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LA MERCERIE

Even at the peak of a long career creating some of the most celebrated interior designs, Roman and Williams founders Stephen Alesch and Robin Standefer managed to discover something new in their first standalone design boutique, the Guild. "We found the category: retail, the location: SoHo, and then executed the vision," says Alesch. "The only thing missing was approvals, which we gave to ourselves without delay at every step—which made it quite fast."

However, it was at the in-store restaurant La Mercerie where the duo had the opportunity to extend their perspective into food and beverage for the first time. The café serves as the entryway to the boutique, as well as the overarching Roman and Williams design ethos. "La Mercerie and Emily Thompson Flowers begin quite traditionally—with a lighter palette—then as one travels deeper into the space into the retail environment, it becomes more modern with darker, richer tones and prismatic and beveled pieces and details," says Standefer. Headed by Marie-Aude Rose (who formerly helmed Paris's Spring with her husband Daniel, now the chef of the celebrated R&W-designed New York restaurant Le Coucou), La Mercerie features delicate French pastries alongside an evening supper menu and cocktail list, but the most interesting feature is that everything in the room is available for purchase—even the oven in the kitchen. Among the most covet-

able goods are the Japanese ceramics curated by stylist Akari Endo-Gaut, a distinct touch that Alesch and Standefer deliberately contrast with the French cuisine. The influence stemmed from an impromptu weekend in Paris while returning home from Tokyo. "We had suitcases filled with Japanese items spread all over a Parisian hotel room, and the two combined were incredibly spectacular," recalls Alesch. Standefer continues, "Because of the fact that we were still under the spell of Japan, we found ourselves combining the cultures, their love of beauty and the quality of things—the way they cared for things—and we thought to ourselves, 'These two cultures are the finest on earth.' We have since always combined the two to represent that—our respect and admiration for both these cultures and what they bring to the earth."

That passion has always translated successfully to their designs, but with the Guild and La Mercerie, Roman and Williams now has a place to build a community of their own. "We hope the Guild attracts creative types who love to be surrounded by creative energy and beauty," says Alesch, "as a place to talk about design and share and be inspired." —*Gautam Balasundar*

La Mercerie is now open at 53 Howard Street, New York.

Photography by Adrian Gaut for Roman and Williams



BURBERRY'S BELT BAG

There are few items of clothing quite as iconic as the Burberry trench coat, which has been a staple in fashion since it was invented over a century ago by Thomas Burberry to keep World War I officers warm and dry. Several of the design's most cherished features have now made their way into the latest line of accessories launching next month from the storied British house with the new Belt Bag, which takes its soft shape from the gentle weight of gabardine and comes ringed with an oversized belt. Initially available in two sizes and eleven vibrant color combinations, each bag comes with two belts in matching and contrasting hues and an additional cross-body strap for variety. Handmade and dyed in Italy, the bags will also welcome a smaller sister and a clutch version in two sizes in May, introducing and expanding a new iconography that merges celebrated heritage with contemporary values. —*Jonathan Shia*

The Belt Bag will be available starting March 1.

Photography by Robert Lindholm



NICK FOUQUET

It was an encounter with a cowboy that inspired Nick Fouquet to pursue the unlikely career of hat-making. "There was something special and unique about the one he had. I could tell it was quality and something completely different," the young milliner recalls. The hat, it turned out, was handcrafted by the cowboy himself.

Fouquet realized that hats were an oversight in the market and seized the opportunity to start his own brand, despite having only a background in environmental science and sustainable design. He soon discovered that there were a lot of parallels between fashion and the degree he had chosen. "The work and the craftsmanship that we do with the brand, with the hats and everything, are very bespoke and made-to-measure," he explains. "So in a sense, it is sustainable."

Hat-making is a trade secret. When Fouquet researched the process, he would call up other milliners for advice, but many weren't too keen to divulge. "When it comes to the actual hat-making process, there's no one way to do it," he says. "There's just your way and everyone comes up with their secret sauce, and not many people want to give away how they make their secret sauce."

Fouquet was able to cook up his own secret sauce, and the likes of Madonna, Pharrell, and Keith Richards have noticed, wearing his bespoke pieces. It's not just the music crowd buying into Fouquet's whimsical and psychedelic Western world but everyone from athletes to stockbrokers and hipsters to surfers.

For many, hats are not easy to wear. To Fouquet, however, it's all about confidence. "I think you wake up every day with a blank palette and how we paint and dress ourselves is an outward expression of art in our soul," he suggests. "That could be said about any piece. It's about expressing yourself." —*Alexandra Sarabia*

For more information, please visit NickFouquet.com.

Photography by Robin Harper

