



# CALIFORNIA FASHION ASSOCIATION

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## New York, Los Angeles Push Production Upswing

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By: Rosemary Feitelberg and Khanh T.L. Tran, with contributions from Arthur Friedman

The remnants of the once-dynamic apparel manufacturing centers in Los Angeles and New York are working toward a revival.

The industry efforts are coming at a time of renewed interest in U.S. manufacturing of textiles and apparel as American plants benefit from rising costs abroad, particularly in China, and brands' desire for greater control of their supply chains. After decades of decline, there has been some improvement in the pattern of job losses. In July, U.S. mills making apparel fabrics added 800 jobs to employ 123,600, but apparel employment fell by 2,000 jobs to 152,900.

In California, fashion companies from Fidelity Denim to **Karen Kane** have been shifting their production from Asia to Los Angeles to address these issues. To help designers access pattern makers, factories and others involved in making clothes in Los Angeles, nonprofit trade group **California Fashion Association** has launched a Web site called **California Fashion Manufacturing**. The free site hosts a database of companies, industry data and profiles on fashion labels that make clothes locally.

"This is for businesses to find a way to manufacture their product here," said **Ilse Metchek, President of California Fashion Association**.

As interest in local production has grown, so has the number of employees working in apparel manufacturing, according to the **Los Angeles County Economic Development Corp.** In Los Angeles County, the number of people working in apparel manufacturing increased 6.2 percent to 52,900 in June from a year ago, the LAEDC reported. In California, the number of apparel manufacturing employees grew 3.8 percent to 63,600 during the same period, it said.

Evans Group, a high-end production and development company in Los Angeles, is among the apparel manufacturers hiring more workers. Last February, it opened a factory in San Francisco that doubles as a retail store selling its private label, called the Factory, that's created in collaboration with designers who hire Evans Group to produce their clothes. Shoppers can peruse styles from the Factory while walking around sewers who make the clothes in the middle of the store. Based on the success of the San Francisco concept, Evans Group integrated the retail component into its existing downtown Los Angeles factory in July. It's also working to open another retail factory at a youth-oriented shopping complex called The Lab in Costa Mesa, Calif., by yearend.

"We'd like to expand it into different cities with creative scenes," said Evans Group president Jennifer Evans.

Benefiting from a weak dollar that makes California products seem like a bargain overseas, the state's export business is growing. According to Beacon Economics, a research and forecast firm in San Rafael, Calif., California exporters posted their 19th consecutive month of annual gains in May. Shipments for the month totaled \$13.2 billion, a gain of 10.5 percent over the \$11.95 billion reported a year ago, Beacon said. In the same period, the state's manufactured export trade increased 6.1 percent. Exports of cotton, including yarn and woven fabric, more than doubled to \$400.2 million in the three months through May from a year ago.

In New York, efforts such as the Save the Garment District campaign and other initiatives aimed at encouraging new talent to start manufacturing in New York are building momentum. Apparel manufacturing jobs in the state stood at 16,000 at the end of May, up 0.1 percent for the month, but down 1.2 percent year-to-year, according to the state labor department. Longer-term trends show New York City lost 64 percent of its apparel manufacturing jobs from 2000 to 2010, employing 9,850, while textile production fell 75 percent to 2,920, according to labor department data.



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The Council of Fashion Designers of America's Fashion Incubator has been set up to help grow the businesses of 12 tenants over the next two years. Justin Giunta, Prabal Gurung and Waris Ahluwalia are among the participants talking up their Garment Center digs.

The program is an offshoot of Fashion 2020, a 20-year effort designed to rev up the industry that is being spearheaded by Mayor Michael Bloomberg. Last month, Parsons The New School for Design and the New York City Economic Development Corp. hosted the first Fashion Campus NYC, a career-building and networking event to help 200 interns pursue fashion-business careers in the city. The up-and-comers mingled with fashion types from more than 25 New York-based companies, including Aéropostale, Gilt Groupe, Lord & Taylor and Calvin Klein. The gathering was so popular that the concept is being expanded this fall. Fashion Draft NYC will bring together a select group of students from around the world to brainstorm and interview with top fashion executives, with a chance to earn full-time management positions.

In the next month, organizers of Save the Garment District will relaunch its Web site with the aim of attracting more supporters to the campaign. On another front, the Design Trust for Public Space has just wrapped up phase two of its Made in Midtown survey and is now intent on reigniting manufacturing within the district and the city.

Yeohlee Teng, who was instrumental in starting the Made in Midtown initiative, said, "We hope to recommend policy initiatives in early 2012. It's not only designers who need the district but the city needs it, too. Everyone needs to wake up to the fact that fashion needs diversity."

Introducing a freestanding store or a concept shop in a department store that only sold New York-made clothing could also drum up interest among consumers, she said. Fashion's Night Out, the citywide shopping night slated to be held Sept. 11, would provide the ideal time to launch such a concept, Teng said.

"It's really giving back to the city, too," she said.