



The Aug. 16 meeting at the Ace Hotel in downtown Los Angeles

Destination: Denim City, Los Angeles

By Dorothy Crouch | Thursday, August 30, 2018



From left: Gerbert Kasst, Adriano Goldschmied, Mariette Hoitink and James Veenhoff

Denim City is an impressive educational institution that has a jean school that incorporates a three-year denim-development program to train people in all aspects of the blue-jeans industry with courses, workshops, access to the showrooms of world-renowned denim designers and a retail space for consumers.

With so much concentration on denim and blue jeans, one would assume that Denim City is located in Los Angeles, the world's denim manufacturing center. But it's not. It is located in Amsterdam.

Denim City was founded in 2014 as a collaboration between the **House of Denim Foundation** and denim leaders with a mission to improve production through cleaner, more sustainable and less pollutive methods.

Now some blue-jeans veterans in Los Angeles are working toward developing a similar initiative and asking, "Why has this taken so long to bring it here?"

Many of these leaders set the foundation for premium-denim heritage brands and have been at the forefront of cleaning up the industry to transition toward more efficient, less toxic production.

"I am on the board of Denim City in Amsterdam," said **Genious Group** founder and Chief Executive Officer Adriano Goldschmied, who is the co-founder of the Italian apparel brand **Diesel** and for years worked for premium-blue-jeans label **Citizens of Humanity**.

"The idea—and promoting the idea—made them the capital of the world's denim," he said. "In LA, we missed that energy. I would like to make a Denim City in LA."

During a West Coast tour in August, which included stops at **Liberty Fairs** in Las Vegas and a pop-up event at the **Rose Bowl** in Pasadena, Calif., House of Denim Foundation founders James Veenhoff and Mariette Hoitink brought their **Indigo Embassy** initiative to the United States. Gathering with denim-industry leaders, government officials and press during the **Ace Hotel** meeting on Aug. 16, the pair discussed the need for a Denim City initiative in Los Angeles.



"What we are looking for is local collaboration with the local school and community in Los Angeles, which has the heritage," Hoitink said. "Amsterdam is a good example of how working together and getting education, industry and consumers on the same page can make a brighter blue."

Hoitink wants to work with leaders who have pushed for environmentally safe apparel manufacturing and been key to the city's apparel industry, including Goldschmied, **Marithé + François Girbaud's** Francois Girbaud and **Atelier & Repair's** Maurizio Donadi.

"There is no other place in the world that has the legacy of denim," Donadi said as he addressed a room full of his peers at the Ace Hotel. "Our responsibility toward Los Angeles is not the status quo. It's not to keep things as it is. It's to create an industry that is clean, that is creative and innovative and help the public socially and philosophically."

While Amsterdam's Denim City includes the **Jean School**, Hoitink feels that working with existing fashion schools in Los Angeles to create greater educational opportunities would be ideal. The organization has already partnered with New York City's **Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT)** to create an exchange program every January that allows students from both cities to learn about the local denim industries.

"We go to New York for one week," Mira Copini, coordinator of Amsterdam's Jean School explained. "Our students work with students from FIT, they do a denim project together, then they all fly back to Amsterdam and they have a week in Amsterdam where they work together again on the same project. At the end, they present the project."

The Amsterdam school offers a three-year course for Dutch-language speakers, which began before Denim City in 2012 with 20 students and recently included a class of 50 graduates in July.

There are also short programs for industry professionals whose companies sponsor their trips and a yearlong program for international students, which is administered over 40 weeks and has included students from the United States, United Kingdom, South Africa, Sweden, Pakistan, Korea, Brazil, India, Germany and Italy.

"It is not our idea to open a Jean School in Los Angeles. However, if there would be one it has to be raised from the city's existing fashion schools," Copini said. "The answer toward a brighter blue in Los Angeles can only be found in Los Angeles and answered by the Los Angeles industry and fashion schools together."

Fashion students at one Los Angeles school will not have to wait long to explore Amsterdam's Denim City. A fixture in the fashion community for nearly 50 years, the **Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising (FIDM)** is now in its second year of offering an associate's degree in the Business of Denim. The program includes a trip to the major denim regions of Tokyo and Fukuyama, Japan, and the Netherlands and is timed for students to experience **Denim Days**, the House of Denim-produced event that celebrates denim Oct. 22-28.

"So many brands are designed there [Amsterdam]. We visit Denim City," Barbara Bundy vice president of education, said. "They do some workshops and we've never been able to fit that into our schedule. We keep talking about some form of collaboration in the future."



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While there is talk about a Denim City in Los Angeles, the organization is opening **Denim City São Paulo** in Brazil in 2019. In December, the consul general of the Netherlands, Gerbert Kunst, will organize a pop-up embassy that could potentially forge a stronger connection between the denim industries in Amsterdam and Los Angeles.

"As consul general, I will help open doors where necessary," he said. "We look forward to working together with Dutch and American creatives to help them exchange thoughts and ideas and build their business."

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