

WHO IS LUXURY DESIGNED FOR

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Fast fashion may lower standards in fabric and finish, but luxury lowers its standards elsewhere by deciding which bodies are worth designing for. Walk into a fast fashion store like Zara or H&M and you'll see racks that at least acknowledge size diversity, ranging from XS to XL and sometimes XXL. Step into a luxury boutique, however, and the message is immediate and unspoken: this space was not designed with plus-size bodies in mind.

This isn't an accident or a production limitation. It's ideology.

Luxury fashion is built on exclusivity, the fantasy that its garments are rare, unattainable, and reserved for a select few. Bodies, in this system, function as part of the branding. Thinness becomes synonymous with refinement, discipline, and desirability, while larger bodies are treated as incompatible with luxury's constructed image. The result is an industry that claims craftsmanship and timelessness but refuses to evolve its most basic design parameters.

The difference lies in who these industries choose to serve. Fast fashion is built on volume, responding to demand and catering to the widest possible customer base, which is why plus-size bodies are included—they represent a significant market, and excluding them would be bad business. Luxury fashion, by contrast, thrives on scarcity and controlled access, extending this exclusivity to the body itself. Despite having the resources and expertise to design for all sizes, luxury houses choose not to. This refusal is ideological: plus-size bodies disrupt an aesthetic economy that equates thinness with elegance and exclusivity.

The numbers make this exclusion impossible to ignore. Of the 8,763 looks presented across 208 Spring/Summer 2025 shows, only 0.8 percent featured plus-size models (US size 14 and above). Mid-size models accounted for 4.3 percent, while a staggering 94.9 percent of looks were shown on straight-size bodies. Luxury fashion's runways continue to operate as controlled environments where diversity is minimal and tightly managed.

When inclusion does surface, it is often diluted to the point of meaninglessness. Chanel's introduction of Jill Kortleve as its first "plus-size" model sparked widespread debate because she was never plus-size to begin with. Labeling a mid-size model as plus-size revealed how

distorted fashion's size framework has become. It also exposed the industry's discomfort with actual plus-size bodies: inclusion is acceptable only when it doesn't disrupt the visual status quo.

True representation looks very different. Models like Paloma Elsesser embody what plus-size visibility actually means occupying space without apology, challenging the narrow aesthetic rules luxury has long enforced. Yet Elsesser remains an exception rather than evidence of systemic change. Her presence highlights how rare genuine inclusion still is at the highest levels of fashion.

The problem isn't limited to runways. In *Harper's Bazaar*, model Precious Lee has been outspoken about the structural lack of size diversity within fashion, particularly in luxury spaces. As one of the few plus-size models to gain access to major fashion circles, Lee has pointed out how designers often include a single "curve" model to signal progress, while continuing to exclude larger bodies from their core design and production processes. These gestures, she argues, function more as quotas than commitment.

At its core, the absence of plus-size bodies in luxury fashion is about control. It is about who gets to be seen as aspirational, who is allowed access to beauty, and whose bodies are deemed worthy of prestige.

Luxury loves to present itself as progressive, visionary, and ahead of the curve. But when it comes to size, it is fast fashion that has already moved forward while luxury remains stuck defending an outdated and exclusionary ideal.