

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

A Royal Lesson

Carl Louisville · Thursday, July 18th, 2013

Fancy cars, private jets, shopping sprees on high streets around the world. These experiences are what many people define as luxury.

But to my way of thinking, money does not mean luxury and luxury does not mean money.

What is luxury? Let me tell you a story.

Several years ago I was a sales associate at a luxury boutique on Rodeo Drive. One weekday afternoon, I had a lady walk in. She clearly was not the stereotypical size zero with a Birkin Bag that we were accustomed to seeing on The Drive. Instead, she was a lady of a certain age, plus size; pristine in Hermès flats. I'd recognize that H across the toes anywhere. Her shirt was pristine and white, the crease in her khakis was sharp as a blade. She was gazing at a tray of foulards; fingering through them like gems. Several associates positioned much closer to the woman didn't even bother with a hello.

After what seemed like interminable minutes of awkwardness, I walked to the front of the shop where she stood. She had an Hermès Kelly Bag with a long shoulder strap. It had gold hardware and was my favorite color; a rich cognac. We began a walk through the shop, and began to talk about the collection. I could tell she was concerned about her size, and whether we had any pieces that would fit. I assured her, I'd make every attempt to get any pieces she might be interested in.

After our review of the shop, she asked if I'd make an appointment for her to come back later in the week, as she had just arrived in town and was tired from traveling and taking in the shops. She wanted to get some rest.

Three days later she came back to try on several items in addition to some pieces she'd asked me to order for her. She was extremely soft spoken, reserved and of few words. On closer examination, extremely regal. To this day I can still remember the distinct fragrance she was wearing. It had the most sumptuous notes of exotic florals, and it lingered long after she left.

As she was about to exit the shop onto Rodeo Drive, a swarm of plain clothes security appeared out of nowhere. So did a fleet of black town cars. It was like a little cavalry. There was someone there to open the door for her. As she approached the door, she removed a thin white veil from her Kelly Bag, and draped it over head and face. She promised to see me again in a few days, someone would call to confirm our appointment; and she was gone. She was a princess – a real one.

It was the beginning of a relationship that remains to this day. Every year we make an appointment since that first meeting 13 years ago.

At the time, I had no idea who she was. When she returned to the store, her husband told me she had not wanted to enter a retail boutique. She had just recovered from an extremely difficult pregnancy, and had suffered a significant weight gain. They had just come from Paris where she had been ignored in several shops; it had been same in New York, and I was the first person to make her feel human again with a simple welcome and honest engagement. "You have no idea

what you did for her that day,” he later confided.

She went back to all the couturiers in Paris the following season wearing all the pieces she had purchased from me, and was treated and felt like the Royal that she is. To this day her husband reminds me every time we meet of the impact this experience had on his wife. It wasn't about her size or the clothes. It was about the transformative nature of a true luxury experience, which in this case just happened to involve some beautiful clothing.

In the end the real beauty is the experience and the relationship that remains long after. That's true luxury; because we are all royal in our own way.

Photo by Steve Sims. Handcrafted gold bracelets by Melissa McClure.

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