

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

John Lobb touts handcrafting, workmanship via in-depth series

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Image from John Lobb's "Gestures"

By SARAH JONES

British footwear maker John Lobb is highlighting the intimate relationship between a craftsman and his tools in an ongoing film series.

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John Lobb's "Gestures" depicts the choreography behind the shoemaking process, as artisans perform a duet with the wood, leather and other materials. The pared-down nature of the videos allows the work of the artisan to shine.

"Craftsmanship has been showcased frequently by many luxury brands in the last three years," said [Thoma Serdari](#), Ph.D., founder of [PIQLuxury](#), co-editor of [Luxury: History Culture Consumption](#) and adjunct professor of luxury marketing at [New York University](#), New York.

"As a result, one forgets that craftsmanship is a very specific term that has to do with the craftsman," she said. "It is not a vague, abstract notion of 'how things are done,' it is not a clinical manual of a process. It is a very personal way of doing things when the slightest detail and the most imperceptible gesture matter and make a difference."

Ms. Serdari is not affiliated with John Lobb, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

[John Lobb](#) did not respond before press deadline.

Hands-on process

The first episode of *Gestures* sees an artisan shaping a last, the form made of Hornbeam wood that acts as a mold.

John Lobb's film opens with close-up shots of the wood's grain and the craftsman's apron being buckled. Ambient noise forms the soundtrack as he marks a block of wood with a pencil and begins to file down the piece to resemble the shape of a foot.



Image from John Lobb's Gestures series

As he files, creating a form of dance, details are captured, including the dust falling to the ground.

In the end of the video, he walks away from the table, where the completed last sits.

Scene two picks up where the first episode left off. Similarly to the first film, this opens with an up-close shot of the shoe form and a view of an artisan suiting up.

After the craftsman takes an array of measurements using everything from a measuring tape to a wooden device, he picks up leather and begins to stretch it across the last.

Pieces of the process often left off screen in craftsmanship films, such as the sharpening of tools, are shown to the viewer.

As the artisan begins to cut pieces of leather to the specifications, his smooth movements form a dance style of their own.

Gestures, Scene II from John Lobb

In the end, the pieces cut remain on the table, ready for the next craftsman to pick up.

"John Lobb is a brand whose DNA relies on the one-on-one relationship between the craftsman and the customer," Ms. Serdari said. "It is the tacit knowledge John Lobb's craftsmen have about the brand's customers from doing bespoke order after bespoke order that gives them that extra confidence in manipulating the materials.

"This is precisely what is shown in these videos where the artisan is demonstrating his self-assured control over both process and materials," she said. "This ensures a flawless method of making bespoke shoes that is interspersed with the artisan's personal flair, his unique hand gestures, his very own body language.

"It is implied that the end result is not just perfect but also inspired and unique."

Portraying craft

Extending a craftsmanship story beyond one film allows brands to focus on the details.

For instance, French apparel and accessories brand Berluti allowed consumers to watch the bespoke tailoring process before ordering a custom suit themselves with a social video series.

Berluti's "Grande Mesure Fully Bespoke Tailoring" videos show the making of a suit, from measuring and cutting to the fabric to the point where the consumer gets to try on his one-of-a-kind creation. For consumers who might not be convinced of the merits of custom tailoring, these six videos may sway them to book an appointment ([see story](#)).

While most behind-the-scenes content follows a similar format, some labels have turned to a narrative approach to convey the quality of their production.

Italian menswear label Isaia is delving into the simultaneously sartorial and shady attributes of its hometown in a humorous tale.

"Tailor-Made Crime" is a multi-part thriller parody that plays off the brand's historic home of Casalnuovo, referencing both the skilled craftsmanship and organized crime that calls the area around Napoli home. Throughout the film, a detective attempts to interrogate Isaia employees, leading to some revealing insights about the brand's apparel production ([see story](#)).

"Tested formats never work with luxury brands," Ms. Serdari said. "Those who fall back on 'how things are done in the industry' make mistakes.

"On the other hand, thinking outside the box does not have to be extreme," she said. "What is absolutely necessary in showcasing craftsmanship is staying true to what the brand is about, being authentic and close to the core principles of the brand and communicating those in a way that bridges the digital with the material worlds, as is the case with the John Lobb videos.

"In these, it is very precisely the sound of the craftsman's instruments that transform the short sequence from a strictly visual piece of communication to an all-encompassing experience, one that helps the viewer recall and connect to the material world through the sounds of the pencil, wood and leather. Let's not forget that true luxury addresses all our senses."

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