



COURTESY LOUIS VUITTON

The new Vancouver outpost of Louis Vuitton is the brand's largest in Canada. British Columbians, get shopping!

As Louis Vuitton opens in Vancouver, fans of the haute brand know this:

Don't expect a discount

By NATHALIE ATKINSON

Louis Vuitton has more than 450 stores around the world and celebrates about 70 new store launches, projects and major refurbishments a year, complete with deluxe launch parties — to say nothing of the private dinners and events, like the one last month for the publication of Keith Richards' autobiography (Richards stars in the latest Core Value advertisement). Vuitton executives can't attend all of them, although they certainly try.

"This [Maison] is particularly important," says the company's executive vice president Philippe Schaus by phone; he flew into Vancouver on Thursday to attend the lavish opening party, where a procession of planes, trains and then automobiles shuttled international VIPs to a warehouse

East meets West here and in consequence, this store we are opening today is also significantly larger than the previous store."

Whether aspirational or affluent, spending \$420 for a pochette or \$3,420 for a diamond-studded gold pendant, shoppers take in a soaring two-storey wall of handbags, and in the stairwell, a selection of the Technicolor serigraphs by Vancouver artist Stephen Shearer that make up the Maison's permanent art installation.

But if you're eyeing that handmade \$34,000 wardrobe trunk, don't wait for Boxing Day deals. Louis Vuitton has a strict no-discount policy worldwide. "There is no individual discount, there is no sale, there is no factory outlet, absolutely nothing like that," Schaus explains. "We define the price based on our costs

ago when there was a huge discounting going on in department stores, in America especially, we were the only brand which was not discounted — literally the only brand — and you know what? We did better than them."

"When times are difficult, people go for value," he continues. "Value is about the quality of what you do, the integrity of the brand, and the fact that your product is not devalued by price reduction," he says.

One of those ways is the recent foray into fine jewellery, also carried at the Vancouver Maison. They offer precious baubles and luxury watches like the Tambour Spin Time, and have created trademark diamond cuts based on the house's Monogram canvas. And cannily, just as Tiffany & Co. began dipping into the luxury leather goods business this fall with the debut of an upscale line designed by Richard Lambertson and John Truex, Louis Vuitton announced plans for a

Another way to stay relevant is diverse store formats, not just Maisons and hushed jewellery shops. Just as the Vancouver Maison was opening, Louis Vuitton announced plans for a boutique at Seoul's Incheon airport. Remarkably, for a company crafted on the romance and nostalgia of travel-related goods, Louis Vuitton has never had an airport store.

"Almost all the luxury brands are present in airports," Schaus says, even if it's merely with a rack of

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that had been transformed into a signature space (any resemblance to a certain cult John Candy holiday movie was purely coincidental).

The emphasis on transit ties in with the company's founding philosophy, strategy and the reason for such a strong retail presence in Vancouver; it's now the largest Vuitton store in Canada. "It's a very strategic city for us," Schaus says, "because of its cosmopolitanism and orientation towards Asia, it's really

— the hours that go into the product and the materials we are using. On that we fix a defined price that we feel corresponds. We don't think it would be right for one customer to pay a higher price and then two months later another to pay less."

During the recent economic downturn, that policy had an "extremely positive" impact on the psychology of Louis Vuitton's existing and future luxury consumers, thinks Schaus. "You know, two years

"Vuitton has existed for more than 150 years," Schaus continues. "It's like with the famous advertisement of that watch where they say you don't own the watch, you are only the guardian for future generations. I like to say we don't own Louis Vuitton, we just take care of the brand for the current customers and next generation of managers. We continue to build up the brand to make it more sophisticated, more exciting."

flagship fine jewellery shop in Paris's Place Vendôme.

When you're serious about jewellery, it doesn't get any more serious than a corner boutique with good windows on Place Vendôme: Neighbours will include Boucheron and The Ritz.

Impressive — and for fans of the brand who really wouldn't mind the occasional sale, potentially too posh for casual browsing. "That's also why you cannot just be in Place Vendôme," Schaus says. "We opened a very nice jewellery area in Printemps [the French department store] in the summer. So now you have the two sides — Place Vendôme is an intimidating place but it's also a beautiful area and one of the nicest squares in Paris, if not the world. And then for people who might be too intimidated."

silk ties. "We always resisted going into one because we always felt it was not commensurate with the prestige of the brand. But we always felt if you could find the right place ..." The store in South Korea, he says, will be a large, dramatic space. "It's very impressive in terms of size, very strategic, very visible and the volumes will be fantastic." That's also the expectation with Vancouver.

Was the Vancouver Maison's Christmas retail season opening intentional? "Being able to open around the holidays is nice because it puts you in the holiday mood," Schaus admits. "When you open a store you are in a festive mood. And if you open in a festive part of the year, it's even better!"

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