

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Saint Laurent's cornerstones have allowed for evolutionary opportunities

May 25, 2016



*Cara Delevingne for Saint Laurent Paris' Le Collection de Paris*

By STAFF REPORTS

SAN FRANCISCO When Yves Saint Laurent was rebranded in 2012, many scoffed at the idea, but with the brand's codes well-established, the move was internally trusted.

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During the "Saint Laurent: The Making of a Superbrand" session at Financial Times' Business of Luxury Summit 2016 May 23, Saint Laurent's president/CEO Francesca Bellettini discussed the brand's approach since she joined the Kering-owned house in 2013. After the departure of Hedi Slimane as creative director, the brand is undergoing another transitional period that Ms. Bellettini stressed is all part of its evolutionary plan.

Evolution, not revolution

In 2012, Yves Saint Laurent rebranded, dropping the "Yves" to become Saint Laurent Paris. At the time experts agreed that the execution of the French label's name transition could have been stronger and that it would likely affect its relationship with established consumers ([see story](#)).

The move brought forth incredible brand awareness as consumers, and the media especially, picked apart the decision to rebrand. The brand's redirection was headed by Mr. Slimane, who is credited as bringing clarity back to Saint Laurent.

When Ms. Bellettini arrived a year later the consumer still needed a boost in accepting the new Saint Laurent. Despite not having the public and critics' support, wholesalers were the most receptive to the change.

The wholesale relationship Saint Laurent had with retailers helped with the brand's positioning with buyers being among the most committed to the reform strategy and were most interested in seeing Mr. Slimane's collections and providing adequate floor space in-store.

SAINT LAURENT  
PARIS



### *Saint Laurent Paris haute couture advertisement*

For Saint Laurent this worked well as the brand does not harp on a monobrand retail model, rather placing emphasis on the client and how they want to shop, regardless of where the purchase is made.

Ms. Bellettini explained that pre-2012 Saint Laurent was missing a fashion authority and brand clarity. Through Mr. Slimane's vision the codes of the House of Saint Laurent were brought back to life.

Now, Saint Laurent is at another transitional time in its history. In April, Mr. Slimane announced he would end his nearly four-year tenure as creative and image director after rumors suggested his exit ([see story](#)).

The brand has become very much Mr. Slimane's vision of the Saint Laurent codes, leaving questions of how to proceed on the table.

SAINT LAURENT  
PARIS



### *Joni Mitchell for Saint Laurent Paris*

After Mr. Slimane's departure, he was replaced by Anthony Vaccarello, former creative director of Versus Versace ([see story](#)).

Essentially, the codes of the brand did not die with Mr. Saint Laurent, Ms. Bellettini expressed. Since its DNA of modernity and gender parity have already been established, Mr. Vaccarello is free to explore the codes as he sees fit, telling the brand's story in his own language.

To this point, the importance on Saint Laurent's permanent collection is paramount for moving forward. Items such as the Le Smoking and Tuxedo jackets have become a recognizable part of the brand's DNA offering a sense of security and long lasting investment for the brand.

The permanent collection has become relevant to the brand as cornerstones, but the largest risk with that is becoming "dusty" or irrelevant. By keeping it modern, through seasonal variations, a brand can maintain balance and continue with a forward trajectory.

While the public was not aware of the internal discussions among Saint Laurent and Mr. Slimane regarding his exit, this is likely why his final collection and campaign for the brand featured its iconic pieces so prominently.

SAINT LAURENT  
1966-2012  
PARIS



*Jane Birkin for Saint Laurent Paris*

For the effort, Saint Laurent Paris selected It girls of past and present to represent the brand's latest collections.

Mr. Slimane picked British model Cara Delevingne and former model and muse for the Hermes Birkin handbag Jane Birkin for the Le Smoking jacket. Both women sport the Le Smoking tuxedo jacket in the still campaign, showing that the masculine piece can be incorporated into the style of any modern woman ([see story](#)).

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