

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Mark Cross continues comeback with retail, resale launches

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Mark Cross is launching a direct-operated vintage platform. Image courtesy of Mark Cross

By SARAH JONES

Almost a decade after it was revived, U.S. leather goods house Mark Cross is setting its sights on connecting directly to consumers with the opening of its first standalone store in years and a brand-operated vintage platform.

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Founded in 1845 in Boston as a saddlery, Mark Cross grew into a lifestyle brand in the early 1900s under the leadership of Gerald and Sara Murphy, but the house was shuttered in the 1990s. Revived in 2011, the label's current collections are tied to its roots, using the same Italian factories to produce styles inspired by classic pieces.

"It is a very fine balance using elements of a heritage brand's DNA whilst constantly staying aspirational and relevant," said Ulrik Garde Due, president/CEO of [Mark Cross](#).

"The consumer today is more than ever looking for authenticity and brand integrity," he said. "We have been able to capitalize on our brand's history and utilize it in our storytelling of the brand today, continuing the focus of long lasting, exquisitely crafted products."

As part of the brand's revival, it is debuting a boutique at 667 Madison Ave. in New York, located alongside the building's other tenants including Smythson and beauty and wellness brand Naturopathica. Since its relaunch, the brand's retail strategy has been focused solely on wholesale and ecommerce, and this marks the label's first monobrand store in about 30 years.

"I see very much our flagship on Madison Avenue as our laboratory and platform for future retail expansion both domestically and internationally," Mr. Garde Due said.

Harkening back to its history in the arts, including its former owners' friendship with Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald, the brand has launched an Artist in Residence program. For the New York opening, the current Artist in Residence Alberte Skronski's sculptures decorate the retail space.

Mark Cross has also partnered with artist Sophie Matisse on a collection of hand painted bags, which will also be on display at the New York store.



Handbags from Mark Cross' collaboration with Sophie Matisse. Image courtesy of Mark Cross

In addition to its bricks-and-mortar flagship debut, Mark Cross is celebrating its heritage by taking ownership of its secondhand market. A resale site opening on Dec. 11 will retail vintage items dating back before the 1990s.



Ulrik Garde Due. Image courtesy of Mark Cross

In this Q&A, Mr. Garde Due discusses Mark Cross' retail strategy, the brand's position as a heritage American luxury house and the brand's move into owning its secondhand sales. Here is the dialogue:

Almost a decade into Mark Cross' comeback, why is now the right time for the brand to open its first standalone boutique since the 1990s?

In the revival era of Mark Cross we have not had a flagship store for three decades. Our new strategy is consumer centric and digital focused and we need to service our customers both on and offline.

Whilst we expand into new product categories it is important to have a physical experiential retail environment where the full breath of our lifestyle positioning can be expressed.

Why did you choose this location on Madison Avenue? Why was New York the ideal market to reintroduce the Mark Cross monobrand shopping experience?

The area surrounding 667 Madison caters very much to the same target audience as ours with a unique combination of domestic and international customer profiles. It is an iconic neighborhood and as New York is our home city, we will build our expansion plans from here.



Mark Cross' Madison Avenue store. Image courtesy of Mark Cross

How is this retail space designed to engage a multigenerational audience?

We have created a very innovative experiential retail concept with a conservatory structure that is completely interchangeable. The space can accommodate our Artists in Residence, events and new collection launches in a gallery-like environment that is both aspirational and educational.

Why did you decide to make art a key part of the boutique opening? What is the relationship between Mark Cross and art?

Mark Cross was under the ownership of Sara and Gerald Murphy at the beginning of last century.

The Murphys were friends with and great supporters of many of the celebrated artists and visionaries of the 1920's: Hemingway, Picasso, Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald and Man Ray. We wanted to keep that part of heritage at the center of the brand as we continue to support the art.

With our newly launched Artist in Residence program we are showcasing upcoming as well as renowned artists. We are also proud to say that we are supporting ArtTable, an incredible organization dedicated to advancing the leadership of women in the visual arts.

How do nods to classic culture, including the iconic scene with Grace Kelly in "Rear Window," help Mark Cross create allure in a modern marketing context? How do you make your heritage relevant to the woman of today?

It is a very fine balance using elements of a heritage brand's DNA whilst constantly staying aspirational and relevant.

The consumer today is more than ever looking for authenticity and brand integrity. We have been able to capitalize on our brand's history and utilize it in our storytelling of the brand today, continuing the focus of long lasting, exquisitely crafted products.

We are very fortunate that Mark Cross has a unique and rich history with iconic moments. Alfred Hitchcock was Gerald Murphy's dear friend, and he specially commissioned for that piece to be in the movie with Grace Kelly. The impact of that placement gave the brand a lot of success and household recognition.

We want to capture that feeling of nostalgia as we market the brand today but in a modern way. This season, we unveiled a new version of the Grace bag that is a multifunctional belt bag with personalization and really lends itself to the needs of the woman of today.



The Grace bag now comes in a belt bag style. Image credit: Matchesfashion

What is the value and differentiation for Mark Cross of being an American luxury house with more than a century of history? What role does this American heritage play in the positioning of the brand?

I have in my career been fortunate to execute and manage the revival and repositioning processes of French, English and Scandinavian heritage brands. There are very few true American heritage luxury brands and with Mark Cross' more than 170 years of history we have an unique opportunity to become the leading authentic American luxury lifestyle brand at a global scale.

Whilst from a quality point of view we have always been seeking to manufacture our products where the quality is best, and creatively we are emphasizing the style of the effortless, American sensibility which is unique and very sophisticated in its own right.

What was the strategy behind the launch of the vintage resale platform?

Sustainability is embedded in the Mark Cross value proposition and the durable and timeless nature of our products makes them a good fit for the vintage market. We are with the launch of our vintage platform offering the customer the opportunity to buy and sell Mark Cross vintage product.

We are creating a new directly operated channel where we can authenticate and value a Mark Cross product and offer the customer a service level to our standards. Furthermore, sourcing these pieces has enabled us to add to our existing company archive collection, which is an important tool in our storytelling, whilst also serving as a source of inspiration for our design team.



Mark Cross has launched a vintage platform. Image courtesy of Mark Cross

What is the benefit for the brand of owning its secondhand business?

The luxury secondhand market is growing four times faster than the primary luxury market. I believe luxury brands need to consider the circular economy with the lifecycle of their products being beyond the first sale.

The vintage market is an opportunity for luxury brands to support long-term sustainable goals. First-time buyers who can sell their used product on the secondhand market are more likely to buy another first-hand good.

What is next for Mark Cross?

We are launching some very exciting new product categories in 2020 that reinforce the plan to position Mark Cross as a lifestyle brand. Furthermore, we are opening pop-up stores in Asia, Europe and the U.S. with our key wholesale partners and incorporating our Artist in Residence program and vintage range internationally.

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