Why the fashion industry is taking over the restaurant business

By Dominique Muret - 19 July 2022

Not a week goes by without at least one fashion brand announcing the opening of a café or restaurant bearing its logo. As life returns to normal after two years of pandemic, with consumers eager to go out, the restaurant industry is emerging as the new segment for the luxury industry to conquer. Leading luxury brands have always found a natural outlet in the culinary segment, but never before has this phenomenon experienced such a frenzy as in this period.

Over the past few weeks, announcements of restaurant openings have multiplied. The most recent is that of Boss, which has just opened its very first café in Rome in partnership with the historic Vitti pastry bar in Piazza San Lorenzo in Lucina, not far from its store. The space, decked out in the German brand's colors of black, white and beige, will offer until November "a unique Boss experience, blending design and dining with Roman influences," said the brand in a statement.

Experience is the new mantra of luxury. As the latest studies on the high-end consumer goods market confirm, consumer spending in recent years has tended to shift towards wellness, hospitality and dining. Added to this is the craze for gastronomy, a phenomenon still on the rise, which can be a new growth lever for brands, for example, by converting underperforming retail spaces into restaurants. This diversification also allows brands to reinforce their image and positioning as lifestyle brands.

Christian Dior, which already owns cafés and restaurants in Saint-Tropez, Tokyo, Seoul and Miami, has understood this very well, as reflected in the ambitious renovation project of its historic Parisian address at 30 Avenue Montaigne, where it opened the always packed "haute couture" Monsieur Dior restaurant, placing chef Jean Imbert at the helm. The concept is made complete by the Dior Patisserie.

Already busy running a restaurant in Osaka, Japan, and two cafés (in Osaka and Seoul, South Korea), Louis Vuitton is not far behind. After opening a store in a former Michelin-starred restaurant in Lille in the spring, it took the plunge with its first gastronomic location in France. The "Mory Sacko at Louis Vuitton" restaurant, named after the Michelin-starred chef who runs the establishment, is located in the heart of Saint-Tropez, not far from its boutique, in the White 1921 hotel, managed by LVMH.
Long before Dior and Vuitton, other fashion houses ventured into this segment and paved the way, such as Giorgio Armani, which was among the first to enter the gastronomy industry in 1998 and already has around 20 locations worldwide. By diversifying into the hotel business, the move into the culinary sector was also an obvious choice for Versace and Bulgari. Chanel also opened a gastronomic address more than 10 years ago with chef Alain Ducasse at the top of its flagship store in Ginza, Tokyo.

Prada has also taken its first steps through its Marchesi brand, as has LVMH with Cova cafés. Ralph Lauren has tested several concepts in its flagship stores. In 2015, Burberry opened its Thomas café in London. Not to mention Gucci, which has expanded its culinary offerings in four locations, Florence, Los Angeles, Tokyo and Seoul, as well as Trussardi, which is preparing to reopen its Michelin-starred café and restaurant in the fall under chef Giancarlo Perbellini at its Milanese palazzo opposite La Scala.

In addition to the visibility that these prestigious locations bring, it is also a way to diversify a brand's revenues, something much needed after the pandemic, and to broaden its audience, while encouraging the customer to prolong their presence in their spaces to encourage them to consume more of their products, since the culinary experience is ideally offered inside their points of sale or nearby. By creating a complete universe around the brand, you also manage to better build customer loyalty and capture their attention.

Not to mention the publicity generated on social media by photos of beautiful dishes presented naturally on clearly recognizable branded tableware. This 'instagrammable' aspect, which young people love when it comes to sharing an image on social media has been a focus of attention for certain brands, such as the British footwear brand Jimmy Choo, which has just opened in London an all-pink ephemeral café with tea service in the shoe section of Harrod's department stores.
This opportunity of displaying a brand's image and values through this new segment has also attracted more subtle brands and young designers. Like Simon Porte Jacquemus, with its Citron café, installed since 2019 in the Galeries Lafayette Champs Elysées, or the Chez Jeanne bistro, which opened the same year in the Parisian boutique of Rouje, the brand of stylist and influencer Jeanne Damas.

Announcements of new openings have continued in recent weeks, with the trend of mid-sized brands forging partnerships. Borsalino has partnered with entrepreneur Gualtiero Vanelli to open Panama Restaurant Beach Versilia by Borsalino in Marina di Pietrasanta on the Versilia Riviera in Tuscany. Another alliance is that of Isabelle Saglio, owner of the café de l'Esplanade, located on rue Fabert in Paris, and Lorenzo Serafini, artistic director of Philosophy, Alberta Ferretti's young line, who has customized its terrace for the summer, while designer J.J. Martin of the La Double J brand took over the terrace of the Passalacqua luxury hotel on Lake Como with her very recognizable vintage prints.

Capitalizing on the new gastronomic love of consumers, particularly younger ones, luxury houses are creating new touch points through their gastronomic spaces, while offering their customers a new type of multi-sensory experience. This incursion of fashion into the kitchen is also part of the houses' new strategy around the transformation of their points of sale. The objective is to make them once again full-fledged destinations, no longer focused solely on selling products, but designed as multifunctional spaces, where to live different experiences and spend time, to win back local customers, but also market shares lost to online shopping.

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