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All that glitters

Luxury fashion may seem under threat, says top fashion executive Patrice de Place, but young Parisian designers are heeding the zeitgeist and upholding its spirit in bold new ways. *By Leesa Fogarty*

There's a change afoot in the luxury goods industry.

Gone is the lofty world distinguished by a few select French and Italian brands, whose exquisitely crafted products were available only to the few who could afford them. Enter the luxury product as an accessible treat for any middle-class man, woman and child with a taste for logos and class jumping.

But now, France's fledgling fashion mavens – tired of watching their favourite brands lose cachet – are taking old-world luxury into bright new arenas.

Well-placed to comment on the fresh wind sweeping through luxury is Paris-born Patrice de Place, who for 20 years held executive positions at LVMH



PHOTOS: ALEXANDRE PATTEIN. MODEL: YUNHEE CHOI. GOWN DESIGNED BY JENNY BANNISTER. HAIR: Y SALON.

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around the globe and has recently become director of the elite Paris fashion university, Mod'Art International. De Place's mission? To completely overhaul the French education system's approach to luxury with a greenfields school and industry-based personnel.

According to him, the essential rules of true luxury have not changed. "Luxury is the *savoir faire* of the extraordinary," de Place explains. "It's when a brand consistently exceeds the ordinary. There is no compromise with quality, craftsmanship, distribution and certainly no compromise with the communication," he states.

To ensure Mod'Art's fashion education fits within the current international context, de Place and his committee developed courses offering MBA accreditation and a highly practical content. This includes a specific focus on almost neglected artisan skills – such as millinery, costume jewellery, corsetry and embroidery – along with luxury goods management and marketing.

There's no ignoring the reality that luxury fashion has evolved from its European and artisan-based origins into a global, high-tech industry. With the impact of e-business, corporate takeovers and affordable lines, even from luxury heavyweights such as Louis



Previous page, this page and opposite: Parisian fashion know-how is a drawcard for fledgling designers the world over. Here, Mod'Art International fashion design student Yunhee Choi models some recent creations.

Japan's lead] and start to show what it can do in terms of luxury design," de Place notes.

As for the future of Paris's fashion scene, de Place foresees equally remarkable changes. "Today's designers are much younger than they were ten years ago," he states, "and they are coming from countries beyond the traditional Britain, France and Italy. Mod'Art alone has

showcase their handiwork.

This focus on sartorial details highlights another trend: "Accessories. They are increasingly important in the luxury fashion industry," de Place asserts. The 'It' handbag, for example, has surpassed perfume as a visible and accessible consumer luxury. And fashion houses are taking note, releasing must-have bags priced as low as \$300.

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Vuitton, Gucci and Christian Dior, the industry is worth an estimated \$USD160 billion annually."

"Over the last twenty years I have seen an unbelievable revolution," de Place says. "The time when luxury Parisian fashion houses could impose their style at will is over. Increasingly we are selling to new countries, with new customers, and are forced to have product adaptations."

For example, in a tightening luxury goods market, Louis Vuitton was able to localise handbag sales in Japan with the vibrant artistry of Takashi Murakami, reworking its classic LV logo into a rainbow-coloured blossom design on white leather. Sales of the Murakami line soared to almost 10 percent of the company's worldwide revenue. "I think the next ten years will be extremely interesting because China will [follow

students from 39 different nationalities. I believe the luxury brands of the future will come from the East – Eastern Europe and Asia."

He also points to a revival of luxury in its traditional sense. "To me, Chanel and Hermès are two brands that stand out for having long respected the rules of luxury. Whether or not you like their style, they show no compromise in design, distribution or communication – especially advertising."

Chanel has bought six respected artisan workshops in Paris that no longer have heirs to run them. They include Lesage, makers of fine embroidery; Massaro, the couture shoemaker; and most recently, Goosens, a goldsmith and silversmith. Karl Lagerfeld, Chanel's designer, has paid tribute to these ateliers for some four years by designing small collections that

Mod'Art International is also taking note, working in partnership with established Parisian fashion houses to develop skills in leatherwork, jewellery design, millinery, shoemaking and corsetry. And its students are winning prestigious awards and internships for their efforts.

The luxury fashion industry of the future is also likely to be a sustainable one, says de Place. "I would say the luxury industry [today] does not use anything from the chemical industry," he says, adding that environmental concerns have become second nature to young designers. Non-toxic fabric dyeing and leather tanning are big issues, as are ethical manufacturing conditions. LVMH is known for its embrace of environmental issues, with its support of fair trade, product lifecycle analysis, reductions in

energy and water usage and company-wide goals to become carbon neutral.

If the root of luxury according to de Place is "no compromise", then aficionados of the finer things in life have something else to look forward to: the reach of Mod'Art International is set to go forth and multiply, with branch universities planned for Eastern Europe, Asia and Australia.

Despite predictions of a growing power in the East, it looks like Paris's authority on

all things luxurious will go undisputed for some time yet.

* Figures from consultancy Bain and Company (2006) and Just-Style (2008)

Mod'Art International

1 Rue Bouvier
75011 Paris, France
Tel +33 1 58 39 36 70
www.mod-art.org



Luxe reloaded

Keen for a taste of *real luxury*? Here's our rundown of the best Paris has to offer, from classical to cutting-edge.

Hermès

www.hermes.com
24 Faubourg Saint-Honoré
75008 Paris
Tel: + 33 1 40 17 47 17
Men, women, watches, bags, jewellery, scarves, ties, baby, home and fragrances.
42 avenue George V
75008 Paris
Tel: + 33 1 47 20 48 51
Men, women, watches, bags, jewellery, scarves, ties, baby, home and fragrances.
Hôtel Hilton
18 avenue de Suffren
75015 Paris
Tel: + 33 1 45 66 89 29
Men, women, watches, bags, jewellery, scarves, ties, baby, home and fragrances.
Much smaller selection.

Chanel

www.chanel.com
21 rue du Faubourg St Honoré
75008 Paris
Tel: +33 1 53 05 98 95
Ready-to-wear; handbags; accessories (costume jewellery, scarves, ties).
42 avenue Montaigne
75008 Paris
Tel: +33 1 47 23 74 12
Ready-to-wear; handbags; shoes; accessories (costume jewellery, scarves, ties); fragrance; sunglasses; watches; make-up; skincare; exclusives.

M Raymond Massaro

www.massaro.fr
2 rue de la Paix
75002 Paris
Tel: +33 1 42 61 00 29
Bespoke shoemaker and exclusive shoe designer for Chanel, Christian Dior, Jean Paul Gaultier and others.

Lesage

www.lesage-paris.com
Ecole Lesage
13 rue de la Grange Batelière
75009 Paris
Tel: +33 1 44 79 00 88
Master embroiderers whose work graces the finest creations of grand couture.

Gaspard Yurkievich

www.gaspardyrurkievich.com
43 rue Charlot
75003 Paris
Tel: +33 1 42 77 42 46
Talented new Mod'Art graduate; his summer 2008 collection had a 60s theme.

Tilmann Grawe

tilmanngrawe.free.fr
12 rue Léopold Bellan
75002 Paris
Tel: +33 1 40 41 92 10
Fax: +33 1 40 41 92 10
Cutting-edge luxury ready-to-wear fashion, sunglasses, shoes, perfumes.

Henri Maupiou

www.maupiou.com
2 rue de la Paix
75002 Paris
Tel: +33 1 42 61 08 27
Luxurious, limited-edition haute couture fabrics. Bring your black Amex.

Louise Feuilleère

www.louisefeuilleere.com
102 rue des Dames
75017 Paris
Tel: +33 1 42 93 17 76
Fax: +33 1 44 90 96 22
Awarded the Master Crafts(wo)man of Paris Medal by President Sarkozy for her artisan skills in corseterie and lingerie.

Malhia

www.malhia.fr
Viaduc des Arts 19, Avenue Daumesnil
75012 Paris
Tel: +33 1 53 44 76 76
Famous for providing the fabrics that became synonymous with Chanel, particularly tweeds and wools.

Mokuba

www.mokuba.fr
18 rue Montmartre
75001 Paris
Tel: +33 1 40 13 81 41
Offers 43,000 exquisite ribbons.