

LUXURY GOODS

Samaritans



LAURA HAMILTON HIGHLIGHTS LEADING LUXURY BRANDS AND BUSINESSES FOUNDED SOLELY TO TURN FINERY INTO PHILANTHROPY

Charity's long history is peppered with iconic figures throughout time who have set precedents which are hard to follow. Arguably the greatest example of these is Andrew Carnegie, the famous Scottish philanthropist who founded the first-ever public library in his native Dunfermline, before going on to establishing a further 2,509 such libraries in communities across the world. When he died in 1919, he had given away \$350 million to his worthwhile cause. That's a pretty hard act to follow.

However, there is a new archetype for charity that advocates material awards; although it seems that luxury and charity are polar opposites, combining them can be mutually beneficial. After all, it is always nice to have a reminder of how generous you are. The go-to model for luxury charity is auctions, dinners, balls and designer collections, where high-profile personages raise awareness with their chequebooks. Charity auctions can raise huge amounts of money, as was evidenced one night in 2011, when Elizabeth Taylor auctioned off her treasure trove of jewels for a record-breaking \$115 million, benefitting her AIDS Foundation.

Another thing that luxury brands are associated with is setting up their own charities and foundations, as well as creating special collections. Italian prima donna Donatella Versace, for example, teamed up with Chinese martial arts star Jet Li to start Versace One Foundation, which funds teachers and doctors to work in child centres in the Sichuan region of China, an area devastated by an earthquake in 2008. Versace enlisted the children to draw on canvas tote bags, which were then sold at the brand's boutiques. The end profits of this admirable joint venture not only benefited the child centres in the region, but also the Starlight Children's Foundation, a charity which works with seriously ill and injured children.

On the other hand, Bulgari prefers to work with well-established charities, designing a silver and ceramic ring for UK charity Save the Children. Outwardly, these rings are nothing more than a stylish accessory, with the Bulgari brand engraved on the edge and the charity's name on the inside. That way, the discretion of the charitable wearer remains intact under the façade of style. The profits from the ring, worn by the likes of Isabella Rossellini and Leighton Meester, go to providing books for children in Brazil, safe drinking water in Uganda and coloured pencils for children in China.

"This is not charity, this is work," declares provocateur and fashion legend, Dame Vivienne Westwood about her recent collaboration with the Ethical Fashion Programme, which supports over 7,000 women in Africa. Using recycled materials, Westwood's Ethical Fashion Africa collection is a series of bags made by women who want to improve their lives. The bags are bright and colourful, with avian-inspired designs and supportive slogans, such as "Do it yourself," emblazoned on the entire collection. In a world of gender inequality, it is high-end moves from high-end individuals like this that may make all the difference in the world. To find out more about Westwood's project, visit her website at www.viviennewestwood.co.uk.

A night to remember

As we mentioned before, charity balls and celebrity auctions are still very much de rigeur, but the paradigm of such strategies has shifted and indeed evolved. The epitome of this evolution (at least in its party form) is The Global Party. The brainchild of entrepreneur David Johnstone and backed by Lord Stanley Fink, a British hedge fund manager, the world's biggest secret party (until now) brings the charity ball into the 21st century and on a scale that had never before been attempted. The inaugural celebration in 2011 was inspired by Jules Verne's *Around the World in 80 Days* and dubbed the party of the decade. The hedonistic fun on the surface of the parties actually took two whole years to plan, and raised \$9.3 million for no fewer than 12 charities. Invites to the next one are hard to come by, and are reserved for VIPs and consumers of luxury brands Champagne for Life and Key-2 Luxury.

Whereas previous modes of charitable giving were merely exercises in public relations, or side-projects to assuage capitalist guilt while indulging in a little philanthropy, Global Party guests are rewarded with genuine luxury and a chance to be a part of the world's elite. The invitation and the incentive for being part of the Global Party are one and the same. If you were to steal a glimpse into the handbags of supermodels Helena Christensen or Eva Herzigova, you would find beneath a stylish flash of silver, a coveted item that is not available to the general public: an otherwise innocuous key-ring. This engraved key opens doors to exclusive VIP privileges for life, amongst which complimentary bottles of champagne appear frequently, free to those that can afford it, very expensive to those that can't.

As The Global Party 2011 was such a roaring success, it is trying to outdo itself with its next event. Scheduled for 2013, the theme is 360°; that is, 360 parties in secret locations across 120 cities over four nights, the proceeds of which will benefit 360 charities. Guests are challenged to circumnavigate the world and frequent as many of the 360 parties as possible to be crowned winner of the Global Party 2013.



David Johnstone and Lord Fink launch the Global Party

Merci beaucoup and thanks for all the fish

Nobel Peace Prize winner, Professor Muhammed Yunus came up with the concept of "social business," which is the perfect marriage of profit and charity. Charity used to be an offshoot and not the mainstay of businesses, but now altruism has become a powerful motivator for luxury brands as social businesses kick off.

One such social business is Merci, dreamed up by Bernard and Marie-France Cohen. Best known for founding successful luxury children's clothes brand Bonpoint, they set up the charity boutique in a converted factory in the Marais district of Paris in 2009 and have since acquired a cult following. After making a name and fortune for themselves in the fashion world, they wanted to give something back, which is why they named their new venture "thank you" in French. "Merci" is printed all over the walls, with the names of organisations and people who have provided the products in their boutique and helped them in their philanthropic quest.

Off the tourist track, it is almost a Parisian secret. From the street, Merci looks nondescript, but inside, the luxury concept store is a treasure chest, a testament to French chic and simplistic beauty. It looks like an art gallery. Beyond the façade is a courtyard, which boasts a café, tea room and restaurant. Inside, the interlinking loft-spaces comprise the retail space and a bookstore, a florist and a corner devoted to Annick Goutal (late perfumer and Marie-France's sister), where customers can buy perfume in minimalistic glass bottles or simply fill up their own flacons with their favourite scents. Merci has everything, from haberdashery to antiques. Of course, the main attraction is the apparel.



The door to Merci is deceptively innocuous...



Scents by the late Annick Goutal

Rifles, revisited

Of course, some luxury-based charities are not as uniform as setting up fashion houses or organising parties. Some set themselves apart from the usual dialogue with a bullet... literally. In the last issue of *Sur la Terre*, we introduced you to jewellery-company Fonderie 47, which brings new meaning to the term “precious metal.” When Peter Thum and John Zapolski met at a TED conference, they decided to launch a hybrid business model to align their affinity for charity with good business. Devoted to removing AK-47 rifles from the black market in the Republic of Congo, they buy the rifles and fuse the steel with titanium, white and yellow gold and meld it into rare and stunning pieces of jewellery, upcycling the rifles to make art while subverting and diminishing the power of the weapons themselves. As Pablo Picasso said, “Every act of creation is first an act of destruction.” That is something the good people at Fonderie 47 have taken to heart.

With the help of mechanical engineer Roland Iten and master jeweller Philip Grangi, the rogue weapons are transformed into luxurious cufflinks, earrings, pendants, and rings. Apart from the cufflinks, which have kept the serial number of the gun, there is no indication that this jewellery has been created from AK-47s, or was even upcycled at all. The lure of these luxury items is that it never advertises its humanitarian background and appears only as unusual and elegant pieces. The jewellery has a veneer of antiquarianism, like artefacts you might find in a museum, or bid on at an auction. The timeless pieces have the quality of an heirloom, whether it is the masculine elegance of the bespoke men’s rings, or the Greco-Roman edge to the earrings. Iten, who spawns mechanical luxury for gentleman, has created a limited and numbered series of cufflinks that can be transformed into a bracelet. If you can’t tell, transformation is a central theme at Fonderie 47.

Fonderie 47 holds a blueprint for sustainability in social businesses, using its idea of creative destruction to appease the desire for statement jewellery and aspiration towards charity. Thum wanted to create rare pieces that would inspire people, rather than cheap tokens of goodwill; to that end, the jewellery is sold at private events, and revenue is invested back into organisations to destroy arms in Africa. An earring can destroy 70 weapons, a ring 75 and a set of cufflinks 100. The revenue feeds into the Fonderie 47 Foundation, a charity which finances organisations like Mines Advisory Group to help demolish weapons for the Congo’s government. To cast your eye over more of Fonderie 47’s gorgeous jewellery, visit www.fonderie47.com

Designers, artists, musicians, actors, stylists, authors and famous friends of the couple donated items, from their own collections or specifically crafted pieces and entire collections exclusively for the Parisian retail experiment, generously foregoing profits. The designers who have signed on to help Merci are diverse and eclectic, and range from Yves Saint Laurent to Acne. The Cohens regularly convince European luxury fashion houses like Montero, Italy’s most prestigious silk house, to collaborate with them and create one-off lines. This exclusivity means that the beautiful designer clothes, accessories and artwork that can be found in Merci are not only benefiting charity, but are completely unique. The profits go to a children’s charity in Madagascar, an area of Africa that Marie-France has often visited; her labour of love is helping impoverished girls so that they can get an education and have a career. You can find more information at www.merci-merci.com.



These stunning earrings look nothing like rifles!



Philip Grangi designed these masculine rings



Roland Iten’s specially designed cufflinks, featured in *SLT 20*

Waste Not, Want Not

Another innovative organisation with a conscious is Bottletop, which straddles the borders between charity and fashion by spinning bottle tops and ring pulls into luxurious accessories. While, on the surface, fusing Western waste with fashion sounds dubious, the result is edgy, stylish and becoming very popular. Bottletop bags can be seen in high-end boutiques and on the arms of the rich and famous. The ring pulls are woven together to make lightweight bags, clutches and belts that are both timeless and unusual. The company was conceived and is run by fashionista Cameron Saul, the son of Roger Saul, founder of Mulberry, the well-known and exclusive fashion and accessories label. Style must run in the family.

After discovering a wire frame handbag made from bottle tops while working in Uganda, Saul was inspired to collaborate with the English fashion house, and in 2002 the Mulberry Bottletop Campaign was born. The original Bottletop Mulberry bags became so popular that the company decided to go back to the favelas in Brazil, setting up workshops with local craftsmen and women, and producing the iconic ring pull clutches. Ten years later, Bottletop presents a ready-to-wear range in collaboration with French design studio "Atelier du Sartel".

Not only has Bottletop prevented over three million ring pulls going into landfills, but it pumps its profits back into The Bottletop Foundation, which helps young people from the third world into educational programmes to educate them and give them more opportunities. In Bottletop's attempts to alleviate poverty, they empower 35,000 young people a year with life skills, and were recently shortlisted for *The Observer* Ethical Awards 2012 in the "Fashion and Accessories" category.



This stylish handbag is made from soda can ring-pulls

Philanthropy is Beautiful

Some streets are paved with gold, some with good intentions, but rarely are they paved with both. Former Wall Street banker, Joan Hornig, is an American jewellery-maker who refuses to take any of the profits she makes. After studying Fine Art at Harvard University, she made her own jewellery for years, until someone complimented her on a necklace she was wearing and recommended her to Bergdorf Goodman, the luxury charity department store in Manhattan, where her first collection sold out in days. Bergdorf refused to put a plaque next to her collection, saying she would donate all the money to charity, so she started the Joan B. Hornig Foundation, which supports various charitable organisations around the world and has donated almost \$1 million to over 700 charities so far. She has since moved from Bergdorf to several high-end boutiques where the customer has to fill out a form, designating their chosen charity and can even suggest new charities. Particular pieces have been designed for specific causes, like the silver hammer pendants that benefit the Association of Junior Leagues International, or the snowflake earrings made of 18-carat white cold and blue topaz, which profit UNICEF.

Joan Hornig designs her jewellery on the floor of her bedroom, using 18-carat gold, diamonds, south sea pearls, gold, silver, precious and semi-precious stones to make necklaces, bracelets, rings and earrings that are inspired by nature and by the fine art she studied at university. The Art Deco influence can be seen in her earrings and her cuffs are reminiscent of Austrian artist Klimt. Her signature pieces are lariats, delicate necklaces that look like lassos, decorated with entwined stones and flinty metal. Aerial and simplistic, her jewellery is regularly spotted on the red carpet. This is jewellery designed to make a statement and a difference. As Hornig says, philanthropy is beautiful. See Hornig's beautiful creations at www.joanhornig.com.

Luxury charity is the perfect way of rewarding your generosity, an investment in your soul. It's possible, it seems, to be beautiful inside and out. And if you can't do good things, you can always buy them!



Hornig refuses all profits from her unique jewellery