

FOOD AND BEVERAGE

Hennessy features world's first Black chess grandmaster in latest edition of Wild Rabbit ad campaign

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The latest installment of Hennessy's Wild Rabbit campaign features the story of Maurice Ashley, who became the world's first Black chess grandmaster through sheer grit and determination. Image credit: Hennessy

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

Cognac brand Hennessy has debuted the next phase of its Wild Rabbit ad campaign by highlighting the grit and determination of Maurice Ashley, the world's first Black chess grandmaster.

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Narrated by hip-hop star Nas, the new 120-second film called "Maurice and The Black Bear School" celebrates Mr. Ashley, who earned his title with force of will and mental mastery. In line with its "Never stop. Never settle" tag line, Hennessy positions the story as one of Black intellect and brilliance, featuring chess as a metaphor for a strategy to overcome life's challenges and achieve greatness.

"Hennessy is committed to showcasing extraordinary individuals like Maurice Ashley who push the limits of potential and define history," said Giles Woodyer, senior vice president of Hennessy US, in a statement.

"The eighth installment of the Wild Rabbit campaign comes at a time of momentous social significance, and the relevance of [Mr.] Ashley's story his mental agility, intellectual integrity and ability to harness intellect to move the game forward provides inspiration to all the thinkers, visionaries and doers who continue to propel a more inclusive future."



Still from Hennessy's Wild Rabbit film, "Maurice Ashley and the Black Bear School." Image credit: Hennessy

Tough moves

After failing to make his high school chess team, the Brooklyn, NY resident became a protégé of The Black Bear School, a legendary group of street chess players.

Mr. Ashley quickly emerged as a competitive player taking his learnings, on the board and off, to tournaments throughout New York until his ultimate victory.

In 1999, he earned the Grandmaster title, becoming the first accredited Black player in the history of competitive chess and the world's first Black chess grandmaster.

"Chess teaches the importance of strategic thinking and pushes the limits of intellect not just in the game, but in life," Mr. Ashley said in a statement.

"It's impossible to speak to the deep sense of satisfaction that achieving the grandmaster title gave me, and to be recognized for that accomplishment as part of Hennessy's Wild Rabbit campaign is both exciting and humbling," he said.



Hennessy, one of the world's leading Cognac brands owned by LVMH, regularly features cultural icons in its Wild Rabbit campaign series as part of its "Never stop. Never settle" ethos. Image credit: Hennessy

Created in collaboration with Droga5 and directed by Daniel Wolfe, "Maurice and the Black Bear School" focuses on the power of the mind and depicts Mr. Ashley's mental journey, the wrestling match with his own brilliance, and the development of philosophical maxims that came to define his approach to chess, per Hennessy.

The narrative tells a story of mental perseverance and excellence, as he battles external obstacles and pushes the immense potential of his own mind along his inspiring journey to success.

The campaign comprises long-form ads that dramatize the story of Mr. Ashley and his development as a champion through camaraderie and lessons of The Black Bear School and a series of stand-alone shorts that bring to life the "Lessons of a Grandmaster."

The effort also includes an in-depth, behind-the-scenes look at the history of Mr. Ashley and the Black Bear School, a largely forgotten New York Black history.

Since the campaign's inception in 2011, LVMH-owned **Hennessy V.S** has featured the *Wild Rabbits* of cultural icons including hip hop artist Nas and musician Erykah Badu, while also shining a light on lesser-known historical heroes such as Malcolm Campbell, father/son explorer duo Auguste and Jacques Piccard and cycling champion Marshall

"Major" Taylor.

Hennessy Presents: Maurice Ashley and the Black Bear School

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