



CASE STUDY: LOUIS VUITTON The storied atelier smartly built on its heritage over the years, working with some of the most forward-thinking minds in fashion. Abloh is the latest in a long string of prescient hires poised to bring the house into the future.

When Virgil Abloh was announced as men's artistic director of Louis Vuitton in March 2018, it seemed like the dawn of a new era in the luxury sector. By hiring Abloh—a well-known polymath who has a degree in architecture, takes gigs as a DJ, once worked closely with Kanye West as a creative director, and runs his own wildly popular label, Off-White™—Louis Vuitton seemed to be formally acknowledging streetwear as the driving force in the menswear market.

"Having followed with great interest Virgil's ascent since he worked with me at Fendi in 2006, I am thrilled to see how his innate creativity and disruptive approach have made him so relevant, not just in the world of fashion but in popular culture today," said Michael Burke, Louis Vuitton's chairman and CEO, in a statement. "His sensibility toward luxury and *savoir faire* will be instrumental in taking Louis Vuitton's menswear into the future."

The move demonstrates how Louis Vuitton has been able to master the fine art of balancing two oppositional forces: honoring one's own roots and looking boldly toward the future. It's this balance that has kept the brand a leading name in the high-end European design world for nearly two centuries. And by committing itself to forward-thinking, boundary-breaking designers like Abloh and, for womenswear, the critically lauded Nicolas Ghesquière, Louis Vuitton has kept its name in the news, its cultural relevance intact, and its register tills bursting. According to Forbes, as of May 2019 the brand was worth an astonishing \$39.3 billion, while Interbrand, the global brand consultancy agency, ranked it 18th in its 2018 list of top brands, ahead of Chanel, Hermès, and Gucci.

Louis Vuitton's ability to see beyond traditional guardrails of what luxury is and welcome daring viewpoints into the fold has helped set the template for the modern fashion house, with pioneering, if limited, ready-to-wear lines serving as bold gestures that help to then promote more digestible, commercially viable products like leather goods, accessories, and fragrances.



Opposite: A runway look from Virgil Abloh's debut menswear collection for Louis Vuitton, Spring/Summer 2019, featuring an iridescent Keepall bag. **Above:** A belt with a ceramic orange chain from Abloh's debut collection.