



Welcome to Maison Aspiration

An increasing number of luxury brands are venturing into hotels. From fashion – Armani; jewelry – Bulgari; food – Nobu; and department store – Harrods.

Alexandra Kohut-Cole says High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs) can now totally immerse themselves in the luxury lifestyle of their favorite brand.

THERE HAS BEEN A noticeable revolution in the business of luxury concerning lifestyle consumerism, and the shift to diversification into hotels is leading the way. Lifestyle hotels catering specifically to high-net-worth individuals are being created by high-end luxury brands in partnership with luxury hotel groups and property operators.

Hot on the heels of the rumored Armani Admiralty Arch Hotel in London, it seems a hotel is the next feather in the cap aspired to in the race to provide the ultimate luxury lifestyle. Developers are said to be considering Armani Hotels, among others, to take on this role. Admiralty Arch is a 1912 Grade I listed monument leading from Trafalgar Square to Buckingham Palace and overlooks Whitehall.

Giorgio Armani SpA partnered with UAE property developer Emaar to create the Armani flagship hotel in the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, which opened in 2010.

Hotel Missoni, associated with the international group Rezidor, at last count has opened five lifestyle hotels, in Edinburgh, Kuwait, Oman, Brazil, Turkey, with another, Mauritius, due in 2014. And the famous French crystal company Baccarat (owned by the Starwood Capital Group) will launch the Baccarat New York Hotel in 2014 complete with a crystal bar. Italian fashion house Salvatore Ferragamo is also considering expanding into the hospitality sector in the Middle East.

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some locations... We are open to expanding," Giovanna Gentile Ferragamo, vice president of the fashion brand's holding company and the second of founder Salvatore Ferragamo's six children, said in an interview to a Dubai-based magazine. She added: "What we have done in hotels up until now, it is very much like small boutique hotels. I think in a place like [Dubai] you really need to do something on a larger, wider base. But we are looking to some possibilities."

Jewelry-maker to the stars, Bulgari, partnered with Marriott Hotels to create the Bulgari Hotel in Bali in 2009, becoming the first jeweler to do so. The mere mention of a Bulgari hotel conjures an image of a vast jewel set in the

ocean. There is also a Bulgari hotel in Milan, Bulgari restaurants in Tokyo and Osaka, and a Bulgari hotel is due to launch in Shanghai in 2015. The owners of the Cheval Blanc hotel in Courchevel, LVMH, are planning to expand the brand to Paris in 2016 in a re-development of La Samaritaine department store. Three others are in the design stage in the Maldives, Egypt and Oman.

The fashion designer hotel concept is explored by Maria Meitern, partner at international boutique management advisory firm Luxury Movement: "While in the case of fashion brands with dedicated home collections, the diversification into hotels seemed more sensible as it would promote their products, for other brands such as Moschino or Maison Martin Margiela, hotels are more a design statement, aiming for increased awareness from a creative point of view".

It is a trend fast gathering pace. So, in a sphere where the new is ever important, who did it first?

Possibly it was the Ferragamo to spark the trend in 1995 when they first opened their first boutique hotel. They also launched the Gallery Hotel Art in Florence in 1999, a contemporary design hotel by architect Michele Bonan. "Entering the world of hospitality is very important to my family as it's very similar to the world of fashion, giving us the opportunity to create a different experience and lasting memories," Leonardo Ferragamo explains on the company website.

Then in 2000 the Palazzo Versace was born, with the help of Sunland Group, on the Australian Gold Coast, home

to Surfers' Paradise, adding another kind of paradise.

The newbie on the block is Nobu, the global Japanese restaurant phenomenon. Nobu Hotel opened in January 2013 in Las Vegas at Caesars Palace, and CNN named it the hottest new hotel of 2013. Nobu already has its sights set on Riyadh, London and Manama. And according to CPP Luxury, Harrods' new owner Qatar Holding is said to be all set to launch the first Harrods Hotel in the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur.

So, does this diversification work? And if so, why and how? The venture will no doubt be aided by partnering with a similarly-placed high-end hotel chain with an exemplary record. But what do you get with a lifestyle hotel for your brand? Certainly a strong brand presence and hopefully brand loyalty with existing customers; as well as a novelty value there will be an intention of bringing increased brand awareness. But this can only work if the quality is not compromised. The philosophy behind fashion hotels can be well demonstrated in the words of Bulgari Group CEO, Francesco Trapani who said, in 2001, "Our dream is a Japanese person who gets married in a Bulgari Hotel, buys his spouse's gift in a Bulgari shop and spends the honeymoon in a Bulgari resort."

Projects are definitely buzz-generating. Furthermore, renowned couture houses have launched furniture and home accessories lines. Wouldn't it be safer to just stick to designing the furniture? Fendi Casa are set to design the interiors of luxury apartments in Dubai and Riyadh for Damac Properties as well as 100 serviced apartments in Riyadh ready for a 2016 opening. Bottega Veneta has created branded suites in St Regis Hotels in New York and Rome and one in the Park Hyatt Hotel Chicago. Diane Von Furstenberg has designed the 'Grand Piano Suite' at Claridges Hotel in London.

The phenomenon, however, looks here to stay. Christian Lacroix has completed interior design work at several landmark hotels, including the Hotel Le Petit Moulin in Paris. Oscar de la Renta designed Tortuga Bay, a boutique hotel in the Dominican Republic, and Azzedine Alaïa has converted a 17th-century building in the Marais into three exclusively designed suites in Paris.

The luxury DNA is integral to the lavish lifestyle. A yearning to be a part of this way of life is what these fashion and luxury brand hotels cater to. The guests can be immersed in the experience and their desire for the ultimate luxury is complete.



The breathtakingly beautiful Bulgari Hotel in Bali

Leonardo Ferragamo sparked the trend of luxury brands venturing into hotels.



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