

"We Sell Dreams"

Ketty Pucci-Sisti Maisonrouge has represented over 70 luxury brands on the U.S. market through the Comité Colbert, which includes **Hermès, Chanel, Baccarat, Christian Dior, Lalique and Louis Vuitton**. All of these companies now serve on the advisory board of the **Luxury Education Foundation**, of which Ketty Maisonrouge is co-founder and president.



What is the Comité Colbert and what inspired you to create the Luxury Education Foundation?

The Comité Colbert is an association that has promoted major French luxury brands since 1954, and I was their U.S. representative while they were active in the U.S. from 1989 until 2003.

Thanks to the Colbert Foundation, Columbia Business School and Parsons School of Design became the first

schools outside of France to offer specific MBA luxury programs. When the Comité Colbert shifted its focus to new emerging markets in Asia, we created the Luxury Education Foundation to continue the collaboration between Columbia and Parsons.

The goal is to allow design and marketing students to work together in teams, to understand the role that each field plays in the creation and marketing of luxury goods. The marketing of luxury brands demands collaboration; a designer can't function without business input. Many schools are now trying to emulate this program, but it is still unique to have two top-tier schools working together.

How have you seen the luxury market evolve over the past few years?

In 1989, when I began representing the Comité Colbert in the U.S., the luxury industry was very different than it is today. Luxury companies were of all different sizes, but they were essentially all family-owned. In the past five to 10 years, we've seen the birth and expansion of luxury groups such as LVMH (Louis Vuitton Moët Hennessy) and PPR (Pinault Printemps Redoute), which are publicly traded. These companies now need executives who

are trained in luxury retail. In consumer goods, the products you sell are supposed to answer a need. In the luxury field, there is no fulfillment of need involved—you must generate a desire, to make the clients dream.

What image do Americans have of luxury products and does this differ significantly from common French perceptions?

In France, there is still a greater level of awareness of luxury brand names than in other parts of the world. But the consumer now is global. Most of those people buying these brands travel extensively, so it's harder to look at individual markets today; we do live in a global world. At the end of day, every luxury firm sells a brand. Since we sell dreams, this is the connection with the client, the trust link between the client and the firm. It is important that every consumer feel the unity of the global image.

How do you define luxury?

Just look at Versailles and you see why France was considered the center of luxury hundreds of years ago. Luxury isn't so much about the product as it is about the experience. In France, you have amazing food and hotels offering amazing services. Beauty is all around you. There is a sense of creativity, a real appreciation of fine arts, an emphasis on the quality of life. France has been and will always remain one of the top destinations of luxury travel.

Is luxury necessarily tied to money?

Luxury doesn't have to be expensive. You can walk into a little bistro and have the best food and wine. This quality is very much across the board in France. Luxury is not just a brand; it's very personal. But most people will agree that when they go to France, the experiences of life are pretty amazing.