

# Christian Louboutin to Relaunch Men's with Jaden Smith as Creative Director

Men's product currently accounts for 24 percent of sales at the brand.

By Robert Williams



PARIS — In a year of creative reshuffles across the fashion industry, Christian Louboutin is throwing his hat into the ring: the billionaire shoemaker is taking a first step toward succession by bringing in a new creative director for the men's category.

Jaden Smith, the child actor turned musician and multi-disciplinary fashion creative, will lead Louboutin's men's line starting with a first capsule collection to be revealed in Paris in January.

Louboutin launched men's in 2010 as demand bubbled up for the spiked shoes he had originally created as a custom design for pop singer Mika. The brand opened a dedicated boutique for men in 2011 on Paris' Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the spiked motif — inspired by the poster for 1975 dystopian thriller "Roller Ball" — found its way onto velvet slippers, sneakers, backpacks and toiletry cases.

While interest in Louboutin's spiked sneakers has since waned, the brand's sales to men have continued to climb, powered by surging demand for more classic dress shoes featuring Louboutin's signature red leather soles. Men's products now make up 24 percent of the overall business, the company said.

"We started men's much later than women's but it's become really big. Overseeing it to the level that I look after the women's was taking so, so much time," Louboutin said. One day in late 2024 during his morning swim at the Cheval Blanc hotel in Paris, "I was thinking about how I needed someone else to drive the boat — and that person should be *le petit* Jaden."

Louboutin had met Smith a few years earlier, and felt the Hollywood scion had something special: he's multi-disciplinary, "generous" in his way of sharing space with the people with the musicians and artists he collaborates with, and has "incredible style — not set in a specific look, but always adventuring," he said.

Not least, "he's very, very, very, very, very well brought-up," Louboutin said. "That's a rare quality, and one that counts for me."

Louboutin has shown his fondness for the "well-brought-up" before: After rebuffing takeover offers from various investors for years, he finally accepted a minority investment in 2021 from Exor—the investment vehicle of the Agnelli, Italy's royal family of society and business.

Exor bought 24 percent of the company at a €2.25 billion valuation, confirming Louboutin's status as a self-made billionaire.





Since the investment, the brand has renovated its Paris flagship, opened a bigger-than-ever outpost in Shanghai and entered new markets like Austin, Texas. The brand is seeking to expand in new categories as well, inking an eyewear deal with Marcolin.

In a 2024 letter to investors, Exor chairman John Elkann said Louboutin was “delivering strong financial performance while continuing to innovate” and “progressing towards its target of passing the €1 billion revenue mark,” despite a slowing overall market for luxury goods that led the firm to write down the estimated value of its stake in the brand by €125 million.

While sales are declining for big luxury groups like LVMH and Kering, business is “holding up well” this year and even continuing to grow by single digits for Louboutin. He credits strong appeal in the more resilient US market, as well as paying close attention to entry-level prices, making sure the company continues to sell desirable styles below the \$1,000 mark, which is “an important psychological threshold.”

With women’s shoes driving growth, the brand is taking the opportunity to reinvigorate its men’s line with a new vision and aims to recover some of the excitement around its debut, which quickly captured the attention of high-profile musicians, actors and athletes: “people who have to stand and deliver,” Louboutin said.

With his show-business pedigree, Smith, aged 27, felt like an apt choice to lead the effort. He first achieved fame as a child starring alongside his father Will in 2006’s “The Pursuit of Happiness”, followed by 2010’s “Karate Kid” remake.

Since then, Smith has transitioned away from acting, putting out music, videos and fashion through the collective MSFTSrep, which he founded with his sister Willow in 2012. The collective explores spiritualism, “alternative history” and environmentalism with genre-crossing music incorporating rock and rap, and clothing that fosters an individualistic style.

Smith has worked with Louis Vuitton as a friend of the house since 2016 — often showcasing gender-fluid style in womenswear designer Nicolas Ghesquière’s creations. He’s also experimented with more absurdist gestures, like a castle-shaped headdress he wore to the Grammy’s this year.

Smith also has a luggage brand, Harper Collective, co-founded with longtime Selfridges executive Sebastien Manes in 2023.

“As an African-American designer, coming into a heritage fashion house and bringing my kind of Duchampian, more Dadaist fashion perspective into it — I’m just really excited to get started and to create something really special,” Smith said.

He’s already spent time with the brand’s ateliers and suppliers, beginning to learn about the craft of shoemaking, but says he sees his principle mission as “building a world — building a community around the brand, creating a narrative and then using that narrative to design.”

As a designer who parlayed his fantastical sketches into opportunities to learn on the job at Charles Jourdan and Roger Vivier, Louboutin agrees with the approach: “I quickly realised I was meant to focus on the imaginary — you can lose a lot of time trying to become technically skilled if that’s not your thing,” he said. “Jaden will bring his touch more generally, through campaigns and photographs, through his unique way of looking at the worlds that interest him.”

