

Artisans at Work

Quality craftsmanship and attention to detail is the key to timeless elegance

In this age of fast fashion, it often seems like true craftsmanship is a lost art—but that’s certainly not the case at heritage leather accessories brand Valextra. Founded by Giovanni Fontana in 1937, Valextra has always been about more than just leather, and the brand’s first store in Milan’s Piazza San Babila quickly earned a reputation for crafting innovative leather designs using only the finest artisanal saddler techniques.

Fontana’s team of expert craftsmen worked from the first floor of the boutique, where each unique piece was crafted by hand before being showcased in the store’s famously extravagant window displays. This was a place where anything was possible, including a hippopotamus-skin vanity case and hatbox made for opera diva Maria Callas, a stunning gold bag clasp created as a gift for the Hollywood actress Grace Kelly, and a bespoke 14-piece elephant-skin luggage set made for the Emir of Kuwait.

Fontana’s contemporary yet timeless aesthetics and transformative creative vision saw many of his signature items go down in history as modern icons. These included the inimitable 24-Hour Bag attaché case, designed for



STYLISH STITCHES
Valextra’s handcrafted “costa” piping technique adds eye-catching contours



short trips away and exhibited at New York’s Museum of Modern Art; the Grip gentlemen’s coin purse, devised especially to fit on the dashboard of a car; the Tric-Trac wrist bag created to store men’s essentials during the 1960s vogue for pocket-less cigarette trousers; and the Avietta 48-Hour briefcase and Extendable Sac luggage, the perfect companions for the new age of airplane travel.

In 2000, Emanuele Carminati Molina invested in Valextra, breathing fresh life into the brand and driving business to the next level. Molina remembered gazing admiringly into the boutique’s windows as a teenager, and was determined to stay true to Fontana’s distinctive spirit and vision while bringing the brand firmly into the 21st century—by restoring Valextra’s traditional artisanal techniques and passing down the ancient art of saddlery to a new generation of apprentices.

Luxury at Valextra isn’t in a flashy logo or momentary trend—instead, it manifests itself in the smallest details, from the exclusive skins sourced from specific breeders to the threads used for stitching and finishings, all in colours unique to the maison. Admire the softly curved protective corners of Valextra’s travel accessories, which recall the window contours of the original Piazza San Babila boutique; the shear-cut edges created using a special “costa” piping technique before being hand-lacquered in carefully chosen contrasting or tonal shades; and the soft leather

lining of each item, subtly cut with the signature V shape on its internal compartments and with a double saddle-stitch to reinforce its joints.

After years of cutting-edge mechanical research, all of Valextra’s locking systems, clasps, handles and wheels are patent-protected, while each piece is also hot-stamped with the craftsman’s personal code, the item’s serial number and the date of production.

Valextra’s bespoke service offers customers the utmost in customised luxury, harking back to the days of the Milan boutique, where Fontana himself would attend to his clientele’s every request, however unusual. Nowadays, the bespoke process has been modernised with a convenient in-store app that allows customers to choose from Valextra’s extensive range of hides (from classic calfskins to exotic ostrich), exclusive colours and beautiful finishes (such as the colour of the stitching, hardware and piping)—but the traditional attention to detail remains every bit as exacting as in Fontana’s day. For a truly unique touch, opt for a personalised monogram, where the client’s initials can be embossed in either gold or platinum.

Aside from its stylish handbags for women and men, Valextra is known for its chic, functional travel accessories that range from passport holders to vanity cases and handy all-in-one wallets. Tradition, innovation, elegance and practicality: Valextra’s unique brand of quality craftsmanship is truly built to last. ■

SHEER BEAUTY
Employing artisanal saddlery techniques, Valextra’s craftsmen cut, stitch and polish each piece by hand