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French brands try their luck with the US market at Best of France 2015

The Best of France touched down in New York City for its third edition and set up shop in the city's most popular tourist destination, Times Square. The event is an annual celebration and exhibition of French culture including food, tourism and, of course, fashion.



Best of France took over Times Square and the Garment District in New York City over the weekend - FashionMag.com

Best of France 2015 embraced fashion much more than previous years by giving designers the opportunity to showcase their collections to the American public and represent French fashion. Many designers and brands took part in a runway show at Best of France including the iconic, Saint James, Cremieux, Sophie Theallet for Solstiss, children's brands Kenzo Kids, Junior Gaultier and others.

The fashion shows were also an opportunity for French brands to gain exposure in the US. "I've always thought about [entering the US market] and so now I want to develop my collections and sell it in the US," said bridal designer Aurélia Hoang. Hoang presented her 6th collection at Best of France, which was very well received by the public.

"The response for my show was great; the people really liked it," added Hoang. "At times I would be in conversation and people would come over to say that was gorgeous and that's amazing. I'm very happy because the audience was very open to it and really enjoyed it."

Hoang produces her collections with a small team at her workshop in Lyon. Her bridal gowns are handmade and made-to-measure for each bride, and are handmade in select sizes for retailers.

Though she has interests in entering the American market, she does not want to jeopardize the authenticity and craftsmanship of her collections. "I want to introduce [the line] step-by-step. We

are still a very small structure and do everything by hand and we want to keep it very authentic. I don't want to do a gown one hundred times. Every bride wants to be unique."



The Saint James stand at the Best of France show in New York - Twitter @saintjames

Saint James received a similar response to Hoang from the American public. The company is over 100 years old, and is considered to be French heritage fashion in the US. Benjamin Auzimour, the Managing Director of Saint James in the US, said that the American customer is very appreciative of the brand's heritage and history. The brand also showed a 22ft long, 44ft wide sweater (wingspan) at the event inauguration that best exemplified its long history of craftsmanship. Saint James currently has a store on Bleecker Street in New York City's West Village and they expressed plans to open another store in uptown Manhattan in 2016.

New brand, Haveney, also had the opportunity to present its collection at Best of France. Marie-Laetitia Rossazza launched Haveney this year and presented her line at Vancouver Fashion Week, Monaco Fashion Week before being invited to show at Best of France. "We are a young brand so an event like this helps us get noticed," said Gregoire Allin, Co-founder of Haveney. "The market here is very open-minded with our collections maybe even more than the French market. We would like to sell in a multi-brand store, not in a big retailer, but a fine shop perhaps in Williamsburg. In France we have an e-shop, that's our main point of sale. On September 30, we will open a pop up shop in Marseilles where we're based and that will be our first experience in retail."

New York City is an early adopter when it comes to fashion brands. French fashion has a great reputation in the city with many of its inhabitants' favorite brands hailing from Paris or other cities in France. Only time will tell for the success of the emerging and established French designers in the US market, but so far it seems that the public is very pleased.

By **Obi Anyanwu**

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