

WWWD

Fashion. Beauty. Business.



Rupert's Report

Richemont's Johann Rupert discussed everything from M&A to mystery shopping as the group reported an 11 percent leap in sales for fiscal 2026.
Page 2

Schedule Set

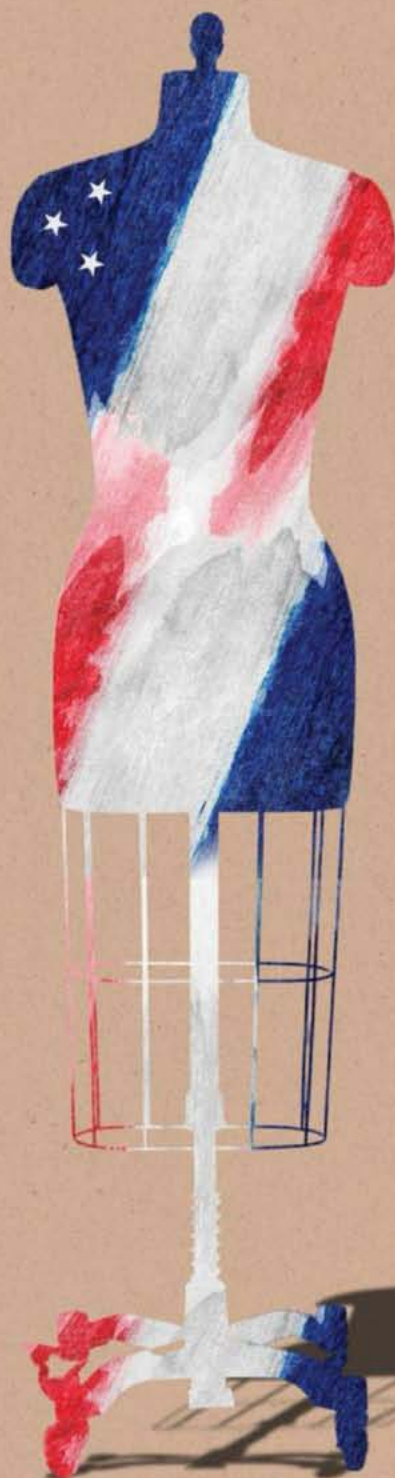
The Paris men's show calendar features 74 brands, including the first men's shows by Michael Rider at Celine and Sarah Burton at Givenchy.
Page 3

Beauty's Pulse

From William P. Lauder to Diane von Furstenberg, Jo Horgan of Mecca to SharkNinja CEO Mark Barrocas, more coverage from the WWD Beauty CEO Summit.
Pages 42 to 52

Fashion Alliance

The U.S. and France have had a special relationship from the moment the country was founded. So as America marks its 250th anniversary this July 4, members of France's Comité Colbert are celebrating the semi-quincentennial with an exhibition in New York, "Hidden Treasures, 250 Years of Franco-American Luxury Stories," which opens Tuesday. *See inside for more.*

COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK **WWD**

Special Relationship

France's luxury goods association Comité Colbert is marking America's semi-quincentennial with the exhibition "Hidden Treasures, 250 Years of Franco-American Luxury Stories," which opens Tuesday at The Shed in Manhattan. For more, see here to page 39.

PLUME DE PAON COLLECTION



BOUCHERON

PARIS SINCE 1858

NEW YORK, MADISON AVENUE
LOS ANGELES, RODEO DRIVE
LAS VEGAS, FONTAINEBLEAU

Luxury Brands Bet on U.S. Market

The high-end fashion houses are rediscovering the New World. BY EVAN CLARK PHOTOGRAPH BY GEORGE CHINSEE



Inside the new spa in the House of Dior New York.

As the French elite gather in New York to celebrate 250 years of Franco-American luxury with Comité Colbert this month, they can toast a U.S. market that is now key to driving the sector forward.

But with any excitement about the U.S. resurgence comes some anxiety and one key question: Will the momentum of the still-nascent recovery hold?

The hope is a very firm yes as the U.S. is the only game in town right now.

China, the driver of the luxury world for a decade, has become iffy. The home market for most high-end European brands is only OK. And the still simmering U.S.-Israeli war in Iran, which has already pushed up oil prices and could wreak global economic havoc, is the industry's other big question.

Even Bernard Arnault, chairman and chief executive officer of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, told investors last month that if the Middle East goes bad, it could be very bad.

"It all depends on how this crisis plays out," Arnault said. "Either it will be a global catastrophe, so to speak, with extremely serious and highly negative economic impacts, and if that's the case, who can say how 2026 will unfold?"

If the standoff is resolved quickly, the luxury titan said that "chances are" LVMH will "continue to gain market share, as we did in 2025."

Gaining share in a market as diverse as the U.S. is always a trick, although it's one

that Arnault & Co. have been working toward for years – and with all the resources a brand could want.

Louis Vuitton, for instance, just held its cruise 2027 show in New York – while LVMH stablemate Dior headed to Los Angeles – and is preparing to open a multifaceted, mega-flagship with a permanent exhibition space and multiple eateries in Beverly Hills in 2029. More than a store, the flagship will be a single building with two structures that are connected by pedestrian bridges.

That, for sure, is one way to plant your flag in the U.S., but not the only one as many brands are also pushing out deeper in the market than ever before.

"There are these tertiary markets that are starting to pop up out of necessity," said Michael Prendergast, managing director in Alvarez & Marsal's consumer and retail group, who pointed to Westport, Conn.

"There is this really great outdoor downtown area and it's been upper middle to sort of high-endish brands like Aerie, Faherty, Lululemon, a couple of cosmetic shops and then Chanel shows up. And that's a small format Chanel too. You're going to start to see more of that. What pops up in Charleston, S.C.? What pops up in these areas around a high income area?"

Of course the stand-alone store push is nothing new.

Luxury brands have for years been focused on building their own

direct-to-consumer U.S. presences. But the Saks Global bankruptcy appears to have given them a nudge to go a little further.

Saks Global has gone a long way toward righting its business and is preparing to exit bankruptcy this summer – but with a trimmer profile and less than half as many Saks Fifth Avenue doors. Most of its Neiman Marcus stores will remain open, but that still has luxury looking at a smaller department store universe in the U.S.

And brands could be feeling a little "once bitten and twice shy."

"Reading between the lines, a lot of the luxury houses are thinking better off for us to invest in our own stores and build out our own brand and control the experience," Prendergast said. "And honestly, nobody is better at it than they are. The Hermès store in downtown Greenwich – you walk in there and you feel elevated and you feel the luxury."

"You'll start to see some interesting, more micro-oriented decisions that are happening by these luxury brands that will set them up for success in the U.S. market," he said.

And that's just one way the established luxury houses will have to flex to really make it in the U.S. market, where the consumer sensibility is different and a different feel is required.

While high-end brands have proven to be malleable enough to, say, add sneakers to their collections or bring edgy designers into stately houses, it's always a

question of just how much should a brand flex as it expands.

"It's very dangerous territory for them," Prendergast said. "The luxury brands have established a brand equity that gives them a license to almost do whatever they want. However, it's the challenge of: Is it brand appropriate? And will it resonate with my customers? And does it create some excitement?"

"Some of the brands have done a great job of that," he said. "And some have gotten into trouble like Gucci by doing a little bit of it and being successful and then chasing a market that's too trendy, too embellished, too far out of their core and thinking, 'Well, it's great because it's Gucci.' And then what happens is it's not great because the cool crowd doesn't want it. There's this odd balance of doing new, innovative, interesting things that I think it's a very small radius of getting outside of the core before you start alienating the customer."

So as French luxury brands expand in America – and no doubt keep trying new things – they'll also have to mind their roots at home.

Certainly, the American competition is looking to expand the other way with Veronica Beard, James Perse and Frame stores all landing on Rue François 1er in Paris this year.

What those clearly prove is that the special relationship between America and France is, even after 250 years, still very much alive and well.

WWD COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK

Comité Colbert on Bringing Cultural Diplomacy to NYC

CEO Bénédicte Epinay explains how centuries of trade with the U.S. have shaped the French luxury sector, and how its focus is shifting from tariffs to dupes. BY JOELLE DIDERICH

PARIS – Diplomatic relations between the U.S. and France may have their ups and downs, but America's love affair with French luxury is undimmed.

As the industry struggles to emerge from a prolonged slump, the U.S. has proved a beacon of resilience, defying tariffs, inflation and geopolitical tensions to remain the top market for French luxury goods.

Comité Colbert will celebrate that special relationship with an exhibition in New York City timed to coincide with the 250th anniversary of American independence.

"Hidden Treasures, 250 Years of Franco-American Luxury Stories" will run from Tuesday to Sunday at The Shed cultural center at Hudson Yards, bringing together a record 65 members of the French luxury association, from brands like Chanel and Dior to cultural institutions, including the Louvre Museum and the Palace of Versailles.

Each house has chosen a symbolic object to tell its story and illustrate how French luxury has been the motor of cultural diplomacy for more than two centuries – from U.S. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy's secret fittings with Hubert de Givenchy to Chanel's collaborations with Hollywood filmmakers on blockbusters like "Barbie."

The opening event in New York City on Tuesday will be followed by a reception on Wednesday at the French ambassador's residence in Washington, D.C., where guests will include a cross-section of U.S. business, cultural and political figures.

In an interview with WWD, Bénédicte Epinay, chief executive officer of Comité Colbert, explains why New York will be the only stop for the exhibition, how French luxury brands are switching their focus from tariffs to dupes, and why King Louis XIV was the original influencer.

WWD: Why was the 250th anniversary of American independence a good opportunity to celebrate the presence of French luxury brands in the U.S.?
Bénédicte Epinay: Our ambassadors worldwide always ask us to mark important anniversaries. That's why two years ago, we staged an exhibition in Shanghai commemorating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic relations between France and China.

In this instance, the presidents of the United States and France wanted to jointly celebrate 250 years of American independence. That decision was taken at the very beginning of U.S. President Donald Trump's second mandate.

Stephane Blanchard, president of Chanel USA and U.S. ambassador for Comité Colbert, held a dinner in New York for U.S. representatives of French luxury brands. Listening to them tell their stories, we quickly realized that all of our houses have an amazing history in the United States. We thought it was a good opportunity to show our gratitude to the United States, not just because it's the leading market for French luxury goods, but because the relationship goes way back.

Inspiration has been flowing back and forth for at least 200 years, making it an unusually fertile exchange.

It's worth pointing out that, against the backdrop of global tensions, we're coming to America with a tribute exhibition that

says to Americans: "Thank you for everything you've contributed to our industry in terms of inspiration, icons and cultural exchange."

Regardless of who's in power, people come to France for the lifestyle and luxury brands. Cultural diplomacy is all about promoting that overseas.

WWD: Bernard Arnault often tells the story of his first trip to New York. When he asked a taxi driver whether he knew the name of France's president, the driver replied: "No, but I know Christian Dior."

B.E.: That's something we see wherever we go. People recognize the names of our luxury brands, our chefs, our philosophers, our landmarks – and our soccer players, I might add.

It's not a cliché to say it all goes back to Versailles and the court of Louis XIV, because if you think of it in today's terms, Versailles was the greatest showroom for French craftsmanship.

Looking at the portraits of the time, he was a king who loved wearing gold, lace, earrings, cultured pearls and perfume. He liked to drape himself in silk, and wear heels so you could spot him from a distance.

Louis XIV was the equivalent of a modern-day influencer, and that still resonates today.

Our royalty lives on in the popular imagination through books and movies like Sofia Coppola's "Marie Antoinette," and that supports this industry.

WWD: Why did you decide to hold this exhibition in New York City?

B.E.: All our CEOs agreed it had to be New York, but our initial idea was to have the exhibition tour the rest of the United States.

We had planned stops in Chicago, Miami, and Dallas, Houston or Austin in Texas. We wanted to go to Los Angeles, and maybe also San Francisco. But it turns out museums plan their exhibitions between two and five years in advance, so the deadlines were too tight.

Bénédicte Epinay



A 3D rendering of Comité Colbert's "Hidden Treasures, 250 Years of Franco-American Luxury Stories" exhibition in New York City.

COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK **WWD**

WWD: Did the current geopolitical situation play a role in the cancellation of this planned exhibition tour?

B.E.: Absolutely not. We had a partnership with the American Federation of Arts which, like us, is a nonprofit. They spent six months reaching out to all the American museums in their network.

I'm very happy and proud to bring this exhibition to New York. My only regret is that we'll be reaching just a fraction of this country's huge population.

WWD: All the more reason to visit the exhibition in New York, then.

B.E.: We're in town for six days only, so it's like Céline Dion's concert run in Paris. Catch it while you can.

WWD: How did you land on a concept that would work for all your members?

B.E.: As soon as we decided to mine the U.S. archives of our houses, the heritage departments got to work. They quickly came back to us with tons of ideas.

We booked a 9,150-square-foot exhibition space thinking we would have 40 participants, and we ended up with 65. Every day, I was getting additional confirmations.

At that point, we realized we needed to focus on one object per house, because otherwise the show would be too sprawling. But there were dozens more stories we could have told.

WWD: The format of the exhibition, with objects displayed inside shipping crates, is inspired by the golden age of transatlantic travel. Why hark back to this period in time?

B.E.: We'd been planning for a while to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Art Deco movement, which was so important for France and for our members.

Art Deco was born with the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts held at the Grand Palais in 1925.

There was a Pavilion of Elegance, a Pavilion of Perfume, and all the major French department stores each had their pavilion. There was also a pavilion dedicated to tableware, so there was already this intention of promoting the French art of living.

It felt like a legitimate reference point.

WWD: As the representative for French luxury brands, what has been your position on U.S. trade tariffs?

B.E.: We are aligned with the French Finance Ministry's position that these tariffs represent a threat to our industry.

I'm a member of the French Strategic Committee for the Fashion and Luxury Sector alongside Pascal Morand, executive president of the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode, and all the other federations. We're in close contact with all our ministers. But on the subject of tariffs, we thought it was best not to add fuel to the fire and to remain measured in our response to U.S. policy, because we were worried things would escalate.

We're also very active at the European Union level. France holds the rotating presidency of the European Cultural and Creative Industries Alliance, or ECCIA, for the next two years. This organization represents the U.K., German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, Swedish and French luxury industries. We have offices in Brussels and we hold at least one meeting a week there.

In a sense, we've learned to live with tariffs. These days, we have bigger battles to fight, such as the cost of energy and counterfeiting. We're preparing to launch a big campaign against dupes, which are a major concern for our houses. The battle against dupes and counterfeiting is our number-one priority this year. There have



The Hall of Mirrors at the Chateau de Versailles.



U.S. President Donald Trump meets with French President Emmanuel Macron at the White House on Feb. 24, 2025, in Washington, D.C.



A 3D rendering of Comité Colbert's "Hidden Treasures, 250 Years of Franco-American Luxury Stories" exhibition in New York City.

been a lot of studies on counterfeiting conducted with customs and police, but these have mostly focused on the scale of the problem. We've joined forces with Kea & Partners on a sociological study to try to understand the causes of the phenomenon. We will publish it on June 3 on the eve of World Anti-Counterfeit Day. We'll also be launching a partnership in June with TikTok Shop, because the sharp rise in dupes is fueled by social commerce. We've worked with them so that when

you search for luxury brand dupes, an automatic message pops up urging users to respect creators' rights.

We're also launching an awareness campaign on TikTok in June and July, aimed at dissuading younger consumers from buying dupes.

According to a recent study by the Directorate General for Competition Policy, Consumer Affairs and Fraud Control, based on a sample of products sold online by seven foreign marketplaces,

75 percent are non-compliant and 46 percent are dangerous.

The legislation regarding counterfeit products is very clear: They can be confiscated, and the buyer risks a fine. Dupes exist in a kind of gray zone. People think they can just buy dupes freely, but we want it to be clearly stated that the legislation is the same as for counterfeits. It's intellectual property theft, and it's very dangerous.

For perfume brands, it's a tsunami.

There's no patent protection for fragrance formulations, so we're also asking for the legislation to be updated.

WWD: Have dupes and counterfeits cannibalized the U.S. market for French luxury goods?

B.E.: The end of the de minimis exemption on low-value imports was a good thing, since it reduced the flow of small parcels from China, although they've been largely redirected to Europe as a result.

But I was still very surprised, the last time I was in New York to prepare for our exhibition, to see dozens of hawkers selling counterfeits on Fifth Avenue. One night, as I was returning to my hotel, I came upon a man who was supplying them. He has a huge trolley filled with counterfeit Chanel and Louis Vuitton bags and he was just going around, topping them up. It was unbelievable to see this happening on an industrial scale right on Fifth Avenue.

WWD: We're seeing brands like Vuitton open experiential megastores that are also exhibition spaces and restaurants. How do you see retail adapting to Gen Z?

B.E.: Luxury brands are increasingly positioning themselves as cultural brands by creating multigenerational spaces where you can come to see, touch and feel, but not necessarily buy. In the past, brands were criticized for having stores with airlocks.

There was a literal barrier to entry, whereas nowadays, they have a strategy of being much more accessible. The aim is to open the doors to a new generation.

U.S. demand for French luxury remains strong. It's one of the most resilient markets in the world.

Studies show there is obviously an appetite for local labels, the same as in China or India, but it does not replace the demand from younger generations for our brands. ■



Cartier



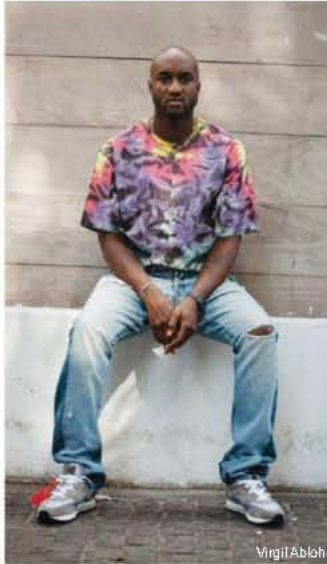
Cartier

WWD COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK

A History of American Fashion Designers in Paris

From Mainbocher to Michael Rider, U.S. creatives have shaped the French luxury industry.

BY RHONDA RICHFORD AND TONYA BLAZIO-LICORISH



Virgil Abloh

For decades, Paris represented the ultimate seal of legitimacy in fashion. American designers could achieve commercial or cinematic success in New York or Los Angeles, but Paris remained the symbolic capital of luxury, couture and critical authority.

Today, however, some of the most influential forces within the Paris system itself are American. From Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton to Virgil Abloh's transformation of luxury menswear, American designers have not only entered the French establishment — they have helped redefine it.

That evolution can be traced back to long before the current era of global luxury conglomerates and celebrity creative directors. It all began in 1929 with American couturier Mainbocher, born Main Rousseau Bocher, who opened his couture salon in Paris at the height of the Great Depression.

His clients included a who's who of the best dressed list from socialites to Hollywood celebrities. But he is best known for styling Wallis Simpson, the Duchess of Windsor. Simpson's name became synonymous with the designer after he created her iconic pale blue wedding gown — to match her light blue eyes — in the color that came to be known as "Wallis Blue," which remained key to her social standing and his reputation as a formidable couturier. In 1939, at the beginning of World War II, he closed his salon, remaining in the United States, where he built a notable legacy in fashion.

In the late 1960s, Jay Jaxon arrived in Paris, becoming one of the first Black American designers to achieve recognition within Paris couture. Born in New York and trained at FIT, Jaxon moved to Paris and spent his formative years at Yves Saint Laurent and Christian Dior, before being named as the creative director at Jean-Louis Scherrer at just 24.

Known for elegant draping and couture-level tailoring, Jaxon became an early example of American talent operating inside the French system, even if designers like him rarely received the

Models onstage during the "Battle of Versailles" fashion extravaganza at the Palace of Versailles on Nov. 28, 1973.



Oscar de la Renta poses with a model in his Balmain spring 1985 couture collection.



same visibility or institutional recognition as their European counterparts.

The turning point came in 1973 with the Battle of Versailles fashion show, considered one of the defining moments in modern fashion history. Organized as a fundraiser for the restoration of the Palace of Versailles, the event staged a transatlantic fashion face-off between five French couturiers — Yves Saint Laurent, Hubert de Givenchy, Pierre Cardin, Emanuel Ungaro, and Christian Dior — and an American team consisted of Bill Blass, Stephen Burrows, Halston, Anne Klein and Oscar de la Renta.

At the time, French couture was still considered the center of high fashion. The Americans, by contrast, were associated with ready-to-wear, sportswear and commercial fashion. But while the French presentations were elaborate and theatrical, the Americans arrived with something looser, faster and more modern. Their segment emphasized movement, contemporary music, diverse casting, and an ease that felt radically current compared to the formality of traditional couture presentations.

The audience loved it. The Battle of Versailles is now widely viewed as the moment American fashion gained international street cred. It also marked a breakthrough for Black models and

designers, particularly Stephen Burrows, whose fluid jersey garments embodied the energy of the emerging disco era. American ready-to-wear no longer looked secondary to Paris couture. It was wearable and contemporary.

By the 1990s, American designers were no longer simply competing with Paris from afar. Increasingly, they were being invited into the French system itself.

In 1993, de la Renta became the first American designer to lead a French couture house when he was appointed creative director of Balmain haute couture. A few years later, Michael Kors arrived at Céline, helping transform the relatively restrained Paris leather goods label into a more internationally visible luxury brand through sleek tailoring and polished American sportswear sensibilities.

Then came Marc Jacobs at Louis Vuitton. His appointment in 1997 marked a profound shift, both for Vuitton and for the broader luxury industry. Until then, Louis Vuitton had been known primarily for luggage and leather goods rather than runway fashion. Jacobs introduced the house's first ready-to-wear collection in 1998, establishing the foundation for what would become one of the most powerful fashion brands in the world. His early collections were restrained and minimal, and over time he worked with contemporary artists including Stephen Sprouse, Takashi Murakami and Richard Prince, ushering in the era of collaborations.

In hindsight, Jacobs' appointment signaled to Paris luxury houses that American designers could shape not just commercial strategy, but creative identity itself.

At the same time, a different kind of American designer began reshaping Paris from the avant-garde side. Rick Owens presented his first Paris collection in 2002 after building a cult following in Los Angeles, bringing his dark, sculptural minimalism into the center of the Paris fashion calendar.

Meanwhile, Ralph Rucci was invited by the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode to show on the Paris couture calendar, following Mainbocher before him. His work preserving American excellence in salon style showings and installations of fashion in its highest art form remains a coveted ticket. In 2004, Paris was still enlisting American ingenuity

with Patrick Robinson at Paco Rabanne, who helmed the house for three years.

Thom Browne followed in 2007, introducing a sharply tailored, highly conceptual approach to menswear that blurred distinctions between American tailoring and European suiting. Both designers embraced Paris not simply as a market, but as an intellectual and artistic fashion capital. Alexander Wang, a graduate of Parsons School of Design known for attracting a coveted list of New York and Los Angeles "cool kids," would be the first Chinese American to helm the house of Balenciaga, from 2015 to 2017.

The clearest symbol of this evolution arrived in 2018, when Virgil Abloh became artistic director of menswear at Louis Vuitton. Abloh's appointment represented more than another American entering a French luxury house. It marked a fundamental shift in what luxury itself could be.

Rather than treating streetwear as separate from high fashion, Abloh brought the two together to create something dynamic. Sneakers, hoodies, skate culture, hip-hop references and graphic logos entered one of the most historic Paris houses while retaining couture-level craftsmanship as well as pricing. His shows became major cultural events that combined fashion, music, celebrity and art in ways that reflected global youth culture rather than traditional European elitism.

The impact extended far beyond Vuitton. Under Abloh, streetwear became fully integrated into luxury fashion's business model as well as aesthetic. Across the industry, brands accelerated collaborations, embraced sneaker culture, and leaned more heavily into entertainment and hype-driven marketing.

Still, Paris remains fashion's symbolic center, but increasingly the culture shaping it is distinctly American. Contemporary American designers continue to seek validation in the French capital, even as they challenge the system from within.

Vaquera founders Patric DiCaprio and Bryn Taubensee first built their label in New York through irreverent, DIY runway shows before increasingly shifting toward Paris, finally fully decamping in 2025 to establish their atelier here.

Their move reflects a broader reality within fashion: showing in Paris still carries a level of prestige, visibility and critical legitimacy difficult to replicate elsewhere. Designers like Willy Chavarria have also joined the Paris calendar in recent years as a way of expanding their international reach, while staging shows that explicitly reflect America's current political discourse.

Even Céline recently returned to American creative direction. Twenty years after the departure of Kors, the house appointed Michael Rider as creative director in 2024 following the slim fit-meets-'70s era of Hedi Slimane — during which the house lost its accent.

Rider, who previously worked under Phoebe Philo at the house before later joining Polo Ralph Lauren, represents another generation of the exchange between American sportswear sensibilities and Paris luxury houses. Another example is the duo of Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez, the new designers at Loewe, who followed the first Latino, Narciso Rodriguez, creative lead for the brand from 1997 to 2001. The duo gave up designing their own label to move to the French capital.

The relationship between American designers and Paris has evolved from outsider aspiration to creative interdependence. Versailles may have opened the door, but over the last 50 years, American designers have increasingly transformed what Paris fashion actually is.

COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK **WWD**

How American Patrons Burnish France's Top Attractions

Fundraisers like Becca Cason Thrash are among those who uphold a long tradition, ensuring cultural treasures like the Louvre and the Palace of Versailles are preserved. BY MILES SOCHA

Fundraiser extraordinaire Becca Cason Thrash, as resourceful as she is relentless, loves to tear through French red tape like a champion sprinter rips across finish lines.

At the 2011 gala she organized in support of the Louvre, which had Janet Jackson performing after dinner and a Richard Prince joke painting up for auction, she was adamant that guests first sip Champagne on the balcony of what was once Napoléon III's private apartments – even though museum officials insisted the doors could not be opened.

Over a two-month campaign, she made two trips to Paris from her native Texas to state her case – at her own expense – secretly procured an estimate from a supplier, and basically would not take “no” for an answer.

“I was like, ‘I’m bringing in \$4 million: Get those damn doors unsealed for me,’” she said in her disarming drawl.

Thrash, whose latest project is a benefit gala at the Palace of Versailles planned for June 8, upholds a long tradition of American philanthropy in support of French cultural institutions.

Over the last 30 years she estimates that events she helped orchestrate have raised about \$30 million for what she calls the “big three”: Versailles, the Louvre and Notre-Dame de Paris. (She has also done fundraising for more than 45 American nonprofits.)

“As Americans, we are born and raised to work hard, make money, pay taxes and give away what you can – do the right thing, basically,” she said in an interview. “It’s a feel good.”

As vice chairman of American Friends of the Louvre, chairman of Patrons for Notre-Dame de Paris, and distinguished honorary chair of the American Friends of Versailles, Thrash has also pioneered fundraising extravaganzas that offer guests rare experiences galore, and hence “bragging rights.”

“My driving motivation is to just be able to do something wonderful for the people that I bring – to show them something they’re otherwise not going to have access to,” she said. “It’s very rewarding to create something magical and wonderful.”

Thrash’s proof of concept came on a Tuesday night back in 2005, when she hosted a dinner to benefit the Louvre at her Houston home, wowing the museum’s then-head Henri Loyrette by pulling in \$900,000, about \$95,000 of that from a single auction lot offering a packet of tickets to haute couture shows.

“I just try to make it as win-win as I can for everybody, for the people that are attending, the people that are bidding, the people that are not bidding, and the beneficiary, which is the bottom line and the end result,” she said.

Lionel Sauvage, president of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, estimates that marquee French cultural institutions receive about 20 million euros a year from American donors – with up to a tenth of that flowing to Les Arts Décoratifs, prized for its fashion and design exhibitions.

Its blockbuster Art Deco-at-100 show wrapped its run last month and attracted more than 500,000 visitors, while its Iris Van Herpen retrospective recently alighted at the Brooklyn Museum, further elaborating on centuries of Franco-American friendship and cultural exchange.

“American donors tend to be a group of faithful individuals that give regularly,”



The grand salon on display at the Louvre Museum's Napoleon III apartments.

Sauvage said in an interview. “They come to France on a regular basis. They come to visit our museum on a regular basis. They may be interested in fashion, some others in design.”

“The topic itself is very attractive,” agreed Les Arts Décoratifs’ chief executive officer Sophie-Justine Lieber. “And secondly, the museum is a private entity, even though we are heavily subsidized... We really depend on the donations and on philanthropy, and I think our American friends know that.”

Lieber noted that about 30 percent of its visitors are international, which is lower than more famous museums like the Louvre, or Musée d’Orsay.

Last year, Les Arts Décoratifs added a tentpole fundraiser, with its inaugural Bal d’Été art-directed by filmmaker Sofia Coppola, who made it a night to remember, from the lavish, hot pink table settings to the blistering performance by French rock band Phoenix. The next one is planned for 2028, given that 2027 is an election year in France, Lieber noted.

Thrash is in Paris gathering up unreal auction items for “A Legacy of Light,” which is expected to raise \$3 million, earmarked for the painted ceiling of Le Salon de Diane, which required urgent restoration work.

Among the lots are a \$150,000 David Yurman diamond bracelet, a Nile cruise for up to six guests on Christian Louboutin’s houseboat, and a safari for up to a dozen people at a game refuge in South Africa.

In the past, Thrash conducted the auctions by herself, cajoling regular American attendees to open their purse strings.

“They’re happy to be called by name and get in a bidding war,” she said. “We need new money, and we need these people that have made it, and they’re happy to give it back, and they’re happy to get their little moment of acknowledgement.”

The late French curator and art expert Gerald Van der Kemp is widely considered a key pioneer in mobilizing rich Americans to restore crumbling landmarks, starting with the Palace of Versailles after World War II, when Rockefellers, Lauders and Wildensteins opened their wallets alongside the Rothschilds, David-Weils and the Aga Khan.

Sauvage noted that France is also the beneficiary of roughly 77 billion euros annually from tourism, with Americans representing about 10 percent of visitors.

“So I would say the biggest philanthropy to France is the share of those billions,” he said with a grin.



Salon de Diane at the Palace of Versailles.



Sofia Coppola lent her cinematic touch to a 2025 fundraising ball at Les Arts Décoratifs.



The Palace of Versailles.



The Château de Chambord in France's Loire valley.

Pierre Dubreuil, director general of the Chambord national estate, agreed that America’s impact goes beyond donations.

“It is also crucial because of the ripple effect it can generate: the commitment of major international patrons often helps to mobilize other partners, both public and private, in France and abroad,” he said in an interview. “It also serves as a reminder that French heritage is part of a shared history and sensibility that extends far beyond our borders.”

The Château de Chambord, selected for a high jewelry event by Van Cleef & Arpels in 2024, has received more than 8 million euros in American donations since 2017.

“While American donors are few in number, they are among the most generous,” Dubreuil said, noting that Chambord’s principal patron is Blackstone chairman and CEO Stephen A. Schwarzman, who gave 3.5 million euros in 2017 for the restoration of the formal French gardens, and then 4 million euros in 2023 for the restoration of the upper reaches of the château.

“Chambord is a national treasure, of great importance to both the cultural

heritage and the French people, as well as to the international community,” Schwarzman commented.

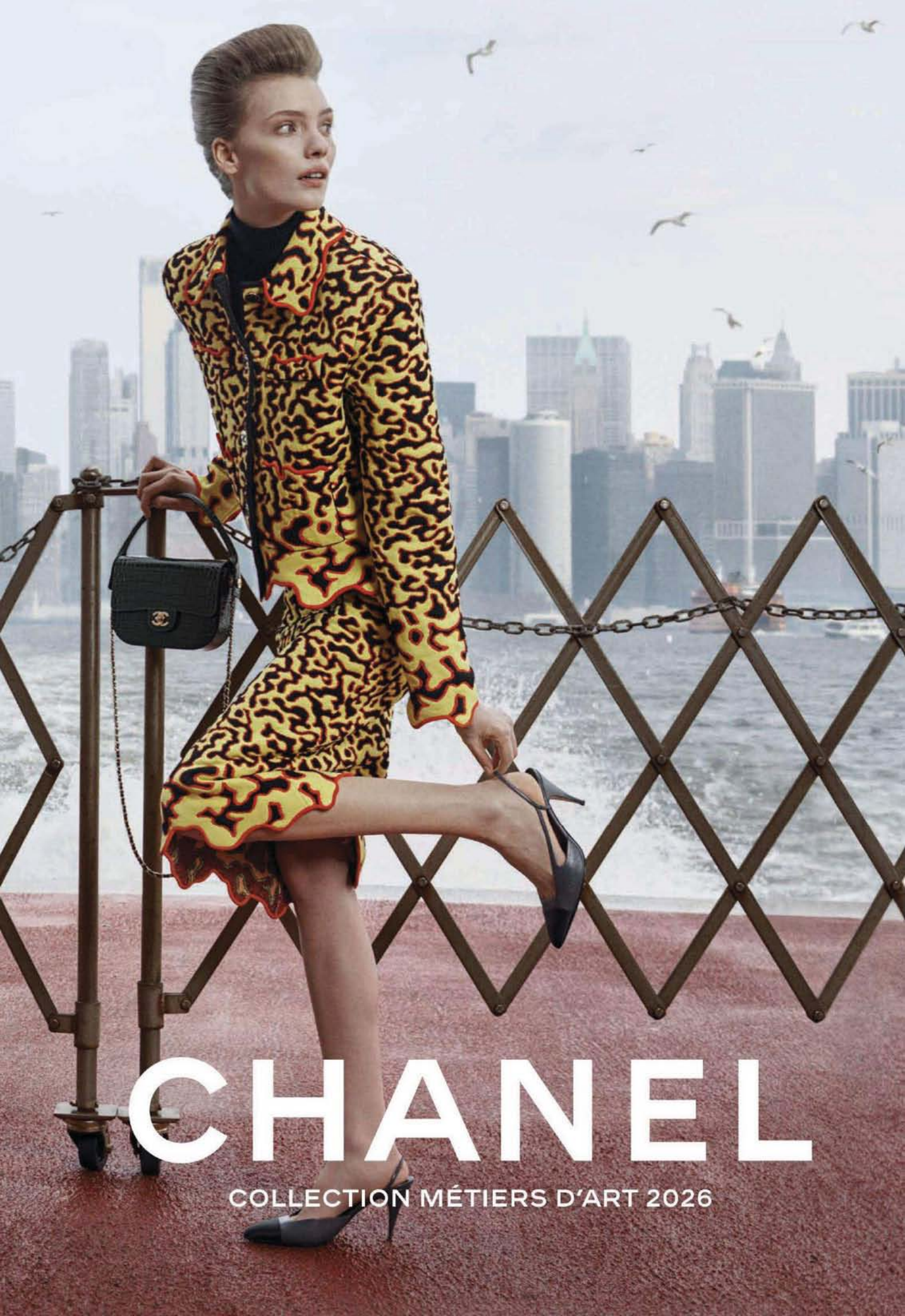
Dubreuil’s latest project is the restoration of the château’s François I wing, expected to cost 37 million euros.

“The first phase is funded, but more than 20 million euros still needs to be raised,” he noted. “In this context, developing relationships with international patrons, particularly American ones, is a priority, as is developing a network of American Friends of Chambord.”

Among other mechanisms that facilitate transatlantic donations are Friends of Fondation de France and Myriad USA, as well as “American Friends” organizations that allow American donors to support French institutions within a favorable tax framework.

“Nationally, several organizations exemplify this dynamic: the American Friends of the Louvre, the Friends of Notre-Dame de Paris, the American Friends of the Musée d’Orsay and the Musée de l’Orangerie, and the French Heritage Society, which has been working for over 40 years to preserve French heritage,” Dubreuil said.





CHANEL

COLLECTION MÉTIERS D'ART 2026

WWD COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK

French Luxury by the Numbers

From Jean-Baptiste Colbert to Birkin bags, the figures behind France's global fashion and luxury dominance. BY RHONDA RICHFORD

20 hours

Approximate time required to handcraft a single Hermès Birkin bag.

1664

Jean-Baptiste Colbert launched a state-backed manufacturing system to build France's luxury and industrial base. The same year, Manufacture de Beauvais was founded to develop French tapestry production and reduce reliance on imports.

4 BILLION EUROS

PRICE AGREED FOR L'ORÉAL TO ACQUIRE KERING BEAUTÉ IN 2025.



1984 The year Hermès introduced the Birkin bag, now one of the world's most coveted luxury accessories.

1837

The year Hermès was founded by Thierry Hermès as a maker of equestrian gear for Europe's aristocracy.

2.3 BILLION EUROS

Value of French handbag exports in the first quarter of 2025 alone, according to industry trade data reported by Leatherbiz.

96

The number of maisons that are currently members of the Comité Colbert, plus an additional 17 cultural institutions.

1954

The year Jean Jacques Guerlain, heir of the perfume brand, founded Comité Colbert to bring together the country's leading luxury houses to collectively promote French art de vivre.

500 BILLION EUROS

Combined market capitalization recently reached by LVMH, Hermès and Kering.

1945

THE YEAR FRANCE FORMALLY CODIFIED THE MODERN HAUTE COUTURE SYSTEM, LEGALLY PROTECTING THE DESIGNATION "HAUTE COUTURE."

20%

Share of France's CAC 40 index represented by the combined market value of LVMH, Hermès and Kering in 2023.

80.8 billion euros

Revenue posted by LVMH in 2025, maintaining its position as the world's largest luxury group.

15.6

BILLION EUROS
2025 sales at L'Oréal Luxe, home to upscale brands including Lancôme, Yves Saint Laurent Beauté and Prada Beauty.

4.5 billion euros

Estimated value of French luxury goods exported to the U.S. in 2024.

11

Number of artisan maisons d'art housed inside Chanel's 1e19M craftsmanship hub in Paris.

1

The U.S. remains the single most important export market for French luxury houses.



Dior

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U.S. First Lady Melania Trump welcomes French First Lady Brigitte Macron at the White House on April 24, 2018 in Washington, DC.

First Ladies Don't Speak The Same Fashion Language

French first ladies always look to showcase their country's fashion and luxury prowess. Their American counterparts take a different approach. **BY SAMANTHA CONTI**

Since the 18th century messages have been flying across the Atlantic between France and the U.S., with U.S. forefathers including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams undertaking diplomatic missions, doing deals with their Gallic counterparts and seeking support for their revolution in North America.

Women, meanwhile, were keeping a close eye on the style of their transatlantic sisters, and none more so than Dolley Madison. After she became first lady, the wife of James Madison shrugged off her Quaker wardrobe and took to wearing low-cut Empire dresses, in the style of Joséphine Bonaparte, and adding exotic,

Continental touches such as turbans adorned with feathers and jewels.

A Francophile like her husband, Dolley Madison learned all about French style from fashion dolls that were regularly shipped across the Atlantic to showcase the latest fashions.

In the 200 years since she was sweeping

"CLOTHES ARE ONE OF THE EASIEST WAYS THAT WE COMMUNICATE, NONVERBALLY, BUT WE NEVER KNOW HOW MUCH OF THE MESSAGE GETS THROUGH."

VALERIE STEELE, THE MUSEUM AT THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

around the White House hosting her famously lavish parties – and serving food by French chefs – America's first ladies have had an on-off relationship with French fashion. Elizabeth Monroe and Edith Wilson loved it, while many others shrugged, and trod their own style paths.

It wasn't until the 31-year-old Jacqueline Kennedy became first lady that the transatlantic romance blossomed again, although the fashion dynamic hasn't changed much since Madison's days. The French still set the style agenda and insist on showcasing their nation's talents on the world stage, while American first ladies sometimes find themselves walking a line between their love of French fashion, and their duty to promote homegrown talent.

Dressing for the New Age of Television

Kennedy had traveled extensively in Europe in her youth, spoke French and loved the culture – and the couture. In June 1961, she tapped Hubert de Givenchy to design the wardrobe for her first official trip abroad as first lady, to her beloved France.

Understandably, she was also under pressure to promote American-made fashion, which meant she would often turn to local talents, including Oleg Cassini, Norman Norell and the boutique Chez Ninon, to create looks inspired – sometimes stitch-by-stitch – by the French fashion houses. Her signature pillbox hats, though, were all-American and came courtesy of Halston.

Balancing French and American fashion wasn't Kennedy's only challenge as first lady. Always hyper-conscious about her public image, she also relied on vibrant color, and sharp lines to project a modern and distinctive look.

Pamela Golbin, the author, fashion historian and former chief curator of fashion and textile at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris, said Kennedy became first lady at a moment "when television became front and center in the lives of millions of people, so relaying a visual message that was both striking, clear and strong was extremely important. She was acutely sensitive to the fashion message, and was able to convey the modernism that her husband brought to the political arena through her clothes."

Valerie Steele, the fashion historian, director and chief curator of The Museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York, said Kennedy, like Queen Elizabeth II, knew how to make herself instantly recognizable in a crowd by using bold color, and defined silhouettes.

"Mrs. Kennedy was really great at it. When she went to India, she wore bright Indian colors. She understood that if you wore a striking color and had a simple look, people would grasp right away who you were. It's not just a question of fashion, but also a fashion at a distance, how it plays out in pictures, the semiotics of it have to be fairly simple," she said.

Golbin added that Kennedy was successful in weaving together French and American style to create a distinctive look, but she wasn't the only one doing it.

COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK **WWD**

Claude Pompidou, who was first lady of France from 1969 until 1974, had a similar "energy," according to Golbin. "France fully entered the fashion diplomacy platform with her. Her wardrobe projected the modern avant-garde [spirit] of her husband Georges Pompidou, and of post-war France," she said.

At the time, Pompidou wore haute couture by younger designers, including Yves Saint Laurent, Pierre Cardin and André Courrèges, "and really crystallized this notion of using fashion as a visual language to portray the key elements of the platform that her husband was trying to get across. All of the [French] first ladies after that continued to do so," Golbin added.

Flying the French Flag

After Kennedy, fashion-loving first ladies Nancy Reagan and Melania Trump carried on the love affair with French fashion, albeit to a lesser extent than Kennedy. Reagan wore Chanel, Yves Saint Laurent and Valentino in addition to American designers James Galanos and Adolfo, longtime favorites of California's Ladies Who Lunch.

Trump often wears Christian Dior for official occasions. Last month she chose a pale delphinium pink silk strapless gown from Jonathan Anderson's haute couture collection for a state dinner at the White House with King Charles III and Queen Camilla. She's also been snapped wearing Louis Vuitton and Givenchy, while her stylist, the designer Hervé Pierre, is French American.

By contrast, French first ladies almost exclusively fly the national flag.

"Fashion and luxury are very important sectors in France, symbolically and economically. France remains the land of haute couture and fashion shows that attract people from around the world several times a year. First ladies want to present and promote the fashion economy," said Elizabeth Pineau, a political journalist at Reuters and coauthor of "Le Vestiaire des Politiques," which looks at what male and female politicians wear, and why.

Every first lady has had her favorite French designers. Current French First Lady Brigitte Macron frequently wears Louis Vuitton and is particularly close to Nicolas Ghesquière, but also wears designs by Balmain, and blazers and coats by Alexandre Vauthier. Her predecessor Carla Bruni's closets were bursting with Dior, but also with pieces by Chanel and Christian Louboutin shoes.

As soon as she stepped into the political spotlight, Bernadette Chirac started wearing Chanel and Dior, which was designed by John Galliano at the time. She was also the woman who gave Princess Diana a handbag from the house that was later named the Lady Dior because the royal wore it so much, and in so many different colors.

When a French first lady goes off-piste, and opts for a non-French designer, it's a cause célèbre.

In an interview, Pineau recalled the scandal that Nicolas Sarkozy's now ex-wife, Cécilia Attias, caused in May 2007 when she appeared at her husband's inauguration wearing a champagne silk dress by the very Milanese label Prada.

"She caused quite a stir at the Élysée Palace. Everyone noticed that she was in Prada. It was very unusual for a French first lady," she said. The Sarkozys divorced later that year, so flying the French flag may not have mattered much to the former first lady.

Speaking a Different Language

Pineau believes that when American first ladies host their international counterparts or travel on official business, "they're more diplomatic than the French. When Melania Trump comes to France she wears Dior. The French, instead, think about their own country's luxury and fashion."



Jackie Kennedy's Chanel-inspired, American-made pink suit, which she wore on Nov. 22, 1963, the day President John F. Kennedy was assassinated. It is stored at The National Archives in a climate-controlled vault.



Ronald and Nancy Reagan attend the U.S. president's second-term inauguration in Washington, D.C., on Jan. 20, 1985.

Steele of MFIT said former U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama took her sartorial messaging a step further. As first lady she made an extra effort to showcase and promote under-the-radar American talent at home, and abroad.

"A lot of first ladies, like Mrs. [Hillary] Clinton, wore nice American fashion brands like Oscar de la Renta for events, but Mrs. Obama was more interesting in as much as she chose smaller brands, often by people of color or immigrants, and highlighted talented and lesser-known designers. What she did was very, very original and important, and helped to highlight those designers more than almost

anything else could have," Steele said.

She added that President Barack Obama's inauguration in January 2009 was a day to remember, with the first lady dressed in a yellow-gold, custom-made dress and matching coat by Isabel Toledo.

"That was so exciting. Isabel is such a genius, but was little known. I remember we did a big exhibition about Isabel's work at the museum at FIT, and we had that dress front and center. Boy, did we have huge numbers of people coming to see it. There was so much interest in the outfit," she said.

Michelle Obama would continue that effort later that day, wearing a gown by the young designer Jason Wu to



Michelle Obama in an Azzedine Alaïa jacket, Etro print top, Moschino white top and Gunex black pant and Carla Bruni-Sarkozy in a Dior coat in Strasbourg, France.

"WHAT [MICHELLE OBAMA] DID WAS VERY, VERY ORIGINAL AND IMPORTANT, AND HELPED TO HIGHLIGHT THOSE DESIGNERS MORE THAN ALMOST ANYTHING ELSE COULD HAVE."

VALERIE STEELE, THE MUSEUM AT THE FASHION INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

the Inauguration Ball.

Reagan, Steele said, did her duty to her country in a different way. Being from California she celebrated the designers there, and wore Adolfo – and red – much of the time. "Red, a color associated for more than 100 years with communism, became associated with Republicans, in large part because Mrs. Reagan wore so much red," she said.

For all the sartorial signaling that goes on in the U.S., France and elsewhere, Steele believes diplomatic messages don't always land the way they're meant to.

"Clothes are one of the easiest ways that we communicate, nonverbally, but we never know how much of the message gets through. When Mrs. Obama wore Isabel, I was thrilled, but most people probably thought, 'Who's she wearing?' or 'What a strange color that suit is.' When people talk to me about fashion being a language, I always say I think of it more as being like music. It might evoke a mood, but it usually doesn't say something directly," she said. ■

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UNPACKING STORIES

In French luxury association Comité Colbert's exhibition "Hidden Treasures, 250 Years of Franco-American Luxury Stories," each object tells a story — like this reproduction of a Givenchy coat worn by U.S. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy on a visit to France. Displayed against the backdrop of shipping crates, the exhibits pay witness to the deep links between French luxury houses and the U.S., as it celebrates the 250th anniversary of its independence — and for more than a century, WWD has been there to document the journey.

WITH ARCHIVAL RESEARCH BY **TONYA BLAZIO-LICORISH**



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WWD COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK

Boucheron's Belle Époque Queen Was Born in Brooklyn

Marie Louise Mackay appears no less than 102 times in the French jeweler's order books in the space of 25 years.

BY LILY TEMPLETON



An archive image of Marie Louise Mackay's 1899 special order dog-collar necklace with plastron, diamonds.



Extract from the commission book mentioning the special order of the necklace.

If the Maharajah of Patiala is a king whose fantastic orders shaped the destiny of Boucheron, then the American clients of the Place Vendôme cornerstone are undoubtedly its queens.

Brightest among them was Marie Louise Mackay, the grandest of Belle Époque

society ladies in Paris whose second husband John Mackay's billion-dollar wealth had sprung from the discovery of silver in the Nevada desert.

From the summer of 1876, when the couple moved to the City of Light and settled in a hôtel particulier overlooking

the Arc de Triomphe, "Madame Mackay" appeared no less than 102 times in the jeweler's commission books for the following a quarter of a century.

Coincidentally, that was the year when Frédéric Boucheron began courting the New World's wealthy clientele on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, taking part in the Philadelphia World's Fair – a move that would net him a grand prize and the Legion of Honor.

Meanwhile back in Paris, Mackay was a regular visitor of 26 Place Vendôme. Earrings, necklaces, and even a tiara went into the treasure chest of this society lady, who had been born in Brooklyn in a modest Irish Catholic family.

Among her treasures was a dog-collar necklace with plastron set with 621 diamonds for a total of 237 carats, documented in the 1899 commission book.

Most of her pieces no longer exist. Some were transformed several times during Mackay's lifetime, such as a piece featuring a 159-sapphire centerpiece that had no less than three incarnations, starting as an original 1878 delicate festoon of florals that was reworked into two successive bow-inspired designs in 1889 and 1890.

Many were taken apart after being dispersed following her 1928 death.

One that survived was a ruby and diamond necklace that would eventually find its way into the hands of a wealthy compatriot – Mona Bismarck, as French writer and journalist Vincent Meylan revealed in "Boucheron: The Secret Archives."

Boucheron chief executive officer Hélène Poulit-Duquesne said the jeweler's transatlantic links ran through such individuals of taste, as she rediscovered ahead of the jeweler's installation on New York's Madison Avenue in 2024.

While some major clients' taste left a mark on the jeweler's creative vernacular, what Americans came for was to be on-trend. "They came to Boucheron to be current," said Poulit-Duquesne. That meant returning to update and rework important sets, like Mackay had done.

Boucheron was the ideal house for this, having laid the groundwork for transformability from the very beginning. The first traces of jewels that can be worn multiple ways date back to August 1859, with a bracelet that can be turned into a brooch mentioned in the very first order book.

Under Poulit-Duquesne's decade-long tenure, she and creative director Claire Choisey have pushed its designs more into multiwear pieces, driven by a desire for the house's jewels to accompany clients as often as possible.

And Americans still are among Boucheron's most fervent collectors, snapping up jewels at auction – or new creations such as the "Eaux Vives" shoulder brooches, unveiled in July 2024.

Balenciaga's Most Devoted Client

Kentucky-born Mona von Bismarck's couture wardrobe stretched from gardening shorts to sculptural evening gowns. BY MILES SOCHA

Mona von Bismarck was so devoted to Cristóbal Balenciaga that when a major chunk of her wardrobe went missing after a train accident, she immediately ordered 150 more pieces.

At the request of WWD, Balenciaga's current archive team unearthed a yellowed page from that order book for the spring 1966 season, her saleswoman Mademoiselle Margot detailing dresses, pants, coats and suits at prices ranging from 1,500 to 11,000 French francs.

Indeed, the Kentucky-born socialite had such confidence in the Spanish couturier that she even entrusted him to create her clothes for gardening, a passion of hers and a recurrent subject in their personal correspondence.

What's more, when Balenciaga abruptly closed his fashion house in 1968 at the age of 74, von Bismarck was vacationing in Capri and reportedly did not leave her room for three days. Legendary fashion editor Diana Vreeland was staying at von Bismarck's villa at the time, and reasoned: "For her, it was the end of a certain era."

Von Bismarck proved how influential French couture was on American style,

although she was a trendsetter in her own right.

A 2018 exhibition about her style at the Frazier History Museum in her hometown of Louisville featured 36 Balenciaga garments and hats – and detailed her wider impact.

When the rest of the crowd was wearing LEDs, or little black dresses, von Bismarck was partial to ivory or white eveningwear. She also helped popularize halter-neck tops, asymmetric bias-cut dresses, colorless nail polish, an aquamarine and double-strand pearls.

In 1958, she ordered look 77 from Cristóbal Balenciaga's winter couture collection: a sculptural gown with a plunging back and a past-the-knee hemline that sloped into a peacock train. The dress, with three-quarter sleeves, was realized in Calais-Caudry lace in a vivid violet shade. It will go on display at the Comité Colbert's exhibition at The Shed in New York City from Tuesday to Sunday.

Born Mona Strader in 1897, she lived a colorful life with five husbands, including wealthy American entrepreneur Harrison Williams and Count Albrecht Eduard von Bismarck-Schönhausen, with whom she lived at the famed Hôtel Lambert in Paris. She died on July 10, 1983, at age 86.

Her social circle included President



A sketch of look 77 from Cristóbal Balenciaga's 1958 winter couture collection.

Cristóbal Balenciaga's evening gown from the 1958 winter couture collection.



Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Princess Grace, Truman Capote, Hubert de Givenchy, Tennessee Williams, Greta Garbo and Cecil Beaton, who called her "one of the symbols of elegance in Western society."

In 1933, she became the first American to be named the "Best-Dressed Woman in the World" by a jury of couturiers that included Coco Chanel, Madeleine Vionnet and Jeanne Lanvin.

She won again in 1934 and 1936 and remained in the top 10 when the list switched hands.

COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK **WWD**

How a Rowdy Gang of Americans Influenced Karl Lagerfeld's Early Chloé

Fashion illustrator Antonio Lopez and models Pat Cleveland and Donna Jordan were among key members of his 1970s entourage. BY MILES SOCHA



A Chloé ensemble in hand-painted silk by Karl Lagerfeld from spring 1971.

to Paris by Lagerfeld and installed in an apartment on Rue Bonaparte, where the models Pat Cleveland, Donna Jordan, Jane Forth, Corey Tippin and Renate Zatsch would congregate, along with other key collaborators who included Juan Ramos and Paul Caranicas.

"This American gang influenced Karl enormously," Zatsch told WWD. "They brought a totally new spirit to Paris, and Karl picked it up right away... They had totally different ideas in the way they dressed."

Indeed. "Pat Cleveland would dance on tables with no underwear," Lagerfeld told WWD during a swing through Dallas in 2013. "She's a marvelous, sweet and refreshing girl."

The late German designer logged two eventful, defining stints at Chloé, in full creative control from 1966 to 1983, and again from 1992 to 1997.

During the early '70s, the house experienced a meteoric rise, and Lagerfeld helped crystallize its soft, romantic spirit, with his American entourage encouraging youthful, glamorous and cheeky pop touches.

"It was a big fashion adventure for us crazy kids out of art school," Cleveland recalled in an interview. "And Karl just loved us because we were American, and we were like the hot item... We all had our own style"

To be sure, they brought a gust of free-spirited energy to the staid, serious Paris scene — perfect for Chloé, whose founder Gaby Aghion built the house on luxury ready-to-wear as an unstuffy alternative to couture.

"We were so cute and innocent and in love with Paris and Karl was in love with us because we were just so loud and busy, dancing, being rowdy and kicking up our heels. It was just something different than the regular couture world," she recalled.

Cleveland and her crew dressed 24/7 in Chloé, whooping it up at La Coupole and clubs like Sept. "Just dressing up for fun," she marveled. "It wasn't a job. It was our lifestyle."

According to Cleveland, Lagerfeld's deep culture and boundless imagination made Chloé shows akin to "beautiful art events with all the patterns and the silks and the



Photos of Karl Lagerfeld with Donna Jordan and Jane Forth in Chloé circa 1970.

beautiful movement. The shows were always around a wonderful theme, and the themes and the shows got bigger, of course, as time went on."

Lagerfeld first joined Chloé as a freelancer in 1963, and two years into the job he introduced hand-painted prints and fabrics, often collaborating with Nicole Lefort, whose Paris atelier would paint on velvet and silk jersey.

For Chloé's spring 1971 collection, he created a mold-breaking cape and dress in silk crepe hand-painted by Lefort and inspired by French artist Sonia Delaunay.

Karl Lagerfeld had impeccable instincts for the new, and when designing Chloé in the early '70s, it was a wild, stylish bunch from New York that inspired and nurtured his creative output.

Fashion illustrator extraordinaire Antonio Lopez was its ringleader, invited

Behind Jackie Kennedy's Givenchy Wardrobe for French State Visit

WWD at the time referred to her sartorial choice as 'The Kennedy-Paris Controversy.' BY JOELLE DIDERICH



U.S. First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, dressed in a yellow shantung Givenchy suit, poses alongside French First Lady Yvonne de Gaulle, American President John F. Kennedy and French President Charles de Gaulle outside the Elysee Palace on June 1, 1961.



A pink wool Givenchy coat from Jacqueline Kennedy's wardrobe for the state visit to France in 1961.

Hubert de Givenchy had a loyal following in the U.S., including leading socialites such as Bunny Mellon, Babe Paley and Deeda Blair. But one of his most famous American clients was also the most secretive: Jacqueline Kennedy.

Her sister Lee Radziwill first introduced Kennedy to the French couturier, who started dressing her when she was still a journalist. She was pictured wearing Givenchy designs during her husband John F. Kennedy's Senate campaign in 1958, with the designer playing a decisive role in shaping her public image.

But after JFK was elected president in 1960 and Jackie Kennedy became first lady,

she was under pressure to wear American labels, forcing her to keep her Givenchy habit under wraps.

Jean-Noël Liart, author of a Givenchy biography, said Kennedy used to snip out the labels of her Givenchy clothes with nail scissors to smuggle them back to the White House. Officially, the first lady's outfits were designed by Oleg Cassini and Norman Norell, with Givenchy later accusing Cassini of wrongly claiming credit for some of his creations.

She may have fooled the American public, but not WWD. In an article titled "The Kennedy-Paris Controversy," published during the U.S. presidential

couple's visit to France in 1961, the paper declared the jig was up: Kennedy wore a Givenchy design to a dinner hosted by French President Charles de Gaulle at the Palace of Versailles.

"WWD for months has reported Mrs. Kennedy ordering Paris clothes. Now the ice has been broken. The First Lady might well wear what she wants," it said.

"It's been a fashion cloak and dagger game for months," it continued. "Pamela Turnure, the First Lady's press secretary, at a last-minute briefing, admitted the Givenchy all-embroidered dress which Women's Wear Daily first mentioned was no longer top secret. Givenchy himself was

sworn to secrecy — but the light in his eyes told the story anyway."

In fact, Givenchy had created a full wardrobe for Kennedy's visit to France, including the pink coat on display as part of Comité Colbert's "Hidden Treasures, 250 Years of Franco-American Luxury Stories" exhibition in New York City. Out of loyalty to Kennedy, he only revealed the extent of his involvement decades later.

"The American people felt emotion for Jackie, but they preferred to have an American couturier design her dresses when they came to France for a state visit. Jackie asked for more than 10 or 15 pieces, saying, 'I don't know if I can be dressed by a French designer.' We did all the fittings in secret," Givenchy told French news magazine Paris Match in 2017.

Underlining her close bond with the designer, Kennedy would go on to wear a black wool Givenchy suit to her husband's funeral in 1963. In an interview with French Elle in 1994, Givenchy paid tribute to her charisma.

"I retain the image of a woman full of grace, elegance and kindness," he said. "She was an ambassador of American charm and beauty."

Chloé ensemble: photograph by Nicoas Norell; Courtesy of Chloé Archives; Karl Lagerfeld with Donna Jordan and Jane Forth: Courtesy of The Antonio Archives; Jackie Kennedy: Yvonne de Gaulle: John F. Kennedy and Charles de Gaulle: Express Newspapers/Getty Images; The Kennedy-Paris Controversy: WWD, 1961; Forth: d'Archie





LONGCHAMP
PARIS

A close-up photograph of a Louis Vuitton handbag, likely a 'Le Jacquard' model. The bag features a light-colored jacquard fabric with an embossed monogram pattern. It is accented with tan leather straps, buckles, and a braided leather shoulder strap. The bag is set against a white background with a soft shadow cast beneath it.

LOUIS VUITTON

LE JACQUARD – *Collection Monogram Emblème*

WWD COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK

How Coco Chanel Pioneered Fashion's Love Affair With Hollywood

In 1931, the designer was hired by movie mogul Samuel Goldwyn to design costumes for film stars like Gloria Swanson. BY JOELLE DIDERICH



A look from Chanel's Métiers d'Art 2026 collection.



Gabrielle Chanel in New York City in 1931 on her way to Hollywood.

In 1931, Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel traveled to Los Angeles to explore the potential of designing costumes for Hollywood films, setting the template for the synergies between fashion and entertainment that are reshaping the industry today.

The initiative was hailed as a coup for United Artists studio chief Samuel Goldwyn, since Chanel was the most prominent designer ever enlisted to dress the stars of cinema, only a few years after the transition from silent movies to talking pictures.

"Anticipation is tense since it is felt that her work here will be a great influence in spreading the recognition of Hollywood as a source of style authority and will also help in various ways to promote the reputation of Los Angeles as a market and a production center for fashion merchandise," WWD wrote at the time.

United Artists set up a private salon for

Chanel in its wardrobe department, and her style pronouncements to the U.S. press were faithfully reported and hotly debated. Her first creations for the screen were a pair of black pajamas and a beige wool sports suit worn by Barbara Weeks in "Palmy Days," according to WWD.

But the relationship soon fizzled out, with some critics judging Chanel's sophisticated designs too minimal for the big screen.

She created costumes for just three productions, most famously dressing Gloria Swanson in "Tonight or Never." In his debut Métiers d'Art collection for Chanel, presented last December, creative director Matthieu Blazy commemorated the collaboration by printing a coat with the poster for the film.

As shortlived as it was, that early experience laid the foundation for Chanel's longstanding relationship with cinema. She would go on to costume seminal movies including "The Rules of the Game" and "Last Year in Marienbad."

For Bruno Pavlovsky, president of fashion and president of Chanel SAS, that historic bond has burnished the aura of the brand with audiences in the U.S. and beyond.

"It's extraordinary for a brand to contribute to iconic moments in cinema, but you never know in advance what will turn out to be an iconic moment. It's only years later that something becomes a cult scene or a cult film," he said, "and defining the need to remain involved across a broad variety of projects in the hopes of striking film gold."

In recent years Chanel has expanded its remit to support filmmakers with financing, and continues to make memorable appearances on the big screen across art house films such as "Spencer" and blockbusters including "The Devil Wears Prada" and "Barbie."

"That has real value for Chanel. It's a genuine relationship that is rooted in our history," Pavlovsky said. "It defines the brand, so being able to continue doing that is super important. It's part of this unique signature."

Chanel No.5's Major Marilyn Moment

Christian Louboutin recounts his 2012 collaboration with Disney on the fabled footwear. BY JENNIFER WEIL

Call it a **viral moment** pre-social media. Marilyn Monroe in a 1952 Life magazine interview was asked what she wore to bed and famously said: "I only wear Chanel No.5."

"The most famous woman in the world wears the most famous perfume in the world. And this is published in one of the most famous magazines in the world. You can easily imagine the effect," said Thomas du Pré de Saint Maur, head of global creative resources for Chanel fragrance and beauty.

The perfume, created in France in 1921 by Gabrielle Chanel and perfumer Ernest Beaux, was groundbreaking because it eschewed reproducing the scent of one flower. Instead, Chanel No.5 was abstract, mixing flowers grown in Grasse, France, with aldehydes in new proportions.

"Gabrielle Chanel's idea was to create an

abstract fragrance, one 'stitched together' like a dress," stated Olivier Polge, Chanel perfume creator. The designer wanted the fragrance to be a work of art.

With Monroe's utterance, Chanel No.5 became woven into American mythology and propelled it into international icon status.

"She was not 'the face of No.5,' but rather the most famous fan of No.5 in the world," said du Pré de Saint Maur, who finds Monroe's mix of fragility, intelligence and power to be in sync with Chanel's spirit. "Therefore, her impact was enormous, in the United States and beyond. First of all, because Marilyn, at the time she said she wore No.5, was the biggest American movie star. And the American star system was also conquering the world."



Chanel No.5

Also in the 1950s, the U.S. market was very important for perfumes, including those of Chanel.

"It was the largest market in size, with two very important phenomena: the development in the United States of a

distribution of prestigious department stores that allowed for a high-quality retail experience," du Pré de Saint Maur said. "And the invention of modern advertising in this same market. Advertising that would be one of the main channels for the growth of luxury perfume sales."

In 2013, Chanel officially used Monroe as the face of Chanel No.5, in a campaign centered on archival imagery and a then newly discovered audio recording, dating from 1960 from an interview with Georges Belmont. In that, the actress said she only wore Chanel No.5 to bed.

At the Comité Colbert exhibition, a bottle of Chanel No.5 appears in a series of capsules like packaging crates that include photographs of Monroe and artist Burton Morris' picture in saturated colors titled "Chanel Perfume," from 2008.

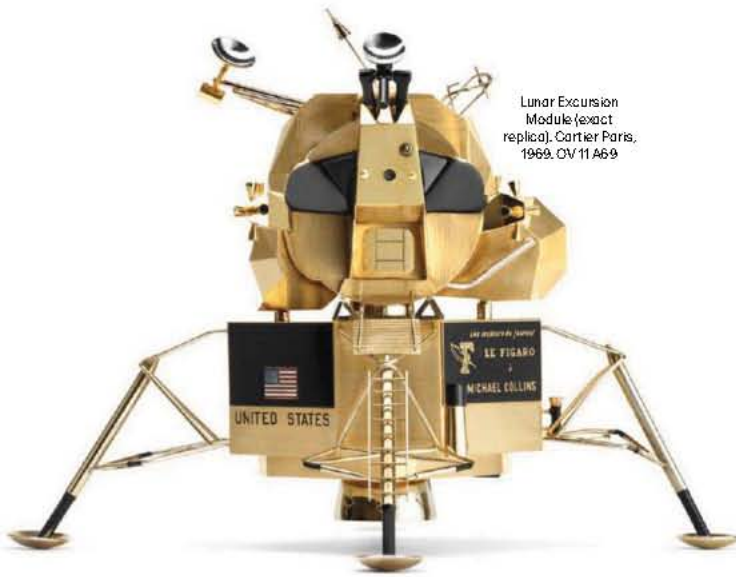
Another American artist — Andy Warhol — also famously featured Chanel No.5 in some of his screen prints. The fragrance was brought back from Europe by American GIs after World War II. And some campaigns for the scent have been staged in the U.S., including Times Square in New York and Big Sur in California.

Chanel No.5's link with American culture remains vast.

WWD COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK

When Cartier Celebrated Apollo 11 Landing on the Moon – and in Paris

French newspaper Le Figaro raised funds to immortalize humanity's "giant leap" with gold models of the Lunar Excursion Module. BY LILY TEMPLETON



Lunar Excursion Module (exact replica), Cartier Paris, 1969. CV 11 A69

In 1969, while the world watched the Apollo 11 mission lead to humanity's first step on the moon, a very different kind of moonshot was taking shape in Paris.

By the time Neil Armstrong, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin and Michael Collins landed for the French stop of their 38-day "Giantstep" goodwill tour, three miniature Lunar Excursion Modules were taking off from Cartier's jewelry benches.

Presented to each crew member at the Hôtel de Crillon, the pieces had been commissioned by French newspaper Le Figaro and financed by a public subscription launched in the days following their safe return to Earth.

Standing some 15 centimeters tall, their bodies were made of yellow gold "by artisans specialized in the making of what we call boxes, [such as] nécessaires for makeup and cigarette cases," said Cartier's director of image, style and heritage Pierre Rainero.

Meanwhile, the landing gear was made by the jewelry atelier in white gold, considered more sturdy, he added. A microfilm placed inside the structure listed the subscribers, while a small plaque on the outside was inscribed with the

dedication "From the readers of Le Figaro" to each astronaut.

Acquired by Cartier in 2003 at auction, the one presented to Collins has crossed the Atlantic Ocean once more for the Comité Colbert's exhibition at The Shed in New York City from Tuesday to May 31.

For Cyrille Vigneron, chairman for Cartier Culture and Philanthropy, the project was "one of the most unexpected special orders" that marked an important American prowess celebrated by the entire world – including in France, which has a long-standing relationship of mutual admiration and continuous exchanges with the U.S.

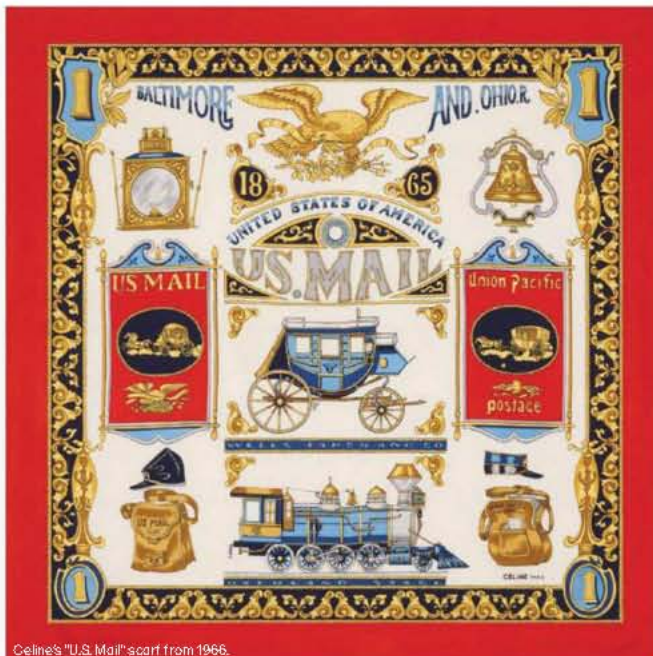
But packed in this sculpture-sized object is a powerful symbolic charge.

Gold's cosmic origin – it is formed during large-scale events such as neutron star collisions and supernovas before landing on Earth during its formation – and its properties also made a fleeting moment of human technological achievement more permanent.

"Creating [the LEM models] in gold also makes this moment, as Neil Armstrong said 'a small step' for him and a giant one for humanity, into a moment of eternity," said Vigneron. "We will never forget it."

Silk Scarves Flutter Throughout Celine's History

Artistic director Michael Rider has made patterned scarves a key leitmotif of the French house. BY MILES SOCHA



Celine's "U.S. Mail" scarf from 1966.

Making his debut as artistic director of Celine back in July 2025, Michael Rider made scarves a key element, dispatching squares of ivory silk artfully knotted around the show invitations, and installing

a giant, rippling foulard over the courtyard of Celine headquarters for the party open-air display.

Speaking to reporters after that show, the American designer described scarves

retrieved data showing rapid and steady growth in online conversations around Celine scarves.

In the quarter before Rider's first show, the media impact value of such discussion amounted to \$21,000.

By the third quarter of the year, after the show, the MIV jumped more than threefold to \$980,000, progressing to \$1.2 million by the fourth quarter of 2025 and to \$1.8 million by the first quarter of 2026.

The top post to date, valued at \$72,000, came courtesy of Elle Taiwan during Paris Fashion Week last February; it pictured South Korean singer Kim Taehyung, known professionally as V, draped in his silk scarf in vitation, the Celine logo writ large over a sketch of the Arc de Triomphe.

Rider has also made silk scarf prints a key element of his ready-to-wear collections, using them for pants, skirts, draped tops, men's polo shirts and trenchcoat linings in his sophomore runway show.

He's added a vertical wall display for scarves at select Celine boutiques to bring visibility to the category, which has had a positive impact on the business, according to the house.

Celine Vipiana, who founded her luxury fashion house in Paris in 1945, introduced silk scarves in 1963 and made them the stars of an advertising campaign three years later, including one inspired by

American postal imagery.

Vipiana expanded her business into the U.S. in 1968, and it now ranks as a key market.

According to Celine, fully integrated into LVMH Moët Hennessey Louis Vuitton in 1996, it should end 2026 with a total of 36 stores in the U.S., including new locations in Scottsdale, Ariz., and two in Florida. The U.S. market has been "particularly supportive" of its new direction under Rider, according to the company.

A silk scarf featured in a Celine campaign, circa 1968.



as a "symbol" and "something that's very personal."

"Scarves are something I wear, and everyone wears differently," he said at the time. "It's also something you tend to keep and something maybe you give to your children, or to a friend. But I like the idea, particularly at Celine, where scarves mattered so much at the very beginning."

They're mattering a lot more again, thanks to Rider's efforts.

At WWD's request, Launchedmetrics

Van Cleef & Arpels

Haute Joaillerie, place Vendôme since 1906





Ballerine
Clip

COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK **WWD**

The Franco-American Story Behind Louis Vuitton's Iconic Monogram

From designers like Marc Jacobs to clients including Louis Comfort Tiffany, American tastemakers have kept the LV logo on top of fashion trends. BY JOELLE DIDERICH

The history of Louis Vuitton's signature Monogram motif, which celebrates its 130th anniversary this year, is intertwined with the brand's U.S. presence.

The brand is showcasing two historic pieces as part of Comité Colbert's "Hidden Treasures, 250 Years of Franco-American Luxury Stories" exhibition in New York City: a cabin trunk acquired by Louis Comfort Tiffany in 1907, and a suitcase from the spring 2001 collection designed by Marc Jacobs, who commissioned American artist Stephen Sprouse to customize the Monogram with graffiti.

Bloue-Marine Massard, head of heritage collections at Louis Vuitton, said the selection was designed to highlight a history stretching back to 1893, when Georges Vuitton first exhibited his wares at the Chicago World's Fair, spearheading the brand's overseas expansion.

"Between the Chicago fair in 1893 and the opening of its first stand-alone U.S. store in 1980, Vuitton established a network of distribution agents across the States including department stores like Wanamaker's and Saks," she said.

A WWD report from 1927 describes a Saks display filled with items including a shoe trunk with "an ample lower drawer for riding boots." From the 1960s, Vuitton collaborated with the retailer on a line of co-branded products developed specifically for the U.S. market.

In a 1968 interview, Gaston-Louis Vuitton — then 86 — recalled the 1920s as a wild and extravagant time, noting that solid gold fittings were commonplace on 50-piece crocodile luggage sets.

"The snob appeal was there from the beginning," he told WWD, noting that his grandfather Louis Vuitton, the founder of the business, was the personal packer of Empress Eugénie, the wife of Napoleon III. "In those days we made trunks for all the Americans coming to Paris after the Civil War...people like Cornelius Vanderbilt."



Louis Vuitton cabin trunk in Monogram canvas that once belonged to Louis Comfort Tiffany, 1907.



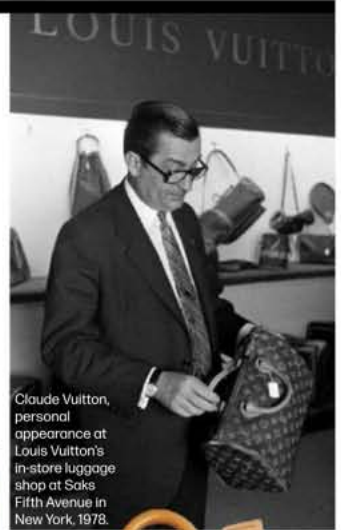
Above: Louis Vuitton 1914 product catalog presenting the Cabin, Excelsior and Saint-Louis trunks. Right: Suitcase in Monogram Graffiti canvas by Marc Jacobs, in collaboration with Stephen Sprouse, for the Louis Vuitton spring 2001 women's ready-to-wear show.

Tiffany, whose father founded Tiffany & Co., may have found in the Monogram an echo of his own Art Nouveau stained glass designs, Massard noted. The house acquired his trunk around the time parent company LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton purchased the New York jewelry house in 2020, she said.

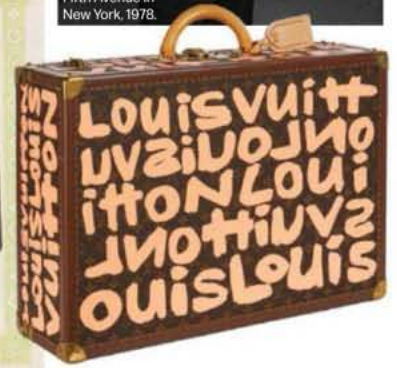
Despite Vuitton's long-standing links with the U.S., LVMH chairman and chief executive officer Bernard Arnault took a

gamble in 1997 by appointing Jacobs as the brand's first creative director of ready-to-wear.

"Marc Jacobs is a designer of rare creativity and unique vision," Arnault said in a statement earlier this month revealing that LVMH was selling the Marc Jacobs label to WHP Global and G-III. "His impact on the world of fashion is undeniable, and I want to warmly thank him for his contribution to the success of the maison and the LVMH



Claude Vuitton, personal appearance at Louis Vuitton's in-store luggage shop at Saks Fifth Avenue in New York, 1978.



Group over the last 30 years."

In the interim, Vuitton has doubled down on U.S. creative talent, naming the late Virgil Abloh and performer Pharrell Williams to senior menswear design roles.

Jacobs may have shocked purists with his reinterpretation of the Monogram canvas, but the move was consistent with the DNA of Vuitton, since Georges Vuitton also broke with tradition when he conceived the logo as a way to thwart counterfeiters, Massard argued.

"It's superimposing layers of history," she said. "He's thumbing his nose at tradition, but in a way that pushes the design in a new direction."

Lancôme La Vie Est Belle's Staying Power

American actress Julia Roberts helped catapult the French luxury brand's fragrance on the global stage. BY JENNIFER WEIL

In 2012, Lancôme launched La Vie Est Belle women's fragrance, with Julia Roberts as its ambassador, who channels a message of happiness. Its bottle, with a curved shape like a crystal smile, was first dreamed up in 1945 by artistic director George Delhomme, but remained unrealized then as it was too technically complex to make.

Vania Lacascade, Lancôme global brand president, said this was a defining strategic move for the brand. "She became the perfect bridge between the maison's French heritage and a deeply universal emotional message," Lacascade said. "Julia embodies a rare combination of iconic stature, authenticity and radiant warmth.

"In many ways, she gave a human face to French luxury," Lacascade continued. "Her natural emotional connection with audiences gave the fragrance an immediate

and timeless resonance, particularly with American consumers."

In 2012, as the U.S. was the main motor of the worldwide beauty industry, it was key for Lancôme.

"Premium beauty was experiencing remarkable momentum, growing at plus 20 percent, with fragrance surging by plus 30 percent," Lacascade said. "The U.S. market was therefore essential for establishing La Vie Est Belle as a modern luxury icon with global influence."

She explained the fragrance profoundly transformed Lancôme's presence in the U.S., as it elevated the brand from being known mostly for skin care and makeup into a fragrance powerhouse.

"As the first 'iris gourmand' fragrance, it redefined the category and became a major business success," Lacascade said. "But La



Vie Est Belle was never just a fragrance launch, it was an emotional statement. It marked a new chapter for Lancôme by expressing a vision of French luxury rooted in joy, confidence and optimism, values that resonated strongly with women around the world."

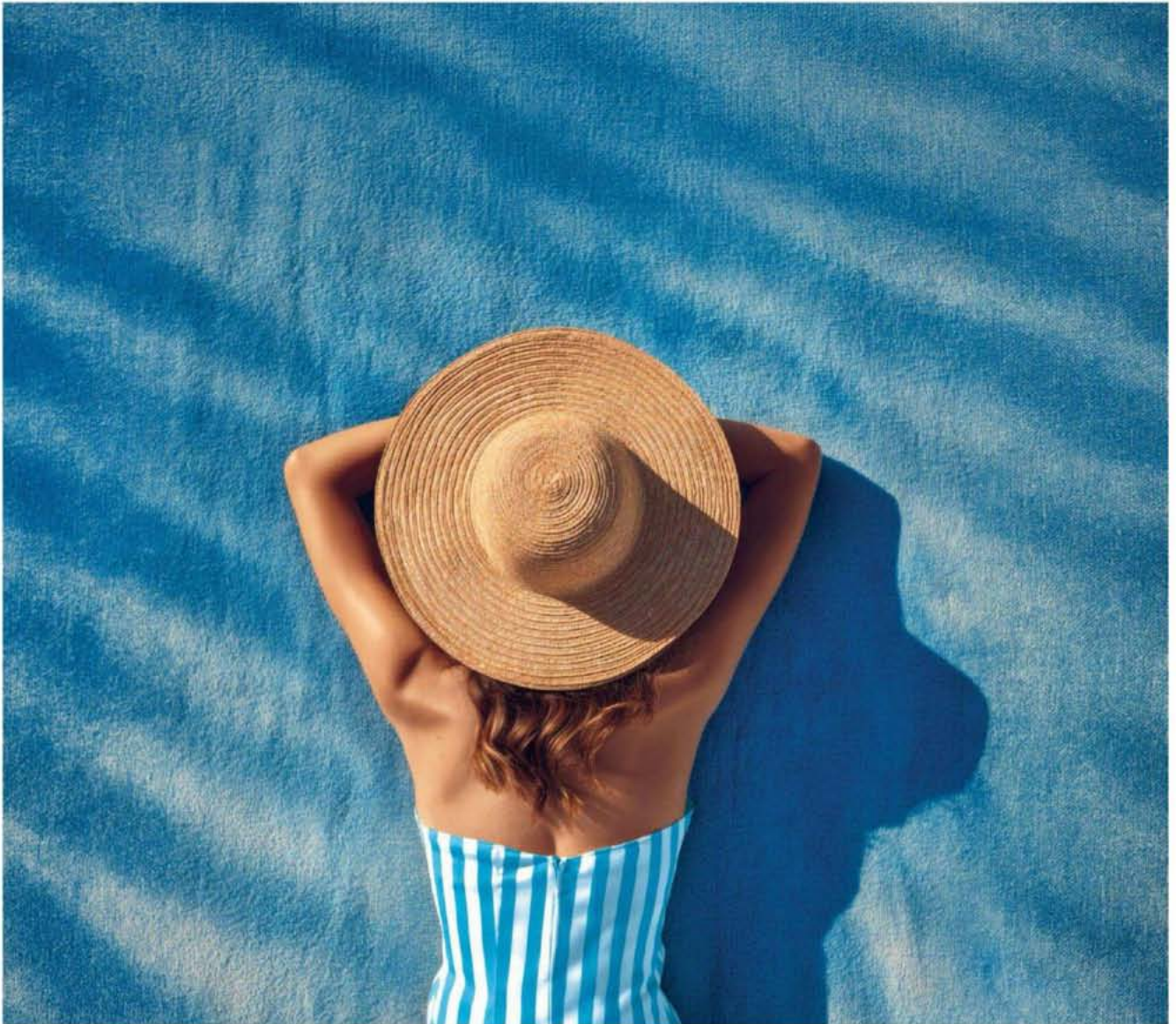
It is rare there's one fragrance ambassador for a fragrance over a 14-year stretch.

"Julia Roberts brings something truly timeless to Lancôme: sincerity, warmth and emotional connection," Lacascade said. "She embodies a form of optimistic femininity that feels both aspirational and deeply human."

The executive added she's struck by how profoundly Roberts has influenced the emotional aura of the brand.

"Over the years, her iconic smile has become much more than a campaign image," Lacascade said. "It represents a lasting message of optimism and emotional connection across generations. In the U.S., the bond is exceptionally strong: Consumers often refer to La Vie Est Belle as 'the Julia Roberts fragrance,' which speaks to the extraordinary trust and long-term equity she has built for the brand. For many consumers, La Vie Est Belle is not only a fragrance, it is a feeling."

La Vie Est Belle is among the top fragrance franchises worldwide. It ranks fifth globally, number 10 in the U.S., and second in both Europe and in Latin America. La Vie Est Belle eau de parfum has consistently stayed in the top 15 for more than a decade, according to Lancôme, which is owned by L'Oréal.



ITA Showcases 23 Resortwear Brands at Miami Swim Week

The Italian Trade Agency promotes Made in Italy **BEACHWEAR** at the Cabana show.

THE ITA RETURNS to Cabana and Miami Swim Week with a selection of 23 Italian companies present this year.

As one of the leading trade platforms in the U.S. for beachwear and resortwear, the Cabana show connects brands with key retailers across the Miami, New York and the broader North American and Caribbean markets. Beachwear, resortwear, prêt-à-porter, fashion jewelry, bags, accessories, eyewear, footwear and childrenswear are the main focuses at the trade event.

Presenting the brands as part of its "Italian Riviera," the ITA continues its commitment to supporting the growth of Made in Italy swimwear,

resortwear and beachwear. For the overall promotional program, the 23 brands will be showcased at the "Italian Riviera" runway presentation on the official Miami Swim Week – The Show calendar.

The upcoming runway show will highlight Italian creativity, craftsmanship, design research and distinct identity for Made in Italy brands across swimwear, resortwear, beachwear, fashion and accessories. Participating companies include Barbieri, Bikinville, Bye Firenze, Carolina Galan, Chio, Collanine Colorate, Isa Belle, Isabel Beachwear, Le Daf, Maria La Rosa, Mirabiliae, Nom, Pier Sicilia, Piero Massaro, Ploumanac'h, Positano Couture, Post & Co, Queen Moda, Raffaella D'Angelo, Selia Richwood, Silvia Gnechchi, Toujours and Viamailbag.

▶ **Erica Di Giovancarlo, trade commissioner of the Italian Trade Agency New York.**

*SOURCE: ITA NEW YORK ELABORATION ON GLOBAL TRADE DATA MONITOR, USA – SCHEDA DI MERCATO MODA MARE, MAY 2025.

The Cabana Show will take place May 30 to June 1 at the Miami Beach Convention Center and the official runway show at the Miami Swim Week will be held at 7 p.m. on May 31 at Mondrian South Beach.

The initiative was created to strengthen Italian fashion in the U.S. market and offering companies in attendance, sponsored by the ITA, a platform for visibility and networking opportunities with retailers, buyers, distributors, showrooms, media and international industry professionals.

"Cabana Miami and Miami Swim Week - The Shows are strategic platforms for strengthening the positioning of Made in Italy in the U.S. market," said Erica Di Giovancarlo, trade commissioner of the Italian Trade Agency New York. "The United States is already the fifth-largest export market for Italian beachwear products and the first destination outside Europe, while Italy ranks as the 10th exporter of swimwear to the United States, with U.S. imports from Italy amounting to approximately



\$16.6 million in 2024. These figures confirm both the relevance of the American market and the opportunity to further support Italian companies in a competitive segment where quality, creativity and lifestyle are key drivers," continued Di Giovancarlo.

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WWD COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK

How Van Cleef & Arpels Got Its Ballet Slippers

Dance is a leitmotif for the French house, which collaborated with New York City Ballet cofounder George Balanchine and supports the art with programs including the "Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels" initiative.

BY LILY TEMPLETON

Born a *pirouette* away from Paris' Palais Garnier opera house in 1906, Van Cleef & Arpels' attraction for dance came as no surprise.

"The family would go on a regular basis to see ballets and operas at Garnier," said Alexandrine Maviel-Sonet, patrimony and exhibitions director for the Compagnie Financière Richemont-owned jeweler.

But it's in New York that this early proximity evolved into a lasting *pas-de-deux* that continues to this day in jewels, but also through a number of programs such as the "Dance Reflections by Van Cleef & Arpels" initiative.

Feminine figures caught mid-step in arabesques, leaps and *entrechats* made their entrance in the house design vocabulary in the early 1940s, just as Van Cleef & Arpels was stepping onto the American stage with an office at Rockefeller Center in 1939 and a Fifth Avenue boutique the following year.

American collectors embraced the Dancer clips, but it was the meeting between Claude Arpels, the second-generation scion who led the house in U.S., and New York City Ballet cofounder George Balanchine that left their worlds entwined for good.

Arpels "was the one who would go very often when he was a child with his uncle [Louis Arpels] to the opera," a taste that he kept in adulthood, Maviel-Sonet said.

Meanwhile, the choreographer was "on his daily route past Van Cleef & Arpels on Fifth Avenue and became fascinated with the extraordinary beauty of the collections" in the early 1960s, WWD was told in 2007 by the jeweler's then-chief executive officer and president Stanislas de Quercize.

Their shared passion for gemstones and movement would later crystallize in "Jewels," Balanchine's 1967 non-narrative ballet in three acts named after precious stones and set to the music of composers Gabriel Fauré, Igor Stravinsky and Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky.

For Van Cleef & Arpels, this proximity to the stage translated into the design of its jewels, from clips to necklaces and even powder cases. Maviel-Sonet pointed out how interpretations evolved over time, with "large diamonds, emeralds, rubies" lighting up the tutus of 1940s ballerinas.

In the 1950s and 1960s, goldwork comes to the fore, with skirts rendered in intricate, lace-like precious metal. A decade later, the silhouette shifts from the graceful, slender dancers to more muscular, powerful figures, mirroring changing physiques onstage.

They took pride of place in "Ballet Précieux," the 2007 high jewelry collection that paid homage to Van Cleef & Arpels' collaboration with Balanchine with its jewels named after famous ballets or



A gouaché of a dancer clip from the Van Cleef & Arpels archive.

shaped after tutus – plus Ballerina clips, of course.

Enriching the house patrimony with such pieces is an uphill battle, owing to their popularity among collectors. "If you see a Ballerina, you have to take it," Maviel-Sonet recalled being told. "They're very difficult to find."

Longchamp's Love Letter to New York

The house revisits its iconic collaboration with Jeremy Scott as part of the Comité Colbert exhibition. BY RHONDA RICHFORD



Longchamp's "Greetings From Paris" bag by Jeremy Scott.

In Comité Colbert's "Hidden Treasures, 250 Years of Franco-American Luxury Stories" exhibition, Longchamp is featuring a special edition of its wildly popular Le Plage bag, created in collaboration with Jeremy Scott.

The French house and American designer titled the work "Greetings From Paris," and the bag serves as both a playful fashion object and a symbol of the long-running creative dialogue between the two countries.

Longchamp first entered the U.S. market through department-store distribution in the 1950s, long before it established a direct retail presence. The brand opened its first stand-alone American boutique on Madison Avenue in New York in 1984, before expanding further with a dedicated New York office in 1993 and larger flagship investments in SoHo and Fifth Avenue in the years that followed.

Scott first began collaborating with Longchamp in 2006, transforming the

maison's signature tote through a series of irreverent, pop-inflected reinterpretations that quickly became collector favorites. This special edition – adorned with a postcard-style graphics evoking vintage travel souvenirs – stands out as one of the most emblematic pieces from their two-decade partnership.

"Fashion has always been about transcending borders for me, and my 20-year friendship with Longchamp has been exactly that: a wild creative collision between my American pop sensibility and their incredible French heritage. That energy never gets old," Scott said.

"It is a profound honor for Longchamp to be included in the Comité Colbert exhibition, continuing our shared commitment to the standards of French craftsmanship and the spirit of luxury that remains at the heart of the maison," said Longchamp creative director Sophie Delafontaine.

"The 'Greetings From Paris' Piage is the perfect emblem for this retrospective as well as a celebration of our 20-year friendship with Jeremy Scott. It remains one of the most dynamic chapters in the maison's history, where French *savoir-faire* met Jeremy's vibrant American pop vision through a shared spirit of joy, creativity and cultural resonance. To see this work showcased in New York City is a beautiful reminder that luxury is a living dialogue, one that continues to bridge our histories and inspire our future," she added.

For Longchamp, the collaboration also reflects a broader commitment to preserving French *savoir-faire* while remaining open to cultural reinvention – values that contributed to the company receiving B Corp certification earlier this year.

"I'm so thrilled that our 'Greetings From Paris' design is being featured in NYC for this exhibition," Scott added. "When designing it, I wanted it to feel like a literal postcard sent across the Atlantic, a wink and a nod to our two identities colliding."

Longchamp's decision to stage its first official runway show in New York in 2018 marked a pivotal shift for the French house from a leather-goods brand into a full lifestyle and ready-to-wear player. The show, timed to coincide with the brand's 70th anniversary, signaled an ambition to position Longchamp within the global fashion conversation while embracing a younger, more international image through initiatives like its Fifth Avenue flagship, as well as the appointment of Kendall Jenner as brand ambassador.

The choice of New York was also symbolic for the house. While Paris represented Longchamp's heritage and *savoir-faire*, New York embodied the future-facing, cosmopolitan identity the brand wanted to project. Delafontaine described the city as a place of "energy and freedom," underscoring Longchamp's effort to evolve into a more fashion-driven and globally visible luxury house.



FAIRCHILD STUDIO X ITALIAN TRADE AGENCY

Esxence's 16th Annual Event Returns With Focus on the World Of Artistic Fragrances

Hosted June 3 to 6 in Milan, the art of perfumery event continues to focus on **EMERGING AND INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITORS** and how scent plays a major role in **HUMAN SENSORY EXPERIENCES**.



The programming for this year is supplemented by a series of exhibitions to highlight the cultural relevance of the event through installations and curatorial projects. Among the artists tapped to enhance the experience are sculptor Roberto Vallini and type artist Stefano Epis.

Notably, Esxence has helped support the development of perfumery on a global level to account for 2 percent of the global market – with countries such as Italy already surpassing this goal. The perfume industry accounts for and impacts more than 10 percent of Italy's economy, resulting in a total spend of more than 400 million euros.

"North American consumers are increasingly embracing artistic perfumery as a form of personal expression, creating significant momentum for the category," said Erica Di Giovancarlo, trade commissioner of Italian Trade Agency, New York. "Esxence has become a key international destination for U.S. buyers, retailers and industry insiders seeking innovation, discovery and authentic brand storytelling."

The conference hall will also host a series of talks to discuss the latest industry trends. Topics include the intersection of neuroscience and artificial intelligence; the role of TikTok and the current social media-driven landscape; China's success in perfumery through social intelligence, e-commerce and market entry strategies, and a look at emerging markets for niche perfumery in South Korea, Vietnam and Indonesia.

"We are experiencing events with global repercussions that are rapidly reshaping the foundations of every human activity," said Silvio Levi, cofounder and chair of the technical committee of Esxence, and founder and director of the Essencional Research Center. "We are witnessing an ongoing cultural convergence. Year after year, we embrace and observe the evolution of consumption and the role of perfume – less and less a mask, and more and more an identity card for its wearer. We have also noticed a marked rise in authentic stories, a desire to champion solid values and a conscious rediscovery of a perfumery more focused on leaving a lasting legacy across generations. For this reason, we must create even greater opportunities for



▲ A visitor samples a fragrance from a scent strip.

▶ A perfume misted onto a blotter for exploration.

▼ A guest exploring a scent under a small glass bell.

GEARING UP for its 16th edition, Esxence returns once again to Milan to showcase an extended presence of international and emerging exhibitors and role as a talent incubator.

The annual gathering from June 3 to 6, held at the Allianz MiCo, Milano Convention Centre, will showcase the world of fragrance in an extended exhibition space of more than 20,000 square meters.

This year will see a growing presence of international presenters from both established and emerging markets including Australia, Austria, Bangladesh, Barbados, China, Colombia, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Italy, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lithuania, Monaco, Morocco, Norway, Oman, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Singapore, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Turkey, U.A.E., U.K., Ukraine and the U.S.

As a talent incubator, the event will also present 108 brands participating for the first time and marking their debut on the international stage. Esxence said that given the global market's increasing interest in beauty and fragrance, the event continues to build itself as an ecosystem for innovators to meet and shape the future.

"This edition of Esxence is part of a meaningful evolution in olfactory culture," said Maurizio Cavezzali, cofounder of Esxence and chief executive officer of Equipe Exhibit. "Much has changed since the early days of niche perfumery. What began as a series of smaller, more intimate events has now become a global phenomenon. In recent years, this transformation has clearly accelerated."

The concept for this year's event is "Sensing the World" – with event creators seeking to explore how humans experience reality through the world of olfaction. The theme looks to ground humans in their present moment and be more attuned to their surroundings through mindfulness.



bold, unconventional and creative new proposals that breathe new life into an industry whose primary goal should not be quick financial returns, but rather to chart a course that ensures a bright future for an increasingly large and complex supply chain – making the sector ever more deserving of being called artistic." 🌟

To learn more, visit ESXENCE.COM

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WWD COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK

How an Hermès Bag Became A Whole Creative Vocabulary

The Kelly bag, created in 1935 by Robert Dumas and later renamed after the actress-turned-royal Grace Kelly, inspired anything from watches and diamond jewelry to perfumes. BY LILY TEMPLETON

Grace Kelly in her dressing room during the filming of "High Society."



Kelly bag in returned style in Box leather.

When photojournalist Dennis Stock snapped Grace Kelly meticulously wiping an Hermès leather purse in her dressing room during the filming of "High Society," he didn't know he was capturing not one but two stars.

In 1955, the silver screen siren was at the height of her career and this would be her final role before becoming Princess of Monaco.

Meanwhile, the bag had yet to begin its

ascent, although it was regularly pictured with the actress, who is thought to have purchased it that year.

A permanent part of the French brand's collections for two decades, it became "the classic Hermès bag with a signature key and padlock," as WWD wrote in 1973. "But nothing much ever happened to it until Grace Kelly sailed off to marry Prince Rainier," bag in hand.

The purse further catapulted to fame when the now-royal used one to shield her first pregnancy, as captured by Life magazine. A couple of years later, Hermès gave her name to the model.

More than the birth of an iconic product, Stock's photograph "expresses marvelously well the connection that forms between an Hermès client and their object," said Guillaume de Seynes, Hermès International's executive vice president, manufacturing division and equity investments. "That's why repairs are so important for us [and we have] over 130 craftspeople dedicated to it around the world."

A Kelly bag in black smooth Box leather with gold hardware – and 20 years' worth of patina – is "an absolutely sublime object that has accompanied a woman in her life, like this one accompanied the princess of Monaco throughout hers," he added.

What is now known as the Hermès Kelly is also how craftspeople test their mettle in the French company's leather-goods training program, which lasts 18 months.

"It's the one that concentrates the highest number of essential know-hows, which is why it's the model we train on," de Seynes told WWD. "And no craftsman makes their first handle right."

The design was imagined in 1935 by Robert Dumas, the always-dapper son-in-law of Emile Hermès who was "very creative, always with a pencil in hand," continued the executive, who is one of Dumas' grandchildren.

Over the decades, numerous variations have been created, playing on size, proportions and placement of its features, as seen in the 2022 "Kelly en Désordre" and its quasi-cubist take. The Kellydoll bag, with a smiley face, even appeared in 2000.

"When we create a new Kelly for the collections, we always try to think as freely as possible," said Priscilla Alexander Spring, the brand's creative director of leather goods. "It's about having fun and approaching design in a very playful [way]."

Its distinctive features also appear as bracelets, sneaker fastenings, and inspired the 1975 introduction of the padlock-shaped Kelly watch, hanging off a turnlock bracelet, and the Kelly Calèche perfume launched in 2007. Creative director of shoes and jewelry Pierre Hardy made diamond-set gold versions in 2012 for the brand's second fine jewelry offering.

"So the Kelly and all its signature details – really, its entire aesthetic – has also inspired other métiers," said de Seynes.

When Jean Paul Gaultier And Madonna Went Viral

The pop star famously bared her breasts at the 1992 benefit event for amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research.

BY MILES SOCHA

What could be more iconic in fashion than a conical undergarment?

Jean Paul Gaultier and Madonna proved that by making a cone bra the centerpiece of the pop star's 1990 "Elond Ambition" tour, cuing up a long, unforgettable collaboration built on overt innerwear-as-outerwear fashion statements.

But their shared penchant for provocation reached yet another zenith on Sept. 24, 1992, when the two participated in a benefit event for amfAR, the Foundation for AIDS Research, at the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles.

Madonna strolled out onto the runway with the famous French designer, ultimately peeling off her black jacket to reveal her bare breasts neatly framed by the leather harness topping the pinstriped dress she wore underneath.

WWD reported that the singer "was dressed in black with her gold tooth as her only accessory."

Well, until "the Eccentric One decided to take things over the top for the finale of the 90-minute show."

"It was like a coming attraction: As everybody's been reading and nauseam,

Madonna's boobs are about to go into wide, wide release," this newspaper reported in a double-page spread under the headline "Hollywood Exposed."

The gesture drew thunderous applause from the audience of more than 5,000 guests, and the event raised nearly \$700,000, illustrating how Gaultier used his platform to raise awareness and funding for a key American charity. He does the same in his native France as ambassador for Sidaction, which also supports the fight against AIDS.

Speaking to Fashion TV, Gaultier described his racy fashion show as "French-y," but with multiple influences, from Africa, England, Spain and the U.S.

"Everybody is influenced by the States," he declared. "We are all like that, and I think it's very good."

Writer Jackie Collins applauded Madonna's daring: "She's really a strong woman and we don't have enough of them around. She does things her way."

Other celebrity characters in the fashion spectacle included Raquel Welch, Faye Dunaway, Billy Idol and Dr. Ruth Westheimer in a black latex nurse's uniform.



Madonna and Jean Paul Gaultier on the runway in 1992.

Madonna's breast-baring dress was last displayed at Gaultier's big retrospective at the Grand Palais in Paris in 2015.

That showing included its precursor: In 1971, the first dress he ever made – for Aitze Hanson to wear in a modeling contest – inspired her to twirl, ultimately exposing her breasts and foreshadowing Gaultier's career-long exploration of the female body's topography.



Wool dress with leather suspenders by Jean Paul Gaultier.



FAIRCHILD STUDIO X BLUNDSTONE

Blundstone Launches New Aerocork Summer Footwear in Sicily

The Australian footwear brand held a **SUMMER ACTIVATION** to accompany the **NEW EXPANSION**.



▲ The new Aerocork sandals.

◀▶ Mazara del Vallo seaside.

▼ Blundstone's yoga class.



what people expected of a Blundstone Series, providing all-season wear while still maintaining our world-renowned durability and level of comfort," said Joe Carfora, global lifestyle and ancillaries range manager at Blundstone.

Tapping into the lifestyle space with the new shoe, the Aerocork looks to expand beyond Blundstone's renown for being the original and winter-gear'd Chelsea boot brand. For the past 155 years the brand has been fit-for-purpose for makers and creators, artists and musicians, adventurers and explorers and everyone in between.

"Our brand's mission is to never stand still and delivering for our consumers is central to that promise. They love our brand and want to be able to wear our footwear year-round, wherever life takes them. We are launching a lighter footwear range for the warmer months and in-between days that still have the style, design and durability we're so well known for. It's rewarding to see this series come to life – returning to our roots of being more than just a boot," said Adam Blake, joint chief executive officer of Blundstone. 🇦🇺

To learn more, visit [BLUNDSTONE.IT](https://www.blundstone.it)

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ON THE SOUTHWEST coast of Sicily, at Mazara del Vallo, Blundstone hosted guests in celebration of the launch of its new Aerocork footwear.

The summer activation offered a taste of sun-soaked Sicily alongside the brand's Australian home on the island of Tasmania – in line with its "Wear Summer Out With Blundstone" lifestyle ethos.

At the three-day event, guests enjoyed lazy pool swims, yoga classes, pizza night and cooking lessons, a beach day with BBQ in true Australian style, a visit to the salt marshes and a relaxed dinner surrounded by nature on the Isola Grande.

Blundstone said it's dedicated to empowering people to "walk life their way." The series of Aerocork's sandals and clogs is designed to enjoy long summer days and easy moments – encapsulating the brand's distinct style, comfort and wearability.

"We were committed to delivering an experience beyond



WWD COMITÉ COLBERT IN NEW YORK

This 'Cinderella' Slipper Has Red Soles

Christian Louboutin recounts his 2012 collaboration with Disney on the fabled footwear. BY MILES SOCHA

In this "Cinderella" story, the size of the glass slipper is no mystery: A 37, the standard size Christian Louboutin always uses when developing a shoe.

But what a shoe! It was 2012 when Walt Disney commissioned the designer to create an interpretation of the fabled footwear in honor of the rerelease of the classic film on Blu-ray and DVD.

Louboutin reimagined the fairy tale with Guipure lace, leather, crystal butterflies — and his signature red soles.

In an interview with WWD, he reflected on mind-melding with Disney, and the most mythical shoes on the silver screen:

WWD: What does Disney represent to you, and how does the studio and its storytelling inspire you as a creative person?

Christian Louboutin: I have worked with Disney for many years, and each time it feels very natural. We share something, which is this idea of fantasy and transformation. Their stories are very strong visually, but also emotionally. Each character has its own identity, its own colors, its own materials, almost like a vocabulary. For me, it is always a playful process, but not only playful. It is also very instinctive, because these stories are already part of our imagination. You do not invent them, you enter them, and then you interpret them through your own language, which is beautiful.

WWD: Need we guess your favorite Disney film?

C.L.: "Cinderella," of course, because the shoe is at the center of the story, it's quite rare. The shoe is not only something beautiful, it's what changes everything. I'm always drawn to characters who carry a

form of dream or possibility. There is something fragile, but also very strong in that. It is very close to how I see women, and how I design for them.

WWD: Did the slippers you designed come to you in a dream, or in the workshop?

C.L.: It always starts with a sketch, to find the line, and then it becomes a form. But with Cinderella, the idea was already very clear in my mind. Since the beginning, I always had this idea of a "Cinderella shoe." A shoe that is rare, almost impossible to reproduce, something that could disappear. So in a way, Cinderella was always present in my mind. For this project, there was no ambiguity. Lightness, beauty and transparency were the words that guided me. It was not only about the material, but about the dream she carries: A dream materialized.

WWD: What was the biggest challenge in creating your Cinderella shoe? Do you recall how many hours went into the realization of the design?

C.L.: The challenge was to create something that feels almost immaterial, while still making a real shoe. Of course, being inspired by the glass slipper, it needed lightness, transparency and delicacy, but as a real-life shoe, it also needed structure. Delicate lace adorned with crystals gave the slipper its enchanting look, but the work was in making those details feel weightless. You need technique, but at the same time it should not feel heavy or constructed. It has to remain very fluid, almost like it could disappear. I don't think it's about hours, it's more about arriving at the right balance, the right feeling.

A storyboard drawing from 1950 for "Cinderella."



WWD: Why is it important to keep an open mind about creativity and cultural inspiration, and how has America fed your creativity over your career?

C.L.: For me, creativity comes from curiosity. I have always been driven by enthusiasm, freedom and the desire to discover new places, new cultures, new people. Inspiration never stays in one place. For me, it can come from an architectural detail, a color, a film, an attitude, and then it can remain somewhere in the mind before appearing for me in another form. America has a very particular relationship to imagination, especially through film. There is freedom in the way stories are told, a way to mix reality and dream, which I find very inspiring. I feel this very strongly with someone like David Lynch, through his colors, his music, his choice of actors, his emotion and his aesthetic. Whether it is Disney or David



Christian Louboutin's "Cinderella" couture shoe.



Christian Louboutin's sketch for his "Cinderella" slippers.

Lynch, it is always about entering a universe that is already very powerful and then interpreting it in your own way. I think creativity needs this movement between worlds and cultures, otherwise it's static.

Shalimar: An Iconic French Fragrance With Strong U.S. Ties

A limited-edition bottle of the perfume, from 2015, is on display at the Comité Colbert exhibition. BY JENNIFER WEIL

A limited-edition bottle of Shalimar was chosen for the Comité Colbert exhibition for a multitude of reasons.

It was selected by Ann-Caroline Prazan, artistic director of art, culture and heritage at Guerlain, now owned by LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton. She explained Guerlain was the first French beauty company to go to New York to set up an office and a boutique in 1927. Therefore, the strong link between the brand and the U.S. spans almost 100 years — a fact unknown by many.

Shalimar, which was developed by Jacques Guerlain in 1925, has become iconic. It was the first major amber perfume in modern fragrance history. Shalimar gleaned inspiration from the legendary love between Emperor Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal, and has a name evoking the Shalimar Gardens in Lahore, in Punjab, Pakistan.

Shalimar was presented at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris in 1925. The style on display thereafter became known as Art Deco.

Raymond Guerlain was the Guerlain family member who traveled to New York two years

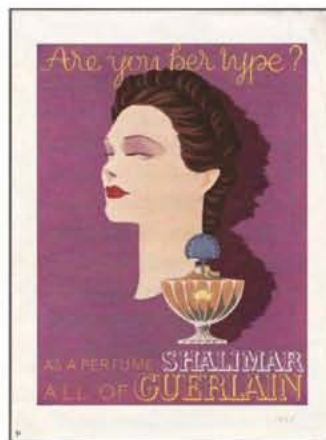
later to establish the subsidiary there. On the transatlantic boat trip, Guerlain's wife Marie wore the scent and inadvertently became Shalimar's first ambassador.

"During this cruise, all the American women — very chic — smelled the fragrance and decided to choose Shalimar for [themselves]," Prazan said. "It was a success already on the boat."

The bottle shown at the Comité Colbert exhibition was made in 2015 to celebrate Shalimar's 90th birthday. Its midnight-blue glass was by Waltersperger, and it comes ornamented with a sculpture of two inseparable birds by Desrues. The birds symbolize Shah Jahan and Mumtaz Mahal's eternal love.

"Since the beginning, the Guerlain family was totally in love with artists, and when they went to New York, they discovered the power of [advertising], thanks to the famous photographers," Prazan said. "They collaborated with the most important artists in the U.S."

Also at the Comité Colbert exhibition is an advertisement for Shalimar dating from 1935. It features an illustration by Lyse



An advertisement for Shalimar from 1935.

Darcy of a woman's face and a bottle of Shalimar. Words above them spell out: "Are you her type?"

"Andy Warhol was totally crazy about Shalimar," Prazan said. "He wore it all his life."

The perfume, created for women, was an immediate success in the U.S., which remains one of the most important markets for Shalimar today. The fragrance's centenary anniversary, in 2025, was celebrated at New York's Waldorf Astoria with an exhibition there celebrating Art Deco.

But while it might be more than 100 years old, Shalimar remains youthful.

"Vintage is the new cool," Prazan said. "We have the pleasure, with Shalimar, to



A limited-edition bottle of Shalimar.

have a perfume that crosses so many generations. The transmission is not finished yet."

An additional fact that ties it all together: The Guerlain family is the reason the Comité Colbert came to be. It was initiated by Jean-Jacques Guerlain, the son of Jacques Guerlain.

chains and tides

Hermès, crossing horizons



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