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## Fashion bug bites Detroit

By [CHRONICLE STAFF REPORTS](#) | Published 10/18/2007 | [Comerica HomeFront](#)

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### Detroit Fashion Week puts local designers in international spotlight



The audience gasped in awe, as silver plates on an evening gown sparkled with every camera flash.

One by one, models wearing locally designed 2008 spring/summer fashions sashayed down the runway and into the international spotlight leaving a mark to show how Detroit has been bitten by the fashion bug.

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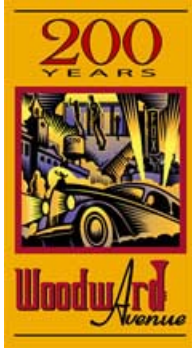
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Once standing in the shadow of notable fashion-oriented cities such as New York, Paris and Milan, Detroit Fashion Week is helping designers, stylists and models to step out from back stage to front center stage.

"Detroit has always been a place where huge talent is represented," said Brian Heath, founder and producer of Detroit Fashion Week. "Our designers are experienced and up to the same standards as designers shown in the New York Fashion Week. Our goal is to be a conduit for independent designers to connect with industry representatives and retailers to develop a visible fashion district in Michigan. This was an opportunity for designers to be seen and make a statement."

Hundreds from around the country witnessed that statement being made, as they gathered in the newly remodeled St. Regis Hotel last month for the Third Annual Detroit Fashion Week.

This year's designers included Camilo; Lujuana Crawford; Gretta Wallace, of Simply Greta; Jill Robertson, of Immer D.; Samaher Mohammad, of Zaynini Fashion International; La'Tosha Williams-Qahhaar, of La'Monee' Couture; Lasijas Miller, of LaMaide Designs, Inc.; Fotoula Lambros and Emily Thornhill, of Familia; Sheila Cooley, of the Beulah Cooley Collection; and Katerina Bocci.

"I loved Detroit Fashion Week and thought it was wonderful and past overdue," said Cooley, who started designing clothes in the 8th grade and now has her line that uses various types of fabrics in stores throughout Detroit and in Flint, Chicago, Florida, Alabama, Kentucky, and Tennessee. "Detroiters like to dress. Yet, there isn't enough support in Detroit for fashion. Going outside of Detroit has helped me a lot. I would love for more store buyers to come to Detroit Fashion Week and support local designers."

Models were provided by Traque Model Management. Hair and makeup was provided by Azenza Salon, Rashida Williams, Salon LUX and the Westbrook Salon.

"It was a wonderful experience and very uplifting," said Catrina Hurst, who has been modeling for 15 years. "It was great to see Michigan designers come together to showcase their work. There was a very warm reception and it was very long overdue."

Charde Moore, a 22-year-old model who started at 15, said connections were made on and off the runway.

"Detroit Fashion Week was a blast. We made a lot of connections, and it was very well organized," said Moore. "All of the models had a lot of fun, and it gave us a lot of exposure. We were able to meet talent agents, scouts, designers and magazine editors in the fashion industry. Whether you were an experience or new model, it was well worth our time."

Spending much of his time abroad working as a fashion photographer, Heath noticed a void in the fashion industry when returning home.

"When I would come home, I saw how designers, stylists and models were all working independently. I wanted to bring them all together to promote the fashion industry," said Heath. "I want to help designers to present themselves to the industry and move out of their basements and into department stores."

On the sidelines at this year's fashion week were representatives from Christian Dior, Saks Fifth Avenue, Six Degrees and others.

"The creative designs, fabric and choice of models used to showcase their lines drew the attention of buyers from major stores," added Heath. "Because there was no industry structure, many designers had to go outside to establish themselves and be seen by buyers. Now, they are coming to Detroit."

Among Detroit's elite design pool are Bocci, Cooley, Mark England, Tracy Reese and Anna Sui.

More than 20 designers are expected to feature fall and winter fashions in 2008 Detroit Fashion Week taking place in March. For additional information on Detroit Fashion Week, visit [www.detroitfashionweek.com](http://www.detroitfashionweek.com) or call (313) 516-6774.

With the pattern already laid out, Heath hopes Detroit Fashion Week will keep cameras focused on Detroit.

"We have to support positive things going on in the city," said Heath. "Fashion needs to be recognized as an industry and developers should develop a space for fashion. We have one of the best talent pools in the country. New York is coming to Detroit to find talent. Support starts at home. We have to support local designers and stylists to keep them in the spotlight."