

Fashion

MARTA WENDLINGER / www.onezonefashion.com

Gay fashion comes out of the closet

● As a prelude to summer fashion, I chatted with owners of some of the hottest stores in Barcelona's Gay Eixample. I started out at M69 on C/Muntaner where Albert Prat, co-owner of the store, greeted me. M69 has a bit of everything, and a minimalist look, so as not to detract from the colourful clothing by renowned international brands such as Replay, davidelfin, trendy bags by Freitag, shoes and sportswear by Bikkenberg, Nike, Vans, hats, skin care and cologne by Paul Smith.

M69 was one of the first "gay" stores to open in the area, some seven years ago. After the gay zone was established, more stores began opening, but none were providing international multi-brands so Albert decided to create his own niche. "Business has continuously improved over the years. It used to be 85% gay but now it's about 50-50."

When I ask Barcelona-born Albert what sort of changes he's experienced in the gay community in the last 10 or 20 years, he doesn't hesitate with his answer. He's seen how the gay community has become more open: "It's not undercover anymore. In Barcelona you see gays holding hands walking down the street and it's normal."

I was curious to know if he thought Barcelona's Gay Eixample would ever compare to San Francisco's Castro district, Madrid's Chueca area, or the Paris Marais quartier. He thought that the structure of Barcelona doesn't lend itself to that; "Gays are all over Barcelona – they're not in a ghetto."

As I was leaving the store, Guilermo, a loyal customer came in told me that M69 has the best clothes in town and what makes the store unique is that Albert actually helps you choose clothes that flatter you and never sells you

anything that isn't "you."

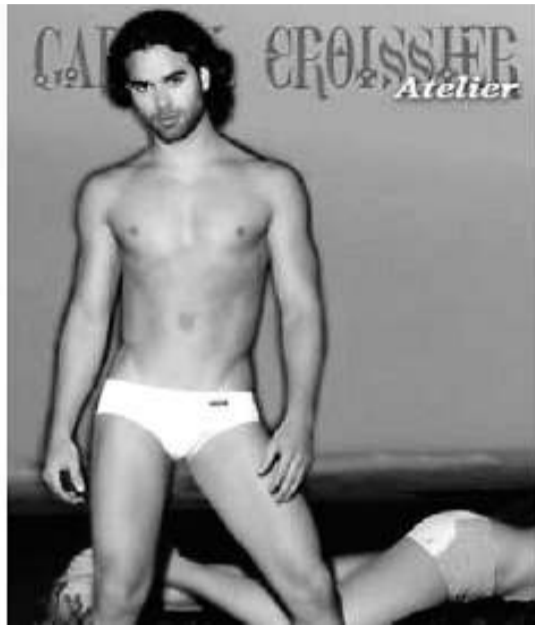
Continuing my route I come to COOL on C/Consell de Cent, where I was able to speak to Toni, whose store has been open for about five years. He got the idea while living in Los Angeles, where he realised that there weren't many stores for gays in Barcelona and decided to give it a go.

COOL, smaller than M69 and more focused on sportswear, draws you in with colourful mannequins in the window displays wearing embroidered jeans, trendy t-shirts and interesting caps. Inside, soft techno-house music greets you and you can find jeans and shirts by Absolute Joy, Japan Rags, Bray Steve Alan, caps by WKK, and underwear by aussiebum. Toni's also quite pleased with his decision to open, as business has progressively grown.

Toni says he has seen significant changes in Barcelona's gay culture. "Years ago there used to be one or two gay bars and now there's a ton," he says. The community has "evolved a lot and now gays coming out of the closet have an easier time, he adds."

Finally, I backtrack to Gabriel Crossier's Atelier on C/Muntaner where I find Gabriel hard at work on his newest swimwear collection. He's a relative newcomer to the area and came here from Las Palmas to study at La Llotja, the only public school in Barcelona for Applied Arts. The store has been open for six months. Previously, he had been selling his garments to other stores. After seeing that there wasn't a shop for young designers he decided to open one.

The store's airy and tastefully done with an assortment of col-



Gay fashion is booming in Barcelona's Eixample district

ourful shirts, pants, and his swimwear collection that any man would be happy to own. He helps promote young designers such as Jose Rivero, Javier Alsamendi, Ester Moya, and classmates Jondalar and Cecistore, who contributes the chic bags.

Gabriel agrees with Albert and Toni that Barcelona's gay community is unique. He feels that "although Barcelona sells itself as a 'modern and progressive city' and therefore has no need for a 'gay ghetto', it's really just a town like any other in Spain" and unfortunately businesses in Barcelona are more pro-money than pro-gay and have little "gay consciousness" which is something he'd like to see change.

Finally, I asked him whether there was a specific "gay look." Gabriel insisted that there were as many styles as personalities and added the point that "more heterosexual guys are trying to become more 'gay or metro-sexual' and gays are becoming more heterosexual...an interesting reversal."

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Barcelona sets the trend for Bread & Butter fashion fair

The new European fashion event begins on July 5

RUTH RICHARDSON

● The fashion industry is easily one of the most merciless when it comes to dealing with aspiring talents. The cut-throat competition makes it hard for young designers to showcase their work and establish the contacts they need to survive. It was this reality that prompted a group of young designers to create their own platform from which to launch their designer labels. The result: the retailer's fashion fair Bread & Butter. The show began in 2003 as a youth street-wear event in a disused Siemens factory in Berlin and although it is a fashion event still in its infancy, it is itself fast-becoming a brand name across Europe. Industry icon Karl Lagerfeld questioned whether Berlin has the consumer base to support ambitious designers when so many young people are migrating from the city and this year Bread & Butter will instead be held at Fira de Barcelona from July 5-7. Although organisers

say the move to Barcelona this summer is not a verdict on Berlin as a venue, hosting the event in south-west Europe will without doubt create a stronger axis to support and promote the event.

The fair maintains a fashionable air of exclusivity by closing its doors to the general public and only allowing access to those with industry accreditations. Major labels like Zara, H&M, and Mango are also excluded from the event in a statement of solidarity against large scale industries which can reproduce new fashion trends at a fraction of the price thus undercutting small-scale designers.

700 designers and an expected 50,000 international visitors will be present. The growing creative and industrial force of Bread & Butter makes it hard to predict what the future holds but at this rate it has the potential to challenge many of the more established fashion fairs of Europe.



Bread & Butter can launch aspiring designers into the industry

A new era for the Passarel·la

XAVI AGUILAR

● The Passarel·la Barcelona approaches its second edition with the intention of consolidating a project that was born out of problems and the need to find its own space. The show started this week at its new home in the Fòrum, although there are some fashion parades planned in other parts of the city.

On Wednesday, the company TCN kicked the series of events off with a look at its new spring and summer line for 2007. The following day, one of the highlights of the event, Catalan firm Armand Basi presented its new women's line in Barcelona's polo club.

The Passarel·la will close on Friday with an Antonio Miró



Designers who are participating in this year's Passarel·la Barcelona

presentation in what is sure to be one of the most unusual sites for a catwalk, the Model prison. The rest of Friday will be devoted to emerging talent, such as Bambi, Casita de Wendy, Luxoir, Gori de Palma and Comentrigo.

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