



Style

The Real-Life Wardrobe of Brunello Cucinelli, Who Thinks ‘You Should Always Try to Be Youthful’

The Italian cashmere king tells GQ columnist Christopher Fenimore about his rules for getting dressed, what it means to be a good man, and why “we are in dire need of poetry.”

By **Christopher Fenimore**

April 23, 2026

Few fashion designers know how to savor life quite like Brunello Cucinelli. The 72-year-old Italian cashmere magnate is famed for turning Solomeo, the Umbrian hamlet where his company is headquartered, into something of a corporate utopia—a reported 1,500 employees live and work there, enjoying high wages, communal lunches, and beautifully manicured grounds. He built a vineyard and olive oil mill in the town, which he runs in his spare time. His exquisite wares are beloved by titans of industry, many of whom are known to make pilgrimages to Solomeo to study Cucinelli’s abiding ethos of “ethical capitalism.” He is almost always smiling in photographs.

Now, Cucinelli has captured the breadth of his life in a new film, *Brunello: The Gracious Visionary*. Directed by Oscar winner Giuseppe Tornatore, the documentary intersperses interviews with the designer, his family, his employees, and his celebrity clients with lush recreations of his formative years.

Last week, a few days after the movie’s New York gala screening, I met with Cucinelli at his brand’s VIP showroom in Manhattan. Over a couple of coffees, with assistance from his translator, we discussed his epic journey from a rural Italian farm to the top of the fashion ladder, why he felt the need to make this film, and the chicest thing a man can wear.



GQ: Do you see a relationship between fashion and philosophy?

Brunello Cucinelli: There is definitely a relationship. Hadrian was an emperor 2000 years ago, and one of the greatest philosophers. He would step into the Senate and comment on the senators' attire. He'd say, "The senator is very rich, but he's not chic. Whereas the young, up-and-coming senator, you can tell that he's not loaded, but he's very refined." Philosophy means studying and reading yourself. So, you need to be clothed accordingly for the way you see yourself.

Just think of the monks and how long it took for them to design their robes. They're beautiful. They're so fitting. You might say, "It's just a robe. It's nothing. Very basic." But if you look at it closely, a white Dominican robe is strikingly different to a brown Franciscan robe. It does have meaning and value.

In *Brunello: The Gracious Visionary*, there were reenactments of your own childhood and adolescence. How did you feel when you saw the biopic for the first time?

We filmed for two years, and then [it took] a whole year for editing. I was filmed for 60 hours, which meant the big job was all Giuseppe's to cut and paste and bring it all down to a manageable time. My wife was interviewed for 10 hours; one minute ended up in the movie. One minute! Every two or three months, he would come to me and say, "Would you like to take a look at some parts of the film?" And I would always turn him down. "No, I prefer to look at it as a whole, in its entirety." I wanted to listen to the music when it was done, however, so, they let me listen without pictures. I was there with my eyes closed, envisioning it, but I did not see the scenes that they applied to because they were still editing at that time.

A month and a half before the premiere, Giuseppe invited me to watch the movie. He said something I really appreciated: “The first time you watch this movie, do not worry about not liking some lighting or this or that. Just take a look at it with poetry, with the right attitude.” This was on a Saturday. I went back to the hotel. Didn’t sleep a wink because it was difficult. I was really overexcited. Sunday morning, we watched the movie for a second time. I was supposed to jot down my impressions in this notepad. You could change up to 5%, but the movie was finished. When he asked me my opinion, I said, “I would not change one single thing.” I was very emotional.

What I liked about it was that it was really true to life. Like the house where I was born, where we actually shot those scenes. I left that home with my family 50 years ago, and it was sold to a shepherd. In that time, he did not change one single thing about it. When he passed away, about four years ago, his daughter said, “Would you like to buy it back?” So, when we actually shot the movie, it was really my life coming back to me.

What did we actually reconstruct? The bar, Gigino. It’s still there. We didn’t dismantle it. There are still all the writings about politics, comments on women and everything, boxing, Jimi Hendrix, everything that was on the walls. If you do happen to be in Solomeo, I’m going to bring you there. We’re going to play cards at the bar. It’s the same. That was really moving for me, because when we actually were shooting those scenes, you would step into a place where you lived for 10 years of your life, where you would play cards with a broken table with a wonky leg.



Why did you choose Giuseppe Tornatore to direct?

It was to be the movie of my life. He's my same age. And so, if you ask me, "What was the movie that most epitomizes your life?" It was *Cinema Paradiso* by Tornatore. He won the Oscar when he was 31, so I had met him then. He, too, came from the countryside, from a small village. He is a great poet who also loves photography. If I had picked a young director, he couldn't possibly understand and grasp that kind of life, the revolutionary years, the '70s, the great value and worth of playing pranks, and family life that was really strong back then.

The same goes for Maestro Nicola Piovani, who wrote the score. Tornatore was always in a close partnership with Ennio Morricone for music. And I know Mr. Piovani well. He's in his 80s now. When I actually asked him to compose the music, he said, "I'm going to pour all my knowledge of life into it." Because he had lived the same kind of life as me with his siblings, so it's easier to grasp and put himself in my shoes. I find the soundtrack fantastic, with moments and scenes that really rob your soul. And it shows because he lived exactly the same way and experienced the harshness of all these different characters of my childhood. If you were to choose a young director, even a great one, but who did not experience those years, that's when it's more challenging. Because I think that we need poetry. We are in dire need of poetry.

In the film, you're shown with long hair and a Bob Dylan-like leather jacket in the '70s. Where did your sense of personal style come from as a young man?

It's something [innate]. I have just a handful of photos of myself as a child. I was always wearing light-colored trousers, and a white shirt, but we were farmers, so we did not have many means. What did I know about fashion? When I was 17, 18, there was Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles. It was really a wonderful world for 10 or 15 years to draw inspiration from—1965, 1966, there was a lot to choose from. You had the music and everything came from it. Also, the fact that my wife opened this small clothing shop, and then with me modeling, fashion was intertwined with my life. It was part of me.

Toward the very end of the film, you say you want to be remembered as a good man. What makes a good man, in your view, and how do you detect when others are good?

We all know what makes a good person. Pythagoras wrote a small text in 500 BC. In three pages, he tries to sum up advice on how to live. When you go to bed, do not be overtired. Try and review what you did during the day that just ended. Have you harmed mankind? Regret it. Have you brought joy to mankind? Rejoice. Because when you go to bed in the evening, you know darn well whether you did something bad. If you fight with someone, do you feel well? No. Even if you are right, you do not feel well about fighting with someone. That's the way life is. So who's a good man? If you behave well with the creations surrounding you, with wildlife, with human beings, you know.



What do you look for in an employee? How is one hired to work for Brunello Cucinelli?

I don't want to know about your marks in school. I do always ask, "Do you have a humanistic or a scientific background, or maybe both?" Because life taught me that there is an intelligence that stems from your education and what you study, but there is another one that comes from your soul. In the past 30 years, the soul is not valued enough. I think we are making a mistake, but this is just my take. Human beings had to be educated. Educated is a word that means you learn how to be open to the world, all the different languages, religions. Whereas, someone who is informed means that someone knows data, but not about the human soul. If you are just a technical learner, that's not enough.

Now what I've noticed is that young people, not just Americans, but Europeans too, are opting to come to study in Italy. I think that there is a lot of longing for humanism. And if you actually come to Italian universities, you can breathe, you can soak in this humanism. Because sometimes we study 17 different subjects in high school. If you're American, you have access to some of the best universities in the world. Why would you come here to study? But it means that there is truly a craving for the humanistic, because my thought is that we are on the threshold of a new humanistic era. This is the Renaissance of the 21st century.

I agree. I think there's an inflection period at the moment, because young people are feeling more alienated by this technology that's meant to be connecting us.

That's 100% true. And the idea is going back to collective creativity. Life in the bar that you saw in the movie is all collective creativity at work there.

I went to a liberal arts college here in the city and had a very similar experience in the cafeteria. Very interesting discussions. And even in a friend's apartment a couple blocks away, it was like *Seinfeld*: Different people would pop in and out all day and discuss everything—music, life, philosophy, literature, even pop culture.

This is such a good experience.



The planet is only getting hotter. Do you have any tips for how to look smart in the summer?

Talking about fashion—and this applies both to winter and summer—everything, generally speaking, must be lighter. The weight must be lighter. Everything must be much lighter than what was used in the past. What I find is that there is a lot of flair and taste around. You need to look dapper, refined, sporty, youthful, chic, cutting-edge. You are wearing cargo pants, but with a blazer and a T-shirt. You dress this way, and you can really attend 90% of events with attire like this. I'm wearing a suit, but I've got sneakers on. If you were to hide my face, I could be a 30-year-old. What really counts, what really matters, is how you combine these different articles.

Do you have a favorite clothing item?

One-and-a-half breasted navy blazer that you can pair with denim, with or without a tie, or with a T-shirt. I will be showing you later wearing it with denim, with a tie, with sneakers. I would say that that would cater to 90% of my events. I think that you should always try to be youthful and refined, contemporary, stylish.

I love that styling moment in the movie, too. You say, “If you’re wearing jeans, it’s always with a shirt and tie.” It’s an interesting detail that has become a signature of your brand, and ubiquitous with Italian style.

Yes, always. That's something I always do. And a white shirt, and I go to work like that. Ripped jeans, but with a tie. There is always juxtaposition, and color combination really makes a difference there.

What’s the most recent thing you added to your wardrobe?

The latest blazers. For menswear, blazers are really the most important, the key piece, because it can be mixed and matched with anything else. It's really versatile. You go to watch a football match, you wear it with a T-shirt, it lends you flair and taste. We have a very young staff of men's designers, and they always wear a blazer to work. Some of them have a T-shirt, a polo, a tie, or maybe a button-up, but they always have a jacket. That's our culture. That's the way we dress. The Italian way.

Is it required?

No, it's not required. But when you're dressed well, you are ready for anything that might come your way.



How do you choose what to wear every day?

Well, it takes me at least 10 to 15 minutes every morning to pick the right outfit, because tomorrow you want to be chicer than today. If we take a picture together today, someone might post it or see it. Tomorrow, you want to be seen different than yesterday. Every photo is there to stay. Thirty years down the road, someone might say, “That young man was so chic.” Your attitude makes the difference. When someone says they just throw stuff on, this is not true. I don’t believe that. Because when you leave home for the day, you want to look better than yesterday. You don’t want to use the very same clothes and repeat your outfit.

I read that you made this film because you wanted to tell your story in your own words while you’re still able to. It seems you’re quite comfortable with the idea of your mortality. Your notion of humanistic capitalism has been well-documented, but fashion at large is also harming the planet immensely. What steps are you taking to ensure that Brunello Cucinelli, the brand, will continue to do things the right way, even after you’ve gone?

I live as an Italian, I run my company as an Italian, but I think as a Greek. I’ve always been passionate about the Greeks. Until 400 BC, they claimed that they lived according to nature. Nature changed as the seasons changed and they would go with it. This is how I like to live. With the business, we try to work without harming mankind, without harming our surroundings, the wildlife, the sun, the sky. Saint Francis, 800 years ago, used to speak to the sky and he would name the moon his sister, the sun his brother. He even called death his sister. That was unprecedented. This is how we work in harmony.

Let me tell you how I would like it to go on. I would like our business to grow a little—very little—every year. That we made a fair profit every year; a just profit. I would like for the next 100, 150 years, for the company to still be headquartered in the valley where it is now. It will not happen, but we have striven towards that. We have fought for that. Our brand has no evident logo, because of course the logo helps, but it doesn’t last very long. The whole family is involved in the business. We are a public company. My daughters act as vice presidents. There is a great design team, and my daughters work with them too. So, I’m pretty confident.

Every day I follow the teachings of Marcus Aurelius: Live according to nature, go along with the flow, and then find peace. I am living through a stage where I am setting the ground for my relationship with the afterlife. This is the start of eternity, which will happen when the creator, the one above, decides that it's my time. But one thing is for sure, that my brand grows very little and makes a fair profit. This is something I'm very passionate about. And to stay true to our identity of high craftsmanship. The coats that I wear now date back to 1996 because I've reused them. It's also chic to have 12-year-old cargo pants with something new on top. I want to live as a caretaker of creation, a temporary keeper, a temporary guardian. And when my time is over, that's it.