

Variety's the Spice of Miami Swim Week

by Rebecca Kleinman

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Anna & Boy

Photo By Courtesy Photo

Miami swim week has reached a new high-water mark.

As attendees navigated last week's zenith of collections at Swim Association of Florida's 29th annual SwimShow at the Miami Beach Convention Center, Salon Allure at the W hotel from July 16-19, runway shows around Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Swim at the Raleigh, off-site showrooms and all sorts of events, the term tossed around most was "overwhelming." There was a lot of innovation and variety to digest from one of the strongest selections in seasons.

"Retailers are having a hard time narrowing down the newness," said Paulette Thompson, swimwear analyst for trend forecasting firm The Doneger Group.

"We're having a field day with all these trends," agreed Howie Greller, vice president of merchandising for Manhattan Beachwear, which licenses 17 brands such as Modern Amusement, a new preppy line from the creator of Mossimo, and a repositioned Puma.

SAF executive director Judy Stein said this was SwimShow's largest turnout with 8,200 attendees, a 15 percent increase from last year, and more buyers from the U.K. and Europe. Exhibitors also hit a new high, with 400 showing 2,500 brands including 100 new vendors. She said she hadn't seen this level of enthusiasm since 2008.

"There was a positive atmosphere and the feeling of a rebounding retail market," she said. "Buyers [appreciated] that designers are designing again, and it translated to sales."

Melisa Belinger, director of merchandising for Everything but Water, an Orlando-based specialty chain with 58 stores, was among them: "[There was] an abundance of fresh product and a cohesive color palette."



Anna & Boy
Photo By: Courtesy Photo

Salon Allure hosted 350 visitors, 130 of which were new, according to event producer Rick Fatzinger. Approximately 1,100 people came out for opening-night runway shows over the pool for Melissa Odabash and Julien MacDonald's new collaboration, followed by a group presentation of 30 designers.

At the two trade shows, any vestiges from swim's frumpy or run-of-the-mill past had been erased. Like many categories, it's been overhauled for a fitter consumer with a youthful attitude who favors the same contemporary styles as in apparel.

"Even our conservative customer goes for statement one-pieces," said Gottex creative director Molly Grad.

Other key trends like saturated color, ethnic looks, tribal prints, fringe, crochet, lace, color blocking, tea rose florals, nautical, wild print mixes, high-waisted retro bottoms and bandeaus came across as modern.

Mother Nature is playing her part, too. Last year's cold, rainy spring and June gloom gave way to heat wave or perfect holiday conditions across the country this year — driving consumers to the nearest swimming hole.

Laurel Jones, owner of Swimwear Solution boutique near Kansas City, Mo., reported "fantastic" sales. "June increased 16 percent from last year, and July, which usually wanes, is still going strong because of the heat," she said, though her buying budget remains the same.



Mara Hoffman
Photo By: Randy Brooke

TRENDS

- SATURATED COLOR
 - NEON
- ETHNIC-BOHO
- TRIBAL PRINTS
 - FRINGE
 - CROCHET
 - LACE
- COLORBLOCKING
 - BIG FLORALS
 - NAUTICAL
- MIXED PRINTS
- HIGH-WAISTED BOTTOMS
- STATEMENT ONE-PIECES
 - BANDEAUS
 - SHAPEWEAR
- CONVERTIBLE COVER-UPS

Libbey Aly, buyer for Swimwear Boutique, an online retailer in Blanco, Tex., said customers are wiser, post-recession. "They're spending the same amount but shifting dollars around to squeeze in that extra piece," she said.

Aly favors Seafolly for its fit and L*Space by Monica Wise for its consistent sizing and cuts. "It's like the McDonald's



Marysia
Photo By: Courtesy Photo

approach: Our customers know what they're going to get, which they want when shopping online."

Chelsea Lachowicz, global sales manager for the Tori Praver label, saw an increase in appointments with online retailers in a jammed schedule at Salon Allure. The show generates 65 percent of her total annual business.

SwimShow, meanwhile, added a lingerie section. After a successful test run of 30 lingerie brands ranging from swim hybrids to standalones, Stein said SAF plans to create a Lingerie Boudoir section next year.

Eberjey co-founder Mariela Rovito dedicated most of her booth to lingerie. Most of her accounts don't carry both categories, but she felt it was better for buyers to see the whole story. The best-selling swim group, featuring a one-piece halter and ruffled bandeau in crisply woven crochet, took its cue from lingerie. Buyers picked up nautical-inspired racer-back pajamas and polka dot Modal rompers trimmed in lavender lace.

"We saw an even split between people in swim mode who wanted to wait until Curve to write lingerie, and those who wanted to do it in one shot," she said.

Major shapewear brand Spanx, however, didn't bring lingerie. Sales director Nancy Makarek-Baez said there are so many other opportunities to focus on innerwear, SwimShow should be about swimwear. With bestsellers including the Bra-llelujah translating to swimsuits at \$178 retail, Spanx is becoming a key shapewear resource in the swim category. Suits, 65 percent of which are one-piece styles, also use draping, ruching and ruffles to hide problem areas.

"We're starting to build the swim division as a brand by investing more in fashion," she said.

Doneger's Thompson said shapewear is contributing to the category's growth as retailers move away from basics to pricier construction. Cover-ups are also netting big increases, averaging a quarter of sales.



White Sands
Photo By: Robert Sadler Clark

After cover-ups jumped from 30 to 90 sku's in two years, Colombia's OndadeMar evolved into a full lifestyle brand with sundresses, knits, shorts and capris for its 2012 collection. Chief executive officer Jose Santos plans to open its 40th store in Coral Gables, Fla., soon. "At this

level of retail, with stores from Milan to Mexico, we couldn't survive on just bikinis," he said.

Even if they haven't broadened into a full range of apparel, designers are extending cover-ups beyond the pool. Sydney-based Anna & Boy offered evening pajamas and maxi dresses as halters or color-blocked sacks in offbeat combos for cocktail parties. At \$200 to \$495 retail, they complement suits like a citrus-hued seersucker one-piece or structured bustier bikinis in khaki Lurex metallic for \$185 to \$235. Co-founder Lill Jenner plans to expand with towels, accessories and sandals.

Anthony Halas, owner of Australia's Seafolly, reports apparel and fit contributed to a 250 percent sales increase from 2010. Coming to SwimShow with 120 appointments pre-booked, he estimated he'd open about 45 new accounts. A pin-up-inspired, bustier one-piece with boy shorts, which Halas said is one of Anthropologie's top suits, was hot in gingham and polka dots.

Color and ethnic prints are up front and center, too. While it can be said that they're always in style, along with animal prints, they've been updated from years past. Thompson called color the most important trend, with saturated brights for the mature crowd and neons for juniors; color blocking in many interpretations, like a single argyle or thick rugby stripes, and prints that

pop on white grounds.

That message came across, from Tyler Rose's burnt orange bikinis to Gottex's 30 colors for a silk chiffon dress mimicking butterfly wings. The latter also showed cut-out monokinis, each incorporating five prints in brights like pink and turquoise accented with gold foil. Grad's hand-drawn prints are transferred to state-of-the-art ink jets for a high level of saturation and shade quantities, said Gottex USA president Linda Sassoon.

"You just can't get these results with the older roller printers," she said.

She added the collection went off track during American sportswear's minimal era, but "After losing our luster, we're returning to Mrs. Gottlieb's glamour." The company also launched Silver by Gottex, a more affordable collection with cup sizes, and distinct sub-brands for its main collection. Sassoon said Profile, a separates collection with tops and bottoms starting at \$38 and \$68 retail, climbed 28 percent from last year.

One-piece suits made a lot of news. Retailers from all regions agreed they must be young and statement-making. Standouts were Red Carter's plunging, black V-neck with ivory ruffles and vivid color-blocked cut-outs, and Tori Praver's plunging versions with fringe or pink and green floral smocking.

For his Glam and namesake divisions, Carter hosted an intimate presentation with live music in the Raleigh penthouse. Rudi Gernreich looks balanced subdued neutrals that were more about texture, like all-over mini sequins.

One-pieces have all but replaced the soccer-mom tankini, although New York-based contemporary line Marysia paired a cropped baby-doll top with a high-waisted bottom in red and pale pink colorblock at \$294 retail.

In prints, big, bright florals, nautical, modified animal prints whether colored or miniature, and ethnic were among the strongest, like those at Mara Hoffman's show in IMG's Cabana Grande tent Saturday.

"We wrote the biggest order from that collection," said Peregrine Honig, co-owner of Birdies boutique in Kansas City, Mo., of Hoffman's Maya-meets-the-Nile theme. "We also fell for Indian designers Shivan & Narresh's odd color combos and clean silhouettes."

Among IMG's approximately two dozen shows, other standouts were Australia's White Sands for a cool, modern zebra print, Eighties' sculpted tops, and high waist and leg cuts; and Delores Cortez, a 53-year-old Spanish brand that's breaking into the American market with a new U.S. distributor. Her best-selling prints were an abstract, colored leopard and pencil drawings based on Henri Rousseau's jungle paintings. Pieces retail around \$120.

"SwimShow is important for us, not only to grow in America but because the European trade show scene is weak [for swimwear]," said Cortez.