

Gaixample Couture

BY
MARTA
WENDLINGER

We explore the trends in some of the Gaixample's hottest stores.

As a prelude to summer fashion, I was interested in chatting 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 is definitely chic and has a bit of everything, beautifully arranged along white walls, modern steel floors, and cement counters. The look is minimalist with black and white furniture 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, with an assortment of music, books, and even postcards.

M69 was one of the first "gay" stores to open in the area, about 7 years ago. After the gay zone was established, more stores began opening up, but none were providing international multi-brands so he decided to create his own niche and he's really happy with his decision. "Business has continuously improved over the years with a bit of luck and a solid client base. It used to be 85% gay but now it's about 50-50."

When I asked Albert (born and raised in Barcelona) what sort of changes he's experienced in the gay community in the past 10 or 20 years, he didn't hesitate with his answer. He's seen how the gay community has become more open and much less taboo. "It's not undercover anymore. In Barcelona you see gays holding hands walking down the street and it's normal" unlike when he was growing up.

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 Paris's Marais quartier. He thought that the structure of Barcelona doesn't really lend itself to that; "it's not like Gracia or El Borne that are small, compact areas. Gays are all over Barcelona - they're not in a ghetto."

I continued my route to COOL on C/Consell de Cent, where I was able to speak with Toni, whose store has been open for about 5 years, after having gotten the idea while living in Los Angeles, shopping in West Hollywood, and realised that there weren't many stores for gays in Barcelona and decided to give it a go.

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COOL, smaller than M69 and more focused on sportswear, draws you in with colourful and trendy mannequins in the window displays wearing embroidered jeans and trendy t-shirts, interesting caps, and of course "cool" shades. Once 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. He's also quite pleased with his decision to open since business has progressively grown and he's even included an outlet section upstairs where you can buy garments from previous collections at great prices.

Toni, like Albert, both have seen significant changes in Barcelona's gay culture. Toni said that "years ago there used to be 1 or 2 gay bars and now there's a tonne!" Another interesting comment was that "now you see gay people on TV... before that was taboo." And it's true, on almost every TV series, there's a gay guy or a gay couple, for example on the ever-so popular series "Aqui no hay quien viva" and on the new Channel 4 they've begun to show "Queer as Folk". Not to mention, one of Spain's most well-loved TV presenters is Jesus Vasquez...an outspoken gay supporter. Toni went on to say that the gay community has "evolved a lot and now gays coming out of the closet have an easier time with it."

Finally, I back tracked to Gabriel Crossier's Atelier on C/Muntaner and encountered Gabriel hard at work on his newest swimwear collection; he's got everything he needs to work: patterns, fabrics, and his sewing machine while he attends customers.

He's a newcomer to the area, having lived in Barcelona for 6 years, after coming here from Las Palmas to study at La Llotja, the only public school in Barcelona for Applied Arts. The store has been open for 6 months. Previously, he had been selling his garments to other stores in the area but since there wasn't a store dedicated to young designers... he opened one. The store's airy and tastefully done with an assortment of colourful shirts, pants, and of course 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.

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Although it's only been open a few months, he can't complain... "during winter, mostly heterosexuals buy at the store, but now with the summer weather, it's the gay community." When I was there, a client came in wanting to buy a really interesting necklace made of alabaster and wood that he had seen displayed in the window and just couldn't resist coming back to buy it.

Gabriel, like Albert and Toni, is happy with his choice of opening shop and the huge advantage of having his studio in the store gives him the opportunity to have contact with clients and personalise garments and since all garments come in a limited edition, what you buy is pretty "unique."

Although both Albert and Toni spoke about the positive changes in the gay community, Gabriel mentioned the negative ones: an increase of drug use at discos and after clubs, primarily with ecstasy, GHB, ketamine, and other pills. But he also mentioned, of course, that now "gays can finally marry...and that's a great thing!"

Gabriel agrees with Albert and Toni that Barcelona's gay community is unique but in a different way. 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 one 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 was interested in finding out if there was a specific "gay look." Each quickly replied, "No." There are many looks... the "bear look: military clothes, jeans and polos or checkered shirts; very fashion conscience wearing the newest trends from Roberto Cavalli or Dolce & Gabbana; really tight and colourful clothes; and of course you can't forget the "leather boys." All agreed that since everyone has their own personality; they also have their own style. But Gabriel made a good point: "more heterosexual guys are trying to become more 'gay or metro-sexual' and gays are becoming more heterosexual... an interesting reversal.

For more information:

M69 Eixample C/Muntaner 69 -- 93.453.62.69

M69 Born C/Rec 28 -- 93.310.42.36

COOL C/Consell de Cent 233 -- 93.451.43.80

Atelier Gabriel Crossier C/Muntaner 77 -- 93.451.56.64

Marta Wendlinger is a fashion consultant who lives in Barcelona. For more information on fashion consulting or to arrange an appointment phone +34 61.755.20.35 or visit: www.one2onefashion.com



Top Right: Young designer Gabriel Croissier works hard producing his latest collection of swimwear. Top Left: COOL draws you in with colourful and trendy mannequins wearing embroidered jeans and trendy shirts. Bottom Right: Gabriel Croissier's Atelier on Calle Muntaner doubles as the designer's studio. Bottom Left: Gabriel Croissier's airy store has an assortment of colourful shirts, pants and of course his own swimwear.



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