

“You can define what success is to you, it's not always just about the numbers.”

Founder, Luxe Provence: Tarik Koivisto

Photos by Tarik Koivisto - Interview by Alice White Walker

Easy to style and lightweight, Luxe Provence's capsule fashion range incarnates summer in the south. We sat down with the founder, Tarik Koivisto, to find out how she started her successful business and why taking new paths is so important.

Can you tell us a little about your career to date?

I started out working in San Francisco — in start-ups across product development, content and marketing. I felt something was missing from my arsenal, so I went back to study design and photography. Then, after working in art director roles, I decided to launch my own boutique brand and design firm, Narratif Design, where — in parallel with Luxe Provence — I've worked for over 25 years creating campaigns, products and visual stories for both American and French clients.

After living in Provence for nearly two years, I came up with the idea of Luxe Provence — in the shower, of all places! A venture where

I could pursue all of my passions and capitalize on my experience in branding and product design. I was so excited; I couldn't sleep for three days!

I saw great potential, but I knew I would need to continue my agency to fund the development. I am grateful to my husband, Mathieu, for supporting me during the launch, as it was not always financially simple.

Against all conventional thinking, I launched the slow fashion line in July 2017.

How did you come to be in France?

Mathieu grew up in Montpellier, and every year, we would visit his

family in Provence while living in San Francisco together.

I fell completely in love with the region's landscapes, rich artistic history and gorgeous markets. Here, people seemed to appreciate life more than in the fast-paced States.

In 2011, my husband and I moved to a quaint village near Aix to raise our two bilingual boys, who are now in their teens.

Which part of life in France inspired you to design your collection?

There's a relaxed elegance to towns like Aix, Cassis and Saint-Rémy in the summer, and linen plays a big part in this. I wanted to create a collection that was easy-to-wear... one that transported you to these places.



Tarik wears the Carine Dress in vichy linen while making adjustments to the Venus Dress in linen gauze.

You were late to fashion design — how did you convert to this new career path?

Yes, starting a fashion brand in my 40s — I never imagined myself doing that!

There weren't a lot of ethically made brands that spoke to the needs of 40+ year-old women. With my background, it wasn't a huge leap to create a clothing line, but I was definitely fortunate to meet a team of great women here in Provence who patiently helped me develop my couture knowledge.

Which challenges have you faced as a brand?

The biggest challenges these past two years have been working through COVID-19 quarantines and shortages of materials. The largest of my ateliers was requisitioned by the government to only make masks and gowns, so we couldn't produce many of our pieces that season.

It's also hard trying to keep a small brand afloat that requires customers to pay a higher price for ethically made pieces. Sustainable fashion isn't the easiest route, but I couldn't imagine any other way.

Do you work alone or with a team?

Luxe Provence as a concept is just me. I handle all the creative aspects — from design to marketing to photography — which I adore. I also run the logistics, production, press, website and social media, which is a hugely important aspect of any brand. I believe it's essential to have an authentic voice and elevated presence, so I don't think I would ever hand this off.

However, I am not alone when it comes to creation. I have been lucky to work with two independent, ethically run ateliers and the same women-led couture teams from the start! My head *couturière*, Laure, has been essential to the development of Luxe Provence and lives just over a mile from my home office, so we are truly working locally.

Tell us how you came to meet artist/photographer Jamie Beck, with whom you collaborate on the “Jamie Beck” collection.

I started following Jamie on Instagram and was blown away by her incredible photography and storytelling talent. In January 2018, she posted a resolutions list that included creating Provence-inspired dresses for her work. I instantly reached out to meet, as I had just launched my line. The dress turned into a small capsule, and we’ve been collaborating ever since. We’re a natural fit, and she brings a beautiful, romantic touch to our work.



The Cézanne Linen Tunic in sesame.



The Audrey Linen Jumpsuit in caramel.

Describe the Luxe Provence aesthetic.

Effortlessly chic, timeless pieces... each is designed to be worn barefoot in the garden by day and paired with heels at night. Our collections combine French *savoir-faire* with classic silhouettes and are made using only the highest quality fabrics, such as OEKO-Tex-certified European linen, silk cotton voiles and Italian haute couture dead stock (Editor’s note: end of series fabrics).

Who is your target demographic? Who is the “Luxe Provence” woman?

My target demographic is women in their mid-30s and above, who appreciate high quality garments with a nod to French style. My clientele is global — from the US and Australia to the UK and Japan. The Luxe Provence woman is discerning and ethical in her clothing choices.

My goal is to design pieces that allow women to feel confident in their skin. I love a wide leg pant or a beautifully flowing dress drape that you can feel in the breeze as you walk. I try to design clothes that flatter a variety of body shapes and that feel good to move in.

How and where are the clothes made?

Right here in France! Linen is the primary fiber, as it requires very little water to grow compared to cotton, and it is also naturally antibacterial, long-lasting and durable. Its breathable qualities are excellent for the hot summers here!

*The Juliette Dress
in white linen.*



Which women or periods influence the designs?

I look to classic French icons for inspiration, like Jane Birkin or Bianca Jagger, for her cool glamor. In terms of eras, I adore the 1920s and 1950s and interpret these styles in a more modern way. I also flirt with the 1940s... for our jumpsuits, for example.

You create capsule collections with only a few items in each. Why did you take this approach to selling?

I use a pre-order system for our collections so that I can efficiently manage size demands and avoid waste. Because I often source dead stock, it means I will only ever have a limited amount of fabric. This

production choice is both sustainable and allows my clients to have unique pieces in their wardrobes. I also work with local textile artists and collaborators for limited-edition releases to keep the collections special.

What are your bestselling pieces? Why do you think this is?

My Anais and Marguerite Dresses are among the first pieces I created, and they continue to do well each season, I believe it's because they're easy to wear and flatter a variety of body shapes. Another bestseller is our Tablier Skirt (one of the collaborative pieces with Jamie Beck), which is a style that is difficult to find elsewhere, as the fine gathering detail at the waist requires it to be made by hand.

What have been your biggest lessons in business?

I was probably too trusting and open with sharing my ideas, and I was unprepared for the hardcore competition and ruthlessness that can come with running a successful business. There are copycats, some frustratingly larger and with much bigger budgets! But I've learned to pivot when I need to and simply focus on what type of business and people I want to work with, which brings me much more creative fulfillment.

What do you see in the future for Luxe Provence?

I'm working on re-releasing a home line featuring Provence-inspired textile designs and artisanal candles, which was created together with the famous "nose," Stéphanie Bakouche, in Grasse. I am also working on more exclusively designed textile prints for the slow fashion collection.

If you could give one piece of advice for an aspiring female entrepreneur, what would it be?

Trust your instincts with regard to both people and your ideas, and don't be afraid to change course. Be prepared to work harder than you ever imagined, but also to ultimately feel creatively fulfilled by turning your passion into a successful business. And remember: you can define what that success means to you, it's not always just about numbers. *

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