

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Luxury fashion centered on creativity, innovation, craftsmanship: LVMH Fashion Group CEO

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Beauty products such as Miss Dior benefit from couture. Image credit: Dior

By SARAH JONES

MADRID Many of LVMH Mot Hennessy Louis Vuitton's recent success stories and strategies in fashion have stemmed from couture, as the group's houses leverage the image created by haute collections into other categories.

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In a conversation with the *Financial Times'* fashion editor Jo Ellison at the FT Business of Luxury Summit on May 20, Sidney Toledano, the chairman/CEO of the [LVMH](#) Fashion Group, explained how the couture positioning carries over to more accessible lines such as beauty, accessories and shoes, convincing consumers to buy into a particular brand. This couture positioning should also extend to a brand's retail environment, allowing stores to live up to the magic.

"When you come to a luxury store to buy a bag or to buy a wallet, it's part of a dream," said Mr. Toledano. "You have seen the collection through Instagram, and then you see the window and then you push the door."

"At that point the dream has to continue or it can become a nightmare," he said.

Leading labels

LVMH does not use the word "conglomerate" to describe itself, instead looking at itself as a number of family houses. While the company's executives do look at numbers, the strategy is more long-term and future looking.

Per Mr. Toledano, the role of a fashion CEO today is that of an engineer with passion. He also believes that CEOs need to enjoy fashion, since a lot of the job is working with the creative director, much as a movie producer works with a director.

The executive also explained that the trifecta behind a successful fashion brand is the executive management, a creative director who is a fit and the brand itself. Even if a creative director is a genius, he or she might not be the best leader for a particular house.

LVMH's long-term approach also extends to its creative director alliances, giving a designer more time to prove

results after joining a brand.

Mr. Toledano noted that women make great brand leaders, in both CEO and creative director roles, since they often have less ego and are good listeners. LVMH is currently aiming to have 50 percent of its management be female, and seven of the 10 CEOs that report to Mr. Toledano are women.

For about 20 years, before taking on his current role slightly more than a year ago, Mr. Toledano was the CEO of Dior ([see story](#)). According to the executive, part of the brand's success has come from its couture positioning.

In the 1990s, many companies were stopping their couture lines, but Dior kept couture as a central part of its strategy. Mr. Toledano stressed that if a brand is going to do couture, it has to be perfect, and it is the CEO's role to ensure that it is.

A couture perspective is also driving change at Givenchy. Creative director Clare Waight Keller is reinvigorating the brand's couture lines.

[Rooney Mara Givenchy L'Interdit](#)



Givenchy L'Interdit. Image credit: Givenchy

This approach combined with celebrity alliances has had a trickle-down effect on categories such as perfume.

Similarly, Marc Jacobs is using its runway shows as a showcase that is similar to couture, extending the image to products such as ready-to-wear apparel.

Mr. Toledano is also emphatic that brands need to have unique designs, rather than just copying someone else and putting a label on it.

LVMH is aiming to turn some of its brands into bigger business. For instance, under Hedi Slimane, Celine is undergoing an evolution aimed at making it a multi billion-euro brand.

Mr. Slimane, who previously brought a couture perspective to Dior Homme, is launching new categories for Celine including menswear, couture and fragrances ([see story](#)).



Celine's new store in Tokyo. Image credit: Celine

Overall, the LVMH Fashion Group is anticipating that it will see organic growth. LVMH's revenues were up 16 percent in the first quarter of 2019, as its fashion and leather goods brands saw the strongest growth ([see story](#)).

Fenty fashion

LVMH recently confirmed it is working with Robyn Rihanna Fenty to create a new luxury house.

After working with the pop star, more commonly known as Rihanna, on a makeup line through its beauty subsidiary Kendo, LVMH is now expanding its relationship with her. Fenty will be molded in Rihanna's vision, with the musician overseeing everything from marketing to commercial strategy ([see story](#)).

Mr. Toledano noted that LVMH's alliance with Rihanna was a long time coming. The performer had appeared in Dior advertising campaigns and had designed sunglasses for the label.

Hinting at the launch date, Mr. Toledano noted that more would be revealed "next Wednesday."

According to the executive, this celebrity-led house is not a sign of an impending trend.

"Saying that the all the fashion business is going to become like that, I do not believe," Mr. Toledano said. "It's one by one. So we'll have a different approach.

"It's about people, it's about the talent of the person," he said. "Rihanna is talented. She's not a couture designer, but she loves fashion."

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