# How the boat aesthetic is steering luxury fashion into new imaginative realms



# The Boat Aesthetic in Fashion: Navigating New Horizons

From pristine pastel boats to evocative gondolas, the boat motif has become a prominent symbol in fashion campaigns, offering a rich tapestry of meanings that extend beyond the superficial. Whether floating serenely on tranquil waters or bravely confronting stormy seas, these vessels serve as powerful metaphors for mastery over time and the surrender to life's unpredictable currents. In luxury fashion, where every detail is meticulously crafted, boats not only signify an escape but also promise new experiences on the horizon.

Prada first introduced the boat as a central motif in its 1997 Fall/Winter campaign, captured by British photographer Glen Luchford. In this groundbreaking shoot, model Amber Valletta depicted a scene brimming with a dramatic tension against a chaotic backdrop, elegantly escaping aboard a makeshift vessel on the Tiber River. Fast forward to a more contemporary interpretation in 2017 by photographer Oliver Hadlee Pearch and art director Ferdinando Verderi, where models including Hunter Schafer, Kendall Jenner, and Troye Sivan are seen adrift in pastel-hued boats on a mirror-like sea. Here, the lack of horizon reinforces a sense of surrender and ultimate freedom. The choice of a simple boat starkly contrasts with the intricate silhouettes of high fashion, suggesting that the essence of style can lead us to unexpected places.

Historically, luxury fashion houses did not merely embrace boats for their aesthetic appeal; they began co-opting the maritime theme over a century ago. Brands like Lanvin and Patou harnessed the allure of the 20th-century ocean liners to entice affluent customers seeking sun-soaked retreats. As boutiques sprouted along sought-after shores, the concept of the “cruise collection” began to materialise, initially denoting a maritime wardrobe but evolving into a sophisticated state of mind by the 1990s. A prime example of this evolution occurred in 2018 when Karl Lagerfeld orchestrated Chanel's cruise collection by reconstructing a life-size ocean liner under the iconic glass roof of the Grand Palais in Paris. Guests clad in marine-influenced attire flocked to this lavish installation, responding viscerally to Lagerfeld’s “invitation to travel.” Similarly, Jacquemus showcased his Le Chouchou collection at the Château de Versailles, where models glided along the historic canals, blurring the lines between runway and immersive experience.

Luxury brands are not alone in adopting this nautical theme; even prestigious watchmakers like Rolex employ boats as key symbols in their campaigns. Here, the vessel represents a controlled escape and serves as an emblem of precision reflective of the brand's legacy. At Louis Vuitton, travel epitomises a luxurious lifestyle, with its Pre-Fall 2025 campaign celebrating the grand origins of cruise collections. While Vuitton's boats evoke opulence, elements of surrealism have also found a place in the narrative. In 2020, the campaign “In Pursuit of the Dream”, directed by Viviane Sassen, introduced whimsical scenes featuring oversized paper boats, inviting audiences into a dreamy exploration of fashion.

Gucci’s utilization of the boat motif takes on a distinctly mythological depth. Their Cruise 2019 campaign, dubbed 'Gucci Gothic', draws from biblical tales, particularly Noah's Ark. Shot once again by Glen Luchford, the campaign presents a surreal reimagining of the animal boarding narrative, merging myth with contemporary fashion in a striking tableau. This imaginative approach extends to the brand's Venetian heritage, where gondolas not only recall Italy's rich history but also offer an enchanting means for audiences to explore both the imaginary and the real. The Utopian Fantasy campaign, illustrated by digital artist Ignasi Monreal, depicts a gondola departing from Venice's serene canals into a fantastical ocean populated by whimsical creatures.

Yet the boat motif's versatility allows for various interpretations across the luxury spectrum. Chanel, for instance, recently anchored its cruise collection on the picturesque shores of Lake Como, while Gucci unfurls its sails in campaigns marked by adventure and creativity. In this ever-evolving narrative, the boat serves as a conduit for brands to transport audiences into their distinctive worlds—whether through biblical allegory, sophisticated nostalgia, or serene minimalism. With summer approaching, one wonders what new horizons these fashion stories will navigate next.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/41052/boat-aesthetic-fashion-campaigns-shows), [[2]](https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/41052/boat-aesthetic-fashion-campaigns-shows)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/41052/boat-aesthetic-fashion-campaigns-shows), [[3]](https://hypebeast.com/2018/9/gucci-gothic-cruise-2019-campaign)
* Paragraph 3 – [[1]](https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/41052/boat-aesthetic-fashion-campaigns-shows), [[5]](https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/gallery/25664/1/gucci-cruise-2019-campaign)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/41052/boat-aesthetic-fashion-campaigns-shows), [[6]](https://www.whowhatwear.com/gucci-cruise-2019)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/41052/boat-aesthetic-fashion-campaigns-shows), [[4]](https://www.cntraveler.com/story/why-gucci-chose-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-for-its-2019-cruise-collection-show)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/41052/boat-aesthetic-fashion-campaigns-shows), [[5]](https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/gallery/25664/1/gucci-cruise-2019-campaign)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/41052/boat-aesthetic-fashion-campaigns-shows> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.nssmag.com/en/fashion/41052/boat-aesthetic-fashion-campaigns-shows> - This article explores the recurring use of boats as symbols in fashion campaigns, highlighting their representation of mastery over time and surrender to the flow of things. It discusses Prada's 1997 Fall/Winter campaign featuring a makeshift boat on the Tiber River, and its 2017 campaign with models in pastel-colored boats on a calm sea. The piece also covers other brands like Gucci, Chanel, and Dior, examining how they incorporate boat motifs to convey themes of escape, freedom, and new horizons in their campaigns.
3. <https://hypebeast.com/2018/9/gucci-gothic-cruise-2019-campaign> - Gucci's Cruise 2019 campaign, titled 'Gucci Gothic,' draws inspiration from the biblical story of Noah's Ark. The campaign features models gathering animals across a rural landscape and leading them to a massive wooden boat, reenacting the tale. Shot by photographer Glen Luchford and art directed by Christopher Simmonds, the campaign presents a surreal take on the legend, blending fashion with mythological storytelling.
4. <https://www.cntraveler.com/story/why-gucci-chose-a-unesco-world-heritage-site-for-its-2019-cruise-collection-show> - Gucci's 2019 Cruise Collection show was held in Alyscamps, a Roman burial ground near Arles, France. Creative director Alessandro Michele chose this UNESCO World Heritage site for its rich history, including its association with early Christian burials. The show featured 114 looks, including velvet dresses and capes, inspired by the site's ancient heritage, blending historical references with contemporary fashion.
5. <https://www.dazeddigital.com/fashion/gallery/25664/1/gucci-cruise-2019-campaign> - Gucci's Cruise 2019 campaign, photographed by Glen Luchford, presents models in a rural setting interacting with various animals. The campaign draws inspiration from the Noah's Ark narrative, showcasing a harmonious coexistence between humans and animals. The imagery emphasizes Gucci's blend of fashion with natural elements, creating a surreal and mythological atmosphere.
6. <https://www.whowhatwear.com/gucci-cruise-2019> - Gucci's Cruise 2019 show in Arles, France, featured models walking a runway lined with real fire and smoke. The collection included bags and jackets emblazoned with the Chateau Marmont logo, referencing the iconic Los Angeles hotel. The show highlighted Gucci's theatrical approach to fashion presentations, blending historical references with contemporary designs.
7. <https://www.theluxurychronicle.com/gucci-campaign-for-2019-holiday/> - Gucci's 2019 holiday campaign, directed by Harmony Korine, presents a festive cruise liner setting with an eclectic group of passengers. The campaign features the Gift Giving collection, combining Gucci's GG Supreme canvas with the Flora motif. Digital activations include an augmented reality portal and Instagram filters, enhancing the campaign's interactive experience.