

# SXSW finds a new style groove

*Marques G. Harper, Style & Substance*

Updated: 3:26 p.m. Thursday, March 11, 2010

Published: 4:43 p.m. Wednesday, March 10, 2010

There are mere hours to the start of the annual delectable threesome that we know as South by Southwest.

While this might celebrate all things interactive, film and music, it has a fourth bedfellow: style.

Just look at SXSW party sponsors and even the acts themselves, and you'll notice an increasing pattern: SXSW has just as much to do with style now as it does with music or film.

This year, Express, Carrera sunglasses, Levi's, Aloft, Airwalk, DC Shoes, Doucette Duvall, Alternative Apparel, Swagg and celebrity and fashion blogger Perez Hilton all will have a presence at SXSW through official and unofficial events.

"Trends that happen in film and music are regulated by fashion," Austin brand specialist Mauricio Cremer, a partner at Duel Purpose, told me last week. And what better place is there to see it all unfold than SXSW?

Austin brand expert Sara Canaday said SXSW's cool factor has increased over the years because of prominent musical acts and celebrities who flock to Austin, and national brands want to be a part of the story line.

"There's not a lot of negativity attached to it," she said. "It's the cool place to be. It's cutting-edge."

The two-week venture also allows fashion and style companies to raise brand awareness and build relationships with new artists and customers in an attractive environment.

"Music and fashion have become interchangeable," said Elaine Garza, a principal of public relations firm Giant Noise, which has offices in Austin and New York.

Garza, who has attended SXSW for a decade, said she has noticed an increasing number of lifestyle brands that are sponsors of SXSW events. In the past, record labels sponsored SXSW parties and events, she said. Budget cuts and declining revenue have caused many record labels to scale back, which has allowed retailers such as Express to step in.

Pamela Seidman, director of communications for Express, said the retailer isn't coming to Austin to promote a particular product, line or even the new store at the Domain in North Austin. "It's about the essence of the brand," she said. "It's about a vibe. It's about an attitude, and just conveying that we're at the right place and we want to take you there. It just worked out at so many levels." Last year, Carrera, a European sportswear sunglass line started in 1956, was working to revive itself. As part of a larger series of national promotions, Carrera sponsored a SXSW lunchtime retreat at Moonshine Patio Bar & Grill on Red River Street for artists, celebrities and journalists. They also had a gifting suite where sunglasses

were given to VIPs such as Austin part-timer Matthew McConaughey, Rachael Ray, Little Boots and members of Semi Precious Weapons. The push apparently worked, as more A-list celebrities such as Taylor Lautner and Usher were photographed wearing the shades last year. Then Carrera got a major boost when Lady Gaga wore a pair with a Benjamin Cho faux polar bear coat for her "Bad Romance" video, one of last year's most-watched YouTube videos.

Starting March 18, Carrera will return to SXSW with Carrera Escape, a three-day retreat for artists and invited guests at the Cedar Door (201 Brazos St.) that will feature other fashion brands Airwalk and Alternative Apparel. Maybe the same magic will happen for Swagg, a mobile technology company, that will offer the Swagg Café at Moonshine (303 Red River St.) for artists and VIPs as well as sponsor celebrity and fashion blogger Perez Hilton's annual one-night-only musical showcase on March 20 at the Whitley Printing Co. building at 301 Brazos St.

Bruce Starr, a partner at New York-based BMF Media Group, knows SXSW well. His company is involved in planning the Carrera, Hilton and Swagg Café events.

As for SXSW, he said: "It's the right people who are there. It's the right movers and shakers from New York and Los Angeles and everywhere else. You get that at South By."

The fashion industry, from bloggers to actual brands, wants to be a part of the SXSW action. And I've been told officials from retailers J. Crew and Claire's will visit SXSW this year.

"It's a huge opportunity for brands to come in and give people a taste of who they are and what they are about in a casual setting," said Cremer told me. "It gives them an opportunity to connect with people. It helps establish credibility."

Take for example his relationship with California fashion brand DC Shoes, which has been associated with extreme sports such as skateboarding, surfing and snowboarding. DC Shoes has expanded its offerings and become a full-fledged lifestyle brand with clothing options such as denim, accessories, footwear and tops for men, women and children. This year, Cremer was able to persuade DC Shoes to have a presence at SXSW.

"I finally sold them on the value," Cremer said. "They feel Austin is a great melting pot of styles. You have so many walks of life coming through this town. We want to expose as many people as we can to it. To miss out being able to connect with them would be a huge loss."

That's why they are promoting their unofficial SXSW event through their Web sites and social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter. DC Shoes, Duel Purpose and downtown hot dog restaurant Frank will partner for a three-day lounge with free food and drink at Duel Purpose's office (1305 E. Sixth St.) starting March 18.

"That creates a more memorable experience," he said. "Maybe with South By, down the line, there might be a fashion component."

Express promoted a contest connected to SXSW and its March 19 party for weeks via its Web site and Facebook.

"We already have so many RSVPs we have to manage the list so we don't go over the fire code," said Erin O'Brien, vice president of interactive strategy for Austin-based DMX, which is working on the Express event.

Express' Seidman said the retailer took a bigger SXSW role because it noticed its core audience —

adults ages 21 to 30 — was interested in music and excited about music festivals such as SXSW, Coachella, Lollapalooza and the Bonnaroo Music & Arts Festival even if they weren't going to attend.

"Music is a huge part of what they are doing," Seidman told me. "Hip, cool music is synonymous with fashion and says a lot about your taste level."

**Looking to add fashion and style to your South by Southwest adventure?** Check out this list of events, and go to [www.austin360.com/sxsw](http://www.austin360.com/sxsw) for other SXSW-related parties and events:

**Friday:** AustinStyleWatch.com founder Rachel Youens, who has been living in Australia, will launch her experimental media project called Marqr during SXSW. The project, in which participants can learn about Austin fashion and culture, uses QR codes, which are similar to bar codes and can be downloaded to most smart phones. By scanning the code, which will be posted in various parts of Austin, you unlock a multimedia story and have a chance to win prizes. Visit [www.austinstylewatch.com/marqr/marqr.html](http://www.austinstylewatch.com/marqr/marqr.html) for more details.

**Saturday:** Fashionism.com, which was nominated in the amusement category of South by Southwest's 13th annual Web Awards, will have a photographer and free cocktails at the Dress Shop (315 Congress Ave.).

**Monday:** Men's lifestyle Web site Thrillist.com will have a launch party with cocktails and music at Stubb's (801 Red River St.).

Launch787, which produces Austin Fashion Week and the Austin Fashion Awards, and public relations firm Wyatt Brand will have the first of two afternoons of massages, drinks, boutique selections and music at 606 E. Third St.

**Wednesday:** Urban Outfitters will begin four days of Drugs Roll & Sex Rock concerts at its store (2406 Guadalupe St.).

**March 17-20:** Levi's, which has a brand presence at several Austin stores such as Service Menswear and By George, will partner once again with Fader magazine for the annual Levi's/Fader Fort at Pine Street Station (1101 E. Fifth St.). This year's lineup includes Local Natives, Freelance Whales, Free Energy and special guests.

**March 18-20:** American Apparel will have a factory flea market of discounted goods at the Mexican American Cultural Center (600 River St.).

**March 18:** Aloft, the W brand hotel, will partner with Banyan Branch, a Seattle-based new media marketing consultant, for an afternoon party of musical acts at Max's Wine Dive (207 San Jacinto Blvd.) before guests are shuttled to an afterparty at the new Aloft hotel at the Domain in North Austin.

New York-based fashion designer Mary Meyer ([www.marymeyerclothing.com](http://www.marymeyerclothing.com)) will have a sample sale at Buy Definition (3100 S. Congress Ave.) as part of several SXSW-inspired events at the South Austin boutique.

**March 19:** Free People (524 N. Lamar Blvd.) will have a one-day event with three bands, discounts, music giveaways and treats.

**March 20:** Designer and University of Texas graduate Annebet Duvall of New York-based women's wear line Doucette Duvall will offer a trunk show of spring and summer collections and limited-edition selections during an afternoon of mimosas and music at Gallery D (436 W. Second St.).

UT grad Misha Anderson, co-owner of New York-based apothecary and salon Woodley & Bunny, will offer a trunk show of fragrance and skin care products as part of a day of music and bands at W3LL People (215 S. Lamar Blvd.).

[mharper@statesman.com](mailto:mharper@statesman.com); 445-3974

UPDATE: This and photo captions above, printed on page D6 Thursday, March 11, 2010 gave the wrong lineup for this year's Levi's/Fader Fort Party March 17-20. This year's lineup includes Local Natives, Freelance Whales, Free Energy and special guests.

---

**Find this article at:**

[Print this page](#)

[Close](#)

<http://www.statesman.com/life/style/sxsw-finds-a-new-style-groove-339780.html>

