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## Sweeping Changes Take Hold at Milan Trade Shows

**Milan's White and Super trade fairs are repositioning by fine-tuning their assortments and promoting internationally.**

By Emily Backus on October 8, 2016

**MILAN** — Milan women's wear and accessories trade fairs White and Super underwent deep change as organizers aimed for worldly, upscale, "researched" events to cultivate Milan's position as a global hub.

White founder and president Massimiliano Bizzi called this "a watershed year," thanks to unprecedented change in the Italian fashion sector and unusual collaboration among private and public institutions, including city and state government, to attract international fashion operators of all kinds to Milan.

International ties are important in Italy, not only to ride the wave of globalization, but also for its intensified dependence on exports. Total turnover for the Italian women's wear and textiles grew 2.5 percent in 2015 to 12.8 billion euros, or \$14.4 billion at current exchange, according to figures from Italian textile and clothing federation Sistema Moda Italia. Exports last year rose 5 percent, compensating again for a squeeze on domestic consumption — a dynamic that has lasted at least five consecutive years. Exports in 2015 accounted for 60.4 percent of Italy's total sector turnover, compared to 51.2 percent in 2010.

### White

Some 22,000 visitors — 10 percent more than last September — came to see White's 500 exhibitors in a renewed, expanded offering in contemporary fashion at and near the Tortona 27 Superstudio.

"This year, there are some good ideas," said Patrizia Roma, a buyer for a northern Italian store in the G&B Negozio group, a chain that has 10 stores and a highly successful e-commerce site. Roma said she was searching White for appetizing novelty items that mix well with the mainstream luxury designers she carries, such as Fendi, Valentino and Marco de Vincenzo. She cited Opéra Swimwear, which offers a collection of hybrid lingerie swimsuits with a romantic, vintage feel. Roma explained that her store's e-commerce site, which opened about seven years ago and largely sells outside of Italy, now represents the majority of the 30-year-old group's sales. "We are still fighting in Italy," she said of business here, "but we work well abroad."

White launched a dedicated floor for its new entrants called the “Red Area — Only New Brands @ White.” There, Carlotta Canepa showed the first season of her namesake line of women’s wear. Based on vibrant, intricately patterned textiles sewn into vintage silhouettes, her spring collection showed button-down shirt dresses, light coats, and full, pleated skirts with oversized front pockets. “I designed the fabrics myself,” said Canepa. “They come from men’s neckwear.”

Canepa is an expert in necktie fabrics, as she worked in that department for her family’s renowned luxury textile manufacturer Canepa, an early adopter of the Greenpeace Detox protocol. She is the architect of the textures, weaves, and patterns of her fabrics, which are made at the family factory using sustainable practices. Her clothing wholesales for 60 to 180 euros, or \$67 to \$202.

“We’ve exceeded our expectations by more than double,” Canepa said, referring to orders. A spokesperson for her Milanese showroom, Cashmere Srl, said 30 to 40 clients had signed on.

Also showing in the Red Area was Francesca Castagnacci, winner of the fledgling Ramponi Prize for women’s accessories. She showed highly structured, candy-colored purses and bags made of soft leather, lizard, transparent plastic and colored stones. Geometric hard shells opened to release soft, pleated clutches in contrasting hues made by a Tuscan manufacturer that also produces bags for major luxury labels like Bulgari and Chanel.

“It’s an exaltation of pop-culture,” said Castagnacci of her spring collection. Pieces wholesale for 220 to 450 euros, or \$247 to \$505.

A new pavilion called White East showcased 15 edgy, high-end Chinese designers, recognizing China’s growing profile as a font of creative fashion, and provided live editorial shooting by Italian multibrand boutique and e-commerce player Luisaviaroma.

Special guest Jinnnn, a Shanghai-based brand designed by Jin Chong Yu, made its European debut with couture pieces that mixed technology and intense craftsmanship, like a lacy transparent evening gown made of black silicon, and a denim jacket whose dense beading required three-months of needlework by artisans in a rural village. While the couture pieces wholesale for 2,000 to 8,000 euros, or \$2,245 to \$8,980, Jinnnn also showed spring ready-to-wear inspired by the traditional Chinese qipao dress, developed in the 1920s. The high-necked, form-fitting silk classic in its time represented modernity and the introduction of fashion to Chinese culture, but was suppressed during the Cultural Revolution. Jinnnn’s edgy pieces related to the qipao about as literally as a Cubist portrait.

“Jin Chong Yu is trying to reconstruct the contemporary Chinese girl exploring traditional dress,” spokeswoman Sasha Krymova explained. The rtw collection wholesale at 150 to 500 euros, or \$168 to \$561. Krymova said Jinnnn is popular with Chinese celebrities, has 12 showrooms in China, and is carried by Lane Crawford and Opening Ceremony, and noted that a pair of its best-selling eyewear frames was recently requested by Lady Gaga.

White also introduced opportunities for designers from unexpected geographical regions, like Georgia, Belgium, Portugal and Argentina.

“In the last two years, there has been a big jump in fashion. The Georgian government helps a lot to promote the country through fashion and art,” said Sofia Tchkonka, curator of the Georgia area, featuring seven Georgian designers, and founder of Mercedes Benz Fashion Week Tbilisi.

“We are up to 40 designers at Fashion Week and they keep getting better and better,” she reported, pointing out that Georgian designers Demna Gvasalia and David Koma, creative directors at Balenciaga and Thierry Mugler,

respectively, have burnished the fashion credentials of the former Soviet region.

Meanwhile, White's Break Time offered selected designers from emerging countries a chance to be featured in an atelier-like room for a day. Aika Alemi, from Kazakhstan, showed a minimalist, architectural spring collection that drew on traditional Kazak garment construction for black or white monochrome pieces in linen, silk and wool.

"I am [inspired] by Japanese and Dutch constructionism," said Alemi, who explained she speaks six languages, holds an MBA from Duke University, and worked in finance at multinational corporations before embarking on a creative career. Dresses and coats in her three-year old line retail from 400 euros, or \$448, to 2,000 euros, or \$2,242. They are currently sold at shops in London, Paris, Zurich and Moscow.

White also revamped its beauty area dominated by boutique scents, created a new White Studio zone for contemporary artisanal collections, and revealed its international roadshow, promoting White and Italian fashion at the Fashion Weeks of Shanghai, Seoul, Dubai and Berlin this fall.

Asked the thrust of White's latest evolution, Bizzi replied, "Internationality."