

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Loro Piana documents cashmere's origins in craft conservation effort

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Loro Piana worked with Luc Jacquet to document goat herders. Image credit: Loro Piana

By SARAH JONES

Italian apparel and accessories label Loro Piana is delving into cashmere production in a documentary that aims to shed light on traditional goat herding techniques that are under threat.

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The LVMH-owned brand tapped filmmaker Luc Jacquet for a trilogy of films about its signature textiles, the first of which premiered on Oct. 18. Through storytelling, Loro Piana seeks to share its own efforts to preserve sustainably sound practices in Mongolia.

"As the market for luxury goods grows with the influx of a new generation of consumers, all brands need to retell their story," said Thoma Serdari, brand strategist at **Brand Lux** and professor of luxury marketing at New York University, New York. "This is also a good opportunity to emphasize those parts of the story that are less known or new initiatives that have not reached the brand's audience yet.

"As the conversation on climate change, sustainability and responsible production of luxury goods intensifies, Loro Piana's documentary is signaling to the world that the brand has been concerned with these questions for at least a decade," she said.

Ms. Serdari is not affiliated with Loro Piana, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. **Loro Piana** was reached for comment.

On location

Mr. Jacquet is perhaps best known for his Academy Award-winning film "March of the Penguins." For Loro Piana, the director has filmed his first documentary centered on humans' adaptation to nature's evolution.

"Cashmere The Origin of a Secret" centers on nomadic Mongolian herders. Mr. Jacquet lived with the communities he profiled, gaining a firsthand understanding of their processes and lives.

In a challenging climate and mountainous terrain, herders rear *Capra hircus* goats. This species survives in the fluctuating temperatures and sandstorms thanks in part to its fleece.

After generations of cultivating cashmere, the herders know the precise time to collect the animals' underfleece.

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"Cashmere - The Origin of a Secret" paints a portrait of enduring harmonies, intense harshness and sublime softness excellences found in extremes. World premiere 18th of October, Shanghai. #TheOriginOfASecret #Cashmere #LoroPiana Photography by @giuliodisturco

A post shared by Loro Piana (@loropianaofficial) on Oct 16, 2019 at 12:30am PDT

Instagram post from Loro Piana

Since 2009, Loro Piana has been working with local herders to selectively breed goats. The strategy keeps the population smaller and more in line with traditional numbers.

Loro Piana also says that this population control improves the quality of the cashmere from these goats.

Dubbed the "Loro Piana Method," the program was developed in partnership with Jilin Agricultural University in China, the Academy of Science of Inner Mongolia, the University of Camerino in Italy and the Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development (ENEA).

As a result, there has been an improvement in the animals' standards of living, and the natural balance between the animals and their habitat has been rekindled through a reduction of desertification in the area ([see story](#)).

The 20-minute film follows the processes behind raising the goats, including herding the animals across the snowy or sandy landscape atop camels, caring for them and eventually hand combing them to gather their undercoat. The fibers are then processed, turning into the cashmere fibers used by Loro Piana.

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Ecologist and Academy Award- winning Director @Luc.Jacquet takes us on a visual quest to discover the delicate symbiosis between humans, animals and the environment in "Cashmere - The Origin of a Secret". World premiere 18th of October, Shanghai. #TheOriginOfASecret #Cashmere #LoroPiana

A post shared by Loro Piana (@loropianaofficial) on Oct 17, 2019 at 1:31am PDT

Instagram post from Loro Piana

Future documentaries in the trilogy will highlight vicua and The Gift of Kings, which stems from Merino wool.

"All content produced by luxury brands is singular. In Loro Piana's case, there could not have been a quick or easy way to tell a story about these herds and their cultural value," Ms. Serdari said. "To communicate the essence of their being, their character, their relationship with their herdsman, one needs time to observe and reflect.

"The technique of shooting on film lends itself to such attitudes and results in a slower paced production. The director is not rushing the process," she said. "All is written on film, then edited to capture the goats' strife in their natural habitat. Works such as this shot on film also signal an added layer of responsibility that Loro Piana demonstrates in perceiving itself as the steward of this particular type of husbandry.

"Film has a lasting quality and longer lifespan, which will ensure that the message Loro Piana intends to deliver is indeed delivered not only to us but also to a younger generation of viewers and consumers in the future. In this case, Loro Piana positions itself as the steward of the animals, the people of that region and the history of our civilization in that part of the world."

Sustainability stories

When expertly leveraged, sophistication and exclusivity can still find an audience as luxury consumers continue to gravitate to heritage brands that are experimental and accessible.

In a conversation with *Financial Times*' Milan correspondent Rachel Sanderson at the FT Business of Luxury Summit on May 21, Loro Piana's CEO Fabio d'Angelantonio discussed how the label differentiates itself in a crowded luxury marketplace. The Italian clothing company, which specializes in luxury wool and cashmere goods, remains committed to its understated elegance.

Mr. d'Angelantonio finds that ethical environmental practices are noticed by more customers than in the past. Environmental efforts are of special important to Loro Piana, which has relied on natural fibers for its apparel since its inception ([see story](#)).

Other luxury brands have used documentaries to touch on sustainability topics.

Jeweler Tiffany & Co. enlightened consumers on how its diamonds make their way into its blue boxes by charting the stones' path from the time they are unearthed.

Tiffany's short film, "Journey of a Tiffany Diamond," travels with the gemstones as they undergo both careful refinement and an arduous selection process before being set into the brand's jewelry. Consumers are increasingly concerned that the businesses they support take responsibility for both people and the planet, making opening up operations in this manner a way to create additional appeal for a particular label ([see story](#)).

French fashion house Herms similarly documented its global impact on people through stories of creation and progress.

The brand's "Footsteps Around the World" series highlights workers in Herms production facilities and those who have benefited due to outreach from its eponymous foundation or corporate funds. Putting a human face to corporate social responsibility may help consumers gain a better understanding of who and how Herms helps ([see story](#)).

"Luxury brands that are working on sustainable practices should broadcast their work," Ms. Serdari said. "It contributes to their intended transparency and mostly it puts pressure on those who do not follow sustainable practices and who harm our planet.

"Luxury brands bear the responsibility of educating consumers about what is the proper way to handle our resources so that consumers internalize the message and begin increasing the pressure on those brands and producers that are harming the environment," she said.