

LUXURY MEMO SPECIAL REPORTS

Museums of luxury – Luxury Memo special report

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Gucci Garden opened in Florence, Italy earlier this year. Image credit: Gucci

By NANCY BUCKLEY

Luxury brands have long aligned themselves with the prestige and craftsmanship of art, but some companies have chosen to go beyond this and actually be art in branded museums showcasing their imagination and history.

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Exhibitions are common pop-up trends in the luxury business, offering a limited-time glance into the artists that the brand aligns with or collections of the past. Setting up a specifically branded museum can offer a permanent space for enthusiasts to interact on a personal level, but will likely not attract consumers unfamiliar with the brand.

“The question that any luxury brand should be asking is why?” said Rebecca Robins, global chief learning culture officer of **Interbrand**, London, and co-author of *Meta-luxury*. “What is the purpose of a museum dedicated by a business to its brand?”

“As the world’s museums have been evolving to become more culturally relevant and part of connected ecosystems, a brand that is doing it differently and beautifully is Gucci,” she said. “Gucci Garden is a powerful example of how a brand’s history is celebrated and carried forward as cultural legacy, all within a series of spaces that entwine past with present and experiences that continue to surprise and delight.”

Top 5 trends in luxury brand museums

- Not just for fashion houses

Museums for fashion houses are often the most common type of branded museum, but other industry sectors have opened tributes to themselves.

- The city matters

Choosing the location of the museum is one of the most important factors in opening a branded exhibition space. Picking a city that not only aligns with the brand, but that will also attract luxury consumers and aspiring customers is key.

- Showcasing the past and future

Museums are often to share a culture’s past, but a branded museum can also offer an opportunity to showcase

the future of a company.

- An intimate look at the brand

A curated museum can offer a level of intimacy that is not available in-store and provide a chance to connect with a consumer on a personal note. Showcasing the archives of the house can offer a once-in-a-lifetime experience for connoisseurs of the brand.

- Furthering the culture of the brand

Special exhibits and a well-trained museum staff can offer consumers and brand enthusiasts a chance to interact with the brand's culture and hospitality through a different channel than making a purchase.

Fashion is art

The most common sector of the luxury business to have its own museums are fashion brands.

Cartier, Louis Vuitton, Yves Saint Laurent, Balenciaga, Ferragamo, Prada, Gucci, Lalique, Chanel, Dior and Hermès have dedicated spaces to honor the brand in some manner or form.

"If the brand has a long-enough history that warrants the creation of a standalone museum, it is a good idea to invest in building permanent collections with public access," said Thomai Serdari, professor of luxury business marketing at New York University, New York.

"Brands that have been forward thinking have already been preserving their past while thinking about the future," she said. "Maintaining archives and material collections properly is a field that requires an archivist's or curator's special expertise. Therefore, the public receives the message that this particular brand values its own history, which also includes its customers.

"We often see elaborate displays of the most important patrons of the brand in association with a specific product that they particularly cherished. This helps create social and historical context for the content of the brand's collections, but most importantly, it humanizes the brand in the eyes of the viewer. The narrative shifts from placing emphasis on product to the impact that this branded product has had in someone's life and the emotional bond between that person and the brand."

Fondation Cartier is a little different than other branded museums, in that the focus of the space is to honor contemporary art. The foundation honors contemporary artists who are individuals who are up-and-coming or those who are known but are experimenting in a new field.

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Fondation Cartier video

In 2014, Fondation Cartier celebrated its 30th anniversary with an exhibition that showcased the creation and freedom of its past artists ([see story](#)).

Fondation Louis Vuitton is similar to Fondation Cartier. The LVMH-sponsored institution is an art museum and a cultural center. Opened in 2014, the Frank Gehry-designed foundation contains 11 galleries that promote 20th- and 21st-century artistic and creative movements.

At the time of opening, a brief video was produced to showcase the architecture and the initial exhibitions for fans elsewhere in the world.

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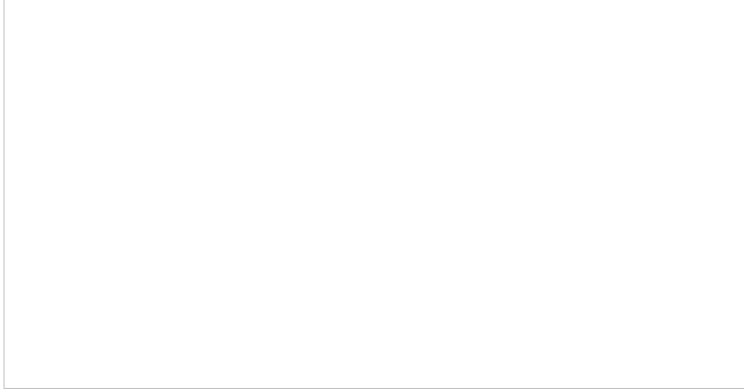
Fondation Louis Vuitton

The video has an eerie quality to it, due to the empty and echoing rooms and the downcast weather of the particular day. Nonetheless, viewers will get a good sense of what the place holds ([see story](#)).

Fondation Pierre Bergé-Yves Saint Laurent opened in 2004 with three main goals: to preserve, organize exhibitions and support projects. The preservation aspect is of haute couture and ready-to-wear clothing and accessories, along with the sketches, documents, and drawings that relate to Saint Laurent.

The foundation-produced exhibitions are devoted to fashion, painting, photography, the decorative arts, contemporary art and Saint Laurent's work.

Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris Open House Day



Musée Yves Saint Laurent Paris Open House Day

The foundation opened the Musée Yves Saint Laurent in 2017 in two locations. On Avenue Marceau in Paris, and in Marrakech on the aptly named Rue Yves Saint Laurent, the Saint Laurent Paris brand opened two of the former residences of designer Yves Saint Laurent to the public.

These two museums are dedicated to the life's work of Yves Saint Laurent, and will offer visitors an intimate look at his workspaces, sketches and inspirations on hallowed fashion ground ([see story](#)).

Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa opened in 2011 in Getaria, Spain to honor the founder of the brand and highlight his artistic creations.

The museum hosts permanent and temporary exhibitions, as well as rotating exhibitions highlighting fashion and educational and leisure activities. The museum's location was chosen to commemorate Mr. Balenciaga's time spent in Getaria as a child at the summer home of a couple for whom his mother sewed.

This exhibition space opened after a traveling exhibition returned to Spain following stops worldwide.



Balenciaga spring/summer 2018 campaign. Image credit: Balenciaga

Similarly, the Ferragamo Museum in Florence opened after a successful exhibition. The museum is a full dedication to the life and works of the founder of his eponymous footwear label, Salvatore Ferragamo.



Salvatore Ferragamo

"Ferragamo chose Florence in which to settle in virtue of its acknowledged centrality in the geography of Italian taste and style during a time in which the word 'return' was especially meaningful: the return to order in the arts, the return to professional skill and to the great national tradition," said Rebecca Miller, founder/CEO of [Miller & Company](#), New York. "Developed in chapters like a coming-of-age story, the exhibition focuses precisely on this trend in the culture of the period.

"The museum exhibit takes you on a voyage, as its guiding thread, on an ocean liner back to Italy as a metaphor of Ferragamo's mental journey through the Italian visual culture of the 1920s, 'the source of the themes and works that were to influence his poetic vision directly or indirectly,'" she said. "At the same time, it also encompasses all the cultural and social facets that distinguished Italy's rebirth after the Great War.

"The shoes on exhibit reveal Salvatore Ferragamo's relationships with artists of his day, such as the futurist painter, Lucio Venna, who created the famous label, while others document his endless search for the perfect fit and shoe constructions he invented. He may be best known for his famous cork 'wedge' patented in 1936, followed by uppers made out of raffia, cellophane and the transparent paper used for chocolates during World War II. The collection also includes shoes made for Hollywood stars like Greta Garbo, Marilyn Monroe and Audrey Hepburn."

Fondazione Prada, the apparel house's organization dedicated to the arts, has three locations: Milan, Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan and Venice. The Milan permanent structure was announced in late 2014 and officially opened in April 2018.



Eyewear and jewelry from Prada's fall/winter 2017 collection. Image credit: Prada

The new space has 144,000 square feet of exhibition space across a group of buildings that will host events such as performances, art exhibits and symposiums. This new compound joins two other spaces for Fondazione Prada, allowing the brand to further its art and culture outreach in Milan.

Fondazione Prada's annual shows then turned into biannual exhibits, many featuring artists that had not had a solo exhibit of their work previously. The foundation later expanded into research exhibits.

Now, 25 years later, the organization is entering a new phase, in which it is establishing a permanent exhibition space in a compound that used to house various manufacturing buildings, including a distillery ([see story](#)).

Another museum in Italy is the Gucci Museum in Florence, opened in 2011. Located in a 14th-century building in the Piazza della Signoria, the museum was designed to honor Gucci's leather goods legacy.



Gucci's spring summer 2018 campaign. Image credit: Gucci

The Gucci Museo contains three floors dedicated to recounting the brand's story through permanent branded exhibits.

In addition to numerous exhibition rooms, the museum features a Gucci café at its entrance. Gucci aims to entice tourists and locals alike into the space as a meeting place or regular coffeehouse.



The Gucci Museum second floor

Also located on the ground floor are three stores: a bookstore that sells rare publications, a gift shop that retails branded Gucci Museo items and an Icon store that hawks Gucci products such as handbags and scarves from the Icon collection.

Permanent museum exhibits include a travel-themed room that showcases Gucci luggage from the 1950s, '60s and '70s ([see story](#)).

The museum recently opened up Gucci Garden. Announced in November 2017, Gucci Garden is found in the Piazza della Signoria's Palazzo della Mercanzia in Florence. Envisioned by Gucci creative director Alessandro Michele, the museum-like space includes a store retailing one-of-a-kind merchandise and a dining concept.

Gucci Garden was selected as a name due to the house's references to flora and fauna as well as its metaphorical

meaning.



Gucci Garden Galleria, Guccification exhibit. Image credit: Gucci

Gucci describes Gucci Garden as a lively, interactive experience rather than just a rich archive. Instead of simply a display of historic pieces in a permanent collection, Gucci Garden aims to collide past with present.

Organized by themes, visitors to the Gucci Garden Galleria, which occupies the first and second floors of the palazzo, can experience contemporary and vintage clothing, accessories, video installations, artworks and documents from throughout Gucci's history ([see story](#)).

Lalique's museum is located in the village of the crystal glassware firm's founder, Rene Lalique. The main goal of Musée Lalique is displaying the works of the founder to demonstrate the brand's diversity.



Museum Lalique

"The Musée Lalique, located in Wingen-sur-Moder, France exhibits Lalique's art in all of its diversity, with the accent on works in glass and crystal," Ms. Miller said. "The museum has on display more than 650 exceptional pieces created by René Lalique and his heirs ranging from drawings, jewelry, perfume bottles, chandeliers, tabletop items and radiator mascots.

"This region of France, known as 'Le Grand Est,' is the center of French crystal glassware production and is comprised of Alsace, Bourgogne, Champagne-Ardenne, Franche-Comté and Lorraine," she said. "Baccarat, Saint-Louis, Gallé and Daum are also located nearby in Alsace and Lorraine, and the Northern Vosges region.

"The Musée Lalique offers educational activities for adults and children, [and] the opportunity to observe the artisans at work as well as temporary exhibitions."

Similarly, the Christian Dior museum in Granville in France's Normandy region offers a dedication to the fashion designer and is aptly placed in his childhood home, Les Rhumbs.

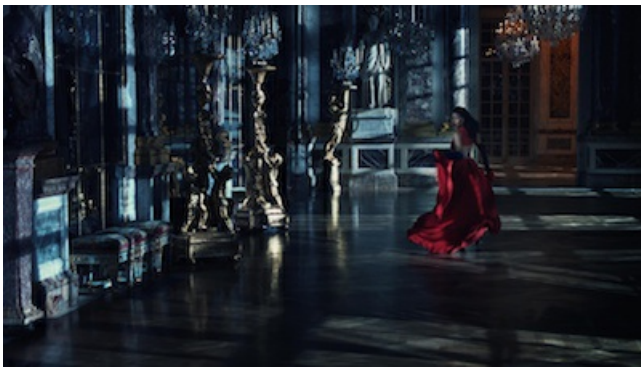


Christian Dior Museum in Granville, Normandy, France

In 2017, during the brand's 70th anniversary, the museum hosted the "Christian Dior and Granville: The Source of a Legend" exhibition.

In his memoir, the designer wrote in reference to his family home, "My life, my style, [I] owe almost everything to its situation and its architecture."

Throughout his career, Mr. Dior channeled Les Rhumbs' decor and gardens for his designs.



Dior Secret Garden

For example, the gardens still serve as inspiration for Dior Parfums ([see story](#)) and are often featured in its marketing efforts to evoke a sense of place for the brand ([see story](#)).

The "Christian Dior and Granville: The Source of a Legend" exhibition brought to light Mr. Dior's appreciation of his Norman roots as well as historical and stylistic touch points ([see story](#)).

A twist to brand museums is seen in The Emile Hermès Museum. The secret museum is on top of the brand's flagship store in Paris. The space is only open to Hermès staff and personally selected guests.

"One of the best-kept secrets of Hermès is The Emile Hermès Museum nestled on top of the brand's flagship store on Faubourg Saint-Honore, Paris," Ms. Miller said. "The ultra-exclusive museum was once Emile-Maurice's study. It is open only to Hermès' staff and selected guests such as Elizabeth Taylor, Andy Warhol and Grace Kelly.

"The museum includes delicate objects collected from Emile-Maurice globe-trotting travels, but not all of the exhibits are made by Hermès," she said. "Equestrian-related objects and antiques have been acquired from auctions or other collectors, which are also on display.

"One of the most important objects is a painting by Alfred de Dreux, which portrays a waiting groom and a hitched carriage that inspired the brand's logo introduced in the 1950s. Another highlight includes a rocking horse which belonged to the son of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte.

"The museum serves as a source of inspiration for Hermès' designers and artisans for accessories, ready-to-wear and crystalware. They are 'invited' on Tuesdays to visit the museum for inspiration."

Kicking up some gravel

Fashion houses overwhelmingly take over the luxury brand museum space, but they are not the only industry playing homage to themselves.

Automobile brands also have self-branded tributes. However, the automobile museums tend to not just look at the brand's history, but also the future of the company.

For example, the Lamborghini Museum in Sant'Agata Bolognese, Italy hosts both vintage and concept cars, as well as a production line tour and numerous events.



Lamborghini's new Aventador S Roadster

In addition, Ferrari hosts both a Enzo Ferrari Museum in Modena, Italy and the Ferrari Museum in Maranello, Italy.

In Maranello, guests can see the brand's most famed F1 racing cars, sports prototypes and the road cars. An exhibition, in collaboration with the London Design Museum, tells the story of Ferrari's creative and engineering development.

A shuttle bus is offered between the two museums.

In Modena, an exhibition looks toward the connection between women and Ferrari as a brand and an automobile. A separate exhibition is dedicated to the engines of the vehicles.

In addition, guests can visit the Autodromo and experience a lap around it or experience an F1 through a driving simulation. As a tribute to the location, the museum hosts Discover Ferrari & Pavarotti Land where they can sample the foods and wines of the Modena area.

Clocking in the time

Another sector that favors self-tributes is watchmakers. Primarily in the watch capital of the world, Switzerland, numerous brands host branded museums paying homage to themselves.

The Omega Museum in Bienne, Switzerland hosts 4,000 watches, along with clocks, tools, photographs, posters, signs and awards from the brand.

Embedded Video: https://www.youtube.com/embed/_Vx2ay5EUvQ

Omega Museum in Biel: the Omega Watches' history

IWC Schaffhausen also hosts a museum in Switzerland at its headquarters within a building built by its founder in 1875.

Also in Switzerland, the Patek Philippe Museum hosts antique 16th and 17th century timepieces, as well as the brand's collection dating back to 1839.

Longines Museum in Saint-Imier, Switzerland pays homage to the brand's past. In 2013, as an attempt to educate consumers and enthusiasts about the brand, the watchmaker offered a video series to bring the world to Saint-Imier.

Longines' President Walter von Känel acted as tour guide to the viewers by showing off the timekeeping technology in the brand's museum. The 10-part video series covered various topics and offered insight into the brand's history ([see story](#)).



Longines Museum video still

Travelling out of Switzerland to Germany, the Glashütte Museum is housed in the historic watchmaking school of the brand. The history of the brand is presented in chronological order with a multimedia approach.

In 2015, the museum celebrated the arrival of its 250,000th guest. Andreas Kunze was visiting the museum for his birthday and entered as the 250,000th guest. Executives from the brand greeted Mr. Kunze in a celebration that focused outward on the consumers, fans and guests of the brand.

When Mr. Kunze arrived at the museum he was most likely expecting his birthday visit to be an ordinary museum experience. He was instead met with the CEO of Glashütte Original and the curator of the German Watch Museum Glashütte.



Mr. Kunze's surprise

The museum opened in May 2008 and since then has seen 35,000 people each year, or about 3,000 guests a month, 750 a week and more than 100 every day ([see story](#)).

Celebrating the guests of the museums is a way for brands to reach known enthusiasts in a personal manner. The establishment of these museums is largely for those already interested in the brand and its products, but may not attract the casual tourist like an exhibition within a larger museum may.

“There is no need for every single luxury brand to set up its own private museum,” New York University's Ms. Serdari said. “It is costly in terms of location, design, expert personnel and additional staff, and can be perceived as pretentious and redundant when it does not really add anything new to the conversation about the brand itself, a specific location or its culture.

“On the contrary, in the absence of a permanent museum, a brand can leverage its relationship with existing cultural institutions and stage a temporary exhibit there with the help of the institution's in-house experts,” she said.

“This could in fact give younger brands the boost they lack either because they have not been around for such a long time to have developed complete and interesting archival collections or because they may have a complete set of their products but not enough collateral material that documents the processes of production, human relationships that develop at the place of production or the public reception of the brand's products.

“This type of material often exists in historical societies affiliated with the place of production or with great metropolitan centers where the particular brand has made a mark.

“In other words, it is best to visit established brand museums to understand what a brand does not possess yet. This will lead either to a more concerted effort to preserve the present for the sake of the future or to the realization that the archival material the brand owns is not enough by itself to warrant a private museum because it lacks in collateral archival material that would give the viewer context and a deeper or better understanding about the role the brand has played in modern life.”

Best-practice tips for luxury brand museums

- Thomai Serdari, New York University
 - "Highlight the history of the brand with product but do so with modesty. Don't place product on pedestals trying to blur the distance between commercial production and art. Instead, try to display products as they would have been used or worn. In the case of high-jewelry brands, where indeed some product could easily belong to an art museum, this can be achieved with the display of collateral material culled from historic publications."
 - "Hire someone who has been trained in archives preservation and who is an excellent writer. Allow them to exercise their creativity in the way they organize the in-house material and the way they structure the story to be told with an exhibit. Hire people who have had enough experience in the profession but who are also young or understand younger customer segments well so that they can create exhibits and environments that resonate with younger viewers."
 - "Communicate as much as possible about the processes of production because younger audiences respect brands that are transparent and because this type of information is often very rare. By doing so, brands not only reveal more about the true value of their manufacturing innovations—which also justifies the higher prices of their products—but they also inspire younger generations of crafts people or artists to consider the brand as a vital cultural agent, without which our own culture would be poorer."
- Rebecca Miller, Miller & Company
 - "There are several advantages for a luxury brand to have a dedicated museum of their products. It enables them to authentically showcase their heritage, inspirations, designs, artisans, techniques, the region and, when applicable, the family behind the brand. It allows for both well-curated creative and native visual storytelling, pride of craftsmanship captured with the juxtaposition of vintage tools and technology demonstrating unique workmanship, and typically is located near a factory or original production site, enriching the overall experience."
 - "There has been a significant focus on the need and desire from customers concerning transparency of luxury products. A brand's dedicated museum is another venue which allows the end user a comprehensive glimpse into, and an understanding of, the behind-the-scenes processes which are used to create their product. It affords them the ability to tell their story from a 360-degree. Brands who do not have this type of permanent vehicle may elect to replicate components through in-store displays, marketing campaigns and social media outreach."

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