



FASHION

Hermès Creates Immersive Mystery Game

- Mystery at the Grooms' challenges people to find a number of missing horses.

BY JEAN E. PALMIERI

Hermès is shining a spotlight on grooms. No, not the ones preparing for nuptials, but the ones who care for horses.

The focus makes sense considering the equestrian heritage of the French luxury brand, which got its start in 1837 as a harness and saddle maker.

Hermès is embracing this history in an elaborate installation on Pier 36 in downtown New York called Mystery at the Grooms'. The company is inviting the public to visit a residence where grooms live with horses. But there's a problem: the horses are missing. They've disappeared and it's up to visitors to find them hidden among the objects on the set.

The players search the rooms for every hidden horse while the voice of equestrian detective Mr. Honore – who, not coincidentally, bears the name of the street in Paris that housed the first Hermès store – helps them in the search. Lucky visitors may find Ringlet peeking out from behind carrots in the hay bales in the pantry, or Clip-Clop, who is curled up under a Rocabar blanket in the dormitory.

The installation has six rooms and players have seven minutes in each room to find as many hidden horses as they can. There are five horses hidden in each room and horseshoes on the ground lead players from one room to the next.

But it's not easy, even though the head groom, a woman named Maeleine Galop, and other grooms are on site to offer hints.

Spoiler alert: one horse is hidden in a safe that can only be opened with the right code, another is under a silver serving dish and yet another behind a wooden panel that only opens after hitting the right switch. There's one only visible through a peephole hidden behind a panel on a wall, and there's even one printed on a yellow sweatshirt mixed in with a sea of white button-down shirts on a conveyor belt in the laundry.

The installation will be in place from Thursday to June 29 and is free to visitors who must register to guarantee a spot. So far, some 25,000 people have signed on to participate, the company said. The game has been promoted by ads in the New York Times and the New Yorker and the walls in the nearest subway station on East Broadway is filled with posters about the game.

"It's just to have fun and spread joy," said Diane Mahady, U.S. president, who was all in on the game, downloading the digital version of the mystery and clicking on the horses on her phone when she unearthed them. "Nothing is for sale. It's just a free experience to share the playful nature of the brand. We want people to just laugh for an hour for escapism."

Those who manage to find all the horses are rewarded with a prize as they exit: a notebook and a coloring book.

Although fun and creative – carrots are used instead of knives in the "refectory," or dining room, or as candles in the dormitory – the experience is intended to highlight the company's 16 métiers, or product categories, which include everything from men's and women's ready-to-wear and scarves to shoes, headphones, surfboards, dishes and leather goods, all of which are showcased throughout the installation.

Mahady said she expects fans of the brand to be especially enamored with the installation since many of the products are rare and "they'll enjoy getting to see them up close and in person."

The installation made its debut in Shanghai at the end of last year and will move on to Tokyo, Singapore and then Paris.

Pierre-Alexis Dumas, artistic director of Hermès, summed up the Mystery of the Grooms' this way: "Playing means being together. Play is movement, freedom, imagination, fantasy, lightness...and the horse is our first companion in the playground of creation."

