

NEWS

It's catwalk time as fashion week comes to the Fira of Barcelona

Top national and international designers show off their designs at the Passarel.la Gaudí

MARTA WENDLINGER

Barcelona Fashion Week (BFW) is once again in full swing. Starting on January 31 in the Italian Pavilion of the Fira of Barcelona, BFW is a week-long celebration of many leading local and international designers, situating it among the most significant shows in the world.

Passarel.la Gaudí, the long-standing showpiece of BFW, features ever-present local Catalan and Spanish designers such as Miriam Ocariz, Josep Font, Lydia Delgado and Agatha Ruiz de la Prada, as well as select international guests such as the Portuguese creators Miguel Vieira and Jose Antonio Tenente. Other up-and-coming professionals will be showcased: rising stars Gloria Rodríguez Figueroa, Alberto Tous and Lola Blanquer, for example. New designers from the Escuela Superior de Diseño (ESDi) and Moda Felicidad Dulce, two renowned fashion universities bring up the rear.

Friday and Saturday are dedicated to the 11th edition of Circuit, entitled "Re-do". Since its inception in 2000, Circuit has been considered a platform for launching new trends and a pioneer, both in Spain and Europe,

taking fashion to the limits by merging different art and design disciplines. In addition to the 30-odd catwalks, BFW also features various showrooms highlighting a range of issues in the world of fashion. Rounding off the week are various events sponsored by ModaFAD (part of Barcelona's decorative art foundation FAD).

This year, the Department of Commerce, Tourism, and Consumerism has designated a total of 7.4m euros for the event, more than ever before. Josep Huguet, council member for the department announced that a Fashion Committee composed of designers, schools and associations, will discuss the "evolution of BFW" as part of the textile industry's globalisation and a redefinition of the BFW's management model. Also for the first time, all of the catwalks, showrooms and events are taking place in a coordinated, non-competitive way. In earlier years, spectators were torn, as they had to choose to attend a Passarel.la Gaudí or a Circuit catwalk. This year, they can see everything. That is, if they have an invitation for Gaudí; Circuit is open to the public.



Clothes by designer Vittorio in the Italian pavillion at the Fira of Barcelona / L.CRUSSET

Catalans in New York raise funds for tsunami disaster appeal

Friends of Catalonia/The Catalan Institute of America raised 4,400 dollars (3,370 euros) in a silent auction in New York last week to help victims of the Asian tsunami, writes Hillary Gardner. The association, which is composed of Catalans, their family and friends living in the New York area, met at the Roger Smith Hotel in Manhattan for a fundraiser attended by R. Jayasinghe, ambassador and deputy representative of Sri Lanka to the United Nations. "We may be gathered in fun," remarked Joan Salavedra, the organisation's president to the 200 participants, "but we have a serious purpose: to help those whose lives were devastated by this catastrophe." The fundraiser was made possible through the support of the Spanish consulate, COPCA, as well as a long list of companies.

High water consumption penalised

The Catalan water provider *Agència Catalana de l'Aigua* (ACA) is planning to penalise domestic consumers who use more than 200 litres per day with rates as much as four times higher than will be applied to those who only consume 100 litres per day. According to the ACA, the new regulations will come into force on April 1. Water consumption levels as measured under the new rules will take into account the number of people in each household. ACA has calculated that, if current consumption levels persist, more than 65% of families will see increases of 1.5% in their water bills.

Cold snap damages agricultural produce across Catalonia

Consumers will no doubt soon be feeling the sting of the recent Arctic cold wave in the form of higher prices for fresh produce. Crops that have suffered the most damage include vegetables, decorative flowers and citric fruits grown along the Catalan coast. Olive trees have been affected to a lesser degree. Livestock have also suffered, as animals have taken longer than normal to obtain desired weight levels. The amount of damage will increase if the cold weather and winter drought persist. In anticipation of additional damage, the farmer's group *Unió de Pagesos* has not yet assigned a value to current losses.

Ex-pats organise pub quiz competition in Catalonia

British and Irish ex-pats who miss the tradition of pub quizzes, as well as those who would like to experience it for the first time, will be pleased to learn that competitions are to be held at various bars throughout Catalonia. Bar quiz participants are groups who compete in teams of five, answering trivia questions in various thematic areas. Organisers of the Catalan competitions plan to have questions prepared in English, Catalan and Spanish to increase participation. Prizes include free drinks and other surprises. The quizzes will run until May 8. For more information, visit www.qnecat.com.



Secondary school students can now read Catalonia Today at school / Marta Perez

CT now available in public secondary and language schools

CATALONIA TODAY

The Catalan Education Ministry and the publishers of *Catalonia Today* have reached an agreement whereby all public secondary schools (IES) as well as government-run language schools (EOI—*Escoles Oficials d'Idiomes*) in Catalonia will receive the newspaper each week. More than 500 secondary schools and 32 EOI centres will benefit from this agreement.

Teachers and students will be able to use the newspaper as the basis for

classroom activities and discussions. The aim of the measure is to help increase the level of English amongst students of these institutions with the help of the only Catalan newspaper published in English.

To resolve any issues related to distribution (address changes, failure to receive the paper, delays, etc.), institutions receiving the newspaper can send an email message to *Catalonia Today* (subscriptions@cataloniatoday.info).

Maremàgnum mall stocks up on retailers

A.L.

Maremàgnum, the leisure complex at Barcelona's port, is about to undergo a makeover. The site will boast new restaurants and retail shops of a higher standard, according to its management. The incoming businesses, including clothing shops such as Mango, are to take over much of the space that was occupied by bars and discos. The word *discoteca* is being carefully avoided, though the new manager of Maremàgnum, Fraser Denton, says some bars will have a "dance area". In effect, the Maremàgnum will go from being an out-of-fashion, late-night booze and dance haven to a modern restaurant and retail complex; a mall on the Mediterranean. The site changed management after closing down a year ago, following a noticeable decline in the number of visitors and a rise in crime and violence, such as the murder of an Ecuadorian young man, Wilson Pacheco. The Maremàgnum administration are now keen to lease the renovated space, and say that 70 per cent of its 18,000 sq metres has already been filled, Spanish newspaper *El País* reported. The newest on the list, retailer Mango, will set up shop in a space of 1,300 sq m.

Immigrants get up to speed in special classes

AGENCIES

The growing population of immigrant children has led the Generalitat to create special classrooms where newly-arrived pupils can receive enough intensive tutoring in Catalan to survive academically in the Catalan school system. Some 12,500 students from 150 countries are being taught in such special classrooms during the 2004-2005 school term, which have cost the government 36 million euros.

Of the 700 such classrooms that were added to the public system this term, 63 per cent are located in primary schools and 37 per cent in secondary schools. The bulk of these classrooms exist in schools which are 100 per cent public, with only about ten per cent of them in schools partially subsidised by the government (*escoles concertades*), even through 40 per cent of Catalonia's school-aged children study in these semi-private schools.

Education minister Marta Cid said she is pleased so far with the results of the programme, although many headmasters have complained that there is not a sufficient number of such classrooms to meet the current demand.