



All in good taste

Some of the world's most fêted fashion labels are bringing their sense of style to the food and beverage world

WORDS CHARLOTTE MCMANUS



PHOTOGRAPHY: ANDRE LORIANO (LOUIS VUITTON)

Clockwise from far left: Louis Vuitton's LV Dream cultural space in Paris serves up fantasy pastries; the LV Dream café is named for pastry chef Maxime Frédéric; Gucci Osteria Seoul

Historically speaking, the world of luxury fashion has not shared a close relationship with food. Yesterday's style-obsessed designer acolytes were more synonymous with sparkling water and cigarettes than pasta and fries. A trip to an upmarket boutique might have involved a glass of Champagne, but little else.

However, recent months have seen a shift towards a tantalising new trend, with many of the industry's most fêted labels establishing dedicated F&B spaces that combine the height of style with the *crème de la crème* of cuisine. The opportunity to nibble on a sticky Dior pastry or tuck into a succulent Gucci burger is becoming increasingly possible for fashion fans around the globe.

"We have predicted the blurring between fashion and the food and drink industry for some time," says Jennifer Creevy, director of food and drink at trend forecaster WGSN. "Now this is coming to fruition, with fashion brands opening up bars and restaurants, and moving into the drinks and snacking space."

Though fashion brands experimenting with lifestyle offerings isn't exactly new — whether it's beauty, homeware, or even hotels, chances are, it's been done — it is notoriously tricky to make a dent in the realm of F&B, even for names with a luxury pedigree. As a result, while the occasional designer eatery has surfaced over the years — one notable example being harbinger Chanel launching fine dining restaurant



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Beige in Tokyo in 2004, in collaboration with Ducasse Paris – it’s only now that we’re seeing fashion houses really sinking their teeth into the idea.

Take Paris as an example. There, well-heeled diners are fighting to get a table at the new Monsieur Dior restaurant; a space that’s as dressed to impress as its clientele. An integral aspect of Dior’s 10,000-square-metre 30 Avenue Montaigne boutique – and a first for the French flagship, following its recent head-to-toe renovation – the Peter Marino-designed interior sees designer-clad waiters circle an airy dining room replete with the maison’s signature

codes, such as houndstooth-patterned seating. A gigantic Guy Limone art wall is collaged with over 1,000 vintage cut-outs showing Dior’s archive of collections.

In the kitchen, French chef Jean Imbert crafts cuisine inspired by the life of the real Monsieur Dior, from a soft-boiled egg served on a bed of caviar – a favourite childhood dish – to the entrecôte frites du defile the designer was said to have indulged in before every catwalk show. Imbert also helms the on-site Pâtisserie Dior, a more casual eatery dedicated to coffee and pastries.

Other designer sweet shops are gaining pace elsewhere at LVMH. In December, the luxury conglomerate launched a pop-up patisserie in collaboration with its Paris-based fashion e-com brand, 24S. Located on Rue Sainte Croix de la Bretonnerie, its sugary confections were modelled after iconic styles stocked on the 24S platform, including a Fendi First bag spun from meringue and mousse, and a raspberry financier-cum-cheesecake shaped to resemble the Balmain six-button jacket.

“Like Parisian fashion and luxury, pastry is the ultimate symbol of the French way of life,” says Tal Spiegel, 24S Pâtisserie’s pastry chef. “Both are the result of passion combined with craftsmanship. Not everyone can afford the pieces on 24S, so we wanted



Clockwise from top far left: meticulous technique from Tal Spiegel, pastry chef at LVMH’s 24S Pâtisserie; the dishes at Gucci Osteria Seoul reflect the brand’s innate elegance; Spiegel’s creations include Balmain and Burberry, rendered as desserts



to offer an accessible luxury experience for fashion lovers, at a more affordable price point.”

Also in Paris, Maxime Frédéric at Louis Vuitton — named for its star pastry chef — is a new café and chocolate shop located within the recently launched LV Dream cultural exhibition space in Paris. Visitors can indulge in a variety of treats, from bombons to cakes and beyond. Confectionery comes detailed with Louis Vuitton iconography, such as the Damier Ebène checkerboard; each edible creation is meticulously crafted by hand using the same artisanal savoir-faire that is applied to the brand’s signature trunks.

In the UK, following the success of a Café Dior winter pop-up, spring saw Harrods open the doors to its new Prada Caffè, open until January 2024. With tasteful décor awash in pastel Prada green, complemented by a monochrome chequered floor reminiscent of the one in the label’s inaugural 1913 boutique, the design borrows inspiration from one of Milan’s most historic patisseries, Pasticceria Marchesi. Continuing the Italian theme, dishes include pizettes, cannelloni and tramezzini sandwiches, served on exclusive Prada tableware alongside branded crystal glasses. Diners can round off proceedings with a negroni sbagliato cocktail, or enjoy a gelato to go from the ice cream stall positioned outside the Hans Road entrance.

Prada Caffè’s menu describes how the activation “adds a new dimension to the Prada brand” offering “an engaging and stimulating experience” that “reflects Prada’s tastes and passions.”

While Europe is starting to experiment with luxury branded cafés and restaurants, East Asia has been at the forefront of the trend from the start. In fact, numerous luxury brands have debuted their concept cuisine in countries such as China and Japan before installing activations in other regions. Recent East Asian launches have included Ralph’s Bar in Chengdu — an old-school restaurant and bar concept from Ralph Lauren that combines classic design with Stateside-themed cuisine and an impressive range of American whiskies. Other examples include a Café Kitsuné in Singapore, plus Maison Margiela Café pop-ups in Shanghai and Shenzhen.

In Seoul, Gucci recently opened its latest Osteria restaurant — to no small degree of anticipation among South Koreans, given that several of the brand’s other Osteria outposts have scooped a Michelin star. The kitchen is led by chefs Hyungkyu Jun and Davide Cardellini, who together rework classic Italian fare with a contemporary Korean twist. Gucci’s signature, super-indulgent Emilia Burger sits in pride of place on the menu, here combining a cotichino patty with hanwoo beef, topped with salsa verde and sticky balsamic.

“Food brands now deliver as much cool currency as fashion brands”

For today’s hyper-visual, Insta-happy consumer, these stylishly curated fashion-meets-food initiatives appear to work as a savvy marketing approach. They make it easier for younger or aspirational shoppers to savour a taste of the luxury lifestyle; they also enhance the value and desirability of bricks-and-mortar boutiques, tempting shoppers back into stores.

Crevey agrees. “Fashion used to be the biggest cultural concern for younger generations; now, food and drink is as important a status symbol,” she says. “The food and drink brands that consumers choose are now very much a part of who they are and what they stand for, as much as the clothes that they wear. Fashion houses are understanding these changing values and moving into this space to align with future consumers.”

As more designer-branded eateries open, is there a risk of diluting the exclusivity factor of a luxury maison — or even causing consumer fatigue?

“Food brands now deliver as much cool currency as fashion brands,” Crevey responds. “Consumers will applaud them for being bold and brave.”



From far left: the Prada Caffè at Harrods is decorated in the brand’s signature pastel green; the café’s monochrome chequered floor draws on historical design cues that recall Prada’s inaugural boutique

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