

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Brick clicks: Why Maison Atia chose New York's Madison Avenue

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Maison Atia's store on 833 Madison Avenue in New York

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

When New Yorkers Chlo Mendel and Gustave Maisonrouge decided they wanted a dedicated store for their two-year-old faux fur brand Maison Atia, there was no question of the location: Madison Avenue uptown, sharing the same stretch of swish space with storied labels such as Hermès, Prada, Chanel, Loro Piana, Graff, Gucci, Giorgio Armani, Dolce & Gabbana and Asprey.

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Supporting an already existing ecommerce operation, the store on 833 Madison Avenue is especially a dream come true for Ms. Mendel, whose father opened his first boutique on the same boulevard at the same age: 27. It is also a testament to the power of tactile, touch-and-feel retail for a brand touting craftsmanship to discerning clientele.

"When a customer tries on one of our coats, they always say how photos cannot do justice to how beautiful and luxurious they are and feel, how our finishes are perfectly crafted, and how flattering the cut is on their person," Ms. Mendel said.

"Offline and online complement each other, and the boutique allows us to share to a wider audience the full breadth and depth of our collections, what our brand's home looks like, and how we welcome our friends," she said.

In this dialogue, Ms. Mendel and Mr. Maisonrouge discuss [Maison Atia's](#) approach to bricks-and-mortar and ecommerce, the enduring allure of New York's Madison Avenue, experiential retail, price points, lessons learned since launch, strides made so far, and the focus on faux fur. Please read on:

You both are young and so is your brand. And yet you chose Madison Avenue on the Upper East Side in New York to open a Maison Atia's bricks-and-mortar. Why?

Gustave Maisonrouge: Actually, Maison Atia is in Neiman Marcus at Hudson Yards, as well as in SoHo in the cool downtown Le Board concept store where we'll have our own dedicated area. So it was logical for us to look on Madison Avenue.

Chlo and I were both raised on the Upper East Side, and we love our neighborhood. At the end of the day, Madison Avenue remains *the* luxury destination for both curious and serious shoppers, as well as brands. How amazing is it

for a two-year old brand to be on the same block as Prada.

Chlo Mendel: My father, Gilles Mendel, was 27 years old when he opened his first boutique on Madison Avenue. I just turned 27, and, from the moment I had the idea for Maison Atia, I wished to open my own place on Madison.

For me, this is a dream come true, a good omen, and my way of saluting my father and everything he has taught me.



Maison Atia founders Chlo Mendel and Gustave Maisonrouge want to disrupt the faux fur market by translating the luxury touch of real fur to this new material

Which market are you trying to reach with the Madison Avenue location? What products will you stock and sell in the store?

Chlo Mendel: We welcome all women who are looking for quality, modern yet timeless design, who appreciate craftsmanship and the small details that Maison Atia is known for.

We have created an exclusive capsule collection to celebrate this milestone, the *833 Collection*, for our address 833 Madison Avenue.

My mom is from Taiwan, where the number 8 is considered to be a lucky number and is associated with prosperity and success, and hopefully it will be auspicious for us as well.

We also offer personalization for our boutique. We are unveiling some new accessories.

Men have been asking why we were forgetting them, so we created a small mens' line: the Billy jacket, one-of-kind Sea blue and Bordeaux styles for the boutique, and the Francois long coat with other exclusive colors such as caramel.

We'll also have a few creations for babies and toddlers in November, just in time for my own little ones and the holiday shopping season.

Gustave Maisonrouge: I traveled extensively this past spring to understand opportunities for Maison Atia outside the

United States, and I realized the power of the Madison Avenue brand name abroad it is *the* American Avenue Montaigne, and being here establishes you as a true player in the luxury world.

We started looking for spaces on Madison right after I came back from this long trip.

We are a small brand with big dreams, and, from the day we started, our aim has been to become global.

From Day one, we worked hard at securing trademarks in most key markets in Europe and Asia. This location is the logical next step in our long-term strategy.

How will the store complement your online efforts?

Chlo Mendel: We are a tactile brand. Touch-and-feel are the essence of our creations.

When a customer tries on one of our coats, they always say how photos cannot do justice to how beautiful and luxurious they are and feel, how our finishes are perfectly crafted, and how flattering the cut is on their person.

Offline and online complement each other, and the boutique allows us to share to a wider audience the full breadth and depth of our collections, what our brand's home looks like, and how we welcome our friends.

Gustave Maisonrouge: We spent a lot of time the last few months creating videos to better share online our brand's voice.

We consider ourselves the first true luxury faux fur brand, but we are a young brand, Chlo and I are both in our 20s, we both have a quirky sense of humor, and we had fun sharing that aspect of the brand.

We want everyone to understand that we are serious about quality, craftsmanship, authenticity, but we don't take ourselves too seriously.

We hope that all customers who come to Madison Avenue will realize that craftsmanship is cool, young and fun.



A display at Maison Atia's Madison Avenue store

Experiential retailing will be key to drawing footfall. How will you achieve that? And how many store staff will you have initially?

Gustave Maisonrouge: After we launch and have established that this boutique is Maison Atia's first winter home, the space will regularly reinvent itself until the end of the year.

We are welcoming artists, other luxury brands, and unveiling a collaboration with Koio Collective, the cool, ethically handcrafted sneakers made in Italy, among other initiatives.

This small Koio capsule collection is, like the rest of our creations, animal friendly, using vegan leather and some patterns from this fall collection, as well as timeless ones.

Anyone entering the boutique will make a new discovery each time, no matter how often you come to the store, and we hope that it will be very often.

Thanks to Luxe Avenue, a leading talent search firm in the luxury field, we have been lucky to attract as part of our ephemeral boutique, veterans of the luxury field, who will bring their talent and expertise to welcome our clientele with perfect professionalism and warmth.

Chlo Mendel: The first collaboration we confirmed is with the iconic jewelry brand Marina B, who was founded by

Marina Bulgari in the 1970s.

I couldn't think of a better fit as my inspiration for this fall 2019 collection is the passionate, powerful and effortlessly chic 1970s.

David Bowie, Jane Birkin and Charlotte Rampling are icons who really weave through this collection.

Marina was herself a trailblazer, her designs are bold, and she too left her family company to create her own brand, and I am doing the same thing, so it felt as if it was meant to be, like everything else with Maison Atia.

How will you get the word out on your brand's retail presence?

Chlo Mendel: We discussed internally what questions we ask ourselves as millennials, and will launch the *Maison Atia Insiders Series*, with experts, often women, who will share their insights on a hot topic, from how do you start collecting art with a small budget? How do you start investing? How do women with amazing degrees who paused their careers to raise their children, go back to work in a way that makes sense at this stage of their lives.

I am happy to share that, for our first event, we are welcoming Ms. Marvella Sullivan Berchtold, the founder of Marvella Co., who helped form the non-profit Haven while a managing director at JP Morgan, whose talk, "Why there is Hope for Healthcare", is certain to attract leaders in the field.

And we'll also organize more fun events such as wine tastings that Gustave is passionate about. We'll welcome pets and have animal focused events to salute Paws Chicago, a national leading no-kill shelter we have been working with since the beginning with our #buyacoatsaveapuppy campaign.

Gustave Maisonrouge: We'll also have the *Maison Atia Afterschool specials* a nod to the childhood ABC television series we all grew up on where we will invite New York city schools' moms, and groups such as National Dance Institute.

NDI has been transforming lives, which brings dance, music and art to public schools in New York City since 1976.

I was part of the NDI programs for as long as I could remember, I started dancing well, maybe then it was walking when I was two years old. It taught me so much about the power of dance, how hard work also means beauty and joy, how success requires discipline, and how teamwork brings friendships.

We are also taking advantage of our boutique to engage more actively on our social media platforms, both overall on our brand and also locally, including activations with invites to exclusive events we'll be hosting throughout the season in our Madison home.

It has been two years since you launched Maison Atia. What strides have you made?

Gustave Maisonrouge: We have expanded our retail partnerships nationally.

In addition to Le Board and Oui Boutique in Manhattan, Neapolitan in Chicago, Performance Ski in Aspen, and Halsbrook where we were already last year, we are now part of the Orchard Mile online community, along with such iconic brands as Valentino and Balenciaga.

We are also honored to be both online and at five key locations with Neiman Marcus this fall: Hudson Yards in New York City, Short Hills in New Jersey, San Francisco, Dallas and Boston.

I'll be going to each location to complement the in-store offerings with trunk shows and events.

We are even now available in Deauville, France. All this requires time. You need to build the legitimacy of your brand. We are proud to have accomplished all this in just two years, and look forward to expanding even more in 2020.

What lessons did you learn since launch and how did that inform your physical store decision?

Chlo Mendel: I have learned a lot from the creative point of view.

We have a better understanding of what the Maison Atia woman likes, what catches her eye, what she wants to wear, what questions she has.

When we launched in November 2017, we had started working on the idea that previous January, first by doing in-depth research to understand the market, the players, the demand, and basically made the decision to launch in April, so we created it in less than six months.

This year was the first year when we finally caught up with the calendar and were able to show our Fall 2019 collection during New York Fashion Week.

In a way, we launched at a moment when most startups are still in thinking mode, but we decided to take the plunge, and now have two years worth of knowledge when we finally have our first full fall collection.



Maison Atia faux fur coat

What is your current product line-up with price points?

Gustave Maisonrouge: As Chlo mentioned, we learned a lot in the last two years, which brought us to expand our collections to accessories.

We tested our pochette concept in the spring, and saw that this \$90 price point was ideal as an entry level to make our brand truly accessible.

Our accessories start at \$90 and go up to the low-\$300s.

We are also testing this fall a fun jacket, easy to wear, casual yet impeccably crafted with the best quality materials, working with our local New York City-based craftsmen, hence reducing our carbon footprint, that we priced at \$650.

Most of our coats are around \$1,400, with a range from \$850 to \$2,300 for the most exclusive pieces.

Many luxury brands continue to sell products with real fur, including on Madison Avenue. Do you think they got the memo?

Chlo Mendel: We are an animal friendly brand, we give women options.

As a sixth generation of a lineage of Russian Jewish furriers, the craft of fur is in my DNA.

I wanted to take this heritage and bring it to a new medium, faux fur, by using the old-school fur techniques that I saw my father and grandfather using, working with traditional furriers who understand the importance of the pile, hair

direction, how to properly apply furrier stitching techniques, and creating glamorous pieces in a more accessible manner to all women.

So what do you hope to achieve in the first year with your maiden retail store?

Gustave Maisonrouge: My mother [Ketty Maisonrouge] is a luxury strategist and, since I was a little boy, I remember her saying how the leaders in the field she admired the most had all worked in a retail environment at some point in their career, and how essential such an experience is to truly understand this sector.

So, right after college, when I decided to enter this world, I applied for a position as a sales specialist at my favorite luxury brand, Hermès, and was lucky enough to be a part of the first Hermès Parfumerie in Brookfield Place [in downtown Manhattan].

There I did learn the importance of this exchange with potential clients, how it allowed me to understand what they might be looking for, how I was able to identify the perfect item that I knew she would fall in love with from our conversation. I embraced the art of sharing stories rather than selling a product.

This will be the first time Maison Atia is able to truly exchange face-to-face with our clientele, see what resonates the most with her, what questions she has, and that will help us deepen our understanding of our Maison Atia woman, and will guide us, both creatively and strategically, as we develop future collections and continue to expand to new markets.

Maison Atia: Inside the atelier

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