

FASHION & BEAUTY

Brand to Know: Coats (and Home Goods) Made Entirely of Faux Fur

On the Verge

By MERRELL HAMBLETON DEC. 5, 2017



Maison Atia's Debut Collection
Masato Onoda

Few contemporary designers know fur as well as Chloé Mendel. Her family's iconic fashion house, J. Mendel, was founded in St. Petersburg in the 1870s and was the official furrier to the Russian aristocracy. As a girl, she spent long hours among the lynx and chinchilla pelts in her grandfather's Paris atelier and later watched her father, Gilles Mendel, introduce Manhattanites to lightweight sheared minks. During college and after graduation, she joined the Mendel design team. "It's very much in my DNA," she says.

Mendel's decision, then, to found [Maison Atia](#), a label devoted exclusively to faux fur, might seem like the ultimate act of rebellion. But she insists that it's less a political statement and more the natural evolution of her own design interests. "I wanted to do something fun and young,

and I thought faux fur was so cool," she says. "It's just another fabric. I thought, let's get the best of the best and figure out what to do with it. I don't think I ever looked at it as the opposite of fur."



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The result is a line of luxury coats and, most recently, a tightly edited selection of home goods and accessories that launches on Dec. 6. When they started the project just over a year ago, Mendel and her business partner, Gustave Maisonneuve, knew what they wanted to make — but not how to make it. "We started from scratch, talking to mills, figuring out how factories weave," Mendel says. One mill specialized in a playful, curly faux lamb fur that she wanted for a trench and pillows; another wove a sleek, long faux fox perfect for pull-through scarves. "It was a full on research project. No one's an expert in this field at the moment."

The entire Maison Atia collection — from the throws to the full-length outerwear — is fully reversible. "You have to have both sides perfect," Mendel says — a particular challenge since the designer works with vintage sewing machines used in real fur production. "Vintage machines have natural error, so nothing is consistently perfect. But it was a challenge that I really pushed." The resulting items are surprisingly versatile (not the first quality you'd ascribe to a fur coat or blanket), featuring luxe leopard, sleek mink or longhaired goat on one side and bright, relaxed polka dots and florals on the other. "We made pieces that you can wear to a nice dinner or day-to-day," Mendel says. "They're fun and easy."

For the holidays, Maison Atia will release pillow and throws in a white faux Mongolian lamb, backed by a polka dot or a pink floral pattern. There's also an extra-soft fluffy fox used for scarves and hats.

Though Mendel's choice of faux fur is more aesthetic than that of an activist, she's put a lot of thought into the impact of the brand. For the past five years, she's worked with a national no-kill animal shelter called Paws Chicago, and support for the organization is built into every purchase. "When you buy a coat, it pays for an animal to get transportation to a no-kill shelter," she says.

Mendel, who watched her father grow his business from "a nook on Madison Avenue" into a global brand, is confident that her craftsmanship will appeal to an audience beyond animal lovers. "It's a material that can be elevated," she says. "I want to be the house of faux fur."

Prices range from \$750 to \$1,500. All pieces are available for purchase at [maisonatia.com](#) or Flying Solo in New York.