



## Fashion week provides key insight into retailer expansion

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The extravaganza that is fashion week comes with high drama, high stakes and larger than life image. Designers display their creations beginning September 5th and bow out September 12th. In this design epicenter, the worlds of fashion, society, celebrity and retail mix in a celebration of decadence and, of course, ego. This is all that is Mercedes Benz Fashion Week.

Under massive tents spanning nearly eight acres in Bryant Park and teeming with a veritable who's who of press, buyers, socialites, celebrities and-of course-models, the runways are a blank canvas magically turned into mini-worlds created in the minds of the designers and truly are a work of art.

Australian designer and artist Michael Angel opened the show, followed by BCBG Max Azria and Perry Ellis. At noon, it was time for the slinky silhouettes of Yigal Azrouel, the Israeli-born designer whose successful boutiques in the Meatpacking District and East Hampton are destinations for the likes of Sara Jessica Parker and Natalie Portman.

Two times a year, one week in the spring and fall, New York has the opportunity to host what's in store fashion-wise for the following year. Fashion press royalty promotes the best collections, crowns its favored designers and selects must-have styles which give retailers a sign on who, what and which to carry.

For those of us in the real estate industry, fashion week brings invaluable insight into which designers or "houses" may be soon expanding into multiple locations, including which up-and-coming or newly minted foreign designers will be setting up shop in Manhattan. Conversely, by their absence from the shows, we wonder what's in store and if there is change on the horizon.

After a vibrant summer of retail highlights in the Hamptons in which Intermix added an East Hampton outpost, as did John Varvatos, Elie Tahari, and the aforementioned Yigal Azrouel, there's nothing like coming home to Fashion Week. The end of summer is signified by a slew of fabulous new designers and a coterie of well-established couture, many of whom I have had the privilege to work with over the years.

Sunday, September 7th, design doyenne Donna Karan is moving DKNY into the big tent to celebrate her brand's 20th anniversary. Hervé Leger by Max Azria, Diane Von Furstenberg, Akiko Ogawa and Thuy are also among the fashion house highlights on Sunday.

Monday should also prove to be dazzling with collections that include those of Carolina Herrera, Jill Stuart, Peter Som, Luca Luca and Ports 1961. The following day, we'll undoubtedly be awed by Cynthia Steffe, Betsey Johnson and Vivienne Tam.

Adding to the festive flavor of the event, Mercedes Benz fashion week sponsor Havaianas will again give away custom-made flip flops. It's a particularly popular theme, especially considering the success of last season's runaway show by Brazilian swimwear label Rosa Cha, which opened its Soho boutique at 460 West Broadway just in time. Rosa Cha appears on Saturday, September 6th and what goes better with sexy bikinis than the best-ever flip flops.

During the last few days, from September 9th through September 12th, some of the most important and popular designers in the U.S. and abroad will have their turn on the runway, including Cynthia Steffe, Betsey Johnson, Max Azria, Michael Kors, Anna Sui and Vera Wang.

If designer fashion and the retail that picks them up are showing signs of weakening, no one is telling this crowd! Maybe it's just that New York is an economic anomaly. The latest reports from the Federal Reserve District showed tourist spending is actually brisk in New York City. Meanwhile, nationwide the overall pace of retail sales moderated in certain markets, but in high fashion, it's still robust. And nowhere is high fashion better understood than under the tents in Bryant Park during Mercedes Benz fashion week.

Twice a year in New York City we have the opportunity to celebrate many of our greatest fashion designers and meet others from around the world. There is something so grand and important about this gathering of visitors whose primary agenda is to bring beautiful design to New York City and secure our place among the world's major fashion centers.

New Yorkers are very fortunate to have the Mercedes Benz fashion week in our backyard!

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