

HOME FURNISHINGS

Home dcor is the new fashion: Liaigre president

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Liaigre has opened a new showroom in New York's NoMad neighborhood. Image courtesy of Liaigre

By SARAH JONES

French design house Liaigre is undergoing an evolution to engage more directly with clients as consumers increasingly take home dcor into their own hands.

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Nearly 30 years after the opening of founder Christian Liaigre's first Parisian showroom in the 1980s, Liaigre has developed into a global brand. In 2009, Mr. Liaigre sold his company and passed over the creative reins, ushering in a new era at the interior brand.

In recent years, Liaigre has been evolving to engage more directly with end clients through services and its retail presence, with 28 showrooms around the world.

This summer, Liaigre is expanding its New York footprint, opening a showroom in Manhattan's NoMad neighborhood to cater to the downtown crowd and its distinct aesthetic. Whereas Liaigre's uptown location around Madison Avenue and 61st Street serves mainly interior designers, this new showroom is aimed at engaging both trade professionals and clients themselves.

"The NoMad Design District is a rich place of creativity, art and design," said Christophe Caillaud, president of [Liaigre Holdings](#), Paris. "It is an international design destination with some of the world's most distinct designers, international brands, high-end furniture showrooms, art galleries, architectural firms and interior design studios.

"It is also a center for creative artisans wanting to develop products of the finest quality in the design world," he said. "NoMad Design District is becoming New York's preeminent center within the world of design.

"It was important for Liaigre to have a presence in this place of creativity, movement and retail."



Christopher Caillaud, president of Liaigre. Image courtesy of Liaigre

In this Q&A, Mr. Caillaud discusses Liaigre's expansion plans, its creative transition and what is next for the company. Here is the dialogue:

What is the importance of the brand having a retail presence in the U.S.?

Liaigre activity in the U.S. has historically and successfully leaned on trade.

While the culture of calling on the talent of an interior designer is still strong in the U.S., there are more and more customers in the country who are seeking for personal expressions of their inner journey in life, set up by themselves. We want to welcome them in the Liaigre world and show how relevant is Liaigre in such projects.

We also want to address audiences that might not know yet that Liaigre can be considered for a single purchase: a stool, a lamp, a sofa desirable pieces that can be memorable gifts for yourself or a loved one. This is also the reason why we are emphasizing our lighting collections and are developing collections of home accessories, to expand our legacy in the contemporary home business.

Finally, showrooms are the best place to showcase the brand, as they are the ambassadors of an elegant and modern art of living we want to embody. Conceived as true projects of design and decoration, the showrooms are the essence of the Liaigre style and spirit. Furniture, lighting and accessories are displayed in living spaces alongside contemporary pieces of art with a unique soul. This retail presence is key to ensure Liaigre remains top-of-mind to customers seeking the best in cutting-edge design and quality.

What are Liaigre's expansion plans in the U.S. and beyond?

Opening this second showroom in New York is a long-term project, which I am glad to see happen today. We have seized an amazing real estate opportunity in the NoMad district with this one-of-a kind location at the corner of Madison and 29th. I believe Liaigre really stands out in the area.

We have lots of projects in the U.S., which remains our first market, among those the installation and development of our "Decoration & Stylism" offer, which is a service based on the idea to be advised by Liaigre for an interior decoration project, should it be a penthouse, a house, a boat.

We have just introduced at the new NoMad showroom our first custom-made wardrobe offer, Mirabeau, which will be complemented soon by an introduction of custom-made libraries both orientated towards personal services Liaigre can provide.

More globally, we are aiming at developing our retail network, should it be through proprietary showrooms or local partners with the relevant choice of places and time, initiate a reaction on online sales and consider longer-term new developments in the hospitality field under Liaigre's identity.

In 2018 and right after the opening of the new showroom in New York, we are opening in August the first Liaigre flagship store located at the heart of Faubourg Saint Honor in Paris. [It is] an ambitious project in a historical Parisian building, where we will show in a more playful and experimental way our furniture, lighting and home accessories collections assorted with artworks, installations and curiosities.

Totally open to the public and not to be compared with other existing places, it will be one "must-see" in Paris.

Finally, we will open our first showroom in Seoul at the end of the year, Korea being a country where we historically work on interior architecture projects but where the brand has up to then no public awareness.



Exterior of Liaigre's NoMad showroom. Image courtesy of Liaigre

In what way do you design the showroom environments to engage both trade and consumers?

First and foremost we design our showrooms to ensure each of them bears and conveys a special identity, fitting the context of the country, the city, the area. Offering a global lifestyle and interior architecture experience is always what we seek for first.

Second, we like to express what makes Liaigre different from other furniture brands: all our pieces of furniture are originally designed for residential and hospitality projects led by our studio in Paris, revealing the existence of an intimate connection between furniture design and architecture. It is this connection we are aiming to express, showing that in a same lay-out we change our showroom lay-outs every six months pieces originally designed for projects in London, Taipei, Miami or Athens express the harmony, relevance and obviousness which make the Liaigre signature and style.

Having said that and beyond this global experience which makes Liaigre showrooms highly visited as essential city stopovers, we want to answer both specific needs, emerging from trade and end consumers.

Some areas of our showrooms such as the material library - mimicking the ones our creative use on a daily basis at the headquarters in Paris - are opportunities for trade to elaborate in the finest and most constructive way their projects, and for end consumers to find out the amazing world of precious materials and know-how that constitute the basis of all our creative gestures. All our staff in the showrooms are originally interior architects, able to advise and understand the functional and aesthetical request they have to answer, should it be to create a full Liaigre ambiance or advise the choice of a fabric or dimensions, or inserting Liaigre in a more eclectic project led by an interior architect.

We are also starting to work on the elaboration of IT solutions to present our collection to customers in the

showrooms, trade or final alike, in a more flexible way so that they could easily project their wishes and ideas, something particularly relevant for a brand like Liaigre, which relies on endless customization.

How would you describe Liaigre's brand strategy? What has been the brand's direction since Christian Liaigre stepped back from a creative role almost a decade ago?

Over the last few years, Liaigre has been undergoing some major changes, growing larger and more structured, expanding its distribution network, breaking into new markets and reaching out to more and more "end" clients. Today, the company is managed by a new generation of creative talent, building on a new organization, and entering an era of openness and communication.

My purpose is not to revolutionize Liaigre, but to help it evolve and be more consistent with our time, both as a brand and as a company. We are proud of our heritage and the desire sparked by our name.

The new creative direction we are taking today is meant to help us examine our roots and the sources of Liaigre's creations, which have made us so successful and given us our solid reputation, and re-anchor and reinterpret them in the context of current times, while maintaining the artistic and creative heritage we leave behind and helping it prosper.

As other brands are about to navigate a creative transition away from a brand founder, what lessons did Liaigre learn from the process, and what suggestions do you have for brands facing similar shifts?

Each situation is different so I won't give any recommendation, but only share our experience.

As per Liaigre, the transition has been significant and smooth. In a very wise way, Christian Liaigre felt he needed to pass on the company he had successfully founded to shareholders who would be able to preserve the incredibly unique and beautiful heritage and help it become stronger to face the challenges of a new era. He sold Liaigre to people he entrusted to lead this important evolution.

I have been personally involved with the company since 2009, and the creative director who is now managing all creative directions for Liaigre was formerly Christian Liaigre's right arm she has worked with him for 18 years. So as you can easily imagine, we are in a very smooth and well thought-out transition.

Frauke Meyer, our creative director, is seeking to re-express in 2018 and on the creative fundamentals of Liaigre, what made the brand so successful at its beginnings and what makes it so relevant still today. Any transition, all the more when business is dynamic, is a great opportunity to question and evaluate your bedrock what still makes sense today and what would we like to see evolve.



Liaigre NoMad showroom. Image courtesy of Liaigre

In what way does Liaigre set itself apart and differentiate itself in the home furnishings field?

Liaigre has a unique identity in its field that is highly specific when it comes to the art of living, decorating and furnishing. Liaigre cannot be compared directly to others in the industry. Rather, its processes are more comparable to those of certain fashion and beauty houses, such as Dries Van Noten, Azzedine Alaïa, Pierre Hardy and Frédéric Malle, than to furniture companies.

Within the vast and extremely diverse luxury sector, Liaigre is considered a "house of creation," a type of company

usually motivated by strong beliefs in creation, independence and freedom. Instead of reacting to customer and market demands, Liaigre offers unique and differentiated value proposition to connoisseurs and lovers of fine work and creations.

Liaigre is neither a manufacturer nor a furniture editor, but a creator.

Liaigre must not be thought or spoken of as a brand of furnishings as it reduces its essence and philosophy and positions Liaigre alongside other brands, when in fact it is very different from the competition. Liaigre takes a fully exclusive, personal and intuitive approach to its work, unlike the "onesize-fits-all" tack so common to the luxury sector today.

Our creative teams first write a story or a scenario in response to a person, place or project, which is the starting point for the architecture and interior design from which the design of furnishings and light fixtures. Every single piece of furniture or light available in the showrooms has been originally designed for an interior architecture project. There are no collections at Liaigre but one collection rich of 600 references, each of them conveying a special cultural and geographical context.

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the home decor business today?

Good news is that the main opportunity is the incredible dynamism of the home decor business. Everywhere in the world there is a strong appetite and desire to project oneself's personality in an interior project, should it be the purchase of a single object or a global home.

Home decor is the new fashion, if we may say. Just as in fashion, there are less "trend effect" and more personal creative expressions emerging from a very diverse market: kinfolk, hiving, lagom, vintage. We have gone far from the traditional opposition between minimalism and baroque.

What is common to all those heterogeneous expressions is about intimacy they explore that close relationship that every person has with interiors. Not interiors in general, not only big and grand rooms, but that corner, that detail, that object that makes a room feel unique and yet personal. It can be a palazzo, a flat or a boat.

At Liaigre, we aim at inspiring a new generation of globetrotters, taking them on a journey through sophistication, obsessive collecting, colors, materials and fabrics. There is a huge demand for such.

We are also into a challenging situation, as along with this freedom to create your own environment has also come the booming of opportunities to get it auction houses, flea markets, online platforms, fashion brands designing home collections and vice versa. In such a competitive and dynamic market, we have to remain faithful to what has made our reputation and success simplicity, quality, balance and beauty synonymous with French taste and style without ostentation based on exceptional expertise and furnishing design but be all the more innovative and thoughtful about the way people live today and stage their interiors.

What is next for Liaigre? Where do you see the brand in five years?

The next big step for Liaigre is to settle the brand in Asia. Our strategy is to establish a retail footprint in the region with the opening of new showrooms in Shanghai, Tawan, Hong Kong and possibly in Japan to complement our existing showrooms in Singapore and Bangkok.

We also would like to engage the local A&D community and reach out to the growing constituency of Asian based clients and introduce our "Decoration and Stylism" offer locally with a dedicated team in Bangkok. Our studio in Paris is currently working on a major hospitality project in Bangkok which shall open in 2021 and which will help to express Liaigre's philosophy in the region.

Introducing the brand in Asia, strengthening our position in the U.S. and in Europe and creating new experiences around Liaigre should they be within our own retail network or in other kind of public places are top on our road map for Liaigre in the upcoming years.

We want the strong aura of our beautiful brand to remain as mythical as it has always been, but make it more open and known to new audiences.