

MARKETING

How values, vision led 3 luxury entrepreneurs to start their businesses

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Nouvel Heritage owns its supply chain. Image courtesy of Nouvel Heritage

By SARAH JONES

NEW YORK As luxury becomes more about the individual, three companies are aiming to provide a more personalized experience by owning the entire client experience.

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During a panel at Women in Luxury 2019, a Savile Row tailor, an African tour operator and a jeweler explained how a desire to do things their way or change the market led them towards entrepreneurship. At the center of these businesses is a focus on customized luxury, whether it means individualized itineraries or a custom suit.

"It's about really understanding the individual, taking time to understand them and allowing them to tell you things about themselves," said **Kathryn Sargent**, founder of an eponymous tailoring house.

Women in Luxury 2019 was produced by Luxury Daily, with venue sponsor UBS

Founder stories

Ms. Sargent is the only female master tailor in London. She began her career at Gieves & Hawkes as an apprentice after graduating from fashion school, and she eventually worked her way up to head cutter by offering to work on Saturdays, becoming the first woman to hold that position.

In bespoke tailoring, typically women have been in behind-the-scenes roles, rather than consumer-facing positions. But Ms. Sargent did not see this as a barrier, and instead focused on making herself needed by the firm.

Ms. Sargent was asked to create a proposal for Gieves & Hawkes to take on more women's wear. While the more than 200-year-old house was interested in exploring the idea hypothetically, they also affirmed that they wanted to remain primarily focused on men's bespoke attire.

Ms. Sargent saw an opportunity for women's bespoke and wanted to explore her own values as a tailor, igniting the idea of starting her own shop. After creating a business plan with a downloaded template, Ms. Sargent started with a Web site seven years ago.



Kathryn Sargent's shop in Mayfair. Image courtesy of Kathryn Sargent

Today, Kathryn Sargent Tailors has five full-time employees working in its Mayfair workshop.

Similarly to Ms. Sargent, **Roar Africa** founder/CEO Deborah Calmeyer got the idea for her business based on her background growing up in Africa. The travel entrepreneur spent her formative years on a farm in Zimbabwe with a pet lioness and hyena.

Ms. Calmeyer moved to New York, and friends would ask her advice about trips to the continent. She felt that her friends' itineraries were being planned by people unfamiliar with her homeland and saw an opportunity to change some of the misperceptions about Africa.

For Ms. Calmeyer, launching her own travel company was a means to not only leverage her expertise, but also to provide employment opportunities for local women in remote parts of Africa, who would otherwise not have jobs. The employees on the ground are earning an American salary.

All of the itineraries that Roar Africa puts together for its clients are bespoke and tailored to the individual.



Roar Africa is based in New York City and Cape Town. Image credit: Roar Africa

Ms. Calmeyer designed her company so that guests are taken care of by her employees from start to finish. Wanting to be able to control the entire journey experience, she noted that she desires to own her own planes in the future.

Also keeping control of the supply chain is Camille Parruite, the founder and CEO of **Nouvel Heritage**. Ms. Parruite grew up in France in a jewelry making family, but relocated to the United States for college to study finance.

For the jewelry entrepreneur, launching a business was partly a way to stay in her newfound home.

According to Ms. Parruite, Nouvel Heritage is differentiated in owning its production facilities. This enables the brand to offer faster returns on bespoke or personalized pieces.

The company has put itself in front of more consumers through advertising in *Town & Country* and *Harper's Bazaar*. It has also found celebrity fans including Reese Witherspoon and Emilia Clarke, who have worn Novel Heritage pieces for appearances.



Panelists, from left: Kathryn Sargent, Deborah Calmeyer and Camille Parruitte. Photo by Alice Young for Luxury Daily

"I think there is a need in the market and space for another brand," Ms. Parruitte said.

"I like to say that we're in the middle," she said. "We're not a jewelry designer, [but] we have the expertise that I think a jewelry designer doesn't necessarily have of actually making [jewelry] and being able to make it on a really large scale, which is important if you want to grow and scale your company."

Tapping into trends

Kathryn Sargent, Roar Africa and Nouvel Heritage reflect trends in the luxury business towards more personalization and oversight.

Wealthy individuals represent a powerful, global economic force, but they can be a difficult audience for brands to target due to their busy lifestyles and elevated expectations.

According to a whitepaper from researcher Euromonitor, there will be 3.6 million more HNWIs created in the next decade, bringing the total population above 8 million. This growing audience that can afford luxury purchases is typically time poor and looking for brands that go the extra mile ([see story](#)).

As spending on experiences continues to eclipse sales of luxury goods, brands across sectors need to consider how they are delivering personal interactions that take consumers' individual preferences into account.

Whether planning a bespoke travel excursion with seamless execution or allowing consumers to shop with the level of help they desire, luxury brands need to take their client's interests and needs into account. During a webinar hosted by *Luxury Daily* on April 24, panelists noted that while firms are leveraging data to provide the most targeted options, luxury comes down to the human touch ([see story](#)).

"Every trip that we design is unique," Ms. Calmeyer said. "We've never done the same one in 13 years."

"It's a luxury company, but it really depends what luxury is to you. For me, I've lived in New York for this many years, it's space, it's silence, it's the privilege of being with animals," she said. "Yes, of course a nice high thread count of sheets is fabulous and I'll take it any day, but give me the wildlife any day."

"That to me is luxury, and that's what our guests are looking for. They're looking for a transformational experience."