

Gucci celebrates 90 years with cocktail party in Naples

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NAPLES — We all have our regrets. One, which stands out particularly harshly in my annals of shame filled moments, involves a fierce pair of Gucci booties, a bounced rent check, some questionable long-term financial decisions and me repeating the mantra “but they’re Gucci.”

Needless to say, when I was asked to attend the Naples Gucci Store’s private cocktail party in honor of their 90th anniversary, I traveled sans wallet, just to be safe.

Not that I’m the only one who has ever fallen prey.

Named the most desirable luxury brand in the world by the Nielson Company in 2007, the design house has captivated fashionistas, celebrities, and girls with high credit card limits and low self-restraint since its inception in 1921.

And after posting 3.4 billion dollars in sales in 2010, Gucci is proving that at 90 they are anything but over the hill.

From humble origins, Guccio Gucci, granddaddy of today’s mega brand, had his sights set on the luxury market from the very beginning.

Employed at London’s swanky Savoy Hotel, Gucci noticed the upscale clientele’s opulent tastes permeated every category of their lives, all the way down to their luxury leather luggage. A native of Florence, Italy, a town rife with skilled leather artisans, Gucci knew he could produce a product of unparalleled craftsmanship, one the world’s elite would embrace.

It wasn’t long until the little leather shop in Florence was attracting the jet set crowd. In just a few years Hollywood starlets and global socialites would begin coveting Gucci goods, catapulting the brand to international recognition.

Over the years, stars like Audrey Hepburn, Vanessa Redgrave, Princess Grace Kelly and Madonna have been photographed wearing Gucci, adding to the brand hysteria. When Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis was seen commuting to work toting a Gucci bag, the style was renamed the Jackie O, a name the hobo bag retains to this day.

Which speaks to the brand's timelessness. Many of the styles in today's enviable lineup, are based off of pieces created years ago. By producing pieces with classic elegance, and avoiding the temptation to cater to every passing trend, Gucci's styles have endured the test of time. A particularly good example of this is Gucci's Bamboo Bag, and New Bamboo Bag, which were on display at last week's reception.

The bamboo handle, born of necessity after World War II when materials were in short supply, has become a legacy piece in the collection. With a few updates here and there including two sizes for the bag. The New Bamboo Bag is just as covetable today as it was in the late 1940s.

Perfect for matching with the breezy fabrics and beachy aesthetics so appropriate for south Florida, I found myself swooning over these bags in particular during last week's event, just as countless girls undoubtedly did some 65 years ago.

So Gucci, how do you look so good at 90?

The answer to that is frequent facelifts.

A slew of exquisitely talented creative directors over the years have been the golden ticket to keeping the wanton masses wanting more. From Dawn Mellow and Tom Ford, to Gucci's most recent creative director, Frida Giannini, the line has stayed fresh, relevant, fashion forward, and of course, incredibly desirable.

Meaning there will be no rest for my weary credit card as Gucci marches steadily toward a centennial of sartorial perfection.

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