



Access

• September 1994 •

FASHION ON THE CUTTING EDGE

One of the surprise "hits" of Canada Expo 94 in Mexico City was the Canadian fashion industry, which brought a touch of glamour to an otherwise practical affair.

The fashion area, featuring clothing, accessories, jewellery and perfume, offered a contrast to the more functional machinery, technology and agricultural displays that were the main course offered in the Exhibimex.

There was always a great deal of interest and activity in the fashion products area — women twirled in the aisles, trying on fur coats or jackets, while spritzes of perfume were liberally applied to passers-by (male or female). Re-arrangement of samples at the jewellery counter would produce an aisle-blocking crowd, and the whole area exuded colour, scents and the atmosphere created by goods that are, at the very least, discretionary buys.

Quite a few orders were placed for clothing, perfumes and jewellery by some of Mexico's high-end fashion chain stores, and a lot of interest was engendered in future transactions between Canada's style practitioners and a growing new market.

"Fashion is a specialty, niche market," admits Carol Outram of the Canadian Apparel Federation's Design Division. "It finds its level fast, and then plateaus. We at the CAF consider it part of our

role to look at the market and to create networking and promotional opportunities."

Design-driven companies do not have enormous volume in any given market. "We have made an effort to find ways for the designers to expand. In recent times, we have identified two strong potential new market areas for Canadian designers: the United Kingdom and Mexico."

When it comes to Mexico, Ms. Outram says, the CAF decided to "take advantage of a new market." Aware of NAFTA, and all the trade initiatives related to it, the CAF invited the Mexico edition of *Vogue*, the bible of international fashion coverage, to attend the September showing of the Toronto Collections, as the twice-yearly ready-to-wear shows are known. The immediate result was an unprecedented four-page full-colour spread in *Mexico Vogue*, and a new interest in the notion of fashion from Canada.

"With that response, which came in the February issue of *Vogue*, we knew there would be a lot of active interest from the Mexican buying market," Ms. Outram says. "That kind

of space means that the editors have identified interest from their subscribers — their audience — and feel they can keep the advertisers happy."

As a result, she intensified efforts to make the presence of the Canadian design and fashion sector a part of Canada Expo, and it paid off. "Designers have to look at how they can maintain and expand their business, make sure their decisions are the right decisions."

They made an attractive and appealing presence. Several companies, including Franco Mirabelli of Montreal, a fashion designer, Coro Canada of Toronto, a cosmetic jewellery firm, and Parfums Simon Chang, made sales on-site. Many of the other exhibitors received orders and most received expressions of interest.

Other members of the design trade are also investigating the Mexican market: Toronto tie manufacturers Oscar and Eduardo Lulka, who are originally from Mexico, have returned home to expand their own market.

Although they operate a small manufacturing plant in Mexico, the Lulka brothers continue to produce the bulk of their high-end silk ties in Canada. They reckon that wages are only about 20 per cent of the cost of an apparel product, and that the lower operating costs in Mexico

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**"AM I GOING TO
GET PAID?"**

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