

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

The rise of the luxury T-shirt

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Luxury T-shirts show the rising influence of streetwear in the industry. Image credit: Versace

By DANNY PARISI

High-end apparel usually calls to mind quality suits, elegant evening gowns and watches made from precious metals, but more brands are turning to T-shirts as luxury goods, exemplifying the growing influence of streetwear on the fashion industry.

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When a simple T-shirt from Versace can cost hundreds of dollars, it cuts to the heart of what makes a product luxury. For some, it has to do with price, but others see rarity, quality and other factors as well.

"I have always defined luxury as a mind set that can include price point but also has other factors from how it is produced, quantity of availability etc," said Kimmie Smith, fashion Stylist and co-founder/style director of **Athleisure Mag**, New York. "We live in a time that our lifestyles have to be supported and the trend reflects that a casual and easy appearance is something that is embraced across price points and luxury is not immune to this concept.

"The market will always reflect what it's consumers are seeking and the T-shirt continues to evolve in this manner."

T-shirt revolution

T-shirts have been a staple of Western wardrobes for a century, and luxury brands have been steadily incorporating them into their collections along with more traditional staples such as dress shirts and polos.

A quick look at the Web stores of brands such as Dior, Gucci, Versace and Saint Laurent show a plethora of T-shirts ranging from the ostentatious and patterned to the simple and monochrome.

For example, Italian fashion house Dolce & Gabbana is taking cues from fast-fashion copy cats for a series of logo tees featured in its spring/summer 2017 collection.

Fast-fashion players have taken a satirical approach to the logos of a number of luxury and designer brands, often taking their iconography and putting a comical spin on it. Labels are constantly working to protect their intellectual property, but taking a light-hearted jab at imitators may direct consumers to, as Dolce & Gabbana suggest, "The Real Fake" ([see story](#)).



Luxury T-shirts are on the rise. Image credit: Dolce & Gabbana

But with a price point that can climb just as high as other luxury goods, it raises the question of what constitutes a luxury good.

"The idea of a luxury T-shirt is not a new concept and has been one that has been introduced into a number of lines whether it was based on a couture brand including it within their line or utilizing fabrications that were premium in nature," Ms. Smith said. "Either way, luxury T-shirts are a coveted portion of the market that allows the consumer to pair this item with casual or structured looks that maintain an easy appearance while having an elevated look."

Brands have been using T-shirts in many ways. From the aforementioned branding efforts of Dolce & Gabbana to humanitarian and fundraising efforts, T-shirts have a versatile place in the luxury wardrobe.

Ralph Lauren sold a limited-edition T-shirt in support of Japan relief efforts after the devastating earthquake and subsequent tsunami in 2011 ([see story](#)).

Tory Burch jumped in with a similar campaign, selling luxury T-shirts to raise money for the same effort ([see story](#)).

"We're definitely in a place where all the rules of fashion are continuously being broken and I'm looking forward to seeing how many more boundaries are going to be pushed and explored in this industry," said Dalia Strum, educator at the Fashion Institute of Technology, New York. "As individuals, we're looking to express ourselves through creative expression and fashion is the most relevant opportunity on a day-to-day basis."

Streetwear love affair

Another thread of the luxury T-shirt tapestry is the growing relationship between luxury apparel and streetwear, the fashion sector influenced by urban subcultures such as hip-hop, skating and punk.

Streetwear brands have been steadily blurring the lines between streetwear and luxury with partnerships such as the one Supreme struck with Louis Vuitton.

In less than two decades, Louis Vuitton has gone from taking legal action against Supreme for allegedly using a pattern that resembled its logo to designing a menswear collection alongside the label. For Louis Vuitton, this collection offers an opportunity to tap into a new audience as well as shows just how far streetwear's influence has come in the luxury world ([see story](#)).



Louis Vuitton x Supreme. Image credit: LVMH

Additionally, LVMH's annual Prize for Young Fashion Designers this year honored several designers whose style is

heavily evocative of modern streetwear ([see story](#)).

This relationship is only likely to grow as T-shirts, ripped jeans and other elements of casual and streetwear continue to seep into the luxury world.

High-fashion and streetwear has been in an intricate relationship for years.

"We will continue to see the two playing off of each other whether it's collaborations that are celeb or athlete driven, diffusion lines that are created to showcase these concepts and having celebs/athletes/influencers wearing these pieces," Ms. Smith said. "Ultimately, the consumer will continue to showcase through their purchases how much they are interested in the assorted offerings."

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