



WORLD VISION

PROMOTING HUMAN DIGNITY
&
LIVING A DIGNIFIED HUMAN EXISTENCE

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Above:
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Photos Courtesy of:
Brunello Cucinelli S.p.A.

Brunello Cucinelli was named 2021 Fashion Designer of the Year by British GQ. The award might well have been Philosopher of the Year, Entrepreneur of the Year, or Community Organizer of the Year, because Cucinelli's reach extends well beyond fashion. He is a thinking man, a man of action, a man who sees to it that his good fortune extends to others.

Sound too good to be true? Maybe it is. But the evidence suggests otherwise. And it is for this reason that dig.ni.fy magazine has chosen to highlight Brunello Cucinelli and the company he developed. The good work being done stands as an example of what is possible not only to individuals of dream and drive, but to companies both large and small.

His Early Influences

Brunello Cucinelli was born into a peasant family in Castel Rigone, a 15th century little hamlet nearby Perugia, in 1953. Cucinelli speaks fondly of the time spent with his family in the rural area when he was young – how hard they worked and how close they became. But these happy memories changed when the family was forced to move to town and his father took a job with a cement company. Cucinelli has spoken forcefully about the impact that change had on him, particularly when seeing his father unjustly offended in the workplace ("they treated him like a slave"), in witnessing the unfriendly pranks played on his weakest schoolmates, and in experiencing personally the actions taken by his classmates against him and his brothers simply because they came from the countryside.

Cucinelli also speaks honestly and openly about his education. Trained as a building surveyor, Cucinelli claims never to have been a great student. And it was not long after obtaining his diploma that he enrolled in the faculty of engineering, only to drop out. Where he did find inspiration and gained an education was when talking to his fellow classmates about ideas and social issues in the cafes. There, he engaged in formative debate and developed the world view that continues to form his character and practice today.



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As Cucinelli tells it, he simply could not get his head around why people would treat his father, his colleagues, and his family in such a way. And it was only when spending a significant time analyzing his family's experience, his formal education, and his life spent talking with people inside those cafes that he came up with his theory of 'humanistic capitalism.' It is a theory that continues to guide his actions as a human being and as executive chairman and

This means not harming mankind in the process. For these reasons, Brunello Cucinelli argues the workplace should heighten and not diminish dignity. A workplace must be an amiable place, where workers engage with the landscape to remember the home and family they are going back to after work. It also demands fair working hours, and a life outside of working hours where it is prohibited to be conducting business online. Here, Cucinelli

I envisage humanistic capitalism as a great harmony within which profit, giving back, guardianship, human dignity and the ethics of truth coexist and enrich each other.

”

- Brunello Cucinelli

creative director of Brunello Cucinelli.

Humanistic Capitalism

Brunello Cucinelli's philosophy has been articulated in *The Dream of Solemeo: My Life and the Idea of Humanistic Capitalism*, published in 2018. It is a book that won him many accolades, and it remains in high demand. Fortunately, Cucinelli has articulated much of his thinking behind the concept.

First of all, humanistic capitalism builds off the notion that people and communities must live in harmony and without harming Creation. Cucinelli believes this to be a just idea, one built around the concept of fairness. Fairness is, in many respects, the key to unlocking his thinking. For example, fairness underpins his belief in individuals and companies making a fair and sustainable profit, from which they are obligated to act as guardians of creation by leaving the world not exactly the same as we found it but more amiable. This requires individuals and companies to strike a balance between profit and giving back.

Second, humanistic capitalism demands that profits be made with ethics, dignity, and morals.

cites Saint Benedict, who reminded his monks that there is a time for work and a time for the soul.

Cucinelli believes fair work never steals one's soul, and thus showing esteem and appreciation for someone's work is important because it increases responsibility and creativity. It is for this reason humanistic capitalism requires, thirdly, that profits be shared among his workers and other companies along the supply chain.

The Company

At first, Brunello Cucinelli was not sure what kind of business he wanted to start. All he knew was he wanted to foster human dignity, by promoting a concept of work that ensured "being moral and economic dignity."

Mr. Cucinelli settled on an idea of producing colored cashmere knitwear for women in 1978. Story has it he started by producing six sweaters, in bright colors. Perugia had a history of wool production, and Cucinelli thought it would be an innovation if he were to introduce cashmere into the mix (which he sourced out of Mongolia).

The Hamlet & Operations



Photographs Courtesy of:
Brunello Cucinelli S.p.A.

"Ideals for Life and Work"

I.

We love and respect Mother Earth: we cultivate our land according to nature and we welcome its fruits as its greatest gift.

II.

We do not use more resources than it is necessary or natural. We make careful use of the universe.

III.

We always act as loyal and affectionate guardians of creation.

IV.

We believe in the moral and economic dignity of human beings.

V.

During work we support fair profitability and harmony between profit and giving back to the community.

VI.

We seek harmony between fair work and human privacy.

VII.

We commemorate our forefathers. They taught us to respect the law, and our story is written in their words.

VIII.

We believe in universalism and we act displaying great respect for all civilisations.

IX.

We welcome fair change in order to experience the best from our time.

X.

We are fond of young people and pass down to them hope and the dream of a bright future awaiting them.

He selected cashmere because of its quality: situated in the underbelly of the longer outer fibers of the animal, its very structure – fibers which are not only smaller than those of Merino wool, but which also hides an internal air chamber – creates a means for regulating heat that can last across lifetimes. He also appreciated the way in which the goats of the "Hircus" breed were reared. Combining quality with color, Cucinelli found his niche. "Today," says Mr. Cucinelli, "the brand is a byword for cashmere items made in Solomeo according to Brunello Cucinelli's taste."

Those were, of course, different times. To start the company, he secured a loan for what today would be the equivalent of 500 euros with a handshake solely on the basis of his character. And, with his designs finding interest not only in Italy but Germany and elsewhere around the world, he never looked back.

In 2012, Brunello Cucinelli listed his company on the Milan Stock Exchange. Neither Cucinelli nor his employees regard the company as participating in or being defined through "haute couture." Yet, there is no denying it is a major fashion house. The company is valued at approximately \$2.5 billion. Though the pandemic saw revenues drop by approximately 10 percent, the company has since seen approximately 60 percent growth at constant exchange rates in the first half of the year to 313.7 million euros compared with the same period of 2020. It employs 2100 people (approximately 1000 in Solomeo, and some 1100 others around the world). Cucinelli also works with approximately 5000 external collaborators, and some 364 world-class, small Italian businesses.

The business has not only brought Brunello Cucinelli a great deal of personal wealth (estimated to be \$1.7 billion), but it has allowed him to realize his idea of 'humanistic' capitalism. For example, he believes profits should not only be shared with employees in a fair manner, but profits should also be shared all along the supply chain. Cucinelli is proud to point out that 70 percent of the company's

Women's Clothing

(Spring - Summer '22)



Photographs Courtesy of:
Brunello Cucinelli S.p.A.

2100 employees are women, who are paid the same as men. Equally, he has publicly stated that "if any person in his company offends someone, you are fired on the spot." Though the company saw revenues drop during the pandemic (revenues are again rising), not one of his 200 global team members was made redundant. This is quite an important thing to

which the company is grounded. The School of Arts and Crafts was established to rediscover and enhance old crafts, passing them down through generations. The curriculum covers subjects such as Pattern Making and Women's Tailoring, Cutting and Men's Tailoring, Mending and Linking, Horticulture, Gardening and Masonry. Crafts are taught in a practical

I'd rather talk about people than profit, spirituality than budget.

”

- Brunello Cucinelli

note, and quite a commitment, given that 52 percent of each garment is hand made. Moreover, during the height of the pandemic, the company started a new initiative, called "Brunello Cucinelli for Humanity," where it sent out their unsold luxury goods to their contractors and told them to pass them on to the needy.

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The Hamlet of Solomeo

Solomeo was the home of Frederica, Brunello's wife. When he met her and they became engaged, she had been running a small clothing shop in the hamlet. It was there he came upon the idea of starting a knitwear business. He realized it would be a challenge, as Perugia was one of the main centers for manufacturing with 13,000 people working in the trade.

All the same, Brunello purchased his first building in the hamlet – a 14th century castle – in 1985. That act started a process of restore and rebuild, which continues to this day. Restoring the castle, Cucinelli was able to locate his original studios in the building until moving into new facilities at the foot of the compound in 2000 (the building of another factory, to be completed in 2024, was just announced).

The creation of craft schools evidences a deep commitment to the traditions and craft upon

manner under the guide of a master.

The point is to view the most advanced technology always as a tool, never as an end. Tools only serve craftsmanship, which has absolute priority. As Nicola Pisello, our guide around the compound for the day, told us: "We always start from the material, with innovation and new products evolving therefrom."

New buildings in Solomeo include Forum of the Art, the Neohumanistic Aurelian Library, the Gymnasium, the Amphitheatre, and the Theatre. The creation of the library and the theater evidence a deep commitment to the intellectual and moral growth of hamlet members. Any member of the community has access to the library, and s/he can take and return any book without a formal process of checking the book out. Tickets for theater performances, many of which involve highly regarded actors/actresses in well-known plays and roles, are available to all members of the community on a limited but first-come first-serve basis solely because of seat availability in the small theatre. More recent additions to the community involve the creation of sports fields, a vineyard, and monument to human dignity – all placed, again, in the valley at the base of the hamlet.

The ongoing commitment to moving heritage, traditions, and practices forward can be seen throughout the Cucinelli compound. Everywhere one looks there are busts of

Men's Clothing (Spring - Summer '22)



Photographs Courtesy of:
Brunello Cucinelli S.p.A.

famous theorists – Socrates, Kant, Confucius, – as well as sayings attributed to various people: Confucius, "I transmit, but I don't create."; Xenophanes, "All things come from the Earth."; Socrates, "Love of knowledge echoes in our hearts and nourishes great thoughts."; Plotinus, "Only through beauty can man ascend to God."; Hadrian, "I felt responsible for the beauty of the world."; Galileo, "Behind every problem there is an opportunity."; Seneca, "To live is to be useful to others."; Marcus Aurelius, "In human life seek justice, truth, temperance and courage, and you will profit from the supreme good that you have discovered."; 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 an end."

An Ongoing Commitment to Family, Company, and Community

Mr. Cucinelli has never shied away from his support of the family. Family, he says, is the "guardian of ideals" that defends "its members from the worst poverty known to man: loneliness." Family stands at the core of a healthy society. It is a place for respect and mutual acceptance, which "conveys love for the future."

This is why Brunello is so proud his daughters, Camilla and Carolina, and their husbands have joined the company. As he sees it, they are true guardians of the corporate culture, as they believe in many of the same things he does – "their love for mankind, for looking after the surroundings, for a sustainable, balanced and fair profit."

Their commitment to the place, to the hamlet, is also on demonstration. Both the daughters and their husbands live in the hamlet along with their children, in restored properties, as does Mr. Cucinelli himself. In fact, Mr. Cucinelli can often be seen at the end of the day, walking along the streets, talking with members of the community.

Finally, in a nod to the future, Brunello and his wife established the Brunello and Federica Cucinelli Foundation in 2010 with the purpose of spreading and translating into practice the ideals that have fed the humanistic goal Solomeo. At the heart of the Foundation's activities, both in Italy and abroad, is preservation of the artistic heritage and programs aimed at supporting people as well as improving the towns in which they live and work.

Awards

Given what we have learned about Mr. Cucinelli's background, philosophy, and work, it is not surprising he has won many recognitions and awards. He was nominated to "Cavaliere del Lavoro" (Knight of Industry), assigned by the President of the Italian Republic in 2010; he was awarded an honorary degree in Philosophy and Ethics of Human Relations, conferred on him that same year by the University of Perugia as a tribute to his merits as a humanistic entrepreneur; he received the "Global Economy Prize for the World Economy" from the eminent Kiel Institute in 2017, with a remark stating that he "perfectly embodies the figure of the Honorable Merchant"; and in 2018, he received another prestigious honor, the nomination to "Cavaliere di Gran Croce al Merito della Repubblica Italiana" (Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic) and was also awarded an honorary Ph.D. in Philosophy by the University of Messina in 2018.

It is for all these reasons that dig.ni.fy wishes to acknowledge Brunello Cucinelli and the company he founded, as it demonstrates our belief that companies both large and small can do good through good work.

You can learn more about Brunello Cucinelli by visiting:
<https://www.brunellocucinelli.com/>



Ideas?

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