

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Balmain debuts intimate, experiential store concept in Milan

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*Balmain's store on Milan's Via Montenapoleone. Image courtesy of Balmain*

By STAFF REPORTS

French fashion house Balmain has opened its first Italian flagship in Milan, bringing touches of the label's Parisian hometown to Via Montenapoleone.

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The 3,000-square-foot boutique features a new store concept for Balmain, which will be used as the basis for future openings. Surrounding the opening, Balmain is letting consumers further immerse themselves in its universe through a virtual reality experience.

"I was born and raised in Milan but, the truth is, opening here has little to do with hometown pride," said Massimo Piombini, CEO of Balmain, in a statement. "Montenapoleone is one of the world's iconic retail addresses there are probably only five other locations in the world like this one and after opening in SoHo, Mayfair and Melrose, this was the logical next step for Balmain."

### Paris in Milan

Balmain creative director Olivier Rousteing worked with Studio AMV's architects Anna Philippou, Marie-Charlotte Proserpi-Fouchard and Victoire Guerlay to develop the new store design.

As with other Balmain boutiques, this latest opening channels the house's history. For instance, the brand's Mayfair location in London is designed to resemble an imagined pied-à-terre for founder Pierre Balmain.

In Milan, the design is centered on the brand's Parisian heritage. The resulting store concept divides the sales floor into a series of connected rooms that recreate the feeling of a Parisian apartment, modeled after a library or bedroom.

Each of Balmain's collections is showcased in a separate room, inviting consumers to discover in an intimate environment.



*Balmain's store in Milan. Image credit: Balmain*

"Since this design will serve as a prototype for all future addresses, Olivier wanted the stress to be placed squarely on the second part of the house's official name: Balmain Paris," said Studio AMV's Ms. Philippou.

"He made it clear to us that he wanted Balmain to transport Paris to all corners of the globe, to make each Balmain visitor feel the atmosphere of Paris, wherever they may be in the world," she said. "But he also ensured that every step of the process that this was done in a modern fresh way, that avoided all the expected clichés."

For the Milan boutique's opening, the brand has set up a temporary lounge. Here, consumers can put on a specially designed Oculus headset to take a virtual tour of Paris guided by Mr. Rousteing.

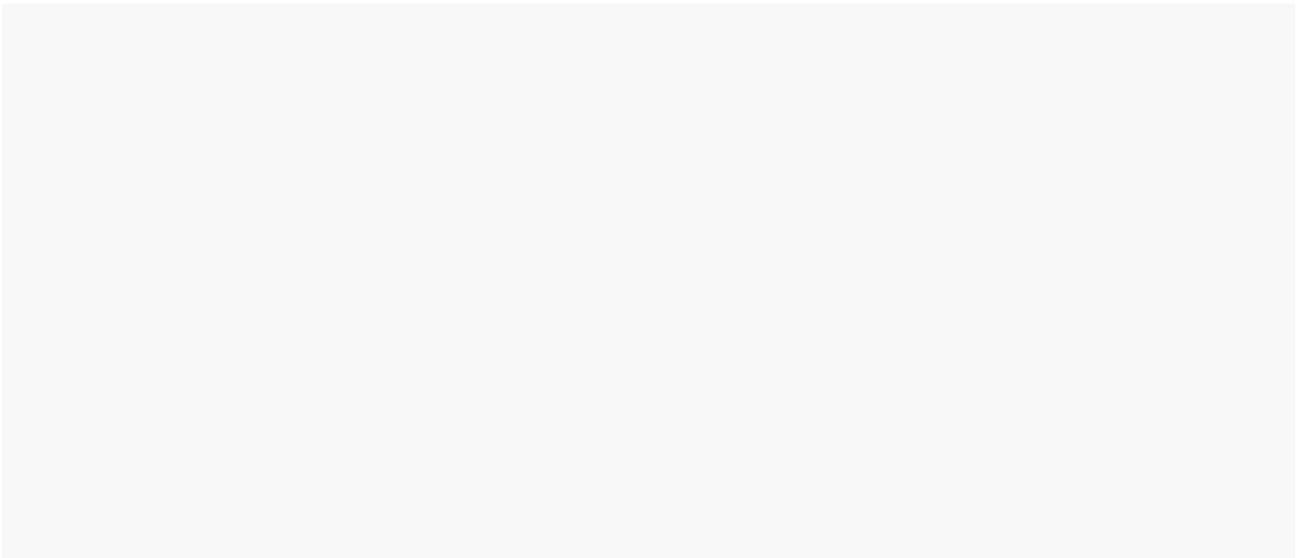
"My City of Lights" follows the designer's emotional journey as he creates each runway collection, taking consumers into the process.

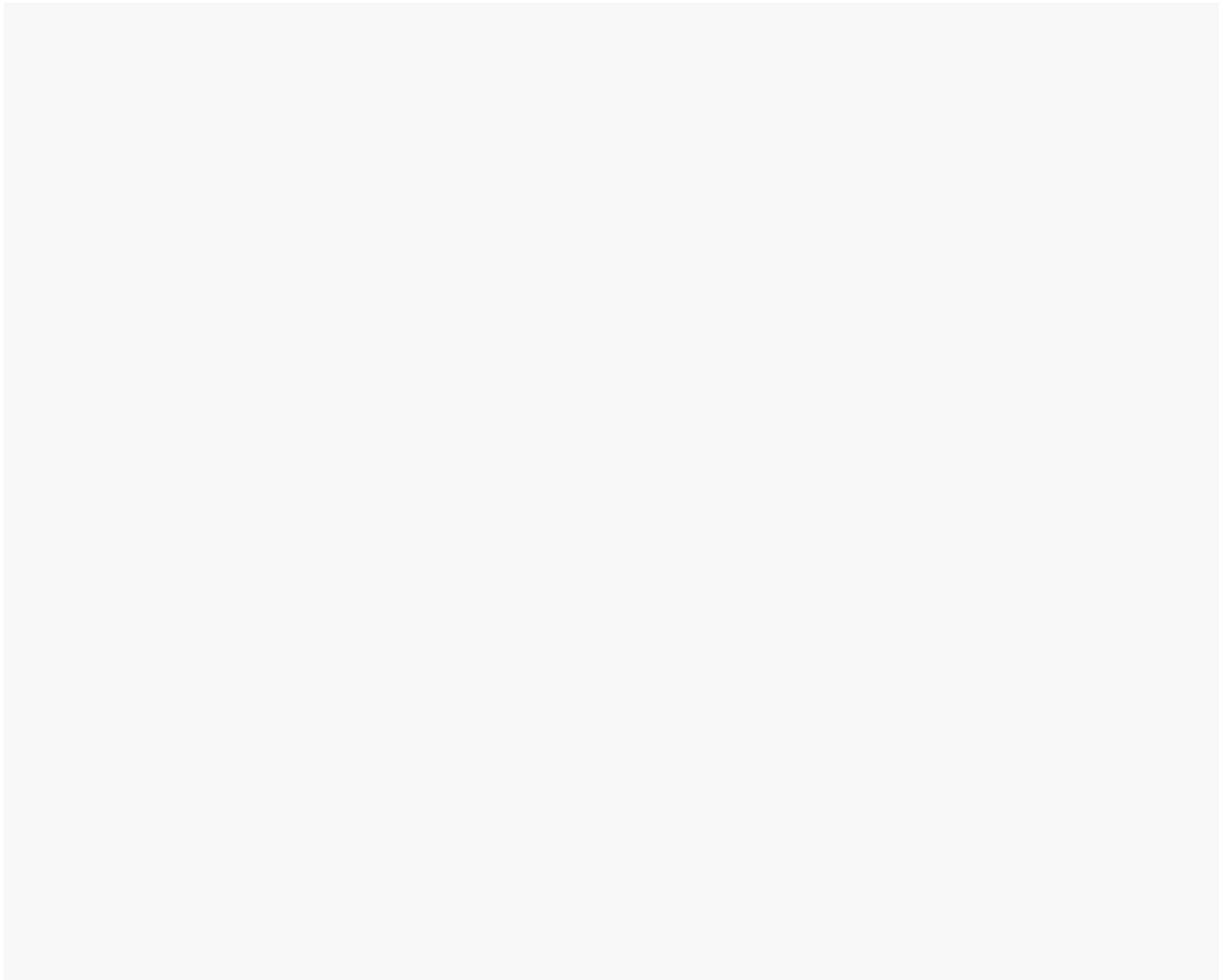
"In many ways, Milan's interior echoes the guiding principles behind all of our Balmain collections," Mr. Rousteing said. "While each runway offering acknowledges and salutes the house's singular heritage and impressive savoir-faire, my team and I always ensure that we are, above all, designing for how today's generation lives and dresses.

"That same historic-modern duality can be spotted in the new prototype design for Milan," he said. "The parquet, moldings, chandeliers, curtains and mirrors all make clear references to classic elements but we're definitely not trying to create some sort of museum piece or dollhouse.

"Instead, what we've done is to play with each historical reference, making sure that designs are modern as well as elegantly crafted from the finest materials. This is a space where I know that the Balmain Army would definitely feel at home."

My City of Lights will be viewable in Milan until April 29. After that, it will travel to other Balmain boutiques.





MY CITY OF LIGHTS For the launch of the new store concept in Milan, me and my team developed a unique virtual reality experience called #MYCITYOFLIGHTS which invites visitors to join me on a visually immersive journey tracking the creative milestones behind each #Balmain collection. @olivier\_rousteing #BALMAINWONDERLABS #BALMAINTAKESMILAN

A post shared by BALMAIN (@balmain) on Apr 17, 2018 at 10:56am PDT

Virtual reality is gaining popularity in luxury retail, as brands use the technology to provide immersive experiences to shoppers.

For instance, department store chain Barneys New York is blending diversity, technology and art together in an immersive storytelling experience that brings the retailer closer to consumers.

"Mantle," a virtual reality video experience, features a diverse group of dancers from the Martha Graham Dance Company who range in age up to 80 years old. The 360-degree film is being featured at select Barneys stores on Samsung Oculus headsets to make a lasting impression on shoppers, which is a vital component to in-store marketing today ([see story](#)).