GFFC Global Footwear Future Coalition
A FORUM FOR KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

GFFC LUXURY FOOTWEAR ROUNDTABLE – SUMMARY

Date: 10 June 2025

Attendees:
Representatives from-

- The Worshipful Company of Cordwainers
- Joseph Cheaney & Sons
- John Lobb Ltd
- Le Chameau
- Manolo Blahnik
- Rupert Sanderson
- VYN Switzerland

With special thanks to Killik & Co for hosting.

KEY THEMES FROM THE DISCUSSION

1. Importance of storytelling in times of change

- Storytelling emerged as a powerful tool for brand resonance, industry reflection, and navigating change.
- Brands shared how stories can connect legacy, material choices, and emotional value in footwear.
- There was appetite for storytelling that goes deeper than marketing - rooted in place, craft, community, and values - while still resonating with consumers.

2. Adopting authentic approaches to responsible practices

- Participants reflected on the ongoing tension between cultural desirability and sustainability, noting that sustainability is having to work harder to stay relevant in public discourse.
- Repair, care, and “lived-in luxury” were positioned not as compromises but as a reframing of value and prestige. There was discussion around whether “sustainability” is still the right term to convey what is needed.

3. Commercial inertia of existing business models

- Commercial pressures, especially around production volume’s link to business growth, were seen as barriers to sustainable change.
- There was tacit agreement that overproduction, driven principally by seasonality, is a core issue. There was debate around whether reducing volume necessarily harms business.
- This linked to questions of retail incentives, overstock, and second-life models.

4. Community and cultural currency

- Attendees challenged the notion of who defines luxury today and in the future, with calls for deeper engagement with real communities beyond consumer personas.
- Cultural sustainability was linked to long-term loyalty, authenticity and relevance.

5. Craft, legacy, and future skills

- Multiple attendees reflected on how to preserve skill and integrity in making while adapting to contemporary needs.
- There were open questions around whether bespoke and artisan models can maintain their status while adapting to new techniques, questioning the value placed in “hand made” as artistic expressions. The role of hybrid models, such as robotics in high-end making, was seen as both a tension point and an opportunity.
- Ideas of “perfect” and “imperfect” luxury were discussed across different markets, indicating that different approaches may be needed to meet regional consumer expectations of what is luxury.
- Concerns were raised around how to attract and train the next generation of skilled makers and the broader loss of connection to place, traditional production methods and craftsmanship.

AREAS FOR FURTHER EXPLORATION

- **Pre-competitive collaboration for sustainability**
  Identify shared regulatory, R&D, and compliance pain points, starting with topics like upcoming EU policy and disposal requirements.
- **Industry-level storytelling**
  Develop formats or partnerships to embed cultural, material, and human storytelling into product and brand experiences.
- **Footwear communities as a force for good**
  Explore how grassroots, collector, and identity-based communities can influence culture, innovation, and sustainability.
- **Volume without harm**
  Investigate models that decouple success from constant output growth, without defaulting to austerity.

- **Next-gen artisan development**
  Rethink how to attract, train, and sustain future craftspeople, including business models that support slower skills.
- **Materials deep-dive**
  Collaborate across brands on material innovation e.g. leather alternatives, regenerative or circular materials.

NEXT STEPS

1. **Prioritise areas for further exploration** – of the potential topics discussed at the roundtable, solicit feedback on which are most interesting to take forward and work on collaboratively

2. **Broaden engagement beyond senior leadership** – engage the next layer of stakeholder organisations (managers, senior managers) to explore and brainstorm concepts set out from the roundtable

3. **Further roundtables beyond luxury footwear** – engaging senior leadership in sportswear, sports lifestyle, high street and other segments to explore common and unique themes

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