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The Luxury Education Foundation's (LEF) 10th Anniversary

by Mary Shustack



From Lalique to Louis Vuitton, Van Cleef & Arpels to Ferragamo, the world's leading luxury brands share more than just a dedication to craftsmanship and innovation. Realizing this unwavering dedication has been integral to their enduring success, they joined together 10 years ago to ensure the next generation will carry on their legacies.

And on a recent evening in Manhattan, WAG was among those invited to participate in the 10th anniversary festivities for the Luxury Education Foundation (LEF).

The public nonprofit organization was created to focus on educational programs related to the creation and marketing of luxury goods, targeting undergraduate and graduate students in design and business studies at Columbia Business School and Parsons The New School for Design.

The night, which kicked off with a glittering reception on the Parsons campus on Fifth Avenue, put the spotlight on how the program has, since its inception, continued to provide students with opportunities to work closely with senior executives in leading luxury firms to gain a better understanding of and develop a deeper appreciation for the industry's unique elements.

The goal is to inspire these students to become the future leaders, both on the business and creative sides, of the luxury field.

In welcoming remarks, Henri Barguirdjian, president and CEO of Graff USA and a member of the LEF board of directors, noted that the companies that work with the organization have much in common.

“It’s really serious work that we do, and we take it that way,” he said. “None of our companies would be here if we didn’t have these wonderful craftsmen.”

As guests mingled and spoke with LEF students past and present, there was a chance to explore some of the iconic projects that LEF has coordinated in its first decade.

These ranged from exclusive watch designs created for Graff in 2006 to a launch strategy developed for Balenciaga's 2013 opening in SoHo.

"Vivre Avec Lalique" presented two strategies that showcased the evolution of the decorative crystal company into a lifestyle brand in 2014. Students collaborated to create a luxury spa concept and also a mobile, modular installation that might travel to events such as Art Basel.

Maz Zouhairi, president and CEO of Lalique North America and an LEF advisory board member, said an organization such as LEF continues to provide inspiration for those who have long dedicated their careers to the luxury-goods industry.

"For me, personally, it's great to be part of a group that makes a difference for a young audience."

Lalique, he added, is a company that continues to build on its celebrated history to move ever forward, drawing on its past for inspiration while developing new products and cultivating expanded markets.

No matter the season or the collection, there is that need to balance a legacy with an ever-changing world market.

“How do you continue to make these brands relevant?” Zouhairi said is an enduring question that propels all luxury firms today.

“There’s no better place for us than to start with an audience that’s fresh and bright,” he added, an approach shared by all those who are part of LEF.

“We all care about craftsmanship, history and experience.”

And on this evening, it was clear that those representing brands that also included Chanel, Dior, Hermès, and Maclaren, for example, shared Zouhairi’s perspective about LEF’s guiding hand in the future of the industry.

As he said, “It’s our duty — we’ve been entrusted with all these brands and this history — to keep them relevant.”