

RETAIL

Saks launches second annual designer accelerator program

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In its second year, the New Wave accelerator program welcomes eight new brands. Image credit: Saks

By LUXURY DAILY NEWS SERVICE

U.S. retailer Saks is inaugurating the second edition of its emerging designer accelerator program, The New Wave.

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The purpose of the program is to develop and support independent brands in accelerating their growth at Saks and ultimately across the entire fashion industry. This year, the retailer is featuring eight new brands: Claude Kameni, Keeyahri, Ludovic de Saint Sernin, Nalebe, Sunni Sunni, Undra Celeste, Who Decides War and Zeynep Arcay.

"Saks is committed to amplifying emerging brands and it is incredibly important to us that we use our platform to elevate independent designer businesses and BIPOC voices," said Anna Irving, senior vice president and general merchandise manager of women's designer ready-to-wear at Saks, New York.

"This program is a crucial part of our goal to increase representation in our merchandise assortment and to provide emerging designers with the resources to succeed at Saks and beyond," she said. "At the same time, the program supports our mission to offer unique and inspiring fashion to our customers."

New Wave

Participating designers were selected from all categories, including men's and gender-open brands in a first for the program. The Saks executive team identified these participants as brands that have significant growth potential but require additional support to scale their businesses.

Like last year, the program will offer an onboarding boot camp, advisory sessions with leaders from various areas of the Saks business, sessions with industry experts and designers and access to workshops to support brands with small business know-how.

Each designer will also be eligible to receive a \$10,000 grant to support their business operations and growth, as well as marketing support from Saks.



Saks is placing a greater emphasis on supporting Black-owned businesses and labels. Image credit: Saks

For the second year in a row, Mastercard will serve as the presenting sponsor of The New Wave. The company will provide designers with "Digital Doors" toolkits, including resources to help small businesses digitally transform, as well as one-on-one mentorship.

This year, commercial airline United Airlines will also take part in The New Wave program, and participating brands will have the opportunity to design the new Saks-branded day blanket that will appear onboard United flights in Polaris and business class.

Other program partners that will provide mentorship opportunities and entrepreneurial workshops throughout the year include the Council of Fashion Designers of America, Harlem's Fashion Row, Launch Collective, NuOrder and SKYPAD.

Another goal of the program is to emphasize BIPOC voices, with Saks ensuring at least half of the participating brands are BIPOC-owned. This year, six of the eight participating designers are BIPOC.

The first iteration of The New Wave launched in June 2021 as part of Saks' diversity, equity and inclusion strategy ([see story](#)), which outlines goals to advance its commitment to increase the total sales of Black-owned, -designed or -led brands by nearly \$100 million by 2023.

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