

Leather turns heads at Tranoi

The former home of the Paris Stock Exchange, Le Palais de la Bourse, once again played host to the Tranoi exhibition at the start of March, allowing designers from all over the world to showcase their forthcoming autumn/winter collections.

For the second year running at this small but classy and eclectic component of the Paris Fashion Week, a group of Swedish designers—12 in all—held their own mini-exhibition on a separate floor. Stand-outs for us among this troupe of talented Swedes were The Swedish Model (TSM) and Dagmar.

TSM is based in central Stockholm. Two of its four designers devote most of their creative energy to leather, and one of them, Staffan Flodquist, came to the Paris event to show off a new collection of bags. Mr. Flodquist insists that the relationship TSM has set up with a manufacturing partner in Portugal, is an important element of the company's strategy, and something he and his colleagues are keen to keep in place.

"We want to produce everything in Europe," he says. "We believe our designs are of high quality, and to find the skill and craftsmanship to match them, we believe it's important for us to stick with European manufacturers. We've had a good look around here, in Paris, and, even in the biggest name stores, you really can't find anything to compare with the craftsmanship, the stitching, the finishing, the quality of raw material that we have been able to achieve in, say, our Sarek model. I'm not sure, but it looks to me as if even those big names may be paying too much attention to cost-cutting."

Greta Garbo and grandma

Also based in the Swedish capital, Dagmar is the creation of three sisters—Karin Söderlind, Kristina Tjäder and Sofia



TSM's Sarek bag



TSM's drawstring balloon bag



TSM's zip balloon bag

THE LOOK of LEATHER



Malm. They named their company after their grandmother, whom they describe (along with Swedish film star of the 1920s and '30s Greta Garbo) as their big inspiration. Their grandmother worked in the tailoring industry but was also, the sisters say, committed to looking chic and feminine at all times; Greta Garbo, meanwhile, was named as "the most beautiful woman who ever lived" by the Guinness Book of Records.

This inspiration is clearly paying dividends because, last year, Swedish Elle Magazine gave Dagmar its 'best new designer of the year' award. After that, the three sisters went on to launch their new label in the United States and Japan—they now have their own showroom on West 29th Street in Manhattan and a presence in six important boutiques across Japan.

Their latest collection emphasises a



Swedish design house Dagmar has combined short-sleeved and sleeveless tops in its new collection with long, lamb nappa gloves.

'vintage couture' look and includes knitwear, woven tops, sleeveless evening dresses and short-sleeved jackets. Most eye-catching of all is a range of long gloves—some going to the elbow and beyond—in beautiful, satin-soft lamb nappa with a textile lining. Sofia Malm explains that, with so many short-sleeved garments in the collection, the Dagmar designers "thought it would be fun" to have long gloves to complement them.

Kristina Tjäder is the real leather-lover in the team and the gloves are her creation. She comments, "I like the mix of rough and fine that we have achieved here, with the contrast between rougher woollen garments and the smoothness of the leather." She confirms that Dagmar will continue to include leather in its future collections.

Below the belt

Leather will always be central to the designs of another Tranoï exhibitor, Marcello Scunzani. Belts are the focus for this Italian Modena-based company, which Mr. Scunzani recently took over from his father. He has wasted no time in stamping his own ideas on Scunzani products.

The range on display at Tranoï included belts in sting-ray, crocodile and snakeskin, as well as more typically Italian leathers, mostly dark in colour, with only understated decoration on the belts themselves (letting the quality of the leather speak for itself), and buckles chosen with great care

to complement the overall design.

"I'm trying to reach ever more deeply inside myself and put more and more of myself into the designs," Mr. Scunzani explains. "I know I have a dark taste, but I also know it's not enough for me to rely on my instinct, or on my taste, and that I have to keep studying." To prove the point, he has a book about Plato with him on the exhibition stand and two journals in which to record his thoughts and reactions.

He already has a remarkable eye. He refuses to be content with going to industry events and choosing from exhibitors' displays the leather he will work with. He does this too, of course, but he also pays visits to Tuscan tanneries that know him well and looks for himself at what's available.

Last year, one tannery (which he prefers not to name), had rejected a piece of leather because of a mistake during the rolling process. An unusual stripe appeared across the grain spoiling the whole sample, at least as far as the tanners were concerned. Marcello Scunzani disagreed. "The effect was beautiful," he says, his eyes glazing over at the memory of it. "You could not reproduce it if you tried for 100 years. I took it off them immediately and made a dozen truly limited edition belts that my clients loved."



He chooses his own colours and often dyes the leather himself. On buckles, though, he has come to rely on partnership agreements he has in place with a handful of specialist studios in Milan to make exactly what he wants. Examples on show at Tranoï included a snake's head in silver, with a 'cera persa' (melted candlewax) effect to go—naturally—with a snakeskin belt. Another buckle came from an antique jewellery shop in Milan's Via Manzoni, complete with a certificate guaranteeing it to have come from a London silversmith some time between 1750 and 1800. 🌐