



Mary Katrantzou x The Rug Company.

FASHION

Fashion's Big Lifestyle Push

● For fashion labels, homeware presents an attractive opportunity to experiment with a slower category and connect with customers in more meaningful ways.

BY NATALIE THEODOSI

LONDON — Fashion has always flirted with homeware, but COVID-19, an accelerator for many industry trends, has pushed the category to new heights.

Lockdown has forced some fashion diehards to swap their outfit-of-the-day photos for interior-of-the-day ones, filling their homes with fantastical tablescapes, Gucci pillows and Anissa Kermiche's tongue-in-cheek Body Language vases.

"People used to only think about how to dress to impress, but they now need to dress their homes, which became accessible to many more virtual eyes. That has undeniably helped [build] our brand awareness on Instagram: Everyone was posting their favorite item and a community was born, without the need to run a marketing campaign," said Anissa Kermiche, whose ceramics, shaped to resemble women's body parts, have become one of Instagram's latest sensations.

According to Isabelle Dubern-Malleveys, the former creative director of Dior Maison and cofounder of luxury design platform The Invisible Collection, this increased visibility on social media has translated into "more attention from the top management" for the category, which has always gone hand in hand with fashion. Paul Poiret designed his own furniture; Yves Saint Laurent and Hubert de Givenchy were avid collectors, and Christian Dior started a homeware department where his couture customers could pick gift items while waiting for their dresses to be finished.

The difference was that, in the past, home collections were constrained by

the physical limits of traditional retail stores — where they were usually treated as secondary and kept at the back. Now, they're getting a bigger share of the spotlight.

As the consumer appetite for homeware collections grows, fashion brands and retailers have been pushing the category more than ever, and watching sales climb.

Matchesfashion.com, which launched a dedicated home category two years ago, saw its homeware sales go up 160 percent compared to last year, with a particular interest in tabletop collections, blankets, cushions, and silverware by The Wolseley Collection.

During lockdown, the retailer also amped up its home-focused content, spotlighting creatives who shared wish lists featuring as many interiors objects as they did Bottega Veneta sandals.

"We have always approached our

homeware offer as an extension of our customer's style. A customer with a purist style who wears The Row and Jil Sander might be enticed by an Anissa Kermiche vase or some Nathalee Paolinelli ceramic plates. We try and cater to that women's full aesthetic and lifestyle," said Chelsea Power, senior buyer at Matchesfashion.com.

She added that customers are equally interested in home objects by fashion labels they know, as well as lesser-known, design-specific names.

Mary Katrantzou, who has a background in interiors and architecture, released a collaboration with The Rug Company earlier this year that had been in the works for two years. Despite a quiet launch, sales have been strong and the move allowed the brand to experiment with its prints and connect with the end-consumer in new ways.

"It was an incredible experience because you get to look at a 12-year archive of prints, see which prints you can utilize for someone's home and blow them up at a completely different scale to what they were initially designed for. That liberates

the print in a way and doesn't confine it to a pattern," said Katrantzou, who is now working on a second rug collection, as well as broadening the brand's spectrum of interiors collaborations.

Having moved away from the traditional show schedule last year in favor of a destination show in her native Athens, Katrantzou has allowed herself more time to experiment with new partners and categories and sees interiors as having a big part in the process of refining a new vision for her label.

"It's liberating, to be honest. When you slow down a bit, you can really think about what concept directly relates to the partnership you're working on. Interiors can create the environment or the context in which you want your brand to exist in the future," she added.

J.J. Martin, who was among the first to describe "plates as the new 'It' bag" and who sells ready-to-wear and homeware collections on Matchesfashion, experienced similar consumer sentiment on her label La Double J's web site:

"During the entire period [of lockdown], what worked most consistently was homeware. This was great validation for us as we launched this category three years ago. We just sold out, again, of our rainbow glasses, made with Salviati in Murano. So, yes, the category is accelerating," said Martin.

Ditto for Martina Mondadori, who has been expanding her interiors and design-focused publication Cabana to include a homeware e-commerce platform that saw "an unbelievable surge in sales of tabletop in April." According to Mondadori, people are simply looking for quick ways to make their surroundings look better — and a tablecloth can easily do the trick.

As for Kermiche, who started off as a jeweler and added ceramics to her offer later on purely out of her own interest in the category, there was a clear spike in interest during lockdown that "translated into a tremendous number of orders."

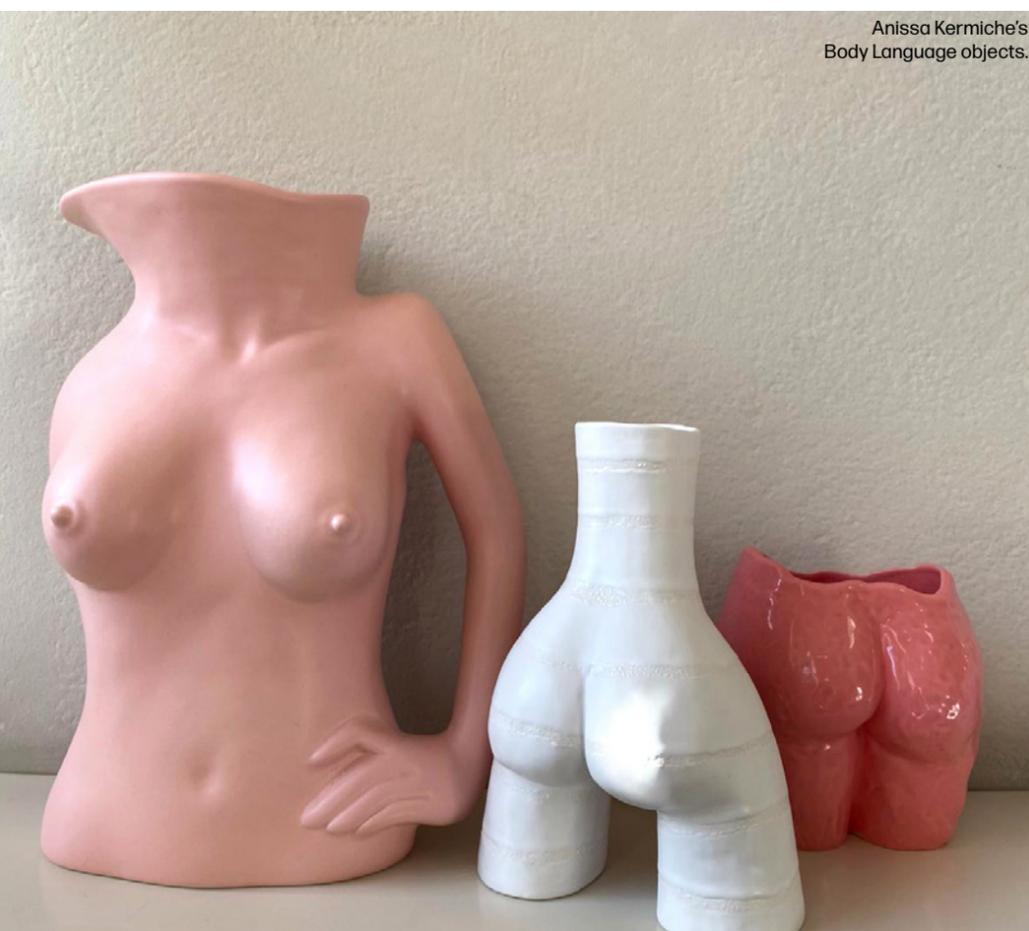
Given the growing relevance of the category in consumers' lives, more brands are wanting in, and have been releasing their first home collections. French label Sézane introduced a home collection in May for the first time; Istanbul-based Mehry Mu created rattan and leather trays as demand for its signature bags featuring the same materials waned; days after lockdown, LoveShackFancy translated ▶



Anissa Kermiche's Body Language vases.



Helle Mardahl at Matchesfashion.com.



Anissa Kermiche's Body Language objects.



Matilda Goad at Matchesfashion.com.



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its romantic floral dresses into patchwork quilts that sold out instantly and had to be reordered, and Marni debuted an online Home Market selling resin and metal trays, stools, and wood baskets handmade by Colombian artisans.

With the fashion cycle on hold, canceled orders and the whole idea of seasonality in question, the slower-paced home category could prove an appealing new revenue stream for fashion labels struggling with shrinking sales.

Expanding into home “would also allow many designers to diversify their production and supply chains. The engagement is there from the consumer and the interest for decorating has been further piqued during lockdown, so it feels like a natural next step for so many of the brands which have a strong identity in terms of a print, logo or design,” said Ida Petersson, men’s and women’s buying director at Browns.

The London retailer started experimenting with the category last Christmas by way of art objects, candles, fragrance and crystals. Following positive response, it’s planning to launch a fully fledged home offer this fall featuring a mix of fashion brands from Versace, to Anissa Kermiche, She’s Lost Control and L’Objet, as well as lifestyle-specific brands such as Tekla.

“Anyone who visits us should feel that this new department is a natural extension of how they are already shopping with us and that our edit complements their taste in fashion,” added Petersson.

There will be launches aplenty in the coming months, as the general consensus is that the trend of nesting and ensuring that one’s interiors are Instagram-ready isn’t going anywhere.

“Through the crisis, most corporations have found – perhaps to their surprise – that remote working is very efficient, so it will be here to stay. With even top restaurants now offering a takeaway service, socializing at home will also become more prevalent than ever before, meaning a greater focus will still be given to people’s homes,” said Dubern-Malleveys.

Kermiche is already plotting to expand her ceramics offer to a wider-size range and add tableware to the mix, while Matchesfashion.com will be launching a new tabletop collection by Ann Demeulemeester and Serax, as well as Campbell-Rey glassware.

New businesses are also emerging out of this newfound appreciation for dressing the home, namely tablescape rentals.

Later this month, ModusBPCM chief executive officer Julian Vogel and a group

of partners will launch Maison Margaux, a luxury tableware hire company offering porcelain china, glassware, artistic placemats and cutlery sourced and commissioned from artisanal makers. Their plan is to cater for events large and small.

Sophie Elliott, who runs an independent fashion communications agency, will be launching a new site dubbed The Sette this month, where shoppers in the U.K. can choose to rent from seven different styles of tablescapes.

It will be a premium service – priced at 30 pounds a person – and will offer the buyer everything they could need for a dinner party, from table linens to cutlery, vases and candles. Elliott was convinced it was worth going ahead with the business, despite the challenges of the COVID-19 crisis, having seen the sustained demand for products of her interiors client The Edition 94, which has been far surpassing the demand for fashion.

“It’s a nice way to encourage people to come together more, be present and

create memories around something that’s beautiful, as lockdown eases,” said Elliott. “People won’t have the same amount of money to spend and they’ll be investing more in experiences. It’s a different feeling when you buy something for the home, it feels less indulgent and it’s more likely to increase in value.”

Apart from a lucrative business opportunity, the home category offers designers the space to share more of themselves and their worlds with their customers.

J.J. Martin often found herself on Instagram Live during the period of lockdown and whether she was speaking to a makeup artist, a ceo or a wellness coach, the backdrop of her home ended up being the conversation starter.

“This is because the color and the print brings joy and illumination. This is my goal for the company,” said Martin, who has built a narrative of spirituality and self-care around her flair for bright patterns and the concept of investing in one’s personal space.

Now her label has turned into a platform where design and fashion talk are mixed in with conversations around meditation, Qi Gong and dealing with anxiety.

Alighieri’s Rosh Mahtani has also been translating her jewels into home objects, ranging from candlesticks to vases, as a means of sharing her love of ritual in new ways.

“I see putting on your Lion Necklace for courage as the same as lighting a candle to mark the end of a day. For me, everything we make is about searching for light in the midst of darkness,” said Mahtani, who’s seen interest rise in her home objects from younger clients, too. “This time has made younger generations realize what it means to stop, and reflect. We won’t be traveling as much, or going out to eat as often. I definitely think it will inspire people to invest more in their homes. We’re also taking more joy in the simple things: lighting a candle, burning a palo santo stick, laying the table just for yourself.”

It also comes down to an opportunity to simply be part of a customer’s life in a bigger way and fostering more committed relationships, outside fashion’s relentless pace: “Somebody’s home is something that they live with every day. It’s not like buying a dress or a shirt that you’ll just wear when you’re in the mood. More and more people will buy into pieces that feel special, that have meaning behind them and can be kept forever. You don’t change a rug every three months, it’s a commitment,” said Katrantzou. “A lot of the interiors objects in your home are just that: You don’t change them every three months, you wake up and go to bed with them, so there’s a significant commitment and that makes a purchase more meaningful. You really have to think about it, if it’s talking to you and if you love it.” ■



Mary Katrantzou x Brigitta Spinocchia Freund limited-edition dinner set.



Alighieri's seashell dish.