

## Scandinavian Fashion Heats Up Berlin

By Melissa Drier

Filippa K, a Stockholm-based brand, will enter doors in France this year.

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BERLIN — A dressier sportswear look moved to the fore here this season, as contemporary fashion makers generated more buzz and captured more bucks at the recent Premium and Bread & Butter fairs.

Scandinavian brands were particularly strong, reflecting several years of gradual market penetration, as well as a general sea change in the young fashion scene. Active-influenced streetwear looks have slowed down, and retailers and manufacturers say premium denim is beginning to lose some of its luster, opening the way for a contemporary fashion splash.

"The Italians and the Germans are a bit too junior right now when it comes to sportswear," said Sam Ben-Avraham, owner of Atrium, a specialty boutique in New York, who added he's opting instead for dressier European looks. "The Scandinavian look, on the other hand, is more mature, but with a bit of a twist when it comes to small details. It's all very subtle."

Manuela Fassbender, founder of MBF Trend Consulting in New York, said, "I definitely think we're going toward a more dressed-up situation. Milk & Honey [the women's show-within-a-show at Bread & Butter] has pulled together big time. That was the core for me at Bread & Butter this season, especially the Scandinavian collections and all the details they're using."

Vibeke Kemner, who designs and runs Mille K with her husband, Morten, said, "Business has been very good. There's a real focus on Denmark and Copenhagen and you can feel it."

Exhibiting at Milk & Honey for the second time, Kemner said customers were buying "small, feminine, underwear-influenced tops and knitwear and lots of silk chiffon and dresses, and many are asking for basic jackets and pants to wear

with all the fancy tops."

Noa Noa, a Danish brand at Milk & Honey, already has 300 customers in Germany, but also was seeing retailers from Turkey, Italy, Russia and Poland at the fair. A study in subtle contrasts, Noa Noa played with Edwardian touches taken from museum pieces, but also used slightly dandy, masculine looks. A typical mix: wide-legged pants in a soft handled tweed with a beaded ribbon belt over a beaded sweater, a printed floral wool bolero and a striped wool muffler. While people tend to talk of "Scandinavian fashion," Swedish brands tend to take a less embellished fashion approach than the Danes.

Filippa K is a prime example. Known for easy-to-wear urban fashion with a contemporary edge, the Stockholm-based brand just opened its first store in Berlin, with Munich to follow in two weeks. German sales continuously have doubled in the last four years, and the collection, which now generates 50 percent of its volume outside of Scandinavia, will take on France for the first time this year.

Founder and designer Filippa Knutsson, showing at Premium, said next fall is about "the contrast between feminine and masculine, strict and casual, shiny and matte. It's a well-dressed look, but with a sexy vibe, though we're very sensitive to vulgarity, which we stay away from. We're more into timelessness and value for money."

After three years on the German market, "we can finally say things are going well," said Karen Warburg, German agent for the Danish collection Baum und Pferdgarten.

"Retailers see how easy [the collection] is to integrate without having to open a Scandinavian shop," Warburg said. "And interest in Scandinavia has continuously grown because they offer an emotional type of fashion that reaches many people."

She said everyone bought playful looks, such as an acid yellow and natural jacquard cardigan over a petrol and cream polkadot silk ruffle-edged blouse and a blue striped flared skirt with a pieced hem, or a puff-sleeved, back-pleated coat with a polkadot lining.

Both Premium and Bread & Butter were also strong platforms for young Berlin

designers. There were more group stands than ever and scores of individual presentations. The Eighties remain an important stylistic starting point, with designers then reworking and reconstructing iconic shapes such as blousons, bat-winged sleeves and wrap jersey dresses.

Meike Vollmar of Macqua was seen writing page-long orders at Milk & Honey for boutiques in Japan; Antwerp, Belgium, and Germany for her blouson tops in pure angora jersey or mohair. But for her, the inspiration was less "Flashdance" and more Joan of Arc.

"There's a medieval element and it's a little warlike," Vollmar said. "But the Macqua concept is always a mix of masculine-feminine."

Bread & Butter, which ended its three-day run on Sunday, attracted 30,500 trade visitors, up from 26,000 last summer but below the show's high point of 40,000 prior to the launch of the Barcelona edition last year. Foreign participation rose, with 44 percent of visitors coming from outside of Germany.

Premium, which ran for three days and ended on Tuesday, broke attendance records with 17,000 buyers shopping both the Station and Tunnel venues. About 60 percent came from abroad.

According to Premium co-founders Norbert Tillmann and Anita Bachelin, Premium and the newly founded Berlin Fashion Week will run parallel to Bread & Butter next season. Bread & Butter has scheduled the next Berlin show for July 14-16, but even if these dates change, the Premium team said, "Premium will be held at the same time as B&B, no matter what."