

THE CULT SHOP

parasolerie heurtault

Haute-couture precision meets practicality at this bijou umbrella and parasol atelier in Paris

Very few of us ardently hope for a rainy day, but the clients of Michel Heurtault (pictured right) are a rarefied bunch. The umbrellas that he handcrafts for them in his bijou atelier, Parasolerie Heurtault, in the artisanal arches of Paris's 12th arrondissement, embody the same perfectionist principles as the city's fast-disappearing haute-couture houses. Some take upwards of 300 hours to assemble, sharing many of the elaborate techniques, sumptuous fabrics and precious materials as a Valentino ballgown – yet somehow, without eschewing practicality. “We buy silks from the same sources as the fashion labels,” Heurtault explains, displaying a bolt of delicate, midnight-hued damask, “and treat the fabric so

that it becomes thoroughly waterproof. We avoid using synthetics as much as physically possible. They simply won't stand the test of time like silk will.” Heurtault's historical knowledge is as detailed as his craft. He began his career as a costume designer and spent 20 years in the film industry specialising in corsetry for period dramas, before John Galliano asked him to design haute-couture pieces for Dior in 1996. Then, in 2008, he took the step of following his childhood passion for parasols and founded Parasolerie Heurtault. He has since been awarded the distinction of Master of Arts – one of France's highest honours for an artisan – while the workshop is now one of only 72 Grands Ateliers de France.

His exquisite off-the-peg men's umbrellas, such as the handsome classic Ferdinand (€490), are offered in a range of colours, with shafts in polished wood and handles carved from horn, and all can be customised. Commissions can take any number of jumping-off points, from antique handles to a particularly tricky technical spec. Heurtault recently created a foldable version (€10,000) for a globetrotting Indian businessman who only wears made-to-measure suits. “The client is delighted with it, as it fits in his hand luggage,” says Heurtault. More extravagant models are to be found in the ladies' collections, some breathtaking in their virtuosity and



glamour. The maribou-feathered Longchamps with a silver art nouveau-style handle (€9,500, pictured left) wouldn't look out of place in the race-day scene in *My Fair Lady*, while the hand-embroidered canopy of Ginko (€4,500) would doubtless have made Marie Antoinette giggle with glee. The designs look almost too beautiful to expose to the elements, but Heurtault is adamant that this is not the case. “Our pieces are exquisitely made, but they are also designed to be used,” he says. “We've had a note from a very wealthy

member of a royal family, saying that she regularly carries her umbrella – a bespoke piece that is made with a jade handle by Fabergé and lined with green silk to match. The handle alone cost €30,000, but she steps out with it.” The atelier's high standards certainly make for some very happy customers, even on the dreariest of days. As a recent missive from a Sydney-based client read, “Michel, yesterday I was so happy – it finally rained!” **SOPHIE WALKER** 85 Avenue Daumesnil, Paris 75012 (+331-4473 4571; www.parasolerieheurtault.com).



FOR GOODNESS' SAKE

Fashion fix

The Ethical Fashion Initiative counts Vivienne Westwood and Stella McCartney among their star collaborators, and now designers Sarah-Jane Clarke and Heidi Middleton of Sass & Bide have joined the ranks with an accessories line created by women from the Kikuyu, Masai, Samburu and other east African tribes. Featuring a tote, clutch and purse hand-decorated with tribal prints, the collection is part of an ongoing mission to connect the world's most marginalised people with international fashion talent. Training in crafting and management is emphasised, and the project benefits both unskilled women and established artisans. “It allows them to support their immediate families and greater communities,” says Clarke, who went with Middleton to Kenya to work on the pieces. “It's rewarding to see their wages being put towards educating their children.” From \$150. 480 Broome Street, New York, NY 10012 (+1212-226 8190; www.sassandbide.com).

A natural selection

“Very few places on earth are home to such a fascinating diversity of species as the Galápagos Islands, and since 2009, we have supported the Charles Darwin Foundation, which provides scientific research to aid conservation. It is currently celebrating 50 years of its research station on Santa Cruz, the second largest island in the archipelago, so we've created three new Aquatimer Chronographs to support it and the foundation's indefatigable efforts.”

Georges Kern, CEO, IWC watches

IWC bronze Aquatimer Chronograph Edition Expedition Charles Darwin, £8,250 (www.iwc.com). www.darwinfoundation.org



Eggcellent

Fabergé's inaugural The Big Egg Hunt in London two years ago, with its 210 specially designed egg sculptures, drew a crowd of around a million participants and raised more than £1m for charity. This month the hunt is back – in New York. Over 250 giant eggs, each individually designed by leading creatives such as Mark Quinn, Bruce Weber and Diane von Furstenberg, will be hidden in all five boroughs. Participants have the chance of winning one of three Fabergé egg pendants set with Zambian emeralds or amethysts, or Mozambican rubies donated by Gemfields. The sculptures will be auctioned at Sotheby's and online with all proceeds split between The Elephant Family, which protects the endangered Asian elephant, and Studio in a School, an initiative that sends professional artists into more than 150 New York public schools each year. Until April 26, with the auction on April 22 at Sotheby's, 1334 York Ave, New York, NY 10021 (www.thebigegg hunt.org). **SIBÉAL POUNDER**