Celebrities add a twist to fashion campaign trails

Louis Vuitton's place in the fashion world has long been assured but it recently ventured in a bold new direction, tapping into the talents of designer Marc Jacobs and director Sophia Coppola which has surprised and pleased in equal measure. By Rachel Chrysostom

Louis Vuitton has stayed at the forefront of fashion without compromising traditional craftsmanship. In its latest campaign it has teamed up with a number of designers to create pioneering designs, adorned, as always with the time-honoured LV logo. One such collaboration was with designer Marc Jacobs, who utilised the graffiti leopard images of artist and designer Stephen Sprouse, for a 2006 collection which sold out instantly. Young director Sofia Coppola has since followed in the designers' footsteps with her own design ideas for Louis Vuitton. However, it is not only in the design that Louis Vuitton excels. The house of design has also managed to impress the public with its high-profile collaborations and advertising campaigns. The company has carefully cultivated a celebrity following that has used famous models and actresses in its marketing campaigns. Following the success of their campaigns which included USSR leader Mikhail Gorbachev, tennis champions Steffi Graf and Andre Agassi and others, the fashion house has signed contracts with Madonna and Sean Connery.

An hommage to Stephen Sprouse

Stephen Sprouse has been credited with pioneering the 1980s mix of 'uptown sophistication in clothing with a downtown punk and pop sensibility.' Marc Jacobs, a fan of the designer's work and newly-appointed Artistic Director for Louis Vuitton wanted to somehow incorporate Sprouse's designs into the Louis Vuitton logo.

"I had this idea to kind of deface the Monogram, and I wanted to do that with graffiti, which to me was always a defiant act, a rebellious act, an anarchic act, but also something that creates a new surface and new meaning with something old," he said. "So I thought, whose hand and whose graffiti would mean something to me, and of course I went back to Stephen. I invited him to basically deface with his fabulous graffiti, the iconic Monogram, therefore creating a new Monogram and a new way of promoting Louis Vuitton that was disrespectful and respectful at the same time."

The original idea was born when Marc Jacobs visited Charlotte Gainsbourg's apartment in Paris on the Rue du Bac. In the corner of her bedroom, his eye caught sight of a trunk covered in black paint which had rubbed off to show the Louis Vuitton Monogram canvas. The idea intruded him, taking something iconic and venerable, something respected and old, and making it new again by defacing it. The natural choice for making this idea happen was Stephen Sprouse himself. Several months later, preceded by uniformed porters laden with graffiti-tagged Monogram luggage, models took to the catwalk for Louis Vuitton's Spring/Summer collection carrying bags scrawled with Stephen Sprouse's graffiti, and wearing the artist's digitized rose prints. It was a seminal fashion moment; the first time Louis Vuitton's historic Monogram had become a canvas for creative expression, and the start of a series of celebrated collaborations with contemporary artists. Weeks later, the graffiti bags – sold out in Louis Vuitton's stores worldwide – were already a cult collector's item. When Stephen Sprouse, who was secretly battling lung cancer, died in March 2004, Marc Jacobs paid tribute to his art by using a leopard print created during the initial collaboration, but never before issued, for his Fall/Winter 2006-2007 collection. The Stephen Sprouse leopard-print scarf, revisited in different colours each season, is one of Louis Vuitton's most iconic items. As part of its tribute, Louis Vuitton made a donation to New York's National Academy of Design – Stephen Sprouse Scholarship fund.
Sofia Copolla, designer
The director’s collaboration with fashion house Louis Vuitton as a guest designer was completely unexpected for her. She had gone to Louis Vuitton’s Special Orders workshop in Amières, with the intention of placing her own special order when inspiration struck. Perhaps it shouldn’t have been so unexpected. When you have to be surrounded by beautiful things, when you have a keen sense of personal style and creativity runs in your genes, it is hard not to be inspired by the neat stacks of bobbins and spools, piles of canvas and coloured skins, and boards of tiny brass pieces. A year on from that fateful day, Sofia Copolla and Louis Vuitton are proud to present the results of their collaboration: a capsule line of bags and shoes whose starting point was simple – things that Sofia would love to have, but could not find. A day bag, for instance, that could fit everything she needed but was neither too big nor too heavy, and always chic and discreet. The colours, too, were carefully chosen: they had to be timeless and versatile, but not black, so that they could be used during the day as well. In addition to the iconic Monogram canvas, Sofia chose her favourite autumnal tones: cobalt and Jasper in supple, subtly grained leather and aubergine in soft, sensual suede. Designing the bag for women who, like herself, “walk around, have things to do and places to be,” she paid particular attention to practical details: the wide opening, the inside phone and zippered pockets, the detachable shoulder strap. The shoes were also designed in a similar fashion with the needs of busy, stylish women in mind. While Sofia, a resident of Paris as well as New York, admires French women who “walk around all day in crazy high heels”, she has an American’s love of easy elegance. Her creation was a flattering version of the Parisian sandal, with a chic narrow wedge, a slender ankle strap and cute peep toes. All the prototypes were tried and tested by Sofia herself, so you know that they will be items you will use and cherish for a long time.

Madonna as new face of Louis Vuitton
Following his acclaimed Spring/Summer 2008 ready-to-wear show for Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs knew exactly who he wanted to embody the spirit of the season. And so, the face of Louis Vuitton’s Spring Summer fashion campaign was none other than Madonna herself. The iconic pop star was photographed by her long-time creative collaborator Steven Meisel. This was the first time that the influential fashion photographer had shot a campaign for Louis Vuitton. The chemistry between the two is evident, as Meisel uses a sepia-toned setting reminiscent of a Paris café in the 1920s, complete with a zinc bar, bentwood chairs and an air thick with smoke, to
transform Madonna into Marc Jacobs’s vision of the quintessential Parisienne, striking provocative poses in the season’s sexy short skirts, ethnic-inspired sandals and animal-print bangles. “I wanted the campaign to be very bold, very sensual and very atmospheric,” says the designer. “To carry off all those references and all this sophistication we needed the ultimate performer – and for me, that is Madonna.”

The stunning shots of the Spring/Summer advertising campaign have been adorning the pages of glossy magazines since February 2009.

Sean Connery for the Louis Vuitton Core Values Campaign

Sir Sean Connery is the latest exceptional personality to hop on board the Louis Vuitton’s Core Values advertising campaign, playing on the theme of travel as a personal journey. In the sixth of a Louis Vuitton series of portraits, the veteran actor is photographed by acclaimed photographer Annie Leibovitz on a beach near his home in the Bahamas. Sitting on a rough wooden landing stage, the actor exudes the relaxed charm and natural elegance that have led him to being regarded as one of the world’s most attractive men. Next to him is the waterproof version of Louis Vuitton’s iconic Keepall travel bag. The tagline reads: “There are journeys that turn into legends. Bahamas Islands. 10/07.”

At the end of the campaign, the fashion house, actively committed to promoting environmental responsibility and sustainable development, made a donation to the Climate Project, spearheaded by Nobel Peace winner Al Gore, on behalf of Sean Connery.