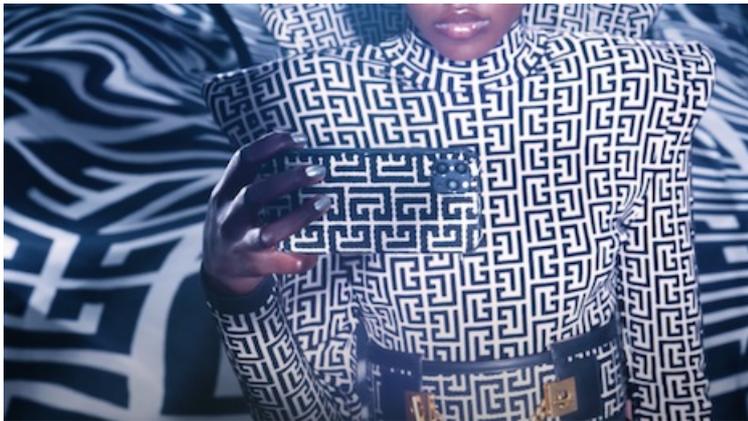


APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Balmain goes on complex quest for handbags

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Caren Jepkemei stars in Balmain's newest campaign for the 1945 bag collection. Image credit: Balmain

By NORA HOWE

French fashion label Balmain is finding its way through a labyrinth of PB monograms in a stealthy campaign for its 1945 Heritage bag.

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Named for the year the house was founded and featuring a bold maze pattern, the 1945 bag collection was first introduced in the early 1970s. Balmain creative director Olivier Rousteing has reinterpreted and modernize the design which was originally inspired by Pierre Balmain's love of the mazes found in French Renaissance gardens.

The quest for Balmain

The 90-second film opens with a fast-ticking noise and immediately focuses on model Caren Jepkemei who enters the black-and-white maze dressed head-to-toe in Balmain monogram. She takes a smartphone out of her bag and a voiceover of Mr. Rousteing begins.

"Welcome to my Balmain 1945 monogram maze," he says. "You have one minute to get to the center and a special surprise waits for you."

She walks hastily through the maze of monogrammed floors and mirrored walls, looking for any pathway toward the center. The voice directs her as she discovers and collects a multitude of bags from the 1945 collection.



Balmain bicolor jacquard 1945 bag. Image credit: Balmain

Ultimately, she reaches the center where a large monogrammed trunk sits on the floor. She opens the trunk and discovers a micro version of the Balmain 1945 labyrinth.

The 1945 bags come in four styles: the double-chain shoulder bag, the cross-body, the envelope clutch and the tote. Each includes metal clasps, stamped with the PB moniker, which have been treated with a special galvanizing technique.

Balmain 1945 Heritage bag

As he continues the traditions of Mr. Balmain's distinctive style, Mr. Rousteing finds it important to draw a connection to the founding principles of the brand while incorporating his own contemporary influence.

Reaching the youth

The French fashion house and its nearly decade-long creative director have made a continuous effort in reaching younger affluents and informing them of the brand's heritage through the utilization of digital platforms.

In December, the label joined the roster of brands experimenting with podcasts with the launch of a series hosted by Mr. Rousteing, exploring the history and pillars of the house. The first episode "How You Gonna Keep Them On The Farm After They've Seen Parea?" studied the origins of founder Pierre Balmain and Mr. Rousteing, both of whom grew up in the French countryside before rising to prominence in the fashion industry ([see story](#)).

In a conversation with *Financial Times* menswear critic Alexander Fury at the FT Business of Luxury Summit on Nov. 23, 2020, Mr. Rousteing, who is known for renovating the brand and collaborating with pop culture fixtures such as Beyonc, Rihanna and Kylie Jenner, shared his perspective on democratizing luxury and appealing to Generation Z.

Mr. Rousteing has pushed Balmain to be a more inclusive and global brand. During the session, he expressed his belief that the definition of luxury is evolving, as Gen Z consumers want luxury to be more sustainable or authentic ([see story](#)).