

# THE GENTEEL



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## BUSINESS

### A Belated Affair

by **Semmi W.** | Posted October 10, 2012

*Topics: Akris, Alexander McQueen, Balenciaga, Bergdorf Goodman, bulletin, Christian Louboutin, Cornelius Vanderbilt, David Hoey, Ethel Frankau, fall collection, fashion, Fifth Avenue, Isaac Mizrahi, Jacqueline Kennedy, Joan Rivers, Judith Leiber, Maison Martin Margiela, Mark Gagnon, New York City, New York Times, Prada, Princess Grace Kelly, Proenza Schouler, Samantha Smith, September, Tom Ford, window installations*

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Source: [bergdorfgoodman.com](http://bergdorfgoodman.com).



Giant purple ribbons have enveloped Bergdorf Goodman's Fifth Avenue store to celebrate its 111th anniversary.

Source: [vanityfair.com](http://vanityfair.com).

To pick up her wedding invitations, Princess Grace Kelly headed to 58th Street and 5th Avenue. At that very same corner, Jacqueline Kennedy also made a pilgrimage of her own - picking out a dress for her husband's inaugural ball. These, and other memories have been sewn together in a new book, *Scatter my Ashes at Bergdorf Goodman*. The anthology celebrates the iconic store's 111th anniversary and accompanies a documentary of the same name.

And these projects are not the only ways in which company executives are commemorating the special year. "We love to create windows at Bergdorf that are complete high fantasy," explained window director David Hoey, in a special audio tour featured on the store's [website](#).

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Taking over six months to produce, Hoey and his team put together special anniversary window installations, each highlighting key moments in both the store's history and fashion design. The installations include vintage photographs and items such as the store's original blueprints as well as a *New York Times* article dating back to 1928 (the year of the current location's opening). New York artists Mark Gagnon and Samantha Smith were commissioned to create a unique paper sculpture installation. Twelve hand-made costumes, including a 1920s flapper dress were as Hoey attests, an "incredible use of paper."

Giant purple ribbons have covered the entire 5th Avenue complex, snaking past windows, and wrapping the Beaux-Arts building like a gift. The installation represents how company executives plan to make up for lost time - the last anniversary Bergdorf Goodman celebrated happened in 1951. In 2001, the store's executives decided to halt celebrations for their 100th anniversary due to the September 11 attacks.

Technically, Bergdorf's already celebrated its founding earlier this September with a star-studded gala. But to keep the party going, an **exclusive collection** of over 100 pieces have been created by the likes of Prada, Maison Martin Margiela and **Maison Francis Kurkdjian**. Inside the building, visitors can find one-of-a-kind pieces, limited edition collections and commissioned designs, like a one-of-a-kind Alexander McQueen ruched velvet dress, or a pair of Christian Louboutin pyramid-studded platforms. Both Oscar de la Renta and Akris have created special evening wear pieces in celebration of the anniversary. And for accessories, labels like Proenza Schouler, Balenciaga and Judith Leiber have created bags, inspired by key moments in their own history as well as the store's. Take for example, the Tom Ford lavender alligator doctor's bag, created in honour of Bergdorf's classic purple shopping bag.

An unequivocal mecca of New York luxury fashion, Bergdorf Goodman's place in fashion history is difficult to quantify. Since it opened as a dress atelier in 1901, it has become an institution, helping to shape the city into the fashion capital it has become today. The building's interior feels like a home, a grand manor of sorts, where guests are invited to walk through hallways and gaze at collections in awe, or perhaps sit on couches, waiting for a chance to be fitted.

Joan Rivers, who is featured in the book, sums up the lore associated with Bergdorf's when she explains, "my first trip to Bergdorf Goodman was probably in utero, because my mother shopped here all the time, so I just can't remember not coming."



A celebratory window installation featuring Tom Ford's limited edition lavender bag.

Source:berdorfgoodman.com.

styling, rather than just shopping. In the book, Christian Louboutin recalls, "They made it very easy. I just had started my company. I really had no idea how it all worked. They were very comprehensive and very nice about dealing with a young designer who didn't know even what the prices should be. I remember exactly the order. It was 330 pairs of shoes."

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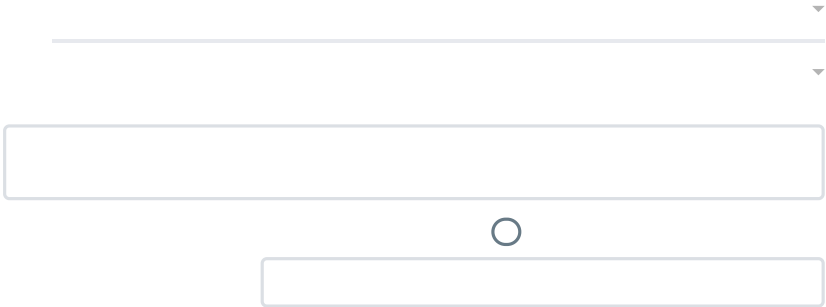
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Throughout a century of wars, economic crashes and epidemics, Bergdorf Goodman's focus has always been fashion. Staying open to trends and new designers, has remained a clear tenant. Even in the store's earlier days, seemingly unusual techniques like the bias-cut were promoted despite an initial lack of understanding or even popularity.

Executives at Bergdorf like the legendary fashion director Ethel Frankau had a precise intention when evaluating collections. Each item had to synergise with the Bergdorf environment, not the other way around. "The great lesson of my life was walking into Bergdorf and seeing just the stillness of it," explained Isaac Mizrahi. In the book, the designer goes on to note, "today retail is not about that. It is about loud noises and huge displays... but when I was a kid, somehow when you walked into Bergdorf you just felt like everything would be okay. Like if there was a hurricane, or an earthquake, or tsunami, if you were at Bergdorf's you would just be fine."

Once the site of Cornelius Vanderbilt II's mansion, each designer "room" inside the store is set up to essentially appraise and admire wearable art. Its guiding principle has always been to create a retail experience focused on actual

Maintaining a respect for the sanctity of quality and a discreet environment is what has allowed Bergdorf's to retain its cult-like, fairytale status. Presidents and princes, models and muses, designers and admirers, have all been entranced by its magic. With each generation, a new plot in the company's storybook emerges. And unlike the fairytales we are used to; Bergdorf's shows no signs of ending.



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