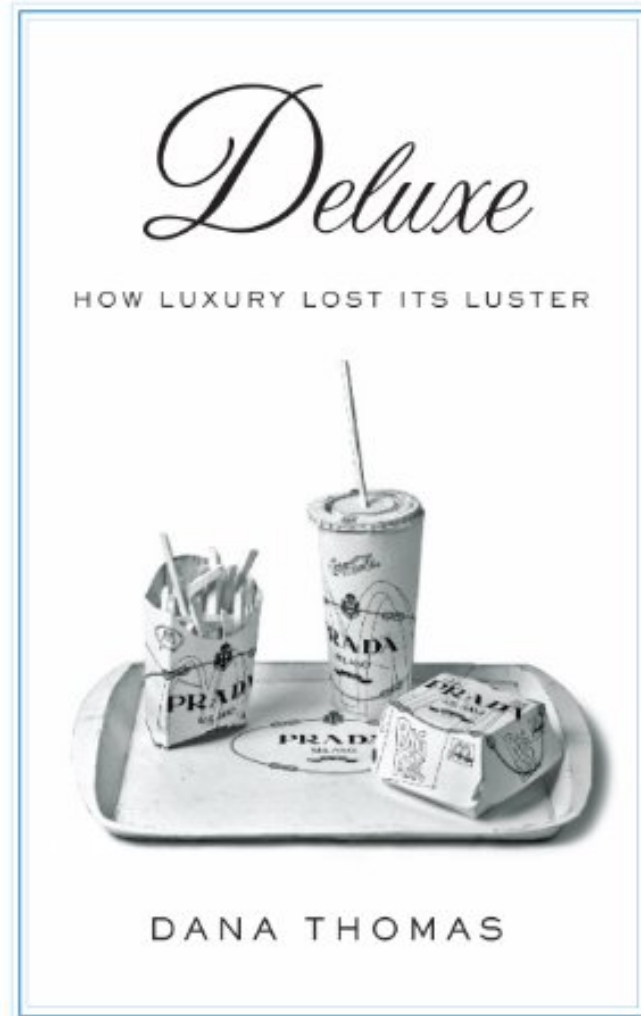


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Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster

Dana Thomas

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Dana Thomas : Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Interesting stories behind some well known brandsBy T.V.D.Enjoyable stroll through the good and the bad of luxury. Overall, it seems like the author lost some direction when writing this book: it starts out somewhat critical of the current trend in luxury industry and then it goes on to say it's actually not so bad and ending with a promise of a bright (if somewhat different) future. Either way, read it for some insight into how high end brands do their thing.0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Sharing In The Aristocratic Buying ExperienceBy TerrelAre you interested fashion and the changes that have been taking place in the

world of high fashion luxury goods? Are you interested in how these luxury goods are made and who buys them? Just the chapter alone on the Hermes handbags was worth the price of the book. This is a fascinating look at how and why global corporations have made this once only aristocratic buying experience more accessible to the common masses. Very very interesting book. I finally had to buy a new one since my old one had been passed around to friends so much it was falling apart. Everyone loved it. It would make a great gift for anyone who loves anything about high fashion and luxury goods. Yes, even if you can't afford to have all these things in your own closet! 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Kind of a interesting book, a reminder that if ...By jhtlag Kind of a interesting book, a reminder that if you're mid-America you're getting what you pay for despite those fancy names on the labels. There are a couple brands that still mean "luxury" in the old school sense.

Once luxury was available only to the rarefied and aristocratic world of old money and royalty. It offered a history of tradition, superior quality, and a pampered buying experience. Today, however, luxury is simply a product packaged and sold by multibillion-dollar global corporations focused on growth, visibility, brand awareness, advertising, and, above all, profits. Award-winning journalist Dana Thomas digs deep into the dark side of the luxury industry to uncover all the secrets that Prada, Gucci, and Burberry don't want us to know. *Deluxe* is an uncompromising look behind the glossy facade that will enthrall anyone interested in fashion, finance, or culture.

From Publishers Weekly Newsweek reporter Thomas skillfully narrates European fashion houses' evolution from exclusive ateliers to marketing juggernauts. Telling the story through characters like the French mogul Bernard Arnault, she details how the perfection of old-time manufacturing, still seen in Hermès's handbags, has bowed to sweatshops and wild profits on mediocre merchandise. After a brisk history of luxury, Thomas shows why handbags and perfume are as susceptible to globalization and corporate greed as less rarefied industries. She follows the overarching story, parts of which are familiar, from boardrooms to street markets that unload millions in counterfeit goods, dropping irresistible details like a Japanese monk obsessed with Comme des Garçons. But she's no killjoy. If anything, she's fond of the aristocratic past, snarks at "behemoths that churn out perfume like Kraft makes cheese" and is too credulous of fashionistas' towering egos. Despite her grasp of business machinations, her argument that conglomerates have stolen luxury's soul doesn't entirely wash. As her tales of quotidian vs. ultra luxury make clear, the rich and chic can still distinguish themselves, even when Las Vegas hosts the world's ritziest brands. Thomas might have delved deeper into why fashion labels inspire such mania, beyond "selling dreams," but her curiosity is contagious. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist **★** Thomas has been the fashion writer for Newsweek in Paris for 12 years and writes about style for the New York Times Magazine and other well-known publications. She traces the origins of luxury from the mid-nineteenth century, when Louis Vuitton made his first steamer trunks and custom-made clothing was strictly the province of European aristocracy, through the fashion boom of the 1920s, when names such as Dior, Gucci, and Yves Saint Laurent came into prominence, and buyers with expendable income could afford exquisite clothing and perfume. Sadly, today most of the well-known names are owned by multinational groups, and luxury items have become commodities, where buyers crave name brands for what they represent rather than their inherent quality of manufacture and design. Thomas takes us into the streets of New York, where counterfeit items are sold that look so much like the real thing that it takes an expert to tell them apart, to the Guangzhou region in China, where children make knockoff goods under appalling conditions. She manages to remove the veil from the fashion industry with a blend of history, culture, and investigative journalism. *Siegfried, David* The Devil Wears Herms (He Bought It at the Caesars Palace Mall in Las Vegas) By MICHIKO KAKUTANI Skip to next paragraph Back in the late 1980s, the Prada backpack made out of black or tobacco-brown parachute fabric trimmed in leather became the it bag for many would-be fashionistas. It was hip, modern, lightweight and at \$450 expensive, but not as expensive as the stratospherically priced bags made by Herms and Chanel. According to the fashion reporter Dana Thomas, that Prada backpack was also the emblem of the radical change that luxury was undergoing at the time: the shift from small family businesses of beautifully handcrafted goods to global corporations selling to the middle market a shift from exclusivity to accessibility, from an emphasis on tradition and quality to an emphasis on growth and branding and profits. With *Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*, Ms. Thomas who has been the cultural and fashion writer for Newsweek in Paris for 12 years has written a crisp, witty social history that's as entertaining as it is informative. Traveling from French perfume laboratories to Las Vegas shopping malls to assembly-line factories in China, she traces the evolving face of the luxury goods business, from design through marketing to showroom sales. She gives us some sharply observed profiles of figures like Miuccia Prada, who was a Communist with a doctorate in political science when she took over her family's small luxury goods business in 1978, and the business tycoon Bernard Arnault, who relentlessly built LVMH into a luxury monolith with dozens of brands (including Louis Vuitton, Givenchy and Dior) sold around the world. Ms. Thomas peppers her narrative with lots of amusing asides about everything from how orange became Hermès signature color because it was the only color widely available during World War II to the money-saving benefits of raw-edge cutting, which has been marketed to the public as a cutting-edge, avant-garde

innovation. But her focus remains on how a business that once catered to the wealthy elite has gone mass-market and the effects that democratization has had on the way ordinary people shop today, as conspicuous consumption and wretched excess have spread around the world. Labels, once discreetly stitched into couture clothes, have become logos adorning everything from baseball hats to supersized gold chains. Perfumes, once dreamed up by designers with an idea about a particular scent, are now concocted from briefs written by marketing executives brandishing polls and surveys and sales figures. With globalization, Paris and New York are no longer exclusive luxury meccas. Ms. Thomas notes that a gigantic 690,000-square-foot luxury mall called Crocus City (featuring 180 boutiques, including Armani, Pucci and Versace) is flourishing outside Moscow, and that a group of high-end boutiques will be part of a luxury complex called Legation Quarter, scheduled to open in Tiananmen Square later this year. Approximately 40 percent of all Japanese own a Vuitton product today, she says, and one recent poll showed that by 2004 the average American woman was buying more than four handbags a year. With more people visiting Caesars Palaces glitzy Forum Shops each year than Disney World, Las Vegas has made shopping synonymous with gambling and entertainment, even as outlet malls have brought designer clothing and accessories within the reach (and budget) of many suburbanites. High-profile luxury brands like Louis Vuitton, Herms and Cartier were founded in the 18th or 19th centuries by artisans dedicated to creating beautiful, finely made wares for the royal court in France and later, with the fall of the monarchy, for European aristocrats and prominent American families. Luxury remained, writes Ms. Thomas, a domain of the wealthy and the famous until the Youthquake of the 1960s pulled down social barriers and overthrew elitism. It would remain out of style until a new and financially powerful demographic the unmarried female executive emerged in the 1980s. As both disposable income and credit-card debt soared in industrialized nations, the middle class became the target of luxury vendors, who poured money into provocative advertising campaigns and courted movie stars and celebrities as style icons. In order to maximize profits, many corporations looked for ways to cut corners: they began to use cheaper materials, outsource production to developing nations (while falsely claiming that their goods were made in Western Europe) and replace hand craftsmanship with assembly-line production. Classic goods meant to last for years gave way, increasingly, to trendy items with a short shelf life; cheaper lines (featuring lower-priced items like T-shirts and cosmetic cases) were introduced as well. Although this volume quotes Anna Wintour, the editor of *Vogue*, saying such changes mean that more people are going to get better fashion and the more people who can have fashion, the better, the author reaches a more elitist and pessimistic conclusion. The luxury industry has changed the way people dress, she writes. It has realigned our economic class system. It has changed the way we interact with others. It has become part of our social fabric. To achieve this, it has sacrificed its integrity, undermined its products, tarnished its history and hoodwinked its consumers. In order to make luxury accessible, tycoons have stripped away all that has made it special. Luxury has lost its luster. "New York Times", 8/21/07 *Luxury, and How It Became Common* HARRY HURT III WANT to buy luxury products like Louis Vuitton handbags? Gucci shoes? Prada dresses? There's no need to comb the fashion alleys of New York, Paris or Milan in search of the brands boutique stores. Just zip over to the nearest mall, where high-end department stores hawk luggage, footwear, apparel, jewelry and virtually every other designer-label item that ever appeared under the klieg lights. But be prepared to see scores of fellow shoppers already wearing the exact goods you covet. 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At first lip-blush, that might seem like merely an elitist complaint. Ms. Thomas shows, however, that the repercussions of democratizing luxury have had dire effects across the globe, and on almost every socio-economic level. The corporate quest to reduce operating costs, for example, often leads to the creation of sweatshops. Along the way come an array of related crimes ranging from fraudulent labeling and counterfeiting to embezzlement and even prostitution paid for with luxury goods in lieu of cash. If the corporatization of luxury is new, the flaunting of wealth through acquisitions is not: It dates at least as far back as the ancient Greeks and Etruscans. The ancestry of modern extravagance traces to the Bourbons and the Bonapartes. (After France earned \$15 million selling hundreds of millions of acres to the United States, Napoleons wife, Josephine, spent half of the money on clothes in 10 years, Ms. Thomas reports.) 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It was hip, modern, lightweight and at \$450 expensive, but not as expensive as the stratospherically priced bags made by Herms and Chanel. According to the fashion reporter Dana Thomas, that Prada backpack was also "the emblem of the radical change that luxury was undergoing at the time: the shift from small family businesses of beautifully handcrafted goods to global corporations selling to the middle market" - a shift from exclusivity to accessibility, from an emphasis on tradition and quality to an emphasis on growth and branding and profits. With "*Deluxe: How Luxury Lost Its Luster*," Ms. Thomas - who has been the cultural and fashion writer for *Newsweek* in Paris for 12 years - has written a crisp, witty social history that's as entertaining as it is informative. Traveling from French perfume laboratories to Las Vegas shopping malls to assembly-line factories in China, she traces the evolving face of the luxury goods business, from design through marketing to showroom sales. 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