

NFT Fashion

Exploring style's new frontier

BY SHERI RADFORD

There's no need to travel to Paris or New York to discover what's new and hot in fashion. Nowadays, the hottest trends are as close at hand as your phone or laptop. Companies ranging from everyday brands to luxe labels are jumping into the virtual world with attention-grabbing experiences in the metaverse. Think NFT releases, digital runway shows, gamification and more.

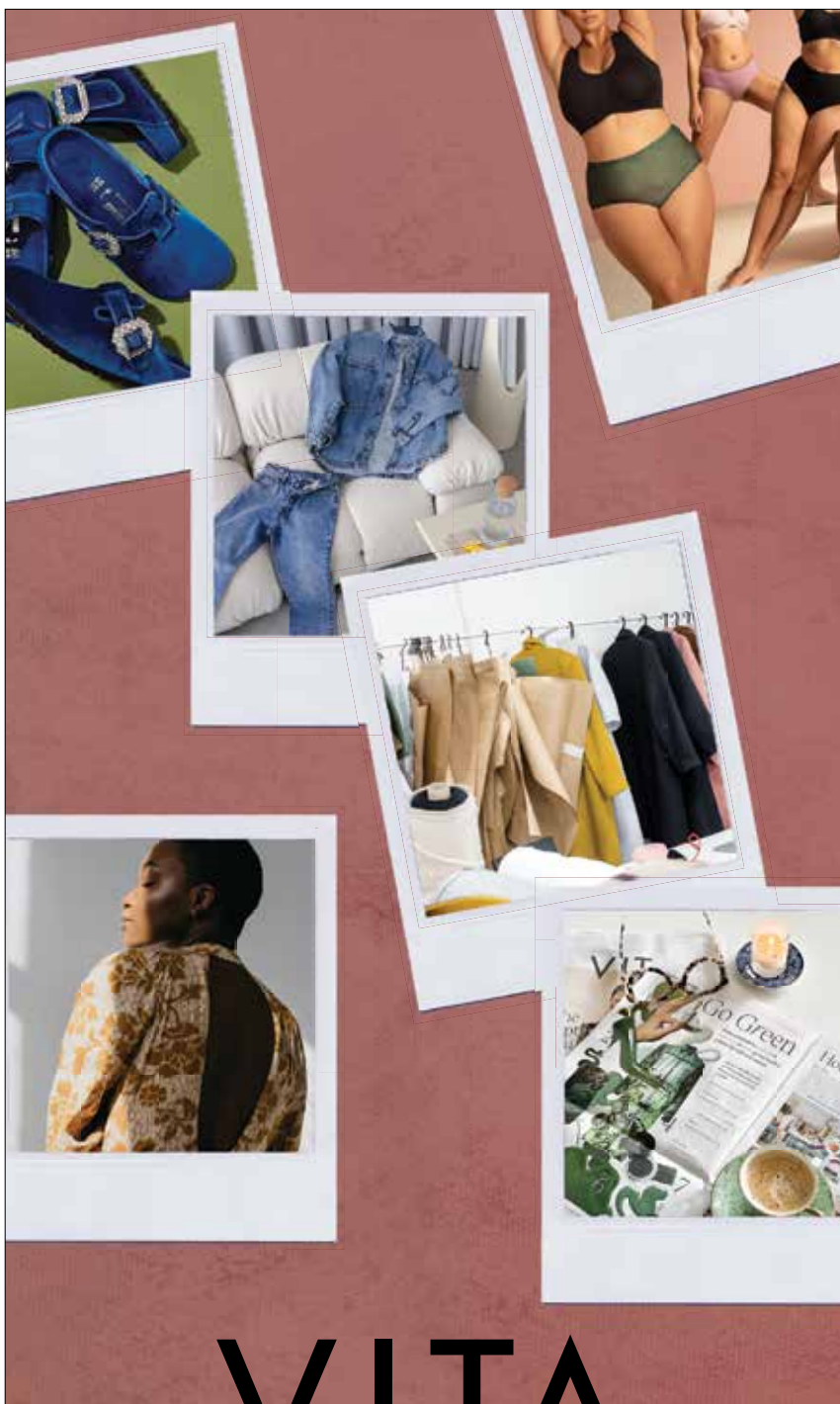
Gap Inc. is just one of the companies making a splash virtually. Last year, the company launched limited-edition collections of non-fungible tokens (NFTs) with "Frank Ape" artist Brandon Sines, hip-hop fashion innovator Dapper Dan and former pro-soccer player Demit Omphroy, and the resulting collectible hoodie digital artworks were made available to consumers via the open-source blockchain Tezos. Gap invited artists to reinterpret the brand's iconic logo, then encouraged customers to vote to determine what three designs would become both NFTs and physical hoodies. The brand launched a Discord server, to allow customers to connect easily online and form a community. And, Gap ventured into the world of Roblox online gaming, setting up the Club Roblox Boutique, where teens' avatars could try on virtual outfits from the summer collection, snap photos and play games.

"Gap Inc. is exploring new ways to bring our brands and iconic product to new and existing customers in a rapidly evolving digital ecosystem," explains a company spokesperson. And, regarding NFTs in particular: "As with all our partnerships with artists, we really look to them to put their own spin on whatever it is we are creating."

Gucci has also been exploring the metaverse in a big way. The luxury brand teamed up with Superplastic (which creates animated celebrities and digital collectibles) to launch Super-gucci: CryptoJanky NFTs paired with ceramic sculptures handmade in Italy. Members of Gucci's Discord community were granted early access to purchase coveted limited-edition NFTs. Gucci also



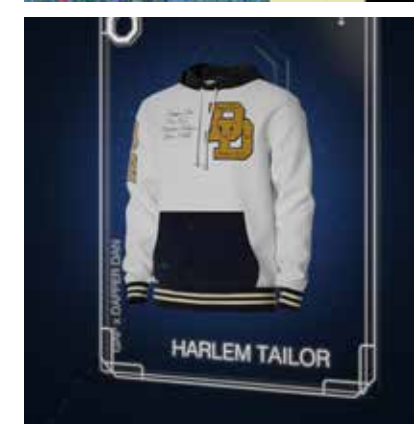
"Fashion has always been about pushing boundaries, taking risks and exploring what's new"



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partnered with SuperRare to exhibit The Next 100 Years of Gucci in the Gucci Vault experimental online space, auction off a selection of NFT artworks and host Twitter Spaces conversations featuring participating artists. Plus Gucci collaborated with digital artisan Wagmi-san on 10KTF Gucci Grail, an NFT collection of digital clothing available only to an extremely select group of individuals: members of the Gucci Vault community on Discord; those already inhabiting New Tokyo, where Wagmi-san lives; and those who already have a Picture For Proof (PFP), the NFT version of a profile pic.

Closer to home, Vancouver brand Cape de Coeur launched, last year, three limited-edition NFTs based on both its signature capes and a special digital artwork video. Company president Bettina Mueller Reichl describes the NFTs as "something truly special and innovative" and "an exceptional opportunity to introduce Cape de Coeur to the world in a unique way."

What's possible in the metaverse just keeps expanding. Online games such as Fortnite and Minecraft have done partnerships with fashion labels. An increasing number of brands are experimenting with accepting cryptocurrency as payment. And runway shows that blend IRL and digital elements are bringing high fashion to anyone with an internet connection.

Fashion has always been about pushing boundaries, taking risks and exploring what's new. The last three years have been an especially challenging time for fashion houses and retailers, with ongoing supply chain and staffing issues, not to mention people abandoning their chic outfits to work from home in yoga pants. Many overseas clothing factories continue to face issues surrounding working conditions and sustainability. Forays into the metaverse are an ingenious way to offer new experiences to large audiences in an eco-friendly (and surprisingly affordable) manner.

It doesn't hurt that Gen Z is the perfect audience for these types of virtual experiences. A highly ethical and environmentally concerned cohort, Gen Z is less driven by material acquisition than older generations. They're constantly looking for new experiences. And they live online, by some estimates spending half of their waking hours each day on social media.

If the thought of all these experiences leaves you more confused than enticed, rest assured that the big brands are already hard at work on an adventure that will draw you into the metaverse. V