

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Luxury fashion will have to shed its opacity

December 27, 2019



*Known for its rigid standards of quality, Loro Piana sources the finest wool from around the world for its apparel and accessories. Image credit: Loro Piana*

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

The fashion industry has typically led the luxury business in terms of perception. But of all the sectors that cater to affluent consumers automotive, travel and hospitality, real estate, beauty, watches, jewelry, wines and spirits, arts and home furnishings it is fashion that is taking the heat from those worried about the future of the planet.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**  
Plus: Just released  
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

In terms of public perception, there is a case to be made that fashion comprising apparel, leather goods and accessories is associated with polluting natural resources, expanding the carbon footprint, slothful progress on diversity and encouraging wasteful consumption. Add to that the images that make the rounds every few weeks of fashion weeks, as well as apparel and accessories that seem to shout frivolity in this Age of Outrage.

Fashion has a perception problem. Part of it is rooted in reality, part of it in opacity.

Open up

In its vilification of fashion, blame is heaped on millennials and the generation after them, Gen Z. These generations are regularly portrayed as imposing harsh purity tests that few can pass. They are blamed for expecting more from the brands they wear, consume, display or visit. They are feared for their power to "cancel" a brand or person if they cross their path.

Brands, if it must be said, fear the wrath of the generations that expect a relationship based on honest dialogue and shared values. Brands are not used to this and certainly not those occupying the Olympian heights of luxury.

So here is a mandate for luxury fashion next year: Start sharing.

Conglomerates such as LVMH, Kering and Richemont, as well as Chanel and Hermès, have already instituted best-practice policies within their organizations. They are on track to meet sustainability, transparency and diversity goals, albeit it is a long trek to that destination of minimum waste and maximum benefit to all stakeholders in the luxury ecosystem raw material providers, factory and workshop labor, management, retailers and shareholders.

And what are these houses doing to publicize their achievements? Producing videos, films and insightful commentary online via social posts and op-eds, as well as sending out emissaries to push out the message of

compliance with eco-standards. Their leaders are enlisted in getting the message out hopefully, not as mere PR lipstick or marketing feel-good.

It is the smaller houses that need help those independent, family-owned firms in Europe and the United States that are primarily centers of fashion production and retail. Perhaps industry organizations can step in and institute standards that do not render these fashion brands unviable and unprofitable.

#### Labeling it

What fashion needs is the implementation of a farm-to-table sort of practice that informs consumers of the product's journey from cotton plant, sheared wool or hide to animal treatment, material collection, transportation, refining, dyeing, tailoring, packaging, shipping and end destination.

The carbon footprint must be displayed on each package and label, just as ingredients are on food items and, in some cases, calories displayed on restaurant menus. Maybe even have an industry-acceptable eco seal of approval based on authorized audits of the entire production-to-retail process.

Another thing to consider is letting consumers know how the fashion industry contributes to the global economy. Disclose employment numbers of jobs generated across the entire supply chain and the causes that fashion brands support. Talk up the benefits of keeping alive artisanal skills and craftsmanship. Disclose the taxes paid that fund schools and colleges, fire-prevention services, police protection, healthcare and infrastructure.

THIS WILL NOT come easy.

In addition to living by their own creed, brands will have to enforce standards on vendors and contractors, who will have to do the same with those below them in the food chain. Blockchain technology must be deployed to ensure tracking from end-to-end, and offered as a certificate of proof that the product journey was legitimate through and through.

It is clear in 2020 that fashion brands will have to not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk.