

Fashion retailers buy up at fair

Zelda Cawthorne

IF THE rag trade is a barometer of the economy, Australia is well out of the doldrums.

Evidence of major recovery was plentiful this week at Australia's biggest fashion fair, Fashion Exposed, held at the Melbourne Exhibition Centre.

Some 7000 visitors from across Australia and abroad attended the three-day, trade-only event devoted to autumn/winter 2010 collections - about 3000 labels ranging from men's, women's and childrenswear, to shoes, accessories and jewellery.

By the end of day one, the mood was verging on euphoric at many stands, especially in upmarket section, Preview, and at new intimate apparel attraction, Allure.

"We've had a flood of buyers coming through - several from high-end boutiques - and they're placing serious orders," said South Yarra-based fashion accessories agent, Mandy Nowlan, representing Melbourne labels Etiquette and Coussinet.

Also celebrating the return of buoyant business was Angela Gilmore, Christchurch manager for leading New Zealand women's wear designer Annah Stretton.

"We reached our sales target at lunchtime (on opening day, Sunday) and were so inundated we had to turn people away," Ms Gilmore said.

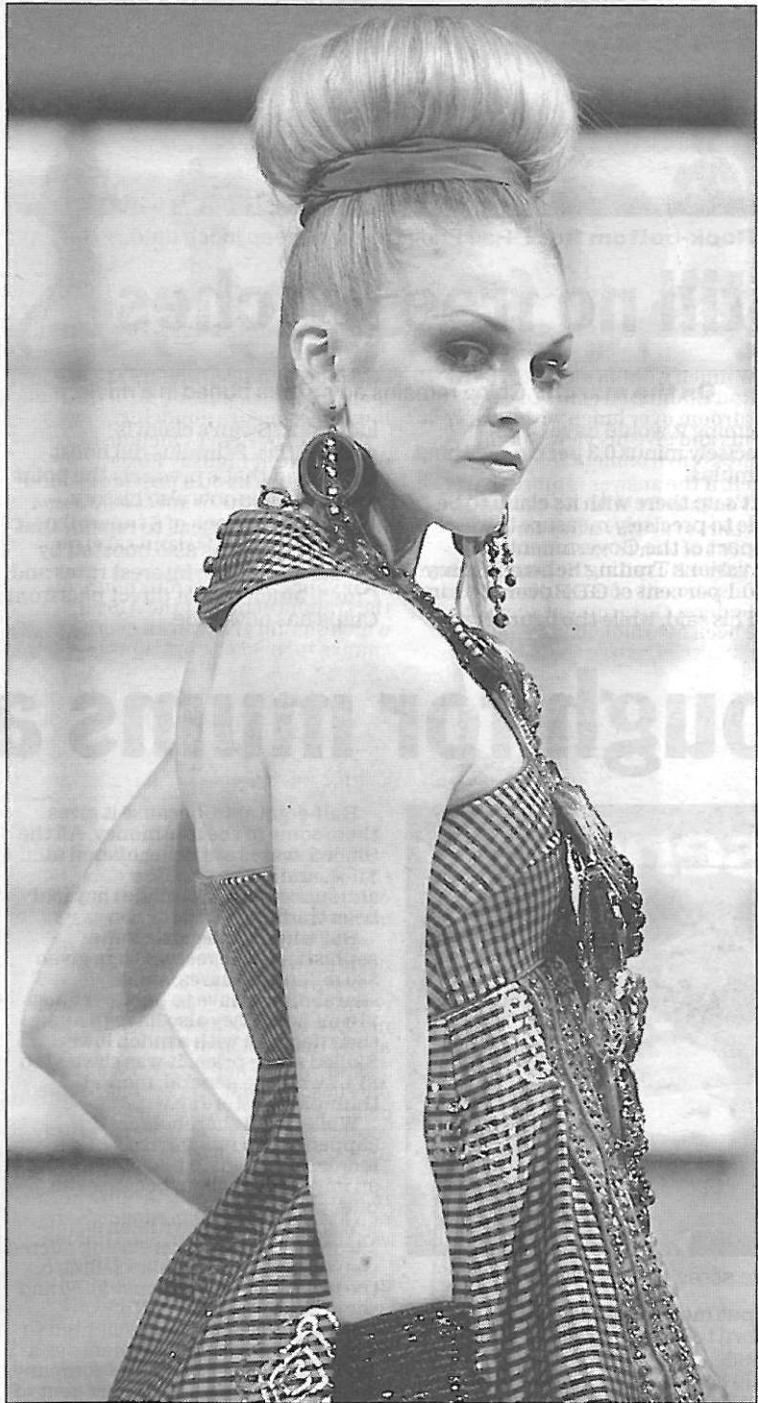
Keith Hyams, manager of Sydney's trendy maternity lingerie label, Cake, which won the Allure section's Best Stand prize, was equally delighted.

"There's been a marked shift in retail purchasing over the past couple of months," he said.

"During the economic downturn, stores were very much into lockdown, getting rid of inventory and holding endless sales.

"Then they realised consumers were still buying, but they (the retailers) weren't! They're making up for it now."

Marie Kinsella, chief executive of Melbourne-based Australian Exhibitions and Conferences, which



Showing off: one of the garments modelled at Fashion Exposed.

organises the biannual fair, agreed that the large number of sizeable orders reported by exhibitors this week reflected both renewed confidence and depleted retail stocks.

She also noted that strong links with the Australian fashion industry were being sought by several international visitors - not least the four

delegates led by Jiang Heng Jie, executive vice-chairman of the China National Garment Association, which runs China's most prestigious fashion fair, Chic Beijing.

"We've been invited to send a delegation to Chic next year," Ms Kinsella said.