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We Want Clean Stuff

Fashion & Lifestyle Show

LOCAL EVENTS

"We're oftentimes perceived as L.A.'s 'little sister,' and we're not really looked upon as a design center," said Lara Matthews. The 29-year-old founder of Thread — a "fashion and lifestyle show" — was speaking about San Diego and its place in the universe of clothing and accessory trends. Matthews acknowledged that San Diegans are not known as the most fashion-conscious people in the world. "That's the impression because of the lifestyle. But we don't all walk around in flip-flops. We have a craving for more fashion options down here, you know? We want the lifestyle, but we also want cool stuff to wear."

To satisfy our craving for fashion, out-of-town designers from L.A., as well as San Francisco, Hawaii, and elsewhere, will be in San Diego this weekend to participate in the latest Thread. "They see San Diego as an important target. They see potential down here. They want to get into the boutiques and be recognized."

Local designers will be on hand, too: half of the 55 vendors are San Diego–based. Kites Designs is owned by 31-year-old Carla Manuel, a Brazilian who has lived in San Diego for 12 years and also designs for women's sports lines. "Every single piece she makes is completely different," said Matthews of Manuel's independent work. "She uses lots of silks and laces. It's very feminine. She pays attention to the female form very well, but it's not fluffy or tarty in any way."

Barbara Rourke, 26-year-old owner of Bells&Whistles, whose studio is in Del Mar, designs handbags. "Her line is very simple and clean and tight, and she sets the precedent for what you will see at Thread," Matthews said.

(Rourke also designs art furniture with Jason St. John; their firm, Christine Alexander, is a combination of their middle names.)

Matthews was speaking to us by phone from Portland, Oregon, where she had gone for a brief preshow vacation. Asked what she was wearing, she said: "I have on pink jeans, and I'm carrying a big silver bag. On my feet, yellow sneakers. My top is a black shirt that I bought at one of the trunk shows."

Matthews's accent is British. In London, she used to organize photographic trade shows; she also worked in publishing. Three and a half years ago she emigrated to San Diego after meeting a guy from here who was in London "on holiday." The guy is no longer on the scene, "but San Diego has opened up some great opportunities for me," she said.

About a year ago, Thread was born. "I realized that there was no place for the designers to showcase themselves here," said Matthews, "so I wanted to create that." She started small. The first Thread was in Matthews's back yard in Hillcrest. By her own account, hundreds came to shop for clothes by the independent designers she had assembled.

The event on Sunday will be the fourth Thread. This time, the date was purposely chosen to coincide with the last day of the weekend-long Action Sports Retailers convention *(www.asrbiz.com)*.

For now, Thread is peripatetic. The venue for number four is the soon-to-be-demolished Old Wonder Bread Factory in East Village (on a nongame day, so parking shouldn't be a problem).

Besides one-of-a-kind creations, Thread will feature a lot of jeans and T-shirts that are made en masse for stores. That's Thread's mix, said Matthews, "because that's how we dress — one-of-a-kinds paired with new jeans, new shoes, and so on."

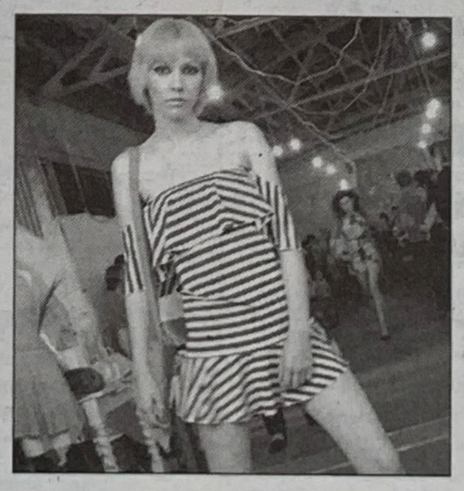
At Thread, though, the en masse stuff will be discounted, some of it as steeply as 50 percent. "We're really trying to set a precedent for the high-end style available at low cost," she said.

That's a commendable combination, but how can vendors afford to sell wholesale to the public? "It's a chance for some designer to get rid of some of their lines that they haven't sold to the stores."

In addition to the shopping opportunity, there will be an art show, art auction, and professionally choreographed fashion show with runway models wearing the clothing and accessories of the participating designers.

Asked to name some fashion trends that she has noticed, Matthews declined. "I'm not really a fashion forecaster. I'm the person that creates the vehicle that will get all of these designers in front of the right people."

Still, she was the one who decided which designers were accepted and which rejected. So, what were her criteria? "I turned away 25 designers because their products were not so high-end. We don't want to see tie-dyed Indian cottons. We want the clean stuff, not anything that reflects beach life. And to be frank, there's nothing else like this in San Diego, so we get everyone applying."

— *Jeanne Schinto*

Thread 4: Fashion & Lifestyle Show
Sunday, September 12
11 a.m.–7 p.m.
Old Wonder Bread Factory
147 14th Street (14th and L, opposite Petco Park)
Downtown
Cost: $5
Info: 619-922-1974 or *www.threadshow.com*