



## Buyers mean 'serious business' at White Milano AW23

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Premium womenswear trade show White Milano took to the Italian fashion capital between 24-27 February. Drapers reports from the event.

By Gabriele Dirvanauskas 27 February 2023

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The halls of White Milano were bustling with well-heeled attendees for its autumn/winter 23 edition. The vast show, which focuses on premium womenswear and accessory brands, takes place in the Cortona Fashion District, in the south of the Italian fashion capital, and handily coincides with Milan Fashion Week (21-27 February).

The show is in its fifteenth year and shows twice annually, in line with the autumn/winter and spring/summer buying seasons. White Milano prides itself on being more of an exhibition than a trade show, and it lived up to its name, with brands housed in spacious, chic white booths. A breakout area in the main Superstudio space featured vintage-look oak-coloured leather sofas and mismatched armchairs, and sweeping chandeliers hung from the ceilings.

White Milano general manager Simona Severini told Drapers: "After Covid, we decided to focus on quality and not quantity, so we are not just selling spaces, we are considering the designers we are selecting. We don't have the goal of having to reach a certain number of exhibitors."

Severini went on to explain that each season, around 2,000 brands and designers apply to exhibit at White Milano, and they are not guaranteed to secure a space for consecutive shows – each brand is analysed on its collections and success at the show.

This year, over 300 brands exhibited at the show – half of which were from Italy, and half international. The exhibition was split into two separate buildings, located across the street from each other. The Superstudio space, at Tortona 27, housed the premium brands while Tortona 31 concentrated on more commercial brands.

This season, White Milano invited five emerging labels to exhibit as part of its "Secret Rooms" initiative. London Fashion Week designer Olubiyi Thomas, who creates both womenswear and menswear, participated in the programme, he told Drapers that "People come to buy here to do business, they aren't messing around", and said he had spoken to a buyer from London-based ecommerce independent LN-CC, as well as buyers from Italy, China, Russia and Toronto, Canada.

Thomas explained that buyers are now beginning to experiment and take a risk on new and exciting labels. He said: "It feels like there has been a renewal – they're saying 'we need something fresh and we need it now.'"

British brand Brodie Cashmere, a Drapers Sustainable Fashion Awards 2022 finalist, also exhibited at White Milano. Head of marketing Lana Rush explained that the brand had previously shown at the show's AW22 and SS23 seasons and had done "really well" – she added: "This [Milan] is the fashion capital of the world, so we love to bring [the brand] here."

It was the second time that Elisa Trombatore, creative director of lingerie-inspired womenswear brand Dreaming Eli, which also shows during London Fashion Week, had exhibited at White Milano. She told Drapers that she had spoken with buyers from



London and Los Angeles, and that buyers from Italy had placed an order with her on the first day of the show, Friday 24 February. Other brands told Drapers that they had spoken with buyers from Canada and Germany.

“We have buyers visiting from all over the world,” Severini told Drapers. Those from the UK included The Library London, Selfridges, independent retailer LN-CC, Matchesfashion and premium independent Squared Clothing in Kingston.

Severini explained that over half (55%) of buyers present at **White Milano** are local to Italy, while European and US buyers also populate the trade show. She said that Japanese and South Korean buyers have started travelling again “but not yet at the same level as before [Covid]”.

Final visitor numbers are yet to be released, but Severini told Drapers that before the pandemic, **White Milano** would attract up to 26,000 attendees. For the SS23 season, it reached 18,000. “Of course we hope to reach this number,” she added.

Severini shared that the show has felt the impact of Russian and Ukrainian markets not travelling and thus **White Milano** will “be lucky to reach the same [visitor numbers] as previous seasons, considering that the Chinese and Japanese markets are not travelling as much”.

Attendees also had the option to participate in **White Milano** 's events. They included a discussion on diversity and inclusion in the workplace with the Fashion Minority Alliance – with designer Thomas on the panel.

**White Milano** also partnered with the Indigenous Fashion Arts organisation from Toronto, Canada to showcase six designers: size inclusive activewear and eveningwear designer Lesley Hampton; Evan Ducharme, who specialises in custom-made tailoring; streetwear designer Justin Louis, founder of Section 35 which launched a collaboration with Footlocker Canada in October 2022; Haida fashion and jewellery designer Dorothy Grant; jewellery designer Nii Perkins who specialises in beadwork, and jewellery designer Erica Donovan, founder of She Was a Free Spirit.

The SS24 season of **White Milano** will coincide with Milan Fashion Week in September 2023.

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