

Fashion's New Playground

Parsons/Columbia students seek to make park style central

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(NEW YORK) Central Park: fashion's new playground?

Or so it seemed at the 12th annual presentation of "Design and Marketing of Luxury Products," the semester-long course sponsored by the Luxury Education Foundation that teams Columbia Business School students with Parsons The New School of Design undergrads to create solutions to real business challenges faced by luxury goods companies. Held at Columbia University on December 5 in front of an audience of industry veterans and the subjects of their research—Lalique, Louis Vuitton, Salvatore Ferragamo, Saks Fifth Avenue, Hermès, and Graff—two-thirds of the final project presentations involved some use of the 843-acre parkspace.

"Luxury companies are in it for the long haul," said Barbara Cirkva, chair of LEF and the division president of fashion, watches, and fine jewelry for Chanel in the U.S. "They should look at an investment as just that, and not as an expense."



Team Lalique's Black Widow necklace



According to Ketty Maisonrouge, president of LEF and adjunct professor of marketing at Columbia Business School, the motivation

Team Vuitton's novel picnic tools

behind the project is to grant students access to senior management and to tackle real life issues. "The students learn how to work as a team and also how to work on real projects," she said. "They know that if they come up with a good idea the company will run with it. Right now, yes, it is specific to New York in the sense that the companies are based here, but it's still growing slowly because it's such a time consuming project."

The 55 students—22 from Parsons and 33 from Columbia Business School—split into six teams, and each group worked their powers of persuasion at the podium in front of Power Point presentations. Team Lalique developed an original capsule collection, "Femme Fatale." Revamping Lalique's identity with themes like "Black Widow," "Poison," and "Thorns," pieces included a black crystal necklace with a black widow specimen housed inside, mercury placed in the crystal boasting simulated cracks, and purple crystal thorns embedded in jewelry pieces. The team also envisioned an accompanying night event at

Central Park, with black tents erected to display the merchandise with an air of mystery. Pop-up stores, billboard advertising, a Femme Fatale Website, and anime art and video competitions were also proposed.



Team Graff used a three-phase approach to expand the house's product line to include men's and women's watches to complement their couture-like jewelry. The result was to create by first introducing a \$1 million women's watch boasting a clear crystal plate and a diamond that circles the hour face, and eventually marketing "less expensive" \$100,000 watches for men and women. A tag line teaser, "How long must I wait for you?" was proposed, as was a time-themed Central Park performance by Cirque du Soleil to complement lighting the frame of Columbus Circle like a watch and a subsequent party at the Museum of Art & Design.

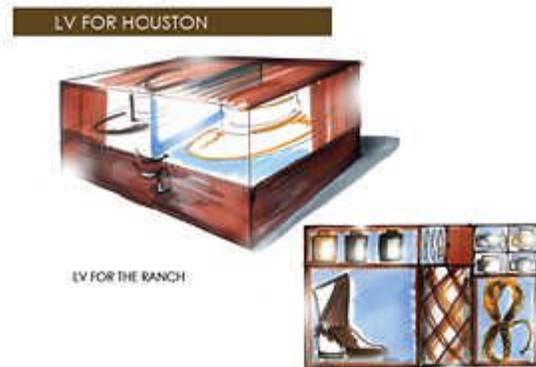
Team Hermès' reversible silk H belt

Working under the motto "Tradition Meets Innovation," Team Hermès

sought to update Hermès' storied classics like the Birkin bag and H belt, creating an enamel inlay that would adorn the hardware on such classic bags as well as on the belt buckle, as well as a reversible silk H belt, halcyon boxes as family keepsakes bearing the enamel design, and a new collection of evening bags with anchor chain and enamel H charms. To promote the new motifs, city-specific parties were outlined: for Boston, a Winter Wonderland-themed party complete with carriage riding

through Boston Common; for Bal Harbour, FL, a summer yachting event with custom hot air balloons bearing the enamel designs; and in New York, setting up a Le Duc drive-in in Central Park over four Saturdays in lieu of cars. Hermès would install enamel pattern banners on light posts along Park Ave. above 34 th St., sponsor a sculpture at P.S. 1 MoMA, and partner with the art-oriented charity Publicolor. The students sought to use the store windows to announce the product's launch as well, with a flurry of enamel H's appearing in windows a month before launch and then bigger H's once the product hits stores. "We've already passed it on to the design atelier in Paris and they've embraced it," said Robert Chavez, president and chief executive officer of Hermès USA.

Team Saks developed new ways to reach and attract men's customers in the store, particularly on the sixth and seventh floors. Proposals included enlisting "Ambassadors of Style" to each throw a benefit party on the men's floors. Products, like a pen with a built-in laser pointer, as well as Saks logoed umbrellas that open to reveal a panoramic skyline of the city underneath, were also suggested, as was an express elevators to the men's floors, same day alterations, and online personal consultants.



Team Vuitton's ranch-inspired accessories

Team Vuitton had perhaps the most time-intensive and laborious proposal for their mission, which was to enhance the company's association with luxurious travel for potential growth, developing a new collection of custom pieces based on region using the brand's Nomad leather. An autumn picnic in Central Park? Try a Vuitton muffin container or Thermos cover. In San Francisco? An art box. For Dallas and Houston? A Vuitton trophy/tiara container and bi-level case to stow Stetsons and/or knives on the ranch, respectively. Aspen? A wardrobe case, complete with swivel seat, for skis and ski gear, and for overseas trips, magazine containers, eyemasks, and noise reducing headphones. Going one step further, Team Vuitton proposed introducing a "Customize Your Space" campaign at NASA Kennedy Space Center, with an exhibit of custom made pieces designed by astronauts (LV for space travel—who would've thought?) And perhaps as a nod to a moneyed version of *Survivor*, students introduced a Louis Vuitton island, which would be leased or owned and operated by the company to launch an exotic island collection.



Team Ferragamo's Vara vending machine

It's always hard to tamper with a tried-and-true classic, but Team Ferragamo updated the company's famous Vara shoe in order to relaunch an icon. "The bow makes it girly but not sexy," said one student, who said consumers described the shoe as not so comfortable, youthful, or fashion forward. Their plan? Carve out the heel, unravel the bow, introduce three heel heights, and match the sole to the buckle—essentially letting the shoe "let its hair down." To target concentrated areas of influential fashion types, students suggested setting up a Vara vending machine to dispense shoes during fashion week at Bryant Park or at various events at the Cannes Film Festival.

This year, unlike years past, questions were virtually nonexistent, as were budgets—with the exception of Ferragamo. But as Heico Wesselius, an assistant professor in design and management at Parsons, pointed out, "A lot of these companies compete with each other [in real life] and so there was a need to be guarded." He added that there was more "richness" to

the private presentations shown to each respective company the week before. "Clients had the choice in releasing cost and financial data," he said. "In the end, a proper budget analysis is difficult to do in a 10 minute presentation."

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