

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Launching winter capsules, luxury goes for pole position

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Balenciaga, which launched its first-ever skiwear collection last month, joins a host of luxury brands releasing related capsules this season. Image credit: Balenciaga

By ZACH JAMES

As the colder months of the year draw near, a new crop of luxury labels are embracing winter sports.

Though many maisons have released apparel based around activities such as skiing and snowboarding before, now, they increasingly include more functional wears and wares, with designer sports equipment becoming a norm for these year-end drops. This year, French fashion houses Dior, Balenciaga and Balmain, as well as Italian fashion house Fendi, are among the luxury brands looking to skiwear as an expanding avenue of investment.

"Today's winter sports market offers excellent brand and business potential for luxury fashion houses," said Daymon Bruck, chief creative officer at [The O Group](#), New York.

"The growth of the global ski market provides exceptional opportunities for fashion brands to build awareness, create partnerships, develop activations, push technical development, showcase sustainable practices and expand their visual impact and creativity within a classically glamorous activity," Mr. Bruck said. "Some brands realized this opportunity many years back but even those who are just now showing up to design for winter sports are being supported by an enthusiastic and highly desirable consumer base."

Uphill climb

Several luxury maisons are working their way up the slope with the debut of new capsules.

Last month, Balmain announced the release of its first-ever ski collection, slotting the launch in as part of an overarching women's winter 2023 assortment. Included are a selection of coats, ski suits, hats, handbags, shoes and sunglasses, among other cold-weather staples.

Unlike most collections, it also features a set of skis, branching the brand into the sporting gear category. The equipment is produced via a partnership with Italian winter sports gear brand Bomber Ski, which uses a handmade full-wood core construction on the products outfitted in Balmain's "PB" pattern.

The "Bomber x Balmain All Mountain 78" skis are up for pre-order now on Bomber Ski's [website](#) and retails for \$2,950. The remainder of the collection is available on Balmain's [digital storefront](#), in addition to other retail channels.



Balmain is expanding into the skiwear market with its first-ever ski-focused capsule. Image credit: Balmain

Balenciaga is making similar strides, folding snowboards, ski poles, helmets, balaclavas, ski sneakers with attached chains, boots, backpacks and gloves into its first-ever winter sports line. Cargo pants and parkas are sprinkled throughout the offering as well, highlighting functionality over form.

Each item is said to be aerodynamic, water-repellent and insulated, allowing for a stylish and warm downhill adventure. Another differentiating facet is the availability of options for men and women, something not unilaterally true of all high-end skiwear efforts this year.

Balenciaga's drop is available [online](#) and in stores now.



Fendi's snowboard and coats feature the same multicolor printing. Image credit: Fendi

Fendi's collection integrates some menswear exclusives, namely a ski suit, snowboard, helmet, goggles, coats, sweaters and gloves.

Each of the pieces of the set is emblazoned with a stylish Fendi design, melding functionality and style. Meanwhile, a range of womenswear looks for both the slopes and apres-ski hangouts have also touched down.

As far as more seasoned bouts of marketing are concerned, the annual Dior Alps womenswear campaign is back this year with a key change, adding goggles, boots and ski suits to its usual ready-to-wear and handbag lineup for the winter season.

Designed by creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri, campaign messaging calls attention to the line's water-repellent fabrics, opting for practicality as a selling point.

"This winter sports category requires a long list of products for fashion brands to develop, on and off the slopes," said Mr. Bruck.



The Dior Alps campaign features a diverse cast of models. Image credit: Dior

"Hats, helmets, gloves, scarfs, parkas, sweaters, goggles, glasses, skis and snowboards (not to mention a long list of off-slope items) can each become unique luxury brand expressions, potentially delivering on both form and function, style and performance at the highest levels of craftsmanship," he said. "With the recent advancements in high-performance fabrics and materials that offer a host of benefits for winter sports (insulation, breathability, weather protection, aerodynamic functionality) and in some cases, utilizing sustainability practices.

"Fashion houses today can meet or exceed the demands of a discerning luxury consumer."

Downhill thrill

Skiing and other like winter activities are mainstays of luxury, a fact bolstered by recent findings and previous branded releases.

In a new report, global real estate consultancy Knight Frank shared that the resort market in the Swiss and French Alps is going strong following pandemic-era booms. The firm found that luxury property demand is still fair, with ski chalet prices remaining high and the stock of listings remaining low ([see story](#)).



The ski market is full of the younger, more active consumers luxury is looking for. Image credit: Balenciaga

While climate change threatens to make ski season shorter by the year, luxury has increasingly looked to the practice as a sustainable and strategic market in which to indulge.

Last year, Italian fashion brand Gucci worked with German sportswear brand Adidas on a collection suitable for shredding the slopes ([see story](#)).

Around the same time, Italian fashion brand Prada brought its Linea Rossa line to the Riders Republic video game, a move that united luxury, gaming a market luxury is increasingly looking to tap into ([see story](#)) and sports under a single umbrella ([see story](#)).

German automaker Audi took a different approach earlier this year, renewing its sponsorship of the Ski World Cup through 2026 ([see story](#)).

Nuances of blue, lilac, and powder pink fade into delicate orange and yellow in this season's Fendi Skiwear selection for him. pic.twitter.com/BBosnPbDWO

Fendi (@Fendi) October 19, 2023

The skiwear and gear market looks to be an apt target for expansion as luxury attempts to secure younger consumer audiences whose purchases and preferences will inform the future of the sector's sales.

"Even though the winter sports season is short and weather patterns make seasonal snowfall unpredictable, this global market is still an excellent opportunity for brands who wish to build lifestyle connections with an enthusiastic luxury audience who will invest in the finest (both in design and performance) to elevate their favorite winter activities," Mr. Bruck said.

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