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Bringing a Curatorial Approach to Mandalay Bay

By Lisa Lockwood



A view of February's shows inside Mandalay Bay Convention Center.
Photo By Courtesy Photo

The Mandalay Bay Convention Center in Las Vegas, which will host MAGIC Men's, Project Las Vegas, ENKVegas, PoolTradeShow, Project MVMNT and The Tents@Project, is expected to rock next week with over 2,000 brands and 20,000 buyers.

From Monday through Wednesday, Mandalay Bay will be transformed into a platform of discovery for men's and women's advanced contemporary sportswear and premium denim that is curated through a retailer's sensibility.

"By bringing Tommy Fazio [former men's fashion director of Bergdorf Goodman and Nordstrom] in, what we wanted to do is less about 'Let's create a party,' and more about 'Let's take the trade show space and treat it as content and editorialize the fashion in the show,'" said Tom Florio, chief executive officer of Advanstar Fashion, a division of Advanstar Communications, which owns the trade shows. Fazio is president of Project.

The result is an editorialized show where both the buyers and brands are expected to feel like they're living in these trends, said Florio. Throughout two floors of Mandalay Bay, a host of installations will make the buyers feel like they've just spent time on a European buying trip, said Florio. Mandalay Bay will feature 70 percent men's and dual brands, and 30 percent women's.

Last December, Advanstar closed on its deal to buy ENK International from investment group Forstmann Little & Co. After a February debut and then six months of working together, the Project-ENK partnership will now present the largest collection of high-end premium brands in North America, said Florio. Among the 500 women's brands that will exhibit are Current/Elliott, Rebecca Minkoff, Textile by Elizabeth and James, Trina Turk, Milly, McGuire, AIKO, Maaji, James Jeans, IRO and CJ by Cookie Johnson.

Tom Nastos, ceo of ENK Trade Shows, added that ENK, together with Project and The Tents@Project, "creates the single largest contemporary floor in Las Vegas. It's an incredibly powerful statement." ENK will launch a new area called Oasis, which is a curated section of leading inspirational brands such as Black Halo, Skull Cashmere and Clover Canyon.

Florio sees synergies in combining the women's and men's shows in one location. "The whole idea is to editorialize it and create these small communities within the show for these trends to take place. Rather than make it an all men's or all women's show, the way many of these shows would play out, we create one-stop shopping for any buyer who wants to buy in an elevated area for both men's and women's, and that is why we brought in ENK," said Florio.

Last year, MAGIC Market Week introduced The Tents@Project, and this year, that area will be populated with more than 25 brands, including seven CFDA Award winners and Incubator designers, such as Public School, Michael Bastian, Todd Snyder, Billy Reid, Timo Weiland, Burkman Bros. and Number:Lab. Other brands that will participate include Theory, Craft Atlantic, Elie Tahari, Relwen, Ernest Alexander, Simon Miller, Hugo Boss and Sundek. (Sundek will sponsor a Vespa giveaway, where 100 keys will be given out to buyers and one key will start the ignition.)

Premium denim is where Mandalay Bay is expected to shine. Thirty-seven brands, many of which are dual gender, will be housed in a new area of Project called Indigo. Companies such as J Brand, AG Adriano Goldschmied, Citizens of Humanity, 3x1, Seven For All Mankind, Hudson, DL1961, Paige Denim, Comune, Joe's Jeans, Paper Denim & Cloth and Levi's will exhibit. "It's the most concentrated area of premium denim," said Florio. "Coming from being a retailer, the hardest part of going to see all the premium denim people is that they were all over the place. We curated this area called Indigo which allows them to be together in one location," added Fazio.

Another area that's new for the August edition of Project is called Threads & Fins, which is a contemporary approach to surf culture. "We want to give the smaller, unique culture brands a platform to engage with high-end retailers," said Fazio. Among them are very small brands that Fazio found in Southern California, such as UNIV, led by Tim Swart, which will display its classic, yet quirky premium denim and T-shirts. Other brands exhibiting are Hurley, Hang Ten, Katin USA, Mollusk Surf Shop and Paste. To further intersect surf culture with men's fashion, elements of the "surfboard-shaping" process will be brought to life in a 25-foot mobile RV, displaying the culture of the selected brands. Custom Project surfboards, created by Swart and Sal Masekela, will be on display in the "Tommy's Edit" section that showcases the talent of the surf designers exclusively. Twelve one-of-a-kind surfboards, designed by Fazio and UNIV boards, will be auctioned off, with proceeds benefiting the Stoked Foundation.

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One section of Project is called Project MVMNT, which will feature urban youth culture brands. The area will have a pop-up shop that will house merchandise from brands such as Rhude, Stampd Los Angeles, Cotton Citizen and Fear of God. In addition, Diamond Supply will celebrate its 15th anniversary with creator and designer Nick Diamond. Boxing champion Floyd Mayweather, who has a brand called Money Team, will set up a live boxing ring on the floor. Rapper T.I. will also be on hand with his line Akoo, as will rapper Wiz Khalifa with his namesake brand and breakout star Tyga with Last Kings.

As part of MVMNT, there will be a "Trend Watch," which is Fazio's interpretation of trends that are happening in the street culture world. Trend boards will be positioned throughout Mandalay Bay and will highlight such trends as prints, summer black, camouflage and new looks in streetwear, men's suiting and outerwear. Another area is the Pool Tradeshow, which spotlights artisans who are doing fashion that is "younger and cooler," said Fazio.

Its namesake show, MAGIC Men's, which has been in business 80 years, has been curated to "allow bigger brands and bigger stores to come together and do commerce and communicate," said Fazio. Some 340 brands will participate, including Chaps, Nautica, Southpole, Galvanni, Destino Vero, Hummer, Dirtball and Egg and Butter. Going into 2014, Florio added that "redefining classics" will be the focus of MAGIC Men's in a very big way. "We kind of own the elevated contemporary space now. We'll now move into that classic world and leverage the relationships we have with those buyers as well," said Florio.

He recalled when he took the job about a year-and-a-half ago, friends asked, "Do people still go to trade shows?" Now, "we have more retailers coming to the show, and honestly, more international brands that want to come to the shows."

"We have a 10 percent increase in our buyers coming to the show, a 20 percent increase in our international audience, there's an 18 percent increase in Internet retailers and an increase in department stores," said Florio. He said they are giving an average of 13 percent return on investment to their exhibitors. "For the money they spend, they get a check 13-times back in the amount of business they write," he said.

Next week, MAGIC Market Week will also introduce Shop the Floor, a new digital platform where buyers can shop online from show's exhibitors through the entire shopping cycle. "If you're one of our buyers or exhibitors, you can take part in it," said Florio.

Asked whether the increased competition in Las Vegas has raised the bar, Florio replied, "I think the reason there's more competition is because of what we created. I think that we've created a vibrant marketplace in this contemporary market. It's not unlike a particular neighborhood such as [Manhattan's] Madison Avenue or the Meatpacking District, where you see more stores coming in. All of a sudden, the marketplace is really robust. I don't really see that as a bad sign. I see that as a good sign."