



## “I would like us to look at the heavens again”

Brunello Cucinelli, 65, menswear designer

*Dignity, humility, civility – these are not words usually applied to the cut-throat, fast-paced, self-regarding world of high fashion. But they sound perfectly at home next to the name Brunello Cucinelli: the softly spoken and endlessly reflective Philosopher King of men’s style.*

*Cucinelli grew up in a tiny rural farming community in Umbria in central Italy. His family home had no electricity or running water, and his overriding memories from childhood are of dawn harvests, ox-drawn ploughs, and novels read by candlelight. When he came to launch his fashion brand at the age of 25, his first product was a run of just six cashmere jumpers, each dyed in bright, unexpected colours and weaved from yarn borrowed from an old friend.*

*Today, the company is valued at some €1.7bn, and Cucinelli himself, now 65, is the darling of style doyens the world over: a kind of sartorial godfather for these confused times, and a dream dinner party guest to entrepreneurs everywhere. In his uniquely poetic style, the designer and humanist discusses the problem with smartphones, the importance of dignity, and the power of looking at the stars.*

**I retain a great memory of my childhood.** I never saw my parents argue, and I still hold in my mind the image of my father, my grandfather and my uncles working hard, but with a serene attitude. We led a simple, but peaceful life. Their example was an unforgettable experience for me, role models that still inspire me.

**My father said to me:** “You must be a good man. Now remember, try to always keep your word.” I came across this very same concept later on when reading Kant: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as a noble end.”

**At our company we have always strived to strike the right balance** between making a profit and giving back – trying to work without harming the creation, or impacting it as little as possible. I share the view of Emperor Hadrian, who said that he felt responsible for beauty in the world.

**I believe that being online all the time** has worsened the malaise of the soul that human beings always carry within themselves. In my view, we should reconsider and redesign our lives, and take care of our mind through learning, and take care of our soul through praying and working – perhaps leading a life unbeknownst to our smartphone.

**I draw inspiration from Pavel Florensky,** a genius who stated: “When you feel sad, when someone offends you, when something goes wrong or you are overwhelmed by your inner storm, get out and look at the heaven and the stars and everything will fall back into place.” I would like us to look at the heavens again and lead less frantic lives.

**On my desk I have pencils,** white paper, my slide rule and a magnifying glass. I always have sheets of paper available to jot down my notes. The slide rule is a tool that I used as a boy to quickly make calculations. And the magnifying glass is useful to check the fineness of this wonderful product called cashmere.

**Throughout my career,** I have tried to invest in man and dignity, believing that human beings feel better and more creative if our working conditions are pleasant. It is high time to attach moral and economic dignity to work, especially to artisanal work, which epitomises the beauty and uniqueness of our people.

**In 10 years’ time,** I would like us to work in the same way as we do now, trying to

produce beautiful, special, contemporary, chic products while respecting human sustainability. I would like our youth to stop feeling afraid – as us parents have told them to be – and replace fear with hope.

**To me, beauty is linked to the concept of guardianship.** The search for beauty has brought me close to the great men of the past, who have taught me to feel like a guardian rather than an owner. The same search also drove me to restore the medieval hamlet of Solomeo, which we have called the “hamlet of the spirit”, and has become the headquarters of our company. In this tiny village we have built monuments meant to last for the next thousand years. There is the theatre, a tribute to the arts; the winery, a tribute to “Mother Earth”; the “Monument to Human Dignity”, a tribute to mankind. The aim of this restoration was to turn both the hamlet and its surrounds into pleasant places for the generations to come.

**As my great mentor Marcus Aurelius taught me,** I live according to nature, thinking that life is a beautiful gift from the creation, seeing dreams as great mates of the soul. I would like to be remembered as a good man who loved beauty – as having offered my contribution to mankind and having tried to comply with the rules given to us by the creation. ①