

WWWD

Fashion. Beauty. Business.

A Slower Chanel

Chanel's operating profits fell 30 percent last year, hit by weakness in mainland China. **Page 2**

Docked

Authentic Brands Group inked a \$311 million deal to buy Dockers from Levi Strauss. **Page 3**

Kering + Google

The luxury company's eyewear unit is making AI-powered glasses with the search giant. **Page 4**



Agility and Opportunity

Those will be two of the key themes on Wednesday at the WWD Global Fashion and Beauty Summit in Riyadh. The daylong event, "Age of Agility, Identifying Opportunity," is in partnership with the Saudi Fashion Commission and has a lineup of international designers, creators and executives, seen here. *For more on the continued rise of fashion and beauty in the Kingdom, see pages 20 to 26.*

BUSINESS

Chanel Revenues, Profits Fall in 2024

The finale of the Chanel fall 2025 show.



- The French fashion house sees no quick fix in 2025, despite the arrival of Matthieu Blazy as creative director.

BY JOELLE DIDERICH

PARIS — The Chanel juggernaut came to a halt last year, as revenues fell for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic and operating profits plummeted 30 percent amid a sharp slowdown in luxury spending in mainland China.

The French fashion house reported on Tuesday that revenues totaled \$18.7 billion in 2024, down 4.3 percent at comparable rates, as growth in Japan and South Korea failed to offset the impact of macroeconomic and geopolitical volatility elsewhere.

Operating profit fell to \$4.5 billion from \$6.4 billion the previous year as Chanel continued to invest heavily in its store network and supply chain.

In an interview with WWD, global chief executive officer Leena Nair and chief financial officer Philippe Blondiaux said they saw an inflection in the first quarter of 2024 and expect little improvement this year, despite the arrival of Matthieu Blazy as artistic director of fashion activities on April 1.

“We continue to operate in a very challenging environment,” said Nair, adding that the house is taking a long-term view. “As a 100-year-[old] brand, we expect ebbs and flows, and we will continue to navigate with a long-term strategy, which is why last year, we invested more than ever in our fundamentals.”

Chanel has declared a hiring freeze, with plans to maintain its headcount stable at 38,400 this year after hiring 10,000 people in the last three years, including 1,900 in 2024, mostly in the first semester, Blondiaux said.

The privately owned company said earlier this year it was cutting 70 roles in the U.S., representing about 2.5 percent of its workforce there. Blondiaux denied reports that it plans to slash its headcount in China by 20 percent this year, clarifying that it plans “relatively minor” adjustments

in regions where growth has stalled.

“For a company of our size going through this change of cycle, it’s normal, I would say, to adapt your structures in different places,” he said. “In China, we are adjusting our workforce to a large extent through natural attrition.”

Investments are also expected to remain stable, after a 43 percent jump last year, with capital expenditure forecast at \$1.8 billion in 2025. Chanel plans to plug a record \$600 million into its manufacturing network, as illustrated by its purchase of a minority stake in Como-based silk specialist Mantero, Blondiaux noted.

Among its key acquisitions last year was a 25 percent stake in Swiss high-end watchmaker MB&F, as well as the building housing its boutique on Avenue Montaigne in Paris.

Investments in “brand-support activities” were broadly stable at \$2.45 billion in 2024, versus \$2.46 billion the previous year, with key initiatives including a new No.5 campaign featuring Margot Robbie, the new face of the fragrance, and Jacob Elordi.

“We set our own course in challenging economic conditions. We could have slowed down the momentum of investment. We’ve done the opposite. We’ve invested more than ever, and plan to do so in 2025 as well,” Nair said.

She detailed plans to open 48 new stores this year, including 22 new boutiques across key markets such as the U.S. and China, in addition to expansions in less-developed territories like India and Canada.

Chanel has prioritized Greater China for events, staging a repeat show of its cruise collection in Hong Kong last November, and presenting its Métiers d’Art line in Hangzhou in December, which Nair billed as its most viewed show ever. It garnered 84.3 million views across social media platforms including Weibo and Douyin, the brand said.

“We have about 127 boutiques across China, and we opened 15 last year. We’ll continue to open 15 this year,” she said. “We’ve invested in new cities like Chengdu, Nanjing, to talk to our client base that’s diversifying in China, so there’s

a lot to look forward to in China.”

Chanel ended the year with 644 boutiques, up from 612 at the end of 2023, with openings including its first U.S. store dedicated to watches and fine jewelry on Manhattan’s Fifth Avenue, and its inaugural House of Beauty in Paris.

Nair emphasized that although Blazy will show his first collection in October, Chanel is not expecting immediate results.

“Matthieu is one of the most talented and gifted designers of his generation. His vision and understanding of the Chanel codes quickly convinced us that there is no one else better suited for the job, and we were very impressed by his mastery of natural, luxurious materials, his deep commitment to craftsmanship, the amount of time he spends in workshops, ateliers, really understanding the product and the craftsmanship,” she noted.

“Chanel is a profound brand. It takes time to understand the depth and the essence of our brand,” Nair continued. “We are having patience and perspective as Matthieu settles into his job. We don’t just think about the next collection or the October collection, but look at it

long-term, because we know a vision takes time to unfold and it has impact over time.”

She paid tribute to the studio team, which has designed collections since June 2024, and thanked former creative director Virginie Viard for her contribution, noting that Chanel’s revenues nearly doubled over the previous three years.

Nair also highlighted key launches this year, including Chance Eau Splendide, which she flagged as the house’s first new fragrance in eight years, and the Chanel 25 handbag, which she described as “a huge success.”

Blondiaux said that after growing 23 percent in 2023, ready-to-wear sales have remained relatively resilient despite the absence of a creative figurehead — though he declined to provide figures.

“Ready-to-wear was one of the best-performing product lines last year and this year, year-to-date, we are positive in terms of growth with ready-to-wear, so it really shows that the quality of the work done by the studio has been amazing, even in the absence of a creative director,” the executive said.

But Chanel appears to have lost some of its pricing power amid growing criticism of a series of hikes that pushed the price of its signature Medium Classic bag above \$10,000.

After several years of twice-yearly price increases to reflect inflation in raw materials and harmonize its prices between different regions, it raised prices for fashion by 3 percent in 2024, in line with global inflation.

“It was more or less the same for all the product lines on average,” Blondiaux said. “And for 2025, we plan more or less to increase prices in the same way.” In the U.S., the brand is taking a wait-and-see attitude to prospective trade tariffs amid ongoing negotiations with the European Union.

Blondiaux declined to delve into the reasons why Chanel, which is owned by the secretive Wertheimer family, underperformed leading luxury sector peers last year. Hermès revenues rose 14.7 percent in comparable terms to 15.17 billion euros, while luxury conglomerate LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton said revenues rose 1 percent to 86.15 billion euros.

“We never compare ourselves with competition, because we think our portfolio is obviously different from LVMH, we are operating in different geographies,” he said. “We are confident that the consistency of our long-term approach and the unique strengths of the Chanel brand position us very well for the future.”



Chanel’s fine jewelry flagship on Fifth Avenue.

BUSINESS

Done Deal: Nordstrom Goes Private



The Nordstrom New York City flagship.

● The transaction takes Nordstrom away from the glare of Wall Street and enables the family to strategize for future growth with a new partner in Mexico's Liverpool.

BY DAVID MOIN

It's a new era for Nordstrom Inc. and the Nordstrom family.

Brothers Erik and Pete Nordstrom and their cousin Jamie, along with El Puerto de Liverpool, finalized their \$6.25 billion, all-cash acquisition of the department store chain on Tuesday.

With the completion of the transaction,

which was expected, the Nordstroms now have a 50.1 percent controlling stake in the company, and Liverpool has a 49.9 percent stake. Nordstrom is based in Seattle, and Liverpool is based in the Santa Fe section of Mexico City.

In addition, Erik and Pete became co-chief executive officers, and the company's stock will stop trading and be delisted from the New York Stock Exchange on Wednesday. Erik Nordstrom was the sole CEO before, and Pete was president and chief brand officer.

Jamie Nordstrom continues as chief merchandising officer.

The deal, at \$24.25 per share, represents a premium of about 42 percent to the company's unaffected closing stock price on March 18, 2024, the last trading day before media speculation about a deal.

Shareholders of the company will also be paid cash dividends of 25 cents per share and 14.62 cents per share, reflecting the special cash dividend and a "stub period" quarterly dividend. A majority of the shareholders approved the deal last week during a virtual meeting.

"The completion of this transaction is an important milestone in our nearly 125-year history," Erik Nordstrom said in a statement. "As we embark on this

new chapter, we remain focused on what matters most – providing outstanding service, offering the best merchandise, and ultimately, helping our customers feel good and look their best. We're grateful to our teams for their hard work on behalf of our business and our customers, and we look forward to building on Nordstrom's strong foundation to reach even greater heights."

"Since our founding, Nordstrom's commitment to our customers has been at the heart of everything we do," Pete Nordstrom said. "We're excited to enter this next phase of the company's evolution with the many customers and employees who have been an instrumental part of our story."

To help pull off the deal, the Nordstroms borrowed \$450 million from a \$1.2 billion asset-backed loan. The deal was also funded by equity from the Nordstrom family and Liverpool, cash from Liverpool, and Nordstrom's cash reserves. Nordstrom already had \$2.7 billion in debt.

Liverpool will have a seat on the board, and will be influential on how Nordstrom evolves.

"What the family is saying is that the world has changed," said consultant Antony Karabus.

This family is so well aligned on strategy and future direction unlike management at most other retailers, Karabus said.

"The Nordstroms are so strategic," he said. "These guys have all grown up with

the customer and think long, long term.

The fact they made this deal is a huge vote of confidence in the business. It's a smart move. Now they won't have to worry about outside interference. This is one company I would never bet against.

"Liverpool is another great company," Karabus added. "Liverpool's earnings have steadily grown over the years, and is also really well run. Liverpool and Nordstrom can together increase their sourcing power and clout over technology providers, and could create some consolidated shared services."

Wall Street has long taken a dim view of Nordstrom and most department stores. By taking their business private, the Nordstroms can take a longer-term view and make necessary investments and changes away from the scrutiny of public markets.

But generally, a privately held Nordstrom isn't expected to diverge much from its current priorities, notably its aggressive expansion of the Rack off-price chain, pursuit of greater digital growth and much-needed comp gains at the Nordstrom upscale department stores. So far, the strategy has born some fruit. Decent comparable store gains were realized at both the Nordstrom department stores and Rack stores in the fourth quarter.

Founded in 1901 as a shoe retailer, Nordstrom Inc. operates 93 Nordstrom department stores, about 300 Rack off-price stores, and six Nordstrom Locals, which operate as service hubs. The retailer has been able to maintain its reputation for superior service while losing some of its merchandising edge in recent years.

BUSINESS

Authentic Brands Group Buying Dockers for \$311M

● The brand management firm has already signed Centric Brands to oversee most Dockers categories in the U.S. and Canada.

BY JEAN E. PALMIERI

Authentic Brands Group has flexed its considerable muscle – and its sizable bank account – to score another high-profile acquisition: Dockers.

In March, Authentic competitor Marquee Brands was on the verge of finalizing a deal to buy the men's khakis brand from Levi Strauss & Co., but the volatile economic situation around tariffs forced Marquee to walk away, opening the door for Authentic.

Under the terms of the deal, which was announced before the markets opened Tuesday, Levi's has signed a definitive agreement to sell Dockers to Authentic for \$311 million. The deal has the potential to ultimately reach up to \$391 million through an \$80 million earn-out opportunity based on the performance of the Dockers business under Authentic's ownership in the years ahead.

"The Dockers transaction further aligns our portfolio with our strategic priorities, focusing on our direct-to-consumer first approach, growing our international presence and investing in opportunities across women's and denim lifestyle," said Michelle Gass, president and chief executive officer of Levi's. "After a robust process, we are confident that we maximized the value of the business and that Authentic is the right organization to usher in the next chapter of growth for

the Dockers brand. We thank the global Dockers team for their strong commitment and execution to building the brand, which continues to be the authority on khaki."

Levi's said it intends to return approximately \$100 million of the net cash proceeds from the transaction to shareholders through share repurchases.

"Dockers is a natural fit for the Authentic model," said Jamie Salter, founder, chairman and CEO of Authentic. "It's a brand with deep roots, high awareness and a solid foundation in licensing – all things we look for when acquiring new brands. Dockers played a key role in shaping casual workwear as we know it today, and we see significant potential to build on that legacy and grow the brand across a variety of categories."

The deal will happen in two parts, with the sale of Dockers' intellectual property and operations in the U.S. and Canada expected to close around July 31, while the sale of the rest of the brand's operations will be wrapped up around Jan. 31.

In addition, Levi's will provide certain transition services to Authentic and its licensing partners through a limited transition period.

Authentic wasted no time rolling up its sleeves and getting to work. Although the deal won't close until the third quarter, it has already signed a licensing agreement with its long-standing partner Centric Brands, which will serve as the operating partner for Dockers across key categories in the U.S. and Canada. Centric will take on oversight of the sportswear, activewear, kids' apparel, dress shirts, workwear and performance golf categories, Authentic said.

Jason Rabin, CEO of Centric Brands, said, "Dockers represents everything we

look for in a brand partnership – iconic heritage, consumer loyalty and growth potential. We're bringing the same strategic expertise to Dockers that we've applied to our successful brand portfolio that includes design, strategic sourcing and an extensive wholesale network. We look forward to the growth of the Dockers brand."

The plan, Authentic said, is to tap its global network of more than 1,700 licensing partners to expand Dockers' reach. Authentic said it is already in "active discussions with regional operators" to build on the business across Latin America, Europe, the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

"Few brands own a category the way Dockers does, yet still have so much room to grow," said Matt Maddox, Authentic's president. "Its legacy in casualwear gives it a strong foundation, but the real opportunity lies in reimagining the brand for a new generation. Through our global platform and deep licensing network, we're committed to stewarding the brand into its next era of growth and relevance."

The fate of Dockers president Natalie MacLennan and the rest of the current management team is unknown. A spokesperson for Authentic said it is premature to discuss since the deal will not close until July.

The sale of Dockers is illustrative of Levi's plans to focus more on its namesake brand and its women's business, which includes Beyond Yoga, which it is in the process of expanding.

Bank of America helped Levi's pursue "strategic alternatives" for the men's-focused Dockers business.

Dockers has long been treated as a stepchild by Levi's, which created the business as a men's khaki brand in 1986 to diversify beyond its denim roots. While it was at the center of the Casual Friday movement, once that cycle ran its course – and other companies got into the space – the brand struggled.

Levi's has entertained the idea of selling the brand several times. In 2004, it signed



A look from Dockers' Made in the USA collection.

a letter of intent to sell Dockers to Vestar Capital Partners, but that deal never closed. More recently, in the spring of 2021, it was flirting with a deal to sell it to Bluestar, sources said at the time, but that never came to fruition either.

Dockers had sales last year of around \$318 million, which accounted for roughly 5 percent of Levi's overall revenues. But its well-known brand name and global reach – it currently sells in 50 countries – make it a prime candidate for growth under Authentic.

Authentic owns more than 50 brands that collectively generate approximately \$32 billion in annual systemwide retail sales. It operates in 150 countries, has more than 29,000 freestanding stores and shops-in-shop, as well as 400,000 points of sale worldwide. Among its brands are Reebok, Champion, David Beckham, Nautica, Brooks Brothers and Sports Illustrated. Through its joint venture with Saks Global, Authentic Luxury Group, it works with Barneys New York, Judith Leiber, Hervé Léger, Vince, Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue and Saks Off 5th.

Kering Eyewear's headquarters.


BUSINESS

Kering Eyewear Partners With Google

● The partnership is expected to blend cutting-edge AI technology with high-quality, stylish design to redefine interactions with the real and virtual worlds.

BY LUISA ZARGANI

MILAN — In a major new development for Kering Eyewear, the company revealed on Tuesday that it has inked a partnership with Google for the development of AI-powered glasses with Android XR.

“We are honored to share the values of innovation and forward thinking with Google, and we are proud to partner with them to explore new horizons for the future development of our company,” said Roberto Vedovotto, founder, president and chief executive officer of Kering Eyewear. “Together, we are shaping a product that people will want to wear: a pair of masterfully designed, high-quality, stylish glasses that unlock the potential of artificial intelligence, while

redefining the way of interacting with both the real and virtual worlds.”

Aimed at seamlessly integrating into everyday life, the smart eyewear will feature intuitive, personalized AI-driven functions enabling users to engage with their environment in new and meaningful ways.

“We’ve always believed in blending cutting-edge technology with great user experiences,” said Shahram Izadi, general manager and vice president of XR at Google. “Integrating our immersive XR platform with Kering Eyewear’s glasses will give consumers the fashion and function to get the most out of Android XR.”

A precise timing of the launch is not yet available.

Founded in 2014, Kering Eyewear was a pioneer in changing the business model for luxury groups with regard to the eyewear category, straying from the well-trodden licensing business model. It has grown to produce and distribute collections for 14 brands, including Gucci, Cartier, Saint Laurent, Bottega Veneta, Balenciaga, Chloé, Alexander McQueen,

Montblanc, Dunhill, Alaïa and Puma. It also owns brands Lindberg, Maui Jim and Zeal Optics.

In April, Kering Eyewear inked an agreement to acquire Italian eyewear manufacturers Visard and Mistral, as reported. The two companies have been strategic partners of Kering Eyewear since its foundation in 2014 and this operation will allow the company to further strengthen its position in the industry and to advance its industrial development.

In 2024, Kering Eyewear reached record revenue of 1.6 billion euros, a 6 percent increase on 2023 on a comparable basis. It reported recurring operating income of 277 million euros, and a margin of 17.5 percent on sales.

The collaboration with Google marks a new chapter in design smart glasses as it will leverage the eyewear expertise of the Italy-based company and Google’s revolutionary technological innovations within extended reality.

Although tech companies have been quite prolific in this field, with Snap launching its Spectacles camera

glasses that counted a high-end fashion collaboration with Gucci, unveiled in 2019, and Bose introducing Frames, embedded with an open-ear audio formula, for example, fashion-leaning eyewear players have stayed quieter. A few exceptions include Ray-Ban Stories, a joint effort of the EssilorLuxottica-owned brand and Meta, and South Korean buzzy label Gentle Monster’s connected eyewear developed in tandem with Huawei.

In September, EssilorLuxottica said it had extended its partnership with Meta Platforms with the aim of building on the success of its Ray-Ban Meta smart glasses to develop the next generation of smart eyewear products.

The two companies initially joined forces in 2019.

The second iteration of Ray-Ban smart glasses allow wearers to make phone calls, capture and share photos and videos, listen to music and livestream content to Facebook and Instagram. Meta recently introduced an AI assistant for consumers in the U.S. and Canada.

In September 2023, Safilo introduced a new high-tech Carrera model in partnership with Amazon, equipped with smart features courtesy of Alexa, the latter company’s virtual assistant technology, dropping exclusively in the U.S.

BUSINESS

Gucci Names New President for EMEA Region

Maria Cristina Lomanto



● The appointment of Maria Cristina Lomanto, currently executive vice president, brand general manager, is effective June 1. Marcello Costa is also being promoted to chief merchandising officer.

BY LUISA ZARGANI

MILAN — More C-suite changes are taking place at Gucci as chief executive officer Stefano Cantino continues to build his team.

Effective June 1, Maria Cristina Lomanto, currently executive vice president, brand general manager, will assume the role of president of Europe, the Middle East and Africa. She will report to chief commercial officer Cayetano Fabry and succeed Matteo Mascazzini.

Lomanto joined Gucci in 2022 from Roger Vivier, where she was chief executive officer of the Paris-based luxury brand.

When she went to Gucci, Lomanto brought extensive experience in fashion and luxury as she began her career at Jil Sander, before joining Yves Saint

Laurent in the wholesale department. She then moved to the Prada Group, where she held several leadership roles, including leather goods merchandising and marketing director for Prada, retail director for Prada France, worldwide retail director, and ultimately general manager of Miu Miu.

At the same time, Marcello Costa will be promoted to chief merchandising officer, reporting to Gucci CEO Stefano Cantino.

Costa joined Gucci in February, bringing more than two decades of industry experience from leading fashion houses including Bottega Veneta, Miu Miu and Stella McCartney.

In addition to appointing Demna as the successor of Sabato De Sarno, who exited the brand in February, other key changes under Cantino’s watch have included the arrival of Valérie Leberichel from Givenchy as senior vice president of global communications at Gucci; Francesco Falai, named chief people officer from his role as Gucci’s senior vice president of global people retail and business; Marcello Mastrogiacommo from Armani Beauty Global as VP of

digital marketing and media, a new role; Daniela Raganato from Valentino as global media director, and Davide Buzzoni, who joined Gucci from Loro Piana as global communications director. Last month, Christophe Marque joined the Italian luxury brand from DFS Group, a subsidiary of LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton, as president and CEO of Gucci Americas reporting to Fabry. Marque succeeded Federico Turconi, who exited Gucci last October to take on the role of CEO of the SA Hospitality Group.

After showing its cruise collection in Florence last week, designed by a team, Demna is to make his first fashion statement at Gucci this fall. The creative director of Balenciaga since 2015, he is to officially take up the reins at the Italian megabrand after staging his swan song at Balenciaga, a couture collection, on July 9. Demna will be succeeded by former Valentino creative director Pierpaolo Piccioli. Hopes are pinned on Demna to reverse declining revenues at Gucci, which fell 25 percent in the first quarter of 2025, dragged down by low traffic and anemic demand for carryover styles.

MEN'S

Paul Smith, Vivienne Westwood to Headline Slim Milan Men's Calendar



Here, right and below: The campaign for Milan Men's Fashion Week in June 2024.



- Running June 20 to 24, the showcase will feature 80 events, including 15 physical shows and 41 presentations.

BY MARTINO CARRERA

MILAN — A duo of British designer brands is expected to inject a jolt into the upcoming edition of Milan Men's Fashion Week, scheduled for June 20 to 24.

In addition to Paul Smith, which is taking his men's show on the road joining the Milan showcase in June for the first time, fellow British brand Vivienne Westwood is returning to the city's calendar after nine years to present its spring 2026 men's collection.

The Vivienne Westwood line has been unveiled in London since 2017 for both men's and women's. The relocation to Milan suggests a renewed commitment to the menswear division. The presentation, slated for June 22, is to feature a catwalk-like component, anticipating a full-fledged runway show planned for January 2026.

Meanwhile, the Andreas Kronthaler for Vivienne Westwood line will continue to be showcased as part of the Paris Fashion Week schedule in a coed format.

Save for the two names, the calendar — which comprises 80 events, including 20 shows, five of which are digital, and 41 presentations — is particularly slim this June.

Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana president Carlo Capasa acknowledged its weakness; however, he described the lack of big names as transitional and a “byproduct of the context.”

“In part it's linked to the crisis and decision of many brands to reduce the number of storytelling moments in the year,” he said. “In part it's due to creative

changes at many fashion houses. We hope that the landscape against which the past two to three seasons have proved weaker, will improve in the near future.”

Zegna is decamping to Dubai, showing its spring 2026 collection in the United Arab Emirates city on June 11 together with the next installment of the Villa Zegna project.

And Fendi is once again mounting a coed show in September designed by Silvia Venturini Fendi, artistic director of accessories and menswear collections, to continue celebrating its centennial. The brand is also facing changes in its creative direction after the departure of Kim Jones last year.

Other marquee fashion houses have also recently switched to the coed format, including Gucci.

Dsquared2, which has shown twice a year in a coed format during the men's season, only appears in the calendar with a party to celebrate its 30th anniversary, an encore after the blockbuster show hosted last February, exceptionally during the women's fashion week.

Contacted by WWD, the brand said its spring 2026 menswear and womenswear collections will be unveiled with showroom appointments during Milan Fashion Week.

“Following the incredible success of our 30th anniversary celebration in February, we've chosen not to present a show this summer season. Instead, we're keeping the celebratory spirit alive with a fun gathering for our community,” Dsquared2's Dean and Dan Caten said via email.

Marking its 40th anniversary, Jacob Cohën is doubling down this June with a presentation of its spring 2026 collection and a celebratory party, while fashion darling Luca Magliano is experimenting with a new format, ditching his usual runway show for the screening of a short

movie titled CineMagliano and centered on the new collection.

The fashion week lineup reflects the creative and business upheaval roiling the global industry. According to figures released by Camera della Moda, sales of Italian fashion amounted to 95.8 billion euros in 2024, down 5.4 percent from the previous year.

Preliminary data showed that sales decreased 5.8 percent during the first two months of 2025. Exports in January and February decreased 6 percent to 10.3 billion euros. And current projections point to a deceleration of 3.8 percent in first-half sales of Italian fashion.

“The uneven performance is the result of geopolitical instability,” Capasa said. “Fashion is really a litmus paper for the complexity of global macroeconomic challenges, which we hope will improve. Markets thrive against clarity.”

Among established brands showing continued commitment to Milan Men's Fashion Week, Prada is showing on its usual Sunday spot at 2 p.m. CET, Emporio Armani and Giorgio Armani shows are scheduled for Saturday at 7 p.m. CET and Monday at noon CET, respectively, while Dunhill, which has been showing in the Italian fashion capital since June 2024, will cap off Sunday's shows with a 7 p.m. CET display. Fellow British brand Saul Nash is also returning to Milan for the second time.

Newcomers to the men's show calendar include Fiorucci, which is officially moving from the women's to the men's market with a coed show; Setchu by Satoshi Kuwata, which is to hold its sophomore runway show after a catwalk debut last January at Pitti Uomo in Florence, and

Qasimi, the brand now helmed by Hoor Al Qasimi after the death of her brother and brand founder Khalid, who joined the Milan showcase last January for the first time with a presentation.

On the presentation front, Bally, currently without a creative director after losing Simone Bellotti to Jil Sander, is unveiling its men's and women's collection on June 22. Ralph Lauren Purple Label, MSGM, Tod's and Etro are all debuting their spring 2026 men's collections in presentation formats.

Entirely new to the June round of fashion presentations are Cascinelli, Leonardo Valentini, Meriisi, Rowen Rose and Uma Wang. Outbreaklab and Sagaboi are both joining the official calendar with digital presentations.

Capasa highlighted that the seasonal campaign to promote Milan Men's Fashion Week spotlighting Italian up-and-coming talents is among the initiatives of the Cultural Olympiad, the series of multidisciplinary cultural initiatives planned throughout this and next year to promote Olympic values.

The Camera della Moda head also shared that the fashion governing body is strengthening its ties with the Triennale museum in Milan, but declined to provide details of the larger partnership currently in talks, which he said will be revealed at a later stage.

EXCLUSIVE

Gabriela Hearst Launches Tailored Bespoke

- The new bespoke tailoring program will allow clients to create customized, luxe, made-to-order suiting across all Gabriela Hearst flagship boutiques.

BY EMILY MERCER

"I always say you're never too dressed up or too undressed with a suit," Gabriela Hearst told WWD on Monday. In keeping with the growth mode she finds her brand in, the designer launched new made-to-order suiting offering, Gabriela Hearst Tailored Bespoke, across all its flagship boutiques in London, New York and Los Angeles.

"It's our fastest-growing category in ready-to-wear, with 70 percent growth versus 2024; it more than doubled in between 2023 and 2025, with sell-throughs of 70 percent to 80 percent and above," Hearst said of her growing suiting business, and high retention rate of loyal clientele. Suiting accounts for 24 percent of the brands ready-to-wear sales year-to-date, 65 percent of retail revenue and 42 percent of online business is from returning customers.

"People want things that are special and different, especially when you see this industrialization of luxury," she said of the new Tailored Bespoke program, which expands her brand's pillar of tailoring for both men and women.

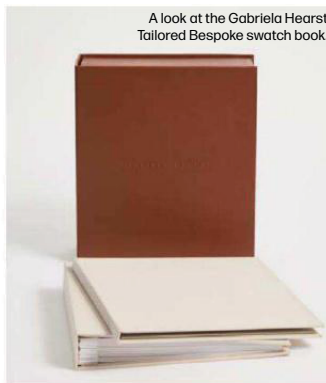
"For some clients, we do full on tailoring suits. They'd come to us regularly because we're actually good at this. Then we realized that we should expand it to all our clients – we have a very loyal client base. It's remarkably high, so it felt like it was a natural thing to do," Hearst said.

"The idea of individualization and product that is not available everywhere. It felt natural and there was this appetite from our clients."

The offering allows clients to create customized tailoring from 12 of brand's bestselling silhouettes, with the ability to select custom details – including buttons and personalized embroidery inside each piece – and fabrications from leather-bound swatch books of curated options. The designer explained that while the brand has a "preferred matching" of these silhouettes, such as the double-breasted Angela blazer with the Vesta pant, clients will also be able to curate their perfect pairings.

Additional silhouettes include the Rhein, Norman and Francisco pants; Leiva and Gavin blazers, and the Coleridge vest. Men's styles include the Sebastian pant, Stevie pant, Irving jacket and Nico blazer. In addition, fabrications includes signature, specialty sustainable materials such as sportswear wool (100 percent virgin wool), solid suiting (virgin wool, silk and linen) and cashmere corduroy (100 percent cashmere), which are available in an array of 20 different colors. Button options include leather and tiger's eye, leather and wood, tonal fabric and rose-gold hued metal. In the future, Hearst said she plans to incorporate additional bestselling materials and silhouettes.

Each style is crafted in Italy, and the Tailored Bespoke process takes about two months from the initial appointment and sartorial decisions to the final fitting in the boutique. Furthermore, each piece can be customized to be lined or unlined and will be available in sizes 34 to 50 for women and 44 to 58 for men, with prices starting at \$4,550.



A look at the Gabriela Hearst Tailored Bespoke swatch book.



A look from Gabriela Hearst.

"They're the proven successful shapes for all our different clients of all different body types," she said of the styles. "It's what they feel most comfortable with. Usually, our client would know which is their preferred shape. Here, they're able to do special colors and things that they don't have in their wardrobe," Hearst said.

Currently, the top six styles accounting for 70 percent of the brand's suiting category's total sales include the Angela blazer (22 percent), Vesta pant (16 percent), Rhein pant (10 percent), Leiva blazer (9 percent), Mairi blazer (6 percent) and Lanthe pant (6 percent). In terms of fabric, solid suiting accounts for 28 percent of the category's total sales, followed by sea island corduroy (13 percent) and sportswear wool (10 percent).

"We're already having appointments in L.A.," Hearst said of the new in-store program and strong retail team.

Beyond the boardroom and travel needs of her female clientele – the majority of the business – the Tailored Bespoke program will enable the brand to create custom options for special events, such as weddings, as well as men's tailoring within its growing menswear business.

"One of the biggest compliments we always get is, 'I felt so strong in your suit,' and that makes me so excited," Hearst said. "A suit is extremely empowering, especially for women."

BUSINESS

Parsons Grads Bring Barneys Store Back to Life

- Before undergoing a remodel under new owners, the Chelsea flagship served as a venue for one last fashion hurrah.

BY ARI STARK

Before Barneys New York went belly up in 2019, what aspiring designer didn't dream about getting their clothes inside its hallowed marble corridors?

This year's Parsons grads might have missed the chance to sell there, but they

did technically get in Monday night to the former Chelsea flagship, which served as their 2025 BFA fashion show venue.

In true Barneys style, it was an original concept for a student-led presentation, but this wasn't the first time the swirling Steven Harris stairway has doubled as a runway. The vacated lot previously hosted Michael Kors for fall 2024 as well various pop-ups and conventions over the years. The Parsons event, however, was the last to be held before the building changes owners and undergoes remodeling.

Throng of people formed an unruly

line outside, possibly leading passerby to believe the legendary warehouse sale had somehow been revived. Inside, on the basement level that once housed cosmetics, former Barneys senior vice president Julie Gilhart made the rounds, surveying a few of the prize winning collections. "It's a little overwhelming. There's so much talent here," she said, highlighting the experimental textile work. "Nothing puts you in a better mood than seeing talent emerge. It's exciting."

Gilhart, who gave the commencement speech at the New School's graduation ceremony Friday, knows that feeling of excitement well. Starting at Barneys in 1992, she helped launch the careers of several alumni, including Jason Wu, Prabal Gurung and Loewe's newly minted creative directors Jack McCollough and Lazaro Hernandez. Gilhart added that this was exactly the kind of initiative Barneys was meant for: supporting young creatives who are "uniquely authentic," as she put it. "It's the Barneys mantra."

Guests later proceeded up to the first floor to take in a parade of over 200 looks across program pathways including collection, materiality, phygital fashion, fashion product and systems and society. Perched on benches under empty shelves where jewelry and handbags had been displayed, it was clear Barneys' all star roster still loomed large for students.

There were clingy knitted evening dresses in the vein of Azzedine Alaïa and several chrome or chain mail pieces

could be linked back to Paco Rabanne. Meanwhile, Rick Owens and Issey Miyake were the chief references in menswear. And on the more experimental front, Rei Kawakubo's ebullient sculptural forms and McQueen's macabre, S&M fetish-wear delirious and sometimes shocked the crowd.

Given the range of silhouettes, it was difficult to discern a thread tying any of them together. Ironic then that, "A Common Thread" was the chosen theme.

According to Parsons professor Anna Lerner-Zwack, Barneys' legacy as a touchstone for the New York fashion community was the thread. "We're bringing it back to life," she said. "The whole idea is about bringing different ideas and different identities, different cultural influences together, but everybody has a very unique standpoint."

Her colleague Deshon Varnado chimed in, reflecting on how the store is intertwined with Parsons history. "It was such an iconic place in terms of Barneys buying some of our designers' collections right out of school, so just bringing it full circle and being able to celebrate before the building is gone, we're very grateful," he said. "We're just so excited to see what our students do next."

To close, models twirled into the street, though it was unclear where they were headed next—perhaps downtown Printemps, which recently opened in the Financial District. As the city's carousel of high-end retail keeps spinning, so did they.



Looks from the 2025 Parsons School of Design BFA runway show at the former Barneys.

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EXCLUSIVE

Molly Sims' Yse Beauty To Enter Sephora Stores

- Yse Beauty is on track to triple year-over-year business in 2025.

BY RYMA CHIKHOUNE

Molly Sims' Yse Beauty is entering 361 Sephora stores nationwide on June 13, following its online debut at the retailer on June 3.

"I knew it was the perfect partner," Sims said. "I want to meet women where they are,

and I think my girl does shop at Sephora."

Founded in Los Angeles in 2023 by the model, actress, podcast host and author, the Yse (pronounced "wise") Beauty consumer is "35 plus," Sims went on. "She's the Millennial who's growing out of being a Millennial. She's having her first baby. She's in her 40s, and she wants to be clean."

Sims aimed to provide a nontoxic, simple and effective beauty routine for

women – like her – who struggled with hyperpigmentation, dark spots and acne scars due to environmental pollution, stress, hormonal shifts, sun damage and blue light exposure, among other factors.

She invested two years in research and development before launching with a collection of six products, priced between \$45 and \$88 on ysebeauty.com, in partnership with L.A.-based brand incubator SOS Beauty. (It's also been sold online at Editorialist and Knockout Beauty.)

"Clinicals were really difficult financially for me," she said of early days.

It paid off. Yse Beauty, with bestsellers like Your Favorite Exfoliating Pads and Skin Glow SPF primer, has a 46 percent consumer retention rate.

"We are barrier friendly. We are glow

first. We are skin care meets makeup. We are clinical all the way," Sims, now 51, said of the line.

The skin care features gentle yet results-driven formulas, while the cosmetics are noncomedogenic and blend color with skin care benefits. The Skin Glow, for instance, with SPF 30, helps prevent sun spots and reduce the appearance of dark spots, while adding natural glow with niacinamide, spirulina maxima extract and sodium hyaluronate.

It's a minimalist "no-makeup" look that Sims herself is known for.

"We will always have our products probably lean into a tint," she said of product development. "My girl, she loves a tint. She loves an instant glow. She loves a brightening." The brand's newest launch, Like a Gloss, a hydrating lip tint, sold out three of its four shades within two days.

Sims now runs a team of 18 that's growing, following investment from Willow Growth Partners, which offers early-stage capital. "They're amazing," Sims said of the firm. "I love them. They have been so instrumental in helping me be strategic and scaling."

Yse Beauty is on track to triple its year-over-year business in 2025, according to Sims, and projects \$2 million to \$4 million in sales for the first six months after launch at Sephora.

In-store, the retailer will carry the exfoliating pads, Skin Glow, Morning Cocktail Vitamin C Serum and Xtremely Rich Moisturizer, with a larger assortment available online, including the Last Call Retinol Serum and The Overachiever Brightening Eye Masks.

For Sephora, Yse Beauty delivers "skin care solutions addressing common concerns for aging skin," with an "elevated, self care experience that enhances daily routines," said Brooke Banwart, senior vice president of skin care merchandising at Sephora, in a statement. "We are thrilled to partner with Yse Beauty as we continue to grow our skin care offerings to meet the evolving needs of our clients across all age groups."

HOME DESIGN

RH Poaches Lisa Chi From Arhaus

- Chi takes on the role president, co-chief merchandising and creative officer of the upscale American furniture firm.

BY SOFIA CELESTE

MILAN – As RH inches closer to its goal of becoming a true American luxury furniture brand, it announced that it's bolstering its creative team.

On Tuesday, the company said Lisa Chi is its new president, co-chief merchandising and creative officer. In this role, Chi will report to RH chairman and chief executive officer Gary Friedman and will co-lead product development, merchandising, inventory planning, sourcing, manufacturing and marketing. She will work alongside Eri Chaya, who also holds the title RH president, co-chief merchandising and creative officer.

Chi returned to RH, which was formerly known as Restoration Hardware, from Arhaus, where she held the position of chief merchandising officer.

"We are honored to welcome Lisa back to Team RH as we continue to elevate and expand our product and platform," Friedman said. "Lisa's accomplishments while at Arhaus were impressive as she led the merchandising organization during a period of rapid growth, exceeding the billion-dollar mark during her tenure."

In 2024, Arhaus reported \$1.27 billion in net revenue. In the fiscal year that ended in February 2025, RH reported that net revenues rose 5 percent to \$3.18 billion.

Prior to joining Arhaus in 2021, Chi was senior vice president of merchandising for upholstery at RH, and has held senior merchandising roles at Talbots, Kohl's and

Lucky Brand, after beginning her retail career at Gap Inc. where she spent 10 years in various merchandise leadership positions.

The American brand is on a mission to create a curated world of luxury living, travel, dining and design services and continues to expand its network of

international collaborators. In February, the Corte Madera, Calif.-based RH told WWD that it added two new designers to its roster: Mathias de Ferm from Belgium and the Milan-based designer Arthur Gentil. De Ferm is known for his skill in combining natural materials and innovative techniques and is specialized in welding and carpentry. Also in February, the company unveiled 40 exclusive collections from internationally renowned designers with its latest 432-page Sourcebook."





Here and below:
Van Cleef & Arpels' store in
Florence.

BUSINESS

Van Cleef & Arpels Opens First Store in Florence

- This is the fourth retail flag the jewelry house has planted in Italy, after stores in Milan, Rome and Capri.

BY SANDRA SALIBIAN

FLORENCE – Van Cleef & Arpels is strengthening its ties with Italy.

After opening a seasonal boutique in Capri last month, on Tuesday it officially unveiled its first store in Florence, adding to the locations in Milan and Rome.

Here, the French jewelry house has zeroed in on a location previously occupied by Valentino and housed inside a historical building in central Via de' Tornabuoni, close to city landmarks such as the Ponte Vecchio bridge and Palazzo Strozzi.

"This was a project that took us a long time," said the company's president of Europe & CIS Stéphanie Rault. Mentioning that the idea to further develop the market traced back to 10 years ago, they eventually came across what she defined as the right location just two years ago and kickstarted the renovation works.

Maintaining its original facade, the 2,798-square-foot space spans over two floors and builds on the interior concept of the other retail locations of the brand, marked by Art Deco-inspired furnishing, geometrical elements contrasting with delicate motifs inspired to nature and dark tones juxtaposed to green hues.

The store opens into an entrance hall decorated by a custom chandelier, with Murano glass lighting further punctuating the space. Adjoining rooms feature oak wood flooring and decorative panels with botanical themes, which serve as one of the Compagnie Financière Richemont-owned label's key sources of inspiration. Bookshelves displaying publications and objects linked to Van Cleef & Arpels' heritage are also recurring elements throughout the store.

Moving up a marble staircase, black lacquered wood and green quartz dominate the space, which offers different corners furnished with plush armchairs and sofas that convey an apartment-like feel. A bar and private salons for one-on-one appointments amplify the sophisticated yet cozy atmosphere instilled in the location.

"We were not in a rush to develop Italy. We wanted to have solid basis, first in Milan and then in Rome...What we've learned in those two boutiques is obviously the strong attraction of Italy, that will always remain one of the main touristic destinations in the world," Rault said. "But also the strong ties with the local clientele, which is very much familiar with the jewelry world. First because there are very famous jewelry brands, but also a tradition of crafts in this country, so there's a lot of resonance with what we try to do," she added.

This two-pronged attraction with tourists and local clientele has also marked the opening of the seasonal store in Capri, although Rault acknowledged the different mission of that outpost.

"We're going to see our clients in another environment, a bit more chill, hence the boutique is different, too – a bit less institutional and a bit more relaxed," she said of the 269-square-foot space previously occupied by fellow Richemont brand Buccellati and nestled in the island's tony street Via Camerelle.

Operating from April to the end of October – covering the destination's high season – the store reprises the botanical themes in an alcove-like setting, which still showcases Van Cleef & Arpels' high jewelry, jewelry and watchmaking collections.

The Capri unit followed a successful test the company launched last year with a seasonal boutique opened in Bodrum, and Rault didn't exclude the idea to replicate such a format in other Italian destinations in the future.

Asked about other retail plans for the market, she said that the next target would be Venice. "It's been on the map for the past 10 years but then again it's about finding the perfect location," Rault said. "I'm not worried, I think it will come eventually. That's the only city that we're looking at for now."

Rollout in Europe has taken an acceleration as of recently. This month the brand also unveiled a boutique in Zurich and plans to open two locations in Germany this year, to be followed by its first store in Madrid.

"Our focus is really to get closer to the local clientele, which we find interesting," said Rault, listing also recent openings in Amsterdam and Wien, that took Van Cleef & Arpels' store count in Europe to 25.

The brand is a pillar of Richemont's money-spinning jewelry division, which also includes the likes of Cartier, Buccellati and Vhernier. As reported, sales of fine jewelry accelerated into the double-digits at the end of fiscal 2025 for the group, which in a challenging year for the luxury industry saw overall sales climb 4 percent to 21.4 billion euros.

In particular, Richemont's jewelry sales grew 11 percent in the fourth quarter, compared with 9 percent consensus estimates and 8 percent growth in the full fiscal year. In the year, all regions grew in the double-digits with the exception of Asia-Pacific. Richemont said that direct-to-client transactions accounted for 84 percent of total jewelry sales.

"That says a lot about local clientele [in Europe]. They still have a strong appetite for jewelry," said Rault, pointing to people acknowledging the intrinsic value of jewels and seeing them as investments and pieces that stand the test of time and can be passed down from a generation to another.

Rault underscored that Van Cleef & Arpels' overall approach is to "being well balanced and not super investing in one

region." She highlighted that the brand has always had very strong ties with the U.S., has been in Japan since the '70s and in Hong Kong since the '80s, while it entered in China in 2006, "relatively late versus our competitors."

"It takes a bit more time in Europe for obvious reasons linked to the real estate market, where there are longer leases and less movement," she said. While France and the U.K. have been the brand's historical markets, Rault sees potential in the likes of Portugal and Spain, in addition to Italy.

As she reiterated Italians' passion for craftsmanship, she said that iconic lines of the brand, such as the Alhambra pieces hinged on the four-leaf clover symbol of luck, the Perlée range marked by beads of gold and the floral-themed Frivole collection, resonate particularly with the local clientele for expressing the brand's expertise in daily, versatile jewelry with identifiable aesthetics.

Further highlighting the affinities between the market and the company, Rault said the firm is looking to enhance the engagement with the local community also by way of cultural initiatives implemented locally. She pointed as examples to the Van Cleef & Arpels: Time, Nature, Love" exhibition the brand staged at Palazzo Reale in Milan in 2019, as well as its involvement in the Homo Faber showcase in Venice, among other projects.

With the same spirit, it marked the Florence opening by staging the "Welcome to Van Cleef & Arpels' world" exhibition in store.

Running until the end of July, the showcase spotlights a selection of pieces from the brand's patrimonial collection with the goal to invite visitors to discover the inspirations, expertise and pioneering spirit behind its creations, their evolution through the years and the link to the house's contemporary jewelry.

Key pieces included the 1956 "Picardie" zip necklace in yellow gold, rubies and diamonds that was first patented in 1938; the 1981 "Everest" necklace in platinum, yellow gold, sapphires and diamonds and defined by the house's Mystery Set technique patented in 1933; the 1950 "Little dancer" clips expressing one of the recurrent inspirations of the company; the "Cadenas" 1944 wristwatch turning an ordinary object like a padlock into a precious creation in yellow gold, platinum and diamonds, and the "Flower" secret wristwatch of the following year, which comes with rubies and diamonds. Yet the star of the showcase was the 1953 "Daisy" gold minaudière designed with different compartments dedicated to hold specific items like a powder box, lipstick case, lighter or a comb.



Inside Kecia Steelman's Far-reaching Vision for Ulta Beauty

The relatively new chief executive officer is firing the retailer's engine on all cylinders. BY JAMES MANSO



Kecia Steelman

Just a few months into her tenure as chief executive officer at Ulta Beauty, Kecia Steelman's vision for the retailer is coming into focus – and it's panoramic.

Steelman detailed all of the facets of her growth plan for the company at the 2025 WWD Beauty CEO Summit in conversation with WWD senior editor Kathryn Hopkins, and it ranges from advocating for emerging brands to doubling down on in-person experiences, driving retention through its loyalty program and taking that mission global with international expansions.

Steelman praised the emotional nature of beauty and its general resilience to broader macroeconomic challenges, noting that it's historically only garnered further share of mind and wallet.

"The more that we can share as an industry, the more we can thrive collectively. This category is special because it's not just about the products, it's about the way we impact people's lives. It's much more than just selling products on beauty and wellness. When I think about the opportunities that are out there, I think we can continue to lean in on innovation and experiences and the human connection that's vital.

"The potential is for beauty to continue to grow, especially when you include wellness in that category," Steelman continued.

That being said, Steelman did acknowledge a increasingly complex landscape for the industry. "Competition isn't getting any easier. Every single day, more and more people are coming into beauty because it's an attractive category. We're in it to win it," she said,

noting that 80 percent of Ulta Beauty's sales are still in brick-and-mortar. "That human connection – the discovery, the playfulness, the innovation – you just can't get online."

That's not to say the company isn't also focused on e-commerce. "Replenishment is important, and if you have a lipstick that you buy all the time, you can buy that online. Soon, you'll see a 'subscribe and save' option online. But it's the human connection that makes us different," she said.

That includes the experiential and service side of the business. "You throw our salons into it, we're leaning into eventing. This next year, we're going to increase eventing by about 40 percent," said Steelman. "We'll have over 70,000 events happening in our stores. It's theater, it's beauty, it's entertainment and connectivity that you get to create."

Pointing to Ulta's recently minted partnership with Cécred, the hair brand founded by Beyoncé Knowles-Carter, Steelman sees opportunities for more collaboration with brand partnerships.

"We have this 360-degree activation in stores where we have not only products on the shelf in a beautiful way, but we're leveraging our salons to have treatments around it: a scalp treatment, a protein treatment, moisture treatments," Steelman said. "We also have backbar takeovers in about 200 of our stores where it is like Cécred on steroids."

With over 44 million members of Ulta's rewards program, the executive noted that 95 percent of sales come through those members. "We know how often they're

purchasing, the power of our UB Media network to communicate with them, and leveraging our brands to be able to talk directly to them," Steelman said. "We are laser-focused on not only gaining new members, but retention of those members and creating experiences like community."

For Steelman, that community starts where she herself started her career – in the stores. "I think it's pretty special to be a CEO who worked her way through almost every single position in retail. It gives me a much better perspective and understanding of what it takes to make this machine work," she said. "The person at the register who engages with every guest is one of the most important people," she added, explaining that they define the experience. "Having that at the root of who I am is really important."

Since assuming her role on Jan. 1, Steelman has been on a listening tour not just with store teams, but the investment community, internal teams and brands. She sees all those different stakeholders as equally important to the success of the company. "If we're not successful, our brands aren't successful, and we've all got to be in this together to move this business forward."

As for what she's seeing on the ground now, "I'm seeing high activity around newness and innovation, and when there's an activation or reason to purchase like our 21 Days of Beauty, it's driving great traffic," said Steelman. "When the customer feels they're getting something special, you see traffic come through."

Citing the company's quiet period

before earnings on May 29, Steelman said she couldn't share much on specific behaviors, but did allude to the category's general resilience. "I like what I'm seeing; engagement with beauty as a whole is still very healthy. When we went through COVID, wellness really started to spike, regimens were being picked up, and a lot of those have stuck. The consumer, even though they might be stretched in their wallet, they view beauty as an affordable luxury and it's something that they're going to do for themselves."

International expansion is also on the docket, with a joint venture taking the company to Mexico and a licensed franchise deal helping it break into the Middle East. "We're going to do what works best for our strategic initiatives in each country," Steelman said. "It's important for me that we're still focused on the U.S.-based business, that's always going to be the top priority. I don't want to be too distracted with chasing a shiny object."

Steelman's ambitions include strengthening the company's ability to build emerging brands, and sees that as among Ulta's differentiators moving forward. "What I mean by that is how we are leveraging our 360 – stores, e-commerce and media network – to unlock our marketing campaigns and bring that to life," she said. In addition to that, there's a workforce of 58,000 beauty associates, services and a broad swath of consumers. "You've got to be exceptional in all parts of your business, and that's what I'm really focused on."

BCEO SUMMIT RECAP

Dissecting the Beauty Dupe Debate

Circana's Larissa Jensen took the stage at the 2025 WWD Beauty CEO Summit to unveil a closer look at how consumers perceive beauty dupes – and the beauty-duped. BY NOOR LOBAD

Dupe culture is riding high in beauty, and so is the industry's divide over its implications.

While some beauty players see dupes as a means to democratize innovation, others see the category, simply put, as a form of plagiarism. But how do consumers – or, as Circana's president of beauty and industry adviser Larissa Jensen described the cohort, "our leaders" – feel?

At the 2025 WWD Beauty CEO Summit, Jensen shared findings of a proprietary Circana x WWD Beauty Inc survey offering a closer look into the dupe-buying behaviors of beauty shoppers of different backgrounds.

While cooped-up consumers tended toward luxury in the immediate wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Jensen said, "in the last few years, some of those fat [post-lockdown] bank accounts have diminished, and so there has been a shift toward accessible luxury; products that are still an investment, but are accessible to the masses."

And dupes – which are less-expensive alternatives to luxury or premium products

– have been a big beneficiary of this shift.

According to the survey, 43 percent of female beauty shoppers have purchased a beauty dupe, while 34 percent haven't purchased one, but would consider it, meaning a combined 77 percent of shoppers are open to the category. Hispanic consumers and young consumers over-index on beauty-dupe purchases, which matters because the groups also represent "some of the most-engaged beauty consumers that we have in our industry," Jensen said.

Consumers also don't necessarily correlate price with quality, meaning many are likely to buy a dupe even if they can afford the original product. "Thirty-two percent of consumers believe that price is more important than innovation – almost double the percent that believes the opposite – so while innovation is important and we must continue to do so, we also need to recognize that consumer sentiment leans more toward price sensitivity."

Consumers report social media platforms as a key channel in influencing



dupe purchases, perhaps unsurprisingly led by TikTok, followed by Instagram and Facebook, respectively. In terms of retailers, 27 percent of consumers look to Walmart to buy dupes, followed by Amazon at 21 percent and Target at 11 percent.

Skin care and makeup are the top categories for dupe purchases, with 27 percent of consumers reporting they've bought into both. "Younger consumers are more likely to buy makeup dupes, while older consumers are more likely to buy skin care and hair dupes," said Jensen, adding that Gen Z is the generation most inclined toward fragrance dupes.

Because 82 percent of consumers

believe dupes have a similar style and quality as the original product and more than half of consumers believe dupes build awareness of the original product, Jensen posited that, "maybe we haven't considered that the success of the dupe and that of the original are intertwined."

"We see it time and time again where premium and luxury products continue their growth trajectories even as new and lower-priced alternatives enter the market and enjoy their own success. Part of the reason why they can co-exist is because the consumer is different, where they're shopping is different," said Jensen. "There is room for all areas of the market to grow."

Inside Michelle Peluso's Revlon Comeback Plan

After taking the helm as CEO of the company in November, the retail veteran is looking to lead Revlon back to growth by not compromising on culture, modernization and leadership. BY NOOR LOBAD

"My whole career has been about how technology is changing industries, and that's exciting for me," said Michelle Peluso at the 2025 WWD Beauty CEO Summit in conversation with CVS Health's Musab Balbale – who was Peluso's colleague at the retailer until last fall, when she took the helm as Revlon's chief a little more than a year after the company emerged from bankruptcy.

Before her time at Revlon and CVS, Peluso held senior leadership roles at IBM, Citi and Travelocity – and she's bringing learnings from each era to her current undertaking: restoring growth to Revlon.

"It's a rare person who's both great at what they do and a fantastic leader of people and a great culture-bearer," Peluso said. "I fundamentally believe we need leaders at the top of Revlon who are 'and' leaders; who are exceptionally good at what they do – the best at innovating, the best at storytelling, the best at building relationships with retailers and with technology – and they're exceptionally good at driving the culture forward."

"Maybe not everyone feels that way, but if you don't, you don't belong at Revlon."

With this uncompromising approach, Peluso is looking to optimize operations at every level of the company – from its respective portfolio brands to international markets to retail and beyond. Already, the company is back to seeing dollar sales growth – even in China, one of the industry's most challenged markets – but the real signifier of success, Peluso said, "is going to be unit growth, customer growth – that kind of retention."

To get there, Revlon is doubling down on speed.

"We've now formalized a speed lane as well as a traditional lane for building product – that's super important, because



Musab Balbale and Michelle Peluso

some trends move fast and we can't use the same processes for everything we do," she said, adding that AI is one key lever enabling this new pace. "We're using AI to think about fast packaging iterations – things that would normally take six to nine months, can happen in a few hours."

Localization, too, is important to resonate with consumers in different markets, especially in an increasingly divided global landscape.

"We're dealing with a dynamic tariff environment, with macroeconomic uncertainty and backlash against American companies – those things are real. Any of us who don't appreciate, frankly, how many levers China has, don't have the story right," she said, adding the company is "showing up as very local in the countries we serve."

For instance in China, the company is capitalizing on the success of its Elizabeth Arden skin care capsules and emphasizing

stock keeping units with brightening benefits, while in Sydney it adds SPF to certain color cosmetics products. In the U.S., the company just inked a fragrance deal with Bronx, N.Y.-born rising rapper, Ice Spice.

"Our brand exists to be unforgettable, to live boldly – those common elements must manifest themselves everywhere," said Peluso, adding that showing up a little bit differently around the globe is key to maintaining a consistent impact.



Jenna Lyons in conversation with Beauty Inc editor in chief Jenny B. Fine.

How Jenna Lyons Does It

The multihyphenate closed out the 2025 WWD Beauty CEO Summit by discussing the art of the pivot, balancing gut versus analytics in business and more. BY NOOR LOBAD

Jenna Lyons might pivot, but you won't see her overcorrect.

The multihyphenate, who was named creative director of J.Crew in 2008 and president of the company two years later, has been up to much since her 2017 departure from the brand. To recap: she's been a two-time reality TV star, most recently appearing as a cast member of "The Real Housewives of New York City"; cofounded a sustainable false eyelash brand, LoveSeen, in 2020, just ended a 10-year tenure on Shake Shack's board, and is now creative executive director at FundamentalCo, a consulting agency launched by private equity giant Blackstone.

"I was at J.Crew for 27 years, and so I always knew what my life was going to look like – I knew what my week would look like, who my team was, when my vacations were, where my paycheck was coming from – what I wanted was to throw everything up against the wall," said Lyons at the 2025 WWD Beauty CEO summit in conversation with Beauty Inc editor in chief Jenny B. Fine. "So I started doing a lot of different things."

Though her gigs since have spun the gamut – even in her role at FundamentalCo, Lyons helps companies from Olaplex to Visa develop strategies and creative efforts – key throughlines have included unlocking success amid cultural and economic backdrops of uncertainty.

On Risk-taking

"What I learned during the disaster of 2008 was that there's an instinct to kind of retract and stop doing everything," said Lyons, who took the helm at J.Crew just as the financial crisis was happening. "While, of course, that's important...what I realized in going through so many cycles like that is that what's also important is what you do with what you have.

"How do you take bets? How do you actually step out and take risks? Because if you pull back too far and you get too scared, what happens is, when the world starts to come back – you're just not prepared."

Case in point: during the economic crash of 2008, J.Crew pulled back on real estate and slowed down on store openings. When the market recovered, "we just weren't positioned to take some of those better deals – we'd sort of slowed our own process," said Lyons, adding that when the next downturn came, "we said, 'OK – what can we take advantage of in this moment? Are there great leases out there we can get? Or anything we can do in terms of buying SEO search terms?'"

She applies the same ethos today in navigating mounting global tariffs and threats of a potential recession.

"Don't overcorrect right now," she said. "Be thoughtful, be strategic, but don't give yourself whiplash. Any sort of tectonic shift like that should make you think about your core competency, what you do well, what

you can do to stand out."

It's an ability that comes with refining one's balance of gut instinct versus numbers in business.

Gut vs. Analytics

"They're equally important. Analytics can create analysis paralysis; I grew up in a company where what was coming was more important than what had been; however, you can't plan a business based just on your gut," said Lyons, adding that one's team is equally as important as those attributes.

"Don't hire people who look like you or think like you or talk like you – my gut is one gut, but I need to have the gut of people around me who have different points of view," she continued. "You will pick up on things if you're quiet, but if you're talking too much – you miss it."

Another key pillar to success, Lyons said, is knowing – and always remaining grounded in – your "why."

"A lot of people think a brand is a logo, but a brand is an ecosystem. It's the essential idea that commands and focuses everything. If you have a strong brand and a strong idea, your team knows what you're doing and where you're going – in the absence of that, it's easy to get lost."

Part of the appeal for Lyons of joining FundamentalCo has been returning to that ecosystem and getting her hands wet at every level.

Doing the Work

"I've enjoyed getting to work with so many different types of companies, whether in beauty, finance, tech," Lyons said. "I think I got to a point [at J.Crew] where every meeting I was having was an HR meeting – I wasn't doing as much of the work, and I get to do the work now. I enjoy doing the work. Being able to have the privilege at my age and stage of career to learn things that are completely out of my scope and element has been incredible."

In terms of the themes she's drawn to today when it comes to beauty in particular, the category's embrace of consumers, however they come – is top of the list.

"When I grew up, everyone looked the same – it was 'Baywatch,' and that was what I thought beauty was, because I lived in Southern California; it felt very one-note," she said. "We still have a ways to go, but brands have woken up and started to connect to people and the ways that they actually want to look, and understanding that what works for one person might not work for another."

While there's similarly no one-size-fits-all formula to success, Lyons emphasized: "Make sure your core is infallible – that's the most important thing. If you feel like you're adding a lot, hold back on what is extraneous. It's so easy to overcomplicate a company, but the fact of the matter is that the more distractions you have, the more distractions your team has, and the more distracted they'll be.

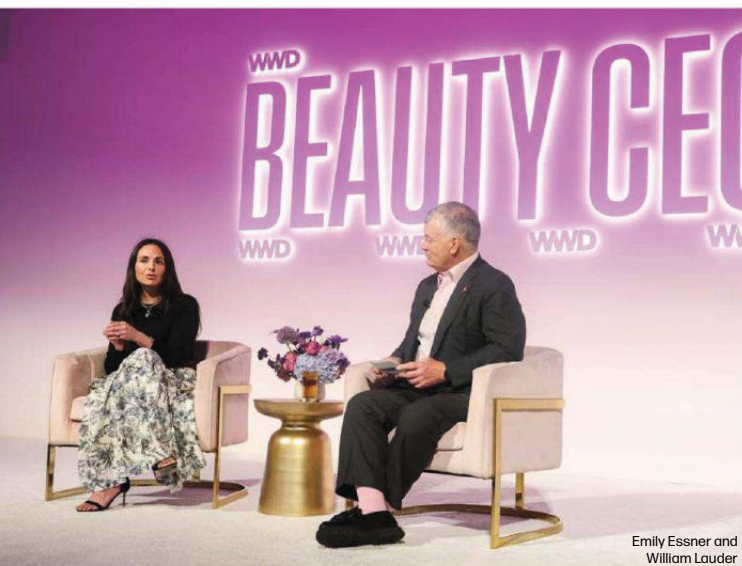
"So take care of the things that really matter, take care of your team, be in constant communication, and maybe get off your computer and walk around."

BCEO SUMMIT RECAP

BEAUTYINC WWD

Saks Global's Emily Essner on Navigating Luxury Amid Uncertainty

Saks' chief commercial officer discussed the retailer's focus on tailored experiences, economic challenges, and its approach to beauty brand partnerships with William P. Lauder. BY KATHRYN HOPKINS



Emily Essner and William Lauder

For Emily Essner, president and chief commercial officer of Saks Global, making its luxury offering stand out in a crowded market comes down to personalization.

"We call this the art of you. That is the core of our strategy," she told WWD during a conversation with William P. Lauder at

the WWD Beauty CEO Summit. "When we think about what is luxury today, it really is how do we create an experience that is distinctly right for each and every one of our customers?"

Noting that there are 30 million luxury consumers in the United States, Essner

spoke of the scale of Saks Global as a key competitive advantage. "My guess is pretty much all of them are our customers, which gives us an incredible wealth of data," she said. "And we're very sophisticated in using this to be able to really identify exactly that right experience for each and every customer."

Nevertheless, Saks, which completed its acquisition of Neiman Marcus Group in December with participation from Amazon, is navigating the luxury segment amid a backdrop of economic uncertainty, which Essner said historically, has been one of the worst enemies to the luxury sector.

"Uncertainty, not understanding where the stock market is going, hearing lots and lots of noise, is not helpful. But what we are seeing, and this is very early, is that at least for a segment of luxury consumers because of the scale of noise, because of the scale of uncertainty, we think they might be tuning it out," she told Lauder. "So some of those historic correlations or historic relationships may no longer be relevant, but very, very much too soon to tell," she said.

Elsewhere in the conversation, Essner addressed Saks' payment issues, with multiple vendors not having been paid over the last 24 months. That is now being addressed. "All the payments that we have promised we have made," she said. "We continue to do so. Receipts are at 2023 levels. We are very soon going to be closing the chapter of this as part of our story."

As for what Saks is looking for in terms of beauty brand partnerships, she stressed that once again it comes down to personalization and experiences.

"What are the launches? What are the exclusives? What are the ways in which we really take that incredible offering of our brand partners, and make it really unique and really special for our clients," she said.

A key part of this means making sure the consumer has a reason to shop at Saks versus its competitors.

"We think about the model very much holistically. We have an incredible store network, 71 stores in the best locations, and we're very lucky to have built that up for over a century in some locations, but we also have, collectively, the most important luxury e-commerce platform in the country, so 700 million visits across our platforms, and that's something we are together really focused on integrating," she said.

"When you think about the importance of experience and the importance of physicality, we offer some of the best aestheticians and makeup artists in the country," she continued. "So you're able to go to a store, engage in a luxurious experience, have a world-class treatment, and do it in a way that feels totally personalized. Once you go and you have that fabulous facial, we follow up with you and remind you how to use the products that you purchased or to purchase when that time comes. We really think of the two as working together, and there's so many opportunities, certainly digitally, to make sure."

In terms of differentiating between Saks and Neiman Marcus post-acquisition, it is not something she obsesses over. "Sometimes that can be a business school concept, that in reality, what we find is what consumers really want is not that they're necessarily different, it's that they are fully realized versions of themselves."

The 'Boring' Marketing Strategy Behind Vacation's Fun Sunscreens

Blending meticulous marketing with a playful, retro aesthetic, Vacation's Lach Hall on how the brand has transformed sunscreen from a chore into a joyful, shareable experience. BY KATHRYN HOPKINS

Sunscreen brand Vacation was perhaps unsurprisingly conceptualized when its founders were on vacation.

"We spent a lot of time on the beach, drinking piña colodas, wearing a lot of sunscreen and we just got talking one day about why is sunscreen so boring when it's used in moments that are anything but," said cofounder Lach Hall, who was speaking at the WWD Beauty CEO Summit.

"We wondered, with a bit of creativity, could we create a sunscreen brand that wasn't a chore to wear, something you actually look forward to wearing, something you want to pose with, something you want to tell your friends about, and something like your favorite book or sunglasses that would actually enhance the moment in the sun."

But while being conceptualized on vacation is perhaps obvious, the secret sauce is less so.

"[There's] a quote about Jimmy Buffett, the musician behind the Margaritaville brand, that's actually been a really big inspiration to us. His biographer, Ryan Wyatt, said Jimmy Buffett didn't just sell music. He sold the state of mind, an illusion of permanent vacation, and his genius was

that he never let you see the scaffolding behind it," said Hall. "With Vacation, that's the dirty little secret behind what we do. For all of the fun, escapist branding that we have, all the Willy Wonka type products, the dirty little truth is that behind it all the scaffolding is actually just very traditional, very boring, very methodical and meticulous, strategic marketing."

Research into the history of marketing around sunscreen became key to Hall's strategy.

"When we looked into the history of the category, we found out that fun was actually the dominant positioning in the category in the '80s, '70s, '60s, '50s when it was all about tanning," he said. "In the '90s, that all shifted when we learned of the dangers of tanning and the positioning of the brand became a lot more clinical. So our thought was people are on board with wearing sunscreen now they want to look after their skin, it's time to have fun again with it."

That thinking led to fun nostalgic designs, combined with effective formulas. Think the Classic Whip – an SPF 30 sunscreen with a whipped cream-like consistency, and Orange Gelée, based on the iconic Bain de Soleil products of the '70s.



"People see our products as collectible and end up taking multiple items down the beach," said Hall. "Most importantly, when using our product, it really sparks that joy

and gets people to talk and write about us and take photos, so much so that we get about 5 million views per week from TikTok and social media."



Tsedal Neeley



David Greenberg

Implementing AI in the Beauty Category to Scale With Speed

L'Oréal's David Greenberg and Harvard Business School's Tsedal Neeley discuss finding the value in the technology in order to drive performance in the beauty category. **BY EMILY BURNS**

AI isn't just a buzzword. It's an industry-wide transformation.

At WWD's annual Beauty CEO Summit, David Greenberg, chief executive officer, L'Oréal and president, North America Zone, L'Oréal, took the stage to introduce Tsedal Neeley, PhD, Naylor Fitzhugh professor, business administration and senior associate dean for faculty development

and research, Harvard Business School. Ahead of her conversation, Greenberg shared a few thoughts of his – first showing what AI created when he asked it for an intelligence briefing, the intended topic of his introduction. He showcased how giving the engine a stronger prompt resulted in a better answer, and discussed the importance of not using AI for AI's sake but actually

finding the value in it for each brand.

"The challenge we all face is to use AI in a way that brings true value to the business by either making the lives of our teams easier or by helping to unlock new growth opportunities," he said.

Neeley then took the stage to deliver a keynote on how technology is transforming industries across the board, with key

insights on how brands should think about scale, speed and scope when using AI.

"Scale: you can reach millions and even billions of people with AI, with the organization or the employee base that you have," she said. "Speed: smarter, faster decisions because of the ability to predict in the right ways, and scope: new products, new services and new innovation."

Neeley walked through key examples that have used AI with this approach, including Moderna's vaccine. In terms of product launches, Tsedal pointed to fast-fashion brand Shein, which has deployed AI to predict and confirm trends.

"The first thing that they do is they start with a minimum factor order of about 100 products, and then they put it up on their platform," she said. "Then they're looking for signals from consumers through data and algorithms to determine whether or not that product is going to be popular. They can have these predictions inform them on whether or not something is going to do well, and they can go from 100 products to 100,000 products in one week.... Because they have data, and they know how to do data. They can have predictions that are unexpected."

Like these examples, AI can be used in beauty in myriad ways from predicting trends and the success of future products to streamlining processes.

According to Neeley, if brands aren't already using AI they are behind the curve and will have to play catch-up, especially as the updates to the engine are happening so rapidly. To close her talk, Neeley left the audience with what she considers the most crucial piece of advice when it comes to implementing AI across a business.

"The biggest driver of success is that when you bring in new technology, you've got to bring in new processes," she said, adding that implementing AI on top of old systems is the biggest mistake a company can make. "If you bring AI, you've got to change the company too."

How Jaimee Lupton Is Building Mass Beauty Brands

Lupton discussed building Monday Haircare, Being Haircare and Daise Beauty for the Gen Alpha, Gen Z and Millennial beauty consumers. **BY EMILY BURNS**

When it comes to creating culturally relevant, cult-followed beauty brands, Jaimee Lupton is on a roll.

During WWD's Beauty CEO Summit, Lupton revealed her secret sauce for building mass brands for the next generation of beauty consumers, specifically Monday Haircare, Being Haircare and Daise Beauty.

"Our approach is different to a lot of the heritage mass players," Lupton said. "We operate with a direct-to-consumer mindset, but we show up with mass distribution space [including Walmart and Target]. We are digital first, not only in data and manufacturing but with our digital teams."

As a longtime beauty consumer, Lupton first recognized the pitfalls of the industry, most notably that there was still a level of exclusivity when it came to the hair care category, which led to Monday Haircare. Lupton recalled walking the hair care aisles of mass retail with her husband and business partner Nick Mowbray and being disappointed with the offering.

"Everything was screaming at us," she said. "We wanted something that whispered with a Millennial aesthetic.... The white space [was] there wasn't a luxury look and feel hair care brand with a viral buzz that was in brick-and-mortar." Monday Haircare amassed viral success, thanks to its aesthetic bottle, quality formulas, affordability and engaging content, and Lupton began identifying adjacent white spaces that have driven her other businesses.

For Daise Beauty, Lupton tapped into the tween beauty craze after noticing white space for brands that were actually created for this demographic, which she said is expected to hold \$5.5 trillion of spending. She launched Daise Beauty as a fragrance and body care brand for the Monday Haircare user's little sister. Her goal was to create something that was age appropriate yet aspirational.

"The crossover between toys and beauty is stronger than ever," Lupton said. "We wanted to lean into this, something

I've coined the 'toyification of beauty,' resulting in brands built for them and encouraging them to play in new forms, formats, lower barrier to entry and a better price point."

Then came Being Haircare. The goal was to address the need for effective solutions for all people and all hair types. "The brand is a truly inclusive Gen Z hair care brand for both females and males, all genders, which didn't exist at mass," Lupton said. "The formulas were targeted for each of the hair types 1A to 4C."

While all three brands are addressing market gaps with their formulas and packaging, the social media content strategy is equally as crucial, particularly given the ages they are targeting. "You need to move at the speed of light," Lupton said. "You need to be at the front of cultural trends. You need to think about how am I feeding this content engine. Just last year, our group presented over 10,000 pieces of content."

In order to make content that is relevant, Lupton analyzes relevant data to discover what the user will like, collaborates closely with TikTok on what's performing well and adjusts their strategy accordingly. Through this approach, she has discovered several ways "to persuade the customer to buy: showing credibility, offering solutions, demonstrating likeability through our content and showing the proof that our product works."

Lupton added that in order to create content these consumers will like, the team has actually tapped into these demographics. "Legacy players often struggle to resource their teams accordingly," she said. "We hire talent that

Jaimee Lupton



reflects the demographic of the brands we are building: Gen Zs and Millennials. They have a seat at the table and they're becoming the new leaders."

BCEO SUMMIT RECAP

BEAUTYINC WWD

Building the Next Generation of Beauty Brands

Maesa is transforming the beauty industry with its innovative brand-building, consumer-focused strategies and agility – setting a new standard in a fast-changing market. BY KANIKA TALWAR



Erin George and Piyush Jain with WWD's James Manso.

In a conversation presented by Maesa, James Manso, beauty and fashion market editor at WWD, sat down with Piyush Jain, chief executive officer of Maesa, and Erin George, managing director of fashion and luxury practice at Boston Consulting Group, to discuss how Maesa has become the blueprint for success within the

beauty industry.

Under Jain's leadership, Maesa has created a successful incubator by working closely with its retail partners such as Target, to create disruptive brands within categories that are ready for innovation.

Our vision is to build the next generation of beauty companies," Jain said. "To build

it, we need to keep pace with where the world is going, where the society is going and where our consumers are going. One of my fundamental beliefs is that the pace of change today is the fastest it's ever been – and yet it's the slowest it'll ever be."

Embracing change and being flexible is a key driving force at Maesa. But moreover, brands should leverage this agility to stay the course with their vision. "Content is king in today's world. With our brand Fine'ry, we created a content factory. We leverage artificial intelligence and move content really quickly. Sometimes we create hundreds of pieces of content within hours, sometimes within days," the CEO said.

Maesa is also moving quickly with its brand launches. For example, the intimate care brand Niches & Nooks went from idea to launch in just nine months.

Meanwhile, George shared that the keys to success in volatile times include having a North Star of what each brands stand for, being customer-centric and scenario planning. Moreover, the amount of data available to drive decision making in the market is unlike it has ever been. "If you're behind on the AI curve, it's going to be hard to keep up," she said.

With tariffs being top of mind for everyone, most of the senior executives George has spoken with recently are focusing their energy on cost management in light of different scenario planning and

spending less time thinking about driving demand generation.

"Everyone is expecting that demand will contract given the high likelihood of a recession, but there will still be spending. We have to remember that consumer savings is still higher today than it was pre-pandemic," she said. "Maybe not what it was during the pandemic but still higher. Interest rates didn't come down yesterday but they may by the end of the year." George shared that the likelihood of consumer spending on beauty declining is lower than any other category.

In uncertain times, Jain said Maesa has been controlling the controllable within the cost side and then leaning in on innovation and demand generation to meet consumer needs. Despite the unpredictability, Maesa has continued to outpace the market in terms of growth, with two brands that launched in the last two years both approaching \$100 million in sales this year.

"We start with the consumers – which is at the heart of everything we do. I'm passionate about thinking about the consumer as a whole. We don't think of ourselves through categories," Jain said. "When launching a brand like Being Frenchy, we didn't think of 'what's the category.' We looked at how wellness translates to the consumer. As long as you elevate yourself, think about the consumer and how to meet their aspirations, you will always be luxury."

The Future of Personalized Marketing

Listrak's data shows shoppers are using social platforms for research, offering personal data for customized brand communication. BY KANIKA TALWAR

With consumers continuing to focus on brands that provide both personalized experiences and community-centric activations and launches, Jamie Elden, chief revenue officer of Listrak, shared how tailored communications enhance brand connectivity to its consumers.

Citing insights from the newly released Listrak 2025 Beauty and Fashion Benchmark report at the Beauty CEO Summit, he noted that customer acquisition is paramount.

Many brands' initial conclusion when receiving customer information is to send products in an email twice a week, and if that doesn't work, send it four times a week. But Elden said the most effective marketing tools are to market to the individual and their needs.

Through its artificial intelligence technology, Listrak can track and personalize its marketing through SMS or emails with products from brands the consumer recently browsed but didn't purchase.

Notably, SMS has seen 70 percent revenue growth year-over-year. Another growth category in North America, that is already popular in Europe and Asia, is RCS – which is enhanced SMS with click to buy and boasts two-way communication.

"We've seen this channel in five years go from 70 percent email and 30 percent SMS to 60 percent SMS and 40 percent email," Elden said. "SMS has become a key channel to drive growth in this sector." The main drivers of this growth can be attributed to the Gen Z and Millennials cohorts.

Listrak's data found that brands saw an 80 percent acquisition growth rate

year-over-year – with Elden stating that more than ever, people are using social media as a platform for research and discovery and willingly offering data for personalized communication with brands on their websites.

One major finding from the report is that makeup sales rebounded after the COVID-19 pandemic over the past two years.

Another finding is that skin care continues to dominate sales – with Gen Z driving 40 percent of new sales. And most notably, Gen Alpha is growing momentum for 2025 with 13-year-olds and younger spending on

average \$140 a month.

"Fragrance is booming with young men and boys who are spending \$200, \$300 or even \$400 on luxury brands," said Elden, who recalled a recent trip to Selfridges with his 12-year-old son, where they bought Paco Rabanne's Phantom cologne in a robot bottle. "I remember it from the '90s – and now that's hot again," he said. "My son saw it on TikTok and we came back with lots of perfume from Europe."

With growth continuing to be dictated by Gen Z, Gen Alpha, social media and new marketplaces, TikTok Live has

continued to be a game changer. Dubbed by Elden as the "QVC for teens," he said that people are setting alarms and logging on for TikTok Live to shop.

"We've recently integrated with TikTok Shop to work with our brands on TikTok Shop," Elden continued. "It's phenomenal the amount of revenue being generated from TikTok Shop in this sector."

With beauty shoppers browsing more than ever, fresh and engaging content is more in demand. With consumers researching skin care, skin care health, popular products and sustainability, Elden stressed the importance of how-to content blogs and social content to educate and inform.

"It's no longer just about the product," he said. "They want to know about your product and who you are as a brand. What do you stand for? Are you a good citizen?"



Jamie Elden

Perfect Corp., Estée Lauder Shape Beauty's Future With AI Technology

Perfect Corp.'s partnership with Estée Lauder Cos. has created immersive, tech-driven beauty solutions that cater to its global, diverse audience. **BY KANIKA TALWAR**

As technology continues to be a leading driver in beauty, brands are turning to artificial intelligence and augmented reality to provide customers with the ultimate experience.

In a conversation presented by Perfect Corp., Amanda Smith, chief executive officer of Fairchild Media Group sat down with Alice Chang, founder and chief executive officer of Perfect Corp. and Lynda Pak, senior vice president of global brand and corporate function technology at Estée Lauder Cos. to discuss how the two companies have worked closely together to allow consumers to be their most beautiful selves.

Since launching Perfect Corp. 10 years ago, Chang said that AI and AR have become an important business driver, and noted the rapid evolution of its practical applications.

"When we were talking with brands about using AI/AR in makeup, it was very new," Chang said. "Not everyone understood what we were doing. But we know that technology can help beauty lovers and beauty purchasers. Ten years ago, it was impossible to try different colors on your own face."

Perfect Corp. launched with a business-to-consumer app that exploded in popularity.



Over the past decade, its technology has greatly evolved to now include virtual makeup trials, skin analysis for skin care concerns, personalized product recommendations and hair diagnostics.

From mapping skin care concerns to makeup try-ons and shade matching, the Estée Lauder Cos. has utilized Perfect

Corp.'s AI and AR technology to create powerful personalization tools for consumers.

"Estée Lauder has been an early adopter to deliver to our consumers beautifully immersive experiences," Pak said. "That was back in 2018-2019, so it was fairly early-on. Once COVID-19 hit, it seemed

like a natural progression to leverage AR to allow our consumers try on skin care and skin wellness without the challenges of COVID or someone touching your face."

Pak shared that a core strategy is to partner with tech companies to deliver impactful, immersive and digital experiences across its multiple categories – makeup, skin care and hair care. "As a technologist and with the partnership we have with Perfect Corp., it has allowed us to build modularized components of features and functionality that we can leverage across brands and categories," Pak said. "We're able to quickly deploy to multiple brands and multiple markets, while allowing brands to customize and have a brand voice as part of our customer experience."

Perfect Corp.'s latest AI skin analysis tool has also become a big milestone in the company's history, Chang said. Able to create personalized recommendations, Perfect Corp. works with brands to recommend products and has expanded into med-spas and aesthetic clinics to work with doctors. The tool is able to create a before-and-after picture for skin care products or procedures.

"Beauty is an even bigger category. It's more than just makeup or skin care – it's your whole look. It's your hairstyle, hair color, apparel, shoes, jewelry and accessories," Chang said. "While there's a lot of criticism about AI, it's only a tool. How you use it is up to you, how you leverage it, in which direction. Our mission is very clear: We're focusing on beautiful AI – making human's lives even more beautiful with analysis and recommendations."

From Clicks to Commerce: Unlocking Sales in the Digital-first Era

Highlighting the impact of social commerce, executives from Recom, True Beauty Ventures and Supergoop chat about leveraging real-time data and fulfillment platforms to convert viral moments into meaningful sales. **BY KANIKA TALWAR**

In a rapidly evolving market where consumers are more digitally focused than ever, customers' expectations are also shifting and demanding more.

Jennifer Weil, WWD's European Beauty editor, sat down with Taylor Hamilton, founder and chief executive officer at Recom; Cristina Nuñez, cofounder and managing partner of True Beauty Ventures and Lisa Sequino, chief executive officer of Supergoop, to discuss how brands can be their most successful in this digital-first age.

"Whether it's Gen Z customer in São Paulo or a Baby Boomer in Albuquerque,

N.M., customers expect the entire journey, from discovery and education to consumption and replenishment, to be completely frictionless," said Hamilton. "[Brands] needs to have a strategy to accommodate that need at each stage. This notion that channels are individually siloed doesn't exist anymore. In today's day and age, each channel is an individual act in a single play."

Nuñez shared that across the True Beauty Ventures portfolio of brands with diversity in DNAs and consumer profiles, the most successful brands have "evolved

thoughtfully and not reactively." She said that brands that continue to home in on their brand identity and not chase trends but are still agile enough to meet consumers where they are is key.

"Digital platforms have transformed and removed traditional boundaries," said Nuñez.

Seamlessly evolving a brand through doubling down on authenticity and cross-functional agility is a core strategy – with a prime example being the premium hair care brand K18, which was bought by Unilever in 2023. K18 rapidly grew its consumer base across "generations, channels and geographies," Nuñez said, while remaining true to its brand identity of being science-backed, biotech-driven hair care. K18 leveraged these core values and goals across salons, TikTok content and on the shelves in Sephora to drive the mission to its prospective customers.

"With Supergoop, sunscreen is such a growing category, it's easy to get distracted to go for every single opportunity out there," said Sequino. "But having the KPIs to drive a healthy and sustainable business is the core of what we do. Looking at KPIs on whether we're acquiring customers efficiently. And asking, 'What are our repeat buys and hero products?' If something's working, we lean in." Moreover, Sequino said that fostering ownership across channels to allow mistakes with testing and learning is paramount.

With social commerce being a growing channel across platforms such as TikTok,

Instagram, YouTube and Amazon, Hamilton said that capturing a viral moment and converting it to sales and revenue is top of mind. "It's not easy to do because there's a lot of friction when there's a customer that is on one channel and can't necessarily convert and then has to leave that channel to log in."

Brands can mitigate such conversion issues by making sure that they have the systems in place to identify data in real time when these viral moments happen and leveraging Amazon as a fulfillment space for the consumer demand, he said.

Hamilton cautioned against brands that use DTC for exclusivity and newness with products. He shared a story where a brand created a huge nationwide campaign, including Super Bowl ads, but lost out on high-level conversion rates when viewers went on Amazon looking for new products but couldn't find them. The brand then decided to launch its entire offering on Amazon to help drive consumer purchasing.

The main takeaway? "Content is king," said Sequino. She shared that this year, Supergoop has created five times the amount of content versus last year. "When you see something is successful, you want to jump on it and then execute it really well and track it so you can develop more of it. We have content being created 24/7; we have a team in Asia that creates it overnight for us and we have a huge ecosystem that creates the magic speaks volumes to the success of our products," concluded Sequino.

Taylor Hamilton, Cristina Nuñez and Lisa Sequino with WWD's Jennifer Weil.



BCEO SUMMIT RECAP

BEAUTYINC WWD

Capitalizing on TikTok and Social Selling, as Per Beauty Founders

E.I.f. cofounder Joey Shamah and Canvas Beauty founder Stormi Steele discuss how to evaluate new opportunities in nascent channels. BY JAMES MANSO



Stormi Steele



Joey Shamah

If Stormi Steele and Joey Shamah are any indication, there's no wrong channel to launch in.

Both founder-influencer Steele, of Canvas Beauty, and AS Beauty founder Shamah, who also founded E.I.f. Beauty, have ably harnessed the opportunities to grow a brand digitally. At the 2025 WWD Beauty CEO Summit on May 8, the duo outlined how they've built burgeoning

businesses – and reestablished legacy brands – as early adopters to social shopping, and where they're eyeing the opportunities next.

"We follow our customer, we built a d-to-c site, we drove engagement through Meta and other channels, and we applied the same tactics to TikTok. Over 70 percent of our customers on TikTok are over 45 and over 55 percent of our

customers on TikTok are over 55," Shamah said of Laura Geller, which sits aside Bliss and Cover FX in his portfolio.

"One of our core tenets is 'rinse and repeat,' not everything is the same shape and size but we've been finding the spots, the angles, the hooks, the engagement and the product. Once those stars are aligned, we lean in on them," Shamah continued.

For her part, Steele went on a near-vertical trajectory with her brand in TikTok's early days. "I launched Canvas Beauty in 2018, I was a one-person show, I built my website from scratch and made products in my kitchen," she said. "My very first year in business we did about a million dollars in sales. It was just me. By 2020, we went viral."

From there, Steele went on to do \$20 million in sales that year. "People in business say you don't want to grow too fast, and I didn't know what that means until everything crashed in 2022. I almost lost my business," she continued. "I got on TikTok Shop in 2023, I made a video in front of a whiteboard. We sold over 2 million units in 15 months."

Steele was an early arriver to TikTok Shop, and built her core audience on the platform. "They resonate with our story. I've always been very transparent," she said. "I've leaned into being a face-forward founder."

For Steele, the longer the livestream, the better. She was the first to have a million-dollar livestream. "Longer livestreams were the thing," she said. "I lean into personal experiences and storytelling."

Shamah thinks there's even more gold to be struck. "The current channels are very underdeveloped," he said. "AI obviously plays a part, we grow with our customers, we understand our marketing and who we're bringing to the sites. 'Digital-first' is going to continue, and we're going to always test and learn."

For him, agility is the imperative. "We're a very nimble organization and we strip away complexity," he said. "International – TikTok U.K. is something we're looking at in the very near future and continuing to find success on our digital sites. That's where we'll continue to follow, both in terms of markets and product, digitally."

Steele is also taking her brand to the U.K. via TikTok Shop. Her playbook has evolved as the platform has. "In 2025, we've transcended beyond buying products. Now, people buy people, especially when there's a face to the brand. Now, leverage the affiliate marketing and don't let affiliates run with their own messaging. Let them know who your brand is."

Shamah sees the new frontier on already established platforms. "Instagram is going to continue to develop and take a lot of the ease that TikTok Shop has," he said. "We have a major focus on Amazon, how we can be more beta testers with them as well."

Conversely, Steele is looking at Twitch. "It's going to have a powerful impact on the way we consume in the future. I've seen people have a lot of success," she said. "Once you garner a fanbase who follows you, you can convert them into customers."

Assessing Modern Luxury With Bluemercury's Maly Bernstein

The Bluemercury chief executive outlined the modern luxury beauty consumer – and how the retailer is meeting them – at the 2025 WWD Beauty CEO Summit. BY JAMES MANSO

Maly Bernstein is aiming high, and in more ways than one.

In the socioeconomic sense, the Bluemercury chief executive officer is doubling down on today's luxury consumers with a household median income of \$250,000; in ambition, she has reimaged the retailer's visual brand identity, and with the high-touch service she's also deepening in her existing fleet of stores.

At the 2025 WWD Beauty CEO Summit, Bernstein extrapolated on the behaviors she's seeing and where she sees the opportunity, based on a survey of thousands of luxury beauty consumers.

"Let's start with who they are," said Bernstein. "The largest concentration of modern luxury beauty consumers are between the ages of 35 and 55, they span all ethnicities, they're highly educated as 90 percent of them have a college degree, and they're mostly employed."

"They describe themselves as sophisticated, charismatic, passionate, curious and thoughtful, natural leaders, tastemakers. They are our muse," she continued.

Pointing to research that shows that 95 percent of purchases are made subconsciously, Bernstein shared how Bluemercury is going heavy on emotional appeal. "Emotions drive customers," she said. "consumer sentiment plummeted 32 percent in April, and this was seen across age, education and income. The modern

luxury beauty consumer is anxious too, but what we're seeing is they've evolved from making purchases that are for external validation and more for internal fulfillment."

That class of consumer is also obsessed with self-optimization. "Two-thirds of them are always thinking about how they can better themselves. In fact, 80 percent of them said that as soon as they have leisure time, the first thing they do is exercise," Bernstein said.

She posited that in-store connection is vital to appealing to that sensibility.

"We think that's best achieved through service – empathetic service. In a world where we are more and more connected, are we actually connecting?" she said. "As an industry, we can help consumers keep on moving in a world of growing tech."

Ranking the top purchase drivers among modern luxury shoppers, the fourth was "a brand that makes me feel good about myself," Bernstein said. "We've taken this feedback and evolved our training and education program."

Among the 17 stores that Bluemercury opened last year, one anecdote stuck out to Bernstein. "We had a client come in who started tearing up, talking about how her routine just wasn't working for her. By the end of it, she was crying in the manager's arms," Bernstein said. "Our store manager encouraged her to come back the next day with her beauty routine so they could go over what's working and what's not, set

new goals and identify new products. Our beauty expert knew that what the client needed the most was to be uplifted."

In a similar vein, the third top purchase driver was "effective products and knowledgeable sales associates," Bernstein

said. "It's a focus on high quality with science-backed professional grade and craftsmanship."

The second purchase driver has informed the retailer's expansion strategy, too, hence its prevalence in neighborhoods and residential areas. "It's a brand and a place for 'people like me,'" Bernstein said.

All of that ladders up to the top purchase driver. "It's a brand that you trust. We know that trust is earned over time," she concluded. "The modern luxury beauty consumer is now celebrating enduring products with enduring experiences, with enduring relationships, to instill enduring confidence. We work and we focus and we live for building trust."



Maly Bernstein

BUSINESS

David's Bridal Unveils an Upscale Concept

- The new format, called Diamond & Pearls, officially launches May 29 in Delray Beach, Fla.

BY DAVID MOIN

David's Bridal Inc., seeking to lift its image and widen its appeal to a higher-income audience, has launched a new retail format called Diamonds & Pearls.

"It's a boutique concept, with a curated and tech-enhanced experience blending affordable luxury and couture with a refined, elevated environment," said Elina Vilks, president and chief business officer of David's Bridal, in an interview. "Today's brides are looking for more than a dress. They are looking for an immersive, shopping experience."

With the opening of the 3,500-square-foot Diamonds & Pearls at 9097 West Atlantic Avenue, Suite 104 in Delray Beach, Fla., "We saw an opportunity to reimagine the bridal journey through innovation, curation and style," Vilks said. The official opening is May 29, though there's already been a few "soft opening" days to get out any kinks.

Compared with the 193 David's Bridal stores around the country, and their no-frills, moderate price presentations, Diamonds & Pearls takes a contemporary and personalized approach for the brides, bridesmaids and special occasion categories contained in a smaller space. It still has some of the same selections as David's Bridal, with approximately one-third of the stock keeping units



David's Bridal's new Diamonds & Pearls store in Delray, Fla.

typically found in a traditional David's Bridal store, but is curated to the most trending styles and silhouettes. There are also some exclusive designer offerings, from Viola Chan and Marchesa, as well as David Bridal's signature lines such as Galina Signature, Oleg Cassini and Melissa Sweet, among other labels. Chan will work with clients on a custom design, either in person or through virtual calls. In addition, appointments can be arranged with personal stylists, Champagne is served, walk-ins are welcomed as well and

trunk shows are planned.

Inside the shop, interactive digital touchscreens powered by Shopify POS provide clients access to David Bridal's full inventory of dresses, accessories and shoes. "Internally, we are calling it the store of the future," Vilks said.

The future may bring additional Diamonds & Pearls stores, as the company is close to signing another lease on the Northeast Coast. But before green-lighting an expansion of Diamonds & Pearls, Vilks and her team will analyze the performance

of the first store for the next four or five months. "We are 'test and learn' people," Vilks said. "We want to see how this store goes, but we anticipate this will be a big part of our strategy next year." There's been "so much demand" for the kind of bridal shopping experience Diamonds & Pearls provides.

Prices start at \$400 to \$500, average just over \$2,000, and go as high as \$6,000 or \$7,000 for a custom couture gown, Vilks said. "We are way more affordable than many bridal boutiques," she said, suggesting other boutiques typically average out with a \$4,000 to \$5,000 price point.

The launch of Diamonds & Pearls reflects David's Bridal's rebuilding efforts after going in and out of bankruptcy two times in the last seven years, in 2018 and 2023, leading to the sale of the company to asset manager Cion Investment. ("Diamonds and Pearls" is also the name of a 1991 Prince album.)

"We're actually doing pretty well," Vilks said when asked how the business is currently performing. "We are completely changing the strategy and driving innovation with concepts like Diamonds & Pearls, becoming more asset-light and taking a tech-forward approach." Vilks said David's Bridal is rebuilding its wedding planning service, started a retail media company in January, and is looking at new AI tools. "Gen Z brides are tech-forward. They don't start their journey in the store anymore. She'll browse online first, then see it on social media," said Vilks, a former Hootsuite, Meta, PayPal and Visa executive. "And she wants affordable luxury."

BUSINESS

Sharon Leite Returns to The Vitamin Shoppe as CEO Again

- Two private equity firms, Kingswood Capital Management and Performance Investment Partners, completed their acquisition of The Vitamin Shoppe on Monday and recruited Leite back to the business.

BY DAVID MOIN

Sharon Leite is embarking on a second tour of duty at The Vitamin Shoppe.

Kingswood Capital Management and Performance Investment Partners, the private equity firms that just bought The Vitamin Shoppe, announced Leite's return to the retailer as its chief executive officer on Tuesday. Leite served as The Vitamin Shoppe's CEO from 2018 to 2023, but left to become CEO of Ideal Image, a chain of med spas, and later CEO of Omni Retail Enterprises, the parent company of

brands operating e-commerce including Bodybuilding.com, Pier 1 Imports and DressBarn.com.

The new owners indicated that the rest of the executive leadership team at The Vitamin Shoppe – which includes the president of the company Muriel Gonzalez – remains in place. The private equity firms bought The Vitamin Shoppe from the Franchise Group Inc. for an undisclosed price. The deal was completed this month.

"With the invaluable support of our partners at Kingswood and PIP – leaders in building brands and driving growth in omnichannel retail – we are primed for an exciting new era of expansion," Leite said in a statement. "I look forward to collaborating with the board, the management team, vendor partners and our dedicated 'health enthusiasts' as we build a world-class health and wellness platform that delivers an unparalleled experience to our customers."

The partners said they will be investing in a variety of brand-building strategies, including further supporting the health enthusiasts in running The Vitamin Shoppe stores, enhancing the company's digital marketing and e-commerce capabilities, innovating the private brand portfolio, and working with existing and emerging third-party

brands "to be the best distribution partner in the market."

During her first tour, Leite launched a new, more modern and easier to shop store format, accelerated the digital side of the business, expanded private label offerings, grew third-party brand partnerships and the Healthy Awards loyalty program, and initiated international expansion with Vietnam.

She is succeeding Lee Wright as CEO.

It's unusual for a CEO to leave a retailer and then come back years later, though the late Myron Ullman 3rd had two stints as CEO of JCPenney, and Howard Schultz had two stints as CEO at Starbucks. Also, Bob Iger is currently in his second tour of duty as CEO of Disney.

With the acquisition just finalized Monday, The Vitamin Shoppe board has been reorganized with new members, including Leite as well as Alex Smith and Beth Kaplan and representatives from Kingswood and PIP. Smith is a Kingswood operating partner and the current executive chairman of World Market, which is part of the Kingswood portfolio. Previously, Smith was executive chairman and then chairman of The Vitamin Shoppe, CEO of Pier 1 Imports, and earlier, she held senior management positions at The TJX Companies.

Kaplan was president and chief operating officer of Rent the Runway. Earlier, she served as president, chief merchandising and marketing officer, and director of General Nutrition Centers. Before that, she held leadership positions at Bath & Body Works, Rite Aid Drugstores and Procter & Gamble.

The Secaucus, N.J.-based The Vitamin Shoppe sells nutritional solutions, including vitamins, minerals, sports nutrition, specialty supplements, herbs, homeopathic remedies, and green living products.



The Vitamin Shoppe in Edgewater, N.J.

FASHION

Bethann Hardison Launches Foundation to Advance Young Talent

● The former model, advocate and adviser has championed Black models and creatives, while also keeping a watchful eye on the fashion industry's representation.

BY ROSEMARY FEITELBERG

Legacy building is not something that Bethann Hardison pays much attention to, even though people routinely ask her about it.

That is about to change with the creation of the Bethann Hardison Foundation. In her incarnations as a model, agency owner, activist, adviser and documentarian, she has spent decades championing and guiding models, designers and other creatives. Decades before diversity, equity and inclusion became a corporate initiative, Hardison cofounded the Black Girls Coalition in 1988 with the model Iman to celebrate Black models, who were working in such abundance at that time, and to give back to the community. The group took on a watchdog role, supporting African American models and raising awareness about racism in advertising, homelessness and other issues. In 2018, Hardison set up the Designers Hub to empower future generations of Black designers and brands with the support of the Council of Fashion Designers of America.

Her immediate reaction to the suggestion that she needed to establish a foundation was, "Foundation? I'm still trying to figure out when I'm going to slow down, which doesn't seem likely. That doesn't seem to be meant for me anyway," Hardison said.

Reluctant as she was to add another endeavor to her already full life, Hardison said, "I don't like failing at anything. I wanted to make sure that if we decided to do something, we would do it well."

Hardison consults for Kering America with continued support for Gucci and was recently in Florence for a few days for the luxury house's 2026 cruise show. On Tuesday night, she will be honored by the Gordon Parks Foundation at its annual gala. Earlier this month she was saluted as one of the honorees at the ACE Awards. And in April, Hardison took part in a Q&A after a screening of the documentary about her life "Invisible Beauty" at the V&A South Kensington.

Hardison's namesake foundation has been realized with the help of its founding board members Jared Williams, Antoine Phillips, Kegan Webb and Kristine King, who have quietly been working on it for the past two and a half years. "The priority was establishing the 501(c)(3) to get that status to legitimize the organization and to demonstrate a long-term vision and commitment to the work ahead," she said.

While Williams encouraged Hardison to create something to leave behind, she said:

"I never think of 'legacy' per se. I loved that this young man had the wherewithal to say to me, 'When you're no longer here.' A lot of people get very nervous, when you talk about dying or no longer living. That is not how I feel about it. I know that we come here to die. I loved that he talked about how things needed to be set up for when I'm not here."

To build the foundation's strategy, Hardison turned to such leaders as the brand consultant Lisa Metcalfe, brand strategist Len Peltier, Gucci's Susan Chokachi, Jamestown Hudson's Tom Mendenhall, journalist Alina Cho, designers Todd Oldham, Norma Kamali and Marc Jacobs, Google's Stephanie Horton, tech executive Celestine Maddy and Sole Folks owner Akil West. At the insistence of the board's founding foursome that one of Hardison's family members be included, her son Kadeem joined the board. "He's just been so thrilled by the whole idea," Hardison said with a laugh.

The foundation will help to make young talent familiar with the business. Not looking to replicate what is already out there, the foundation aims to build something new and to allow creativity to guide the board members. "Bringing together all of these interesting people on the board, they each come with such interesting ideas. Len [Peltier] was the creative director at the Gap [until July 2023] and he used to work in the music

Bethann Hardison



industry, which was also an experience that I have had," said Hardison, adding that the idea is not to limit the foundation's scope to fashion, but to broaden it over time.

Well aware that many young people don't understand how business works, she said the foundation will help expose them to that area and to share information. The aim is to also create initiatives to educate and lead creatives and young brands to a different plain in this new era of fashion. For now, meetings are virtual, which allows board members to be in different places.

"Using the expertise of the past to carve out a better path for the future is something that I feel really strongly about. We have all come up in our industry and we have learned. While some have had businesses under corporations or non-corporations, everything is changing in many different ways. The idea is to come with fresher ideas or different tools," she said. "That's what we are going to try to achieve, which I think we will. We've already made some motions."

FASHION

Karoline Leavitt's Style Spotlighted by Designer, Scrutinized by Others



White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt wearing a custom suit from Christopher Cuozzo.

● The 27-year-old is the youngest White House press secretary in U.S. history.

ROSEMARY FEITELBERG

For nearly 16 years, the fashion designer Christopher Cuozzo has worked under-the-radar.

But that recently changed due to his now-publicized connection to the White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt.

As the youngest person to hold that role, the 27-year-old Leavitt is frequently referenced and photographed in the media, as her predecessors had been. The married mother of one son may stand apart though for her fashion sense – monochromatic pantsuits with spandex tops and bolder colored dresses. Her appearance, as well as her fashion choices, are increasingly being scrutinized and are sometimes copied or criticized.

Leavitt has been photographed in the past wearing designer accessories, including a Gucci watch, Jimmy Choo's \$1,125 "Bing 65MM" crystal embellished pumps and Louis Vuitton's \$2,130 "Neverfull MM" bag. Last month after President Donald Trump hiked up tariffs for goods made in China, she faced a backlash in China and in the U.S. for wearing a Self Portrait dress that was made in China, after Zhang Zhishen, the consul general of the People's Republic of China in Denpasar Indonesia identified it as such on Weibo.

David Loranger, an assistant professor of fashion marketing and merchandising at Sacred Heart University, said Tuesday that Leavitt's style is scrutinized since she is "the face of an administration that has pushed the re-shoring and the 'Made in USA' narrative to eleven. Those on the other side of the podium's expectations are that the White House will walk the walk," when it comes to USA-made products or American brands."

Suggesting her choices of Louis Vuitton, Gucci, Jimmy Choo and British label Self Portrait are "a bit incongruent and hypocritical," Loranger offered American alternatives – St. John, Tory Burch, Brooks Brothers, Micheal Kors and Ralph Lauren. "Although they may not be entirely made in the USA, at least they are American companies to which the proceeds flow," he said.

The Boston-based Cuozzo, whose designs are made in factories globally, is a U.S.-based

designer who Leavitt has relied on for work wear. He never set out to get into fashion. While working 9-to-5 at a pharmaceutical consulting firm, Cuozzo started a custom clothing business that was primarily sold to friends and family members as a side hustle for three years before joining a Boston-based retailer with several locations across the U.S. that he declined to identify. He then struck out on his own in 2015.

He never studied fashion or design, instead earning a bachelor's degree in political science with a minor in communications at Merrimack College. "In a nutshell, I took a passion of mine and turned it into a career. I learned how to monetize a passion and that's what brought me to where I am today," he said.

Running a private by-appointment office in Boston's Seaport district, Cuozzo connected with Leavitt in November through a woman he worked with who was friendly with her. Asked if Leavitt is rebranding (in that she has been wearing brighter colors and appears to have had a beauty makeover), Cuozzo said, "I don't know. That would be a better question for her. I don't have the answer to that. I think she's very well-dressed whether she's in my garments or someone else's. She presents herself very well."

The designer has created about six suits for Leavitt including black, navy pinstripe, red, stone and green ones – "Very American, classy, sophisticated and elegant" and in her style – Trump's front woman is not specific about her design preferences. "She leaves it to me. She'll look to me for colors and ideas. I'll send her that and some products that have been modeled by my clients for inspiration. She will say, 'Yes. No.' but she leaves the design to me – lapels, buttons and linings," Cuozzo said.

There's never been discussion about the significance of her role at the White House or designers that she likes, according to Cuozzo.

Known for his custom linings, which could include a collage from personal photographs such as an engagement shoot, Cuozzo designed one suit for Leavitt with an American flag lining, "but nothing extravagant."

The designer said that the recent media exposure about his link to Leavitt has helped his menswear and the womenswear business (which was launched last year). "To be able to put suits on somebody, who is so notorious and who is on television and is very well-spoken is great for my brand. Of course, there's the flipside, right? Maybe somebody doesn't like her or somebody, who leans more left, might not be too happy with it, which I somewhat understand. I have plenty of customers, who aren't as famous as Karoline Leavitt, who lean left. I make suits for them as well. But overall the feedback that I have seen has come across as very well."

Allowing that there have been some negative comments directed toward him on social media and "on Karoline's posts, which I'm sure she's used to given the position that she is in," Cuozzo said, "Obviously you're going to get negative feedback. You can't make everybody happy in life, obviously. But to each his own."

With factories all over the world, Cuozzo said he sources a lot of his fabrics from Italy, the U.S. and England. He declined to specify, which countries he manufactures in, but said that he has not been heavily impacted by Trump's tariffs. The designer has also made four suits for Leavitt's husband Nicholas Riccio, whom he described as "a gentleman, very classy, polite and grateful. His men's suits start at \$995 and increase by 500-dollar increments depending on the fabrics, whereas women's suits start at \$1,495. With a client base that includes actors, actresses and Boston-based athletes, Cuozzo runs a one-man operation. This year's sales are expected to exceed \$2 million compared to last year's tally of a little under \$2 million.

WWD GLOBAL FASHION & BEAUTY SUMMIT



Moonglaze's launch in London included an outdoor campaign with founder Yara AlNamlah's face emblazoned on taxis across the city.

Sara Al Rashid



Highlighter sticks from Moonglaze create a dewy, glowy effect.

The Rise of A-beauty

The Saudi entrepreneurs behind Asteri and Moonglaze are aiming to transform the beauty industry with a distinctly Arab approach.

BY RITU UPADHYAY

When Moonglaze became the first Saudi beauty brand to launch at Selfridges – selling out within minutes – founder Yara AlNamlah was moved to tears. “It affirmed that we don’t need to adjust our identity to be recognized globally,” she said.

Meanwhile, Sara Al Rashid has expanded her cosmetics brand Asteri to nine retail locations across the Arabian Peninsula in a little more than two years.

Together, these founders represent the vanguard of A-beauty, a movement that aims to redefine beauty standards with formulations as resilient as the culture behind them. AlNamlah describes this philosophy as “emotional, layered and bold – without ever losing authenticity. It’s not just about color or technique; it’s about intention, ritual and confidence rooted in identity.”

This sentiment is echoed by Al Rashid, who launched Asteri to address the region’s challenging climate conditions. “Arab beauty is rooted in centuries of rich tradition – think Kohl-lined eyes, radiant skin and the use of natural oils and pigments,” Al Rashid explained. “At Asteri, we draw inspiration from these timeless rituals but reimagine them for today’s woman through innovation and performance.”

The cornerstone of Asteri’s value proposition is its “desert proof” technology. This climate-specific innovation addresses a real consumer need. “More than ever, our customers are looking for products that last – and not just in terms of wear-time, but also resilience,” Al Rashid added.

“The Middle Eastern climate is no joke – extreme heat, humidity and sand are daily challenges,” she noted. “That’s why we developed a proprietary ‘Desert Proof’ testing protocol to ensure every product can perform under these harsh conditions. Our foundations won’t melt, our lipsticks won’t dry out, and everything is designed to stay comfortable on the skin, even in 45-degree [Celsius] heat.”

Beyond product formulations, A-beauty embraces an approach that values intention and wellness alongside aesthetic results. “Beauty starts from within” is a philosophy that guides AlNamlah’s portfolio as an entrepreneur. In addition to Moonglaze cosmetics, she founded Treat

skin care and wellness spaces. “With Treat, it’s about creating simple, clean skin care that helps people connect to their own rhythm and feel confident in their skin. We bring back the idea that skin care is a form of self-respect and mindfulness. With Moonglaze, it’s about enhancing – not masking – your features,” she said.

The A-beauty market shows tremendous potential in Saudi Arabia, driven by strong economic fundamentals and cultural shifts. With the beauty and personal care market already valued at \$6.26 billion in 2025 and projected to reach \$7.41 billion by 2029, according to Statista, the sector demonstrates annual growth of 4.31 percent. This growth is fueled by increasing disposable income, a young, digitally connected population embracing self-expression, and the cultural significance of beauty in the region.

According to a Chalhoub Group report released in 2023, Saudis are the highest spenders on beauty products in the Middle East. The report, which gathered findings from 2,600 consumers, revealed changing social and cultural norms in Saudi society have placed an increasing emphasis on self-expression and individualism, driving greater acceptance and demand for beauty and cosmetics products.

From Local Heroes to Global Players

The A-beauty entrepreneurs aim to translate regional success into global recognition without compromising cultural identity. “I don’t believe you need to change who you are to be accepted globally. In fact, the more I lean into my heritage, the more people connect with the story,” AlNamlah said.

Al Rashid shares global ambitions for Asteri’s future: “We’re aiming for greater expansion beyond the Middle East – Europe, the U.K. and parts of Asia are next. But beyond geography, I want Asteri to stand as a cultural ambassador for Arab and desert proof beauty.”

While developing Asteri, Al Rashid incorporated values that resonate universally, positioning the brand at the intersection of cultural authenticity and contemporary ethical standards. The company is B-Corp certified, utilizing



sustainable packaging where 70 percent is refillable, recyclable or contains recycle. The products are vegan, cruelty-free, and formulated without known skin irritants.

The Retail Evolution

While e-commerce provided the initial launch pad for many A-beauty brands, physical retail has proven essential for growth. “Building a digital brand is one thing – but translating that into a physical space required a new kind of thinking,” Al Rashid said. “There’s something irreplaceable about in-person interaction – being able to try, touch and feel the products. Our stores are designed to be immersive experiences where beauty meets storytelling.”

It also revives the concept of discovering beauty rituals with community. Al Rashid traces her connection to beauty back to being the youngest of three sisters. She said she was “schooled in the art of makeup from a young age, learning advanced application tricks” that she would then share with her circle of friends. This community-centered approach to beauty is a hallmark of A-beauty’s distinctive character, she contended.

Asteri’s collection includes 53 products across 157 skus in four categories: eyes, lip, face and skin care. Products within the lineup reflect both heritage and innovation: mascara and kohl designed to enhance Arab women’s naturally dramatic eyes; foundations and color cosmetics formulated for the diverse skin tones and types of the region.

Asteri defines A-beauty as “the globally

pioneering Arabian beauty movement that’s the ultimate modern trendsetter. Arabia has a rich cultural history of makeup artistry that celebrates the widest doe-eyes, thick brushed brows, voluminous lips and beautifully sculpted features.”

Asteri’s buildable formulas allow for a more flexible, weightless application that Al Rashid claimed deliver impactful and highly pigmented color with protective skin care. This combination of performance and skin benefits positions Asteri in what the brand calls “affordable luxury” – competing with international players like Make Up Forever, Charlotte Tilbury and Fenty Beauty while maintaining its distinctive regional identity.

Looking Ahead

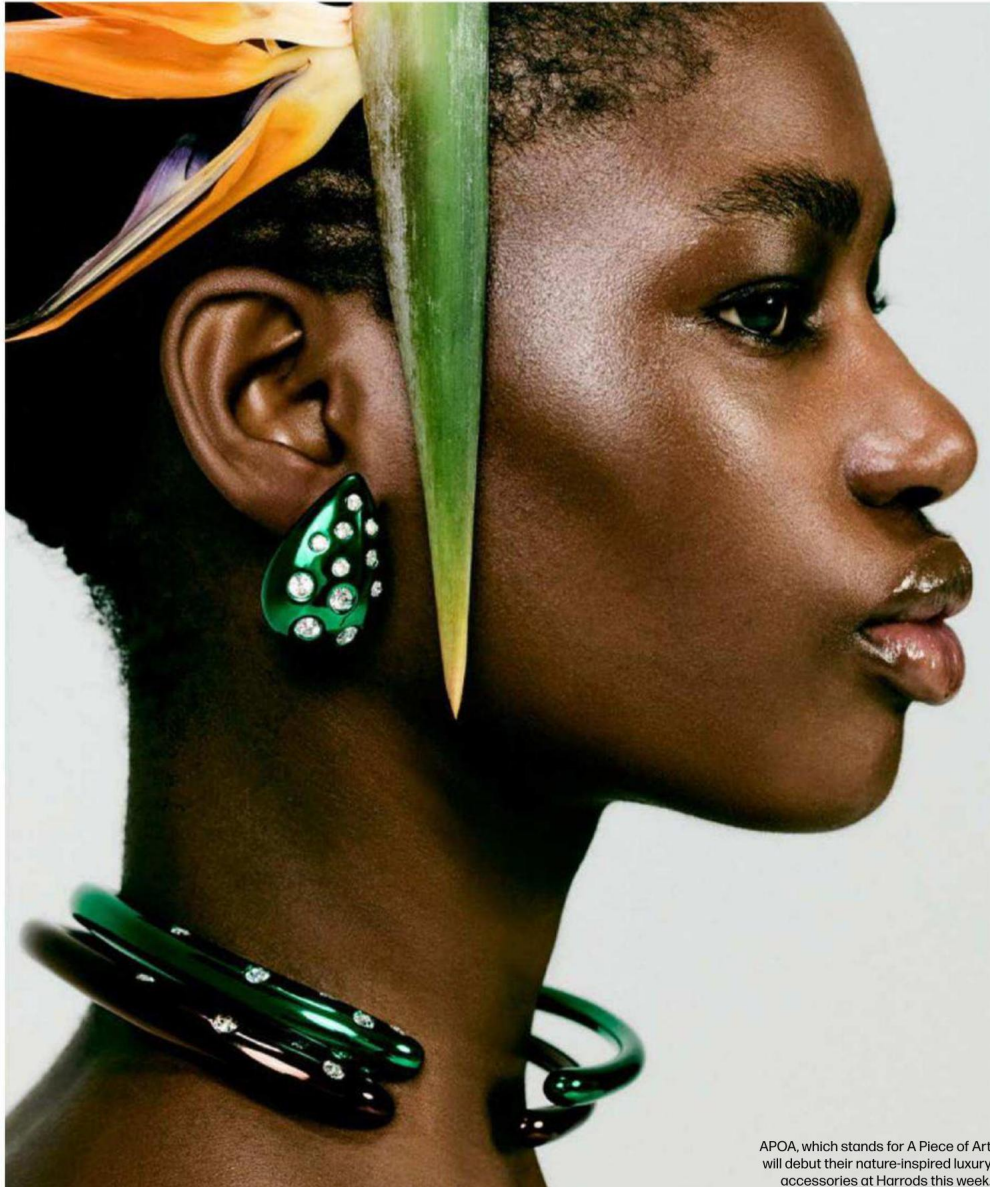
As A-beauty continues to gain global momentum, its founders see opportunity not just for their individual brands but for shifting perceptions about the region as a whole. “We’re not just building brands – we’re building a new standard for what lifestyle means in this region,” AlNamlah said.

Al Rashid believes A-beauty can serve as a cultural bridge: “We bring depth – beauty that’s intentional and culturally rich. Saudi beauty is about honoring ritual while embracing innovation. We value luxury, but not without meaning.”

As consumers worldwide increasingly seek beauty products with authentic stories and substantive values, A-beauty is positioning itself not as a passing trend but as a key voice in the future of global beauty.

Royal-founded Jewelry Brand Debuts at Harrods

The cult-favorite label turned a huge following and long waitlists into a global expansion strategy. BY RITU UPADHYAY



APOA, which stands for A Piece of Art will debut their nature-inspired luxury accessories at Harrods this week.

Saudi luxury jewelry brand APOA is launching at Harrods this week, a significant milestone for the label that has built its reputation through limited online drops that sell out within hours in the Kingdom.

Founded just three years ago by a powerhouse team of royal cousins – Princesses Noura Abdulaziz Al Saud, Sara Naif Al Saud and Mashael Khalid Al Saud – APOA has rapidly cultivated a fervent collector base with waiting lists stretching into the thousands for its handcrafted accessories. The Harrods debut represents the brand's first major retail partnership outside the Middle East and comes amid growing global interest in Saudi Arabia's emerging design sector.

"After building a loyal following through our limited online drops, we felt it was the right moment to expand selectively into curated retail environments that align with our brand values," Princess Noura told WWD in an exclusive interview ahead of the launch. "This shift allows us to maintain exclusivity while elevating visibility, positioning APOA as not just a

product, but a lifestyle synonymous with modern luxury and artistic expression."

The brand will maintain its signature direct-to-consumer "drop" model online on their own platform while adapting its strategy for the traditional retail environment with partners. This dual-channel approach allows APOA to expand its global footprint while preserving the scarcity model that has propelled its success.

"Being at Harrods is a significant milestone for APOA, and we are excited about the opportunities it presents," said Princess Sara. "Our drop approach has been instrumental in maintaining exclusivity and creating excitement among our clients. By releasing limited pieces throughout the season, we keep our customers engaged and eager to see something new, rather than overwhelming them with a large collection all at once."

While the Harrods presentation will allow new audiences to discover the brand, Princess Sara said that "keeping the drops on our direct sales channels allows us to deliver an exciting experience for our customers."

Cultural Heritage as Luxury Currency

APOA's rapid rise is a testament to their ability to translate Saudi cultural heritage into contemporary designs with global appeal. The brand's debut collection celebrated the Gulf's pearl-diving traditions, while recent releases have explored other facets of Saudi identity.

"Saudi Arabia is now on the global stage, and the world is beginning to appreciate the depth and beauty our country holds – from its landscapes and architecture to its fashion and art," says Princess Mashael. "At APOA, there's always a piece of Saudi woven into our designs. We draw inspiration from both the subtle and the striking."

Embracing nature has served as a fundamental source of inspiration for the founders. "You see this in the organic curves and shapes of the pieces. Volumes, color and textures from nature are key and deeply embedded within APOA designs," Princess Mashael explains.

The Harrods launch will feature a



APOA takes inspiration from Saudi Arabia's natural landscape to create sculptural accessories.

collection showcasing Saudi's botanical heritage. "Our most recent chapter was inspired by the botanical flowers native to Saudi which hold cultural and historical significance," Princess Mashael reveals.

The royal trio aims to elevate their accessories beyond fashion items to collectable art objects. "We refer to them as 'wearable sculptures' because we view every design as a unique expression," says Princess Mashael.

Their royal lineage infuses their approach to luxury with a sense of cultural responsibility. "As royal founders, we feel both thrilled and responsible to present the best of our culture to the world," Princess Sara shares. "Our background instills in us a deep respect for tradition and a commitment to quality, which are essential in the luxury industry."

Changing Global Perceptions

APOA's international expansion comes amid growing recognition for Saudi creative talent on the global stage, a shift the founders have witnessed firsthand since launching their brand. "We have observed a remarkable shift in the global perception of Saudi creativity," Princess Sara notes. "There is an increasing appreciation for the unique cultural narratives and craftsmanship that Saudi designers bring to the international stage. The world is beginning to recognize that our creativity is not only rich in heritage but also innovative and forward-thinking."

They see their international success beyond individual recognition for their brand, but as broader cultural representation. "It encourages dialogue about the depth and diversity of Saudi design, allowing us to challenge stereotypes and showcase our talents on a global scale," Princess Sara adds.

Princess Noura emphasizes that maintaining this cultural identity is a vital part of the brand's global expansion strategy. "APOA's Saudi DNA is the soul of the brand, it's what sets us apart. As we step onto a global stage like Harrods, we're not diluting that identity – we're amplifying it through a lens of craftsmanship and storytelling that resonates universally," she said. "Authenticity is what luxury consumers seek today, and by staying rooted in our origins while designing with global elegance, we're able to bridge both worlds."

Saudi Arabia's Ambitions for The Next Creative Generation

With the upcoming opening of Istituto Marangoni's Riyadh Campus, Burak Cakmak emphasizes the value of creative education in fueling innovation across all industries. BY RITU UPADHYAY

RIYADH — Istituto Marangoni will open its doors in Riyadh this August, becoming the first international fashion school with a permanent campus in Saudi Arabia.

The Milan-based institution's arrival comes as Saudi Arabia's fashion retail market expands rapidly, with local industry data showing it's on track to reach \$32 billion by 2028. This growth reflects changing consumer behaviors in the Kingdom, where a young population increasingly embraces both global brands and emerging local designers.

The Istituto Marangoni campus will anchor the new Riyadh Creative District at KAFC, part of a government strategy to build cultural sectors that diversify the economy beyond oil revenue. The Saudi Fashion Commission has secured 50 government scholarships for local students, signaling their commitment to developing homegrown creative talent. Six specialized programs, all accredited by the Technical and Vocational Training Corp., will form the core curriculum, developed specifically to address gaps in the region's fashion workforce while meeting international education benchmarks.

As the Kingdom aggressively invests in the development of creative industries, the opening of an institution like Marangoni reflects a shift in how design education is being approached in Saudi Arabia, moving toward fostering critical thinking and innovation with potential applications across multiple sectors.

Creative education is about developing a mindset that can transform industries," explained Burak Cakmak, chief executive officer of the Saudi Fashion Commission. "When we invest in design education, we're cultivating innovators who can apply design thinking to challenges in healthcare, technology, urban planning, and beyond."

With 70 percent of Saudi Arabia's population under the age of 35, the country aims to drive economic diversification through creativity and innovation.

The Saudi Fashion Commission's educational strategy extends beyond traditional skills-based training. "Education is definitely sitting at the core of ensuring progress and a stable future. We want to start with bachelor degree programs, but ultimately also build into master's programs, short courses, and even looking at opportunities for doing a Ph.D. in design," Cakmak said.

Critical Thinking Through Design

Cakmak said the commission aims to see interdisciplinary exploration, with students making connections between fashion and domains such as anthropology, history and technology.

"We need to see new expertise developed in different elements of creativity and design," Cakmak emphasized. "The industry needs not only designers but researchers, strategists and business innovators who approach problems with creative methodologies."

Istituto Marangoni's Higher Training Institute will offer programs designed to develop critical thinking capabilities alongside technical skills that incorporate the local cultural context. Stefania Valenti, managing director of Istituto Marangoni, emphasizes that the Saudi campus will bolster the vision to diversify the economy

Burak Cakmak and Stefania Valenti



away from oil, part of the Saudi government's Vision 2030 plan. "Our mission is to nurture local creatives by combining global expertise with Saudi heritage and lay the foundation for developing a new generation of Saudi talent, equipping them with the skills to connect with international markets."

The school will offer six specialized programs including Fashion Design and Accessories, Fashion Communication and Image, Fashion Management, Digital Communication and Media, Fashion Product, and Fragrances and Cosmetics Management.

In addition to diploma programs, they will offer upskilling courses for industry professionals, addressing the needs of the current workforce alongside preparing future talent.

Balancing Tradition and Innovation

Istituto Marangoni brings 90 years of experience in education to Riyadh, with the institution having launched more than 45,000 luxury professionals globally, including designers Domenico Dolce and Alessandro Sartori.

"Blending local cultural heritage with contemporary global trends allows students to develop culturally meaningful designs while benefiting from international exposure," Valenti said.

Integrating technology into the curriculum is also vital. "For us, digital is a tool to develop and promote creativity," Valenti explained. "Our students graduate with both strong traditional skills and advanced digital capabilities."

Fashion design students will create both



traditional and virtual collections, while communication students will develop campaigns in both classic and immersive formats. Business students learn to build brands using new technologies, ensuring graduates are equipped to support traditional brands, launch start-ups and lead innovation.

Focus on Real-world Outcomes

Beyond innovative teaching methods, Valenti pointed to concrete results as the institution's true measure of success. "Istituto Marangoni's main KPI is employability. We've made significant investments in our career services team," she explains. "Starting in the second year of the three-year program, students receive guidance to build their CVs and

access job opportunities."

This approach has yielded impressive statistics. "Our global employability rate is 91 percent, as measured by DOXA, an independent research firm. They surveyed our students of Istituto Marangoni campuses worldwide, one year after graduation from both bachelor's and master's programs," Valenti said.

What's particularly notable is the entrepreneurial success of graduates. "Of those employed, 32 percent have become entrepreneurs. That's our second KPI," she said.

This entrepreneurial focus aligns well with Saudi Arabia's economic diversification goals, potentially creating a new generation of Saudi fashion brands with global potential.

Saudi Arabia Transforms Into A Global Luxury Destination

With tourism breaking record numbers, the Middle East country is out to redefine travel through its hospitality and cultural mega-projects. BY RITU UPADHYAY



The Ritz-Carlton Reserve-Nujuma.

As luxury hotels rise from desert sands and ancient historical sites open to international visitors, the travel world is turning its attention to Saudi Arabia.

The kingdom, which was closed to international tourists just a few years ago, is emerging as luxury travel's new frontier, blending centuries-old heritage with cutting-edge sustainable design and five-star hospitality.

Saudi Arabia's government has invested over \$800 billion in tourism, making it the world's fastest-growing tourism market. In the first quarter of 2025, international arrivals jumped 23 percent, building on record numbers from 2024, according to data released last month by the Saudi Tourism Authority.

The country surpassed its ambitious visitor target for 2030, seven years ahead of schedule, coinciding with Saudi Arabia's emergence as a global arts and culture destination. World-class exhibitions and high-end hospitality concepts are attracting a sophisticated international audience seeking immersive cultural experiences.

Tourism spending has surged, with international visitors contributing about \$37.6 billion to the Saudi economy in 2023. The sector now accounts for 5 percent of the country's gross domestic product, up from just 3 percent in 2019, with plans to reach 10 percent by 2030. Saudi Arabia has raised its ambition further, targeting 150 million annual visitors by 2030, including 70 million international arrivals – a goal that would place the kingdom among the world's top seven most-visited countries.

Riyadh Air: The Kingdom's New Global Carrier

Central to Saudi Arabia's tourism strategy is Riyadh Air, the kingdom's new flagship carrier launched to connect Saudi Arabia to over 100 destinations by 2030. The first flights are set to take off at the end of this year. With a fleet of state-of-the-art aircraft, Riyadh Air represents Saudi Arabia's determination to create a world-class aviation experience. The airline, backed by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, has already placed orders for dozens of aircraft, including 39 Boeing 787-9 Dreamliners and 60 Airbus A321neo aircraft.

The recently unveiled cabin interiors rival the most luxurious airlines in the world, with four-tier seating including a dramatic "Business Elite" class featuring 52-inch-high privacy walls, 78-inch fully flat beds, and what the airline claims are the



The Riyadh Air crew uniforms designed by Ashi.



The Saudi Arabia GP.

world's largest business class screens at 32 inches. The branding incorporates Saudi heritage through a color palette of deep purples, mocha gold, and veined stone accents. The airline has partnered with high-end French audio company Deviate to embed speakers directly into the headrests, eliminating the need for headphones. Saudi couturier Ashi has designed the uniforms, which were revealed during Paris couture week.

"Riyadh Air will be a digitally native airline, driven by a pioneering spirit with an obsessive focus on attention to detail and innovation at its heart," said Tony Douglas, chief executive officer of Riyadh Air. "We aim to permanently transcend our guests' perceptions and experiences of flying in the modern world."

Douglas emphasizes the market necessity driving the airline's creation: "We're not trying to create a market that doesn't exist. Riyadh, the capital city of a G20 country, is not well enough connected. Today, you do not have the option to fly direct to Tokyo. You do not have the option to fly direct to Shanghai or Seoul or Sydney, and the list just goes on and on."

Hosting the World: Major Global Events

Saudi Arabia's event calendar has expanded dramatically as the country has opened up. Cultural festivals like MDLBeast Soundstorm, one of the world's largest music festivals, are attracting international artists and visitors in unprecedented numbers. The Formula 1 Saudi Arabian Grand Prix has become a fixture on the racing calendar, and the kingdom has invested heavily in sporting events ranging from championship boxing matches to golf tournaments. The

upcoming 2034 FIFA World Cup will put the kingdom at the center of the global sports stage.

The recently completed Diriyah Gate project, a \$50 billion cultural and lifestyle destination near Riyadh, showcases the kingdom's UNESCO World Heritage site while offering luxury retail, dining, and entertainment experiences in a setting that honors Saudi Arabia's historical roots.

To accommodate the projected influx of visitors, Saudi Arabia is dramatically expanding its tourism infrastructure. Hotel capacity is scheduled to double from 400,000 rooms to 800,000 rooms by 2035, with major international hospitality brands establishing a presence in the kingdom. Airport development is accelerating, with King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh undergoing significant expansion and the new King Salman International Airport under construction with a capacity to handle 120 million passengers annually. Ground



MDLBeast Soundstorm festival.

transportation is being enhanced with new high-speed rail connections and road networks linking major tourism destinations.

Red Sea Global: Redefining Luxury Tourism

Perhaps no project better exemplifies Saudi Arabia's tourism ambitions than the Red Sea Development. Red Sea Global is creating what aims to be the world's most ambitious regenerative tourism destination, with strict environmental protections and a commitment to operate using 100 percent renewable energy. The project, which will eventually encompass 22 islands and six inland sites, is already welcoming guests to its first luxury resorts.

Major international hotel brands are making significant investments in Saudi Arabia. Marriott International has been particularly aggressive in its expansion within the kingdom with 40 hotels and more than 11,000 rooms in its development pipeline for the country.

"We are super excited about what's going on in Saudi," says Tina Edmundson, president of luxury at Marriott International. "The vision is very compelling."

Marriott's current investments include the St. Regis and The Ritz Carlton Reserve, Nujuma Reserve at the Red Sea, an upcoming Edition hotel in the Red Sea, and multiple luxury properties across key Saudi cities.

Among its newest properties is Bab Samhan, a Luxury Collection Hotel, which opened in January in Diriyah, the historic district of Riyadh known as the birthplace of the kingdom. Bab Samhan – named after one of the most iconic gates in historic Diriyah – is the first luxury hotel to open in the UNESCO World Heritage area. Its location offers panoramic views of Wadi Hanifah and is within walking distance to At-Turaif, the UNESCO World Heritage Site, and the popular Bujairi Terrace dining district.

Edmundson highlights the strategic importance of the Saudi market, noting, "Luxury is such an important part of the Saudi vision." She also praised the kingdom's commitment to sustainability: "They've approached building in a way to really protect the environment."

Even with the remarkable momentum, Saudi Arabia's tourism transformation faces challenges. The kingdom must balance its conservative cultural identity with the expectations of international visitors and continue to develop its tourism infrastructure and workforce.

But Douglas highlights that beyond transportation, Riyadh Air serves as a powerful branding vehicle for the kingdom's tourism aspirations, carrying the message of Saudi Arabia's transformation to global markets and helping to overcome some of the perception challenges. "Riyadh Air will play a considerable role in opening our kingdom to the world for many more people to enjoy our hospitality, warmth and beautiful tourist sites."

WWD GLOBAL FASHION & BEAUTY SUMMIT



Alessandro Sartori



Patrick Ta



Matteo Tamburini

of his namesake brand. Across the collections, product names have a strong, uplifting voice with descriptions like “She’s Bold” and “She’s Vibrant.”

It’s no surprise that the foundation, body products and blush have become the hero products in his business, which launched in the teeth of the pandemic and has gone on to become a top seller at Sephora.

More than a decade ago, two young L’Oréal executives decided to leave their corporate positions and take the ultimate leap of faith by starting their own brand. Under the leadership of cofounders and co-chief executive officers Christine Chang and Sarah Lee, Glow Recipe’s considered approach to expansion (in terms of both geographies and categories) has culminated in a global powerhouse.

Now 11 years old, Glow Recipe has become one of the world’s most successful independent skin care brands. Its blend of clinically effective, fruit powered products have become multigenerational favorites – with Watermelon Glow Dew Drops and Pore-Tight Toner achieving true hero product status. More recently, the brand has ventured into makeup – infusing its bestsellers with hints of color and forging the way for the skinification of makeup.

The brand recently ventured into Latin America, specifically in Mexico and Brazil with Sephora, and launched in Europe this past year. When it comes to deciding which market to enter next, Lee and Chang examine how they can build and sustain and strategize how to win.

Other awards being presented by the Saudi Fashion Commission on Thursday recognized achievements in the Saudi fashion industry include Fashion Stylist of the Year; Fashion Photographer of the Year, presented in collaboration with Hia Magazine; Menswear Brand of the Year; Womenswear Brand of the Year; Jewelry Brand of the Year, and the Elite Model Honorary Award for Model of the Year.

The judging panel includes Hollywood stylist Law Roach; Amanda Smith, CEO of Fairchild Media Group and WWD; Burak Çakmak, CEO of the Saudi Fashion Commission; Xavier Romatet, dean of Institut Français de la Mode; Mohammed Aldabbageh, KSA managing director of Chalhub Group, and Mai Badr, editor in chief of Hia Magazine.

WWD to Present Honors At Saudi Fashion Awards

In collaboration with the Saudi Fashion Commission, WWD will present four awards at the gala due to be held in Riyadh on Thursday. BY LUISA ZARGANI, RYMA CHIKHOUNE AND JAMES MANSO

WWD, in collaboration with the Saudi Fashion Commission, will again present awards as part of the Saudi Fashion Awards taking place in Riyadh on Thursday.

The WWD Awards will recognize Alessandro Sartori, artistic director of Zegna, as International Designer of the Year; Matteo Tamburini, creative director of Tod’s, as International Brand of the Year; Patrick Ta, founder of Patrick Ta Beauty, as International Beauty Innovator of the Year, and Glow Recipe as International Beauty Brand of the Year.

Sartori has been spearheading a major stylistic shift at Zegna as its artistic director, boosting the company’s business around the world. The fall 2021 collection was a watershed moment for the brand, establishing a precise and significant aesthetic change.

At the time, he called the collection “The (Re)set,” pointing to an entirely new course for Zegna, acknowledging that traditional formalwear had run its course, and the designer proceeded to blur the lines between luxury and leisurewear, elevating both, creating functional and comfortable yet exclusive garments. This led him to receive the WWD award for Menwear Designer of the Year in 2022.

His knowledge of fabrics is encyclopedic and he has been lacquering jacquard tops; rubberizing leather and nylon, and using recycled paper, which telegraphs Zegna’s focus on sustainability and its “Oasi Cashmere” traceability project, increasing the use of wool and technical fabrics made from preexisting and postconsumer sources.

In fact, Sartori hails from Biella, Italy, not far from Zegna’s Trivero headquarters, and received a degree in textile engineering in Biella, followed by a degree in fashion design at Istituto Marangoni in Milan. Sartori and Zegna go a long way back, as he began his career at the Italian group in 1989 as a menswear designer and became creative director of the Z Zegna line in 2003. In 2011, he was appointed artistic director at Berluti and left five years later to rejoin Zegna in his current role.

Other introductions that contributed to

gel his vision for Zegna include his shirt jackets and an innovative cashmere jersey fabric developed by Zegna – superlight yet reminiscent of felt – on fluid suits in generous silhouettes or on kimono-style belted jackets and oversized blazers with no internal canvas or linings, often in soft and dusty monochromatic palettes.

Tamburini’s first collection for Tod’s bowed in February 2024 and, as the brand’s creative director, he has been in charge of both the women’s and men’s collections.

Born in 1982 in Italy’s Urbino, he arrived at Tod’s from Bottega Veneta, which he had joined in 2017. The two brands share a time-honed expertise in artisanal leather goods made by hand, and, to be sure, Tamburini has proved he is embracing Tod’s world, aesthetics and values while pushing the envelop farther, experimenting with volumes, fabrics and fits, and evolving his designs with increasing confidence.

Most recently, his fall 2025 collection was a step further in his narrative as the designer was inspired by the PAC contemporary art museum in Milan, where he staged the show, and its history. As a space that showcases art, Tamburini looked to artists Carla Accardi, Alberto Burri and Lucio Fontana, exploring how they treated the fabrics. This led, for example, to a beautiful brushed alpaca coat with black-and-white swirls reminiscent of an Accardi abstract painting or Fontana’s technical severity was reflected in the sharp and structured tailored coats.

Over the seasons, Tamburini has been offering sleek and sophisticated designs, yet with a modern touch, fluid shapes and a sort of nonchalant attitude. At the same time, he has further developed Tod’s core leather goods business, from the signature Gommino moccasins to the handbags.

Ta began his career in Arizona before moving to Los Angeles, where he built up a client list that reads like a who’s who of celebrity today – Gigi Hadid, Sydney Sweeney, Camilla Cabello, Ariana Grande

and the Kardashian clan. But it’s his ability to connect with all women, famous or not, that has propelled his brand to be one of the fastest growing in beauty today.

Women made up by Ta love his ability to create the most beautiful, radiant skin in the business, with a light that seems to glow from within. With a skin-forward approach that emphasizes a radiant complexion, his products, formulated for a wide range of skin tones, translate professional makeup techniques into everyday essentials – while capturing the playful and empowering spirit at the heart

Sarah Lee and Christine Chang



Saudi Arabia, Qatar Primed For New Design Events

The increasing demand for local events, interior design contacts, talents and hubs is highlighted as Riyadh hosts Saudi Arabia's first design trade show. BY SOFIA CELESTE

MILAN – Since its transformation from a sleepy pearl farming hub to the future-forward metropolis it is today, Dubai has long been a reference point for the region across all sectors, design included. But its dominance is about to change.

Downtown Design Dubai, the Middle East's leading contemporary design fair since 2012, is about to cut the ribbon on Downtown Design Riyadh, Saudi Arabia's very first design trade show. The four-day fair at the Jax District opened Tuesday and will run through Friday. Organizers are gearing up to blend international and local talents, bringing together industry professionals, decision-makers, and design enthusiasts through exhibitions, installations and a tailored program of talks and activations.

"In its inaugural edition, what I'm most looking forward to is seeing KSA professionals and design lovers engage with the diversity of our program. The venue is quite spectacular – literally perched on the hilltop of the UNESCO heritage site [At-Turaif], it is unparalleled for a design fair, globally," Mette Degn-Christensen, founder of Downtown Dubai and director of Downtown Design, said of pulling off Saudi Arabia's first design fair.

The fair will feature well-known international brands like Venetian glassmaker Venini, French crystal firm Saint-Louis, and luxury furniture maker Natuzzi.

"We see enormous potential in engaging with a new generation of collectors, architects and patrons who are eager to shape a modern identity without losing sight of tradition," said Venini president Silvia Damiani. Venini will open a store in Riyadh by the end of 2025.

Regional names such as Jordan-based Naqsh Collective will also take center stage alongside Saudi talent like engineer and designer Noura Suleiman and her brand NWII.III and Riyadh-based furniture designer and ceramic artist Lucas Barceló.

Part of Vision 2030

The expansion aligns with Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 plan to diversify the local economy away from oil and beckon international investment. Since the dawn of the strategic initiative the nation has made a significant investment in fashion and design, growing new talent and supporting existing ones. It has also helped draw the international set to the city and residency of Alula. Global industry leaders have taken notice: In 2026 Riyadh will host the first Salone del Mobile.Milano in the region.

Another driver: Saudi Arabia's contract business is booming, thanks to the proliferation of giga projects and development of vacation islands like Shura and Sindalah and an uptick in branded homes and upscale villas and apartments. The government reported that tourism rose from 60 million overnight stays in 2016 to more than 100 million in 2023, even though the majority of those lodgers are Saudis. The demand for more immediate interior design solutions is fueling local fairs like Downtown Design Riyadh and the Design Doha biennial in Qatar. No longer must designers and builders travel to Dubai to meet their needs.

Degn-Christensen echoed this change. "We're all witnessing the pace of development that the dynamic market of Saudi Arabia has experienced in recent years. Driven by some of the KSA's most

A spectator views the historic Al-Turaif site, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which sits below the Jax District, which will host Saudi Arabia's first design fair.



ambitious projects and growing real estate developments across retail, hospitality and luxury residential properties, there is strong demand particularly in the interior design industry – and at the same time, there is a surge in great creative talent here," she said, adding that there's a new focus on modern aesthetics and materiality, innovation, quality and identity. More than 10 exhibitors at the fair are from Saudi Arabia, while more than 15 are from the United Arab Emirates, she said.

International Brands Arrive

The region's design retail landscape is thriving, too: Fendi Casa opened its doors last year, partnering with Dar Al Arkan Interiors, which now oversees nine showrooms across Riyadh and Jeddah. Under its umbrella are prestigious brands like Armani Casa, Versace Home, Bentley Home, Dolce & Gabbana Casa, Missoni Home and Elie Saab Maison. Molteni&C and Giorgetti are slated to cut the ribbon on openings in the near term, further establishing Riyadh as a rising design hub.

Doha, a Burgeoning Hot Spot

Nearby Qatar has also made strides in developing fashion and design-led initiatives with events like the "Forever Valentino" exhibit in 2022, "Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams" retrospective in 2024 and the 2021 Fashion Trust Arabia FTA Prize at the National Museum in Doha. On Tuesday, Art Basel organizers announced that the first Art Basel Qatar will launch in Doha in February 2026.

Fahad Al Obaidly, acting director of Design Doha, the biennial event that began in 2024, told WWD that fashion helped drive attention to the city.

"These events have been instrumental in igniting public interest, attracting global attention, and proving that Doha can be both a stage and a player in the global creative industry. Fashion served as the entry point, allowing us to quickly engage younger audiences, international brands and talent development initiatives. These exhibitions create cultural momentum," he said.

The inaugural Design Doha was a success, organizers said. The Msheireb Downtown Doha exposition center welcomed 118,000 visitors, including nearly 4,000 international buyers and industry leaders. The event generated an economic impact of \$17 million and reached 45.6 million people across various

channels. Organizers are promoting the second edition, which will take place from April 16 to June 30, 2026.

"Design, in its broader form, is where we see structural potential – urban planning, public furniture, collectible craft, digital innovation. Design Doha reflects that evolution: a multidisciplinary strategy supported by long-term government investment, infrastructure and policy frameworks," Al Obaidly continued.

As for producing design, do these countries have what it takes to compete with leaders like France and Italy? Design executives in the region are naturally optimistic. Qatar is home to craft traditions like *sadu* weaving, gypsum carving, woodwork and calligraphy. The government is also working on integrating these communities into "design ecosystems," to propel local creatives and firms. Qatar is home to 130 active design firms across interior design, architecture, product design and branding with an increasing number of multidisciplinary studios launching every year.

One such design firm is Fromm., founded by Alia Rachid, daughter of Mayhoola for Investments chief executive officer Rachid Mohamed Rachid. Fromm is a luxury contemporary furniture and accessories brand founded in Doha and Milan with the aim of creating a mix of design and manufacturing.

It collaborates with local and international designers to create collections that blend heritage, innovation and contemporary aesthetics.

Rachid later launched Fromm Labs, a creative hub that bridges the distance between Qatar's design world and Milan, which she still considers the gateway to the global market. This year, Rachid launched the first international design competition inviting under-35 talents to reimagine Arab heritage, access mentorship, production support and garner international exposure.

"The response so far has been very encouraging, whether in Milan, Doha, or across the region. We're still early in the process, with registration open until May 30, 2025, but the energy is building. We're connecting with universities, design communities and young talents globally," she said.

The initiative is guided by a strong mentorship and jury team that includes Al Obaidly; art director and fashion designer Giulio Cappellini; British architect Joseph Grima, and Lebanese-born architect Aline

Asmar d'Amman, who most recently designed the interiors for the Middle East's first train Dream of the Desert, developed with the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Culture, Saudi Arabia Railways and Italy's Arsenale.

Going Local and Global

Saudi Arabia is also investing in propelling local creativity through the nation's Arts and Creative Industries at the Royal Commission for the ancient city of Alula and the Alula Design Residency. Together they are playing a key role in cross-cultural pollination of ideas between the global design community and local Saudi Arabian makers and talents. Within this arena, Madrasat Addeera, an Alula-based school, was set up to safeguard and perpetuate traditional crafts. In Milan in 2024, they showed the designs for Madrasat Addeera Editions, the fruit of the creative dialogue between the local design community in Alula and a range of well-known Saudi and international designers and artisans.

One standout collaboration came from French design collective Hall Haus, which was invited by Alula to create Haus Dari, a modern-Majlis-type seating system that mimics desert dunes, settling on the approach and seeing their creation come to fruition took a good six weeks.

Started in 2020 by Zakari Boukhari, Sammy Bernoussi, Teddy Sanches and Abdoulaye Niang, the firm's design ethos is based on its diverse mix of backgrounds, influenced by hip-hop culture, fashion, art and architecture. "We didn't know anything about Saudi manufacturing, it was a challenge but in the end, we learned about them and they learned about us," said Boukhari.

Downtown Design Riyadh will unfold as a showcase of the old and the new. Highlights include NWII.III Interiors' new furniture line titled "Mezljaj," which is rooted in Saudi Arabia's evolving interior design narrative showcasing living and working environments that balance progressive design and traditional sensibilities.

Barceló will present his eclectic sculptural pieces and visitors can explore accessories from Hobal, a Saudi-based, culturally driven design brand.

The fair will also spotlight architectural installations and interactive works previously commissioned by local cultural institutions and initiatives, emphasizing the country's evolving creative scene. This includes "Narrating Woven" by Ruba Al Khaldi and Lojain Rafaa, an homage to the region's *sadu* weaving technique in the spirit of a united future.



Spectator photograph by Jax District

WWD GLOBAL FASHION & BEAUTY SUMMIT

May 21 and 22 Agenda

Here, a schedule of the day's speakers and events leading up to the **WWD/Saudi Fashion Commission** awards presentation.

21

- 10:30 a.m.-11:30 a.m.** ● **Summit Registration + Fashion and Beauty Hall**
Before our official kick-off, engage in meaningful networking, sample some refreshments, and experience our partner activations.
- 11:30 a.m.-1:00 p.m.** ● **Block I**
- 11:30 a.m.-1:50 a.m.** ● **Welcome**
Amanda Smith Chief Executive Officer, Fairchild Media Group
- 11:50 a.m.-1:50 a.m.** ● **Introduction**
Burak Cakmak Chief Executive Officer, Saudi Fashion Commission
- 11:30 a.m.-12:10 p.m.** ● **Moving Markets: An Inside Look at the Key Global Beauty and Wellness Trends**
Larissa Jensen Senior Vice President & Global Beauty Industry Advisor, Circana
- 12:10 p.m.-12:30 p.m.** ● **A New Era in Menswear**
Alessandro Sartori Chief Executive Officer, Mytheresa with **James Fallon** Chief Content Officer, WWD and Fairchild Media Group
- 12:30 p.m.-12:50 p.m.** ● **The A-Beauty Pioneers: Saudi's New Wave of Global Beauty Entrepreneurs**
Yara Alnamlah Founder & Chief Executive Officer, When Minds Meet
Sara Alrashed Founder, Asteri Beauty with **Ritu Upadhyay** Middle East Bureau Chief, WWD
- 12:50 p.m.-1:10 p.m.** ● **Star Turn: When Makeup Mastery Becomes a Booming Business**
Kimberly Villatoro Chief Executive Officer, Patrick Ta Beauty with **Jenny B. Fine** Editor in Chief, Beauty Inc and Executive Editor, Beauty, WWD
- 1:10 p.m.-1:40 p.m.** ● **Networking Break**

1:40 p.m.-2:55 p.m. ● **Block II**

1:40 p.m.-2:00 p.m. ● **Philosophy of Design**

Lorenzo Serafini Creative Director, Alberta Ferretti with **James Fallon** Chief Content Officer, WWD and Fairchild Media Group

2:00 p.m.-2:20 p.m. ● **Luxury Reimagined: Transforming Brand into Lifestyle**

Frédéric Fekkai Founder, Fekkai and Bastide with **Jenny B. Fine** Editor in Chief, Beauty Inc and Executive Editor, Beauty, WWD

2:20 p.m.-2:35 p.m. ● **Creating Pathways to Fashion Careers in the Kingdom**

Anna Zinola School & Education Director, Istituto Marangoni Riyadh with **Ritu Upadhyay** Middle East Bureau Chief, WWD

2:35 p.m.-2:55 p.m. ● **Art, Craft and the Value of Tradition in the Digital Age**

Montse Suarez Founder & Managing Partner, Iris Ventures
Catalina Ruiz Urquiola, Vice President, Middle East, Artemest with **James Fallon** Chief Content Officer, WWD and Fairchild Media Group

2:55 p.m.-3:45 p.m. ● **Relax and Reset**

In addition to our afternoon discussions, please continue to cultivate new relationships and strengthen your connections with peers in our networking area.

3:45 p.m.-4:45 p.m. ● **Block III**

3:45 p.m.-3:50 p.m. ● **Welcome Back**

Jenny B. Fine Editor in Chief, Beauty Inc and Executive Editor, Beauty, WWD

3:50 p.m.-4:10 p.m. ● **Warm Glow of Success: Breaking Through in a Crowded Landscape**

Christine Chang Co-founder & Co-Chief Executive Officer, Glow Recipe with **Jenny B. Fine** Editor in Chief, Beauty Inc and Executive Editor, Beauty, WWD

4:10 p.m.-4:25 p.m. ● **Asian Beauty on the Rise in GCC**

Andrea Fetzer, Vice President, Strategy, Chalhoub Group
Presented by Chalhoub Group

4:25 p.m.-4:45 p.m. ● **Growing an Icon**

Matteo Tamburini Creative Director, Tod's with **James Fallon** Chief Content Officer, WWD and Fairchild Media Group

4:45 p.m. ● **Closing Remarks**

James Fallon Chief Content Officer, WWD and Fairchild Media Group

8:00 p.m. ● **VIP Speaker Dinner (invite-only)**

22

12:00 p.m.-5:00 p.m. ● **Welcome to Riyadh: Cultural Tour**

Hosted by Fashion Futures, a day highlighting the reasons behind Saudi Arabia's rising prominence and its ambitious plans for the metropolis.

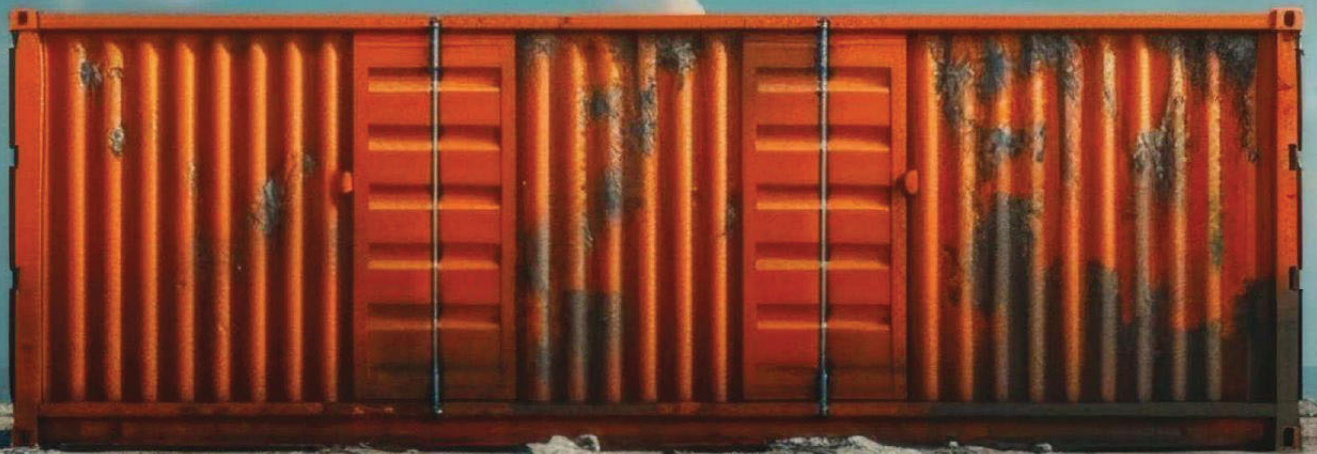
8:00 p.m.-11:00 p.m. ● **Saudi Fashion Awards & Gala Dinner**

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SPECIAL REPORT

Reinventing Retail:
Navigating Tariffs, Technology and Trends
in Pricing and Allocation



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SUSTAINABILITY

Denim's Bio-dye Revolution Starts With a Bacteria-fed Breakthrough

- Citizens of Humanity is betting that the future of fashion isn't just plant-based – it's bacteria-born.

BY ALEXANDRA HARRELL

The Los Angeles-based owner of premium denim brands and the luxury department store chain celebrated their “ongoing commitment to shaping a more sustainable future in fashion” alongside two partners in sustainability: fiber producer The Lycra Company and French biochemicals company Pili. The event also marked the launch of Agolde's latest collection featuring bio-derived EcoMade Lycra Fiber made primarily from corn.

“At the end of the day, there are a lot of people working on different innovations; it comes down to talent, leadership and transparency,” said Amy Williams, chief executive officer of Citizens of Humanity Group. “And when things are in the early stage, they don't go perfectly, and you have to have an open conversation and the willingness to shift and learn.”

Citizens of Humanity Group began investigating Pili's bio-dyes a few years before officially partnering with the

company earlier this year. In January, Citizens of Humanity launched the first garments produced with Pili's flagship product, Eco-Indigo, a bacteria-based alternative to petroleum-derived indigo dye.

The collaborators returned to Bloomingdale's for an evening panel conversation around advancements in sustainable denim – and the resulting redefining of fashion's responsible future.

“It takes everyone working together to bring something to market,” Williams said on how the Pili partnership began. “We want to do things better; I have children. One of the founders of the company has grandchildren. We can't look at ourselves in the mirror and say we did enough, if we didn't really do everything. So, what drew us to them, frankly, was them.”

Pili was founded in 2015 – eight years before the “carbon-conscious color company” secured \$15.8 million in Series A funding in 2023. The funding was used to produce the first tons of Eco-Indigo and address the textile industry's consumption habits, considering the sector devours 2 million tons of dyes (99 percent of which are fossil-based) annually.

Using a hybrid process that merges industrial fermentation with green

chemistry, Pili creates high-performance pigments for high-pollution sectors like textiles, inks, polymers and coatings. It is made by fermenting sugar-fed, genetically modified bacteria – no fossil fuels, no toxic inputs, no harmful byproducts. The result? A scalable, low-carbon alternative to petroleum-based indigo with equivalent performance. Pili's process can cut carbon dioxide emissions by up to 50 percent compared to traditional indigo dyeing processes.

“It's a little bit like magic; you're turning biomass or sugar into colors,” said Jérémie Blache, CEO of Pili. “And it took us almost 10 years to develop this solution; so now, we're very happy to be here first.”

Pili's efforts, then, become interesting when considering the other dye options on the market.

Conventional dye production processes rely on non-renewable resources. Botanical dyes – those derived from plants, not petroleum – offer advantages like biodegradability and hypoallergenic. However, a handful of hiccups – limited color ranges, inconsistent results, higher cost – render them incomplete replacements for indigo's conventional, synthetic counterparts. Pili's Eco-Indigo dye, however, is



Citizens of Humanity

primarily composed of natural materials. More specifically, sugar, ethanol, oxygen and hydrogen. About 90 percent of that composition is derived from renewable resources.

“One element of hope for us is that, when you switch from non-renewable resources, you connect with people who are also trying circular resources and not just extracting things from the Earth,” Blache said. “You also connect with people also aware of the need for regenerative agriculture management or sustainable management of resources instead of just extraction. And in this change [comes] a great source of happiness.”

BUSINESS

Daniella Pierson Launches Chasm

- The self-made founder of The Newsette is tapping like-minded entrepreneurs including Sara Blakely, Lionel Richie, Alli Webb and more, with an invite-only membership club focused on supporting women.

BY ALEXANDRA PASTORE

Daniella Pierson, entrepreneur, founder and chief executive officer of The Newsette, is leveraging her network and entrepreneurial knowledge to help women everywhere find their own success in business. Having built a net worth of \$200 million by age 27, the self-made BIPOC woman has often spoken out about the alarming wage gap and the lack of funding being given to women – something she aims to disrupt with the launch of a new invite-only membership club called Chasm. Chasm's mission is to close the gender

gap through entrepreneurship. Notably, reports have found that male-led businesses in 2023 received 98.2 percent of VC funding while women received just 1.8 percent. Pierson said that her bet is simply that the fastest path to gender equality is helping women earn as much as possible so that they are in a position to put women in the room.

“Chasm is going to make a massive dent in the gender gap by focusing on one solution that has a domino effect: creating more successful female entrepreneurs,” said Pierson. “If you think about who has the most wealth and power in the world, they have two things in common. They are men and they are entrepreneurs. We're using that exact formula for women, without excluding men from the fix. In today's society, money equals power – and when women earn more, we all win.”

The invite-only membership is a club for “the most successful men and women in the world” and is launching with 50 members, including household names and

moguls worth \$200 million to \$2 billion. Named members of the organization include Sara Blakely, Spanx and Sneex inventor and founder; Lionel Richie; Fidji Simo, chief executive officer of Instacart; Alli Webb, cofounder of Drybar; and entrepreneurs Tony and Sage Robbins, among others.

The club will make moves to transform capital into change by funding monthly non-dilutive grants to the Chasm community and welcoming female entrepreneurs into an ecosystem rooted in community and insights. The strategy behind Chasm is informed by Pierson's own entrepreneurial journey.

Reflecting on her own experiences as a young, female entrepreneur, Pierson said that she was surrounded by male, VC-backed entrepreneurs around her age and hesitated to ask for advice to avoid seeming inexperienced. While Pierson admits that she “secretly envied their term sheets” at the time, not getting funding from “the men who laughed [her] out of their offices” turned out to be a “blessing disguised as a bruise.”

“Without investors or a board breathing down my neck, I built a business that let me put eight figures in my bank account by 25 – and more importantly, I had full control over my destiny,” said Pierson. “That kind of independence is rare. And while some businesses do need VC money to grow, no one tells you the fine print: like how giving up a board seat too early can backfire, or how your lead investor may end up feeling more like a boss than a partner.”

In addition to providing grants, Chasm's solutions will be designed to focus on eliminating all barriers for women entrepreneurs and leveling the playing field for resource access beyond funding.

Resources will include free content and access to a network designed specifically to help women founders thrive.

“Money helps – but access, insight and resources are what actually tip the scales,” said Pierson. “Empowerment without actionable content is just a Pinterest quote. The gender gap isn't going to vanish because we manifest it away. Inspiration is great – but action is better. The old system wasn't built for us. So instead of trying to fit into it, we're building something bolder. Something better. We're not waiting to be included – we're constructing the table, carving our names into it, and passing the power forward.”

Pierson said that she believes the main point of disconnect for women not getting funding is power, adding that “if 99.9 percent of the power, money and influence still sits with men, they need to be part of this solution.” Moreover, she doesn't believe that the conversation around the gender gap is happening nearly enough. Instead, it usually gets “trotted out during Women's History Month or at panels where people solemnly nod at stats, they secretly think are too massive to ever fix. It's like gender equality is treated as a noble idea, not a solvable problem.”

With that in mind, Chasm's solution has been built to not isolate men, but rather to invite them in.

“The funding landscape favors people who look like the last person who made investors money – and historically, that's been men,” said Pierson. “Instead of ignoring that fact, Chasm is flipping it into a feature. We're inviting the most powerful men in business into the solution. With Chasm, men aren't on the sidelines – they're co-architects of progress. And when those with money and influence decide to redistribute both? That's when the game actually changes.”

For entrepreneurs, Chasm is now live and free to access online.



Chasm aims to create real change for women in business by supporting entrepreneurs.

ACCESSORIES

Bulgari Presents Polychroma Collection in Taormina



- Viola Davis, Blackpink's Lisa and Priyanka Chopra Jonas attended the high jewelry event.

BY LUISA ZARGANI

TAORMINA, Italy – Photo-ops were numerous on Monday at sunset, Mount Etna in the background, the shimmering Ionian Sea below, the gardens of Belmond's Grand

Hotel Timeo filled with lemon and orange trees and brimming with bougainvilleas. However, it was the celebrity quota that had guests attending the Bulgari high jewelry event rushing to their iPhones to capture the likes of Viola Davis, Blackpink's Lisa, Liu Yifei and Priyanka Chopra Jonas arriving at the location for the cocktail and dinner held by the Italian brand.

As she posed on the balcony of the

hotel, asked about being photographed on the red carpet and on social occasions, Davis, flanked by her husband Julius Tennon, admitted that at first she felt a bit uneasy. "It wasn't my style growing up, my mom never liked to be photographed, I never thought I was that girl, I never thought it had anything to do with my work. But over time I'm enjoying it more because it gives me the chance to celebrate me, all the things inside of me that make me feel joyful and beautiful and special and extraordinary and I have to say it's become easier when I think of it that way."

What does she think about when she is being lensed? "I think of two things, I think of little Viola and I also remember what a friend of mine said years ago – 'all you have to do is look at the camera and smile' – and there was something about that, that released something in me that was quite beautiful," said the Academy Award winner, who was wearing a dramatic black Mugler dress – and indeed smiling agreeably.

Bulgari brand ambassador Yifei, wearing a richly embroidered Elie Saab gown, was struck by the context, saying it was her first time in Taormina. "It's just so unbelievably beautiful," she said. Looking at the ancient Greek theater where the Bulgari show was to be held later in the evening, she said "as an actress I feel the connection and I am looking forward to

the event in this environment I love."

Posing for the WWD cover, she said she aims for the best shot "two ways, either trying to be a model, or more as an actor, going within myself freestyle, and playing with it."

After a speech by chief executive officer Jean-Christophe Babin, guests took their seats at the dinner tables, set with Caltagirone ceramics, neo-antique statues and rich compositions of local fruit to emphasize the colorful boldness of the Polychroma high jewelry collection.

The emotional peak of the event took place at the theater, where Bulgari staged a performance in three acts, inspired by Greek tragedies and choreographed by multiaward-winning Sir Wayne McGregor, resident choreographer of The Royal Ballet.

Models then walked on stage, framed by imposing arches and white veils blowing in the evening breeze, wearing key Polychroma jewels and bespoke dresses by rising Italian fashion talent Francesco Murano, a finalist of the 2025 LVMH Prize, who debuted his first runway show during Milan Fashion Week in February.

Fondazione Bulgari, paying tribute to the cultural richness of Sicily, has committed to supporting the restoration of a fresco of profound symbolic value at Palazzo Corvaja, and a new collaboration with the Antonino Salinas Regional Archaeological Museum in Palermo.

FASHION

Giorgio Armani's New Exhibition Celebrates His 20 Years of Haute Couture

- Opening to public on Wednesday at the Armani/Silos space in Milan, the showcase will run through Dec. 28.

BY SANDRA SALIBIAN

MILAN – Giorgio Armani is opening the golden gates of haute couture to the public by way of a dazzling exhibition staged at the Armani/Silos space here.

Inaugurated with an event on Tuesday evening and officially running May 21 to Dec. 28, the showcase is titled "Giorgio Armani Privé 2005-2025, Twenty Years of Haute Couture" to mark the milestone for the designer's Privé line, which he introduced with a spring 2005 collection paraded in Paris.

Ever since, Armani presented his haute couture collections in the City of Light twice a year, with the only exception being January 2021, when, due to the pandemic, he staged the fashion show behind closed doors at Palazzo Orsini here and then broadcast as part of the Paris couture schedule.

So this is the first time the Milanese audience and the general public can get an up-close look at his haute couture creations, indulge in the rich embroideries, beaded embellishments and crafty details and discover the references behind the dreamy garments.

Armani himself curated the set-up at the Silos space, which had more than 150 couture looks arranged across four levels, either spotlighted singularly or grouped in thematic rooms, according to colors or inspiration.

"We've heard you've curated the

installation yourself until last night," Armani was told at the opening event. "Actually, until this morning," he quickly replied.

"I'm looking at this exhibition again with the critical eye of a person that has designed all these dresses at different times, with different means, different techniques and different skills. So I have a strong critical sense and I won't tell you what doesn't work but what does. And that is to have chosen a path, and most importantly, [ran it] not being led by the hand by anyone," he said.

"In my haute couture collections, I express my vision of style and elegance through the art of craftsmanship and savoir-faire: only here am I free to do so without limits," said Armani. "Twenty years of Giorgio Armani Privé have been an extraordinary, liberating journey. Now, I want to share it with a wider audience, inviting them into this dream of mine, a dream of dresses woven from imagination and grace. A very special world that takes on new meaning in this exhibition."

Visitors will be able to see garments pulled from the designer's couture shows as well as custom made Privé gowns seen on international red carpets through the years. These ranged from the Swarovski crystal mesh gown worn by Cate Blanchett at the 2007 Academy Awards to the spring 2010 strapless, sculptural number Jennifer Lopez picked for the same occasion in 2010; from the long-sleeve, floral-embroidered spring 2021 dress Nicole Kidman sported at the SAG Awards in 2021 to the custom champagne silk gown Demi Moore wore to scoop up her first Golden Globe award earlier this year.

Accessories such as bags, shoes, jewelry and headpieces were also showcased, both

across the exhibition and in a dedicated section in the space's top level, flanked by an area screening backstage footage of the Armani Privé shows.

The exhibit's sensory experience was replete with dim lighting, the Armani Privé high-end fragrance Bois d'Encens lingering in the air and an original soundtrack L'Antidote music trio Redi Hasa, Rami Khalife and Bijan Chemirani created specifically for the show.

The Italian designer, who this year also marks 50 years in business with his namesake brand, has always seen couture as a forum for experimentation in both design and formats. For one, as early as his second couture collection in 2005, he introduced daytime options to the lineup, highlighting a new approach to couture.

In January 2007, he also decided to broadcast the spring 2007 couture show live online for the first time from the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. At the time, he addressed that couture "represents the pinnacle of creativity and sartorial skill, but it is only accessible to

the few" and how "today, through the democracy of the Internet, we can offer a front-row seat to everyone."

Armani paraded his latest couture collection, for spring 2025, in Paris earlier this year, presenting a sophisticated lineup that acknowledged the diverse references the designer has made with his couture designs over time, from the linear elegance of Japan and the shapes and colors of China to the opulence of India, the decorum of North Africa and the landscapes of Polynesia. This was the first collection presented at Palazzo Armani, which was unveiled last year.

A historic building dating back to 1864 and located nearby Avenue Montaigne, Palazzo Armani spans over 21,527 square feet to house the couture atelier and several offices, including the designer's workspace and departments such as sales and communications. Originally built as a private residence, the estate changed use in 1912, becoming the headquarters of various companies until Armani took over and restored the stuccoes and period paintings decorating its rooms.

As for the Silos space, opposite Armani's theater, it was inaugurated in 2015 with a retrospective of the designer's clothes and has staged several exhibitions, spanning from those dedicated to Larry Fink or Sarah Moon to Tadao Ando's work, to name a few.



The "Giorgio Armani Privé 2005-2025, Twenty Years of Haute Couture" exhibition at Armani/Silos in Milan.

WWD


Imogen Poots on Working With Rodarte, Kristen Stewart and Embracing 'BTE'

The star wore Rodarte on the red carpet, but would love a T-shirt with the new power phrase coined by her director. BY RHONDA RICHFORD PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHAEL BUCKNER

CANNES, France – The morning after a six-minute standing ovation for “The Chronology of Water,” Imogen Poots sits calmly in the coolly cream-colored Chanel suite.

“It was the best time ever. Getting to share it with Kristen was so special,” she said. The Kristen in question is Stewart, of “Twilight” fame. The actress is now a first-time director, although she is no stranger to the Cannes Film Festival having presented several projects here.

The film is in this year’s Un Certain Regard section, and in competition for the Camera d’Or prize which recognizes best first film.

For the red carpet, Poots selected a black lace Rodarte gown. The British actress does not personally know the L.A.-based design duo Kate and Laura Mulleavy, but they remain a fashion favorite.

“They’re my absolute favorite brand and always have been,” she said. “I just think everything they do is so interesting and cool, and they don’t follow any pattern or trends. What they make is artwork to me.”

The dress was chosen with her stylist Chloe Hartstein, whom she credits not just with fashion guidance but creative partnership. She finished the ensemble with a smoky eye look made with Inika products, a vegan, organic and cruelty-free Aussie brand.

Despite the glamour, Poots is quick to ground herself. “I’m probably more of a T-shirt and jeans person,” she admits. “But I really admire fashion. I love it. I mean, it’s art. The turnaround is so fast, but it’s a very kind of magical realm to me.”

Poots’ respect for the creative process carries into her work on “Water.” Stewart’s bold and raw directorial debut. Aside from the standing ovation, the film has earned solid reviews.

“It was really great to finally birth the film,” said Poots of seeing it on the big screen at the Palais des Festivals for the first time. “I was just so proud of Kristen and everybody who worked on the project. It was a pretty bold film that Kristen decided to make for her debut.”

The film pulls no punches from its intense, often disturbing and ultimately redemptive storytelling.

Based on Lidia Yuknavitch’s memoir, the film’s non-linear structure and raw story of abuse and overcoming addiction was immersive and emotionally demanding. “[The book] felt very much like a living document, like it was breathing,” Poots said. “It’s not linear in any sense, and yet it’s a life that’s contained in those pages.”

The story’s themes hit home for Poots. “[Yuknavitch] was dealt cards that she had nothing to do with,” she said. “She was subjected to things that she had nothing to do with and made choices off of that. And that can happen so often to women – the expectation on how we’re supposed to be, how we’re supposed to act, what we’re supposed to hide, how we’re supposed to be pitted against one another. These are really damaging. It’s very much a disease that’s kind of inoculated into your brain at birth by culture.”

Working with Stewart deepened the experience. “She’s absolutely incredible – instinctive, very precise, completely singular,” said Poots. The two formed a special bond as actor and director, in part due to the intimate nature of indie filmmaking and the intense nature of the subject.

As a result, they developed a rare creative shorthand on set. “The kind of



director-actor dynamic melted away,” she said. Everything about working with a director of the same age and same background of an actor that started young, created a close-knit atmosphere on set.

The “Twilight” star’s own experience as an actor played a key role. “[Kristen] understands what it is to have three thoughts at once, be saying one thing while you’re thinking another,” said Poots. “What’s amazing is she’s already there with you.”

The mental jump allowed Poots and Stewart to make physical jumps as well. Poots learned how to swim and dive from former child champions from Brazil and Ukraine.

Everything that followed was intense. Due to budget limits, the film was shot in Latvia on a shoestring. And besides budget limitations, the material created a sense of urgency and honesty with the two playing off of each other’s knowledge.

Stewart’s essence is putting all her cards on the table, and that ethos was equal on set.

“You’re screaming at each other like sports coaches,” she said. “But because of that, if you really respect someone, you owe them your honesty.”

To call Yuknavitch a character is dismissive, as Poots is playing a real person that is not the classic film heroine.

“The female experience has often been so reactive, and that’s expected, and it’s very confronting when that doesn’t follow through. For me the rhythm [of Yuknavitch’s story] is jolting. The way she has lived her life is like, there is a right thing and a wrong thing and I’m going to do the other thing,” said Poots. “It always feels like she is peeling off a layer.”

The approach of working with a peer like Stewart, who had felt so passionate about the story that she reached out to the author before she even hit page 40 of the book, was to pursue all-out rawness on screen. There was no competition, Poots said, or proving someone is right or wrong – it was more about making sure the team could achieve the most honest emotion possible.

“That’s what happened with the two of us – if it can be better, let’s make it better. That doesn’t need to make anybody feel insecure or defensive.”



Here and above: Imogen Poots in Rodarte for “The Chronology of Water” premiere.

Poots’ spirit of collaboration goes beyond “Water.” She recently wrapped the romantic drama “All of You,” directed by William Bridges and costarring “Ted Lasso”’s Brett Goldstein.

The film was less intense than “Water,” and is expected out in September. These days, Poots spends time on getting back to basics with swimming and life drawing as hobbies. She goes to a studio most days and spends other days swimming.

Following “Water,” she finds the immersion meditative.

Both are pretty solo activities, she admitted. “I should really, like, see people occasionally, right?” she joked.

Even though she learned quickly and intensely, swimming brought her more than just skill for the film. She’s taken it back to real life.

And that is Poots’ “BTE” – a phrase coined by Stewart during a press conference during the festival.

“Imogen was just the only person that could play this part,” Stewart said. “She doesn’t have, like, big tits or anything, but she seems like she does. I’m like, she has ‘big tit energy.’ Like ‘big dick energy’ – BDE. She has BTE. I was like, you don’t, but somehow, I feel like you have big tits, and you have to play this part.”

So how does Poots feel about such a description? It’s 100 percent a compliment for the actress, especially coming from Stewart.

“If you have it, you don’t know it, you just have it. You don’t have to have big boobs because you’ve got the energy. I’ve got ‘BTE,’ watch out,” she joked. “I would love that on a T-shirt.”

WWD Weekend

SUMMER IN STYLE with the WWD Weekend Escapes Issue—the season’s ultimate guide to luxury beauty, wellness, and travel is packed with the must-have products—from SPF essentials to scalp treatments—and the latest in beauty destinations for the luxury traveler. Distributed in the Hamptons, this issue speaks to an exclusive, style-driven audience who expect nothing less than the best. Align your brand with the essence of summer sophistication and indulgence.

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Fashion Scoops



Looks from the Victoria's Secret Valentine's Day campaign.

Victoria's Secret's Suitor?

Victoria Secret & Co. has an admirer who might be getting a little too close for comfort.

The lingerie company adopted a shareholder rights plan – commonly described as a poison pill – to “protect the best interests” of all shareholders after Australian entrepreneur Brett Blundy’s BBRC International amassed a 13 percent stake in the business.

The poison pill is designed to prevent any investor from taking over the company on the open market without paying a “control premium” that is typically seen in acquisitions. The plan lasts for one year and will allow shareholders to buy additional stock at half price if any party acquires 15 percent of Victoria's Secret stock.

BBRC has been an investor in Victoria's Secret for a few years, but switched to a more active stance in February 2024 and, over the past three months, has been ramping up its stake.

Victoria's Secret claims that BBRC bought shares of the company “in violation of U.S. antitrust law for nearly three years by failing to file forms required under the Hart-Scott-Rodino Act and observe the regulatory waiting period.”

Now, BBRC has made “corrective filings” and the company said it could theoretically acquire up to 49.99 percent of its stock once the waiting period has expired. That is expected to happen at the end of the day on Wednesday.

Donna James, chair of Victoria's Secret, said: “The company has engaged in open and constructive dialogue with Mr. Blundy and other representatives of BBRC over the past three years and appreciates BBRC's investment in the company.”

“Our board and management team remain focused on effectively managing near-term headwinds in the macro environment, while pursuing a focused strategy to unlock the full potential of our brands and business under our new CEO Hillary Super,” James said. BBRC did not

immediately respond to a request for comment, but its website touts its 40-plus year track record as a private investment firm that “makes fast and confidential decisions, with Brett Blundy acting as a partner, investment committee, and decision-maker all in one.”

– EVAN CLARK

On & Off The Track

Charles Leclerc is bound for a few high-adrenaline days ahead.

The Ferrari x Charles Leclerc capsule collection's campaign.



Before the Monaco Grand Prix hits this weekend, the Monégasque Scuderia Ferrari HP racing driver is to officially unveil the capsule collection he codsigned with Ferrari Style's creative director Rocco Iannone on Wednesday.

Teased last month with a brief announcement, the range, dubbed Ferrari x Charles Leclerc, is to be celebrated with an event at the Fairmont Hotel, before its initial retail rollout at the brand's e-commerce site and at Ferrari boutiques in Maranello, Milan, Rome and Miami, as well the temporary store at the Fairmont Hotel in Monte Carlo.

Drawing inspiration from Leclerc's personal wardrobe off the track, encompassing occasions from travel to leisure, and imbued with his dynamic spirit, the capsule collection builds on Ferrari's “Cabinet” concept, introduced for spring 2025 as a range of essentials distilling the Ferrari fashion vocabulary.

“I really enjoyed collaborating on this capsule collection with Rocco and his team. It was a unique opportunity for me to explore my creativity in a new way, beyond racing,” said Leclerc. “I loved learning about all the details that go into conceptualizing, designing and bringing a fashion line to life. This collection perfectly captures my style and the strong bond I have with Ferrari. What I value most is the flexibility and ease of a wardrobe designed for movement and comfort, all while maintaining a bold and distinctive feel,” he added.

The collection comprises sweatshirts and T-shirts bearing racing-inspired branding, parkas and cotton trousers with cargo-style pockets, driver suits, and textured technical knits boasting 3D embossing of Leclerc's initial. Tie-dye denim and jeans with

racing-derivative quilting patterns round off the ready-to-wear offering.

The range is complemented by accessories spanning from fingerless gloves and sunglasses to baseball caps and skater boy-meets-hiker sneakers as well as other goods.

The capsule collection is marked by a dedicated ad campaign by photographer Michael Bailey-Gates starring Leclerc against views of his hometown of Monte Carlo.

– MARTINO CARRERA

Clear Vision

In turbulent times, companies big and small need a sharper focus more than ever.

That's why Italian entrepreneur and Persol creative director Riccardo Pozzoli is launching Hyle, a Milan-based advisory firm.

“After eight years on different individual advisory projects and in venture capital, I realized it would be very interesting to start connecting the dots between brands, different industries and different companies,” he told WWD. “I can help them really fine tune all the potential that they have in their hands and exploit it to its fullest potential.”

The new company, incorporated in January and being publicized as of this month, offers a range of services covering brand and growth strategies, from full-service branding, experience marketing and content creation to finding new distribution models and collaborations.

Hyle's portfolio currently includes Italian luxury urban-activewear label Sease, cofounded by Franco and Giacomo Loro Piana; Icon Yachts, a shipyard which specializes in refitting old service vessels into high-end explorer and purpose boats; and Junkers, an aircraft company revived by Dieter Morszeck, the former chief executive officer of Rimowa.

These varied profiles are part of his plan for Hyle.

“My idea is not really to get specialized in one industry, but mostly to get specialized in a type of customer,” he told WWD.

That profile is “a sophisticated customer in terms of the experiences that this customer wants to live while buying products and services,” be it in hospitality, retail or entertainment, he added.

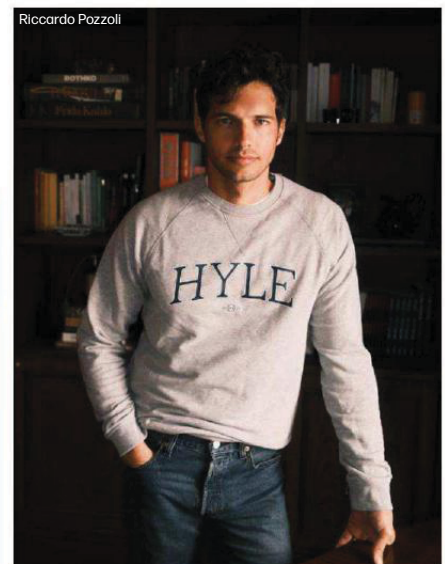
And Pozzoli certainly has practice at what he preaches.

This graduate of Milan's Università Bocconi in economics, finance and marketing management made a name for himself over the last decade for his involvement in a range of ventures from fashion to food.

He was an investor and adviser to mobile social shopping app Depop prior to its sale to online marketplace Etsy and began advising EssilorLuxottica's social media and PR team in 2019.

In 2021, the eyewear giant tapped Pozzoli as brand director for 108-year-old Persol. He evolved toward his current creative role in 2024, a position he will retain in parallel to Hyle.

– LILY TEMPLETON ▶





Jil Sander's Stone collection was designed by Formafantasma and made by Venini.

Venetian Glass

Fashion brand Jil Sander indulged in the history-laden world of Venetian glass for the opening of its brand new store in Venice's Piazza San Marco. On Tuesday, it announced that it unveiled a special collection of Murano glass vases for the new location, situated steps away from the ancient seat of the Venetian Republic, Palazzo Ducale, which is also known as the Doge's Palace.

For the collection named Stone, it teamed up with design powerhouse Formafantasma, the Milan and Rotterdam, Netherlands-based design studio founded by Simone Farresin and Andrea Trimarchi. Formafantasma designed Stone, while the glass creations were blown and handcrafted by Murano-based Venini's artisans. Formafantasma, who most recently designed the bottles for Jil Sander's Olfactory Series 1 Collection of fragrances, was also appointed for the interior design of the store. The boutique officially opened May 9 and took place concurrently with the opening of the Venice Architecture Biennale, which runs until Nov. 23.

The collection consists of four poetic yet contemporary shapes Stone 01, Stone 02, Stone 03 and Stone 04 – each made in a limited edition of nine pieces and distinct for their deliberate imperfections, explained Venini's president Silvia Damiani.

"Glass is a living, unpredictable material that only responds to those who know how to listen to it. It is thanks to the sensitivity and experience of our master glassmakers that we are able to transform uncertainty into art," Damiani said. Venini was founded in 1921 by Paolo Venini, a Milanese lawyer, and Giacomo Cappellin, a Venetian antiques dealer. It was taken over by the Damiani Group known for its eponymous jewelry

brand in 2016.

Jil Sander said Formafantasma worked closely with Venini's artisans to shape the nuances of each piece.

"These subtle differences reflect presence and attention, allowing the vases to result into their final shape. This approach stands in contrast to industrial production, which prioritizes uniformity. Craft invites unpredictability and rewards curiosity," the brand said.

Each product features the sandblasted Jil Sander logo and the engraved Venini and Formafantasma signatures. The collection is exclusively available at the Jil Sander store in Venice. —SOFIA CELESTE

Villa Noailles Departure

Marking the end of an era for the International Festival of Fashion, Photography and Accessories – Hyères, its founder Jean-Pierre Blanc has stepped down as managing director of Villa Noailles, the festival's parent organization.

Contacted by WWD, the association said Blanc had exited the role earlier this month to concentrate on the artistic direction of its

cultural events, which also includes the Design Parade festival in Hyères and Toulon.

This comes after a recent audit by the French ministry of culture's general inspectorate of cultural affairs highlighted a debt of 3.8 million euros in the association's financial results for 2023.

In the interim, Bénédicte Lefeuve, former regional director of cultural affairs for the Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur region, was named administrator by the French ministry of culture.

Blanc's successor as managing director has not yet been named by the Villa Noailles executive board, with candidates expected to go through a vetting process that also involves its public and main private partners.

Pascal Mussard will remain president of the association.

Meanwhile, the 2025 editions of the Design Parade and the Hyères fashion and photography festivals, respectively scheduled for late June and mid-October, will take place as planned.

"They will be adapted to be coherent with the new budgetary capacity but no cancellation of events is being considered to date," the association told WWD in an email. "The core of [our] DNA – support to emerging design, accessibility and



A pair of silver thong heels brought back from 2000.

international reach – will be preserved."

Its accounts for 2023 showed an annual deficit of 650,000 euros and unpaid supplier invoices to the tune of 2.7 million euros. Figures for 2024 were not yet tallied at press time.

"We have already paid over 1 million euros in [outstanding invoices] since the beginning of 2025, prioritizing artists and suppliers who were in greater difficulty," the association said.

Since Lefeuve's arrival in May, a plan to pay off the remaining debt and a budget with appropriate liquidities for 2025 have been put in place.

"Starting this year, we are dedicating 845,000 euros from our annual budget to pay the remainder of our outstanding debt while maintaining the quality of our cultural offer," the

group said.

Also among remedial actions are prioritizing artistic spend and building greater governance and transparency with local public stakeholders. —L.T.

Choo Reissue

Who hasn't watched – and pined after Carrie Bradshaw's Jimmy Choo heels – after her iconic "Help, I lost my Choo!" moment on "Sex and the City"?

Yearn no longer: Fashion designer Conner Ives, fashion journalist and archivist Alexander Fury, and Jimmy Choo's creative director Sandra Choi have teamed up to curate and reissue styles from the brand's archives, from 1997 to 2001.

Included in the revival are Bradshaw's feathery

Jimmy Choo heels, which took flight from her foot as she dashed to make a ferry – making them available to purchase for the first time since their TV debut.

"We looked at three decades of work and dialed back to the first five years. Why? Because those years truly represent the heart and soul of Jimmy Choo – they're our roots, where it all began," explained Choi.

"And in looking at these styles, I saw ideas that are still essential to Jimmy Choo today – eternal values of glamour, of femininity, combined with make and craft. This was a fascinating exercise for me – to see Jimmy Choo through other people's eyes," she continued.

Also included in the capsule are a pair of strappy heels from the brand's first collection in 1997; a pair of sultry silver thong heels designed in 2000, and a gold sandal topped with a violet flower from 2001.

"This collection is about where we've come from, and what we stand for and where we continue to go. It's a celebration, pure and simple – and Jimmy Choo can always ignite a party," added Choi.

Jimmy Choo's been on a hot streak lately.

The launch comes shortly after Chloë Sevigny was announced as the face of Jimmy Choo's summer 2025 campaign earlier this month. Bella Hadid was also spotted wearing the brand's silver "Scarlett" shoes at the London launch of her fragrance brand, Orebella.

—VIOLET GOLDSTONE ■

The Villa Noailles in Hyères.

