

France's Leading Fashion School Inaugurates New Campus

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The Institut Français de la Mode in Paris. Sacha Heron/Courtesy of IFM

PARIS — Almost three years after launching with [plans to become “the world’s best fashion school,”](#) the Institut Français de la Mode on Wednesday officially inaugurated its new campus in Paris in the presence of industry heavy hitters and students ranging from pattern makers to future managers.

Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire joined executives including Sidney Toledano, chairman and chief executive officer of [LVMH](#) Fashion Group; Bruno Pavlovsky, president of fashion and president of [Chanel](#) SAS; Guillaume de Seynes, managing director of Hermès, and Pascal Morand, executive president of the Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode.

Le Maire noted that French fashion generates annual revenues of 150 billion euros and employs 600,000 people.

“You represent a vital economic sector for France. It’s not an accessory,” said the minister, whose office overlooks the IFM headquarters at the Cité de la Mode et du Design, a striking contemporary building on the banks of the Seine.



French Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire at the inauguration of the Institut Français de la Mode campus.
Pierre Mouton/Courtesy of IFM

Despite the disruption caused by the coronavirus pandemic, which forced the institution to close for five months last year, the school is growing ahead of schedule.

There are nearly 1,000 students on board, a figure set to increase to 1,250 within two years, said Xavier Romatet, the former president of Condé Nast France who took over as dean of the IFM in 2019. The school had initially announced a target of 1,000 students by September 2022.

“We launched courses faster than initially expected, and secondly, the attractiveness of the school was almost immediate, meaning we’ve had an important number of applications,” he told WWD.

The IFM’s new 86,000-square-foot headquarters, designed by architect Patrick Mauger and built at a cost of 15 million euros, opened in January and now houses 16 courses catering to all levels of fashion education, from vocational training to Ph.D., following the IFM’s merger with the École de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne (ECSCP).

Founded in 1986 by entrepreneur Pierre Bergé, Yves Saint’s Laurent’s business partner, the IFM has produced designers such as Guillaume Henry and Nadège Vanhee-Cybulski, though it is mainly known for churning out world-class managers who have filled the ranks of leading luxury groups.

Famous alumni of the ECSCP include Karl Lagerfeld, Valentino Garavani, Saint Laurent, André Courrèges, Issey Miyake and Tomas Maier, though in recent decades it has been overtaken by overseas competitors such as London’s Central Saint Martins and the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, Belgium.



Students' creations on display at the Institut Français de la Mode.

François Goizé/Courtesy of IFM

In a bid to challenge those wellsprings of cutting-edge design, the revamped IFM added two new degrees to its curriculum in 2019: a bachelor of arts in Fashion Design and a master of arts in Fashion Design.

This was followed by a bachelor's degree in Pattern Making, launched in 2020, which alternates classroom work with hands-on experience, and a bachelor of science in Management for Fashion and Creative Industries, which kicked off this fall with 74 students.

"The first condition for this project to be successful was to have balanced programs between training in know-how, design and management, which is one of the trademarks of the IFM," said Romatet.

"Today, out of 1,000 students, we have 380 who are studying fashion design, either at the bachelor's level or master's level, meaning that the creative population is the most important within the student ranks at the IFM," he added, noting that the inaugural master's degree graduate show [kicked off Paris Fashion Week](#) in March.

Students continued working in glass-walled workshops on Wednesday evening as guests filed in.

The crowd included Guillaume Henry and Sophie Brocart, artistic director and CEO of Patou, respectively; Johnny Coca; Alexandre Mattiussi; Julie de Libran; Coperni's Arnaud Vaillant; Nicolas Houzé, CEO of Galeries Lafayette, and Bastien Daguzan, CEO of Paco Rabanne and head of the IFM Alumni organization.

Roughly a third of students come from overseas, though the pandemic has meant that Europeans now account for 50 percent of foreigners attending the school, versus one third previously. In all, 48 nationalities are represented, with half of the non-European students coming from Asia, and the other half from the Americas.

Conscious that the school has trouble attracting students from the African continent, the IFM this year launched an accelerator for African fashion brands with Birimian, an investment company focused on African luxury and premium brands, which aims to welcome between 10 and 12 brands per year.

Participants follow physical and online courses, and are mentored by industry executives such as Geoffroy de la Bourdonnaye, the former CEO of Chloé. Selected brands will be featured in a dedicated corner at the Printemps department store next spring, Romatet said.



Xavier Romatet at the inauguration of the Institut Français de la Mode campus.
Pierre Mouton/Courtesy of IFM

The project is part of the school's Fashion Entrepreneurship Center, created this year to group existing and new initiatives, including an incubator, which takes on 10 early-stage brands every six months, and the IFM Labels accelerator, which has helped grow brands including Jacquemus, Marine Serre and Koché.

The school is also launching a new prize for entrepreneurs with fashion brand Ami Paris, open to all students.

The winner will benefit from a year's mentoring from members of the jury, which include Mattiussi, the brand's founder and creative director, and Nicolas Santi-Weil, its CEO, and cultural personalities such as writer Leïla Slimani; Sarah Andelman, founder of consulting agency Just an Idea; and musician Max Sokolinski.

"Giving back as much as I have been given when I first started is essential for me. As an artistic director, it is invigorating to share my experience with young creatives. As a founder, I never forget how dialogue, trust and mentorship can help transform a dream into a successful reality," said Mattiussi.

"Together, Ami and Institut Français de la Mode are committed to involve young people, to encourage them to initiate the decision process, by raising awareness for the limitless opportunities they can generate as entrepreneurs. Initiating this project, giving free rein to the entrepreneurial spirit of the next generation of leaders, is a huge source of pride for me," Santi-Weil added.

It's part of the IFM's remit to introduce its students to the wider cultural scene in Paris, which also includes ongoing partnerships with major institutions such as the Centre Pompidou contemporary art museum, the Cinémathèque Française and the Paris Conservatory.

“Fashion plays a very important role in the cultural landscape in Paris,” said Romatet, noting a plethora of exhibitions this fall, including [“Thierry Mugler: Couturissime” at the Musée des Arts Décoratifs](#) and “Vogue Paris 1920-2020” at Palais Galliera, the Paris City Hall-backed fashion museum.

In a bid to promote diversity, some 30 percent of eligible students, or 130 in total, benefit from needs-based scholarships provided by the IFM Foundation, presided by [Chanel’s](#) Pavlovsky. Its budget totaled 1 million euros this year, funded by 31 companies including Adidas, Balenciaga, Burberry, Celine, Chanel, Chloé, Dior, Farfetch, Hermès, [Kering](#), L’Oréal, Louis Vuitton and Saint Laurent.

Le Maire said it was important to ensure that the fashion industry is inclusive. “It must be open to all because it is a part of our culture, and our culture is not just for an elite. It is open to all our compatriots without exception,” the minister said.



Bruno Pavlovsky, Sidney Toledano and Guillaume de Seynes.
François Goizé/Courtesy of IFM

Romatet said that in addition to their precious financial support, industry players big and small have been equally generous with their time. “Although this industry is very competitive, they all came together to create this school and ensure it is world-class,” he said, noting 100 fashion and luxury professionals teach at the IFM.

Chanel, [Kering](#) and trade show Première Vision have also funded academic chairs on sustainability, craftsmanship and sourcing, respectively.

“I’m surprised because every day at school, I see industry people who don’t have to be there. They are there because they want to be there. To me, this is a sign of the success and attractiveness of this school, and it’s probably what makes us different from other places where the fashion industry is weaker than the one we’re lucky to have in Paris,” he concluded.