

Walpole

British Luxury Summit

2025

SETTING THE COURSE FOR LUXURY

SUMMARY

15TH MAY 2025

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WEEK

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Walpole
British Luxury Summit

Walpole

Agenda

8.00am REGISTRATION, COFFEE AND NETWORKING

8.45am **Welcome**

Helen Brocklebank, CEO, Walpole

8.50am **Introduction and Summit Overview**

Charlotte Keesing, Summit Director, Walpole

9.00am **The Walpole View**

Presentation by **Michael Ward**, Chair, Walpole, and Managing Director, Harrods

9.10am **The Macroeconomic and Political Outlook: Ten headlines to watch**

Jon Yeomans, Business Editor, *The Sunday Times*

9.30am **The Global Outlook for Luxury**

Presentation by **Andrea Steiner**, Senior Manager, Bain & Company, followed by panel discussion featuring: **Erwan Rambourg**, Global Head of Consumer & Retail Equity Research, HSBC; **Michael Ward**, Managing Director, Harrods; and **Katie Prescott**, Technology Business Editor, *The Times*

10.15am **Lessons in Luxury: Leading the transformation of luxury in the GCC**

In conversation with **Patrick Chalhoub**, Executive Chairman, Chalhoub Group

10.45am NETWORKING AND COFFEE

11.15am **Architects of Joy**

Yinka Ilori MBE, Artist and designer in conversation with **Katy Wickremesinghe**, Founder, KTW & The Wick

11.40am **Facing New Frontiers: Wellness and biohacking in luxury**

Presentation by **Chris Sanderson**, Co-Founder & CEO, The Future Laboratory, followed by panel discussion featuring: **Dr George Gaitanos**, Chief Operating and Scientific Officer, Chenot Group; **Lucy Goff**, Founder, LYMA; and **Kate Woolhouse**, CEO, Hooke

12.25pm **Luxury and the AI Mindset**

Presentation by **Greg Williams**, Deputy Global Editorial Director, *WIRED*

12.45pm **Evolution for the Win: How to thrive as a British luxury brand**

Andrea Baldo, CEO, Mulberry in conversation with **Kirsty McGregor**, Executive European Editor, *Vogue Business*

1.15pm NETWORKING LUNCH AND BREAKOUT SESSIONS

2.30pm **Reaching the Unreachable: Invaluable insights into UHNW customers and VICs** Presentation by **Amrita Banta**, Managing Director, Agility Research & Strategy

2.50pm **Beyond the Brand: The new importance of experiential and sensorial luxury**

Panel discussion featuring: **Rebecca Burdess**, Global Head of Guest Experience and Services, Maybourne; **Freddie Denham Webb**, Co-Founder and Creative Director, Father; **Anna Gallagher**, Customer Love Transformation Director, JLR; **Mikki Sandhu**, Head of Innovation Strategy, T&Pm; and **Catherine Sykes**, VP of Product Development, Jo Malone London

3.25pm **Craft, Couture and Culture: What India can teach the world about luxury**

Sabyasachi Mukherjee, Founder, Sabyasachi in conversation with **Divia Thani**, Global Editorial Director, *Condé Nast Traveller*

4.00pm NETWORKING AND TEA

4.30pm **Timeless British Luxury**

Julia Koeppen, Global General Manager, Penhaligon's in conversation with **Helena Lee**, Features and Special Projects Director, *Harper's Bazaar*

5.00pm **Capital Ideas: Why creativity is a superpower for London and luxury**

Dr Nicholas Cullinan OBE, Director, British Museum, in conversation with **Chioma Nnadi**, Head of Editorial Content, *British Vogue*

5.40pm NETWORKING AND COCKTAILS

Welcome



Helen Brocklebank
CEO, Walpole

The Walpole British Luxury Summit 2025 was a rich day of insights, ideas and inspiration – all designed to energise, spark new connections and help make 2025 the strongest year yet, even in what's proving to be a challenging landscape.

Walpole is the UK's only body dedicated to British luxury, a sector that's grown by an astonishing 69% in just five years to reach £81bn. That growth, despite significant headwinds, reflects the power of our beautiful, innovative, independent brands, all underpinned by nearly half a million skilled people across the UK. With £56bn in exports, every British luxury product sent overseas is a powerful ambassador for the UK's creativity, craftsmanship and cultural power.

Our mission at Walpole is to promote, protect and develop this exceptional sector. From pushing back against risks in the government's generative AI bill to celebrating wins in the UK-India trade deal for luxury cars, whisky and cosmetics, we've been actively championing your interests.

We've also made progress when it comes to reducing the US tariff on luxury cars from 25% to 10% – but that's not enough. With the US as our most important luxury market, one still rich in opportunity, we badly need a reduction in that 10% across all goods. In the meantime, it's vital that the government does all it can domestically to mitigate the damage of those tariffs. That's why we're pressing urgently for the return of tax-free shopping, so that when high-value visitors come here from the US they're met with a red carpet and ready access to the best of British luxury.

And yet, even with all these challenges, what I see in this community is remarkable. No other sector shows such resilience, such entrepreneurial spirit. You adapt. You innovate. You continue to inspire. The Summit is about developing that strength, arming you with research, analysis, ideas and inspiration so you can seize opportunity wherever it lies. Our brilliant experts shared their knowledge on how to win in emerging markets, discover powerful brand strategies, explore new trends and be reminded that at its core, luxury is about joy – creating pleasure through beauty, artistry and meaning.

One of British luxury's greatest strengths is its unity. More than 250 Walpole member brands stand together – with shared values, a shared customer and a shared commitment to excellence. That collective spirit makes us stronger, more resilient and more influential. When one of us wins, we all win.

Introduction



Charlotte Keesing
Summit Director,
Walpole

As ever, the Walpole British Luxury Summit offered a thought-provoking and action-inspiring programme that captured the main strategic priorities for our sector, tackled the realities of the current climate and focused on a number of the most compelling prospects.

In developing the programme for this year's Summit, we focused on three simple priorities:

- What matters now: how to navigate the current political and economic global landscape, as well as a harder trading environment, coupled with shifting consumer priorities
- What's coming next: identifying the new frontiers for luxury and how we can capitalise on them or mitigate their impact on our ability to do business
- Understanding the now and the next: where are the opportunities for growth that will enable our sector to reach the £125bn forecast made in our *Luxury in the Making* study last year?

We began the day hearing from Harrods' Managing Director, Michael Ward, who gave an unparalleled view of the luxury sector globally and the priorities to thrive. We then covered the view of the wider world in which we're operating, looking at the big picture and the turbulent political and economic landscape, before focusing on the outlook for the luxury sector globally, with talks from *The Sunday Times'* Jon Yeomans followed by the highlights of the Altagamma Bain Luxury Observatory from Bain's Andrea Steiner, and a panel with Michael Ward, and HSBC's Erwan Rambourg in conversation with *The Times'* Business Technology Editor, Katie Prescott.

Opportunities across the Middle East, now UK luxury's third largest international market, and lessons in servant leadership were the subject of our interview with Patrick Chalhoub, Executive Chairman of Chalhoub Group, before focus shifted to creativity and design. Brilliant artist and designer Yinka Ilori discussed these drivers of success and how to inspire joy in the hearts of customers with cultural commentator and Founder of KTW and The Wick, Katy Wickremesinghe.



Then it was on to a new frontier for luxury: wellness and biohacking – a sector growing at 10% annually driven by shifting consumer priorities and the pursuit of living better, for longer – with the latest research from The Future Laboratory’s Chris Sanderson followed by a panel bringing together three pioneers in longevity: Dr George Gaitanos of Chenot Group, Lucy Goff, founder of LYMA, and Kate Woolhouse, CEO of Hooke. With tech innovation and disruption in mind, we then looked at the risks and opportunities of AI for luxury with *WIRED*’s Greg Williams.

We were then delighted to welcome Mulberry’s new CEO, Andrea Baldo, who shared his strategy, lessons in leadership, and how British luxury brands can thrive drawing on their unique qualities and strengths with Kirsty McGregor of *Vogue Business*.

Invaluable research into UHNWs – that top tier of customer creating 65%+ of global market growth – was offered by Amrita Banta and Agility Research & Strategy’s latest Global Billionaires report before a fascinating conversation on the new frontier in brand marketing – multi-sensory luxury – with Maybourne’s Rebecca Burdess, JLR’s Anna Gallagher, Jo Malone’s Catherine Sykes, and sonic brand specialist Father’s Creative Director, Freddie Denham Webb,

in conversation with neuroscientist, strategist and marketer, Mikki Sandhu.

Sabyasachi Mukherjee, India’s leading luxury designer, offered up a fascinating conversation on the latest insights on the luxury market in India with the ever-inspiring Divia Thani, Global Editorial Director at *Condé Nast Traveller*. Penhaligon’s Julia Koeppen then took to the stage with *Harper’s Bazaar*’s Helena Lee to talk about the reimagination of one of Britain’s iconic perfume houses, before the day closed with a conversation on London’s superpower of creativity, the role of cultural generators and what’s in store for the British Museum with Dr Nicholas Cullinan OBE and *British Vogue*’s Chioma Nnadi.

As ever, we aimed for the Summit to blend both the business of luxury with the creativity and emotional connection that defines our success. We hope guests were armed with a thorough briefing on the latest developments, thinking and insights, a strong sense of the key priorities for luxury, and an understanding of the bold strategies that will lead to success. More importantly, our hope is that guests were refreshed and inspired by these conversations and left feeling optimistic about future prospects and their role in setting the course for luxury.

“You’ve got to be prepared to *invest in the future* and take those bold steps. You can either sit back or you can *rule your own destiny.*”

The Walpole View



Michael Ward
Managing Director,
Harrods

A lot of people ask me, are the glory days over? Is this the end of a bubble? Will the luxury sector come through? I know very firmly that my glass is more than half full.

We’ve had meteoric growth, which needed a pause, but luxury brands became complacent. Creativity disappeared and they thought the customer could be taken for a ride pricewise. The customer stood back and said, “This season’s collection is broadly the same as the last season’s. I’m not going to buy it.”

At the brands, there’s been a massive intake of breath and a realisation that they’ve got to change. The result has been a scramble of designers and what’s come to the fore is that creativity is the key, and where we’ve seen creativity it’s sold very, very well. Look at a brand that has gone back to its original DNA, like Miu Miu, where they’ve returned to playfulness. A brand that was in the doldrums is now absolutely flying because it’s creativity the customer wants.

I think this recognition of the faults in the industry will lead to this being a very successful year. There are two sorts of people in luxury at the moment: those who sit behind their desks and say, “I’ve not got tax-free shopping, and all the non-doms are disappearing, and the world is coming to an end.” And those who create their own future.

Nobody is saying it’s not hard work. You have to run twice as fast as you ever ran before, but you can do things that spark the imagination of the customer and make them want to come and see you. You’ve got to be prepared to invest in the future and take those bold steps. You can either sit back or you can rule your own destiny.

I’m absolutely confident that those people who step forward, who come up to the mark, are going to have an unbelievably prosperous future. Thanks to them, the luxury industry will go from absolute strength to strength. As I said, my glass is more than half full.

The Macroeconomic and Political Outlook: Ten headlines to watch



Jon Yeomans
Business Editor,
The Sunday Times

Jon Yeomans, Business Editor at *The Sunday Times*, kicked off the Walpole British Luxury Summit by breaking down the headlines that are going to be dominating our news feeds over the next 12 months.

Beginning with the domestic fiscal outlook for the UK, Yeomans predicts a “peaky” UK economy will cause headaches for Chancellor Rachel Reeves, with tax rises, spending reviews and a possible return to austerity on the cards. A bright spot for businesses, however, will be the continued decrease in interest rates, but Yeomans cautions that “inflation will remain sticky in some areas. While rates may go down, we are unlikely to go back to an era of next-to-zero rates. The cost of capital is being reset.”

Overseas, the uncertainty caused by a chaotic US administration seems unlikely to abate, with Yeomans pointing, in particular, to the effect of President Trump’s penchant for showmanship and seemingly little regard for the consequences. “Trump launches a trade war, he tanks the stock market, and then he quickly strikes deals so we’re almost back at where we started. Even more than in Trump’s first term, this is a television presidency driven by a president who thinks in terms of what drives ratings. Markets, companies, trade, people: these things all feel rather secondary.”



“Customers are comfortable *paying a premium for the peace of mind* of knowing your products are made to the *highest possible standards.*”

Related to this, of course, is a geopolitical landscape in which US policy decisions have a huge impact on the outcomes of both trade wars and ongoing conflict. While tensions between the US and China have cooled for now, actions taken by China to boost its flagging economy – which has been “hit by rising debt, falling property values and flatlining consumer confidence” – or changes in its position towards Taiwan and Russia could easily be viewed as antagonistic by the US. Elsewhere, the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East will likely continue to impact supply chains and global trade, with Yeomans predicting that any reprieve offered by a ceasefire in Ukraine may be offset by flaring conflict between India and Pakistan, as well as the ongoing war in Gaza.

One area likely to be notable for its absence of headlines, meanwhile, will be DEI and ESG. “In many cases, corporates are using the Trump administration as cover to roll back on

initiatives that they were perhaps never very comfortable with in the first place,” explains Yeomans. “It’s clear we are in an era where companies won’t be opining on social and cultural issues in a way they felt they had to in the past five years.”

But, adds Yeomans, don’t make the mistake of thinking that means you can abandon your own ESG commitments, particularly where sustainability is concerned. While you may become a ‘green husher’ – a company that acts on climate change without shouting about it – by now, says Yeomans, your customers see responsible practices as “baked in”. “They may not necessarily ask for it. They may just assume that your sustainable credentials are part and parcel of the price. Your customers are comfortable paying a premium for the peace of mind [of knowing] your products are made to the highest possible standards.”

The Global Outlook for Luxury



Polarisation – both geographically and among the different luxury sectors – is the word that best sums up the market in 2024, says Andrea Steiner, Senior Manager at Bain & Company. While the market as a whole shrank by around 3% compared to 2023, this was felt most keenly in product-led sectors, such as personal luxury goods and cars, while experience-based sectors, for example fine dining and travel, actually grew by 5%. As Steiner neatly puts it, “consumers are diverting their spending from owning products to experiences.”



Geographically, the slowdown in China continues apace, with the luxury market here shrinking by 20% in 2024, echoed by a 1% drop across the rest of Asia, contributing to a total loss of around 50 million luxury consumers worldwide. And while Europe and the Americas showed modest growth in 2024, the ongoing issues around US tariffs may well see this growth in the American market disrupted throughout 2025.



There are, however, some reasons to be cheerful, says Steiner: “We have regions like Japan that have been growing at double digit rates. It’s a market set to grow almost 20% fuelled by Chinese, Americans and Europeans flying to Japan for travelling and luxury shopping. I also think there are bright prospects in the Middle East.”



And, while there are certainly macroeconomic and geopolitical factors at play here, Steiner impresses that much of the damage may well have been self-inflicted. “Between 10 and 15% of consumers are pulling back from the market, not only due to macroeconomic pressure, but also due to a perceived sense of detachment towards brands, of lower creativity and of price hikes that were not fully justified by a similar increase in value.

Andrea Steiner

Senior Manager,
Bain & Company

Erwan Rambourg

Global Head of Consumer
& Retail Equity Research,
HSBC

Michael Ward

Managing Director,
Harrods

in conversation with

Katie Prescott

Technology Business Editor,
The Times

“Creativity is under the spotlight,” he continues. “What has been lost by some brands is their identity. With the change of creative teams comes a change in the DNA, the values of the brand, and this alienates the consumer. It makes it hard for consumers to find themselves and self-express through a brand.”

So how to reset, re-find your DNA and re-establish a connection with your customers? Begin by returning to the key facets that define a luxury brand – craftsmanship and artistry – while showing your customer that you stand for more than just the product on the shelves. “We talk about craftsmanship, transparency, authenticity and trust,” says Erwan Rambourg, Global Head of Consumer & Retail Equity Research at HSBC. “All of that points to the fact that this is a sector that will be isolated from the idea of pulling the plug on DEI. It’s sort of expected that you’re doing the right thing, producing in the right areas, promoting the right people.”

"If you're selling a cashmere jumper for £7,000, the supply chain can be correct and verifiable," agrees Michael Ward, Managing Director of Harrods. "What we have to do is differentiate ourselves from the person selling three shirts for £10, because there are totally different levels of social responsibility in that. Our industry is about aura – the reason we've got selective distribution is to make it special – and we've got to do the same with sustainability. How can we be sustainable but make sure that we differentiate ourselves from the pack?"

Both Rambourg and Ward agree, however, that any responsible luxury leader should also be looking at ways to use AI to their advantage. At Harrods, says Ward, it has

already been implemented to standardise sizing and help identify potential high-spending clients while, for Rambourg, it offers the opportunity for brands to return to "scarcity" by helping better predict buying patterns. "I think AI in creativity, in logistics, in production is very much game changing for this industry," he concludes.

However, says Ward, AI must never be allowed to take the place of human instinct and expertise. "It helps you get the information but it should never, ever be allowed to go into the showrooms and do the buy," he says. "It looks back. It would never predict that you want an orange dress if last season you sold a black dress."

"I think AI in creativity, in logistics, in production is very much *game changing for this industry.*"



Lessons in Luxury: Leading the transformation of luxury in the GCC



Patrick Chalhoub
Executive Chairman,
Chalhoub Group

The GCC may currently represent only 4% of the global luxury market but, with consistent year-on-year growth of 8-10%, as well as a booming tourist and vibrant young domestic consumer base, the region represents huge opportunity was the message from Patrick Chalhoub, Executive Chairman of the Chalhoub Group.

Alongside an influx of tourists from the US and UK, attracted by both opportunities for luxury shopping and the fresh hospitality offerings of Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Saudi Arabia, Chalhoub also points to the region's emerging and highly discerning youth market as a key target. "We have a young, wealthy population, which means they are more able to spend; the emergence of Gen Z, Gen A even, is much stronger in our part of the world."

These shoppers, advises Chalhoub, are increasingly brand savvy – and prioritise substance, creativity and the unusual when looking for brands that appeal to them. "We see a different mindset from this customer. The younger customer is much more attached to sustainability than anyone else, they are eager for newness, they are reassured by strong brands, but they do not want boring, they are playful."

To capture this market – and convert them to those all-important lifelong fans – means investing in your retail spaces and, even more importantly, your staff to take those opportunities for in-person connection to the next level. "Upscaling our resources is absolutely key because the customer is more and more knowledgeable," says Chalhoub. "The customer does not want a cashier giving them products they could find online. If we speak with passion and expertise, people will not even look at the price. People crave emotional connection. It's about that joy."

A strong team, of course, stems from strong leadership and Chalhoub advocates for what he calls 'servant leadership': having a clear vision, communicating it effectively and then giving your teams the support, resources and empowerment they need to execute it. "With empowerment you need to give trust," he adds. "You have to accept failure; you have to learn from it and move forward otherwise people will be scared to take initiative."

Architects of Joy



British artist and designer Yinka Ilori is no stranger to lending his uniquely colourful brand of creativity to commercial collaborations – having in recent years worked with a long list of household names including Meta, Bombay Sapphire, Lego, The North Face, Bulgari Hotel London and Sony – but post-Covid, he says, there is one thing he is asked for more than ever.

“Brands want joy – that’s the brief. I’ve been creating joy since I started in 2009 because my parents always celebrated joy through food, music, culture. What I’m seeing now is brands giving creative control to artists to let them tell a story about how they can bring joy.”



Yinka Ilori MBE
 Artist and designer
in conversation with
Katy Wickremesinghe
 Founder,
 KTW & The Wick

For Ilori this invariably means adding his signature colourful prints, inspired by his Nigerian heritage, to any given product or public space, but the message at large is clear: don't be afraid to be big and bold with your brand storytelling. After all, how else are you going to stand out from the crowd?

It’s a sentiment that chimes strongly with Ilori. In the early stages of his career, Ilori was turned away from every studio he applied to before being picked up by designer Lee Broom and eventually starting his own business with a grant from the King’s Trust (then the Prince’s Trust). But it is his steadfast loyalty to the uniquely vibrant style that feels authentic to him, coupled with a commitment to making his work as accessible as possible, that he believes has made him a success.

So, having worked on projects as everyday as a Marks & Spencer carrier bag and as high-end as a custom McLaren Artura supercar, while still maintaining his own artistic practice, how does he walk the fine line between creativity and commerciality? “I’ve always been obsessed with storytelling through design, public spaces, architecture; that’s where my love of design came from,” he explains. “[Collaborations] are about really respecting both brands and their ideas, their heritage, their culture, and bringing them together. How do we reach the audiences? How do we make what we’re creating accessible? But also, are we pushing boundaries?”

Facing New Frontiers: Wellness and biohacking in luxury



As luxury consumers continue to move away from a desire to merely own products and towards meaningful experiences and brands that promise to enrich their lives, we see the emergence of the idea of our bodies as the ultimate asset, says Chris Sanderson, Co-Founder & CEO of The Future Laboratory. Accordingly, the global wellness industry is now worth more than \$6tn – and presents huge potential for growth across the luxury sector.



Wellness, which Dr. George Gaitanos, Chief Operating and Scientific Officer at the Chenot Group, defines as “a dynamic way of living where body, mind, spirit are all engaged and that allows us to perform at our optimum” is more than the mere absence of ill health and, with the key window for longevity practices coming between the ages of 20 and 50, is a journey that luxury customers are embarking on earlier and earlier.



Kate Woolhouse, CEO of longevity clinic Hooke, says many of her clients begin coming to her in their mid-20s, partly because of increased awareness around the benefits of prevention over repair, and partly because of the growing status symbol nature of health and wellbeing. “People will talk about who their personal trainer is and their gym, more so than perhaps the handbag they’re wearing,” she explains. “There’s nothing more bespoke than personalised healthcare. Effectively, the consumer becomes the product, and everything is targeted and tailored specifically to the individual.”



Dr. George Gaitanos
Chief Operating and Scientific
Officer, Chenot Group

Lucy Goff
Founder, LYMA

Chris Sanderson
Co-Founder & CEO,
The Future Laboratory

Kate Woolhouse
CEO, Hooke

This idea of personalisation, already prevalent across the luxury sector, is absolutely imperative when it comes to longevity and wellness. After all, as Gaitanos reminds us, “There is no one-size-fits all when it comes to health.” But, says Sanderson, luxury businesses – be they cutting-edge clinics, spas, hotels or even retailers looking to take a more holistic approach to their sales points – are better positioned than ever to offer this custom experience.

“One of the skills we have in the luxury industry is our ability to address every single consumer as an individual because we have far fewer consumers than other businesses,” he says. “Where so many luxury industries have gone wrong over the past 30 years is that they started to behave like mass businesses; they lost sight of who the actual consumer was. Technology now enables us to talk to each and every single one of our consumers as individuals.”



Manage this effectively and your marketing may well take care of itself. Woolhouse describes word-of-mouth as the key driver of new client growth for her business, while Lucy Goff, Founder of skincare company LYMA, says the high-tech nature of her brand means she finds far more success with less conventional marketing routes.

"We don't find traction with the traditional beauty influencer," she explains. "We find a lot of traction through authentic storytelling in the professional setting. So, it might be a surgeon, it might be an aesthetician, it might be a dermatologist, but it's that professional credibility that gives the most authentic reach."

"One of the skills we have in the *luxury industry* is our ability to *address every single consumer as an individual* because we have far fewer consumers than other businesses."

Luxury & The AI Mindset



Greg Williams
Deputy Global
Editorial Director,
WIRED

Whatever stage your business is at in its AI journey, this is one technology that isn't going anywhere, says *WIRED*'s Deputy Global Editorial Director, Greg Williams. The potential of artificial intelligence, Williams explains, is closer in magnitude to the invention of the internet than a flash-in-the-pan fad like the metaverse: "We need to think of it as a consequential tool. This is an innovation that can transform businesses, organisations, behaviours and economies."

While many of us are now familiar with Generative AI (large language models like ChatGPT capable of generating text, images and videos), over the next 18 months, the emergence of more powerful Agentic AI models could offer huge efficiency savings and alleviate admin in both our personal and professional lives. With the private and public sectors investing around \$130bn per year in developing AI models, and with around 800 million people worldwide already using ChatGPT every month, Williams predicts the adoption of AI systems capable of booking holidays, managing calendars and even using initiative to schedule routine meetings and appointments could be rapid and widespread.

For luxury, however, the true value of AI lies in the increasingly in-depth knowledge it can offer on your customers, which in turn allows for ever more personal communication. "New uses of AI can really develop our understanding of customer preferences and provide highly curated suggestions, replicating the personal touch of an in-house consultant," explains Williams. "There's also a lot of research to suggest that personalised AI enhances customer engagement and drives higher conversion rates."

However, Williams warns, it is important to remember that AI is a tool – not a sentient being. It is only as powerful and as reliable as the way you choose to use it. Take, for example, the well-documented instances of AI 'hallucination' and misinformation. "AI models are not trying to mislead us – but they don't care whether what they tell us is true or not," says Williams. "It's just about being plausible. Technology has no relationship with truth."

Related, and top of mind for many in the creative industries when it comes to AI, are issues around the copyrighted data these models are trained on. OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT, is already facing lawsuits from institutions such as *The New York Times* for the illegal use of its copyrighted material, while artists, designers, authors, filmmakers and actors have also spoken out about the unlawful scraping of their work.

The truth, says Williams, is that creative brands who trade on their unique style and design signatures are particularly susceptible to this – and the luxury sector must respond accordingly. "I dare say that the data sets that [AI] is trained on do contain facets of your IP. The trouble is that digitalisation generally leads to commoditisation. It's really important that any creative industry acts very, very firmly in order to protect what it does best."

Evolution for the Win: How to thrive as a British luxury brand



Even by the admission of recently installed CEO, Andrea Baldo, British heritage brand Mulberry has lost a bit of its sparkle over the last few years – but he won't be making any of the usual excuses for its poor performance. "When a company has heritage and the strategy is not working, CEOs usually say something about macros or disruptions," he explains. "The reality is the company has drifted and lost contact with reality. Yes, you can reorganise and reduce costs, but it's re-finding the culture of the company that matters."



Andrea Baldo
CEO, Mulberry

in conversation with

Kirsty McGregor
Executive European
Editor, Vogue Business

For Baldo, this means a return to the 'Mulberry Spirit': both a campaign and a wider company ethos inspired by the outlook of Mulberry founder Roger Saul. First and foremost, this means "leading with creativity", with Baldo reorganising the creative arm of the business to be responsible not just for product design but the full span of brand touchpoints, be that window displays, the website homepage or campaign shoots.

Backing this up will be an attempt to reorient public perception around price and value when it comes to Mulberry's bags and leather goods. "Our products are half the price of a similar brand in Europe, so the price perception, I think, is wrong," explains Baldo. "A lot of people I met said we increased prices too much. This happened during what I call the 'Hermès era' of the brand, more than ten years ago.

"Today, we need to design products our customers are happy to have at the pub on Friday, not save for special occasions. That was one of the strategic missteps we made in the past. So many customers told me, 'I don't want to be scared to take it out of the dust bag, I want to wear it.' So now products are made to last, mostly in UK, and have the longevity of timelessness, but are also functional."



‘Made in the UK’ is a *huge focus for Mulberry* and will see the brand *continue to invest heavily* in its Somerset factory

This idea of ‘Made in the UK’ is also a huge focus for Baldo and will see the brand continue to invest heavily in its Somerset factory, where craftspeople are trained in both the production of new bags and the art of repairing vintage pieces. This emphasis on increasing the lifespan of a bag adds not only to its value, says Baldo, but also the perception of Mulberry as a brand which prioritises both traditional crafts and sustainability.

“Today, what we call the ‘green’ part of the business represents 1% of sales but it’s growing. How to make that profitable is the thing – and that’s why the brand needs to own the entire length of production. We are really investing in that part of our operation so that, in the next five years, it’s up to 10% of the business and profitable. That’s the

responsibility of a brand that has our kind of price point – sustainability has to become part of the price.”

While Baldo is in no doubt that having almost every part of Mulberry’s production based in the UK has myriad advantages, not least protecting the company from the US tariff policy, he laments the loss of tax-free shopping as putting British brands at a strategic disadvantage. “All we want is to have the same advantages as other companies,” he says. “You want to have British manufacturing and craft, but this is actually not allowing us to compete. It’s about marketing it in a way that is not about giving things away for free but celebrating our customers. Do it only for those who produce in the UK, with an assured end-to-end supply chain, so that we’re investing in the UK.”

Reaching the Unreachable: Invaluable insights into UHNW customers and VICs



Amrita Banta
Managing Director,
Agility Research &
Strategy

Looking ahead to buying trends for 2025, Agility Research & Strategy predicts a difficult year in which luxury spending will be at its lowest since 2022, driven largely by a deliberate trading down in spending by consumers. While 56% of C-level executives say they are 'concerned' by these challenges, they also agree that, in times of turmoil, the UHNW consumer becomes more important than ever – with these customers remaining the key target for 51% of brands surveyed.

Given the richest 2% of consumers generate more than 40% of luxury revenue, it is a strategy that makes sense but, says Amrita Banta, Managing Director of Agility Research & Strategy, the wants of these customers and how brands reach them has changed vastly over the past few years.

Banta points specifically to the waning of post-Covid 'revenge buying' and the societal pressures of conflict and turmoil turning luxury consumers away from ostentatious displays of wealth and towards something a little quieter and more purposeful. "Post-Covid, luxury for them is definitely more relaxed, more intimate," she explains. "They've done the logos. A lot of UHNWs talk about 'lean luxury'. They want to do things but discreetly, and a lot of them have become much more focused on the simpler things in life: family and meaningful experiences. What luxury really means to these people, in their words, is rarity, superiority and access. The access to be part of experiences that no one else is able to do."

Absolutely key to building and maintaining long-lasting relationships with this consumer, then, is personalisation on a granular level. "The part they value most is being considered individuals. They don't want to be seen as just a number," explains Banta, adding that the two key drivers for UHNWs joining VIC programmes are personalised information and advice, and attaining a personal connection to a brand.

"That doesn't mean it has to be super expensive. It could just be a ticket to a Taylor Swift show for their daughter. It's really important to understand those small things you're able to do to be valuable to this customer. It's about being relevant to their passions, their hobbies, their lifestyle. It's customisation, but to the maximum, it's not about monogramming."



Rebecca Burdess

Global Head of Guest Experience
and Services, Maybourne

Freddie Denham Webb

Co-Founder and Creative Director,
Father

Anna Gallagher

Customer Love Transformation
Director, JLR

Catherine Sykes

VP of Product Development,
Jo Malone London

in conversation with

Mikki Sandhu

Head of Innovation Strategy,
T&Pm

Beyond the Brand: The new importance of experiential and sensorial luxury

A theme that ran throughout the Walpole British Luxury Summit 2025 was that it is no longer enough for luxury brands simply to offer great products – the way you communicate your story and create emotional experiences for your customers is key to grabbing and keeping their attention. Or, as Mikki Sandhu, Head of Innovation Strategy at T&Pm, succinctly put it, “Emotion is the new equity. Brands have not only to be really strong storytellers, but also experience designers, joy designers, fascination designers.”

Anna Gallagher, Customer Love Transformation Director at JLR, neatly sums up what this means when she describes the care and attention that goes into the moment a customer first sees their new Range Rover. “Everything is thought about and curated and purposeful from that first touch. What does it feel like when you touch the door handles? Is it just the right weight? What’s the smell? What’s it like when you get in the seat? What does that first touch of the steering wheel tell you about the craftsmanship? We have to surprise and delight our customers, but at the same time give them everything they expect from a Range Rover.”

To create this sense of surprise and delight when building the brand around its new Defender Okta model, JLR worked with sound studio Father to design an aural landscape that would communicate the car’s robust power. It is this type of immersive storytelling, says Father Co-Founder and Creative Director Freddie Denham Webb, that can really set a brand apart.

“Sound has this ability to build those genuine, emotive relationships with audiences,” he says. “All brands are, in some way, using sound. What you need to do is identify those touchpoints; is there opportunity to be more strategic? Then it’s about aligning that sonic strategy to your core strategy, understanding the medium’s capability of achieving emotional connections that you might not be able to achieve with visuals, and harmonising them with all the other senses. Think about smell and sound, how incredible they are in giving us this ability to transport ourselves but also be incredibly present.”

Yet, while smell may be the *raison d’être* for Catherine Sykes, VP of Product Development at Jo Malone London, it is often the way scent makes people feel that matters far more than their top notes. “Everything we do when we create a fragrance starts from a story. Whether that story is audible, whether that story is visual, if you have



that stimulus at the same time as scent, you'll have a much deeper connection to that product or that experience." Accordingly, the brand has worked with researchers to quantify the effect its perfumes have on the moods and emotions of their wearers, leading to impressive findings it can now communicate with its customers. "We keep talking about subconscious, but also there's the conscious," says Sykes. "We can now claim that we can make you feel comforted. We can make you feel replenished. We can make you feel renewed. We can make you feel uplifted. We can prove that these multi-sensorial experiences with these products really promote emotional restoration."

This type of restorative experience is, of course, central to the success of a hotel group like Maybourne but, says Rebecca Burdess, Global Head of Guest Experience and Services, the modern guest expects so much more from a luxury hotel than just somewhere beautiful to lay their head.

"We are very focused on emotive, evocative connective experiences with our guests. How are we constantly meeting or exceeding what we know they want but also helping them discover new things that are fascinating for them based on their areas of interest?"

While data is key to building relationships with return guests on an individual level, when it comes to the wider company outlook, resisting the temptation to standardise the experience is crucial – a lesson that could surely be learned by retailers looking to localise their physical stores. "Our hotels are extraordinarily individual in each location," says Burdess. "We are not seeking to create something that is homogeneous in any way, shape or form, but seamlessness is important. We're looking for unified but not uniform experiences, because at our level, with our customer base, things must be individualised. That is what people expect and it's up to us to over-deliver."

Craft, Couture and Culture: What India can teach the world about luxury



Sabyasachi Mukherjee

Founder,
Sabyasachi

in conversation with

Divia Thani

Global Editorial Director,
Condé Nast Traveller



It is widely agreed that India represents a bright spot for growth in the luxury sector but, to fully understand and capture this market, you must get to know its people, its society, its complex history and the way it envisions its future on the global stage. This was the message from Sabyasachi Mukherjee, one of India's most successful global fashion designers, most recently seen gracing the Met Gala 2025 red carpet alongside Bollywood legend Shah Rukh Khan.

"I've never considered India to be a third-world country," he explains. "Luxury started in India centuries and centuries ago. Somewhere down the line we stopped believing in ourselves but I think a lot of things are changing. There's a young India that has broken the shackles of colonialism and is looking forward to reinstating its political will in the world."

This generation is ready and willing to spend, says Mukherjee, but brands mustn't fall into the trap of thinking that the playbook that has seen success in Europe and the US will necessarily work with the Indian consumer. "Indians want to be heard, want to be seen, on their own terms. To win them, you have to understand that no amount of arrogance and no amount of believing 'this is my brand's way' is going to apply."

And, while winning India specifically may require a shift in mindset, Mukherjee is firmly of the opinion that a complacent approach from luxury brands is endemic the world over – to the huge detriment of the industry. "Somewhere or other we have fallen off the value grid. The whole world has become greedy," he says. "For the longest time, brands have relied on average product and great marketing. Today, if you really want the consumer to buy, the product better be good."

The answer, as was heard from speakers throughout the Summit, is to return to your brand DNA, re-find your creativity and invest in craftsmanship. Above all else, however, says Mukherjee, is the imperative not to underestimate your customer. "When social media came in there was a lot of noise. As the dust is settling, people are becoming wiser about their choices. A lot of businesses need to realise that consumers are shying away from buying not because their money is shrinking, but because they are more discerning about their choices. The consumer is becoming more confident, and in many cases brands have not been able to catch up. I think it's a wake-up call for the entire luxury industry."

Timeless British Luxury



Julia Koeppen
Global General
Manager, Penhaligon's

in conversation with

Helena Lee
Features and Special
Projects Director,
Harper's Bazaar

Brand is everything because it means you don't just sell a product, you sell a dream, you sell an identity, you sell statements the consumer can lean into," says Julia Koeppen, Global General Manager of Penhaligon's of her mission to revitalise the storied British perfume house. "The beauty about British luxury brands is that we are not precious. We are luxury, but with a little bit of charm. We can be quite carefree, we can be rebellious, and it makes us more approachable."

For Penhaligon's, this boldly playful approach has seen it launch Eau So British, an immersive storytelling pop-up that recently arrived in London after debuting in Shanghai. Having worked with Chinese artists and puppeteers to localise the exhibition for an Asian customer base who was au fait with Penhaligon's products but knew little of its 155-year heritage, in the UK, says Koeppen, the approach was much more about the story behind its scents. "We have stories that inspire our scents, and then we have scents that inspire stories, but the stories are always the most important part. Emotion, identity and imagination are the three elements that allow us to connect with the consumer."

Having identified not merely sales but "the energy we create by people wanting to share us and reference us" as a metric for success, Koeppen is encouraging her teams to embrace technology as a way to make Penhaligon's relevant to a new generation of customers. AI, in particular, has been transformative in streamlining the business's global onboarding processes, reducing admin and freeing up time for strategy and creative thinking.

"It will filter through everything and, in two years, things will look very different – but it's not a threat," says Koeppen. "Use it to your advantage. We are luxury, so you still need to curate, you still need to have an emotion – if you're a creative brand that's not going to change. It's just a process that allows you to prioritise the client differently."

What leaders must do, advises Koeppen, is remain curious, open to new ideas and recognise the knowledge and experience that exists at all levels of your company. "Hierarchy, in our world, doesn't really work anymore," she explains. "When we look at new technologies, we need to give everyone a seat at the table and be willing to learn. I can ask the right questions, but I'm not the expert, and it changes the hierarchy of the team. Progress can only come when you have diversity of opinion, diverse teams in general, and you challenge each other, and everyone's happy to be challenged."

Capital Ideas: Why creativity is a superpower for London and luxury



Dr Nicholas Cullinan OBE

Director,
British Museum

in conversation with

Chioma Nnadi

Head of Editorial Content,
British Vogue



Whether it be fashion, art, design or theatre, Britain – and London in particular – has been a global leader in culture for centuries thanks to the priority we place on making our museums, galleries and cultural institutions as accessible as possible. A commitment to making the world-class collections of destinations such as the V&A and The National Gallery free to all, and offering affordable tickets to productions at theatres such as the Royal Opera House, have seen London produce a huge array of internationally recognised creative directors, artists, designers and actors.

It is this, says Dr Nicholas Cullinan OBE, that drew him home from New York and to the British Museum at a moment of turmoil for the institution. "I like a challenge; I like to feel fear and keep pushing myself," he explains. "The British Museum has probably the most incredible collection in the world but it's a museum that's super complex. A couple of years ago, it was quite high profile, and I thought, 'Should I sit this one out or get involved and see what I could do?'"

He has, he says, never looked back and remains constantly inspired by the work his colleagues do, particularly when it comes to the often-unseen work of rescuing international treasures from the dangers of conflict. This awe for British creatives is a sentiment shared by Chioma Nnadi, Head of Editorial Content at British *Vogue*: "Being a Brit abroad for 20 years, and then coming back to the UK, I think I appreciate the things that make British culture and style so distinctive. I love how scrappy the London creative scene is."

For Nnadi, however, it is the digital revolution that has helped open up the formerly elitist world of fashion, and *Vogue* in particular, to a much wider audience. "Historically, the fashion world has had a reputation of being exclusive. That just doesn't jive anymore. It doesn't make sense. Social media and the digital age really cracked everything wide open. People want to be part of the conversation. They want to express their point of view."

In turn, she says, it has forced fashion to reckon with its arguably narrow world view and recognise its power as a lens through which to view the current moment. "Over the past ten to 20 years, fashion has increasingly opened its doors," says Nnadi. "We have the power to start a conversation, which is such a privilege, but I also think it's our responsibility to make sure we're including voices, perspectives and thinking outside our own world."

About Walpole

Walpole is the sector body for the British luxury industry, which is worth £81bn to the UK economy, supports over 450,000 jobs and contributes 3.7% of the UK's GDP. A not-for-profit organisation, Walpole speaks on behalf of more than 250 of Britain's finest brands including Alexander McQueen, Aston Martin, Burberry, Claridge's, Fortnum & Mason, Glenfiddich, Harrods, Rolls-Royce Motor Cars and Wedgwood, and is recognised in both Westminster and Brussels.

With a mission to promote, protect and develop the business of luxury in the UK, Walpole brings its members together to collaborate and connect. Key events include the annual Walpole British Luxury Summit and the Walpole British Luxury Awards. It also provides a collective voice for luxury on key topics, commissions industry-leading research and works with government on issues affecting the sector. Walpole runs the flagship 'Brands of Tomorrow' programme to develop new British luxury brands – alumni include Bremont, Emilia Wickstead, Nyetimber and Orlebar Brown – and works with the London Business School MBA programme to help develop the talent of the future with 'Luxury Leaders of Tomorrow'. Walpole also spearheads the British Luxury Sustainability Manifesto, with the vision of making British luxury the global benchmark for luxury sustainability.

thewalpole.co.uk

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