

THE RADAR FASHION

BY MOLLY EACH

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From left: Designers Tennille White, Caroline DeVillo, Amy Butts (LadySmith Jewelry), Caroline Becker-Joss (Caroline Rose) and Lauren Bartkowski (Doe Work-Wear), all part of the Chicago Is... Red Hot!!! fashion show. Insets: LadySmith Jewelry.

SINGULAR SENSATION

Chicago Is... Red Hot!!! breaks away from Fashion Focus and heads to Northerly Island

After three years as part of the city-sponsored Fashion Focus fashion week—holding court with shows like Gen Art, Sister Cities and the Allure of Couture—the Chicago Is... Red Hot!!! fashion event is breaking from the crowd and staging an independent show at Northerly Island five days before the Fashion Focus kickoff.

Could the high-profile move be a case of typical fashion-world chaos? Nope, there's no *Project Runway*-style catfights going on here. The drama-free decision to pull out was for reasons both financial and artistic, says Marsha Brenner, executive director of the Apparel Industry Board, Inc. (AIBI), the city agency that runs Red Hot.

"We always were independent, but we participated with the city because we believe in their mission," she explains. "Chicago Is... Red Hot!!! is our annual fundraiser," she continues. "We don't make money on most everything we do, so once a year we have to make money somehow. With the city there were unforeseen costs that made it a little more than we could afford."

Presented annually by AIBI, Red Hot, now in its ninth year, is a staple of Chicago's style scene, with a board of many of the city's most prominent fashion patrons. And as the AIBI exits to nurture and give visibility to the local fashion industry, the criteria for designers to participate in the Red Hot show is entirely Chicago-centric.

"It's an all-Chicago show," says Lauren Wyka of AIBI. "The designers are based in Chicago, they produce in Chicago. We're building business in the city of Chicago."

While the separation from Fashion Focus will financially boost AIBI, the artists stand to benefit from the change as well. As designers are only allowed to participate in one Fashion Focus show, the independence of Red Hot allows the opportunity for extra exposure by showing in two high-profile shows within two weeks.

The Red Hot show will feature a mix of new and established designers, and it mimics the eclectic vibe of Chicago's style scene as a whole. This year's roster includes wedding gown designer Caroline DeVillo, metalsmith Amy Butts, workwear creator Lauren Bartkowski, plus-sized designer Tennille White and Caroline Rose, a mother-daughter team whose women's line is sold at Neiman Marcus. Each designer shows five looks, and according to the designers, selecting the pieces is no small task.

"You have to design so that people remember you. It's important that you choose what represents you and your brand," says DeVillo. The new venue and the show's stellar reputation have inspired the designers to kick their presentation up a notch. "We're all trying to make it a little more couture runway than in the past," says DeVillo.

In addition to fashion, the Susan Glick-produced show will feature a tribute to AIBI president Dorothy Fuller, an award presentation to Barneys New York creative director Simon Doonan and a smattering of designs from top students at local colleges. And then there's the whole lakefront party aspect, which Brenner anticipates will be red hot itself. "We're going to have good food, good booze, good dessert, a great band—what more could anyone want?" ■

For information and tickets, go to www.aibi.com or call 312.836.1041.



Caroline DeVillo
Bridal's Lou gown.