

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Rimowa captures importance, love of travel in Topas portrait series

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Rimowa's Topas was introduced in 1937. Image credit: Rimowa

By JEN KING

LVMH-owned luggage manufacturer Rimowa is celebrating the 80th anniversary of its aluminum suitcases with its first digital campaign.

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In the 1930s Rimowa's Cologne, Germany factory was ravished by a fire, and the only surviving material was a light silver-grey, fire-resistant metal that would soon become the luggage manufacturer's signature. Since 1937, Rimowa has produced the lightweight aluminum Topas luggage line, updating its design with a grooved structure in 1950, a move that put its suitcases on the map as part of the exclusive travel culture.

"The campaign focuses on a different part of the brand's heritage, one that puts Rimowa owners at the center of our communication," said Hector Muelas, chief brand officer of [Rimowa](#), Cologne, Germany.

"The idea behind it is that aluminum is an organic material that evolves with time, thus making our suitcases natural vehicles for storytelling," he said. "Every bang, every scratch is a portrait of a character, a personal journey, a story."

Case in point

Since the creation of the Topas, the aluminum case line has remained true to its heritage and its design relatively unchanged, with the luggage maker only making improvements to things such as its wheels, handles and waterproofing.

Founded in 1898 in Cologne by Paul Morszeck, Rimowa is known for its innovations in luggage aimed at lightweight construction and ease of use. Throughout its more than a century in business, the brand has remained family owned and run.

The founder's son Richard Morszeck is credited with developing the first aluminum suitcase, bringing it to market in 1937 ([see story](#)).

Rimowa is of the position that over the course of a case's life, every dent, scratch and sticker placed on its surface by a traveler is part of a shared history.



Display of Topas luggage inside Rimowa's Paris flagship. Image credit: Rimowa

As such, Rimowa's first digital campaign will focus exclusively on the Topas and famous travelers who rely on their aluminum cases to get from point a to point b.

To mark 80 years since the first design, friends of Rimowa are sharing their own aluminum luggage pieces to include the brand and like-minded enthusiasts of their personal travels.

"From the beginning, we knew we wanted to feature people that had a longstanding connection with the brand - authentic Rimowa customers rather than commercial endorsements," Mr. Muelas said. "Luckily for us, many of them happen to be influential icons, which validates the brand's role in culture in a organic way."

Participants in the digital series include fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld, who personally photographed his Rimowa Topas for the effort.



Karl Lagerfeld's Rimowa Topas case. Image credit: Rimowa

Others include award-winning director David Fincher, editor in chief Carine Roitfeld, artist Anne Imhof, designer Virgil Abloh, entrepreneur Martha Stewart, chef Massimo Bottura, curator Hans Ulrich Obrist, design collective AMBUSH, architect Annabelle Selldorf and DJ/designer Nigo. Rimowa worked with a total of 29 brand friends for the 80th anniversary effort.

Aside from Mr. Lagerfeld's personal submission, Rimowa's series was photographed by German photographer Frank Hlsbmer. The Rimowa Topas portraits will be presented on the brand's [Web site](#) and social media channels.

Each Topas portrait will be accompanied by a quote provided by its owner. In the quotes, the brand friend explains how travel has given them character and shaped their identity.

Swedish singer Lykke Li, for example, said, "I idolize that person in the airport with the perfect worn-in suitcase and the sense of inner calm. For me to feel that way, packing has to be a precise routine."

Stefano Tonchi, editor of W magazine, told Rimowa, "I prefer big cities and historical sites over fun destinations and comfortable resorts. Traveling is always about the people living there and their stories."

Rimowa also highlights the creation of a Topas suitcase at its Cologne factory in a film directed by Dan Tobin Smith. Taking 90 steps and 205 individual parts, a single Topas suitcase takes 117 minutes to complete.

The 80th anniversary of the original aluminium suitcase

Since many travelers decide to decorate their Topas case with stickers from destinations and favorite things, Rimowa has created a limited-edition anniversary sticker for the occasion.

In collaboration with 032c, a contemporary culture magazine, the luggage maker has commissioned seven stickers by global artists such as Wes Lang, Geoff McFetridge, Othelo Gervacio, Martine Syms, Il Pelicano, AMBUSH and Mr. Abloh.



One of seven stickers designed for Topas' 80th anniversary. Image credit: Rimowa

Rimowa will not sell the sticker, but it will be available to friends of the brand as a gift at select brand-operated stores and through 032c's winter 2016/2017 magazine edition.

Who what when

When signature products hit a milestone anniversary, brands often script heritage campaigns. These campaigns often highlight notable fans of a particular style of watch or fragrance, for instance.

Richemont-owned jeweler Cartier, for example, is celebrating one century of its iconic Tank watch with a collection of newly designed timepieces as well as a series of videos highlighting the pieces' history.

Designed in 1917, the iconic watch was inspired by the silhouettes of French Renault tanks used in World War I. This history is deeply entwined in Cartier's marketing for the watch, highlighting some of the figures from history who have famously worn the watch since its debut a century ago ([see story](#)).

Social media campaigns help to dispense the historical significance of a product anniversary with fans as well as a wider audience.

"[Rimowa's] campaign was conceived as a socially native initiative from day one, and we have worked closely with the platforms to develop the right type of content for the right type of audience," Mr. Muelas said.

"It is the first time that we get the change to engage with an audience that had been expecting this behavior from Rimowa, while allowing us to connect with a broader audience that, although aware of our product, might not be versed on who we are as a brand," he said.