

## **Stockholm New York**

By Claes Britton

*The tough got going as the going got tough when Stockholm New & friends hit the heart of Manhattan for the third stage of our ongoing Monsters of Lifestyle World Tour...*

There was never a more effective game plan than to start out hard, then step up the pace.

It was a few years back when we realized that the mountain wasn't coming to Mohammed - at least not anytime soon. Since offense was always the finest defense, we decided to take our lifestyles right to the endzone of the opposition. For the furniture fair in Milan in 1998, Stockholm New joined forces with restaurant Sturehof, design companies Asplund, Box Design, cbi, and David design, fashion label elleGAL/ilLEGAL, record labels Diesel Music and Superstudio, and "guest stars" Wallpaper magazine of London, treating the Italian style metropolis to a five-day mega-event featuring the best of Swedish design, fashion, music, food and drink, and top quality people, smoothing out the edges - needless to say - with rich and wholesome slabs of genuine subpolar party spirit.

In 1999, this *Living in Sweden* event was followed by *Swedish Style in Tokyo*, a mighty ten-day crosscultural relay staged at the Swedish Embassy and various clubs, galleries and other

venues around Tokyo, highlighting Swedish fashion, music, art, photography, graphic design and gastronomy. This was a splash with an even greater impact, paving the way for a whole new range of bonds between tiny Stockholm and the Japanese megalopolis, and serving as inspiration for many other events to come.

But for Stockholm New, New York has always been the end destination. Ever since we got started in the fashion magazine business in the late 1980s, the place has been our main competitor, for good and ill, constantly draining our home town of its finest creative talent. We've stayed behind, while so many of our friends have crossed the Atlantic, hell-bent on proving that we are indeed capable of producing something for the international from right here down home.

And at least I have long nursed a secret, childish dream of one day taking our thing right to the heart of New York City; to show them what baby Stockholm can do right there on their home turf. I guess it's something of a universal dream of the province, whether you're a boxer, an artist, a wannabee or whatever you may be.

So we decided it was now or never, and went along and did it. For *Stockholm New York*, May 9-11 2000, we mobilized every single creative force available from the vast Swedish and international network that we've spent the last decade building around Stockholm New.

The event was staged at the Altman Building in New York's Chelsea district, where we built a "live-in" exhibition featuring some of the best of contemporary - and some classic - Swedish design, along with new products from our commercial

partners, including a number of leading design brands from Sweden and the rest of Scandinavia. The exhibition area, totalling 1,600 square meters, and designed by Thomas Sandell, also featured a complete restaurant, several bars, a stage, a catwalk, a giant film screen, a shop and a downstairs lounge area.

I still can't understand how we got it all in place. All through Monday and Tuesday, the sidewalk alongside the Altman Building was lined U-Haul trucks unloading boxes of Sweden to a never ending line of human packhorses, while the power tools of the production team never ceased smattering away. In the end, it was as if a giant had filled his huge fists with contemporary Sweden and strewn the contents out in the center of New York City. Long podiums split the showroom right down the middle, heaped with fresh new furniture, textiles, glass, fashion garments, design objects, Daim chocolate bars, and paraphernalia of all kinds, resembling oversized, overstyled stalls in a flea market. There were groups of couches sitting in groves of plastic Christmas trees, more podiums displaying glass and antiques, the H&M corner with its wall of fashion images, the restaurant with its bright, bold Marimekko tablecloths, the 9x3 meter Hasselblad film screen showing constantly shifting images, a "stable" with 1,000 Dalacarian horses, more plastic trees with heaps of gifts underneath them...all in all, quite an overwhelming, overambitious, over-everything chunk of Sweden for the thousands of invitees to enjoy for a brief 60 hours.

After kicking off with a "quiet" cocktail for some 500 informally invited guests on Tuesday night, the main event started out with a design seminar on Wednesday morning, hosted by design companies Ytterborn&Fuentes and Sthlm Design Lab,

with moderators Cilla Robach of the National Museum and Göran Lagerström of Sthlm Design Lab, speakers Cilla Robach, Niclas Forsman of the Auktionsverket auction house, Stefan Ytterborn of Ytterborn&Fuentes, and Thomas Ericsson of Sthlm Design Lab. The seminar finished with a panel discussion featuring Thomas Sandell, Thomas Meierhofer, James Irvine, Björn Kusofsky, Thomas Ericsson, Mats Theselius and Christina Britton. It was followed by a spectacular lunch "designed" by Håkan Ericson and Staffan Lindgren and their partners at Sturehof, with a memorable main course of succulent reindeer filet with fried cépes, nettle risotto and red wine sauce...

The rest of the day was open house for invitees, leading up to the fashion show and subsequent cocktail party in the evening. Consultants had advised us against doing a Swedish fashion show for the blasé New York crowd, but we thought, hey, we've never been afraid of making fools of ourselves - after all, if we were, there'd never been a Stockholm New magazine...

The mere 19 minute fashion show, styled by Stockholm New fashion director Maria Virgin, featured six Swedish designers representing different sectors of the budding Swedish fashion scene: Anna Holtblad, Pia Wallén, Lovisa Burfitt, elleGAL/ilLEGAL, J.Lindeberg, and Whyred. The looks of each designer were shown against the backdrop of specially produced films (one for each designer) by Jonas Åkerlund (director of reputed videos for The Prodigy, Madonna, Metallica, Smashing Pumpkins, U2 and others), with the models parading down a catwalk built in front of the screen, to the beats of specially selected Swedish songs, again one for each designer. Some of the audience were stunned by the brute force of some of the music and images (biker rock, a dead, rotting rat, a huge eyeball, giant mite viewed through a microscope marching across the

screen, etcetera), but then, fashion people were never that big on rock'n'roll...

The fashion show was followed by live music and DJ-ing by electro-jazz trio Koop, with close to 1,000 guests partying to such an extent that the last thing you would have guessed tomorrow to be was a workday. It was a strange treat to see the New York fashion crowd dive into the huge trays filled with salmon, oysters, herring and whitefish roe, provided by those laborers of gastronomic pleasure at Sturehof. Another interesting anthropological case study surfaced thanks to the rich supply of give-aways of various kinds, and the somewhat blurry line between those gifts and the design objects on display. Kleptomania is, as we all know, a disease that crosses all social boundaries. The guards had plenty of opportunity to study this phenomenon as they spent the evening emptying handbags belonging to young models and middle-aged Upper East Side types alike, packed with Orrefors crystal, Ordning & Reda notebooks, Absolut and Grand Hotel aquavit bottles, H&M perfumes, Marabou chocolates, Eton dress shirts, and a wide variety of other goods. The Sturehof boys and girls just couldn't believe the amounts of Absolut consumed by these fashion people. In the end, we were quite relieved when the party was closed soon after midnight. If we'd kept going, God knows where that night might have took us...

The next day started on a more sophisticated note with a splendid lunch for some 60 reoresentatives from the New York gourmet media and various other potentates, designed by master chef Marcus Samuelsson and Aquavit Restaurant in New York, in cooperation with Håkan Ericson and Staffan Lindgren at Sturehof.

This seven-course luncheon explored the higher echelons of our Swedish culinary heritage, mixing traditional ingredients with delicacies from all around the world, prepared with a frontline contemporary gastronomic attitude. An all-pervading theme was the typical Swedish blend of sweet, sour and salty flavors: smoked tuna carpaccio with corn foam, marinated salmon and kobe beef ravioli in wasabi boullion, lightly salted duck with goose liver garnish....oh dear, those sensations are with me still...

With the party from the night before still fresh in our minds, we couldn't help feeling slightly concerned in our anticipations for the final Thursday night party, at which we were expecting an even bigger crowd. We took the spontaneous decision to bring down most of the design exhibition for this party, turning the podiums into one monumental, 50-meter bar in the center of the ballroom: a magnificent Absolut altar with the shifting images on the Hasselblad screen as a backdrop.

But there was no reason for worries. The 1,500 strong crowd that showed up for the party turned out to be completely different from the night before: older, dressier, more elegant and discreet. Even so, it sure got going to the back-to-back performances by soul/dance acts Titiyo and Stephen Simmonds, both performing with full-scale bands. As an editor of *Vibe* magazine put it: "Goddamn it, we still see Swedish music as being ABBA and little else. I didn't have an idea that anything like this existed - it could be very big here! Where does Sweden get these tunes from?". The subsequent DJ-ing by Koop got all of the Altman Building rocking to the point that when time came to end the show, the crowd was screaming and pleading for "just one more song."

But there was no more. The New York experience was over, and with it a full year of craziness. Stockholm pulled out of New York. It'll be some time before we have a proper perspective of what really happened over there, and even longer before we know when, where, and in what guise we'll turn up next time. But don't worry, we'll be around - just keep your eyes and ears open. Until then, we'll take the liberty of priding ourselves on perhaps the finest compliment uttered on this event, delivered by a member of New York's avantgarde Lower East Side fashion scene: "Shit man, this is surreal. All these people, all this food, all this cool stuff you've never seen before - it's just as if Santa Claus has come!"