



FASHION

Time for an Irish fashion fest

Instead of awarding someone thousands for being 'best dressed', we should be helping creative Irish people during a fully fledged fashion design festival, writes **Paul Galvin**

If there's one thing we're great at in Ireland, it's festivals. We can throw a festival for just about anything. In fact, there are hardly enough weeks in the year for us, such is our lust for a good old festival. Any town, village or crossroads worth its salt in this land has its own.

Tralee? Only the grandest of all festivals.

Lisdoonvarna? Not content with having its own song, it's now the go-to place for lonely bachelors looking for love. A match-making festival? Oooh Lisdoonvarna.

Our creativity knows no bounds when it comes to dreaming up festivals. Books, food, film, arts, poetry, jazz, blues, trad, rock, comedy — all worthy of a weekend festival. A Love Music festival. What's not to celebrate there?

Americana, international short storytelling, international guitar storytelling? Oh go on then. We love a good story in Ireland. Just don't make it an international short story — we had one of those last month.

Let's see. A banjo festival. Weren't we reared on banjos. A piano festival? Got one for my 10th birthday. A sea festival? Well, we're an island after all.

A mountain festival? Besides being a whole lot drier and happier, where would we be without all our mountains? Baroque (no idea either, go to Ardee to find out), burlesque, sci-fi, vintage, folk, small boats, tall ships, gourmet.

A walking festival? Sure, why not? I can see that really taking off. Next year, we'll have a jogging festival and, by 2015, we'll throw Ireland's first ever flat-out sprinting festival. The fastest festival ever seen.

Hold on lads, we're not that fit, says the committee — we'll hardly knock a whole weekend out of sprinting. Not to worry, they all agree, we have to walk before we can sprint. A walking festival it is.

I'm so glad to see we had the second **Dublin Fashion Festival** earlier this month, which was held across a number of stores with fashion shows, styling advice and talks at their HQ in Dawson Street. Congratulations to the organisers for backing the venture and all involved.

Elsewhere, Vogue's Fashion's Night Out finally found its way to Ireland for the first time this month. Launched in New York in 2009 to help save fashion from the recession, BTs held the free event and I'm told it was a big success.

It's great to see us begin to open our minds again to such celebrations.

Unfortunately, the industry in Ireland isn't quite strong enough right now to sup-

port our very own fashion week, though it was very successful in the past.

The **Dublin Fashion Week** was highly inspirational, but it has been 'parked' for the moment during the recession.

In its time, **Dublin Fashion Week** helped Irish designers such as Joanne Hynes, who this week showed at London Fashion Week for a second time, onto the next rung of the ladder.

Meantime, we have to content ourselves with New York, London, Milan and Paris fashion weeks and voyeuristically observe what the cool kids are up to over there.

START SPREADING THE NEWS

New York kicked off a month of fashion weeks. The Central St Martins graduates show is always keenly watched by editors and was full of fresh new talent again this year.

Ireland's own Dean Quinn is one of the names to watch out for from New York. Fermanagh-born Quinn is a St Martins graduate, has interned at Versace and is a very highly regarded young design talent in New York.

Yet again, we see real home-grown fashion talent prosper outside Ireland. I can't help but feel that we miss the point here of what fashion represents.

We organise fashion shows to support every kind of club, society, charity and cause you can imagine.

We judge the best-dressed woman or man at race meetings all over the country and hand over thousands of euro to the winner in the process; we honour Ireland's most stylish man, woman, couple, actor, musician and TV star in our magazines, and yet we never seem to honour the people who are the real driving forces behind the industry.

Apart from third-level institutes such as DIT, which supports and encourages and more importantly funds young designers. Brown Thomas is also doing its bit with its Irish Design Installation showcasing fashion, jewellery and accessory designers.

The question I ask is: Would the thousands we give to a woman for dressing herself not be better spent on helping young designers establish themselves? It depends on whose money it is, I suppose.

Anyway, how about getting some of these brilliant young people home for a weekend to hold a workshop and watch them as they practise their craft? I have always found the imagination and creativity involved in the design process fascinating.

Wouldn't it be interesting to watch Merle

O'Grady make a piece of jewellery and explain where the inspiration for her work comes from?

Or watch Edmund McNulty work with alpaca, merino and mohair to make wool jumpers and knits. Or listen to Pauric Sweeney tell us about how he likes to work making handbags that are famous all over the world.

This is where real fashion happens. Creativity is at the heart of it. And it should inspire young boys and girls, especially art students, to see design and creativity as a viable career path.

The only obstacle is running it by the powers that be. I've given this some thought and I think what we'll do is hold the design workshop over a bank holiday weekend and call it a festival. The design festival.

Simples. ☐



Rising Irish talent (clockwise from left): Pauric Sweeney's bags are famous all over the world; a wool hooded sweater by Edmund McNulty; and the work of Fermanagh-born Dean Quinn is one to watch

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