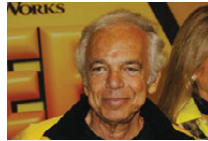


# WWD

Fashion. Beauty. Business.



## Ralph's Show

Ralph Lauren has revealed plans to show his fall 2024 collection in New York once again, on April 29.

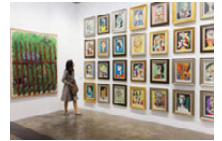
Page 2



## Martin Greenfield Dies

The acclaimed master tailor and Holocaust survivor, who dressed presidents, celebrities and more, was 95.

Page 3



## Hong Kong's Moment

The city is hosting Art Basel as it aims to prove its vibrancy despite political and economic challenges.

Page 16 to 19



## Red-dy or Not

From New York to London, Milan to Paris, all shades of red were the rage on the fall 2024 runways, from oxblood to tomato and beyond and on everything from boots and shoes to handbags, suits and outerwear, as seen here in this fringed coat and dress from Gabriela Hearst. *For more on the trend, see pages 4 to 7.*

PHOTOGRAPH BY NINA WESTERVELT

### BUSINESS

# LVMH Shuffles Top Execs

- Toni Belloni will step down and hand over his duties to Stéphane Bianchi, as Bernard Arnault sharpens succession plan.

BY JOELLE DIDERICH

**PARIS** — In the latest chapter of a generational changing of the guard, LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton announced that Toni Belloni, one of Bernard Arnault's most trusted lieutenants, will relinquish his key duties at the French luxury conglomerate and hand over his responsibilities to Stéphane Bianchi.

After more than 23 years working alongside Arnault, Belloni is to step down as group managing director and chairman of the executive committee of the LVMH group and leave the board of directors following the annual general meeting scheduled for April 18, LVMH said in a statement issued after the market close Thursday.

Bianchi, who has moved swiftly up the ranks since joining the group in 2018, will chair the executive committee and exercise, alongside Arnault, the strategic and operational supervision of the group's brands, which range from Louis Vuitton and Dior to Tiffany & Co., Sephora and Moët & Chandon.

Previously president of LVMH's watches and jewelry division, the 59-year-old will also oversee the presidents of the regions and the group's digital and data transformation, the group said.

Belloni, who is 69, will be in charge of strategic missions for Arnault and will be appointed president of LVMH Italy. "The idea is not at all to stop working. But today, I wanted to have more time for others, and primarily for my family," Belloni said.

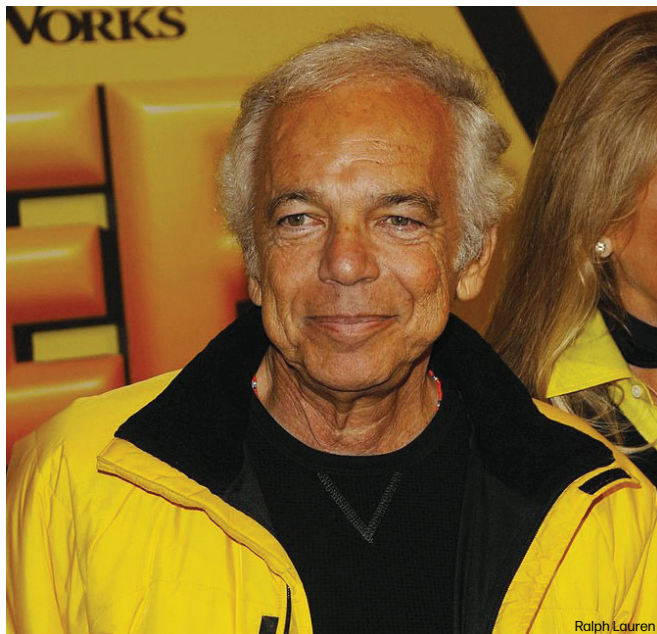
The announcement comes as Arnault, who turned 75 this month, prepares his succession by tightening his family's grip on the group's leadership and transitioning some of his most senior executives to advisory roles.

At the AGM next month, LVMH will propose the appointments of his sons Alexandre Arnault and Frédéric Arnault to the board, as reported.

Alexandre Arnault, executive vice president of product and communications at Tiffany, and Frédéric Arnault, chief executive officer of LVMH Watches, will join their siblings Antoine Arnault, head of communication, image and environment at LVMH, and Delphine Arnault, chairman and CEO of Christian Dior Couture, on the board.

Meanwhile, group veteran Michael Burke has succeeded Sidney Toledano, 72, at the head of LVMH Fashion Group. Toledano left the executive committee and became an adviser to Arnault in the handover, which took effect on Feb. 1.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 21



Ralph Lauren

## FASHION

## Ralph Lauren to Show Fall Collection in New York

- The show will be held on April 29 at a soon-to-be-revealed location.

BY JEAN E. PALMIERI

**Ralph Lauren** is once again embracing his New York roots and will return to the city to show his fall 2024 collection.

The show will be held on April 29 at a venue that has yet to be revealed. The show is expected to be small and intimate and will reference the city in which the designer still finds much of his inspiration, according to sources.

Although the Bronx, N.Y.-born designer has shown his collections in a variety of cities over the years, he has been using his hometown more frequently of late. In September 2023, Lauren showed his spring 2024 collection at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, marking his return to New York Fashion

Week. For that show, he transformed the location into a luxe artist's loft in a barn and hosted high-wattage guests including Jennifer Lopez, Gabrielle Union, Ariana DeBose, Keri Russell and Diane Keaton for the runway show, followed by a dinner.

The season before, he showed his fall 2022 collection at Huntington Gardens in San Marino, Calif., in what marked his West Coast debut, but prior to that, he showed at MoMa in New York.

In perhaps his most expressive love letter to New York, Lauren celebrated the 50th anniversary of his company with a spectacular show at Bethesda Terrace in Central Park during New York Fashion Week in September 2018. That show drew stars ranging from Oprah Winfrey and Hillary Clinton to Steven Spielberg, as well as a slew of other designers including Calvin Klein, Diane von Furstenberg, Michael Kors, Thom Browne and Tommy Hilfger.

## BUSINESS

## Lululemon CEO Calvin McDonald Warns of Slow Start to 2024 in the U.S.

- The company beat fourth-quarter profit expectations, but U.S. weakness at the start of the year sent shares reeling.

BY EVAN CLARK

**Lululemon Athletica Inc.** finished strong for 2023 with a fourth-quarter earnings beat, but chief executive officer Calvin McDonald warned "there has been a shift in the U.S. consumer behavior of late, and we're navigating what has been a slower start to the year."

For the perennial outperformer – which continues to track ahead of its strategic goal to double sales over five years, hitting \$12.5 billion by 2026 – it was an unusual splash of cold water.

Shares of the Vancouver-based company fell 10.6 percent to \$428 in after-hours trading on Wall Street.

But McDonald told analysts on a conference call that Lululemon remains both strong and flexible.

"We view this as an opportunity to keep playing offense as we lean into investments that will continue our growth trajectory," the CEO said. "Outside the U.S., our business remains strong in all our international markets."

"Consistent with what we've seen

from others in the market, the consumer environment in the United States has been somewhat challenging," he said. "However, despite the market dynamics, we remain optimistic about our opportunities to grow our business in the U.S. in 2024 and to continue to gain market share.

We have robust plans in place to further strengthen our position. We will continue to open and optimize our stores with plans for five to 10 new store openings and 15 to 20 optimizations. With U.S. sales per square foot above our overall average of \$1,600, our stores remain among the most productive in the industry."

McDonald said the company would continue to spend to boost its brand awareness in the U.S. with community-based events and larger brand campaigns.

"I know we have an opportunity in this market," he said. "Our sizing in particular, in 0 to 4, is something we're chasing into. Color, where we had color, it performed well. And honestly, we just did not have enough – and both of these attributes over-indexed in the U.S....We're going to continue to play offense in the market. The innovation product pipeline remains very strong for this year, and we have some exciting brand initiatives in addition."

He said that traffic has slowed in the U.S., but is still growing, while conversion

is down slightly.

This is all a change of pace for Lululemon, which is more accustomed to powering through even when others in the fashion space struggle.

That was the case as recently as last quarter.

Lululemon's fourth-quarter net income jumped more than fivefold to \$669.5 million from \$119.8 million a year earlier, when the bottom line was pulled down by \$442.7 million in charges tied to the Mirror at home workout tech business.

Earnings per share rose 20.2 percent to \$5.29 from adjusted results the year before, coming in 29 cents above the \$5 analysts projected, according to FactSet.

Sales for the quarter ended Jan. 28 increased 16 percent to \$3.2 billion – in line with what analysts penciled in. Comparable-store sales increased 12 percent with a 7 percent gain in the Americas and a 43 percent jump elsewhere in the international business.

Lululemon opened 25 new stores during the quarter, ending the year with



DK Metcalf in Lululemon, which is looking to grow its men's business.

711 locations.

Sales for the full year increased 19 percent to \$9.6 billion.

But Lululemon sees that growth rate slowing and is projecting sales gains this year of 11 to 12 percent. That puts the top line in a range of \$10.7 billion to \$10.8 billion, with the help of an extra week in the current fiscal year.

Growth is seen as slightly weaker than that in the first quarter, when sales are slated to rise by 9 to 10 percent.

Lululemon no doubt has plenty of room to maneuver, but if it's lost a step, the rest of the market could be falling even further behind.



Calvin McDonald



Lululemon added 25 stores in the fourth quarter.

## OBITUARY

# Master Tailor Martin Greenfield, 95

● The Holocaust survivor created suits for several presidents and scores of athletes and celebrities.

BY JEAN E. PALMIERI  
WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM  
LORNA KOSKI, 2014

**Martin Greenfield**, a Holocaust survivor who rose to become the custom tailor to several U.S. presidents and other luminaries, has died at age 95.

He passed away at a hospital on Long Island, N.Y., on Wednesday, according to an obituary in *The New York Times*. No cause of death was given but his son Tod Greenfield said he had been battling dementia for a while and had retired from the business about five years ago.

Greenfield's story, as well as his unparalleled skill with a needle and thread, has become legend within the menswear industry.

Born in the small town of Pavlovo in the Carpathian Mountains of Czechoslovakia, he and his family were captured by the Nazis and brought to the infamous Auschwitz prison camp. In his 2014 autobiography "Measure of a Man: A Memoir, From Auschwitz Survivor to Presidents' Tailor," he describes in graphic detail how Josef Mengele, the Nazi doctor known for his grotesque, criminal medical experiments, spared the lives of Maximilian Grünfeld, as he was known then, along with his father and one sister, while his mother, another sister and baby brother were sent off to their deaths.

Ultimately, Greenfield was the only member of his family to survive the war, although he was in the slave labor camp Buna and the concentration camps of Gleiwitz and Buchenwald.

One day in 1947, a letter arrived for Greenfield, who by then had decided to change his name to the "more American" Martin Greenfield, from relatives he had never heard of: an Aunt Elka and Uncle Irving and their families were living in the U.S., and another uncle, Antonio Berger, was living in Mexico. These were all his mother's relatives, and they had left Czechoslovakia before he was born. They offered to send him a boat ticket and sponsor him in America. He arrived in New York in September 1947.

Once here, he landed a job at the men's tailoring firm GGG, named for the three Goldman brothers – William P., Mannie and Morris – in Bushwick, Brooklyn. He started off sweeping floors and eventually worked his way up to vice president of production. And 30 years later, he bought the factory and renamed the business Martin Greenfield Clothiers.

"I was determined to learn every single task at GGG," he wrote in the autobiography. "I wanted to be the best, to stand out. Hand-basting, darting, piping, facing and lining, blind stitching, pressing, armhole work, joker tags, fell stitching, preparing besoms, finishing – I would learn how to execute every procedure better than the person who taught me."

His father had wanted him to be a doctor, Greenfield said, but as a recent immigrant with no money to sustain him during the years of schooling ahead, he didn't see how this could be accomplished. "So I became a suit doctor," he said. But he didn't make just suits. "We used to make vicuna coats for [President Dwight D. 'Ike'] Eisenhower and for gangsters. It was a big thing." One low point was men's fashion in the '70s, when, as he recalled, "My boss made me

make the Nehru jacket, but it was the most beautiful Nehru jacket."

Greenfield said the hand stitching makes the suits "wear better over time." He added, "Not like most suits, which look best on the rack, ours are able to mold to the shape of your body and fit better the longer you wear them."

Among those who also were fans were Presidents Lyndon B. Johnson, Gerald Ford, Bill Clinton, Barack Obama and Donald Trump, as well as scores of celebrities and athletes. In the book, Greenfield recalled how he was making Eisenhower's suits when he was president during the Suez Crisis of 1956. He felt so strongly about the course Eisenhower should take in this matter that he began writing notes to advise him about what to do, slipping the notes into the pockets of his suits – a gesture that, fortunately, Eisenhower found rather amusing.

When Hillary Clinton asked for help dressing her husband, Donna Karan recommended Greenfield. Today, the master tailor admits he was startled by Bill Clinton's wardrobe when he was first invited to the White House to fit him. "This had to be one of the most pathetic presidential wardrobes in American history," he writes. "I had my work cut out for me."

Greenfield writes that Obama is "built like a fitting mannequin, a 40 long with an enviable 33.5-inch waist," and adds that he looks good in any color but prefers gray and navy for suits. Greenfield was introduced to Obama through Ikram Goldman, the owner of the Chicago boutique Ikram, where First Lady Michelle Obama often shopped. Initially, President Obama intended to send one of his suits to the firm to copy, rather than letting himself be fitted. Jay Greenfield, Martin Greenfield's son, however, dissuaded him from doing this, and he and his father went to the White House to fit the president. Obama ended up wearing one of the resulting new suits on a visit to Buckingham Palace.

Greenfield was scheduled to do a fitting on then-President George W. Bush in Washington, D.C., on Sept. 11, 2001, which, naturally, was canceled.

He also dressed titans of industry including Michael Bloomberg who told WWD in 2013 that he got all his suits at Martin Greenfield. "They're cheaper than Paul Stuart, where I used to get my clothing," he said at the time.

Over the years, Greenfield, who never marketed his suits under his own name, expanded his reach to the entertainment world as well when he created the wardrobe for the HBO series "Boardwalk Empire" in the early 2000s. He also worked on other projects, including "The Great Gatsby" and "The Wolf of Wall Street."

Greenfield's roster of athletes included Carmelo Anthony, LeBron James, Michael Strahan and Shaquille O'Neal. "Patrick Ewing owns maybe 250 suits of mine that I made for Donna Karan," Greenfield said. "First of all, he's a very nice man. I know his father in Boston, took care of him [i.e., made him a suit]. And [Ewing] took care of his money. He is very different, and he's very nice. We used to be such Knicks fans when we met him. I come up to about his navel. He's 7 feet tall."

Because of the Holocaust, Greenfield was never bar mitzvahed, so he decided to have a bar mitzvah at age 80. He wrote: "Did I survive because I'm a hero? No. I survived maybe because God wanted me

Martin Greenfield



to survive. Or maybe I was lucky – I don't know. But I'm here."

Today, the business is run by Tod Greenfield and his brother Jay, who together operate a union factory in East Williamsburg. Jay's son David Greenfield has also been active in the business over the past two years.

Over the years, they've produced goods for companies as varied as Rag & Bone, Freemans Sporting Club, Neiman Marcus and Brooks Brothers, and they're known for their handwork, such as interior French seams.

"We still work with emerging designers and certain custom tailors," Jay Greenfield said Thursday, "but most of our business is taking care of individual customers here at our Brooklyn factory. We also do a pretty significant amount of work making clothes for movies and television shows."

He added of his father: "Martin lived life to the fullest. It amazes me how many people he has impacted. We have always been here to help his dream of Martin Greenfield Clothiers succeed. Nothing gives us more pleasure than enabling so many people who love wearing the Martin

Greenfield label close to their hearts."

Hearing of the death Thursday, designer Joseph Abboud said: "Martin Greenfield was a true gentleman and so very passionate about our industry that he loved so much. He was emblematic of the civility and culture of the men's tailored business...and was a cornerstone of the golden age of menswear. We will miss him and his extraordinary contribution to us all."

Lou Amendola, chief merchandising officer of Brooks Brothers, added: "I first met Martin at Donna Karan in 1994 and we worked together again later at Brooks Brothers. He was an exceptional craftsman, and always had amazing stories to tell. I personally appreciated his sense of humor and how he made every customer feel like they were the most important person in the room."

In addition to his sons, Greenfield is survived by his wife, Arlene and four grandchildren. Services will be held on Friday at 11:30 a.m. at Gutterman's Funeral Home, 8000 Jericho Turnpike in Woodbury, N.Y. The service will also be livestreamed.



# RED All Over

Red was the rage on runways for fall 2024 in shades from oxblood to tomato.

BY ALEX BADIA



Proenza Schouler



David Koma



Simone Rocha



Christian Cowan



Molly Goddard

David Koma and Molly Goddard photographs by Giovanni Giamoni; Simone Rocha by Altor Rosas Sufé; Christian Cowan by George Chinese

Ferragamo



JW Anderson



Christian Siriano



Versace



LaQuan Smith



Dries Van Noten

Saint Laurent

Courrèges

Dries Van Noten photograph by Giovanni Giannotti; Saint Laurent by Dominique Maître; Jason Wu by Don Stahl

Jason Wu

**BEAUTY**

# Douglas Shares Drop After Stock Market Redox



- IPOs are picking up steam in the beauty space.

BY JENNIFER WEIL

**PARIS** – Shares in German fragrance and beauty retailer Douglas fell sharply in early trading after its return to the Frankfurt Stock Exchange on Thursday.

Douglas on Tuesday had set the price of its initial public offering at 26 euros a share, and the stock opened at 25.50 euros. At 5:15 p.m. CET, the shares were trading at 22.66 euros each, down 11.1 percent against the opening price, and closed the day at 23.06 euros.

Douglas' IPO began one day before

that of Galderma, which is expected to be among Europe's largest in 2024 and which could value the company at about \$17 billion. The pure-play dermatology products maker priced its offering at 53 Swiss francs, or \$59.07, a share and will begin trading on the SIX Swiss Exchange in Zurich on Friday.

IPOs are heating up in the beauty space as stock markets rally and interest-rate rises mitigate. Spanish beauty and fashion company Puig has said it is mulling an IPO as part of strategic options for the future. And Brazil's Natura & Co. is considering spinning off beleaguered Avon into a separate publicly traded company.

Douglas Group, which is backed by CVC Capital Partners and the Kreke family, plans to use 850 million euros of the IPO proceeds to pay off debt. Three hundred million euros will be injected to bulk up Douglas' coffers.

At the end of the first quarter of 2024, Douglas' net debt was 3.06 billion euros. The group's market value capitalization is at 2.8 billion euros.

Douglas was taken off the stock market in 2013 after Advent International and the Kreke family took the company over. In 2015, CVC Capital Partners acquired Douglas for a reported 2.8 billion euros.

Douglas is now formally called Douglas Group.

**FASHION**

# H&M Opens New Concept Store on London's King's Road

- The store is located in a Grade II listed building and offers a selection of fashion, and styling tips, to customers.

BY SAMANTHA CONTI

**LONDON** – High-street brands are raising the bar on physical retail as customers fall back in love with in-store shopping, with H&M the latest to polish up its offering.

On Thursday, H&M opened a new concept store at 72 King's Road in Chelsea with a "handpicked curation" of its most luxurious and fashion-forward designs.

There is also ample space given to the H&M beauty offer. Staff are on hand to offer styling tips and there is a click and collect service as well.

The store is located in a Grade II listed building, and spans three floors, with interiors by the H&M in-house creative team.

"The store embodies our ethos of fashion for the many, providing contemporary design that aims to empower and inspire," said Ann-Sofie Johansson, H&M's head of design.

The store opened with the spring collection, which includes soft tailoring, sculptural volume and denim pieces.

The concept is part of wider strategies by H&M Group, and its competitors Inditex and Mango, to create luxury, service-driven shopping experiences for customers, no matter how much they spend.

Arket, which is also owned by H&M Group, opened its first shop-in-shop, at Selfridges Oxford Street, last year. The concession stocks a selection of womenswear and lifestyle merchandise, and is meant to complement the retailer's



Here and right: A look at the store's beauty area.

stand-alone stores in the U.K.

At the time, Arket's head of design and creative, Ella Soccorsi, said the brand's stores were becoming "more of an experience space, and we really want customers to feel at ease and spend time once they come in."

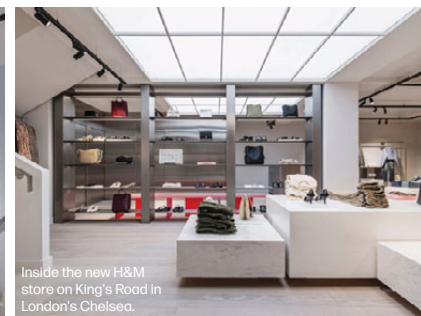
In 2022, Zara opened what was then its most advanced retail concept at the Battersea Power Station development.

The store, housed in a Frank Gehry building, features the latest technology innovations from Zara's integrated online and physical store platform, and looks more like a luxury department store

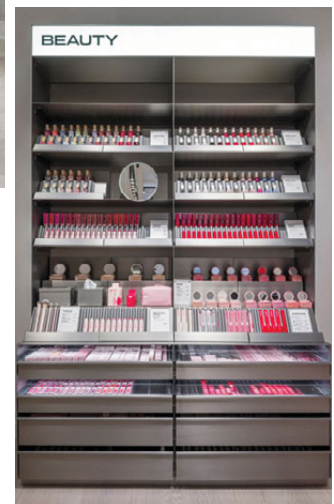
than the average Zara outpost, with airy interiors, lots of blond and natural wood and a spacious shop floor.

Also in 2022, the Spanish retailer Mango opened a vast Fifth Avenue flagship, and installed a tailoring station for menswear.

That same year, Mango reopened its 15,000-square-foot store on Boulevard Haussmann in Paris with its "New Med" concept of bright white walls, terrazzo treatments and wood floors, meant to evoke a seaside villa. The brand also built a giant wave-like installation of Esparto, a grass weaving technique native to the coastal city of Alicante.



Inside the new H&M store on King's Road in London's Chelsea.





## ACCESSORIES

# Brunello Cucinelli Extends Gentle Luxury to Eyewear With EssilorLuxottica



Brunello Cucinelli's eyewear collection in a license with EssilorLuxottica.

● The first collection under a 10-year license reflects the brand's signature elements and one model features a small metal plaque in the arm that reads "Solomei AD MCCCXCI [1391]" in a reference to the founding date of the medieval hamlet that Cucinelli has restored.

BY LUISA ZARGANI

**MILAN** — Brunello Cucinelli is bringing what he calls his "gentle luxury" approach to eyewear.

The first collection of prescription glasses and sunglasses under the 10-year licensing agreement inked in November 2022 with EssilorLuxottica is landing in stores — albeit very selectively — and was unveiled Thursday in Rome.

The license for the Brunello Cucinelli eyewear follows a first capsule launched in 2021 in a collaboration with Oliver Peoples, founded in 1987 and acquired by the Luxottica Group in 2007 as part of Oakley. In 2018, Essilor and Luxottica agreed to a 46-billion-euro merger.

In an interview ahead of the presentation in Rome, Cucinelli touted the relationship with EssilorLuxottica, describing the eyewear giant as a "very

elegant and excellent" partner and expressing his hope "for the collections and our partnership to last for 40, 50 years," entirely in sync with his characteristic long-term strategies and views.

He underscored that this is an agreement between two Italian families, reiterating his praise for Luxottica's founder, the late Leonardo Del Vecchio, and his children, who "believe in Italy and in the value of Made in Italy production." Del Vecchio's stepson Rocco Basilico, for example, is the chief executive officer of Oliver Peoples.

Cucinelli recalled a conversation with Del Vecchio before his death in June 2022. "When I asked him if he liked the glasses [produced for Oliver Peoples], he said that [in any case] they were made in the best possible way. This is what we need to do."

Cucinelli's eyewear for men and women will be positioned in the luxury segment, in line with his fashion, retailing at up to

1,200 euros. "This is not really an entry into the brand, and the way one thinks of eyewear has changed. The first image of a person is their face, this is what you remember, and that's why eyewear is so important," he contended.

Some of the standout details include



Here and below: Brunello Cucinelli eyewear.

lenses in peach, pistachio or cognac hues; cashmere-beige colored arms; multimedia frames in metal and acetate or horn, and titanium arms plated in 18-carat white or pink gold. One model is personalized with a small metal plaque in the arm that reads "Solomei AD MCCCXCI [1391]," a reference to the founding date of the medieval hamlet that Cucinelli has restored and turned into his company's headquarters.

Asked what makes his namesake eyewear different, Cucinelli spoke of "small combinations of colors and details, so the glasses really reflect the brand." He praised the positioning of EssilorLuxottica, its "excellent taste, global distribution, timely deliveries, and the best archive in the world — I have never seen anything like that."

Francesco Milleri, chairman and CEO of EssilorLuxottica, said the Brunello Cucinelli collections "represent the perfect synthesis of contemporary design and high artisanal craftsmanship."

He underscored the importance of working with materials that reflect the positioning and value of the brand, including "acetate inspired by cashmere and fabrics that characterize the fashion collections of the maison," and on details used in the creation of jewelry. "The metal frames are all available exclusively in our Made in Japan titanium and, in sun, they feature the best Barberini crystal lenses, epitomizing the prestige and the tradition of Italian eyewear," observed Milleri.

Cucinelli, who has spoken for years about the importance of giving dignity to work, also highlighted how the two companies share "the same concept of the workplace, offering balance and the right conditions to employees, who work in a beautiful plant [in Italy's Agordo]. We speak the same language." To be sure, Luxottica welfare policies are considered to be among the best in the industry.

"Leonardo Del Vecchio knew how to dream and transmit enthusiasm to those who worked with him, first and foremost to the highly respected Francesco Milleri, who with his special humanity has created between our two teams a relationship of respect that is a foundation in any humanistic company," said Cucinelli. "Plato used to say, 'beauty is the splendor of truth' and for this I hope with all my heart and these glasses, so real and beautiful, will meet the interest of customers and obtain all the success they deserve."

Cucinelli is "not only a great entrepreneur but also a friend that I value and admire," continued Milleri. The eyewear collections "express all the values that characterize the Brunello Cucinelli fashion house: a new conception of luxury, fueled by respect and the dignity of work, representing his true soul. This is a vision that ideally joins together the two companies. Once again, together we will be able to bring into the world all that is beautiful and unique that our country knows how to express in design, quality and style."

The collections will be available in main Cucinelli boutiques worldwide and in select specialty stores globally.



## HOME DESIGN

## Deepika Padukone's Passion for Interiors Comes to Life



Deepika Padukone's first home collection with Pottery Barn.

● WWD talks to the Indian megastar about her focus on the home, as she releases her first home collection with Pottery Barn.

BY SOFIA CELESTE

**MILAN** – Very few people knew that Deepika Padukone, the actress and global face for brands including Louis Vuitton and Cartier, had a flair for interior design. Since signing on as a brand ambassador for

Pottery Barn in 2022, she is now the latest face on Pottery Barn's roster of celebrity collaborations.

"Everyone at home keeps saying that my first passion is interior design and not acting. I love doing up spaces. I've always, even as a little girl, I've always been passionate about interiors,"

Padukone told WWD in an interview. The Hindi star said she travels the world and keeps copious notes on interior brands and boutiques that inspire her.

Padukone, who made her film

debut at age 21 with the 2007 film "Om Shanti Om," said she and Pottery Barn came together to create a collection of entertaining and serveware pieces, textiles and decorative accessories inspired by her love of vintage designs that she has collected for the home she shares with her husband. She designed the house herself, admitting that many of the motifs and styles present in her own living space are "pretty much what you see in this collection" in terms of colors, textures, fabrics and layering.

Over the course of co-creating the collection, she said she put together mood boards with the colors, shapes, patterns and designs and attended meetings with Pottery Barn's global design team.

The collection will be sold in the U.S., India, throughout the Middle East and the Philippines. Pottery Barn is a portfolio brand of California-based Williams-Sonoma Inc.

The U.S. assortment includes bedding, embroidered pillows, decorative accessories and hand-knotted rugs. The textile designs feature an elevated take on traditional Indian patterns and the color palette consists of soothing neutrals and luxe natural tones. A collection for entertaining including dinnerware and serveware, with textured, floral sculpted details and an earthy aesthetic, will be available exclusively in India, the Middle East and the Philippines.

"The new collection artfully blends Pottery Barn's world-renowned quality with Deepika's iconic style, bringing unique designs to the home for creating a beautiful and inviting space," Pottery Barn president Monica Bhargava said. In India, Pottery Barn is sold through Williams Sonoma Inc. franchisee Reliance Brands Ltd., a subsidiary of Reliance Industries Ltd.

Marrying Pottery Barn's easy American aesthetic with Indian lifestyle is something that came naturally to Padukone. "There are a lot of prints from India, a lot of different types of thread work, a lot of brass because I love combining brass as a material with different things because it adds an element of glamour," she said.

Within the serveware collection, she integrated small bowls, which are very specific to Indian cuisine for traditional Indian Thali eating style that centers around round platters.

Pottery Barn's expansion in India began with the launch of potterybarn.in in July 2022, with the brand opening its first retail location in September 2022 in New Delhi.

The brand also has stand-alone store locations elsewhere in India as well as in the Middle East and the Philippines.

The Deepika Padukone for Pottery Barn collection will go on sale Friday and will be available online at potterybarn.com, potterybarn.in and in 18 global stores.

## HOME DESIGN

## Chef Eric Adjepong Puts Ghanaian Decor on the Map

● The celebrity chef, author and TV host traveled to northern Ghana to source materials for his first homeware collection with Crate & Barrel.

BY SOFIA CELESTE

**MILAN** – When Chef Eric Adjepong discussed the building blocks of his first home collection, he slipped and said he used Ghanaian ingredients to make his first home goods collection with Crate & Barrel.

"I meant materials – Ghanaian materials," he exclaimed a second afterward.

Indeed, switching hats from the head of the kitchen to the head of design was a big change, but a welcome one. "I like the idea that these items can last forever," as opposed to his eclectic dishes that last seconds on the palate, he said.

The 36-year-old chef and host of Food Network's "Wildcard Kitchen" decided to return to his parents' homeland to build this collection. "It was more than a homecoming – it was a discovery," the first generation Ghanaian American said.

Upon arrival in the village of Bolgatanga, he was greeted by a mini parade with music, dance and food. It was there where he came into contact with the region's basket weavers, who showed him the entire process of Bolga basket weaving.

Bolgatanga, which is situated in northern Ghana, is a heartland of genuine Bolga baskets, which are exclusively woven by the Indigenous Gurune or Frafra people. Weavers collect beta vera straw, which is subtracted from the top of the grass, and they then leave the roots to grow.

Other products in this vibrant collection

were inspired by the Ashanti Empire, which was founded in 1670 and impacted much of the modern culture of the dynamic region.

With more than 60 pieces of cookware, glassware, serveware and decor, the collection includes a Ghanaian-made market tote; the Didi Ketoa appetizer plates inspired by West African bead work; the Sobolo glass punch bowl with a green marble base, and the Akan-inspired Nkwanta Hammered Brass Punch Ladle, also indicative of the region's artisan traditions.

The first of his family to be born in the U.S. from Ghanaian parents, Adjepong said growing up in New York City made him bold and that growing up around Albanian, Puerto Rican, Jewish, Italian, West African and Caribbean cultures greatly influenced his cooking style. Still, he's been drawn to Ghana and travels there at least four times a year. Accra, a booming cultural hub for Afro Beats, art and fashion, is also a burgeoning pulse for both the kitchen and the design worlds, he said.

Crate & Barrel and Crate & Kids senior vice president of product design Sebastian Brauer said when contemplating new partnerships, the firm has an eye out in "special corners of the world" on what's resonating with communities and audiences beyond just the design world, from cooking to music, technology and fashion on an international scale.

"When chef Eric's team approached us, we saw a powerful opportunity to bring his first kitchen line to life. We worked intimately with him to celebrate his West African heritage and multicultural New York City roots and combined that with



Chef Eric Adjepong

his talent as a chef with Crate & Barrel's timeless and global design approach, to create functional pieces...," he said.

A rising star in U.S. television, Adjepong is known for his success in bringing West African cuisine into the mainstream culinary conversation. Following experiences in several Michelin-starred restaurants, he entered the "Top Chef" circuit and was featured as a finalist on season 16. On Food Network, he has made appearances on "Selena + Chef," "Chopped," "Guy's Grocery Games," "Supermarket Stakeout" and "Tournament of Champions." He also has a degree in culinary arts and nutrition from Johnson & Wales in Rhode Island and a masters degree in public health in international public health and nutrition from the University of Westminster in London. On Wednesday he became the Save the Children's newest global ambassador, joining fellow celebrities Jennifer Garner, Camila Cabello and Dakota Fanning.

Eric Adjepong for Crate & Barrel's exclusive collaboration will be available

Eric Adjepong for Crate & Barrel.



in-stores and online at Crate & Barrel from Thursday.

Crate & Barrel's fashion-forward sister brand CB2 is also reaching further afield, scouting designers and collaborations with compelling storytelling. Last month its Black in Design Collective launched by artist and designer Evan Jerry, added leading Nifemi, Niger-based architect Mariam Issoufou Kamara and Lagos-based designer Nifemi Marcus-Bello to its roster.

## HOME DESIGN

# Italian Design Brands Changes Its Name to Dexelance

- The new name represents the group's increasingly international profile.

BY SOFIA CELESTE

**MILAN** — As it looks to grow beyond Italy, Italian Design Brands has changed its name to Dexelance, an amalgamation of the words design and excellence.

"With the birth of Dexelance, we are not only strengthening our position at the national level, but we also set the ambition to accelerate growth, both organically and by external lines, by playing a leading role in the global reference market," Dexelance

chief executive officer Andrea Sasso said Thursday. A video reel shared at a presentation at Milan's Triennale di Milano museum Thursday revealed the brand's new ethos, built on Italian craftsmanship and values with an eye on integrating "international brands."

The announcement follows statements made by Dexelance's top management earlier this month, revealing it was eyeing new acquisitions and was in talks with potential companies. At the time, Sasso said the company's initial public offering raised its profile.

"We are working on it and are very strong with regard to our M&A

Turri Living is part of Dexelance's, formerly known as Italian Design Brands, galaxy of furniture and lighting labels.



From left: Giorgio Gobbi, Dexelance managing director; Andrea Sasso, Dexelance CEO; and Giovanni Tamburi, founder, chairman and CEO of Tamburi Investment Partners.

agenda...the stock exchange increased communication with more brands," Sasso added, noting that they were not ready to reveal anything definitive. Dexelance managing director Giorgio Gobbi stressed, however, that the company is not planning a transformational acquisition in 2024. "We hope that at least one will come on board, but that can occur at the earliest in 2025, not now."

The first Italian design firm to list its shares on the Milan Stock Exchange, Dexelance is home to 11 Italian companies and 14 Italian brands, and counts North America as its second most important market in terms of sales. Italian Design Brands is the parent company of upscale brands Gervasoni, Meridiani, Saba Italia, Gamma Arredamenti International, Turri, Binova and Cubo Design kitchens, and modern lighting brands Davide Groppi, Flexalighting and Axolight.

The company opened its first U.S. flagship in New York City last October that hosts dedicated showrooms for Meridiani and Davide Groppi.

The move was part of the company's long-term plan to expand in the U.S. and the group continues to scout investors

and partners to open doors in cities like Chicago; Miami; Dallas; Washington, D.C., and Boston, which are considered key to the growth of the group.

Earlier this year, Tamburi Investment Partners, or TIP SpA, bought a majority stake in IDB's parent company. TIP, which is helmed by Giovanni Tamburi, founder, chairman and CEO.

"I am convinced that the current times are particularly well suited to consolidate," Tamburi said adding that the sector has "enormous potential" but "is too fragmented" to cope with the current global market challenges.

In 2023, the company outperformed the performance of the furniture sector with revenues of 310.8 million euros, up 16.6 percent compared to 2022, as it posted strong performances across all of its brands. Sasso said the company would continue to grow in 2024.

FederlegnoArredo, the Italian federation of woodworking and furniture industries, said the year 2023 was expected to close with a steep drop, with the value of the wood furnishing supply chain seen posting a 7 percent decline in terms of revenue, with exports falling 7.2 percent.

## EXCLUSIVE

# Designer Dirk Schönberger and Aspesi Make Furnishing Debut

- The German designer, who is now chief brand officer at Vetsak and Italian heritage brand Aspesi, will unfurl their latest collaboration during Milan Design Week.

BY SOFIA CELESTE

**MILAN** — When designer Dirk Schönberger made a leap into furnishings with next-gen, comfort-centric label Vetsak last September, he said he wouldn't totally cut ties with the fashion and apparel world. He wasn't kidding.

The German company told WWD that Schönberger, its chief brand officer, will unveil his first furnishings project in collaboration with Milan-based fashion brand Aspesi on April 15 and it will be on show throughout Milan Design Week, which ends April 21.

Vetsak's famed modular sofa and Aspesi's celebrated nylon parachute puffers fuse into three distinct color worlds, each complete with a sofa, a large blanket, a regular and an even bigger jumbo pillow as well as both small and larger-than-life toys. The different color

schemes range from Popsicle brights to utilitarian green, as well as shades of blue, gray and black.

"I always followed the brand [Aspesi] because I always loved it. It fits very much into what I'm wearing, which is minimalist, very modern style. So and it came actually accidental. I had a conversation with someone and somehow it got through to them," Schönberger said, adding that it was suggested Vetsak use Aspesi's puffer jackets to build covers for its modular sofa, which can be built in different sizes and formations and on which the colors can be interchanged.

Best known for his time as creative director at Adidas from 2010 until 2018, Schönberger made a strategic jump to leather goods and accessories when he took on the role as global creative officer of luxury accessories brand MCM in 2018.

Complete with zips, tech tags, labels and pockets, he said that the Vetsak project to be unveiled during Milan Design Week is really conceptual.

Aspesi's vice president of global sales and marketing Carlos Pellegrini likewise said Aspesi immediately recognized itself in Vetsak.



Dirk Schönberger

"For us, quality, comfort and authentic values are primary. Their philosophy of creating modular and versatile products that seamlessly adapt to people's daily lives reflects exactly what we aim to offer with our garments," he said, adding that versatility in everyday life is what makes their brands so complementary.

Aspesi has in the past collaborated with upholstered-furniture manufacturer



Aspesi collaborates with Vetsak for Milan Design Week.

Moroso and the Achille Castiglioni Foundation and looks forward to forging new collaborations in the future.

"After years of corporate consolidation, we feel confident in presenting to the market a collaboration with an innovative specialist in the furniture sector. We are excited to take on this new challenge and to continue advancing our design vision," Pellegrini said.

After all, Aspesi's nylon is also ideal for the outdoors.

"The good thing with nylon is that you can do whatever you dream of. Indeed, it was the perfect material, to envision, portray and bring to life the creativity of both creative teams," Pellegrini said.

## HOME DESIGN

## The Eames Lounge, Other Iconic Designs Getting Reboot for Milan Design Week

● The designs will be reimagined by a group of emerging designers for "Homage," an exhibition in partnership with the Masterly Dutch Pavilion and Netherlands-based online marketplace Catawiki.

BY JENNIFER BRINGLE

**The Eames lounge.** Pierre Paulin's Orange Slice. The Mackintosh Hill House chair. These iconic pieces by furniture masters have stood the test of time and changing fashion.

But during Milan Design Week from April 16 to 21, those designs and several others will be reimagined by a group of emerging designers for "Homage," an exhibition in partnership with the Masterly Dutch Pavilion and Netherlands-based online marketplace Catawiki.

Eleven global designers selected famous furniture, decor and tabletop designs to reinterpret with their own twist into limited-edition pieces. The collection will be on display in the Palazzo Giureconsulti before going up for auction on Catawiki – an online auction house that specializes in art, design, luxury goods, jewelry and collectibles.

WWD caught up with a few of the featured designers to learn more about their creations.

### Antonio Barone

**Inspiration:** Isamu Noguchi's Freeform sofa  
Italian designer Antonio Barone sees objects as a system of reversible companions, and he brought that ethos into his reinterpretation of Isamu Noguchi's open, rounded Freeform sofa.



Antonio Barone's reinterpretation of Isamu Noguchi's open, rounded Freeform sofa.



"Noguchi's sofa inspires us mostly for its combination of simplicity and fluid forms that make it a timeless, gentle piece," Barone said. "Our intention was to render this organic design manifesto softer and even more informal."

Barone achieved that by affixing a series of organic, moldable cushions atop a grid platform.

"The grid acts as a flexible 'plug-and-play' infrastructure that allows a range of combinations with different parts," he said. "The form speaks essentially about the search for comfort: This project is the result of the juxtaposition of an organic re-shapeable cushion laid over a rational tabula rasa where the user(s) can try different ergonomics."

### Aptum (Tineke Beunders and Nathan Wierink)

**Inspiration:** Charles Rennie Mackintosh's Hill House chair

Dutch design team Tineke Beunders and Nathan Wierink of Aptum specialize in custom lighting installations that can vary from chaotic and colorful to geometric and sober. To reimagine the oversized geometric silhouette of the Hill House chair, the duo positioned a lamp with a grid coated on the front and back with color.

"When you see the two designs together you'll immediately see the geometrical dessin," they said. "You'll use this light in a corner, and it gives the corner a cozy, warm feeling."

Beunders and Wierink said they selected the Hill House chair in part due to the way it was created.

"Charles Rennie Mackintosh worked together with his wife Margaret McDonald in a way similar to the way Nathan and I work together," Beunders said. "There is something magical about creative couples working together, and we wanted to dive a bit deeper into their way of working. Research into their work made us happy."

Richard Sapper's Plico folding trolley as reinterpreted by Bhulls.



Vonn Jansen reinterpreted their side table and Gianfranco Frattini's side tables.



### Bhulls (Ricardo Parmiciano Borgström and Giorgia Farina)

**Inspiration:** Richard Sapper's Plico folding trolley

Italian duo Ricardo Parmiciano Borgström and Giorgia Farina of Bhulls specialize in creating collectible and unconventional pieces that blur the lines between art and design. They felt a connection to Sapper's design style that made the Plico ideal as inspiration.

"We were interested in measuring ourselves against the fluid tension that characterizes this timeless object," they said. "Plico is a versatile and functional product with a strong aesthetic impact – its apparent simplicity conceals great technique."

In reinterpreting Plico for their Replico low table, Parmiciano Borgström and Farina saw a chance to return to their design roots.

"This project was an opportunity for us to return to square shapes and industrial process," they said. "Replico is made up of three CNC laser-cut aluminum pieces. This approach marked the beginning of our journey as a studio, which we had somewhat neglected recently to work on more curvy and entirely handmade projects."

### Stefan Scholten

**Inspiration:** Charles and Ray Eames' Lounge chair

Known for his reductionist design style and distinctive use of color, Dutch designer Stefan Scholten chose to recreate the classic Eames lounge chair and ottoman as one piece.

"My version has a direct relationship to the angles and proportions of the combined original lounge chair and ottoman," he said. "I created a chaise longue."

Scholten pays tribute to the Eames' California modern aesthetic while incorporating his reductionist sensibilities by stripping his L.A. Chaise Longue down to sculptural, ergonomic wood.

"The wood veneer and bending technique are a very distinctive part of the original chair – in my design I wanted to emphasize that," he said. "The chaise longue is reduced to the essence of what I find striking in the design."

### Vonn Jansen (Nick and Sophie Jansen)

**Inspiration:** Gianfranco Frattini's side table and Vonn Jansen's Trinity dining table

Dutch brother-and-sister duo Nick and Sophie Jansen took over their family's high-end furniture company, marrying the brand's craftsmanship with their modern aesthetic.



Dutch designer Stefan Scholten's reinterpretation of the classic Eames lounge chair.

As head designer, Sophie chose two inspirations for this project: First, Gianfranco Frattini's midcentury side table – which features a two-drawer rectangular top on curved pedestal legs. And, second, Vonn Jansen's Trinity dining table, with a striking pedestal of offset stacked boxes and eye-catching patterned veneers.

"We chose the Gianfranco Frattini side tables as our inspiration because when we saw the designs, it reminded us of the type of furniture our dad used to make, so we felt a connection with the design through the heritage of our company," Sophie Jansen said.

For her creation, Jansen married the two pieces into a table that reflects the silhouette of the Frattini piece while expressing the Vonn Jansen essence through a stacked pedestal and houndstooth and basketweave patterned veneers.

"The piece reflects our look on modern design," she said. "We love making items that really have their own identity and will be a statement piece in someone's interior, while preserving traditional craftsmanship within our company and using the decades of experience we have in manufacturing high-end, quality furniture."

Additional designer reinterpretations in the Homage collection include Dutch textile designer Aleksandra Gaca's take on Zaha Hadid's vases; Italian architect and designer Emanuele Ferraro of Atelier Ferraro and Dutch ceramicist Simone Doesburg of Grace of Glaze both interpreting Émile Gallé's floral glasswork; French designer Laurene Guarneri taking inspiration from Pierre Paulin's Orange Slice chair for her Double Jaune mirror; Dutch maker Simone Post's spin on an Alessi whistling kettle, and Carla Joachim and Jordan Morineau of Studio Joachim-Morineau creating mirror platinum-finished wall decor inspired by the Christoffe Talisman serving ware.

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




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## FASHION

# Toccin Has Its Moment, at Saks, Neiman's, Hudson's Bay and Bloomingdale's



Michael and Alex Toccin

- It's a pivotal year for the five-year-old advanced contemporary brand as it raises its profile and North American distribution.

BY DAVID MOIN

For a modern, advanced contemporary brand, Toccin is taking a very traditional pursuit toward growth.

In May, the company is opening a showroom in the heart of the Garment District, where there's been a shrinking presence of fashion brands. Distribution is more than doubling this year largely through wholesaling to conventional department store chains, and the Toccin collection has been on the road staging trunk shows at hotels, luncheons, specialty stores and charity events.

Some might consider Toccin's growth strategy somewhat "old school," though it also includes elevating the brand's presence on the websites of retailers, expanding the stock keeping unit count, and casting the collection as a new wardrobing concept, rather than a plethora of items.

Over breakfast at Manhattan's Regency Hotel last week, husband and wife Michael and Alex Toccin, the cofounders and co-owners of Toccin Apparel Holdings LLC, were eager to discuss the upcoming widening distribution of their eponymous, five-year-old collection, and what makes their brand distinct.

Relying heavily on long-standing department stores, a sector that's been stagnant for decades, is something Michael Toccin is comfortable with. It's a case of "what's old can be new." He keeps close to the retailers, frequently walking the selling floors and encouraging the buyers and merchandisers to present the Toccin collection in a manner that expresses it the way he thinks it should be.

The Toccins detailed how the collection will widen its distribution, saying it entails:

- Bloomingdale's in May starting to carry Toccin for the first time with the summer collection, at the 59th Street flagship in Manhattan, two other doors and online.
- Toccin doubling its distribution at Saks Fifth Avenue this fall, from eight to 16 doors and selling on Saks.com.
- BergdorfGoodman.com carrying Toccin for the first time beginning this fall.
- Neiman Marcus, which previously carried the collection, relaunching it at five doors and online for fall.
- Canada's Hudson's Bay selling the collection for the first time this fall at 14 locations.

Compared to Saks, Neiman's and Bloomingdale's, Hudson's Bay has more of a mass appeal. But Michael Toccin said Hudson's Bay is still a good fit for Toccin. "We like to be approachable, and we do have our own opening price point. We want women to feel special, put together, comfortable and confident. That's not



From the Toccin fall 2024 collection.

about just charging a crazy price for a dress. We want to be accessible." Toccin's price spectrum ranges from \$115 for a white T-shirt to \$1,500 for a shearling coat. The average price point is about \$500.

"At Hudson's Bay we will be in 14 of their top 20 locations," said Toccin. Hudson's Bay, in a few of its locations, does have "The Room" which sells true designer price points, such as Oscar de la Renta and Balmain. "We're going to be right outside The Room in the Toronto location," in an area shared with Max Mara, Eileen Fisher, and Ralph Lauren, among other brands, observed Toccin.

Department stores have a reputation for not displaying brands properly, sometimes burying the best pieces amid the racks. Asked about that, Toccin replied: "Presentation is everything to me. It's all how you set the stage. We are going to be delivering to all of our stores an 'accordion' of how I want things paginated on the racks. Organization is so important because we want to teach the consumer how to style their wardrobe. We merchandise by look.

"It's also about your relationship with the stores and whether the stores realize what your brand stands for," Toccin added. "We can showcase what our brand stands for. With our retailers, we're always asking what their needs are, in terms of what the customer is reacting to. We show them what we're doing. And they might say, 'Can we get a miniskirt in that style instead of just a midi skirt?' We like to have our people around our partners as part of the process. We also make sure we're always listening to the voice of our customer. So we design into the missing categories or voids." Toccin is also carried at Rent the Runway and several specialty stores.

The Toccins expect to double the volume of the business (which is small) this year and again in 2025. "We'll be cash-flow positive in 2024. We will be profitable," Michael Toccin said. The company is entirely self-funded, he said, though the couple would consider outside investment which would further the potential for growth. The collection currently has more than 200 skus, which is about 60 percent more from a year ago, they said.

"I think what sets us really apart from other brands out there – and I've been walking a lot of selling floors in the past couple of weeks – is that it's not just about coming to us for a dress or an outerwear piece. You're coming to us for everyday wardrobing. We create clothes that make women feel put together," said Toccin.

Toccin showed for the first time at the Coterie trade show at the Jacob K. Javits Center last February. "Normally I feel that the buyers at the Coterie really cherry-pick your collection. But with us, they got it, that we're a wardrobing company," said Michael Toccin. Alex Toccin emphasized the design aspect of it. "If you are wearing one of our blazers and layering one of our coats on top of it, you don't feel so confined," she said.

Toccin's three-piece suits, outerwear (particularly Toccin's oversized Brandy coat), the Remi wrap blouse paired with the Arielle wide-leg pant, the "strong shoulder" slipdresses, and crew neck sweaters have been recent bestsellers.

Last November, Toccin launched its "Core" grouping of classic wardrobing pieces and most popular styles, including the signature tie-front knitwear, blazers, shirtdresses, cardigans, T-shirts, slacks and belts. Seasonless fabrics and mixing and matching pieces are a big part of it. "We're continuing with that program, making sure all the stores pick up the fall styles," said Alex Toccin.

Asked why this year is the time to step on the accelerator, Michael Toccin said, "We're about to hit our five-year anniversary. We went through the pandemic. We've identified what our core is and the key sellers."

A month ago Toccin started staging trunk shows around the U.S., working with a new hire with the title VIP sales director. Among the several trunk shows staged already was one at the Colony Hotel in Palm Beach, Fla., during a charity luncheon for Women of Tomorrow. "We did an informal runway, with four models, teaching customers about our line and how to mix and match combinations within the collection." There was also an hour-long Toccin pop-up. "We sold over \$20,000," said Michael Toccin. "Then we partnered with Five Story in Palm Beach and continued to sell there for two days." On May 9, Toccin will be the featured brand on the runway for the Success Under the Stars luncheon in Miami, followed by a trunk show.

"What makes Alex and I unique is our followers from our Instagram. We're joining them around the country," via trunk shows. The couple started in business together with a blog in 2016 called "Stylists to a T." Unlike other bloggers who charge brands for posting a story, a picture and a link, the Toccins started it with a subscription format and the response from followers of the blog motivated them to start their own brand. Earlier in his career, Michael Toccin interned at Giorgio Armani, Tod's, Oscar de la Renta, and KaufmanFranco, where he later got a job and was encouraged to attend Parsons School of Design. Returning to KaufmanFranco, he became vice president of domestic and international sales, oversaw celebrity styling and created a private client program. He was there for 10 years, and said that he loved his work getting stores to buy the collection, or as he said, "the chase."

Alex Toccin also attended Parsons, studying marketing while interning at Ralph Lauren, where she ended up getting a job in the merchandising department. She also worked as a buyer at Theory, in public relations at the HL Group, and at Emily and Ashley fine jewelry, in sales.

There's no plan for a Toccin store yet, not even a long-term pop up, though Michael Toccin hinted at the possibility one day. "Toccin's dream is to be on Madison Avenue one day," he said. For what's still a small brand, he's thinking big.

# THE WEARHOUSE

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SXSW 2024

Innovation was in the air last week in Austin when WWD, FN, Beauty Inc and Rivet brought the "Innovation, Insights & Influence: The Art of Storytelling in Fashion and Beauty" program to SXSW. From the main stage to the magical experiences, it was a weekend marked by creativity, discovery and connections.



1. **The Wear House Mainstage** | 2. **RelieFF and Recover Lounge** presented by Fitflop | 3. **Beauty Hangout** presented by Mielle Organics | 4. **Lowe's Style Studio** presented by Lowe's Innovation Lab | 5. **Classic, American, Cool** presented by Tommy Hilfiger | 6. **Veronica Servantez**, Senior Vice President, Marketing at BigCommerce | 7. **Boris Mercier**, Senior Vice President, Marketing at Recover | 8. **On The MRKT Experience** with in-kind participation Fatty15, Link x Lou, HERO Cosmetics, Love Wellness, Nopalera and Vacation Inc. | 9. **Tastemaker Bar** presented by in-kind partner Pressed Juicery

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## BUSINESS

# With or Without Dior, City Aims to Forge Ahead as Creative Hub of Asia



● Hong Kong's entrepreneurial spirit and position as the gateway between East and West are seen as among the assets that could carry it forward after turbulent years.

BY TIANWEI ZHANG,  
LILY TEMPLETON AND DENNI HU

As Hong Kong gears up for another busy week around Art Basel, its efforts to reclaim its position as the hot spot of Asia are fueling conversations and spurring plenty into action – even in the absence of Dior, which has postponed its Saturday men's pre-fall show.

In 2023, the city registered a 3.2 percent growth in gross domestic product. It generated 406 billion Hong Kong dollars, or \$51.9 billion, worth of retail sales in 2023, up 13.8 percent year-over-year.

Total visitors in the 12 months jumped 2,922.2 percent to 17.2 million people. The Philippines, Japan, South Korea, the U.S., Singapore and Thailand contributed the largest amount of international visitors.

The city's stock market, which is 12 times bigger than that of Singapore, remains the primary gateway for Chinese firms raising global capital.

While the clear regulatory framework also provides a sense of stability for global investors, they may be spooked by the March 19 adoption of a new national security law, adding further provisions to the National Security Law implemented in 2020.

According to the city's lawmakers, the "Article 23" law that comes into effect on Saturday – covering heavy sentences for crimes of espionage, treason, insurrection, threats to national security, external interference in Hong Kong's affairs and theft of state secrets – is meant to bring a level of stability back after the tumultuous pre-pandemic years.

However, the passing of the bill was met with a raft of international criticism aimed at its fast-track process and perceived ambiguity.

Through spokesperson Vedant Patel, the U.S. State Department said it was "alarmed by the sweeping and what we interpret as vaguely defined provisions laid out" that could impact American citizens and interests.

For the European Union, "this also raises questions about Hong Kong's long-term attractiveness as an international business hub," the EU said, citing the law's "sweeping provisions and broad definitions, specifically in relation to

foreign interference and state secrets," its extraterritorial reach and partial retroactive effects.

Structural challenges also remain as Hong Kong still struggles to find its role in retail in the post-pandemic era, according to Gary Ng, senior economist of Asia Pacific at Natixis Corporate and Investment Banking.

"The lost government policy direction does not help much. It means retail sales will probably only grow 3 percent this year as outbound spending will likely be stronger than inbound recovery," Ng said.

All this may leave Hong Kong's crown askew, but that won't keep a major metropolis down, according to the city's industry professionals and creatives.

"To the people who think Hong Kong is finished, I'll just say that it's an international metropolis much like New York City, London, Paris and Tokyo," said Jimmy Chan, founder of fashion consultancy firm Semeiotics. "Whatever problems are happening out there, they're happening here, too, from a slowdown in consumption in general to the ripple effect of conflicts and wars."

In today's rapid-shift geopolitical landscape, the only certainty is that there will be no return to the heady days that Hong Kong enjoyed for almost two decades until China's 2017 slowdown, he said. "If that's the normal [some] are expecting, it's never coming back."

## Local Retailers Fight Back

A year after the city lifted the last of its pandemic-related measures, the Lane Crawford Joyce Group's chairwoman and chief executive officer Jennifer Woo painted the picture of a city "getting back

to what it does well, which is business," with not only tourist numbers up, but also business visitors and even the return of former residents.

"Hong Kong will continue to thrive as one of the world's most dynamic retail cities," she told WWD. "The amount of curiosity and concern for the industry here is equaled by the amount of ambition here and that fuels opportunity."

Despite the challenges, including expensive real estate and short leases, Woo said "the opportunity is the customers – they are a dynamic, curious, growing group of consumers who want the new and the special – and that gives us huge scope to play with in terms of brands, new categories, new concepts, new collaborations."

A diverse and vibrant creative scene supported by investment from a range of actors, public and private, helps generate cross-disciplinary experiences. Take Lane Crawford's collaboration with the Hong Kong Ballet for the retailer's spring 2023 creative campaign, which included a bespoke dance program at its IFC mall flagship.

The city's ambition reaches far beyond finance, extending into fashion and creativity – if you know where to look.

Hong Kong is "a city to keep paying attention to," Woo said. "We have all faced challenges and barriers these past few years and we've had to be more creative; retail is always among those at the forefront of showing off that creativity, so keep watching this space."

## Catching the World's Eye – Again

For Hong Kong, "the challenge is finding its place again because the competition is neighboring cities," said Chan. "We need to define who we are because it's a matter of exports."

Hong Kong's film industry remains its most famous export, but the manufacturing it was once famed for has moved elsewhere, although companies may still be headquartered in the city. Hospitality and shopping have direct competition from the likes of Macau, Shenzhen and even Hainan Island.

The local authority has been investing heavily in bringing global attention back to the city through a cultural lens. Fashion is an integral and highly visible part of that, since "nothing is going to get you as much attention as fashion, with celebrities and people with large followings," added Chan.

Louis Vuitton in November staged its men's pre-fall 2024 collection at Victoria Dockside, overlooking the city's storied waters.

With its 1,200 guests and 560 million views across different platforms and channels, it amounted to "a precious opportunity to promote Hong Kong's brand and international image," said Victor Tsang, head of CreateHK, an office set up to spearhead the development of creative industries in the special administrative region.

"It reinforced the city's cultural vibrancy and its unparalleled charm in attracting mega events of various nature as well as visitors from all over the world," continued Tsang, who also felt it cemented Hong Kong's position as an "East-meets-West center for international cultural exchange."

This is something the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region government is looking to develop further, particularly with the 2022 establishment of a Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau.

Another step in this direction will be CreateHK's expansion into a Cultural and Creative Industry Development Agency. The agency is tasked with boosting the cultural, creative and arts industries, but also the adoption of a cross-sector cultural intellectual property business ecosystem, Tsang said.

Erin Cho, dean of the School of Fashion and Textiles at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, agreed that the city has been recovering from the negative impact of the pandemic.

"The Hong Kong authorities are in the right direction. In the past six months, [they have] indeed seen the value of elevating culture and tourism to boost [the] economy," added Cho, who relocated to Hong Kong in 2022 from The New School in New York, where she was dean of the School for Undergraduate Studies and came to spearhead the fashion and textiles programs at the prestigious Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

Plus, such events "bring glamour and global attention to Hong Kong," she said.

The now-permanently postponed Dior pre-fall show, which was originally scheduled to bring in thousands of guests to witness the spectacle at a venue built inside Kai Tak Airport on Saturday, was set to be one of the few key moments building up to Art Basel Hong Kong week, slated for Wednesday through March 30.

Not hosting what could have been "the event of the century," with Kim Jones expected to bring a more international crowd, was a huge disappointment for the city's fashion community, said Alex Po, cofounder of the Hong Kong-based gender-neutral fashion label Ponderer, one of the 20 brands short-listed for the 11th edition of the LVMH Prize for Young Designers.

"It generated a bit of self-doubt," Po continued. "Something that came up in conversation fairly often lately is whether we would be able to host something as big as Dior or Louis Vuitton."

But there are still many reasons why fashion lovers are expected to visit the city this coming week.

Natalia Vodionova's charity organization Naked Heart Foundation hosted a gala dinner with Adrian Cheng, CEO of New World Development and founder of K11 Group, at Rosewood Hotel on Thursday.

ComplexCon is pressing ahead with its first event in Asia as well, scheduled for Friday to Sunday at AsiaWorld-Expo. Curated by Japanese graphic artist Verdy, the mastermind behind Blackpink's "Born Pink World Tour," the fair will feature a new work from Daniel Arsham, a one-day crash course on "collaboration theory" by Hiroshi Fujiwara's Fragment University, and concerts headlined by 21 Savage, Simon Dominic and Edison Chen.

"We also have Art Basel at the end of this month, along with Complexcon. These are really good platforms that provides many things. Art Basel elevates Hong Kong's visibility in the art scene ▶

Louis Vuitton men's pre-fall 2024 in Hong Kong.





A PabePabe bag designed by Logan Chan.



and everybody's paying attention, and it provides the opportunity for local creative communities to engage with the global audience," said Cho.

But not all industries can expect a windfall, cautioned Chan.

"Unlike transportation and hospitality, retail isn't exactly benefiting from it," he pointed out. "A lot of tourists come to Hong Kong, including many from mainland China, but they are experience-seeking rather than consumption-based."

### Know Its Strengths

According to Po, Hong Kong's far more international status is something its mainland China counterparts like Shanghai and Beijing are unlikely to ever have.

"When you do a big show in China, it's most likely to be just about China, but when you do it in Hong Kong, it has global ramifications," added Po.

Cho agreed that Hong Kong should be confident about the fact that it has played the role of an international center connecting the West and East for more than a century. In 1997, after decades of negotiations, Hong Kong was handed back to China by the U.K. after 156 years of British rule in the former colony.

"It will continue to play that function because of the very simple fact that the infrastructure is here for foreigners like me to contribute all the same functions that I carried out over in the United States. If you compare to other English-speaking Asian countries like the Philippines or Malaysia, Hong Kong's leading position is beyond comparison, the development, openness and internationalization accumulated over so many decades," added Cho.

She acknowledged that it won't be an easy task since there has been a lack of education about what Hong Kong has to offer to the Western world.

In her opinion, the city is "the English-speaking part of [China]," offering an attractive mix of Western and Eastern assets rooted in "synergetic engagement."

"It's the only city that is so perfectly balanced and where you can communicate and get around in a very safe setting," agreed Chan.

### Brewing Local Community

That cultural and economic cross-pollination has also provided a foundation for the formation of a local fashion and creative community, and despite earlier challenges coalesced into a moment of opportunities.

"Back then, the city was a creative platform. People came here for expos or trade fairs. But now, given the amount of

support brands like ours have been getting and the improving living standard of the consumers, there is a real community here," said Po.

"I hang out with other creatives, and I know where the cool things are happening. I don't think it's fully exposed, but there is a culture there that is getting more appreciated by the Hong Kong people of my generation, who care about the quality more than the label," he added.

Cho noted that operating brands in a location like Hong Kong — where top global labels have maximized their retail operations — is key for designers to differentiate themselves from major players.

"For Hong Kong brands to cut through, you have to be very unique," she said, giving the example of 10-year-old menswear label Demo, founded by PolyU graduate Derek Chan.

"It makes you question many things when you look at it [with its mix] of female elements, very decorative, but gender-neutral at the same time. I think that's one way to go if you want to survive here," she continued.

And it's also what is helping these brands reach, say, Paris, where Demo participated in Fashion Farm Foundation's latest Fashion Guerrilla group showcase.

"I don't think any creatives in Hong Kong are solely looking at Hong Kong. They are looking at China, at the U.S., and at Europe," said Semeiotics' Chan.

This opinion was shared by Logan Chan, cofounder of the accessory label PabePabe, which integrates musical instrument elements into bags and showed at the Fashion Farm Foundation showcase. The brand is also receiving government funding to gain exposure in Shanghai.

"The local market for independent creative brands like ours is very small. We focus on developing worldwide as we need a wider range of customers to ensure our sales amount," said the PabePabe cofounder. "In Shanghai, people are very open to trying new things and experimenting with different looks. This inclusivity in fashion is something that Hong Kong is currently lacking."

Po added that generous governmental funding and a network of industry support have also been crucial in providing a friendly environment for the local creative community to flourish.

He felt that the visibility gained by participating in Fashion Asia Hong Kong, a government-led program that invites global industry experts and highlights emerging talent, was a contributing factor to Ponderer's spot on this year's LVMH Prize for Young Designers short list.

It's not the only avenue for exposure and sponsoring. International buyers also come to September's Hong Kong Fashion Week. There are the Design Incubation Program and the Fashion Incubation Program, both sponsored by the Hong Kong Design Center, with bursaries going toward the cost of attending international showrooms, as well as a free studio space, and networking events that can lead to collaborations between creatives.

Others, like the Fashion Farm Foundation, PMQ and FabriX provide substantial support to homegrown talents with a slew of events in London and Paris.

Shin Wong, project director of FabriX, said local designers should be patient and smart, while "understanding their consumers and aligning their creations with what resonates with them to foster customer loyalty."

Wong thinks Hong Kong remains an ideal playground for start-ups like FabriX, with abundant opportunities to connect with potential investors and collaborate with big tech houses from across the globe.

For ComplexCon, the start-up will set up an AR digital kiosk for visitors to virtually try on creations by Abra, Celine Kwan, Chen

## Erin Cho: City Can Bring Change In Fashion Supply Chain

The dean of the School of Fashion and Textiles at Hong Kong Polytechnic University believes technical innovations from the academy offer solid actions around sustainable practices. BY TIANWEI ZHANG

Erin Cho, dean of the School of Fashion and Textiles at Hong Kong Polytechnic University, believes Hong Kong is in a unique position to bring positive change to the fashion supply chain.

A South Korean transplant via New York, where she worked as the dean of the School for Undergraduate Studies at The New School, Cho sees huge potential in the technological advancements that researchers at Hong Kong Polytechnic University have developed hand in hand with real-life demands from Chinese factories.

"The fashion program here is huge. When I was at Parsons [at The New School], it was just the design. Here, I have a huge operation covering materials, production, fiber science, textiles, manufacturing, supply chain, logistics, retailing, digital space, pricing, marketing, as well as design," she said.

In the eyes of Cho, sustainable practices are one area the university can contribute to the most.

"The United States and Europe gave up fiber science and supply chain a long time ago; they moved on to something more sexy. That creates a situation that when they talk about sustainability, it's just talk.

"But here, we can make things different with innovations in sustainable fibers, sustainable materials and wearable technology to reduce waste in the manufacturing process. Just look around your apartment. It is not just garments. Carpet, cushions, curtains and all the things that go inside your building are made of fiber, which is one of the biggest pollutants damaging the planet," she added.

Upcycling textile waste into functional materials has been a key focus at the School of Fashion and Textiles. Cho said this research, which was led by Prof. Shou Dahua, has resulted in the development of materials that are not only highly durable and lightweight but also exhibit flame-resistant properties.

Cho also has made significant contributions in the field of fiber science and materials engineering with the development of the world's first sweatable textile fabric — "Sweatextile" — which enables fast, one-way liquid flow through spatially distributed channels that act like sweating glands while repelling external liquid contaminants.

Working with Uniqlo, the School of Fashion and Textiles has also launched two surveys investigating consumer awareness around sustainable fashion.

With innovations like these, together with China's significant manufacturing capability, Cho thinks it will take decades for fashion academics in Europe or North America to catch up.

And by further leveraging the school's innovations, Cho said she can help "elevate Hong Kong as the place where all these amazing innovations happen with sustainability, making tangible changes and, through that, contribute to society in a meaningful way."

With more than 65 years of history at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, the School of Fashion and Textiles was established as an independent school in 2022. With a team of 50 faculty members, it serves both the local and regional industries.



Peng, Christian Stone, Eden Tan, Feng Chen Wang, Germanier, Mark Gong, Ryunosuke Okazaki, Susan Fang and Windowsen.

There is one final advantage Hong Kong has for its homegrown labels: a growing and wider regional synergy with China.

Not only is the cost of office space and manufacturing in Shenzhen, a 15-minute train ride away across the border, much lower but the Chinese metropolis also has

the skills available. In Hong Kong, skilled garment industry workers are older and closer to retiring.

That sets a new position for Hong Kong in the Greater Bay Area fashion ecosystem, Po said. "Shanghai is a very competitive place where you go and grow and learn. Shenzhen is where you can make your ideas happen. Hong Kong is a way to step into the international market." ■

EYE

# Gary Card Offers Solo Exhibition



An immersive art installation by Gary Card.

- A hero piece of the “People Mountain, People Sea” exhibition is a 15-foot-tall outdoor sculpture.

BY TIANWEI ZHANG

**LONDON** — Gary Card, one of the most in-demand set designers working in the realm of fashion with clients including Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Vivienne Westwood, Dover Street Market and LN-CC, will unveil his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong at the Oil art space in North Point.

Running from Wednesday to July 27, the exhibition, titled “People Mountain, People Sea” — a Chinese idiom describing how crowded a place can get — will feature sculptures, paintings and digital installations created through Card’s mischievous lens with Eastern and Western iconographies morphing into something outlandish yet familiar.

All the paintings were done in his studio in London. The sculptures were designed in London digitally and manufactured in a factory in Dongguan, which is an hour’s drive away from Hong Kong.

A hero piece of the exhibition is a 15-foot-tall outdoor sculpture called “The Dream of Mr Somebody.”

“It’s a riff on a ceramic piece from the 17th century called Mr. Nobody, which was based on a character from a British play,” said Card, who has been working on the project for a year.

“The character was so popular that the ceramic version of him was made in China and sold back to the British. Going back to that shape and doing a modern take on him was exciting,” Card added.

His version has the figure’s body clustered with familiar things that one can easily find in Hong Kong, hence changing the name of no-body — as the original figure was missing a torso, instead having only a head, arms and legs sticking out of his pantaloons — to some-body.

“I keep thinking about this idea called ‘barnacles of time.’ These objects keep globbing themselves onto this character over the years, he becomes something new with every iteration. That’s one of my observations from the last time I was here.

Nothing is taken away from Hong Kong. It’s only layered. I was excited about whether we could work with this idea and make a brand-new piece of work,” Card added.

Having a Hong Kong angle was part of the agreement with Oil, a space under the government-backed Art Promotion Office, to support Card’s first solo exhibition outside of the U.K.

“A lot of what I’ve been working on is trying to bring a lot of the landscape and the materiality of Hong Kong into the sculptures and paintings. I wanted to make something that a Hong Kong audience might recognize, but maybe give that audience something that they know but with a completely different feeling.

“I think there is an audience here for me. I think people are a lot more receptive to the kind of work that I do here. I think I share a similar love for stuff in Hong Kong in particular. That’s why I feel at home here so much. The show is my love letter to China,” Card said.

Inside the gallery space, converted from a historic yacht club clubhouse first opened in 1908, Card will also present his take on an immersive art installation, a series of large “encrusted” sculptures and paintings, as well as his past sculptural work and research material that informed the solo showcase.

For the immersive piece, Card said it served as a nod to his heritage working in the fashion industry.

“I wanted to make something that wasn’t a traditional immersive experience. I wanted to do something where I elevate



Sculptures by Gary Card.

Gary Card



banal objects like buckets and hair dryers. But within the context of this kaleidoscope of moving objects, they suddenly become fascinating and theatrical,” he added.

For those on a budget wanting to take a slice of his art home, Card has developed a toy called “Sad Sack” that he has been developing with Unbox Industries. It will launch with Amaz by Lokianno at K11 Musea on Friday.

Deep down, Card said the exhibition serves as a personal exploration of his relationship with an oversupply of objects.

“I have surrounded myself with objects since I was a child. I’m buried in stuff at home. I also feel sometimes that I am trapped by my material objects. My job as a set designer is selling goods to people. So it’s a career that sometimes makes me feel a little uneasy. With my art, I discuss that and put it on its head.

“I think this exhibition presents a juxtaposition between things that you might consider sacred and things that you might consider disposable. I’m interested in the relationship between those objects and if the sacred and the disposable can live in harmony together and make something new,” Card explained.

Overall, Card said he is pivoting toward making more art and being more selective about his fashion commissions.

“I’ve enjoyed a fantastic career as a set designer over the last 20 years. When I started, it was about trying to get some of my art ideas into fashion campaigns and editorials. I’d like to think I had a lot of success. But it was still at the service of selling something or at the mercy of the magazine or the company I was working with. As much as I’ve loved my job, I’ve

craved the opportunity to explore my completely unadulterated vision, and that’s what I’m excited about doing at the moment,” added Card.

Hong Kong could be a turning point for his global art career. Previously, Card has hosted several solo exhibitions in the U.K., and curated “Hysterical” an immersive exhibition at Phillips Gallery in Mayfair, London, in 2019. Last year his pieces were featured in Nanzuka Underground’s “Art as Diversity” group show at Tokyo Gendai.

As the exhibition opens its doors in Hong Kong, Card’s other major work of 2024 will also be unveiled at the multibrand concept store LN-CC in Hackney, London, the same week.

Over two years in the making, Card was given a healthy budget to reimagine the retail space for the third time.

“The first couple of times, it was me and my dad building it. There was a lot of stuff that was fairly janky. This time, we gutted it and completely turned it on its head. It still has the same heritage. There are nods to the original LN-CC. We’ve been allowed to make truly luxury spaces with banging sound systems, proper security and air conditioning,” Card said.

Following the Hong Kong debut, the Bournemouth-born Card said he hopes the exhibition can go on tour to cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

“We have been talking to some people, so that might happen. The sky’s the limit at the moment,” Card said.



“The Dream of Mr Somebody” by Gary Card.

# ART BASEL HONG KONG PREVIEW



EYE

## What to Do in and Around Art Basel



A view of the Hong Kong skyline from a corner suite at Regent Hong Kong.



Male and female court garments and jewelry in the Illuminata exhibition.

● WWD's picks include a room with an unparalleled view of the skyline, an AI-powered app that guides you to your next favorite artist and a virtual try-on kiosk with digital garments by emerging talents.

BY TIANWEI ZHANG AND LILY TEMPLETON

**With ComplexCon and Art Basel** kicking off Hong Kong's busy spring social calendar, drawing high flyers from around the world to the global financial hub, the city's creative, culture and hospitality sectors are ready to offer visitors experiences that could make them want to come back for more.

Here, WWD rounds up the latest things to see, as well as exciting places to shop, stay and rewind.

**Hotel With an Unparalleled View**  
Sited on the edge of Victoria Harbor in Tsim Sha Tsui, the renovated Regent Hong Kong – formerly operated under the Intercontinental brand – comes with some of the best views of the city's iconic skyline. Its seafont-facing lobby lounge, which has been a high-tea hot spot for decades, has been given an understated and tasteful overhaul with high ceilings and curved glass walls. The hotel also comes with a slew of fine-dining options, including a cigar bar, a steak house, a new branch of Nobu and the Cantonese cuisine specialist Lai Ching Heen.

**A Quarter of a Century of Original Oakley Design at K11 Musea**  
Peter Yee, Oakley's former vice president of design, will host an exhibition spotlighting 25 years of his designs for the brand at

Adrian Cheng's high-end retail complex K11 Musea. Powered by the 3D-based phygital platform Spin.Fashion, the exhibition, which will run from March 28 to April 28, will leverage Web3 technologies, showing never-before-seen sketches, prototypes, and limited-edition eyewear and watches from the golden age of Oakley.

**Also at K11 Musea, 300 Years Of Jewels and Craftsmanship At Van Cleef & Arpels**  
Another exhibit to explore at K11 Musea is "An Eye for Beauty, the Illuminata Jewelry Collection" by Van Cleef & Arpels' L'École school of jewelry arts, open until March 31. Shown for the first time are some 50 pieces of European and Chinese jewelry from a local connoisseur's private collection, which spans three centuries and ranges from a portable chest in huanghuali wood from the late Ming dynasty and Qing court jewels to a silver-and-gold bracelet of curling cabochon garnets outlined with minute diamonds from the 1840s to aluminum ear clips by JAR.

**Front Row Experience at Rosewood Hong Kong**  
To celebrate its fifth anniversary, Rosewood Hong Kong is offering a 12-day program called "Rosewood Front Row," showcasing its excellence in food, art and design, culture and wellness. It includes an art-focused conversation with the visual art museum M+ featuring speakers like architects Piet Boon, and Roco Yim, and artist Frederik Molenschot; a private yacht transfer from the hotel to the Art Basel venue; culinary collaborations between the Michelin-starred Brat and the hotel's steak house Henry, as well as the Mumbai fine-dining restaurant Masque with Rosewood's



Keiichi Tanaami with a surfboard he designed for Parley for the Oceans.

Dedicated to protecting the oceans for life without plastic pollution, climate change and biodiversity loss, the program will see Parley's Global Cleanup Network collect one pound of plastic for every \$1 donated. During the fair, Parley will curate a space that showcases data underscoring the beauty and fragility of the oceans, as well as Parley's collaborations with artists such as Keiichi Tanaami, Ed Ruscha, Jenny Holzer, Katharina Grosse, Pipilotti Rist and Doug Aitken.

**Street and Fashion Collide at ComplexCon Hong Kong**  
Pop culture fair ComplexCon will bring its first event in Asia to AsiaWorld-Expo from Friday to Sunday. Curated by Japanese graphic artist Verdy, the mastermind behind Blackpink's "Born Pink World" tour, the fair will feature a FabriX AR digital kiosk for visitors to try on virtual fashion creations by Abra, Celine Kwan, Chen Peng, Christian Stone, Eden Tan, Feng Chen Wang, Germanier, Mark Gong, Ryunosuke Okazaki, Susan Fang and Windowsen. It will also include a new work from Daniel Arsham, a one-day crash course on "collaboration theory" by Hiroshi Fujiwara's Fragment University, and concerts headlined by 21 Savage, Simon Dominic, Edison Chen and many more.

**Gary Card Presents "People Mountain, People Sea" at Oi!**  
Gary Card, one of the most in-demand set designers working in the realm of fashion with clients including Louis Vuitton, Hermès, Vivienne Westwood, Dover Street Market and LN-CC, has unveiled his first solo exhibition in Hong Kong at the Oi! art space in North Point. Running until July 27, the exhibition, titled "People Mountain, People Sea" – a Chinese idiom describing how crowded a place can get – will feature sculptures, paintings and digital installations created through Card's mischievous lens with Eastern and Western iconographies morphing into something outlandish yet familiar.

**Have an Art Adviser in Your Pocket**  
Feeling lost among the nearly endless selection of galleries and booths available in town? That's what AI-powered app Docent seeks to solve, with a platform cofounders Hélène Nguyen-Ban and Mathieu Rosenbaum aim to make as easy and straightforward to use as, say, Spotify. For Art Basel Hong Kong, Docent is giving exclusive access to preview artworks from its partner galleries showing at the fair, including Balice Hertling, Carlos/Ishikawa, Fitzpatrick Gallery and Nova Contemporary. It is also supporting the five-artist exhibition "And the Safe Spots Become Impassable," curated by Ethan Yip and Yisi Li.

The platform will be the exclusive online partner of the debut edition of Supper Club Hong Kong, a five-day event held at the Grade 1 heritage site Fringe Club. With 20 galleries from the region and abroad, the program will include live performances and panel talks as well as experiential presentations curated by Hong Kong-based cultural specialist Anqi Li. Docent is available on iOS.

own buzzy Indian restaurant Chaat, and the launch of celebrity stylist Rossano Ferretti's namesake hair spa at the hotel's wellness center Asaya.

**Kasing Lung at Landmark**  
Upscale shopping mall Landmark will present a solo art exhibition and retail concept by the Hong Kong-born artist Kasing Lung on March 26. Taking over the mall's atrium, the showcase will include cutout motifs of Lung's characters, and 25 new paintings – some almost 6 feet tall. On the basement level, called Belowground, there will be an extensive retrospective display of the artist's works, including more than 120 sketches, drawings, and sculptures, as well as Lung's collaborations with brands such as Globe-Trotter, Vans, RetaW Fragrance and Hidden NY.

**Pearl Lam Does Maggi Hambling**  
Two never-before-seen series of paintings by British artist Maggi Hambling, which showcase the lasting influence of Chinese ink drawings on Hambling's career, will be unveiled in an upcoming exhibition called "The Night" at Pearl Lam Galleries' location in Hong Kong. Known for her rebellious spirit and outspokenness, Hambling will also present a selection of new sculptures and a new Wall of Water painting for the occasion.

**Art for the Oceans**  
Parley for the Oceans, the nonprofit environmental organization that focuses on the protection of the oceans, will promote its global fundraising initiative titled "Art for the Oceans" at Art Basel Hong Kong.



The Rosewood Front Row campaign.

## BUSINESS

# Who's the Aspirational Luxury Consumer? Many Different People



Here and left:  
Street style at  
New York Fashion  
Week fall 2024.



## ● A new McKinsey & Company study delivers identikit.

BY MARTINO CARRERA  
PHOTOGRAPHS BY SOPHIE SAHARA

**MILAN** — There is no size fits all when it comes to the aspirational luxury consumer.

A cluster of spenders who both helped fuel the luxury boom post-pandemic but then contributed to its stall as they cut back spending, resulting in lower sales growth for major brands, the aspirational luxury consumer is many different people.

A study presented by consultancy McKinsey & Company on Wednesday here as part of the sophomore edition of Zalando's "Changemakers in Luxury Fashion" conference organized in partnership with Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana, provided multiple ID cards.

In practical terms, Lena-Sophie Roeser, general manager, designer, at Zalando, noted how a fiftysomething, Switzerland-based, male customer buying heritage designer goods on the platform and a Germany-based woman in her 20s who's a fan of up-and-coming designer names and British luxury brands are both equally valuable to the e-tailer's strategy. They both spend 30,000 euros a year on Zalando.

She would define both as aspirational luxury consumers and said the cohort has been consistently growing year-over-year for the German e-commerce site.

The McKinsey study tried to unpack the complexity and differences within that cohort. It noted that different brands the consultancy polled offered, themselves, a broad set of perspectives and descriptions as to who the aspirational luxury consumer is.

Contrary to the common view, McKinsey said, aspirational luxury consumers are not all under 30 or living

outside Europe or the U.S.

The baseline for the research were customers who have consistently purchased at least one luxury item a year, spending 10,000 euros on average each year on luxury goods among apparel, beauty, leather goods, jewelry, watches and accessories.

Gemma D'Auria, senior partner at McKinsey, highlighted that this multipronged cluster of consumers is key to the luxury industry in that it represents 18 percent of its market value, or 273 billion euros. The study analyzed seven key markets including the U.S. as well as China, Italy, France, Germany, the U.K. and Switzerland.

The cohort has different tastes, financial resources, purchasing habits, inclination to become a true luxury consumer and different ages and backgrounds. McKinsey clustered them within five groups.

- Status seekers make up 39 percent of the overall aspirational luxury consumer and contrary to the group's name, only one third of them shop for loud logoed goods. But the majority is looking at luxury products as passkeys for recognition and a sense of belonging. The cluster is best represented by young adults in China, as well as, to some extent, in Europe and the U.S., D'Auria explained.
- Quality seekers 40 and older customers, homeowners with less inclination to overspend on fashion (their average yearly spend is 3,000 euros) and largely driven by sustainability, with 85 percent of them

favoring sustainable brands over non eco-minded labels. They represent 26 percent of the entire aspirational luxury consumer population and are mainly based out of Europe and the U.S., the study said.

- Socialite spenders account for 24 percent of aspirational luxury consumers. With an average yearly spend higher than all other clusters, they are the least loyal segment, buying as many as eight different brands per year compared to the median four for the overall cohort. They are concentrated in Europe and the U.S. and a lot less in China. D'Auria noted that this cluster is often unconsciously picked up by fashion and luxury brands when asked to describe who the aspirational luxury consumer is.
- Timeless chic are loyal aspirational customers, often returning to the same loved brands for apparel as well as leather goods. They are the tiniest group, making up only 6 percent of the global community of aspirational luxury consumers and are evenly distributed between Europe and the U.S., with little to no relevance in China.
- Mindful minimalists are mature spenders who frequently buy online, focusing on the functional side of luxury goods, their number-one go-to product category being beauty, followed by apparel.

One overarching difference the study highlighted is the likelihood of these different clusters to transition to proper luxury consumer status. The wallet

size of the different aspirational luxury segments is very different, the study said, highlighting how timeless chic, socialite spenders and status seekers are the most inclined to evolve into luxury consumers.

"One of the things that is a key to this piece of work is that you cannot have a one-size-fits-all strategy for aspirational luxury consumers. And it's much more about a made-to-measure approach to them, based on not only where they shop or the channel they use, but also the categories they're most interested in," D'Auria said. "One of the things that came out from the research is that brand loyalty is actually not particularly strong for anybody — except for the timeless chic segment — and so there is a real push to say how do you personalize and use advanced analytics, AI, Gen AI to actually personalize customer journeys that can make them much more loyal, and more likely to buy from you now that they're aspirational luxury consumers and want to become proper luxury consumers," she added.

The study presentation was followed by talks with changemakers. They included designer Simon Porte Jacquemus for disruptive communication; Alfonso Dolce, chief executive officer of Dolce & Gabbana, for craftsmanship; Simone Marchetti, Vanity Fair European editorial director and Vanity Fair Italia editor in chief, in conversation with journalist Marilena Delli for value, as well as Renzo Rosso, founder and chairman of OTB Group, and David Fischer, founder and CEO of Highsnobity, for innovation.

Toni Belloni



# LVMH Shuffles Top Execs

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Arnault has shown no indication that he intends to retire. In 2022, LVMH shareholders voted in favor of a resolution to extend to 80 the age limit for him to serve as CEO. Previously, the company's bylaws fixed 75 as the age limit.

The LVMH boss had hinted at a new role for Bianchi at the press conference in January where the group reported another year of record results.

"Since joining the group, Stéphane Bianchi has demonstrated rare leadership and management qualities while immersing himself in the group's entrepreneurial and family culture," Arnault said in Thursday's statement.

While LVMH is known for growing and grooming executive talent from within, Bianchi spent a large portion of his career at the Yves Rocher Group, where he was CEO from 1998 to 2015, directly managing the Yves Rocher and Petit Bateau brands.

At LVMH, he initially focused on the watch maisons Tag Heuer, Hublot and Zenith, gradually adding the jewelry houses Tiffany, Bulgari, Chaumet, Fred and Repossi to his remit. LVMH did not name anyone to replace him in that position.

"I am delighted by his new role and am convinced that with Stéphane at my side, and with the entire executive committee and the group's employees, we will take the success of the LVMH Group even further, while respecting our values and commitments," Arnault said.

He credited Belloni with being instrumental to the growth of LVMH, which last year became the first European company to reach a \$500 billion market value.

"Toni has been an essential partner for me and a very important member of the

LVMH family. I would like to thank Toni for his exceptional contribution over the last few years," Arnault said.

"Inspiring, curious and unfailingly loyal, he has participated in all the acquisitions of recent years and has supported the growth of the group and its teams with agility and pragmatism. His vision of luxury, of the markets, and his work with our teams have been considerable assets," he added.

Belloni joined the French luxury giant in 2001 after a 22-year career at Procter & Gamble. He is widely credited with engineering the strategy that saw LVMH focus resources on star brands, while tailoring new strategies for the individual businesses.

He has also played a key role in dealmaking, including LVMH's \$16.2 billion acquisition of storied American jeweler Tiffany in 2019, its largest purchase to date.

"Never a dull moment!" Belloni said in summing up his tenure at the group.

"As I step down from my current role, I realize how fortunate I have been to play a leadership role at the heart of one of the most extraordinary entrepreneurial ventures of recent decades. I would like to thank Mr. Arnault most sincerely for the opportunity he has given me, and even more so for the trust he has always placed in me," he added.

"Working alongside him has been a unique, stimulating experience, full of challenges and learning, with exemplarity as my compass," he said. "We have achieved excellent results, always respecting our values and supporting numerous initiatives for the benefit of the greatest number of people. It is now up to Stéphane to take us even further."

Stéphane Bianchi



A graduate of the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris, Bianchi started out as a consultant at Arthur Andersen. He described his first five years with LVMH as "rich, exciting and demanding," as he pledged to "always and relentlessly" strengthen its success.



Bernard Arnault with Toni Belloni.

"By joining the LVMH group at the end of 2018, I made the choice to join a family group, chaired and led by a visionary man, and carrying values to which I am deeply committed: legacy, long-term vision, timeless desirability of our maisons and products, and a permanent quest for excellence in all our actions," he said.

LVMH said the board of directors meeting on April 18 would also be asked to appoint Chinese American businesswoman and lawyer Wei Sun Christianson as a director. Christianson has a lengthy career in finance, serving as CEO China and co-CEO, Asia Pacific, for Morgan Stanley, where she worked for close to 20 years.

"Wei Sun Christianson's financial culture, her understanding of the luxury goods market and above all her in-depth and invaluable knowledge of China will be invaluable assets for the board of directors," Arnault said.

## BUSINESS

# Home, Garden and Furniture Retail Poised for Transformation

The home goods sector is poised for growth.



● BigCommerce's Meghan Stabler explores the challenges and emerging trends in the sector.

BY ARTHUR ZACZKIEWICZ

**Similar to other retail segments**, home, garden and furniture was changed by the pandemic as consumers shifted to online channels. Today, while the pace of online growth has slowed, consumer preferences call for a true omnichannel experience, which is challenging for retailers and brands to deliver.

But new technologies are making it easier. Moreover, technologies such as augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), as well as AI-powered solutions, are transforming the shopping experience. Here, Meghan Stabler, senior vice president of marketing at BigCommerce, discusses these trends as well as the key findings of a recent BigCommerce report on the home, garden and furniture sector.

**WWD: What are the challenges facing retailers and brands in the home and garden sector?**

**Meghan Stabler:** The home, garden and furniture sector is not immune to challenges facing the retail industry as a whole. This growing sector is at a critical juncture, trying to balance the post-pandemic return of customers to physical stores with the fast-paced changes in online and mobile commerce.

The act of shopping has entirely changed in recent years. In the past, the product was the central element of the shopping experience, with consumers on a quest to find it. Today, however, the consumer is at the heart of the process, with retailers striving to present the perfect product in a way that best resonates with the shopper.

What does this mean for the home, garden and furniture industry? Retailers are being forced to completely rethink their commerce strategy. From the proliferation of third-party marketplaces to the rapid adoption of buy online,

pick up in store and curbside pickup, they're being asked to create a frictionless omnichannel shopping experience that bridges the gap between online, mobile and in-person shopping in record speed.

This challenge, coupled with the need to adopt and integrate the rapidly evolving technology that consumers have come to expect, demands a degree of flexibility and agility that many traditional brick-and-mortar retailers in this sector are not accustomed to.

At BigCommerce, we witness this daily. Retailers are demanding a platform that is both flexible and adaptable, allowing them to engage with shoppers wherever they are. Our open, composable platform stands out in the competitive retail landscape by providing the flexibility, customization and openness needed to drive innovation and boost sales at every growth stage.

**WWD: What are some of the key takeaways of the report?**

**M.S.:** As a leading e-commerce platform, BigCommerce has been working with major names in the home, garden and furniture sectors like Chair King Backyard Store and Burrow for years.

The 2024 Global Ecommerce Report: Home, Garden and Furniture dives into BigCommerce's global data, comparing it year-over-year to glean insights on the industry as a whole.

Two dominant themes are interwoven throughout this report: the resilience of the home, garden and furniture sector despite a turbulent year and the sector's ability to quickly understand and adapt to the evolving behaviors of its customers.

It's widely recognized that the home, garden and furniture sector grew significantly due to the surge in home renovation projects during the pandemic. A study by Harvard University revealed that while the U.S. economy contracted by 3.5 percent in 2020, spending on home improvements and repairs rose by more than 3 percent, reaching nearly \$420 billion. Despite slowing a bit after the pandemic, growth in this sector continues to be on

the rise. BigCommerce's home, garden and furniture brands and retailers globally saw a 3.25 percent increase in 2023 gross merchandise value (GMV) compared to 2022.

Interestingly, these businesses saw a 7.9 percent increase in global average order value (AOV), despite experiencing a 4.3 percent decline in total number of orders placed. That means people were making fewer purchases but still spending more per order.

Consumers' reluctance to "buy now" is not entirely surprising considering the backdrop of 2023's high inflation and home interest rates, which led consumers to reduce their discretionary spending. However, the rise in AOV is not solely due to price adjustments for rising costs. The real story is the lengths retailers went to increase AOV by understanding and adapting to shifting consumer behavior.

Take the surge of flexible payment options as an example. With a growth of \$23.22 billion in 2022 to \$30.38 billion in 2023, the rapid adoption of flexible payment options by e-commerce retailers suggests that buy now, pay later (BNPL) options are not only popular, but a prerequisite for many customers. As shoppers navigate through financial uncertainties, offering them the opportunity to spread payments over time eases their minds when making purchases, often leading to bigger ticket purchases.

While not touched on in the report, another tactic retailers are employing to boost conversions among budget-conscious consumers is the widespread adoption of loyalty programs. By offering customers immediate discounts in return for valuable data, retailers can drive sales by tailoring outbound promotions through retargeting ads, SMS texting and email campaigns.

**WWD: What trends do you see emerging this year and what opportunities do they present for the second half?**

**M.S.:** From generative AI to augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR), it's clear that the trends shaping the home,



garden and furniture industry are largely driven by rapidly advancing technology. The opportunity for retailers in this sector hinges on their ability to harness this technology to drive conversions through more precise targeting and immersive, personalized experiences for consumers.

The first opportunity for retailers to consider is to leverage AI to drive a more effective omnichannel data strategy. Over the last year, the omnichannel data approach made its debut, turbocharging existing omnichannel strategies that brands and retailers rely on to connect with savvy online shoppers and to stay competitive.

This year, new technologies such as AI will bolster the omnichannel model into a data feed management powerhouse giving retailers a new way to drive better ad performance and sell more products. This is especially critical in a sector like home, garden and furniture, where product catalogs are syndicated to dozens of third-party marketplaces and social channels.

Houzer, one of the largest suppliers of luxury kitchen sinks and faucets in the U.S., turbocharged its omnichannel growth with AI-powered technology from data feed optimization company Feedonomics, a BigCommerce subsidiary. Houzer was able to improve the accuracy of its syndicated product catalogs, resulting in a 47 percent increase in conversion rate, 150 percent increase in transactions and a 118 percent increase in revenue.

Another opportunity is leaning into AR and VR to elevate customer engagement. These technological advancements are revolutionizing the online shopping journey by providing an immersive experience for customers, while allowing retailers to seamlessly connect the physical and digital retail environments.

The home and garden sector is no stranger to this technology, with a Statista study revealing that 35 percent of shoppers aged 18 to 34 utilize AR/VR features to purchase furniture. By incorporating virtual showrooms that allow shoppers to envision products in their own homes, they move one step closer to making a purchase – as well as decreasing the risk the shopper will return the item later.

Lastly, when assessing emerging technology, don't overlook the impact of generative AI on enhancing personalization. Companies like Kleu use AI to strategically merchandise items, generate personalized product recommendations and enhance search capabilities based on a shopper's site interaction.

Overall, it can be challenging to determine which of the rapidly emerging technologies to invest valuable time and resources in. Home, garden and furniture retailers need to ask themselves – does this technology put the customer at the center of the shopping experience, and then prioritize their investments accordingly.



## Business Insights



Sixty-seven percent of Millennials and Generation Z respondents said that they are interested in traveling for sporting events in 2024.

### BUSINESS

# Gen Z and Millennials Are Traveling to Attend Sporting Events

- The rise of sports tourism in major global cities has become a new consumer behavior trend.

BY KANIKA TALWAR

With a rise in consumer behavior mindset shifting toward spending money on experiences over product purchases, American Express' new study, "2024 Global Travel Trends Report" gives a glimpse inside the newest travel trends for the year.

The survey polled more than 2,000 U.S. adults, more than 1,000 Australian adults, more than 1,000 Canadian adults, more

than 1,000 U.K. adults, more than 1,000 Japanese adults, more than 1,000 Mexican adults and more than 1,000 Indian adults – with consumers who make at least \$50,000 a year, or country equivalent, and who typically travel at least once a year.

One trend that has taken off significantly is sports tourism. Attending athletic events is nothing new, but planning trips around major sporting competitions or following a beloved team or sport has seen a meteoric rise, especially among younger generations post-pandemic. In tandem, sports documentaries such as Netflix's "Drive to Survive," "Full Swing," "Breakpoint" and Zendaya and Joshua

O'Connor's new tennis movie directed by Luca Guadagnino, "Challengers" have also provided consumers with a continued surge in interest.

Overwhelmingly, 71 percent of respondents report they are into sports and consider themselves a "huge" or casual fan. Sixty-seven percent of Millennials and Generation Z respondents said that they are interested in traveling for sporting events in 2024. Of the sports, 58 percent of all respondents identified that soccer, basketball and Formula 1 racing remain the most favored they are traveling for in 2024.

The Amex report's authors point to consumers going the extra mile for

attending events this year – with 75 percent of respondents planning on attending a sports event stating that they will spend at least three hours traveling there. Top consumer reasonings for doing so include watching their favorite sports teams in person (35 percent), witnessing a big sports or cultural event (34 percent) and seeing a favorite athlete (20 percent).

Top destinations for sports travel include Miami, with the Miami Grand Prix in May and Miami Heat basketball games, New York with Knicks basketball games, Paris, with Paris Saint Germain soccer games and the 2024 Summer Olympics, and Las Vegas, with the Las Vegas Grand Prix in November and Las Vegas Raiders football games.

"In the past few years, Las Vegas has become an even more sought-after destination due to the growing prevalence of professional sports – giving us an even greater opportunity to focus on luxury, experience-based travel," said Steve Weitman, president of Wynn and Encore Las Vegas. "Iconic sports moments continue to come to life in Las Vegas, with no signs of slowing down."

The report goes on to find that 77 percent of people surveyed care more about having the right travel experience, as opposed to the total cost of the trip. With this in mind and seeing how consumers continue to value one-of-a-kind experiences, American Express Presents Carbone Beach has also recently announced its third year of the Major Food Group-owned beachside supper club for four nights during the Miami Grand Prix.

"Over the past few years we've seen a growing popularity of sports fans, with more ways to access games, and a continued craving for community and live experiences," Audrey Hendley told WWD. "Our '2024 Global Travel Trends Report' shows that Millennial and Gen Z respondents are interested in planning entire trips around watching sporting events and seeing their favorite teams and players in person."

### BUSINESS

# Cart.com Launches Constellation AI

- The machine learning capabilities will be integrated across an existing suite of software and logistics solutions.

BY ALEXANDRA PASTORE

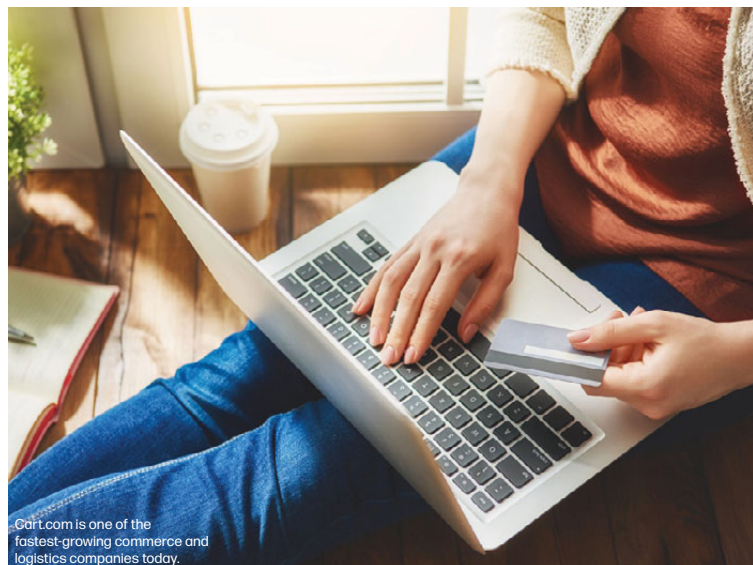
Quickly following the launch of its Constellation Order Management System (OMS), which was announced at the end of February, Cart.com has added the integration of Constellation AI, a new suite of AI features that will be embedded across its software, services and logistic technologies.

At just under four years old, the Austin-based company has gained attention as one of the fastest-growing commerce and logistics companies with more than 6,000 brands currently on its platform. Cart.com's solutions enable merchants to sell and fulfill wherever the consumer is and has been investing in making the physical and digital infrastructure that unifies operations across channels to make it

easier for omnichannel merchants.

With the addition of Constellation AI, Cart.com aims to not only make selling and listing products more efficient but also deliver enhanced forecasting to drive informed inventory planning. Using Constellation AI, Cart.com partners will be able to leverage machine learning algorithms, predictive modeling and generative AI through the introduction of Constellation AI's five key capabilities.

The first capability is new sales channel identification will identify new sales channels with growth opportunities based on current product offerings. Second, the AI will generate and optimize product titles, descriptions and product attributes and translations through proprietary language models for commerce. Third, intelligent repricing will automate prices with machine learning to optimize sales across marketplace channels. Fourth, AI-powered demand forecasting will provide data on future demand of sku and sales channel levels. Last, the AI will determine inventory order and placement optimization.



Cart.com is one of the fastest-growing commerce and logistics companies today.

As Cart.com continues to weave AI into commerce for merchant's realized potential, Omair Tariq, founder and chief executive officer of Cart.com, said, "By harnessing the power of data and AI across the full commerce value

chain, we are taking the guesswork out of marketing products and managing inventory. We're excited to see how our continued investment in new AI capabilities will deliver value to our entire customer base."

## BUSINESS

# Outdoor Voices Bankruptcy Imminent, According to Insiders

● After shuttering all of its stores on Sunday, Outdoor Voices is headed for bankruptcy, employees say.

BY KATE NISHIMURA

Outdoor Voices is barreling toward bankruptcy, according to former employees terminated in mass corporate and retail layoffs last week.

The fallen women's athletic apparel brand reportedly plans to file for an Assignment for the Benefit of Creditors – a state-governed insolvency proceeding that keeps the issue out of the courts, and often results in a speedier liquidation of assets than other bankruptcy filings – within the coming weeks.

Four former employees at the brand's Austin headquarters, who spoke with Sourcing Journal on the condition of anonymity, said the company's well-documented cash-flow issues have caught up to it. Outdoor Voices stopped paying a number of its vendors, including its apparel and accessories producers, and neglected to pay rent on some of its nationwide stores for months, according to those employees.

Insolvency has all but overtaken the flagging business, they said. In dramatic fashion last Tuesday, the majority of the 50- to 60-person corporate workforce was laid off, with less than a dozen roles preserved to deal with the forthcoming liquidation. Team members said they were pulled into Zoom meetings with human resources and told that their positions had been terminated, effective immediately. Some were told that bankruptcy was imminent.

HR also told those impacted by the layoffs that they wouldn't be receiving severance or payouts for their unused paid time off – a position that was reversed this week. On Monday, former employees were told that paying out vacation days had always been the brand's intention.

After the Austin terminations, the company dropped the hammer on its national retail employees, telling them Outdoor Voices' 16 stores across cities like Boston, San Francisco, Miami, Chicago, Minneapolis, Scottsdale, Denver and Atlanta would be closing by the end of the week. They, too, would be denied severance, they were told – but they would also be expected to work through Sunday to push as much deeply discounted merchandise out the door as possible.

Some stores stayed open until the bitter end, while others, like the Houston location at Heights Mercantile, took a stand. On Friday, a note on the store's door informed shoppers that the location would be closing early. "We don't care how far you drove. We are tired, jobless & over this," it said.

An employee at the brand's Charlotte, N.C., store told Sourcing Journal there had been rumblings of trouble before the announcement. The brand's Nashville and Philadelphia stores were shuttered abruptly in January, with corporate liaisons citing "issues with landlords and leases" as the reason for the closures.

Meanwhile, the fourth quarter of 2023 had been peppered with blowout sales that felt like more than the typical holiday rush, the store associate said. Corporate quelled questions from managers with the explanation that the brand was switching factories and wanted to make room for

new product. As recently as last week, store staff were receiving shipments of spring apparel, and were working to organize community events like run clubs.

At headquarters, though, former employees said an air of instability persisted for months.

Outdoor Voices' decline began in earnest years ago, with upper-level mismanagement contributing to debts the company is still working to pay off. Offices filled with extravagances, expensive photo shoots and exotic press events were window dressings that hid a culture widely described as toxic and dysfunctional. Even after founder Ty Haney's departure from the brand in 2020, the onetime direct-to-consumer darling has been unable to shake that reputation – or sort out its balance sheet.

"The books are bad – that's what some people would say," a former corporate employee said.

Lunya founder Ashley Merrill was brought on to the company's board following Haney's exit, and has taken much of the heat for the past week's fallout. The sleepwear entrepreneur took on the role of interim chief executive officer last fall, replacing CEO Gabrielle Conforti, who joined Outdoor Voices three years ago.

One former employee said her understanding was that Merrill already owned a large stake in the athleticwear brand, but "pretty much bought out everyone else" around mid-November. "She was like, 'I essentially outright own this company now,'" she said.

Merrill told employees at an all-hands meeting in early December that her first priority was fundraising. "She said in that meeting that we should feel secure in our jobs," she added. "She was, I think, implying that she could financially sustain us until we got there" – "there" being safe in the good graces of another investor or lender.

"It had been a little like sketchy up until then – we were getting [vendors] reaching out to us about not paying them, and our credit cards were turned off," the former employee said. "It almost felt like, when [Merrill] came on, that the worst was behind us."

"She made it seem like everything disappeared – she would constantly be like, 'I was the one who paid all the debts off for the company,'" she added.

But the new executive's presence also brought fresh anxieties. Described by multiple terminated team members as "reactionary" and "impulsive," one of Merrill's first moves as co-CEO was to kill Outdoor Voices' size-inclusive range, which currently extends to size XXXL. Designs beyond the already produced seasons would only go up to size XL, she decided in early December. She commissioned reshoots of campaigns that had already been photographed with models of her choice, all within the new size range.

Moving forward, Merrill insisted that all new designs should be fit to her body, according to the former employees. She allegedly came to the office on Feb. 8 for a product review with about 20 to 30 members of the corporate team, some of whom attended virtually, and modeled the garments in a session that left employees "speechless" and "uncomfortable." Several reported the incident to HR.

Merrill's disruptions to the product line also resulted in a backlog of work that put



Outdoor Voices' Boston location, which closed on Sunday.

the team behind schedule, the sources said. "You have someone who's making you work extra hours...and you're essentially doubling the calendar when you have to redo the whole line for them," one added.

Meanwhile, the bills still weren't getting paid.

Another former employee described opening an invoice from Meta for the brand's Instagram and Facebook pages. "It was for half-a-million dollars, and no one was in the office to open it, to receive it, to look at it."

"If anyone was a contractor, they were not getting paid on time," the source said. "We would be missing invoices by months. People needed to pay their bills, and we weren't fulfilling their invoices."

Merrill hadn't paid off the company's debts either, as it turned out – she was trying to have them diminished. "She was negotiating all the debts down, and what that meant was she was asking our suppliers to absorb some of that debt," she added. "And I do know that in those meetings [with vendors], the tone literally was, 'We'll pay you or we won't – you'll take this or get nothing at all.'"

Despite the abundance of evidence to the contrary, many employees thought the brand might still pull through under Merrill's direction – that a Hail Mary was still in the works. So the utter dismantling of the brand came as a gut punch for many.

As reported by Sourcing Journal, Outdoor Voices did not file Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notifications in any of the states in which it operates, a requirement of employers with 100 or more employees that are planning mass layoffs. Rick Ostrove, principal trial counsel for Leeds Brown Law, P.C., who specializes in employment law, said the company likely consulted with counsel before the terminations to ensure that they "kept enough [workers] to be under the WARN notice requirement."

"There are exceptions to the WARN Act, and I don't know what exception they're relying on, but it would be extremely unlikely that they would have a mass termination without consulting counsel and getting comfortable that they were in the scope of an exception," added Jeffrey Chubak, an associate at Amini LLC focused on bankruptcy, creditors' rights and commercial litigation.

The law's nuances may have worked in the brand's favor. While Outdoor Voices did employ more than 100 employees nationally, they were only required to disclose forthcoming layoffs in the event of "a worksite closing affecting 50 or more employees, or a mass layoff affecting at least 50 employees and one-third of the worksite's total workforce..." The Department of Labor states. Only the Texas headquarters could have potentially met that threshold.

What's more, "the WARN Act makes certain exceptions to the requirements when employers can show that layoffs or worksite closings occur due to faltering companies, unforeseen business circumstances and natural disasters," according to DOL. Outdoor Voices could

Former employees said the brand stopped paying rent on some stores months ago.

Outdoor Voices



very likely be described as "faltering."

Ostrove said the brand's ultimate decision to pay terminated employees for unused PTO was likely reputational – an attempt to mitigate bad press or restore some goodwill.

"There's no federal law that requires [them] to pay out PTO – those are state-related laws," he added. California, Colorado and Massachusetts are among the few states that mandate compensation for unused vacation time, while many others defer to company policies or employee contracts to determine payout liability.

Meanwhile, Chubak said that HR's mentioning of bankruptcy and "ABC law" to former corporate employees "definitely" points to "a liquidation proceeding." "The typical reason why people do Assignments for the Benefit of Creditors, which are sometimes referred to in shorthand as ABCs, is financial," he said. "Chapter 11 is expensive, and doesn't provide a discharge for liquidating corporations."

According to the American Bar Association, "In many instances, an ABC can be the most advantageous and graceful exit strategy." The business liquidation device provides an alternative to formal bankruptcy proceedings, allowing the company to transfer assets to a party tasked with winding down the business "in a manner designed to minimize negative publicity and potential liability for directors and management."

Contrary to what the term might suggest, creditors – from unpaid vendors and consultants to apparel suppliers – are unlikely to benefit from the proceeding. "It's commonplace for creditors not to get paid in bankruptcy," Chubak said. "The norm is for a huge chunk of the creditor pool to take it on the chin."

For the company's partners, former employees and even disillusioned fans, the toppling of the once-promising enterprise has felt like "a slap in the face," one former corporate employee said. As for the future of the brand, "I don't see them lasting past the next month or so," she added.

Outdoor Voices' enticing ethos, which prized fun and freedom above performance, now reads as a harbinger of its unraveling. "When you let go of the expectation to perform, that's when the real magic happens," the brand's website says. "You learn that the joy of the game will always outlast a win."





Annie Leibovitz brandishes her ceremonial sword at the Académie des Beaux-Arts as Anna Wintour leaves the podium.



Patti Smith



Annie Leibovitz in her ceremonial uniform designed by Louis Vuitton's Nicolas Ghesquière.



# Annie Leibovitz Becomes an Immortal

The U.S. photographer was inducted to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris, receiving her ceremonial sword from Anna Wintour.

BY JOELLE DIDERICH

**PARIS** — Annie Leibovitz has a new title, and a fancy sword to go with it.

The U.S. photographer was inducted to the Académie des Beaux-Arts in Paris on Wednesday in a star-studded ceremony filled with pageantry, earning her the title of Immortal, as the French refer to members of the illustrious institution.

Anna Wintour, wearing her signature dark sunglasses, handed over the ceremonial sword at the outcome of the ritual staged under the imposing dome of the Institut de France, under the watchful eye of infantry officers of the French Republican Guard.

Dressed in an embroidered uniform designed by Louis Vuitton's Nicolas Ghesquière, Leibovitz brandished the gnarly sword — resembling a prop from a Tolkien saga — as she received a standing ovation from guests including designers Giambattista Valli, Guillaume Henry and Harris Reed, fashion editor Carine Roitfeld, and Miren Arzalluz, director of the Palais Galliera fashion museum.

In a speech punctuated by lengthy silences, the 74-year-old photographer paid a moving tribute to her late partner Susan Sontag.

“Susan Sontag shaped my relationship to Paris and to French culture and art. I wouldn't be in this room if it weren't for Susan. She loved France,” she said.

Leibovitz was introduced by renowned Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado, who wiped away tears at the end of his speech, and was followed on the podium by Patti Smith, who gave a stirring rendition of “Peacable Kingdom,” accompanied by her daughter Jesse Paris Smith on keyboard.

In a special section reserved for fellow Academy members sat choreographer Blanca Li, in her uniform designed by Chanel, photographer Dominique Issermann, wearing a bandana on her head, and artist Jean-Michel Othoniel, whose suit was made by Dior.

“The only thing more daunting than a French fashion show is a French academy, and by a similar principle, the only thing

more intimidating than Annie Leibovitz is Annie Leibovitz brandishing a sword, so I stand before you today in awe and some degree of terror,” Wintour said when it was her turn to speak.

The global editorial director of Vogue and chief content officer of Condé Nast has worked with Leibovitz for close to three decades, and suggested a fair amount of sparring was involved. “Annie can parry, be playfully evasive, especially in any attempt to get inside her defenses,” Wintour said.

“Now with a sword in your hand you may not be d'Artagnan, it's true, but with a camera, Annie is as dextrous and, better, a formidable and unstoppable force. The thousands of photographs she has published in her life are not just a testament to her imagination and the way it will survive the future, they are her vision and a plea for a better world,” she continued.

“In that way Annie is the most essential thing any artist can be: She is generous. So Annie we salute you, you have become Immortal,” Wintour concluded, her voice cracking.

Leibovitz was flanked by four generations of relatives, including her aunt Sally Jane, her sisters Susan and Barbara, her brother Philip and her daughter Susan. “My oldest daughter, Sarah, is somewhere in the Apennine Mountains, studying limestone outcroppings. She is a young earth scientist,” said Leibovitz, who has a third daughter called Samuelle.

She paused frequently as screens displayed images from her book “A Photographer's Life: 1990-2005,” which mixes her portraits of luminaries — including Johnny Cash, Nicole Kidman, Keith Richards, Michael Jordan and Nelson Mandela — with reportage from the siege of Sarajevo in the early '90s, landscapes and intimate photos of her family and friends.

“A Photographer's Life” is the closest thing to who I am that I've ever done. It made me understand that my work is not one thing or another. It is one thing,” she

explained.

Salgado recounted how Leibovitz started taking pictures in the late 1960s when she was studying painting at the San Francisco Art Institute, before working for Rolling Stone and subsequently Vanity Fair and Vogue, portraying a roll call of international figures ranging from John Lennon to Queen Elizabeth II.

He suggested that her images were frequently more powerful that the words that accompanied them, a comment she echoed in her speech.

“I'm not a journalist. A journalist doesn't take sides and I don't want to go through life like that. I have a more powerful voice as a photographer if I express a point of view. Portraiture gave me the latitude to pick a side, have an opinion, be conceptual and still tell stories,” she said.

She hinted that photography has also helped her process the most difficult periods in her life. “Susan's last illness was harrowing. I didn't take any pictures of her at all until the end. I forced myself to take pictures of her last days. I didn't analyze it. I just knew I had to do it,” she said.

After the ceremony, Leibovitz and guests headed to the courtyard of the 17th-century building, where she showed off her sword to Antoine Arnault, head of

communication, image and environment at LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, the parent company of Louis Vuitton.

She explained that the custom-made object was created from branches and a mushroom collected at her property in Rhinebeck, N.Y., that were then dipped in copper by florist Ariel Dearie, using a process inspired by French sculptor Claude Lalanne.

“You look so elegant,” Arnault said. Leibovitz said she was pleased with the Vuitton suit, which took 400 hours to complete, though she added jokingly: “But I like my baggy clothes more.”

The photographer joins the ranks of foreign associate members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts alongside the likes of British architect Sir Norman Foster, U.S. director Woody Allen and German artist Georg Baselitz. She fills the seat previously held by Chinese-born U.S. architect I.M. Pei.

It was the latest in a long series of honors for Leibovitz. In 2006, she was made a Commander of the French Order of Arts and Letters. She has received the International Center of Photography's Lifetime Achievement Award, and has been designated a Living Legend by the U.S. Library of Congress.



Annie Leibovitz with Anna Wintour and members of the Académie des Beaux-Arts.

# Fashion Scoops



"Yves Saint Laurent: Line and Expression" will showcase the couturier's original sketches with a collection of photographs, jewelry accessories and haute couture garments.

## The Drawings Of Yves

An exhibition on Yves Saint Laurent is coming to Southern California's Orange County Museum of Art, opening June 28.

Titled "Yves Saint Laurent: Line and Expression," the show dives into the design drawings of the French couturier, born in Algeria in 1936. Featuring his original sketches — works on paper in black ink or pencil, enriched with colors — the display will include a collection of photographs, jewelry accessories and haute couture garments from 1963 to 2001.

"Yves Saint Laurent's sketches differed from the fashion drawings of his contemporaries and are a substantial body of artistic work in their own right. Every December 1 and June 1, before each haute couture collection, and whether in Marrakech or in Paris, the couturier's working method entailed detaching himself from the world to imagine his future collections. On scattered papers, loose sheets or in spiral notebooks, Saint Laurent would begin each collection with a barrage of sketches. Serving as working, preparatory documents for the inhouse workshops, who were tasked with interpreting the garment from the drawing and transforming it into three dimensions, these sketches reveal the couturier's true artistic intentions," notes the museum, adding, "Passionate about the arts, and in particular painting, his palette of

natural and exotic hues would encompass Goya pink, Picasso red and Chagall blue. Certain color combinations, which others would consider incongruent, became a signature in the hands of Saint Laurent: green against blue, orange alongside pink."

Curated by Olivier Saillard and Gaëlle Mamine, the exhibition is organized by the Musée Yves Saint Laurent Marrakech and Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris, with a loan from the collection of the Fondation Pierre Bergé — Yves Saint Laurent in Paris.

"Yves Saint Laurent: Line and Expression" will open alongside "Color Is the First Revelation of the World," exploring the intersection of color — hues of blue — and form. It takes inspiration from Brazilian artist Hélio Oiticica and features more than 20 artists including Cy Twombly, Yves Klein, Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Chris Burden and Agnes Martin. The two shows will be on view from June 28 to Oct. 27, following the current Joan Brown retrospective, which is available until June 2.

"This suite of exhibitions celebrates a breadth of extraordinary creative vision from sculpture to drawing to fashion to painting. From the intimate drawings of Yves Saint Laurent — inspired by his beloved city of Marrakech — through to a constellation of artists exploring blue as a medium for understanding the world, these shows offer embodied sensory experiences that expand our understanding of color,

material, and process. It is an honor to present the U.S. premiere of "Line and Expression" and to create new moments of wonder, awe, and encounter for audiences here in Orange County," said Heidi Zuckerman, chief executive officer and director of the Orange County Museum of Art, in a statement.

In 2022, OCMA unveiled its new home in Costa Mesa, Calif., at the Segerstrom Center for the Arts campus, announcing free admission to the public for the first 10 years. The museum was first known as the Balboa Pavilion Gallery, founded in 1962 by 13 women looking to exhibit modern and contemporary art. It became the Newport Harbor Art Museum before being renamed the Orange County Museum of Art in the '90s. — RYMA CHIKHOUNE

## Picking A Winner

Italian designer Eleonora Falcone has won the Shein X Global Challenge 2024, beating 1,000 competitors from more than 70 countries and taking home 10,000 euros in prize money.

The challenge is part of Shein's incubator program, and this was the first year that the global e-commerce giant made a callout for global submissions.

Applicants' collections were initially voted on by members of the public, while a panel of judges shortlisted 10 designers and then made the final pick.

The theme this year was "Radiance," and Falcone

won for her womenswear collection, which she called "Glowmantic."

"All of us on the judging panel were heartened to see so many submissions by female designers this year, and that [women] topped the list with nine finalists," said Julien Fournié, one of the judges.

He added that Falcone's drive to succeed "was clearly evident, as was her ability to decipher the theme, and translate it into what will clearly be a popular collection."

The 10 finalists were judged based on their ability "to translate a strong, original concept into design, while balancing customer demands, seasonal trends and commercial viability," according to Shein.

They also had a chance to take part in a masterclass hosted by the judges and workshops on sustainable

## ON THIS DAY

Another red carpet season has come to an end, and many stars attempted to make a lasting impression. Nonetheless, few looks stand the test of time like Gwyneth Paltrow's cotton-candy pink Ralph Lauren Oscars gown, as seen in WWD on March 22, 1999. — Jasper Brown



fashion before they presented their submissions in the final round.

The winner, and the other nine finalists, will become part of the Shein X Designer Incubator Program, which launched in 2021, and offers up-and-coming talents the chance to design, manufacture and sell their collections under the Shein umbrella.

Participating designers are given a percentage of the profits from each piece sold and are featured as a Shein X designer

on the site to further promote their collection alongside inspirations and backgrounds.

The program launched with seven designers and, to date, Shein has worked with 4,600 talents who've made 41,000 original designs.

Molly Miao, Shein's chief marketing officer, said Falcone's "flair for design, technical skills and understanding of commercial viability already positions her as an excellent fashion designer. We expect great demand for the ▶



Eleonora Falcone's winning designs for the Shein x Global Challenge 2024.



Grover Rad Collection 005

'Glowmantic' collection when it goes live on Shein sites around the world."

Other winners included Juliana Cavalcanti di Siqueira from Brazil, who took home the Creativity Award, and Japan's Yuto Nomura, who nabbed the Next Gen Award. Fungai Sarah Muzoroza of the U.K. won the Style Award.

They each banked 5,000 euros, while the remaining six finalists took home with 3,000 euros each.

Last September, Shein revealed that an additional \$50 million will be committed toward the Shein X Designer Incubator Program. This additional funding will bring the company's total investment into the Shein X Designer Incubator Program to \$105 million until 2028.

The Shein X Global Challenge 2024 judges included Adrien Roberts, International Fashion Education consultant, Italy; Fournié, founder of Julien Fournié Haute Couture, Paris; Jill Wanless, a U.K.-based editor, and Colin Horgan, an independent designer based in Ireland. —SAMANTHA CONTI

## Five Times Rad

Over the past two years L.A. designer Lizzie Grover Rad has courted controversy with her collections, building her brand on sparking conversation around hot-button issues like reproductive rights

jazz singers," she said. "There's so much focus on the Reagan era and the war on drugs, but it started much earlier, and Harry Anslinger was the beginning."

Rad has been interested in the topic since she was in college and took a course titled "Deviance in Society," she said.

"It was interesting to learn about LSD and how long it was used in therapy before it was outlawed because of the hippies and the counterculture movement...I'm a big believer in the power of psychedelic therapy and I think it would help so many people," she said, also acknowledging the downside of drugs and drug policy, including addiction, violence and mass incarceration.

The designer has developed several signature styles, including denim, stretch mesh tops and dresses, and a show-stopping opera coat on which she showcases seasonal artwork. This collection also featured red "Candyman" pills and orange poppy field prints. Prices range from \$220 to \$2400.

Sold direct-to-consumer through the designer's website, the brand has doubled sales every season, and Rad is not thinking about partnering with a retailer just yet.

"I like being at DTC prices, which are approachable," said the designer, who creates two collections a year. Her customer base has expanded outside of California, she said. "There's a wide range from all over the country," —BOOTH MOORE

"I wanted to research the history of drug laws in America, which is very complex," said the designer, showing her collection on the rack at her Bel Air home, including a stretchy button-down ruffled dress in a purple haze print that tricks the eye, a silk side-tie apron top with a charming cannabis flower print, and an oversized T-shirt emblazoned with text from the 1937 Marihuana Tax Act.

A cotton poplin vest and pants set covered in a subtle black-and-white scribble print of formulas was inspired by Albert Hofmann's discovery of LSD, which was used for mental health treatment before it was made illegal during the 1960s. A color-blocked silk bias cut dress in a collage print features a photo of Billie Holiday, among other images, referencing how the "Strange Fruit" singer was pursued by the Federal Bureau of Narcotics and its racist commissioner Harry Anslinger. "He had it out for all the

## Award Winners

The Accessories Council has revealed the 2024 class of honorees for the Accessories Council Excellence Awards, taking place May 7 at the Pierre Hotel in New York City.

"As the Accessories Council celebrates its landmark 30th anniversary, we could not be prouder to recognize such a versatile group of outstanding designers and leading creatives breaking boundaries in our industry at the upcoming ACE Awards," said Accessories Council president and chief executive officer Karen Giberson. "This year's class of honorees includes some of the most iconic names in fashion and design, as well as emerging artists that have raised the bar on how consumers view and shop for accessories for years to come."

Honorees include Prabal Gurung for Designer of the Year; Coach for Brand of the Year; Linda Fargo, senior vice president of the fashion office and director of women's fashion of Bergdorf Goodman for Style Icon; Fern Mallis for Hall of Fame; Dana Covarrubias, costume designer on Hulu's "Only Murders in the Building" for Style Influencer, and Larroué for Rising Star. "So many things have changed for the Accessories Council since it was founded in 1994 — but the mission has remained the same and that is to help our members thrive,"



Looks from Rhone's Commuter collection.

Giberson said of the council's 30th anniversary, reporting that the council's membership is at an all-time high. "Over the years we have added events like The Design Excellence Awards; supported legislative issues such as tariffs/material usage/ sustainability; incorporated mentoring programs, press events; acquired Ac Magazine, and incorporated many regional events — to name a few."

Additional awards at the black-tie event will be given for Design Innovation, Legacy Award, Operational Excellence, Retailer of the Year and Specialty Retailer. Sponsors of the 2024 ACE Awards include Aria Logistics, Nordstrom, Marchon, A VSP Global Company, EssilorLuxottica, FashionGo, Informa, Judith Leiber Couture, Mercedes-Benz Manhattan, Oracle NetSuite, Safilo, Signal Brands, Steve Madden and The Jewelry Group. —THOMAS WALLER

Halmstead, investment partner at Palistar Capital. "As we prepare to launch our women's collection, Tess brings incredible expertise in brand and marketing from her time at Athleta and CorePower Yoga and Jimmy is a top industry thought leader that brings unmatched experience in sports and consumer products industries," said Nate Checketts. "The addition of Tess and Jimmy will help bring us to new heights in 2024 and beyond."

Roering served most recently as chief commercial officer of CorePower Yoga, where she doubled the company's number of studios and drove revenue growth. She was also instrumental in the brand's sale by L Catterton to TSG Partners. Before CorePower Yoga, she was Athleta's first-ever head of marketing.

As chairman of ESPN, Pitaro manages and supervises the company's full portfolio of sports content, products and experiences. During his tenure, the network signed creative rights agreements with the NFL, UFC, SEC, NHL, MLB, PGA Tour, NCAA, La Liga, Wimbledon and others. Before ESPN, Pitaro worked in various leadership positions across ESPN's parent company, The Walt Disney Company, including as chairman of Disney Consumer Products and Interactive Media. He also served as head of media for Yahoo.

As reported, Rhone is preparing to launch its first full women's collection in May. The company was founded in 2014 as a performance menswear brand. —JEAN E. PALMIERI

## New Board Members

Rhone has added two new members to its board: Tess Roering, a former executive at CorePower Yoga and Athleta, and Jimmy Pitaro, ESPN chairman. They join Nate Checketts, cofounder and chief executive officer of the menswear brand; his father Dave Checketts, managing partner of Checketts Partners Investment Fund; Jon Owsley, managing partner at L Catterton; Simon Hill-Norton, cofounder of Sweaty Betty, and Carras



Prabal Gurung will receive The Accessories Council's Designer of the Year Award.