

A Sixth-Generation Furrier Goes Faux

● Maison Atia is a new line of fake furs by Chloé Mendel, daughter of Gilles Mendel.

BY JESSICA IREDALE

Chloé Mendel has grown up around fur – mink, sable, Persian lamb. Her father is Gilles Mendel of J. Mendel, the designer ready-to-wear collection that he spun out of his family's fur atelier, founded in St. Petersburg, Russia, in the 1870s. It's no surprise then that Chloé has decided to go into the family trade, though her medium may come as a shock. Her new collection, called Maison Atia, is made entirely of fakes.

Mendel's decision to design using exclusively faux fabrics sourced from Italy and France and produced in New York is no political, anti-fur statement. "Not at all," she said during a preview of the collection with her business partner Gustave Maissonrouge in Maison Atia's garment center studio. "It's basically me celebrating my heritage in a way I can do well. I wanted to make something that was fun and that was more accessible and inclusive to everyone. I really felt like I could transform fake fur into an elevated product."

Maison Atia is Chloé's independent project. Her father is involved as a mentor but nothing more. She and Maissonrouge began working on the collection in January with the concept of achieving a fun, glamorous fur look that's not price-prohibitive and fits in with the customer of 2017. Many people want the look of fur without the process and price behind the real thing. "It's not something that should feel like it's a \$100,000 sable, but we're going to treat it like that," said Mendel, who's working with the same factory in New York that makes J. Mendel furs by her father. "Up until now, it's really been a cheaper thing. Linings are just thrown in

Maison Atia's fall collection.



there. There's not much thought put into it besides it's fluffy, it's cool."

Great strides have been made in faux fur fabric development in recent years, which was part of the reason Mendel wanted to go into faux. "The borderline between what's real and what's fake is quite small now unless you've worked with fur hands on," she said. "You don't know what the under hair should look like. You don't know how the cut should be and so on. I think that's what makes me unique in this process. I can assess what's a good-looking Persian lamb or mink versus a not good-looking one."

Her aesthetic inspiration is drawn from the glamorous days of the Thirties and the Seventies, and her mood board is tacked with images of Jane Birkin and Carole Lombard. There's a vintage aura to the range, which includes plenty of fluffy, colorful fun,

though it's not just for young women. Many of the styles are fully reversible, including a faux cotton-candy-pink Persian lamb pea coat that reverses to a pink floral print with decorative top-stitched seams. A white faux Persian lamb coat reverses to a blue-and-white polka-dot print. A leopard print coat reverses to black faux leather. Then there are long-haired "monkey" styles and a faux mink hooded jacket that is nearly impossible to distinguish from the real thing.

Prices range from \$800 to \$1,500 and there are a few accessories – berets, trapper hats, pull-through scarves and slap bracelets – to accompany the outerwear. For the fall 2017 launch season, the collection is available direct-to-consumer through maisonatia.com and at Flying Solo in SoHo, New York.

The name Maison Atia is derived from a combination of Maissonrouge and Mendel's

names – she has a two-year-old son Augustus with Billy Corgan, best known as the front man of The Smashing Pumpkins; Atia was the mother of Roman emperor Augustus. She studied fine art at the Art Institute in Chicago, where she splits her time and manages a teashop called Madame ZuZu's. Her fashion education came on the job through roughly three years of summer internships with her father at J. Mendel. "He would be like, 'Oh, you're going to be in the fur factory this time,' or 'You're going to be PR this time.' So he really wanted me to have a taste for every level," she said.

While Maison Atia isn't an anti-fur brand, there is a pro-animal component to it. The brand supports Paws Chicago, a no-kill shelter. Every coat sold provides a homeless cat or dog transportation to a shelter. Thus, Maison Atia's tagline: Buy a coat, save a puppy!