

WHAT'S IN STORE: COFFEE WITH A DESIGNER TOUCH



With so many of today's shoppers displaying an insatiable appetite for luxury brands, perhaps it was only a matter of time before more high-end labels began offering coffee and culinary delicacies in their stores or at standalone cafes. **Nagi Morkos**, founder and managing partner at Hodema Consulting Services, takes us on a luxury coffee shop global tour.

Luxury brands continue to flourish, selling their customers the dream with glitz and glamor. Food is an ideal medium for channeling creativity, with hospitality well placed to offer a one-of-a-kind experience that's usually more affordable than designer clothes or accessories. Perhaps we shouldn't be surprised, then, that luxury brands are trying their hand at culinary art.

High-end coffee shops, in particular, are proving to be a popular option for brands looking for a platform to convey their distinctive stamp. If you're wondering where to find these luxury branded cafes, a good starting point is inside or next to designer stores, or in the stomping ground of their elite and cosmopolitan clientele.

A winning Italian formula

Italy is synonymous with major fashion brands and good food - a winning combo that makes the country an ideal location to open a coffee shop with luxury couture. Armani was a pioneer and spotted the potential of this marketing opportunity as far back as 2000, when the luxury brand opened its Emporio Armani Caffè and Ristorante via Croce Rossa in Milan. Open from dusk till dawn, it also has a lounge and a champagne bar. The venue underwent a full makeover in 2019, redesigned by Giorgio Armani himself, while the menu has Mediterranean influences, in keeping with the designer's personal food tastes. In 2017, the brand also opened a branch of its Caffè in Bologne. Milan is also Prada's place of birth and, since 2015, when its mastermind Muccia Prada opened her contemporary Art Fondazione, Bar Luce has been welcoming art, fashion and cinema lovers. Inspired by typical Italian cafes with Formica furniture and wood panels, the decor was conceived by the American director Wes

Anderson, who described the venue as a great "place to write a movie." Visitors to Florence, meanwhile, should look out for the Gucci Giardino 25 in the dreamy Plaza della Signoria. The latest addition to Gucci Garden, the cafe offers a selection of high-end specialty blends, before transforming into a cocktail venue when night falls.

Parisian style in a cup

Paris and stylish luxury fashion go hand in hand, so it should come as no surprise that nestled in the heart of the City of Lights, facing the river Seine, Le café Maxime Frédéric at Louis Vuitton can be found. The young chef, awarded the highest pastry nod by Le Gault & Millau in 2022, offers sugary delicacies in a tropical setting. A lunch menu is also available for those seeking something savory. Heading over to the iconic fashion boulevard Avenue Montaigne, visitors will find not only the Dior flagship store, but also its cafe and restaurant. The patisserie, located on the ground floor, provides a chic pitstop for those visiting the nearby museum. In contrast, Yves Saint Laurent has introduced a more underground take on the cafe concept, having attached to its shop a small and edgy chair-free coffee corner with red and neon lights. Located on the Saint-Germain-des-Prés crossroads and opened in 1998, visionary brand Armani's Emporio Armani Caffè & Ristorante is still going strong, while Ralph Lauren operates a typically American café, named *Ralph's Coffee*, which combines authentic style with gourmet treats. Maison Kitsuné, the fashion-forward French-Japanese luxury streetwear label, has found a successful cafe formula, with 18 outlets worldwide, including one located next to the Louvre, which unsurprisingly exudes a classic Parisian bistro vibe.

London: shops and coffee stops

In London, the luxury coffee shops lie at the heart of busy shopping districts. Some are even inside department stores, such as American jewelry brand Tiffany & Co.'s Blue Box Cafe at Harrod's. The chic corner is now also home to a Prada Caffè, following in the steps of Fendi, which opened a pop-up cafe in 2019. In Belgravia, meanwhile, the quirky designer Anya Hindmarch has transferred her imaginative designs to food. Visitors to Anya Cafe will find a menu that includes monster cakes, chubby hearts and caterpillar tarts. Flagship stores are also proving to be popular spots for brands looking to open cafes. Located at Burberry's Regent Street address, Thomas's Café pays tribute to its founder. The company also briefly opened the pop-up Norman's Cafe in 2023. New Bond Street - another iconic London location - has been home to *Ralph's Coffee* since 2014, attracting fashionistas with its typical Ralph Lauren décor. And coffee purists will be delighted to hear that Prada has brought the historic Milanese Cafe Marchesi 1824 to Mayfair.

Asia's ideal fanbase

Asia is undoubtedly offering luxury coffee shops, given the passion there for high fashion. An early bird, Armani opened its Emporia Armani Caffè in Tokyo, Japan, followed by a second in Osaka. The Japanese capital is definitely the go-to location; Cafe Dior has partnered with Ladurée in the popular Ginza district, while in the same area, Le Café V, by Louis Vuitton, offers flavors of Paris. Bulgari, meanwhile, brings glamor to Il Café, situated near the Italian house's jewelry shop in Omotesando. Gucci Café

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takes things to the next level, offering chocolates stamped with the brand's logo, while *Ralph's Coffee* has put down roots in both Tokyo and Kyoto. The US fashion company's coffee shop can also be found in Beijing, in a sign that things are booming in China, another fashion-loving nation, too. Burberry has opened a branch of its Thomas's Cafe in Shenzhen and, in recent years, several pop-ups have also made the headlines, from the Prada Garden at Jiya Gathering to the Fendi Caffè in Changbaishan. Other luxury brand cafes drawing in fashionistas include Vuitton at the Yuyuan Shopping Center and the Qixi Festival, the Maison Margiela and Seesaw Coffee pop-up. On the other side of the strait, Hong Kong is proving to be a firm designers' favorite. The Tiffany Blue Box Cafe has opened a branch there, alongside Ralph Lauren's *Ralph's*, with Vivienne Westwood and Agnès b. also taking the plunge.

Designer cafe life from Dubai to Egypt

It didn't take long for Dubai to become a destination associated with luxury and marketing. Today, the emirate is firmly established as home to both money and luxury brands, so it was only a matter of time before high-end cafes opened their doors there. Armani, again a trailblazer in the industry, opened its first cafe in 2006, before expanding to Egypt and later to Doha. It has two branches at the Mall of the Emirates and Dubai Mall. Two familiar names - Tiffany Blue Box Café and *Ralph's* - can also be found there. In addition, Valentino briefly launched a pop-up at Atlantis the Royal toward the end of 2023.

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The Tiffany Blue Box Café