

MARKETING

Bulgari's 'Mediterranea' showcase provides luxury players with high jewelry blueprint

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The brand's Venetian presentation offers the industry a number of key learnings. Image credit: Bulgari/LVMH

By AMIRAH KEATON

Roman jeweler Bulgari is solidifying its standing as a main contender amid a key category for parent company LVMH.

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Having sent about 400 showstopping high jewelry pieces down a Venice runway this season alone, this year's "Mediterranea" event sees the annual gathering embracing a larger platform year after year. As more brands venture into the lucrative space by the year, chasing the most resilient consumers at the high end of the industry's food chain, Bulgari's sustained strategy and strong sales offer a number of learnings for luxury players.

"Bulgari is the jewel in the crown amongst LVMH-owned brands both literally and figuratively," said Thoma Serdari, author of *Rethinking Luxury Fashion* and director of fashion and luxury MBA at [NYU Stern](#), New York.

"One of the two high jewelry houses, Bulgari is better positioned against Chaumet, the legendary jewelry creator favored by old-world emperors, which appears more traditional in style compared to the dynamic, bold, and inventive Bulgari brand," Ms. Serdari said. "The success of Bulgari has always been creative innovation and this is at the heart of what allowed the brand to expand globally even before the LVMH acquisition.

"Mediterranea" moments

Last year, the Italian Embassy in Paris played host to Bulgari's "Eden the Garden of Wonders" 140-item-wide showcase at the start of June.

The year before, a building centering the "salon of Milan," Italy's's Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, was the vessel through which the brand's "'Magnifica' Opera d'Arte" was presented. The two-day affair also occurred within the first few days of June.

Initial presentations, usually limited in presence to members of the press, in addition to VIC clients and celebrities, have been executed everywhere from the Amalfi Coast to Venice, typically reshown during Paris Couture Week in July, and onward, as part of traveling exhibitions and in other supporting activations.

Never before, though, has Bulgari chosen to execute as early, and as close to the Cannes Film Festival's calendar, as

this.

The brand's Venetian presentation featured around 400 showstopping high jewelry pieces

"With *Mediterranea*, Bulgari unveils its new high jewelry and high-end watches collections by embarking on an epic and immersive journey that starts from Rome, the eternal city and permanent source of creative inspiration for Bulgari, to Venice, the major crossroad of Mediterranean influences where the Roman-Byzantine Empire fused with the Roman Western Empire to give birth to inclusive and unrivaled arts and architecture," said Jean-Christophe Babin, CEO of Bulgari, in a statement.

"With great honor we celebrate the vision of the founder Sotirio Bulgari with magnificent creations that represent the pinnacle of Bulgari identity made of audacious creativity and exceptional craftsmanship, offering to our guests the most extraordinary locations of the City together with pioneering AI-driven interactive experiences further enhancing the beauty and emotions created by 2023 collection establishing a new milestone in extraordinary goldsmithing and gems expertise."

In a manner comparable to haute couture apparel, companies tend to be more sparing when it comes to this accessory category, and for good reason, considering the price point, with consideration for the savoir-faire involved in manufacturing the medium at hand.

Thus, high jewelry has historically been reserved for age-old peers -- audiences can usually expect public-facing marketing from the likes of these luxury names to arrive in the form of an advertising campaign ([see story](#)). Conversely, Bulgari has carved out its own lane, leading the pack with the debut of different show concepts.

Discovering the collection's eclectic heritage, [#AnneHathaway](#), [#Lisa](#), and [@Zendaya](#) were amongst those who witnessed the debut of the new [#Bulgari](#) *Mediterranea* High Jewelry collection. <https://t.co/2tlqvA5wbq> [#BulgariMediterranea](#) [#BulgariHighJewelry](#) pic.twitter.com/XRbDoFibGk

Bulgari (@Bulgariofficial) [May 17, 2023](#)

"With an augmented mind share, now is the time to reinforce investments in customer-facing events, such as jewelry shows, a concept rooted in the tradition of the fashion show," Ms. Serdari said.

"Choosing Venice for this event was well aligned with the concept of the *Mediterranea* collection and offered, perhaps, a convenient jaunt for those already in the South of France for the Cannes festival," she said. "Bulgari brand ambassadors showcased the brand's values toward inclusivity well and made the beautiful new pieces come to life."

Strategic gems

This year has been one full of milestones for the centuries-old maison.

Among these collections sits *Serpenti*, a collection for which Bulgari continues to celebrate a 75th anniversary in 2023 ([see story](#)). Newer accomplishments also slot in here. In September of last year, the label released the first-ever high jewelry "docu-film" ([see story](#)).

The preservation and presentation of Bulgari's history through these initiatives appears to be of prime importance for the luxury behemoth that owns it.

"Having mastered the art of cabochon-cut colored stones, Bulgari has always had a distinct positioning that made it both timeless and contemporary," NYU's Ms. Serdari said.

"As strong as a signature, Bulgari's stylistic evolution has allowed the brand to stand strong against competitor brands such as Cartier and Van Cleef," she said. "They, too, shine in the heritage of their own technical innovations but nothing stands out as prominently as a Bulgari gem-studded piece."

Based on output, the team seems constantly in search of innovative ways to sell heritage with each passing activation. For a maison founded in 1884, the application of a catwalk concept to accessories is quite forward, capturing the most reliable luxury cohort of them all.

"Bulgari targets the absolute customer segment at the top of the luxury pyramid," Ms. Serdari said.

The histories and traditions of the Mediterranean basin coexist harmoniously in our newest collection, taking you on a journey through this timeless region. [#BulgariMediterranea](#)

Bulgari (@Bulgariofficial) [May 18, 2023](#)

"These consumers haven't stopped indulging in hard luxury and, in fact, increased their spending in this category during the pandemic both as a cautionary hedge against uncertainty and as an entertaining pastime in lieu of traveling," she said. "High jewelry brands who had already invested in their ambassador relationships, global footprint, and excellent customer service, three areas in which Bulgari is leading against the competition, saw the lift in their quarterly earnings throughout the pandemic and all the way to the end of the year reports in 2022."

The strategic vision, driven by the annual catwalk affairs, originates from Bulgari's current CEO.

"I would never imagine having just new jewels in a display box," Mr. Babin told [WWD](#), following one of the brand's first high jewelry shows in 2014, marking just one year after the chief executive's arrival.

"It would be unfair, I think, to feminine beauty and to the craftsmen who made the jewelry," he said noting that, at the time, diamond jewelry made up "about 40 percent of the new collection, the largest the Roman firm has ever produced," per reports.

Now, almost a decade after this 2014 showcase, and nearing the 15-year mark post-LVMH's acquisition of Bulgari in 2011, the impact of both circumstances can be felt.

"It wouldn't be surprising to see other competing brands following in Bulgari's footsteps with full-on fashion jewelry shows," Ms. Serdari said.

"However, what brands need to consider is whether a jewelry show aligns with the house codes, whether their absolute customer base is large enough to justify the expense and whether there are other opportunities that can create equal if not greater lift in terms of publicity."