

GUCCI

GUCCI OPENS THE NEW HOME FOR ITS ARCHIVE COLLECTION AT PALAZZO SETTIMANNI IN FLORENCE

"My task was to bring many objects back home, virtually helping them return to the family. To a place which ostensibly preserves the past but which is actually a bridge to the contemporary. An ancient building is a living thing. Like fashion." - Alessandro Michele

The opening on 1st July of the new home of the Gucci archive in Via delle Caldaie in Florence marks another major milestone in the House's 100th anniversary celebrations. The archive is housed in Palazzo Settimanni, which dates back to the 15th century and is located in the Santo Spirito neighbourhood, in the area known as "Oltrarno", on the left bank of the river. This is where artisans and artists had their workshops, and by the 16th century, following the Medici family's move to Palazzo Pitti, they had established themselves alongside the residences of aristocratic families who chose to build their sumptuous homes there.

This transformation from working-class district to sophisticated urban area may warrant a comparison with Gucci's stylistic codes, in which know-how is inextricably intertwined with research, harmony and refinement.

Despite its grandeur, over the centuries the palace proved to be a flexible structure, capable of accommodating additions, splits, partitions, changes of ownership and use. Acquired by Gucci in 1953, it became an integral part of the brand, both physically and metaphorically. It has served as a factory, a workshop and a showroom. Today, thanks to the refurbishment commissioned and designed by Creative Director Alessandro Michele, the building has not only been restored to its original character but has also been allowed to tell its own story and reveal its multiple identities, becoming the symbol of a dialogue between past and present – the necessary prerequisites for the future. Here, the vision of the creative director has joined that of the archivist, the historian, the anthropologist, the scholar, the psychoanalyst and the philosopher, eschewing defined boundaries, instead tracing theoretical and experiential paths that go well beyond the displays.

"Palazzo Settimanni, now free of earlier additions, is transformed into a magical place to which I have restored a sense of porousness: you pass through it, air gets in, you can walk through it as if it were a journey. I'm porous, absorbent, permeable", explains Alessandro Michele. "I have restored to the Palazzo a fairy-tale aura which, for instance, allows the small entrance hall to become a gateway to a dream dimension. I envisaged it as a sort of secret place within the House, an inner sanctum from where one sets out for Gucci's holy lands".

Across the five floors, which include the ground floor and the basement, all the structures accumulated in recent times have been stripped away to reveal vestiges of 19th century decorations, 18th century trompe l'oeil, late 17th century frescoes and even earlier ornamentation; all these elements have been deliberately left intact or restored to their original splendour without being moved or altered. The only significant alteration has been the removal of the canopy in the entrance hall, added in the 1990s, to let in more light and restore the central portico to its original, graceful proportions. Everything has been planned, arranged and designed with the same sensitivity and attention that has informed

the entire repurposing of the building as a home for the brand's historic collections: from the furnishings to the details of the handles that replicate a pair of scissors, from the glazed *wunderkammer* [cabinets of curiosities] to the lamps, the precious cabinetry and the large cupboards in glass and iron.

To achieve this, strong links were maintained with the territory, with all the restoration entrusted to local specialists, including the terracotta floor tiles produced one by one in wood-fired ovens.

Like a treasure chest holding more treasure chests inside, the archive is divided into themed rooms, named after the mantra-like words that are part of Alessandro Michele's lexicon, words coined to denote certain stages in his creative journey. The basement is divided into three halls, *Radura* (porcelain and household items), *Herbarium* (stationery), and *Maison de L'Amour* (leisure items).

The ground floor houses the collections of vintage handbags (*Hortus Deliciarum* hall), small leather goods and vintage belts (*Prato di Ganymede* hall – the field of Ganymede), an exhibition room (*Swan* hall), vintage and contemporary jewellery (*Le Marché des Merveilles* hall) and vintage luggage (*1921 Rifondazione* hall).

Textile creations -- scarves and dresses -- and footwear are housed on the first floor, where the space is divided into rooms with evocative and powerful names, such as *Orto di Giove* (Jupiter's garden), *The Alchemist's Garden*, *Serapis*, and *Aveugle par Amour*, to name but a few. Lastly, on the second floor, we find the *Façonnier des Rêves* hall.

Most striking is the wall showcasing those styles that have maintained their design codes intact while evolving in step with historical events, such as the Bamboo bag or the Jackie, both presented in different versions and materials. In the adjacent jewellery room, which houses vintage items alongside contemporary collections, the mirrors that cover the walls in their entirety erase the concept of dimension, expanding the space to infinity. A welcome revival are the lifestyle accessories, whose function and design are perfectly contemporary despite being created to complete the brand's aesthetics some sixty or seventy years ago.

It is precisely this constant dialogue between past and present that generates a focus for study and knowledge, rigour and discipline – one which, right from the entrance, includes fairy-tale elements, graceful *divertissements*, extraordinary twists and surprising solutions, thereby removing any notion of the object on display as a historical exhibit, instead identifying it as a 'bridge' between different cultural and historical realities, housed in a space that acts as an amplifier, being rooted in today's Florence but proudly displaying the evidence of its past.

A centre for study and for fostering dialogue with the contemporary, Palazzo Settimanni guards and protects, amuses and surprises, but it is not an organised collection of beautiful artifacts so much as a living, vibrant testimony to an organic, creative, constantly evolving work in progress. "The archive is a memory palace," says Valerie Steele, director and curator of the museum at the Fashion Institute of Technology, who collaborated on the layout and curation of the public spaces. "Far from being a dusty attic, it is a dynamic system of knowledge production and inspiration. Archives are based on the drive to collect and categorize objects from the past, not because of any nostalgia, but because the style of objects changes over time. This relation to time means that a brand like Gucci, which has a 100-year history, develops archives in order to keep a tangible cultural heritage alive, now and for the future."

Palazzo Settimanni and Gucci Education

Palazzo Settimanni is also home to Gucci Education, a unique space that offers training opportunities for the brand's employees. A physical location that complements an innovative digital ecosystem, blending traditional learning facilities and new virtual spaces where students may experiment with personalised learning pathways, based on specific needs, interests and abilities.

In addition to an online community, Gucci Education includes practical academic programmes such as the Retail Academy, the Supply Chain Academy, the HR Academy and the Digital Academy, but also the École de l'Amour, which is physically housed in the ArtLab and in Gucci's production facilities.

A wealth of ever-evolving learning opportunities to enrich and maximise personal and collective growth, drawing inspiration from the House's DNA and its codes, now being celebrated in the archive to propel the brand into the next 100 years.

About Gucci

Founded in Florence in 1921, Gucci is one of the world's leading luxury fashion brands. As the House marks its 100th Anniversary under the Creative Direction of Alessandro Michele, with Marco Bizzarri as President and Chief Executive, Gucci moves forward into the coming decades with an ongoing commitment to redefining luxury, while celebrating the creativity, innovation and Italian craftsmanship at the core of its values.

Gucci is part of the global luxury group Kering, which manages the development of a series of renowned Maisons in fashion, leather goods, jewelry and watches.

For further information about Gucci visit www.gucci.com.