

PROCESS? TOOL? SKILL?

The role of design for tomorrow's luxury markets, as antidote to the crisis

by Marco Bevolo

Independent Author, Wharton School Publishing, and fr. Director, Philips Design



The BRIC countries are not immune to the financial downturn. The luxury markets are not immune to the financial downturn. None of us is immune to this downturn. Although a number of speakers aimed at keeping the focus on the everyday processes of luxury business, the **Global Luxury Forum**, held in Moscow on the 8th of December, 2008, was not immune to the concerns derived from the current volatility of value and uncertainty for the future.

The closing panel of the event addressed the heart of the matter, with key contributions by Rogier van der Heide, Director at ARUP, Roland Heiler, MD at Porsche Design, Rieko Shofu, Executive Manager at Hakuhodo, and Mosco-based designer. Moderated by the author of this article, these experts sketched rich insights of how design can work for tomorrow's luxury success.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE DISCUSSION INCLUDED:

- design will have to be used as a catalyst of true values across luxury brands, in a process of re-foundation and renaissance;
 - design will have to be leveraged as a discipline to find back the simplicity and essence of functionalities and applications, shifting from "marketing bling bling" back to genuine authenticity;
 - design will have to be nurtured as one of the possible vehicles to work on new notions of sustainability, where luxury becomes driven by emerging social values and a new sense of ethics, over pure aesthetics. The role of design, according to the experts in this Global Luxury Forum panel, resides well beyond its possible use of "corporate process".
- Design is a creative view of the world in terms of re-thinking the world around us for what is possible, and - possibly, at its best - for what is better. Questions from the floor, a parterre du roi including the likes of the CEO of Royal Falcon Fleet, the Singapore company of luxury yachts with innovative business modeling, pointed even further and deeper to the challenges ahead of us.

In conclusion, luxury is part of culture, and as such, its meaning will change - and dramatically - in the next months and years. As the current crisis goes beyond the plain financial aspects of our society, to actually invest the deep meaning of our lives, new forms of luxury will emerge, to fulfill new visions and dreams. Design will be there, to lead brands and make it all happen.