

EVENTS/CAUSES

Bulgari fetes heritage with Spanish Steps restoration project

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By JEN KING

Italy's Bulgari is investing in Italian heritage projects as a way to give back, while also celebrating its 130th anniversary, with a \$2 million pledge to restore Rome's Spanish Steps over a two-year period.

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The project, slated to begin in 2015, will work to restore the iconic Italian landmark after Italian prime minister Matteo Renzi asked for private investors to help maintain monuments throughout the country. With Bulgari behind the restoration, the project will likely leave an impression on travelers who visit the Spanish Steps.

"For Bulgari, it's an inexpensive, long-lasting public relations spend," said Rob Frankel, branding expert at marketing consultancy firm [Frankel & Anderson](#), Los Angeles. "I doubt that Bulgari will allow the project to proceed without a lot of press mention and permanent signage at the site.

"Theoretically, every tourist on the Spanish Steps over the next few decades will likely be exposed to a Bulgari brand mention of some sort," he said.

"Between press releases, background brochures, tour guides and government programs, you can bet that Bulgari will be thanked endlessly for their contribution. It's usually part of

the deal.”

Mr. Frankel is not affiliated with Bulgari, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Bulgari, owned by LVMH since 2011, did not respond by press deadline.

Supporting history

To support its home country, Bulgari has stepped forward to help restore Italy’s Spanish Steps. The landmark restoration project is just one of many privately-funded initiatives to come about in response to the Italian government cutting funding for the maintenance of its monuments.

Built between 1723 and 1725, Rome’s Spanish Steps include 136 steps and is the widest staircase in all of Europe.

In popular culture, the Spanish Steps have been mentioned in songs such as Bob Dylan's “When I Paint My Masterpiece” and has been used in iconic Hollywood films such as 1953’s “Roman Holiday” starring Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck.



Bulgari's boutique on Via Dei Condotti with the Spanish Steps in view

Bulgari is celebrating its anniversary by ensuring that the Spanish Steps can be enjoyed for generations to come. Bulgari CEO Jean-Christophe Babin in a brand statement fittingly describes the Spanish Steps as an “architectural jewel in the Eternal City” showing that the jeweler is best equipped to refurbish the monument, as the brand is accustomed to working with jewels.

Meanwhile, Bulgari shared a minute-long social video on its Facebook page titled “The Spanish Steps Experience.” The video shows the Spanish Steps, located up the street from its Rome boutique on Via Dei Condotti, shimmering from projector lights with animations of jewels being splashed down the stairs.

Embedded Video: [//www.youtube.com/embed/Ukrhgb6TIT4](https://www.youtube.com/embed/Ukrhgb6TIT4)

Bulgari - The Spanish Steps Experience

Although Bulgari has not released much information about what it has planned for its 130th anniversary celebration, the jeweler has been consistently introducing touch points via social media. On its Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, Bulgari shared the The Spanish Steps Experience event through photographs of celebrities who attended the kickoff event of the jeweler’s 130th anniversary.

Bulgari has dedicated the hashtag #Bulgari130Years for its ongoing celebrations.

Monument brands

Similar architecture restoration initiatives have been introduced by other Italian brands such as footwear brand Tod's which financially funded the restoration of the Roman Colosseum.

Also, Italian fashion house Fendi is the sole benefactor of the project to restore the Trevi Fountain and the Four Fountains in Rome.

The "Fendi for Fountains" initiative allows the brand to reinforce its Roman heritage by giving back to the city that has supplied inspiration to the label over the years. Due to the foot traffic at the Trevi Fountain, the brand will likely see a rise in brand awareness from tourists ([see story](#)).

Other Italian brands have dedicated means to the restoration of other types of art such as film to ensure enjoyment for years to come.

For example, Italian fashion house Gucci continued its film restoration project with The Film Foundation and Warner Bros. Entertainment that showcased the brand's appreciation for and support of cinematic arts.

Facilitating the restoration of director Nicholas Ray's film "Rebel Without a Cause" allowed the brand to show its enthusiasts a side not based in fashion. Artistic collaborations give brands a way to connect with and change the perceptions of consumers outside their niche ([see story](#)).

A restoration project can permanently align a brand with historic relics.

"Aside from the [obvious] benefits, projects like this align Bulgari with classic architectural, artistic and cultural names and efforts, which ostensibly raises its perception in the minds of consumers," Mr. Frankel said.

"If your brand name is constantly mentioned alongside established, high-quality brands and names, pretty soon the public accepts you're in the company you keep," he said. "At least that's what brands are shooting for."

Final Take

Jen King, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

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