

STAGE

The once and future king

With his new song '100 Years' only to be released – you guessed it – 100 years from now, music icon and environmental activist Pharrell is asking #IfWeCare enough about the planet to still be around by then

Words by **Bernd Fischer**

'I don't know if the new generation even needs a message. Because kids today care about others'

– Pharrell

I'm not a fashion icon,' Pharrell Williams tells me. He states this matter-of-factly before he answers the question I pose about the fashion industry's role in ensuring environmental sustainability. Everyone else in the room – if given the chance – would argue against his objection. 'I'm not a fashion icon,' he continues, 'as much as I am a grateful participant.'

We're sitting in The Ritz-Carlton Shanghai, in the district of Pudong, with a view of the most populous city in the world. The smog is worse than two days ago when we first arrived in the Chinese metropolis.

Pharrell is wearing – intentional or not, but appropriate in the context of our conversation – a navy blue cap with the word 'PLANT', well, planted across it. Fans of the multiple Grammy Award-winning singer, songwriter, producer – and yes – fashion icon, might recognise the cap designed by obscure streetwear brand Cactus Plant Flea Market (CPFM) that has gained most of its traction thanks to the support of other artists like Pharrell. 'I think it goes beyond fashion,' he continues to explain. 'I think anyone who is making anything, any kind of ideation, you know, any kind of fruits of people's epiphanies, should always have an element or something in its DNA that points to being responsible to the ecosystem. Because it's the only one that we have.'

Pharrell is in Shanghai together with Louis XIII Cognac for a 'very special project', as the global executive director of the premium alcohol brand, Ludovic du Plessis, described it in a press conference just hours before.

But, calling it a 'very special project' is an understatement. Perhaps an elaborate and ambitious project would be more accurate.

You see, 100 special guests from around the world – including myself, Maps Maponyane, Kojo Baffoe and Zakes Bantwini in attendance to represent the African continent – are directly

participating in this project, an exclusive pre-release listening party where Pharrell debuts a song he specifically wrote for this event, appropriately titled '100 Years'. If you're confused as to why the song hasn't hit the airwaves yet, don't be. You probably won't be hearing it any time soon. In fact, nobody might ever hear it again.

Pharrell was initially hesitant about the collaboration. 'At first it was a kind of larger-than-life consideration. But then you just put yourself in that place and you realise "I'm not going to be there in 100 years. The people who're causing all of the tumult and turmoil at this point are going to be long gone. And they're probably going to fuck up everything anyway, so I might as well just write to them now."'

The only copy of the song is engraved on a unique clay vinyl made from the soil of the Louis XIII vineyard in Cognac. 'It's a powerful, inspiring exploration of the way our actions today shape the world of tomorrow,' Du Plessis explains. 'But it's more than that, because the official release will be in 2117. It's exactly



how we work at Louis XIII. We think a century ahead.'

Since 1874, each cellar master for Louis XIII puts aside an eau de vie – or 'water of life' – for the coming century, the blend only to be enjoyed by the next generation in, yes, 100 years' time.

'It was just a kind of postcard,' Pharrell says of the song. 'Like, "Man, you really did it this time."' The song will only be released in 2117 #IfWeCare about the planet.

Immediately after its debut at the showcase event, the clay vinyl is locked



up in a safe designed by Fichet-Bauche and stored in the cellars of Louis XIII in France, where it will be kept for the next 100 years. The safe, however, is designed to be destroyed if it is submerged in water. And if sea levels continue to rise as they have been due to climate change, parts of the world will be under water and we risk losing the track forever.

'It falls in line with where I am and the kind of things I want to do with my life. And my music,' Pharrell says about his involvement in the project, ultimately aimed at inspiring and motivating people to take action to curb global warming. 'I wanted to do something different.'

And although the song and its title could be interpreted as a touch cynical, it makes sense for an artist like Pharrell to lead this initiative. 'I'm a perpetual optimist anyway. I happen to believe in the positive aspects of humanity,' says the musician. 'Interestingly enough, I don't know if the new generation even needs a message. Because these kids today, they care about others. They are, in a sense, a different type of socialist. They believe in sharing for the greater good of the moment,' Pharrell adds, before he takes a hit at the current American administration. 'I think the world would be a different place if millennials and women were to take positions of power.'



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