

BUSINESS

Fashion revolution hits Barcelona

Comments by Catalan trade minister Huguet herald radical changes in city's fashion industry

MARTAWENDLINGER

When a revolution begins, it is always a shock, though if you look back, you generally find that the change hasn't happened overnight. Since autumn of last year, professionals associated with Barcelona Fashion Week (BFW) knew that things were going to change in terms of how the week was organised and promoted. But the end result, however, has come as quite a shock to some.

For months, there has been speculation and rumours about Barcelona's fashion future, and although everything is still not clear, day by day more light is being shed on the issue. Last Wednesday, on the TV program *Els Matins de TV3*, the Catalan minister for trade, tourism and consumer affairs, Josep Huguet, accused some of the Gaudí designers of being a "private club" that has been profiting from public funding for years. His comments were largely based on the report compiled by Professor José Luis Nueno of the Barcelona business school IESE. The report states that the annual fashion show the Pasarela Gaudí, which receives 90 per cent of its budget from governmental support — a whopping 7.4 million euros, half of which ends up in a few companies' pockets — has become, in essence, stagnant. Other highly successful catwalk shows, as is the case of New York, receive no state or city subsidies. Huguet has announced that in view of the report, a major shake-up is due in the funding of Barcelona's fashion world.

After the report was publicised,



Models presenting bridal wear designs by Rosa Clara at this year's Passarel·la Gaudí catwalk show / EFE

some "fashion players" were clearly in favour; others were firmly against, and have threatened to leave Barcelona for Madrid's Cibeles. Toni Morral, Secretary of the Association of Designers Gaudí, feels that Huguet's decision has been destructive, and that it may result in the fourth most important worldwide catwalk — the Spanish

Pasarela — moving to Madrid.

Repercussions have been highly significant. Last week, Paco Flaque, Director of Moda Barcelona and the long-standing organiser of BFW decided to step down from organising the January 2006 show, which was to be his last. Flaque, in charge of the event since the 70s and a Barcelona icon to many in the fashion sector,

has continually received millions to implement the event with, up till now, few or no questions asked.

But the interesting question is: why? What really motivated Minister Huguet to make such a dramatic change in reorienting BFW, thereby roughing up so many important feathers in the Barcelona fashion/political community? It seems

as if one of the main reasons is Huguet's desire for Pasarela Gaudí to become a showcase for young emerging designers to promote Catalan fashion internationally.

However, one can also speculate that the crucial thrust behind the minister's decision was based on the incredible and unexpected success of the new fashion fair that was held last summer, called "Bread & Butter". This international fair, which first appeared in Berlin in 2001, is self-financed and has become, in such a short time, a point of reference for the international fashion world by creating an astounding amount of benefits for the city, while at the same time linking with other cultural events, thus guaranteeing more international press and exposure. Suffice to say, in its first year, this social phenomenon has had widespread repercussions which have brought into question Pasarela Gaudí's lack of growth and what some call its "obsolescence".

Finally, the Catalan government has seen the beauty of a different model of doing business, free of nepotism, and has realised that opening up the process to other, more progressive European models can bring Barcelona the success it's always hoped for. The minister's decision to radically change its support, after so many years of turning a blind eye, shows courage and, if taken as a benchmark, is likely to spread to other important arenas. Barcelona's future as a first-class world leader depends on it.

Marta Wendlinger / www.one2one-fashion.com

Theme park's 10th anniversary

CATALONIA TODAY

Port Aventura, the theme park in the south of Catalonia, is celebrating its 10th anniversary with good news: in the last six months it has been visited by a record 3,600,000 people, a 6 per cent increase on the previous year. As a consequence, the three hotels in the complex — El Paso, Port Aventura and Caribe Resort — have also achieved record figures, as room occupation has risen to 70 per cent, two percentage points up on last year.

In addition, the current friction between Catalonia and certain parts of Spain over the Catalan Estatut, which has produced threats of a boycott of Catalan products, does not seem to have affected Porta Aventura's profits as it is estimated that 23 per cent of visitors are from Madrid. José Blanco, the manager of the theme park, said "the Estatut has not affected us adversely at all in terms of numbers of visitors".



Port Aventura's Hurakan Condor is the tallest free-fall ride in the world / J.FERNANDEZ

Multi-lingual guide to beef production published

CATALONIA TODAY

The Catalan beef promotion board Provedella, in conjunction with the Generalitat, has published a good practice guide for meat production. The *Manual de bones pràctiques de cria pel boví de car* provides a quick guide to the new laws and control regulations on meat production decreed by the European Union in early 2005.

In addition, the guide has been translated into seven languages, in view of the number of people working in the Catalan meat industry who have come from other countries. Thus, in addition to Catalan and Spanish, the guide is also available in Romanian, Russian, French, English and Arabic.

The guide gives instructions on every part of the meat production process, starting with animal husbandry. For example, the book rec-

ommends leading the cattle into their stable "without use of violence. Beating animals with sticks only hurts them and causes stress in the animals. It is better to guide them using sticks with coloured tape on one end." The guide also points out that cattle are reluctant to walk into dark places, and thus "it is advisable to illuminate the areas into which you want the animals to go". The guide also stipulates the basic regulations for keeping animals, such as the fact that every cow or bullock should be provided with 4 m² of space, as well as suitable feeding appliances.

Beef consumption in Spain has fallen over the past 12 months, and especially in Catalonia, where sales are estimated to have dropped by 4.2 per cent, compared to 1.63 per cent in the rest of Spain. This guide is an attempt to arrest this decline.