

EVENTS/CAUSES

Luxury Education Foundation celebrates 10 years of teaching through practice

March 25, 2015



Lalique is one of many brands that work with the Luxury Education Foundation

By KAY SORIN

NEW YORK - The Luxury Education Foundation celebrated its 10-year anniversary on Monday night with a panel discussion and presentation of projects at The New School in New York.

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Members of the program's board of directors such as president Ketty Maisonrouge, treasurer Robert Chavez and program chair Barbara Cirkva made remarks before introducing a panel of former LEF students to discuss their experiences. LEF brings together young talent and industry leaders to create a program that educates students and provides them with real experience in the world of luxury.

"We have grown our programs organically, listening to our students and executives," said Ketty Maisonrouge, president of the [Luxury Education Foundation](#), New York, "and what we always try to keep in mind is what other program could we create that would allow our students to enter the world of luxury a little more seamlessly."

"One of the best things about our program is that it's almost a one-to-one relationship

between the students, the faculty and the executives, because at LEF, like everyone in the luxury field, we believe in quality over quantity," she said.

Practice makes perfect

The LEF was founded in 2005 with the goal of educating students by providing them with practical experience in the industry. It is a nonprofit educational organization that allows students at Columbia Business School and Parsons The New School for Design to learn about the creation and marketing of luxury goods.

Monday's event focused on the success of the program's past 10 years. In addition to moderator Barbara Cirkva and Robert Chavez the panel included LEF alumni Adaobi Kanu, head of consumer experience at [Maclaren](#), Peter Skeadas, senior manager, loyalty partnerships at [American Express](#) and Chloe Thevenoz , senior jewelry product manager at [Cartier](#).



The panel included alumni and board members from LEF

Some of the brands that students work with include Hermès, Chanel, Lalique, Gucci, Cartier, Graff, Prada and Dior, among many others.

Students and executives from these brands collaborate on projects, and ultimately both groups benefit immensely from the exchange of ideas. Over the past 10 years, a number of projects have actually been implemented by the companies they were hypothetically designed for.



Projects from the past 10 years were on display

After the panel discussion, some of the most interesting projects from the past 10 years were on display. Each project had a small stand with a video telling the story of how it was created by the students and then implemented by the brand.

Not all projects are chosen to be used in real life by the brand they are designed for, but for the ones that are, the success can be enormous. For example, one group of students was challenged to create a new product that would retain Hermès' heritage while still embarking on something new.

The group of students with this assignment took a traditional Hermès china pattern and transformed it by applying it to a new line of enamel bracelets. Hermès was thrilled with their work and the bracelets are now available in stores.



LEF students created an enamel bracelet for Hermès

Because the LEF is a partnership between Columbia and Parsons, students have a diverse range of interests, with some focusing on business and finance and others focusing on creative design and the arts. One of the most surprising things for students involved was the generative nature of this combination.

"The most unexpected part of this program was the relationships I've built with my Parsons colleagues," Mr. Skeadas said. "We are still trying to help each other out nowadays.

"They are wonderful people, super bright, super kind. It was fun for me," he said.

In coming years the foundation hopes to expand its programs and offer students even more of the benefits it provides. It will continue to grow and work with more brands and teachers to educate the future leaders of the luxury industry.



Sketches of various ideas and projects were also on display

Group effort

Other luxury organizations have taken it on themselves to assist talented youth in entering the world of luxury. For example, conglomerate Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton renewed its training program for Chinese-Americans after seeing results in the inaugural class.

LVMH Fundamentals in Retail is a partnership with the Chinese-American Planning Council and Parsons The New School for Design, in which those enrolled undergo training to help them achieve job placement in luxury retail with the goal of increasing their earning potential. During the first round, more than 90 percent completed the course and about 70 percent immediately found employment, with an average increase in wages of three times ([see story](#)).

Programs such as these are not only beneficial to the students, but also to the brands themselves. Since brands continue to struggle to recruit adequate creative talent, luxury conglomerate LVMH Moët Hennessy Louis Vuitton also created a professional training program, L’Institut des Métiers D’Excellence, or IME, to lessen the burden.

LVMH’s IME program allows the company to voice its need for artisans while supporting young talent as they develop their crafts to ensure that the skills of the trade remain strong for future generations. The program launched in September 2014 and gives IME trainees accredited degrees through paired apprenticeships with LVMH houses ([see story](#)).

Programs like these are essential to fostering young talent and preserving the luxury industry for years to come. Both the brands and the students have a lot to gain from the Luxury Education Foundation.

“The wonderful thing about this program is that it’s just as rewarding for us, the executives working with the students, as it is for the students working with the executive team,” said

Robert Chavez, treasurer of LEF and president and chief executive officer of Hermès, Paris. "It really opens up our eyes.

"They come with such a different, fresh and innovative perspective. They help us see things that are right in front of us that perhaps we haven't noticed before. It really is a wonderful program."

Final Take

Kay Sorin, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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