

“A TINY EXPOSURE OF THE EXCLUSIVITY THAT DEMONSTRATES AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW A TRUE FAN APPRECIATES AND TAKES OH-SO-SERIOUSLY THE MAGNITUDE OF ARTISTRY INVOLVED WITH REAL, TRUE OPULENCE”

# LUXURY HAS LOST ITS LUSTRE

By Daniel Scheffler (@danielscheffler)

**LUXURY MARKETING** is all about the reverie. Well it has been up to now. But the dream has been replaced by the waking dream (Thank you 'Inception') and so a whole new way of thinking is slathered across an ever-growing industry – let's not forget this month Swiss/South African Richemont's shares reached an almost insuperable apex.

Marketers have wanted to promote the ambition to have, the expectation to own and the desire to have more. But things can't go on like that any longer as luxury has changed – yet again – and not just due to a post-recession as the experts howl. Luxury has moved from material goods to a conduit for freedom. The lies spewed by marketers that material goods will provide happiness have been revealed and whether the emperor never had any (Gucci?) clothes or the 'Wizard of Oz' was just a little man are not of relevance I guess. What is germane and has become the new nucleus is the way real luxury is about time and space, and that bling cannot bestow on anyone.

Luxury, as we know it, has lost its lustre. Marketing has ruined it. It has for the last 10 years focused all its efforts on giving engagers content that is relevant, captivating and somehow distinguished from the masses of information that has bung up the internet. Then there is the lustrous magazine set, the tacky airport lounges, all 'fancy' hotels (with almost no exception) and every other supposedly 'luxury' space, place, thing or person fattened with more flounce. But this fantasy has risen with the aspirant 'always emerging' but lost all its value with the 'never emerged'.

Luxury magazines are filled with rehashed press releases that self-professed 'luxury marketing agencies' send out, the opening of an envelope is celebrated with canapés and a 'black book' of *faux* celebrity contacts in a supposedly swanky hotel or art gallery (if the client

allows for edgy) and then of course the assault of labels, and vilifying of trade names. Surely that is unintentional you might think. So naturally the real 'engagers', 'buyers' or 'appreciating connoisseurs' have fox-trotted out of the arena before the mess even began.

So what do these engagers really want? Customised, personalised content that doesn't stink of press releases and cheap ploys but rather words and emotions that clearly feel perfuse with integrity, a tiny exposure of the exclusivity that demonstrates an understanding of how a true fan appreciates and takes oh-so-seriously the magnitude of artistry involved with real, true opulence.

The interesting brand IWC sidelines some of the chaos and they roister the veracious uniqueness and the science behind the product at a yearly '*Salon International de la Haute Horlogerie*' in Geneva for writers and journalists alike to experience the brands in their natural habitat surrounded by watch-geeks and passion-makers. This is where a bank of truthful words, emotions and experiences come from and eventually they make it onto the pages, be it online or off, that engagers will find and revel in.

What makes IWC so alluring is not only that the brand is niche (in the real sense of the word) and probably aimed at a real watch-head, that the 'Friends of the brand' include respected actors, legendary sportsmen (Cate Blanchett, Kevin Spacey, Zidane are just some worth admiring) but also how the brand tells their story in two distinct ways. There is the horizontal story telling that reveals the legacy and thrills engagers with their assemblage of extraction and plumage, without bombarding and lying. The second is a

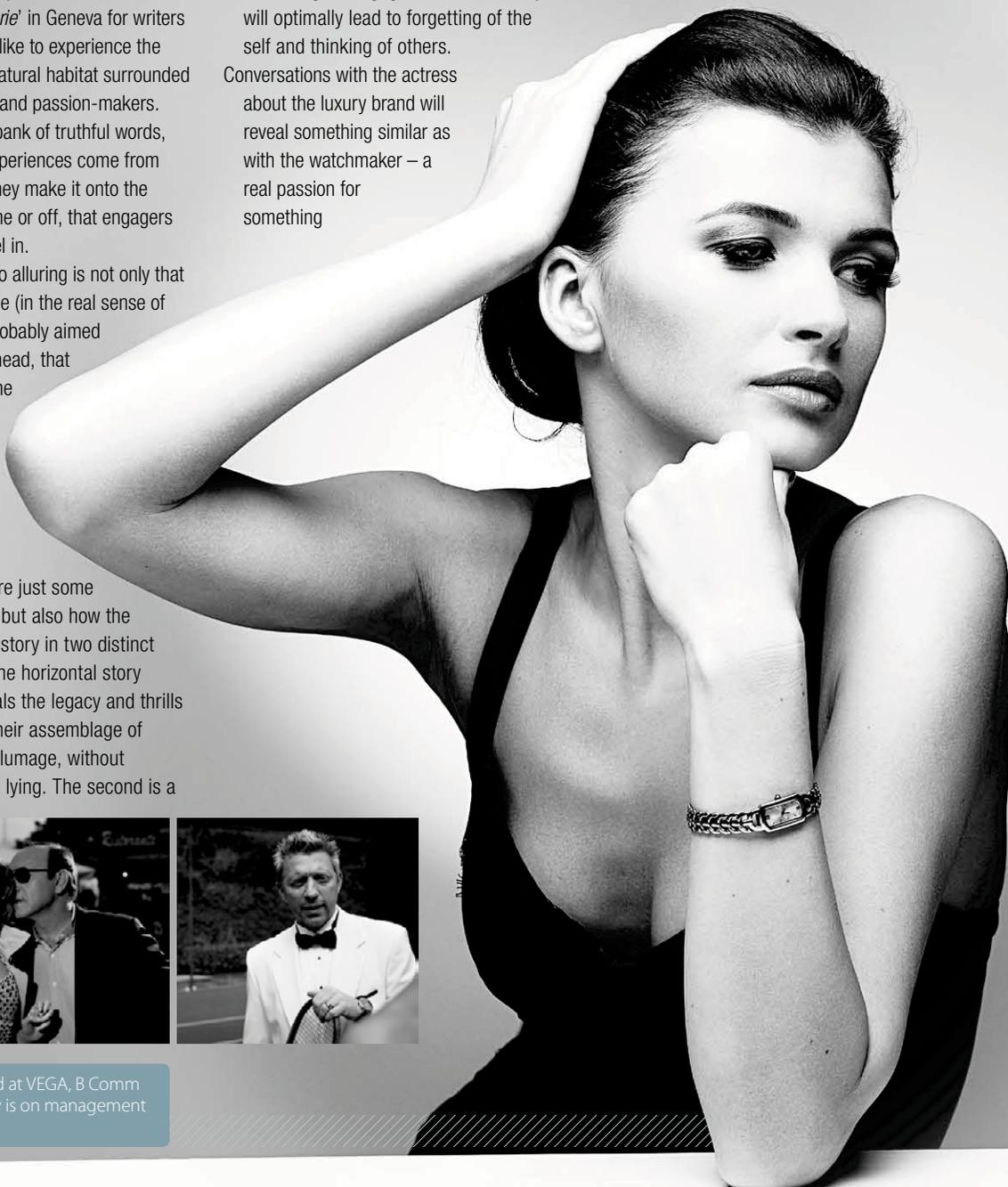
vertical story telling where annual themes are explored – this is where Peter Lindbergh's Portofino shoot of May 2010 comes in exploring some nautical Italian fortitude – where it doesn't mean to create yearning but rather to create inclusivity. Aspiration is out, in collusion is in.

Having Cate Blanchett as the friend of IWC might seem outlandish if the argument is inclusivity, but she's not just the face or the die-hard promoter, she is the friend. Someone who actually wants to wear an IWC, albeit possibly a *gratis* purchase, and although she probably gets paid to wear IWC, the brand is not forced upon her but more importantly not forced upon us, the engagers. The brand, and she, is there to remind us that we're part of an artistry and so reminding an engager of this virtuosity will optimally lead to forgetting of the self and thinking of others.

Conversations with the actress about the luxury brand will reveal something similar as with the watchmaker – a real passion for something



tangible and an understanding, and this is the money-shot, of the intangible. This discarnate mass can bring the attention to giving back, to conservation, to selflessness oppose to hoarding and to modesty opposed to a showing off. So luxury now is finding a kind of respect for something that may be just another brand but can aid in the discovery of what time, space and freedom really means. Maybe lustre's luminance is on the inside after all. <



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