



Public.Factory

Emerging brands are key to a versatile and unique retail portfolio as well as to a prospering, future-driven fashion industry. But how does a buyer find such brands, seeing as cash-strapped start-ups often lack the funds to invest in tradeshow or showrooms and thus remain under retailers' radars? Enter designer collectives: groups of up-and-coming labels whose founders team up to face the challenges of the industry together. Such joint ventures mean more funds, more brain power and more visibility, and they have been mushrooming around the world of late.

The New York-based collective **Flying Solo**, which comprises apparel, accessory and jewelry brands, jointly took over a retail space in trendy Mulberry Street. They also show in joint booths at tradeshow such as **Capsule** at **Paris sur Mode**. Another group of New Yorkers, **Public.Factory**, recently created a concept store next to the Soho Grand Hotel in Manhattan, where every designer has a 'booth space'. The newly opened **Collaborative Store** in London presents not only apparel designers but also independent furniture brands and artists. While in some cases such collectives are a result of self-

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Shamin Vogel

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organization, in others the initiative comes from the local government: **Fashion Hotel** in Germany's Mönchengladbach provides a shared space for young brands from the nearby fashion school. The supporting Council only charges a fraction of their turnover as rent as it recognizes the benefits of the venture: innovative creative projects increase footfall on the high street and enhance the town's reputation.

It is crucial for these collectives to have a leader who can take care of enquiries from buyers, press or general business matters. **Crescala**, also based in

New York, has two fashion veterans at its helm who mentor young designers. Darin Bergonzelli, General Manager at Public.Factory, says: "We package retail as a service, so all logistics and operations are covered by our staff, allowing the designers to focus on the creative aspects and marketing initiatives."

Why are those collectives important? For a start, they enable retailers to discover a number of new brands from the same aesthetic universe under one roof. More importantly, collective stores allow buyers from other outlets to see whether an up-and-coming product works in a retail setting, thus making investment into these brands more secure. Lastly, retailers who have enough space for temporary projects can act as hosts to such designer groups, offering them corners and pop-up spaces and thus diversifying their portfolios, driving in new customers and, ultimately, testing out a new product before investing in it.