

RETAIL

## Guesst.co's Michele Varian: Luxury Woman to Watch 2020

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Michele Varian

By STAFF REPORTS

*Luxury Daily* annually honors 25 smart women executives who show the potential to make a difference next year in the luxury business. This year's list features honorees who have set ambitious goals to achieve in a luxury market that, while growing, is also challenged by rapid changes in consumer behavior and technology.

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Here is one honoree:

Michele Varian, cofounder, [Guesst.co](#)

*"Consumers are shifting from wanting status or trend pieces, to investing in heritage items. They're prioritizing owning fewer things, versus acquiring too much stuff, partly because we're replacing disposability with sustainability"*

What do you most like about your job?

As both a designer and a retailer, I love working with emerging designers and bringing new product to market.

I get to provide opportunity for makers that are both established, and also small or emerging, and I get to work with unexpected designs or work, showcasing them to a New York consumer.

At [my shop](#), I create my own world that people buy into daily, I hear customers say, "Can I move in?" when they visit it in SoHo. That's extremely gratifying. I'm so lucky to get to do what I do.

What is the biggest challenge in your work?

It's challenging changing hats so frequently, every single day. But it's a native aspect of being a small business owner: You go from managing employees, to creating new product, to curating other people's product, to calling a repair man, to showing up on time for a panel discussion. And hopefully looking presentable while you're doing it all.

Co-founding [Guesst.co](#) a platform connecting stores to brands for co-retailing has made the last couple of years

especially frenetic. But what we are building will ultimately make the job of being a designer and a retailer less laborious, and minimize the financial risks for independent businesses like mine.

What is your work priority for 2020?

We've recently launched multiple design collaborations with a couple indie design studios.

With Two Tree Studios, I co-designed a Brooklyn-made furniture collection, and with Lio and Linn, I created a new mobile chandelier using their hanging design elements.

I'm excited about growing those collections and product concepts, and I'm dedicated to making sure they succeed in the upcoming year.

I'm also excited about maximizing [Guesst](#) as a tool to maintain the integrity and the diversity of the design community, and my recent collaborations to continue supporting emerging designers.

What is your proudest achievement in luxury?

I'm proud of having created a shop where people who have aspirational desires can buy in on an accessible level.

Somebody can come to the shop, for example, and buy a lower-priced product, like a giant copper or brass nail for \$5. These consumers can buy into the ethos of the store, and those are the ones that stick around, and pretty soon they're buying my luxury product and my own designs.

I really do want everybody to feel at home in my shop and to walk away happy.

Even though I'm a luxury retailer, I take pride in the fact that I'm not so exclusive that people are excluded.

How do you see luxury evolving in 2020?

We've been heading away from a maximalist mentality. I see that becoming more and more refined in 2020.

Consumers are shifting from wanting status or trend pieces, to investing in heritage items. They're prioritizing owning fewer things, versus acquiring too much stuff, partly because we're replacing disposability with sustainability. And part of that considers valuing one-of-a-kind, handmade characteristics. That's what connotes luxury now: Less, but more special.

[Please click here to see the entire Luxury Women to Watch 2020 list](#)

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