

LUXURY MEMO SPECIAL REPORTS

## Colors in luxury – Luxury Memo special report

June 24, 2019



Valentino highlights red for its pre-fall collection. Image credit: Valentino

By SARAH RAMIREZ

If strong branding makes a good impression, the use of color is a crucial but often overlooked component of luxury labels' imagery.

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From Tiffany blue to Valentino “rosso,” signature shades have long been associated with a range of luxury houses. Incorporating certain hues can help luxury brands make a colorful splash, whether it is through bricks-and-mortar boutiques, logos or packaging.

“Brands with strong and or instantly recognizable colors in their logos, packaging and products understand the brand’s focus, their customer’s persona and exactly how to use color to communicate to them,” said Rebecca Miller, founder/CEO of **Miller & Company**, New York. “Keep in mind, brands did not come across the colors they selected by accident.

“Colors are more than just a visual aid – they ignite and feed emotions, feelings and experiences,” she said.

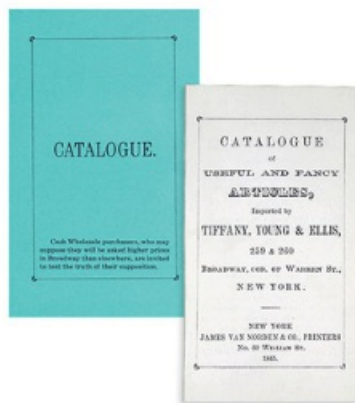
### Top 5 trends in luxury color

- **Color story**  
Many hues are closely tied to a brand’s heritage or refreshed identity.
- **Packaging punch**  
Incorporating brand colors in packaging is one of the most effective ways color can be used.
- **Store shades**  
From architecture to logos and window displays, physical stores and pop-ups turn to color to make an impression.
- **Social scene**  
Consistent color schemes reflect luxury branding on digital properties and social media channels.
- **Color copyrights**  
Signature shades are intellectual property, and luxury brands go to great lengths to protect their brand colors.

## Hue history

For many luxury brands, colors are part of their origin story.

One of the most notable examples is Tiffany blue. In 1845, founder Charles Lewis Tiffany selected the iconic shade of turquoise for the jeweler's print catalog, better known as the Blue Book.



*One of the earliest uses of Tiffany blue. Image credit: Tiffany & Co.*

Sharing the story behind signature shades is a creative way many brands communicate their heritage and craftsmanship.

“Luxury brands can put their personal stamps on specific colors through artful storytelling and iconography,” said C. Aaron Lawry, assistant professor of digital strategy at the [University of Connecticut](#). “Luxury brands should tell authentic, vivid and most importantly, enduring stories about their color palettes to encode them into the memories of their customers.”

For instance, Louis Vuitton’s bright yellow-hued saffron has been a part of the leather goods maker’s brand heritage for more than 150 years.

Louis Vuitton switched its packaging colors after the shade of “Safran Impérial” was noticed during its “Volez, Voguez, Voyagez” exhibition. Originally staged at Paris’ Grand Palais, Louis Vuitton’s exhibition examined the brand’s history as a luggage and steam trunk manufacturer ([see story](#)).

French label Chanel devoted an episode of its heritage-focused series “Inside Chanel” to educating fans about the brand’s signature colors, including black, white, gold and red.

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/TaCdAscgpU0>

*The colors episode of “Inside Chanel”*

“Coco Chanel will forever be synonymous with the color black, in stark contrast with her contemporaries,” Mr. Lawry said. “Yet, the musical, spoken and visual cadences in their digital content tie Coco Chanel’s personal life with different essences of meaningful colors in Francophone culture.”

For British retailer Harrods, the Green Man personifies its heritage hue.

A Harrods Green Man has been posted at every door of the London department store for more than a century, thus becoming an icon in its own right. Harrods’ Green Man has often been the focal point of social engagement campaigns ([see story](#)).

Veuve Clicquot introduced its now-signature yellow label in 1877.



*Veuve Clicquot stands out with its use of marigold. Image courtesy of Veuve Clicquot*

Over the years, the shade of yellow took on an almost orange hue, which helped cellar masters find bottles of Veuve Clicquot in dark wine cellars. Although the reason for yellow is unknown, the visual innovation was ahead of its time ([see story](#)).

“When a consumer sees over and over again different codes of the brand, and then other forms of communication like storytelling on heritage and specific know-how, that color also acquires a meaning of its own, clearly linked with the luxury,” said Sonja Prokopec, LVMH-chaired professor in the marketing department at the [ESSEC Business School](#) and associate academic director for the Center of Excellence in Luxury, Art & Culture - Asia Pacific.

“Color can be embedded into all forms of communication from packaging and marketing materials, Web site design, to store design, product design, to sales associate uniforms,” she said. “Color is one of the strongest codes that a brand can use, and should be included in all touch points with the consumer.”

#### Powerful packaging

Packaging is one of the primary ways that luxury brands make colorful impacts.

“Brand colors within packaging fit into private, self-indulgent ceremonies such as gifting, wearing or storing luxury goods,” Mr. Lawry said. “The colors in packaging must personify a luxury brand and pervade the senses to deliver on the brand’s promises on a very personal level.”

Luxury retailers and brands have long been known for iconic packaging that represents the ethos of their brand, particularly jewelers through the well-known blue Tiffany box and Cartier’s little red box ([see story](#)).



#### *Louis Vuitton’s Safran Impérial packaging*

In the past, Louis Vuitton’s gift boxes and totes were a shade of chocolate brown. The French label decided to replace this design with a brighter shade dubbed “Safran Impérial” three years ago ([see story](#)).

French leather goods maker Hermès has often celebrated its iconic orange boxes through inventive campaigns.

Hermès introduced the "Observatory of Orange Boxes" video series on social media, an irreverent take on the boxes that fits in with the brand’s humorous and light-hearted marketing strategy. Evidently, the orange boxes like to house items, whether it is an Hermès scarf, a tomato or loose change, and they get new tenants with their carnivorous fangs ([see story](#)).

In 2013, the “Hermès on Ice” holiday gift guide starred Hermès’ iconic orange boxes in an interactive countdown.

Each box had its own personality with some boxes holding props ([see story](#)).

More recently, British apparel and accessories brand Mulberry introduced its own signature color in 2015.

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/jjCa-Knts34>

*Mulberry Green has been used in the brand's packaging since 2015*

The shade is inspired by the brand's founder Roger Saul's love of classic British racing cars and the associated racing green color. Mulberry engineers created Mulberry Green to celebrate Mr. Saul's legacy at the company and to create a distinctive identifier for its packaging.

Mulberry Green has been featured on all of the brand's packaging ever since ([see story](#)).

Colorful packaging and labels are not limited to apparel and accessories brands.

LVMH-owned Champagne house Veuve Clicquot celebrated the 140th anniversary of its signature-yellow bottle label in 2017.

The marigold-colored label is instantly recognizable at social gatherings on the shelves of spirits retailers. Veuve Clicquot often features its signature color scheme in brand communications to maintain a consistent marketing presence and ensure visual recognition in a crowded category ([see story](#)).

British department store Fortnum & Mason often incorporates its iconic blue in packaging, including hampers and tea tins.

To celebrate a partnership starting in 1886, Fortnum & Mason and Heinz teamed together for a limited-edition collection of the latter's classic products. Cans of Heinz's baked beans and cream of tomato soup were reimaged in a classic style featuring accents in Fortnum's Eau de Nil color, while a glass bottle of ketchup received a similar makeover ([see story](#)).

Pop-ups of color

Colors also have a physicality to them, and many luxury brands will incorporate their signature shades into bricks-and-mortar locations or pop-ups.

"Luxury retail spaces are like awe-inspiring symphonies, whereas packaging is more akin to a scintillating sonata," Mr. Lawry said. "Luxury monobrand stores are larger-than-life experiences in which brand colors accentuate elements of the store atmosphere such as lighting, music or service that collectively embody the brand."

In 2016, Harrods' Summer Sale kicked off with a green carpet entry for consumers, special treats and live entertainment ahead of the doors opening.

In celebration of shopping, Harrods took its signature forest green shopping bag and blew it up to create a large-scale 3D installation. The giant Harrods handbag was displayed outside the store's Hans Crescent facade ([see story](#)).

Tiffany blue is a prominent feature in the U.S. jeweler's retail strategy, most notably at its Fifth Avenue flagship's Blue Box Cafe.



*Tiffany's Blue Box Cafe at its New York flagship. Image credit: Tiffany & Co.*

For its first dining concept, Tiffany drew inspiration from its iconic blue gift boxes. Tiffany Blue is incorporated throughout the cafe's interior, including seating, tableware and decor ([see story](#)).

Tiffany @ Cat Street, the brand's first concept shop in Japan, features futuristic architecture and a customized logo with the Tiffany blue. The six-story boutique also includes floor-to-ceiling shelves and a wall inspired by the iconic Tiffany Blue Box ([see story](#)).

In addition to concept shops, traveling pop-ups are another way luxury brands can put their classic colors on full display.

Launched in 2016, Hermèsmatic was styled as a luxury laundromat in the French brand's signature orange. The pop-up celebrated the 80th anniversary of Hermès' signature silk scarves ([see story](#)).

Italian fashion label Valentino staged a temporary boutique within a Parisian hotel, coinciding with an exclusive version of Valentino's Rockstud Spike handbag in burgundy velvet. An oversized studded heart in Valentino red was one of the outpost's focal points ([see story](#)).



*Inside Valentino's pop-up at Hôtel Costes. Image credit: Valentino*

More recently, French jeweler Cartier took a subtle approach when hosting its first perfume pop-up shop. Fragrance Fountains, the Mantra Wall, the Olfactory Red Boxes and Pasha Men's Grooming demos were all included in the pop-up ([see story](#)).

Seeing red

Luxury brands go to great lengths to protect their signature shades, whether the hues are seemingly rare or commonplace.

"The advantage of using an established color is that these colors have universal perceived meanings and may be enhanced or reinforced by usage and scale depending on the brand's intent for a specific communication," Ms. Miller said.

In 2017, Italian fashion label Gucci found itself in a legal battle with fast fashion retailer Forever 21 over its trademarked stripes.

Gucci's litigations against Forever 21 centered on its green-red-green and blue-red-blue webbing, which Gucci America owns U.S. trademarks for. The brand also claimed that most of the trademarks for its webbing are not able to be contested due to their longevity ([see story](#)).

After a years-long legal battle, French footwear label Christian Louboutin won a trademark case in the European Union surrounding its signature crimson soles.

In 2012, the brand took retailer Van Haren to court after the Dutch company sold designs that were similar to Christian Louboutin's. According to a report from Agence France-Presse, after a long legal battle, judges in Luxembourg ruled that Christian Louboutin's soles can be trademarked due to their specific color ([see story](#)).

"Reds have been a favorite with luxury brands and extend back hundreds of years in context for a reason," Ms. Miller said. "Red says power, is seen as energetic, aggressive, provocative and passionate."

"Cartier's Morocco deep red logo and leather boxes gives you a profound sense of heritage, power and passion of the jewels within, while the brighter reds used by Valentino and Louboutin express energy and power in a more contemporary spirit," she said. "These brands have purposefully incorporated color into their products to extend their visual prowess."

Valentino has had an ongoing love affair with the color red since the brand's inception.

For spring/summer 2017, Valentino referenced some of its most iconic campaigns from the 1980s, putting a fresh spin on brand history. A number of Valentino ads from the '80s featured large-scale typeface of the label's name in its signature red ([see story](#)).

This year, Valentino highlighted the red, or "Rosso," pieces of its pre-fall collection in new initiatives across social and online platforms. The label has created a series of short films and photography with model Sokhna, focusing only on pieces in its iconic red hue ([see story](#)).

Embedded Video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/JgRwMaCHD3w>

*Valentino emphasized red in its pre-fall 2019 campaign*

Many specific shades, including Tiffany blue and Hermès orange, have been assigned numbers from Pantone for added protection.

"Luxury brands have managed to have their colors embedded in the minds of the consumers," Ms. Prokopec said. "The most important issue is that the color is not used by another luxury brand within the same category, especially if the competitor brand has done a good job linking their brand with that color."

Best practice tips for color in luxury

- Rebecca Miller, Miller & Company
  - "Luxury brands using their 'signature' color should be courageous, but always tasteful, about incorporating their color with those of varying hues, complimentary colors, patterns and textures. We seem to think of a color as one dimensional – rethink that position. Iconic colors must not ever move away from their DNA, but must be open to creating, patterns, shapes, scale and unexpected collaborations to showcase and extend their brand's color. There should be an element of art and science to every aspect of a brand and its offerings – keeping in mind the sales and marketing goals for each audience they intend to acquire or retain."
- C. Aaron Lawry, University of Connecticut
  - "Signature shades, much like brand colors more broadly, need to have storylines. Yet, signature shades are most effective when they align with iconic designers and products. By associating a signature shade with a unique person or product, it brings the stories to life, personalizes them and makes the signature shade more tangible."
  - "I would caution luxury brands not to overdo it by dominating every product line, store location or story with a signature shade. As a best practice, you should experiment with unique fabrics or patterns once the signature shade has been established, as long as you cultivate a limited-edition with an enduring and authentic backstory to legitimize the new line."
- Sonja Prokopec, LVMH chaired professor
  - "Ultimately, it is how the brand uses the color in all of their marketing and communication that gives that color meaning, not the other way around. A brand color is considered a code of the brand and with repeated exposure becomes associated with the brand in the consumer's mind. Other codes could include a pattern, a print, a shape, a specific material. The more a brand codifies their communication, the more likely that the consumer will be able to recognize the brand and desire it without even seeing the logo. Color is one of the first codes used and used very successfully by luxury brands."