

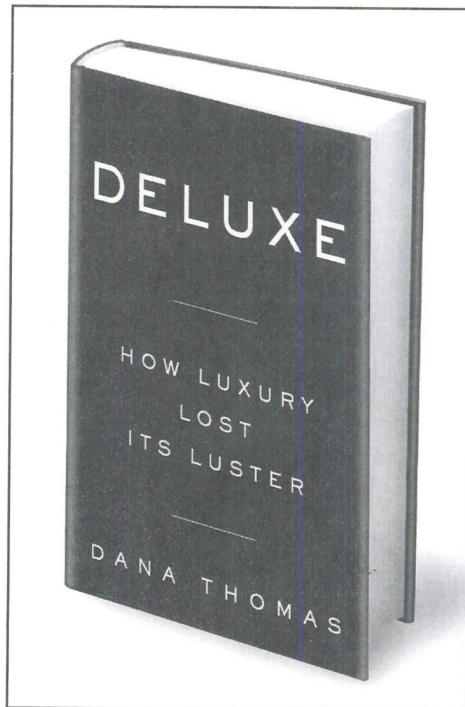


From
Deluxe

By
Dana Thomas

Rachel Zoe blew into the Jimmy Choo Oscars suite on the fifth floor of the Peninsula Beverly Hills Hotel on a rainy February morning in 2005 like she owned the joint. Dressed in a black fitted Roberto Cavalli jacket with fur cuffs, tight skinny jeans, a Chloé belt, and five-inch-high stiletto boots with buckles, she air kissed Sandra Choi, niece of the London-based luxury shoe company's namesake, and clocked the crowd in a swift 360-degree glance. Choi, the company's creative director, and Tamara Mellon, its glam jet-set founder and president, booked the suite to receive socialites, starlets and A-list stylists looking for shoes to borrow for the myriad dinners and parties later in the week, culminating with the Seventy-Seventh Academy Awards on Sunday night.

Swishing her long Botticelli ringlets out of the way and with notebook-wielding Choi by her side, Zoe cut through the sea of tea- and Champagne-sipping faux blondes and headed straight into the bedroom of the buttercup-yellow suite. The bed, dresser, desk, and armoire had been replaced with long banquet tables,



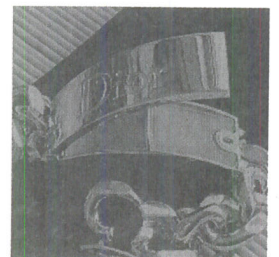
each covered with white linen tablecloths, huge bouquets of white roses and tulips and scores of dangerously tall and wildly expensive women's shoes.

"For Salma"—as in Hayek—"I need sizewise 6," Zoe instructed Choi in her acute northern New Jersey accent. "She called me this morning. 'Rachel, I need five inches!'" Choi nodded and jotted it down. Zoe picked up a strappy gold-leather stiletto and handed to Choi to note and pointed out others in silver and bronze. They were for Julie Delpy, who was nominated for best original screen-

play for "Before Sunset." "I'm not sure what her jewelry is going to be," Zoe explained, "so I'd like to keep it open."

She scanned the table again. "These are fabulous!" she declared of a bronze pair that tied up around the ankle. She picked out a pair of black platforms too. "Can we do a jewel on the platform?" she asked pointedly. Choi nodded and scribbled. "Great," Zoe concluded. She turned to leave but spied another table in the back corner. "Holy crap! Holy crap!" she wailed as she cradled a pair of purple satin pumps with big jeweled buckles. "This is incredible! And look at this," pawing a pair of five-inch silver-strap stilettos. "I could cry!"

Zoe—pronounced Zo, like snow—is one of Hollywood's top celebrity stylists, a bevy of fashionistas who are paid thousands of dollars a day to dress film, TV and music stars. A decade ago, the job of celebrity stylist didn't even exist. But with the onslaught of premieres, charity galas, and awards programs, all of which require stars to look as if they have stepped out of the pages of *Vogue*, stylists have become as essential in Hollywood as publicists, personal assistants, trainers, and chefs.



There was a time when luxury was available to only the rarefied and aristocratic world of old money and royalty. Luxury wasn't simply a product, it was a lifestyle, one that denoted a history of tradition, superior quality, and a pampered buying experience. Today's luxury marketplace would be virtually unrecognizable to the old-world elite. Gone are the family-owned businesses dedicated to integrity and quality; the industry is now run by massive corporations focused only on growth, visibility, brand awareness, advertising, and, above all, profits. Handmade goods are practically extinct, and almost all manufacturing has been outsourced to large factories in places such as China, where your expensive brand-name handbag is being assembled right next to one from a mass-market label that will cost substantially less.

Dana Thomas, a journalist who has covered style and the luxury business for *The Washington Post*, *Newsweek*, and *The New York Times Magazine* from Paris for the past fifteen years, digs down into the dark side of the luxury industry to uncover all the secrets that Prada, Gucci, and Burberry don't want us to know. Travelling from the laboratories in Grasse, where Christian Dior and Prada perfumes are manufactured, to the crowded factories in China, where workers glue together "Made in Italy" bags by the thousands, Thomas explores the whole of today's high-end shopping experience to answer some pressing questions: What is the new definition of luxury when advertising for this upscale lifestyle is targeted mainly to the middle-class masses? What are we paying for when quality has given way to quantity, and luxury is no longer just for the upper-class elite?

Thomas has travelled all over the world to interview corporate heads and factory workers, the old-money, old-luxury clients and the new luxury-obsessed middle-class consumer, and she paints a surprising picture of today's New Luxury. With *Deluxe*, she delivers a fast-paced, uncompromising look at the real world behind the glossy magazines and red carpet couture and asks: How did luxury lose its luster?

Deluxe

How Luxury Lost Its Luster

Dana Thomas

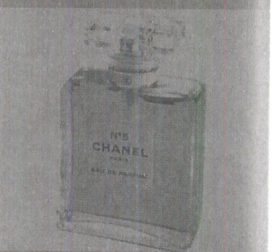


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