

Convenience, Cost Key At Coast Contemporary Show

By Rebecca Kleinman

MIAMI BEACH — Coast has become the Mighty Mouse of trade shows.

Founded three years ago, the triannual event's vendors peaked at 230 contemporary collections on March 15 and 16, and attendance has nearly tripled including more buyers beyond Florida. What began with two floors at the cozy Savoy Hotel in South Beach has expanded to 31 suites, the lobby and lounge, with this year's overflow into the ballroom and terrace.

Coast founder Karen Bennett is sticking with her mission for an intimate layout.

"I felt horrible turning people away. I also was nervous about having everyone spread out in all these nooks, but it's small enough that people find their way, or I walk buyers over to new areas," she said.

Though Coast was born from road reps seeking an easier way to cover Florida, buyers based in the Sunshine State also played a part. Bennett said they don't want to leave stores during high season for Northeast shows, where they might get stuck in a blizzard, and many dislike the convention hall drill.

"New York shows are grueling, and I love Coast's sunny venue by the beach," said Karen Golov, a Coast veteran and owner of Eye of the Needle, a Palm Beach boutique, as she visited Treehouse Showroom, a first-time participant.

Treehouse, based in Miami and Atlanta, opened several new accounts with hot items like Hard Tail's tie-dye leggings wholesaling for \$40 and A.G.'s jeggings in black sateen for \$63, according to owner Kelly Bryan. The show's cost compared with New York and elevated crowd compared with the defunct Trafik show inspired him to return.

"Even if I only see South Florida retailers, it's a success," Bryan said.

Rick Ramseier, a sales executive for George Gina & Lucy, a German handbag firm, also made his show debut after hearing good feedback from other reps. He opened a handful of Florida accounts such as Koko & Palenki, a specialty shoe chain, with utilitarian styles in treated nylon with heavy zippers and carabiner clips, which wholesale

from \$67 to \$654.

"Homegrown shows work best for me," he said. "It's like going on the road without going on the road."

Traffic was up for Jessica Elliott, owner of an eponymous jewelry line as well as the more affordable Skinny collection in Los Angeles. Elliot, who has participated in Coast from its inception, said Skinny's turquoise and coral pavé rings resonated with Florida retailers.

"Half my business has been new accounts. I even got someone from Chicago," she said.

Circa Sixty Three, a vintage Lucite jewelry company in Jacksonville, Fla., did well with color, too, like its Carman suite in a tutti-frutti palette. Sales rep Arlene Patnubay reported the collection's materials meshed perfectly with Floridians.

"We're already confirmed to return. Big shows are for established brands, which isn't us," she said.

Erin Kleinberg's minidress in a black polyester blend with lace for \$106 wholesale rang up orders for The Globe Showroom, another newcomer. Southeast rep Korie Miranda also plans to return after connecting with new buyers.

"A lot of my accounts aren't going to big shows anymore, even in Atlanta, where they get lost," she said.

Katie Taylor, a sales executive for Twelfth Street by Cynthia Vincent, has a focus on Florida, and studies the market through South Beach dinners and people watching.

"It's important to understand the region's climate and lifestyle so I know what my customers need," said Taylor, who appreciates the show's cost and length. "I accomplish a lot."

Chandler Woodall, an owner of Gena Chandler boutique in Raleigh, N.C., said she was able to peruse every piece to write lines like Monrow, Son of John, BB Dakota, T-Bags and Mike & Chris. She searched for new lines and ordered existing ones she didn't have time for in New York.

"It's very laid-back, but offers a ton," said Woodall, already planning to return for the November edition. "I can fly here direct in less than two hours, and it's wonderful to be working and look out the window and see the ocean."

The next Coast is set for May 24 and 25.



Skiny's coral and turquoise pavé rings.

Jewelry from Circa Sixty Three Carman.

