

# Essex House Vendors Emphasize Service



**A cheery look from Algo.**

'ENOUGH IS ENOUGH' SEEMED TO BE THE BATTLE CRY AT Designers at the Jumeirah Essex House, where 24 vendors, more than any other outing, turned up.

Show resources and attendees forged ahead, despite the wave of fickle shoppers and the unlikeliest of occurrences — a murder in the hotel the day before the show opened, on Sept. 20. (A hotel employee has been arrested and is being held without bail for the crime.)

Linda Cunningham, whose suite was on the same floor as the crime, said buyers kept their appointments as planned. "At this moment in time, people are tired of talking about the economy and are moving on to buying, selling and figuring out what's best for their businesses," she said.

A sleeveless shift dress with a coordinating jacket, an off-the-shoulder silk and wool dress and a chiffon halter dress with a ruffle drew interest from stores, Cunningham said.

Carlo Goetschel, president of Algo, said, "The mood is upbeat. People have had enough with the crisis, and they have a lot of hope."

Buyers' show orders seemed to reflect that newfound optimism, considering a cherry-printed jacket at \$600, bright red pants at \$600, a cornflower blue jacket with white polkadots at \$680 and other "happy-colored suits" were among the bestsellers, according to Goetschel. White cotton blouses, which wholesale from \$120 to \$180 were also popular. Focusing on specialty stores, offering two-day turnarounds for customized items and holding trunk shows have helped to boost sales. "We hear a lot about vendors who are sitting around with a long face saying the economy doesn't look good. We never want to be like that," Goetschel said.

William Christiansen, owner of Rakish, a Tustin, Calif., specialty store, said shoppers are searching for more casual options. Sales have halved compared with last year, but he was trying to boost business by ordering

bright, colorful clothes, especially sleeveless dresses and cardigans. The fact that many organizations and charities have scaled back on black-tie events is only enhancing the move to more relaxed looks. "All those dressy events are not going on right now. Even in the restaurants and new hotels that have opened near Laguna, people are a little more casual," Christiansen said.

Francesca Miranda, a new show resource, picked up seven new accounts due partially to retailers' eagerness to freshen up their inventory after a few months of slow sales, said Francisco Jassir, president of Phi Apparel Co., the parent firm. "At the end of the day, stores need to have new merchandise on the floor. They can't stop buying," he said. "My feeling is we've already hit rock bottom. Things can only go up."

A metallic chiffon gown with lace bustier at \$1,200, a silk gown with a lace lining at \$1,200 and a metallic mesh gown with a printed lace inset at \$1,350 were standouts at the show. With 25 percent of its business in the U.S., 25 percent in Europe, 35 percent in the Middle East and 15 percent in Latin America, the Colombian-made label is weathering the global financial storm relatively well, Jassir said. "My projection for this year is that sales will be flat, and in this climate flat is up," he said.