

COLUMNS

Luxury: What better word is there?

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By **Gregory J. Furman**

You can almost set your watch by it. Every so often the media and the world of best buyers, as they say in the vernacular, get their shorts in a knot over the bastardization, overuse, duplicitous or misleading nature of the word "luxury."

The word becomes the villain.

Craft sees

Reports of ladies who lunch inserting their Hermes or Louis Vuitton shopping bags into anonymous brown ones so as not to be publicly seen and excoriated as brazenly conspicuous in enjoying how they spend their money abound.

A rash of editorials and coverage declaring the overuse, hence, demeaned meaning and even pejorative implications of luxury pop up like mushrooms after a monsoon.

And many in the business of luxury who give "luxury" its truest good name by crafting the most exquisite products, services and experiences, momentarily get a little sheepish, and delete the word from their

advertising campaigns and focus on craftsmanship, the importance of excellence, meticulous attention to detail, rarity and things made beautifully bespoke.

Then, everyone gets bored with feeling guilty. The media moves on to another swing of the media pendulum and some other hot topic.

The brands that use luxury to promote their products or services that do not live up to the word keep using it in their advertising and marketing. They are quickly seen for what they are. Word hitchhikers hoping to get a little ride on the Rolls-Royce of the real thing: true luxury.

In short, the people who can afford the best of the best, the most educated, discerning buyers of luxury products and services, really cannot be fooled.

If the underlying product or service does not deliver on the inherent value and quality they demand, no amount of touting it as luxury will serve to make it so.

Word's worth

Mr. Stanley, as Mr. Stanley Marcus was known in Dallas, surely one of the great proponents of true luxury, said it succinctly and brilliantly: "Luxury is the best that the mind of man can imagine and the hand of man create." And he meant both products and services.

The love, sophistication and intelligence of design that are built into great things and great experiences gave birth and continue to give birth to luxury since the court of Louis XIV and long before.

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And what other words are there?

If you liberally surround luxury in the search for a better word, the list might include: opulence, sumptuousness, grandeur, magnificence, splendor, lavishness, highly desirable, unique, bespoke, super rich, expensive, hard to find, extravagance, super affluent, elite, extra special, deluxe, fancy, palatial, sumptuous, hedonistic stately, upscale, plush, posh, epicurean, magnificent, pampered, pleasurable.

And, metaphorically, a bed of roses, the land of milk and honey, the life of Riley, fit for a king. There are likely others. But for all the hoopla, none say it better than luxury.

Luxury is first recorded in English in 1340 and comes to us from French, one of those words imported by the Normans when they conquered England in 1066.

The earliest known English use is found in the Aenbite of Inwyt (say that one after your second glass of wine), a confessional text copied by a Kentish monk in 1340. Luxury then (lechery) was one of the seven vices of the seven-headed beast of hell.

Ultimately luxury is from the Latin **luxuria,** meaning "extravagance, excess." The ancient Romans used **luxuria** to emphasize riotous living and sinful waste. If they wanted a more neutral term to mean simply wealth and splendor, they tended to use the word **luxus,** **Luxuria** filtered down from Latin into the Norman-French noun *l*uxure** (lust).

The sense of luxury meaning "wealth, splendor, opulence" does not appear until the early seventeenth century and is today the most common meaning. A positive or negative? In the eyes and wallets of the beholder.

The challenge? Find a better, more accurate word to depict the best of the best. There is none.

SO LET the pendulum swing.

And let us give a soulful round of applause to the best meaning of the word and the great brands that give "luxury" its truest significance by doing what they do best.

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