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From Aspen to Courchevel, luxury fashion taps the skiwear opportunity

As skiing recovers after pandemic restrictions, luxury players such as Gucci and Armani are investing in skiwear, while disruptor brands like Perfect Moment aim to build market share.

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From Val D'Isère après-ski to the cabins of Aspen, skiing has surged in popularity since 2021. It's a bounceback response to the restrictions of the pandemic — with experienced and first-time skiers hitting the slopes after a long period of lockdown frustration.

No one working in the skiing industry is complacent. In Europe, climate change is a long-term cause of concern, forcing some Alpine ski resorts to close pistes this season because of a lack of snow. However, travel company Le Ski, which runs luxury chalet holidays to high-end alpine resorts Courchevel and Val D'Isère, says demand has remained strong. "This year, people were desperate to hit the slopes again after almost two years without being in the fresh Alpine air," says managing director Nick Morgan.

Looking the part on the piste matters. Ultra-luxury travel company LVH manages property rentals across the world (including ski properties) for high-net-worth individuals who spend from \$15,000-\$50,000 a day on accommodation, in locations including Aspen, Vail and Courchevel. "These customers treat a ski resort like they might treat St Tropez — it's a different outfit everyday," says co-founder and CEO Hugo Barton. LVH's ski property business stalled in 2020/21 but has quadrupled over the last year, he says.

For luxury brands, whether established or emerging, a new generation of skiers represents a new opportunity.



Photo: Jimmy Choo

The skiwear category has “exploded” post-lockdowns, says Jane Gottschalk, co-founder of London-based luxury skiwear brand Perfect Moment, which she took over in 2010 with her husband Max Gottschalk. Perfect Moment was the first ski brand to be stocked on Net-a-Porter, making its debut 10 years ago, says Gottschalk, speaking from a trip with brand investors Nick Jonas and Priyanka Chopra in US luxury resort Aspen. “We brought back the one-piece ski suit and updated it using the latest technical fabrics to make sleek, streamlined fits that resonated with our female customer who felt comfortable and chic — not something that skiwear had historically been known for,” she says. “It sparked a new wave of technical, slim-fitting skiwear that is now so popular.” Sales doubled during the pandemic in the US, where resorts stayed open, making up for a 50 per cent decline in Covid-hit Europe.

The big luxury brands have been busy. Louis Vuitton launched a first women’s ski collection in December 2021, complete with ski boots, goggles, jackets and après-ski layers, followed by men’s ski a year later, designed by the late Virgil Abloh. In January 2023, Gucci launched Gucci Vault Altitude, a limited edition assortment of ski gear and alpine-inspired pieces from eight labels including sports brand Head, snow shoe company Moon Boot and knitwear label The Elder Statesman. Pucci collaborated with Fusalp and Mytheresa on a ski collection (and experiential trip) in December, with influencers and press visiting St Moritz. Italy’s Loro Piana and Zegna have also launched ski collections over the last year.

Giorgio Armani has breathed new life into his Neve ski collection with an activation in St Moritz in December and a portion of Neve looks in the designer’s Autumn/Winter 2023 men’s runway show. “There is a lot of interest, [post-lockdown], in everything linked to the outdoors world, and this of course includes skiwear,” Armani says. “Due to this interest, we have been focusing on dedicated [skiwear] events, and this has created further traction and interest.” Armani Neve was relaunched in 2018. “It is natural for me to present it as part of our shows as an organic extension of the Armani world, as well as with events that better express the performance component,” the designer says.

Jimmy Choo entered ski in December, offering a full wardrobe to clients so the brand “can accessorise them wherever their lives take them”, says creative director Sandra Choi. The collection is inspired by the ski style of the 1980s, with a JC monogram on

ski suits, snow boots and accessories. “I really wanted to offer a full ski-suit in the Jimmy Choo glamorous way,” says Choi. “So, it looks chic but also performs on the slopes.”

The Jimmy Choo collection ranges from bright blues and purples to black and white, which chimes with trends in the ski space. Consumers tend to opt for reliable classic colours such as blue (40 per cent) or black (50 per cent), according to a skiwear survey of over 17,000 global consumers by buy-now-pay-later company Klarna. Ninety-five per cent of surveyed consumers say the label or brand matters when choosing skiwear, while 79 per cent look for brands known for the quality of their winter clothing.

A new generation of skiers presents an exciting market for luxury and premium skiwear. Luxury ski resorts across Europe and the US have attracted newcomers over the last two seasons, according to research by holiday company Club Med. Over 60 per cent of those who booked a ski holiday in the 2021/22 season were first-time skiers or snowboarders.

New brands think sustainable

Concerns about sustainability are becoming more important to skiers, according to Club Med research. From October 2022 to January 2023, conversations around sustainable skiwear grew by 45 per cent year-on-year on popular discussion platform Reddit.

In 2018, Wil Beedle launched London-based brand Shoreditch Ski Club after 18 years as creative director of British label All Saints. “In a world that demands versatility and permanence, how can we create something new?” he says. “We set out to create a jacket that was sustainably sourced, that would genuinely make as much sense in downtown New York or in the streets of East London as it would do in Aspen, Gstaad or St Moritz.” Beedle worked relentlessly on material and performance fabric innovation, while incorporating his design signatures such as harnesses, X stitching and distinctive hardware.

A first product, a puffer jacket, was made from certified post-consumer recycled plastic bottles and quickly became a hero item, bought by models Bella Hadid and Karlie Kloss. Selfridges sold pieces via a Shoreditch Ski Club pop-up shop on its

contemporary floor sandwiched between Off-White and Acne. Now, with a larger offering of T-shirts and jackets, Shoreditch Ski Club is also stocked by Net-a-Porter and Farfetch as well as US retailers Fwrd, Saks and Nordstrom. Sales grew over 400 per cent between 2021 and 2022, the company says.

However, while recycled plastic has become a popular material for brands trying to reduce their impact, this method has drawn some criticism, as unlike the bottles themselves, which can be recycled again, the clothing is often hard to recycle at the end of its life. Critics say the use of recycled synthetics perpetuates the industry's dependence on fossil fuel extraction, and is also linked to microplastic shedding. Beedle is aware of the debate. "We're always actively engaged in finding the best practices, across the range. For us it's never been as simple as finding one solution and sticking to it," he says. "The technology and the materials available, as well as the product performance and the demands of the collection, keep evolving." At the time of writing, he's in Austria testing a recycled lightweight cotton-nylon fabric for the brand's pre-Spring 2024 collection. "For all of us involved in trying to develop the best possible product with the right processes, the learning doesn't stop."

Most skiwear is made from nylon, but brands new to the space are exploring more sustainable solutions. Jimmy Choo's technical pieces are partially made from recycled nylon (mixed with regular nylon), while Perfect Moment has collaborated with circular denim brand DL1691 to create a capsule collection of denim skiwear made from recycled cotton with a water-resistant wax coating. (Outside of the capsule, the majority of pieces are made from nylon). Shoreditch Ski Club produces T-shirts from pre-consumer recycled cotton and leather shearling jackets from tannery offcuts. As with other performance categories, progress is limited because natural materials struggle to match synthetic materials and harsh chemicals for efficacy.

"The alpine culture that existed from some of the bigger brands wasn't really respecting the alpine environment at all," he adds. "There's a lot of mythologising of the snow peaks, but no real respect for the environment that provided that kind of context. The fact that [outerwear] is so clearly juxtaposed with a natural landscape that is melting is very ironic."

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