

BRUNELLO CUCINELLI: A LIFE ON-SCREEN

What happens when your life is so cinematic, it merits being made into a film by the great Giuseppe Tornatore? Legendary Italian designer Brunello Cucinelli speaks with Chris Cotonou ahead of the release of *Brunello: The Gracious Visionary*.

"I want to make love stories," says Brunello Cucinelli, the great Italian designer. His most recent project, *Brunello: The Gracious Visionary*, is itself a love story: a homage to his impoverished, yet happy, childhood in the Umbrian countryside; a tribute to family, to the soul, and to simple pleasures. Commissioned by Cucinelli, it tells his complete life story, all the way up to his success as one of the most prominent people in Italian craft and fashion. It is a genuinely epic, moving tale. At times, the exploits of a young Cucinelli are reminiscent of Fellini in *Amarcord* (1973) or *I Vitelloni* (1953). As the film progresses, it is peppered with poetry and wisdom.

If Brunello feels tonally familiar, the film—which moves between documentary, interviews, and sepia-drowned period re-enactments—is by Giuseppe Tornatore, the director of *Cinema Paradiso* (1988), one of the great love stories in cinema.

"The merit is all his. It's him constructing and building the story," Cucinelli explains. "I believe Tornatore and [composer] Nicola Piovani are poets. And poets are the greatest humans there are."

Behind the film's lyricism is years of research. When Tornatore was approached to direct the film, he set about interviewing Cucinelli for 60 hours. His friends, colleagues, and fans also feature, building a universe around the subject

that is surprisingly earnest. "Tornatore asked if I wanted to see frames during shooting but I said no. I watched the finished version for the first time and didn't sleep a wink," he says, with a big smile. "He asked me to write down anything I was unhappy with, but my page was blank."

By keeping this distance, many of the scenes where the older Cucinelli wanders into his past were actually unplanned. It was fortunate that the very farmhouse he grew up in was available to buy the year before shooting. "Nothing changed. One day, Tornatore asked me to wear country clothes and visit the house." When he arrived, the mostly first-time actors—including those in the role of his father, beloved mother, and brothers—were playing out a scene from his childhood. You can see how overwhelmed it makes Cucinelli, a man who, at the apex of Italian society, is suddenly teleported back to his earthier roots. "It was especially moving at the dinner table scenes. I could hear in-jokes, the names of my cousins... Tornatore remembered everything." Even the ending, which is the culmination of scenes scattered throughout the film of Cucinelli playing Scopa, an Italian card game he picked up at bars and cafes in his youth, had a surprising twist. In the process of making the film, Tornatore was excavating as much depth and emotion from his subject as he could.

Through some scenes, we even learn the origins of some of Cucinelli's most publicised



Above: Brunello Cucinelli in Solomeo.
Below: Giuseppe Tornatore on set.



Italian poster of *Brunello: The Gracious Visionary* (2026).

habits: a notoriously fair and sustainable business leader, one emotional scene shows younger Cucinelli overhearing his own father comparing factory work to forced labour. “He thinks of that moment every day,” one of Cucinelli’s daughters explains.

When asked why he decided to embark on the film, Cucinelli’s answer is actually even more personal. “I want my grandchildren to know who I really am,” he says. “That’s nonno, they will say when they hear me talk; hear what I say and believe. And I wanted it to be as authentic a portrait as could be. This is why I tried to stay out of Tornatore’s way during the shoot, or give too much of my opinion too early on.”

Naturally, the director had Cucinelli’s vast resources at his disposal. He was promised all the cameras, all the equipment he would need—and the film has an epic sense of scale, especially during the re-enactments of post-war Italy. But the methods stayed down to earth. “He would visit the village, and knock on doors to ask if people had photographs or videos from that time.” A blacksmith gave Tornatore footage of a moment

we see early on: a young Cucinelli stands christ-like in the local church during a traditional religious folk performance in the hamlet. In many cases, the designer hadn’t seen these artefacts since childhood. “It was a process of discovery, of excavation.”

So impressed was Cucinelli with this process, he has already begun finding ways to work with Tornatore again, although the next time won’t be so close to home. He wants the director to return to him with an idea for a classic romance—Cucinelli’s biggest soft spot. “I’m not interested in action films or tense dramas. What I like to see on the screen is love,” he explains. “*Out of Africa* (1985) and *Amici Miei* (1975)... these are some of my favourite films. And *Cinema Paradiso* of course. *Titanic* (1997)? Bello,” he continues, widening his eyes. “We need more love in our world. This is a time when humans need more peace in their souls.”

The way Cucinelli describes the world betrays the true reason behind telling this story at such a late stage in his life. Early in *Brunello*, a colleague calls him an “optimist for life”. At a recent fashion event in Solomeo, we see the designer standing up mid-speech, passionately instructing young people to invest in their future. “The film is an act of love,” he concedes. The purpose is to inspire a generation that he feels is overwhelmed with change—from hyperconnectivity to a pervasive cynicism with society—to try and reconnect with tradition, with their roots, to enact change through acts of joy. If this sounds rich, *Brunello*’s own life is testament to this. He approaches it with a Fellini-esque lightness. His words are carefully thought out; his optimism genuine. While he may be one of the great Italian designers, as well as a model businessman, you don’t arrive at these things by total chance. *Brunello* is a film that shows us when your life is cinematic, it turns out to also be a great movie.

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Scenes from Giuseppe Tornatore’s *Cinema Paradiso* (1988). Tornatore returns to screens in 2026 with *Brunello: The Gracious Visionary* (2026).

