



Savoir-faire laid bare

Luxury leathergoods brands owe their success to the army of artisans who use their skill and know-how to create beautiful bags and other products. Most of the time, their hard work takes place out of the spotlight and away from the public eye. However, as this article shows, at least two major luxury groups have taken steps recently to give their craftsmen and women some richly deserved recognition.

The world of luxury leathergoods and high fashion isn't only about champagne and glamour. Away from the limelight, behind the boutiques of the Rue du Faubourg St-Honoré and the Via Monte Napoleone is an army of artisans, highly skilled women and men who are largely unnamed, unknown and uncelebrated. Recently, though, one or two of the big names in the business have tried to lift the veil a little on the work that goes into making a beautiful bag or garment and on the skill and artistry of the craftspeople who do this work.

In May, luxury group LVMH held the third edition of a series of open-house events, which it calls Les Journées Particulières, to celebrate artisan skills. It said the 2016 programme was its most successful ever.

Previous editions in 2011 and 2013 attracted around 100,000 visitors, members of the public who were keen to see how expert leathergoods craftspeople and other artisans work. The figure this time was higher; more than 145,000 people took the opportunity to go behind the scenes at various LVMH fashion houses to see first hand how leather is turned into beautiful finished products. In all, 53 venues opened their doors over three days and visitors were able to take part in workshops and masterclasses.

Antoine Arnault, chief executive of LVMH brand Berluti, said afterwards: "Les Journées Particulières were once again an

opportunity for the group to highlight the richness and diversity of creativity, craftsmanship and savoir-faire at its maisons. They enabled us to demonstrate to the public both the beauty of these crafts and how essential they are for the world of tomorrow."

In July, after LVMH had brought the people to the artisans, Karl Lagerfeld and Chanel decided to do something similar, but this time bringing the artisans to the people, well, sort of. In his time as creative director of Chanel, Karl Lagerfeld has made the brand's haute couture shows quite theatrical, with a Parisian brasserie and a ruined theatre featuring among the scenarios in recent years. For his 2016 haute couture show Mr Lagerfeld decided to set the show up as though it were taking place in a Chanel atelier. The bolts of cloth, the mannequins, the cutting tables and the artisans were all there, working, with the runway show taking place around them.

Karl Lagerfeld says he wanted the people in the audience to see "what nobody ever gets to see", the rooms of an atelier and the craftspeople who work in them. "Craftsmanship today is better than ever," says the 60-year veteran of the industry. "The basic work is the same but it's much more precise, and the working conditions are much better. Without great ateliers you cannot make a good collection. We need these people, and I love to work with them." ●



An artisan working in the Berluti atelier in the Rue Marbeuf in Paris.
CREDIT: LVMH GROUP



Chanel's creative director, Karl Lagerfeld, wanted to show the audience at the brand's 2016 haute couture show what its ateliers and the people who work in them look like. CREDIT: ROLLS-ROYCE