

A 19th Century Jewelry Master's Brand Returns

Rouvenat is the third French heritage maker revived by the LuxImpact group.

By Roxanne Robinson

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Few people know the name of the 19th-century jeweler Léon Rouvenat any longer, but the French group LuxImpact is working on that.

LuxImpact, which is on a mission to revive defunct French fine jewelry labels, was founded in 2020 by the former Cartier colleagues Frédéric de Narp and Coralie de Fontenay, with the later additions of Sandrine de Laage, as a partner and creative director, and Pierre Bolze, as a partner and director of development. Its operations began with Vever, an Art Nouveau-centric brand established by Pierre-Paul Vever in 1821 and reintroduced in 2021 by LuxImpact and Vever's descendants.

"It's been quite organic, to tell you the truth," Mr. de Narp said in a video interview from LuxImpact's headquarters in Paris. "We've been lucky to find brands with specific angles and uniqueness."

Vever's grandson Henri penned "French Jewelry of the Nineteenth Century," published in the early 1900s, which has played a role in LuxImpact's revivals. The team came across the book while working on the Vever brand; it mentioned Oscar Massin — whose house became LuxImpact's 2022 restart project — and Rouvenat.

Léon Rouvenat began his career as an apprentice to Charles Christoffle, a metalwork specialist in Paris, and became his partner in producing tableware and jewelry on a mass scale. In 1851, Rouvenat opened his own jewelry house, using a similar approach and bringing specialists with a variety of talents together under one roof.

As Marie Berthelon Gaviard, chief executive of the revived Rouvenat brand, wrote in an email: "He created the French jewelry pavilion in the Crystal Palace in London in 1851 as part of the Great Exhibition to promote French jewelers. His vision was for jewelry to belong to the true modern world and become a bona fide industry."

While the team at LuxImpact was researching in 2021, it discovered and then purchased 3,000 gouaches of Rouvenat's original designs from the antiquarian bookseller Pingel Rare Books in Paris. These paintings, which are similar to watercolors, depicted jewels such as a lilac brooch created for Empress Eugénie of France, a design familiar to Mathieu Rousset-Perrier, curator of the Middle Ages Renaissance collection and the Jewelry collection at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs in Paris. "The branch of white lilac set with diamonds he presented at the 1867 World's Fair in Paris is undoubtedly his masterpiece," Mr. Rousset-Perrier said.

Rouvenat, the curator added, was considered one of the greatest jewelers of the Second Empire, the period between 1852 and 1870: "A symbol of his success is the numerous gold medals he won at international exhibitions, where he showed his predilection for neo-Greek and especially neo-Renaissance styles, making him one of the best representatives in the historic jewelry taste so dear to the 19th century."





Rouvenat's boutique was designed to showcase the brand's past and present. Here, the Bolt necklace of silver, blackened silver and citrine, in front of a vintage gouache print depicting Rouvenat's original designs. Dmitry Kostyukov for The New York Times

After Rouvenat's death in 1874, the jewelry house continued to operate in several iterations — Rouvenat and Lourdel, Rouvenat and Despres, and Despres and Company — under his widow, some of its workers and their descendants, before finally closing in 1985.

The revived brand presented its first pieces publicly in January, during Couture Week, at its Rue St.-Honoré headquarters. The designs by Ms. de Laage, in the style of Rouvenat, included the Bolt Orissa pendant in 18-karat yellow gold with diamonds and red spinels and a tassel made with rubies from the Orissa mine in India, which closed in the 1930s, and the Bolt Paraiba pendant in 18-karat white gold with Paraiba tourmalines and diamonds. The brand said both pieces sold that month for more than 100,000 euros (\$109,000) each.

Its latest high jewelry collection, called Lost, Found, Anew: Rediscovered Treasures, was shown in July in Paris and showcased the Frame ring, in which pavé diamonds circle a center stone, along with iterations of the Bolt pendant necklaces, including one incorporating an original 19th-century brooch by Rouvenat.

In addition to selling at its headquarters and from its website, Rouvenat is now also carried at Dover Street Market London. The brand recently launched a six-month exclusive sales arrangement at Fine Arts Jewellery, a store that the jeweler Shamsa Alabbar opened in July in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Moving forward, Rouvenat plans to begin selling on 1stDibs in October, and considers its next step to be expanding into the United States.

LuxImpact's founding principles included an ecological approach to jewelry-making, so Rouvenat, like the other LuxImpact brands, uses recycled gold and repurposed gemstones in its pieces. And Claire Portais, another former Cartier executive, has been charged with finding interesting stones from myriad sources for the new creations.

"Two hundred years ago, the goal was to become an industry; today, it's to become a responsible industry," Ms. Berthelon Gaviard wrote.

Putting that into practice means that Rouvenat plans to participate in the ReLuxury Fair — dedicated to resale luxury and collectible items and developing initiatives in the circular economy — in Geneva in November. And the brand is now an *entreprise à mission*, or mission-driven company, meaning that it abides by a French legal framework that lays out a social and environmental purpose with precise sustainability goals.

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