

RETAIL

MatchesFashion evolves Innovators program for emerging designers as leg-up during pandemic

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Designer Harris Reed made this year's cut of MatchesFashion's Innovators program. Image credit: MatchesFashion

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

MatchesFashion has released its 2020 list of The Innovators as the London-based online retailer offers support to menswear and womenswear designers whose progress is threatened by the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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This year's batch comprises Ahluwalia, Art School, Bianca Saunders, Charles Jeffrey, Chopova Lowena, Halpern, Harris Reed, Kevin Germanier, Ludovic de Saint Sernin, Stefan Cooke, Thebe Magugu and Wales Bonner. These dozen emerging designers showcase their own vision in their apparel listed on MatchesFashion.com as well as a 10-minute video with their narrations.

"I am delighted that we have formalized our support for emerging talent, developing The Innovators into a program that actually helps future-proof their businesses in what has been a tough year for the creative industry," said MatchesFashion buying director Natalie Kingham in a statement.

"I have worked with many of these designers for a long time and I am so happy that we are committing to their visionary collections in a practical, material way," she said.

The **yearlong program** will offer mentorship and publicity across MatchesFashion's marketing and content channels. The designers, in turn, will offer new collections and stories to MatchesFashion.



MatchesFashion Class of 2020 Innovators. Image credit: MatchesFashion

By design

MatchesFashion in 2017 created the Innovators program to showcase and encourage a broader dialogue with a series of new names.

The idea to evolve the Innovators program came as the pandemic gained ground, with designers telling Ms. Kingham and MatchesFashion head of menswear Damien Paul that they were not sure how their brands would thrive in 2020 and that they needed practical support.

"This program solidifies what we have always done: recognizing talent and promoting their inspiring collections," Mr. Paul said in a statement.

Per MatchesFashion, here is what its shoppers can expect from the innovators in the coming months:

There is London-based designer Eden Loweth's label Art School, who describes the collections as "decadent minimalism" and explores ideas around gender.



Bianca Saunders is on this year's list of 2020 Innovators whom MatchesFashion will mentor and promote for a year in exchange for content and collections to be sold on the site. Image credit: MatchesFashion

Bianca Saunders, who blends men's tailoring with rich, draped fabrics.

Charles Jeffrey, who blurs the lines of classic tailored shapes to create electrifying showpieces.

Chopova Lowena, who add the avant-garde to traditional Bulgarian dress.

Grace Wales Bonner works within a menswear tradition and translates that to womenswear, bringing an "Afro Atlantic spirit to European luxury."

Harris Reed, whose creations sit at the place where romanticism meets glam rock.

Kevin Germanier focuses on upcycling luxury fabrics and wants to create product with value'.

Ludovic de Saint Sernin brings an elegant sensuality to his gender fluid approach where garments are designed to

be "defined by the wearer."

Michael Halpern's "escapist clothing" includes his signature dresses that burst with colorful sequins.

Priya Ahluwalia describes her menswear pieces as "playful, graphic, nostalgic and fresh" with a focus on reimagined vintage fabrics.

Stefan Cooke, the designer duo who play on the idea of familiar made unfamiliar with clever twists on men's classics.

And, finally, Thebe Magugu, a South African designer who combines modern tailoring with motifs from his continent's storied past.

"Being a part of the MatchesFashion Innovators Program means so much [it] is like that hug that you have always wanted and needed," Mr. Reed said in a statement.

Mr. de Saint Sernin appreciated the leg-up.

"It is so rare [to find] amazing partners to support young businesses like ours it's really making us feel stronger and I think that's all you can ask for as a young brand,' he said.

And for some, the ties were closer.

"I'm working with my family," Mr. Germanier said in a statement.

MatchesFashion's 2020 designer class of The Innovators

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