



Signature
Pieces



“QUALITY IS REMEMBERED LONG AFTER PRICE IS FORGOTTEN” – ALDO GUCCI

Guccio Gucci's death in 1953, just two weeks after his first New York store had been opened, saw the firm pass into the control of his sons Aldo and Rodolfo (with sons Vasco and Udo playing smaller parts in the business).

The brothers were determined to keep their father's dream of an elite brand alive and continued to focus on creating only the most memorable fine leather goods and accessories that increasingly became coveted by the rich and famous. Aldo, in particular, had already proved his flair for both design and business creating the iconic interlocking double G logo in the 1930s and helping create the signature diamante-printed fabric for luggage that was a precursor to the Gucci trunks and bags that are so recognisable today.

In 1953 Aldo created possibly the most iconic of all of Gucci's products: the Horsebit loafer. Although his father had produced fine leather shoes with metal snaffles as early as 1932, Aldo

OPPOSITE Grace Kelly wearing the Flora silk scarf commissioned for her by Rodolfo Gucci and designed by Italian illustrator Vittorio Accornero in 1966. The print went on to be one of Gucci's most iconic patterns.



OPPOSITE Jackie Kennedy Onassis made the slouchy, Gucci hobo bag an instant classic when she was photographed in 1961, reputedly using the handbag to shield herself from the paparazzi. She was subsequently regularly spotted carrying a version of the label's signature accessory which was renamed the Jackie in her honour.

redesigned the loafer and, in homage to his father's love of equestrian embellishments, added a gilded metal snaffle in the shape of a horse's mouth-bit. An immediate success, the simple yet elegant Gucci loafer has become one of the fashion world's most coveted status symbols – so important in fashion history that since 1985 it has been on permanent display at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

The horsebit motif itself subsequently became a detail that was added to many different accessories in many different ways: as a metal fastening it formed clasps to bags and belts and was much later adorned with sequins by Frida Giannini who created jewellery and chain-link straps out of the pattern. During the 1960s the horsebit began to be printed onto fabric including silk and wool ties, scarves and clothing and in the 1970s use of the logo intensified further appearing even on homewares that Gucci had started to offer. With Tom Ford's dramatic revival of the Gucci label in the 1990s, the horsebit was given an ultra-stylised edge appearing on high-heeled patent red loafers and as oversized fastenings on belts and bags.

Another equestrian-inspired creation that has become synonymous with the Gucci brand is the striped green-red-green grosgrain Web fabric inspired by the traditional saddle belt that straddled the horse's girth holding the saddle onto its back. The colours are said to have been chosen for their resemblance to traditional British fox-hunting jackets and the stripe brings to mind military medal ribbons or public school scarves, both with aristocratic connotations of status. Over the years this signature woven fabric has been made into every conceivable product including belts, bag straps, scarves, watch straps and thongs for flip-flops and has adorned everything from clothing to trainers. While Gucci has experimented with various different colours, most often blue, replacing the central red of the striped band, it

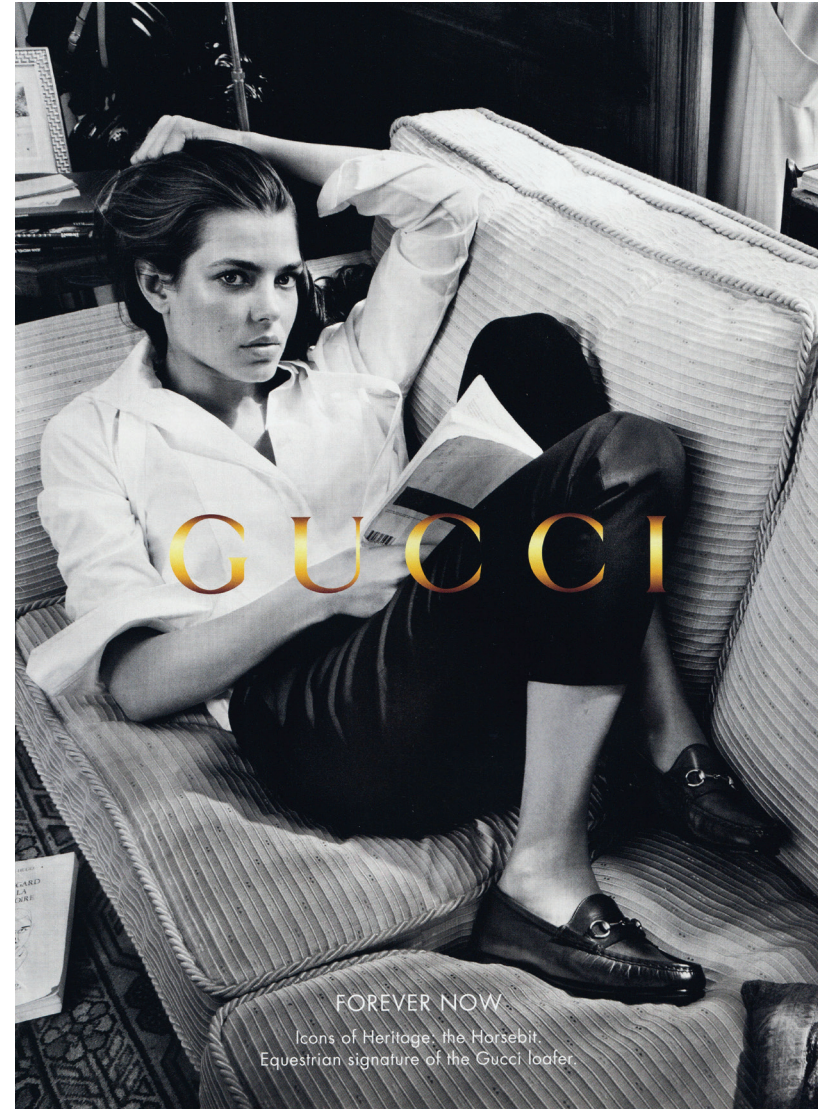
is this red-green combination that remains most quintessential, an instant identifier of the Gucci name.

In the same year as Aldo designed the loafer he also reworked the successful diamanté fabric print, incorporating the double G logo into the centre of the interconnecting diamonds, keeping the same colours: dark brown on a tan background. This GG print, as it has become known, is crafted out of hard-wearing cotton canvas fabric, finished with a leather trim and often combined in handbags and other small accessories with the woven green-red-green Web stripe. Again, the signature print has appeared on many different accessories including wallets, shoes and hats, as well as being printed onto finer fabric to make clothing. In 1955 Aldo Gucci finally trademarked the interlocking Gs logo, now a sought-after status symbol which subsequently became routinely added to all Gucci products. During the 1950s and 60s Gucci continued to target wealthy international socialites and celebrities, opening stores in London and Palm Beach.

Accessories were very much the core of the Gucci brand during the 1950s and 60s and one handbag in particular became another signature piece that is still produced today: The Bamboo Bag. Originally designed by Guccio Gucci the saddle-shaped bag is carried by a burnished bamboo-cane handle created out of necessity during the wartime leather embargo. Its covetable status increased as Hollywood legends including Ingrid Bergman and Elizabeth Taylor were spotted carrying it and in later years it was a firm favourite of Princess Diana.

Renaming a bag or accessory after a celebrity has created some of the most iconic bags of the twentieth century and one of these is the Jackie. Dedicated to Jackie Kennedy, who, in 1961 at the height of her popularity as the most stylish woman in the world was photographed carrying an unstructured, unisex

OPPOSITE Charlotte Casiraghi models the Gucci signature Horsebit loafer, its metal snaffle modelled on a horse's mouthpiece, in 2017. The quintessentially stylish royal equestrian and granddaughter to Grace Kelly could not be a more fitting ambassador for the heritage range.



The background features a repeating geometric pattern of interlocking hexagons. The pattern is composed of two main colors: a light gold or beige and a dark teal. The hexagons are arranged in a staggered grid, with some hexagons being solid gold and others being outlined in teal. The overall effect is a textured, crystalline surface.

Tom Ford



A SEXUAL REVOLUTION

Today Tom Ford is recognised as one of the greatest fashion designers of the last 30 years and is rightly credited with turning around the fortunes of the Gucci label.

However, at the time of his appointment to the ailing fashion house by Dawn Mello in 1990, Ford had none of the experience, credentials or reputation one might have expected for the head of a major label.

Born in Austin, Texas in 1961, the young Tom Ford moved to New York City in 1979 to study history of art at NYU but it was the social scene that opened Ford's eyes to both a career within the fashion world and the possibilities the city had to offer. In a later interview with Vogue magazine he remembers being invited to a party "...Andy Warhol was [there], and he took us to Studio 54 – wow. Even today, I still start shaking when I hear Donna Summer because it's the music of my coming-of-age". Studio 54

OPPOSITE A young Kate Moss models a sensual outfit from Tom Ford's seminal A/W 1995 show. The purple satin silk shirt tucked into hipster trousers with a slim Gucci belt is topped with a matching velvet jacket and patent, high-heeled Horsebit loafers.

RIGHT During the decade in which he was designer-in-chief Tom Ford transformed the troubled house of Gucci, injecting the traditional label with glamour and sex appeal. Part of his success was down to his own charismatic presence and social status which he used to foster celebrity endorsements and boost the image of the brand.



became a regular haunt of Ford's where he mingled with the likes of Halston, Bianca Jagger and Jerry Hall, as well as with Warhol himself and the glamorous, sensual fashion styles of this period were the foundation for Ford's designs that transformed Gucci's fortunes.

After a year of study, Ford dropped out of NYU to focus on an acting career in Los Angeles where his good looks saw him cast in a number of national advertising campaigns, experience which later helped him reshape the Gucci advertising strategy

RIGHT Model Kylie Bax sashays down the catwalk in Tom Ford's Gucci A/W 1996 collection. Her palely glamorous silk shirt is unbuttoned to the waist to reveal a statement gold necklace and matching flowing trousers have a Halston vibe that wouldn't be out of place on Bianca Jagger in her Studio 54 days.



to great success. These early years as an actor sparked a lifelong passion for film-making, which became a second career for the designer in 2005 with the launch of his own production company, Fade to Black.

Returning to New York, Ford studied architecture and interior design at Parson's school of Design, but quickly decided that he preferred to pursue a career in fashion, selectively editing his resumé when he started to apply for fashion roles by neglecting to specify the exact subject of his degree. Similarly, his stint in France employed by Parisian company Chloé found its way onto his CV but Ford glossed over the fact that it was in fact a PR company and not the fashion label for whom he had worked! Through his persistence and ability to charm those he met, Ford eventually secured a position as design assistant to American designer Cathy Hardwick who remembers his interview: "I had every intention of giving him no hope. I asked him who his favourite European designers were. He said, 'Armani and Chanel'. Months later I asked him why he said that, and he said, 'because you were wearing something Armani'. Is it any wonder he got the job?"

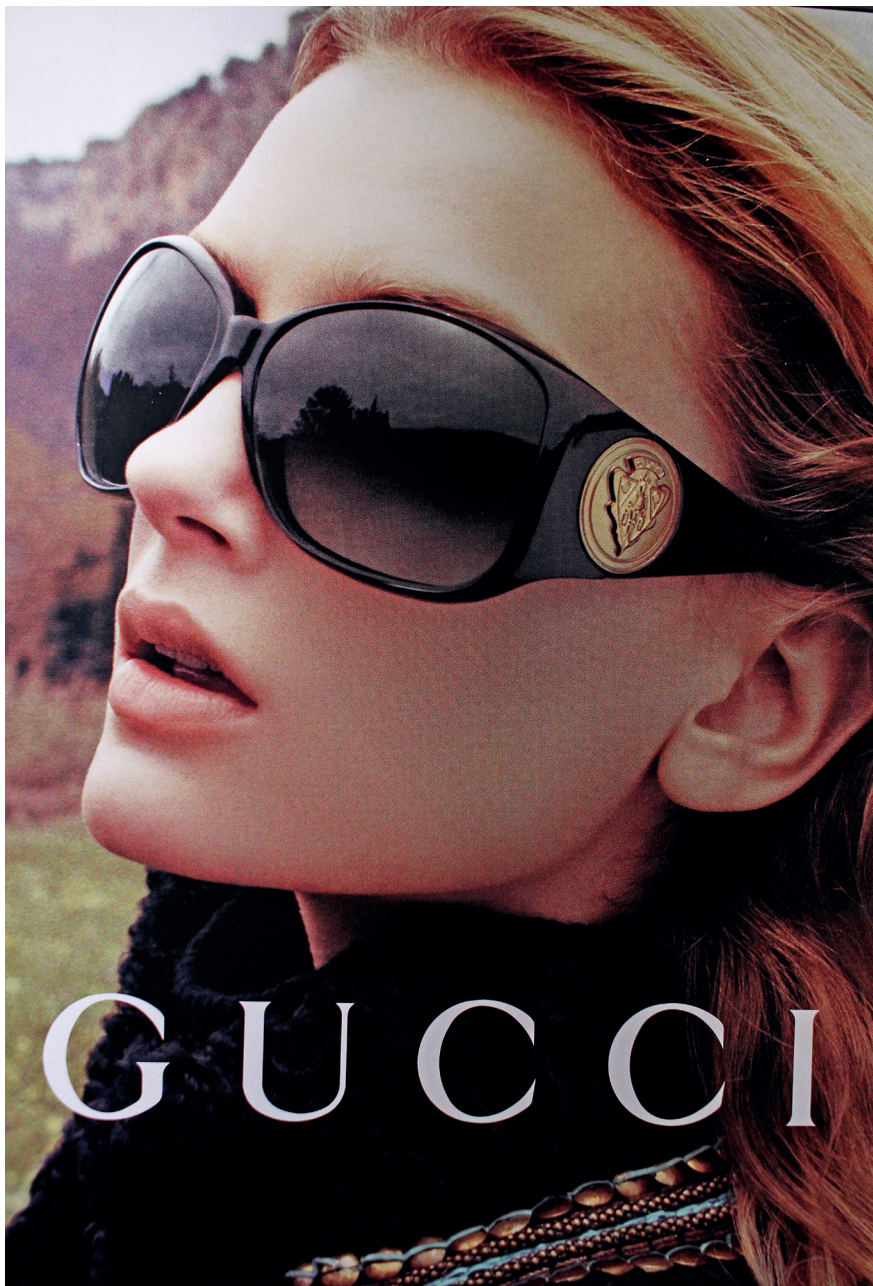
Tom Ford worked for Hardwick for two years until his appointment to head up women's ready-to-wear at Gucci by Dawn Mello in 1990. While this might seem like a massive promotion for the relatively inexperienced young designer it is important to remember that at the time virtually no one in fashion wanted to work for Gucci, let alone relocate to Milan, a condition of the role. Mello explained that "...I was talking to a lot of people, and most didn't want the job. For an American designer to move to Italy to join a company that was far from being a brand would have been pretty risky."

Nevertheless Ford took the position and moved to Milan with his partner, fashion journalist Richard Buckley, a constant

support in his life with whom he has been in a relationship for three decades, finally marrying in 2014. Two years later, in 1994, Ford's role expanded to include overseeing fragrance, advertising and the design of the Gucci stores. When Dawn Mello left the company in 1994 to return to Bergdorf Goodman, Tom Ford became Creative Director and finally stepped into the spotlight. With the unwavering support of President and CEO Domenico De Sole – the pair would soon become known as the dream team 'Dom and Tom' – Ford rapidly stamped his mark on the struggling brand.

RIGHT Madonna was such a fan of Tom Ford's breakaway 1995 A/W show that she wore one of the collection's most recognisable outfits to that year's MTV awards. The turquoise satin shirt – unbuttoned to reveal the singer's bra – and Gucci Horsebit belt instantly sealed the new designer's reputation.





OPPOSITE Expanding the sales of accessories was crucial to the success of Gucci and Tom Ford oversaw striking advertising campaigns all with a subtle edge that infused the brand with sensuality. This sunglasses ad is simple yet effective with the model's parted lips and the Gucci gold logo becoming the focal points of the image.

What few reviews Tom Ford's debut collection in 1994 received were mixed, with hardly any fashion writers bothering to watch the show. *Vogue* magazine's Sarah Mower remembers the Gucci publicist pleading with style journalists to attend his debut and yet just one year later, the fashion crowd flocked to see Ford's Autumn/Winter groundbreaking 1995 collection. After the severity of 1980s power-dressing with its monotone colours and sharply-drawn lines, followed by early nineties shapeless grunge, Tom Ford's louche, overtly sexual designs were eye-opening. Drawing heavily on his experience at Studio 54 and the luxe-glam of 1970s styles his designs included fitted satin shirts in jewel-like colours, unbuttoned almost to the waist on both men and women and paired with hip-hugging velvet bell-bottoms, velvet suits in electric orange and lime green and richly-textured coats of vivid blue. It was an assault on the senses, full of hedonistic indulgence in the form of luxurious fur, velvet, leather and satin worn by models including Amber Valletta and Kate Moss who paraded sexily down the catwalk. Tom Ford's collection was so new and bold that it has been widely credited with transforming the landscape of fashion.

Ford had not forgotten Gucci's heritage – the horsebit loafer was still very much in evidence – but instead of playing it safe with the traditional values of the label he had taken a brand which was essentially boring and blown it out of the water. A huge hit with the fashion press and celebrities including Madonna, who wore a key look from the collection to that year's MTV Music Awards, the charismatic Tom Ford had arrived.

A year later the designer recollects his 1996 Autumn/Winter show when "...it all came together for the first time." Ford's hyper-sexual designs, harking back to Studio 54 with a risqué Helmut Newton style influence shocked the world and was a welcome change for fashion's elite including Anna Wintour who,



LEFT Model Unia Pakhomova in Alessandro Michele's historically-inspired 2018 Resort collection at Florence's Pitti Palace. She wears a Grecian-style dress with gold stripes and sequined silver detail with a gold headdress modelled on a laurel wreath

OPPOSITE Michele has always blurred gender boundaries. From his very first show for Gucci, he has used male and female models for both men's and womenswear shows. This androgynous female model wearing a floral pussy-bow dress and carrying a queenly red handbag appeared in the 2017 menswear collection.

