

There's a Snake in My Boot!
Kering and the Exotic Skin Dilemma

MANAGEMENT DECISIONS

The Rightful Comeback

“We don’t want to remove precious skins [from our products] but we want to be sure that skin doesn’t destroy the species when they come from the wild and if it comes from farming that it has the best conditions for animals, farmers and the ecosystem” (Daveu, 2017).

Snakeskin rules the 2019 trends. This trend comes after a previous 2018 fall movement towards animals’ print. Celebrities such as Rihanna and Kim Kardashian have been captured wearing snakeskin products, confirming the comeback of exotic skins in the high-fashion industry. Therefore, Kering has decided to keep using exotic skins within their luxury products repertoire. However, they decided to manage sustainable and ethical practices. In addition, they have decided to become the world’s most influential group in terms of creativity, sustainability, and economic performance. By doing this, the group ensures a reliable supply chain for their brands.

Python farm in Thailand

In 2017, Kering decided to own a farm in Thailand, where pythons would be ethically raised. Kering declared that the snakes would be grown in the best conditions, from the animal, farmers and ecosystem point of view, before they would be used as raw materials for shoes, bags and belts. This decision was taken as a response to the growing pressure against the use of exotic animal skins for fashion. Moreover, they are committed to a long-term development of a sustainable source of skins with the highest standards.

Responsibility with local communities

The luxury fashion house declared that, under the scheme Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species, they do not look for stopping the source of skins from the wild. They argue that local communities are benefiting from the legal trade in wild skins as source of employment. Furthermore, Kering believes that by demanding higher supply standards, there will be improvements in the welfare of the animals in their own habitat. The idea is that local suppliers will continue to be benefiting from the trade of skins, while being guided to do it in a more sustainable manner.

The luxury group partner with the International Trade Centre, in order to develop a program to monitor and supervise the trade of Nile crocodiles and pythons. The idea is to train the locals in procedures that ensure welfare and population stability for the animals as well as the communities’ livelihood. The program includes a research about farmed and wild populations.

Internal commitments

Kering is asking the group brands to get involved and make use of more sustainable raw materials, for instance, the use of organic cotton and merino wool produced on sustainable farms. As well, 10% of the annual bonus of some of the brands chief executives will depend on meeting the promises about sustainability. In addition, aligned with the creation in 2013 of the Material Innovation Lab (the Lab has the aim to develop new sourcing solutions and innovative raw materials by making use of biotechnologies and circular economy principles, i.e. using recycled materials to develop new items), Kering partnered with the accelerator named Fashion for Good-Plug and Play. They attempt to identify and support startups that are developing innovative manners of embracing sustainability into the fashion industry.

Crafting Tomorrow's Luxury

In 2017, Kering launched their new strategy 'Crafting Tomorrow's Luxury' which states to attain their targets by 2025:

- 100% traceability of key raw materials and 100% compliance with Kering Standards for Raw Materials and Manufacturing Processes (the Kering Standards)
- Reduction of environmental profit and loss (EP&L) account impact by 40% including remaining carbon emissions as well as water use, water and air pollution, waste production and land use changes
- Creation of a Kering Supplier Index of Sustainability which will ensure that each supplier's sustainability performance will be visible to all Kering brands
- Contribution to a positive social impact across the entire supply chain, with a focus on raw material sourcing locations

The Standards for Raw Materials and Manufacturing Processes and their policies, represent a framework and a way of measuring progress and outcomes on traceability, social welfare, environmental protection, animal welfare and chemical use. Whereas the EP&L measures in euros the costs and benefits caused by Kering's environmental impact, in both levels, their own operations and their supply chains.

Finally, it is important to remember that Kering has stated as their main goal to safeguard craftsmanship and to perpetuate traditional know-how. Therefore, all their efforts are not only inclined to ensure species wildlife survival and communities' livelihood but also to preserve the heritage of the communities in which they work with. In order to achieve this, Kering developed a supplier-training platform, which upholds their high-quality standards and shares their best practices. Kering is positioning itself as the industry leader, not just in operating exotic skins farming, but in doing it right.