adding men's apparel," said Mers. "It's one of the categories experiencing a lot of growth, and there are a lot more opportunities for men in fashion. Retailers want to get on board and ride that wave."

"We are really looking forward to August, when FIG's men's market dates overlap with the women's," continued Mers. The men's show is Aug. 16 to 19 and the women's is Aug. 18 to 21. "It will definitely be beneficial, because so many of our contemporary vendors carry both women's and men's lines."

The change in FIG's market days to a Saturday-to-Tuesday schedule has been well received by buyers and exhibitors, said Mers. "We still coordinate with the Dallas Market Center, but it gives our L.A. exhibitors time to get back for that show. More than half of our permanent vendors are L.A.-based."

During markets, FIG continues to build its guest designer program; there have been recent appearances by Jaime Pressly, Rachel Pally and Mandy Moore, and Julie Chaiken is slated for the spring market, Oct. 20 to 23. It also pampers buyers with complimentary massages by Origins and makeovers from MAC cosmetics.

Throughout the year FIG promotes one of its major assets, the FIG building itself, located in the burgeoning Dallas Arts District.

During February and August's FIG Finale, when retailers who shop the market sell their wares at a 75 percent discount, the center is open to the public. "It helps retailers clear out their inventory, and gives the public an opportunity to experience the venue," said Mers.

Other events range from launch parties for local magazines and Grey Goose La Poire vodka to a book-signing by Nicole Richie and a one-man show by Francis Ford Coppola. In October, Billion Dollar Babes will make its Dallas debut with an international designer sale at the venue.

"FIG was designed to provide a gorgeous, high-design, contemporary setting in which to showcase fashion, or what we call 'the fashion arts,'" said Mers. "It always made sense that fashion people, who have a sophisticated sense of space and design, would prefer to do business in a venue such as ours. Interestingly, the venue has become the setting of choice for special events for a similar crowd."



Circle 5 is a new addition to FIG's showroom roster.



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