

# “LIVE

AS IF

IT'S THE LAST DAY OF YOUR LIFE,

BUT

# PLAN

AS IF

YOU'LL BE HERE FOREVER”

STYLE POWERHOUSE  
**BRUNELLO CUCINELLI** REVEALS  
HIS LONGEVITY  
AND SERENITY SECRETS.

BY **RICHARD DORMENT**

PHOTOGRAPHS BY **SUSAN WRIGHT**

**ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS** to go when you turn 70 has gotta be your ability to give a good noogie. Maybe it's your diminished grip strength, or maybe you no longer have the bodily stability or the physical leverage to really dig in your knuckles and make your buddy squirm, but at a certain point in life, noogies are really no longer on the table. Except if you're Brunello Cucinelli, the 71-year-old yet seemingly ageless Italian fashion magnate, who could give one hell of a noogie were he so inclined.

It is a hot September morning in Solomeo, a medieval village less than a three-hour drive north of Rome, and I'm sitting at the end of a long white table across from Brunello (which he insists I call him, because everyone, from his longtime assistant Francesco to his exceedingly cool daughter Carolina, calls him that) in his spacious office at the company's headquarters. One of the walls is filled with framed headshots of his personal heroes and inspirations throughout history (Saint Francis of Assisi, JFK, and Barack Obama make the cut), and Brunello's own face—deeply tan and lightly creased from a lifetime spent in the Mediterranean sun, with an angular profile straight out of a Roman sculpture gallery—would fit in nicely with the collection.



Brunello Cucinelli, seen here in Solomeo, Italy, is a fitness Renaissance man, training two hours a day in a variety of disciplines.

Within minutes of sitting, it becomes clear that Brunello is not much of a sitter. Over the next hour, in a rolling storm of facial expressions, hand gestures, and body movements, punctuated by frequent standing and walking, he tells me about his practices and perceptions around strength and nutrition, sleep and stress, and about building a life of deep, considered purpose. We talk about the company culture he's built. We talk about the importance of daily naps. (He prefers his after lunch, no clothes.) And we talk about his favorite influencers, and by *influencers* I mean the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers and Enlightenment thinkers who shape his worldview. (Pythagoras, Plato, Socrates, Marcus Aurelius, Saint Benedict, Kant, and Schopenhauer all join our conversation.)

We also talk about his physio (or, as Americans call it, physical therapist), with whom he's been working for decades. “My physio, he's 77, and when we met”—in the late 1990s—“he was training the world champions of boxing, five or four of them, just with massage. He does something really unique. He gets your wrist and he presses in hard. And then your hands. He massages your hands. He does it on your face, too.” Brunello demonstrates his physio's kneading, muscle-shaping



The weights are a little lighter than when he was in his 40s, but Cucinelli still strength trains regularly.

movements with his hands, twisting and squeezing the air in front of him, but a hand demo can only get him so far. He bolts up from his chair, walks briskly down to my end of the table, and performs his physio's trademark technique, on me, right above my jawline. "You need blood in your face," he explains as he digs his knuckle, or maybe it was his thumb, into my lower cheek and massages the area intensely. Granted, this wasn't a noogie, technically speaking, but it felt like one, and as Brunello returns to his seat and my face pulsates with freshly summoned blood flow, I think: *This man is alive.*

Well, yeah. He's 71, not dead. But what's the secret to being *alive* at 71 versus being not dead at 71? Brunello knows, and it's not really a secret. It's all right there in the books he's read and the very simple rules that he follows, and he is more than happy to tell you all about them. Because while not everyone can afford to buy one of his cashmere sweaters, and not everyone has access to a physio with vice-grip hands, everyone can be *alive* like Brunello Cucinelli, if only you know how.

**"I'VE ALWAYS BEEN LIVELY,"** Brunello tells me as he describes a childhood on a working farm in nearby Castel Rigone. "We lived in the countryside until I was 15, and we had no electricity and no television. Can you imagine what kind of life we lived in the fields? Climbing trees, building tree houses, walks in the woods with other kids." Every day, his mother prepared simple farmer's meals for him and his two brothers.

"We had a wholesome diet. Every day we would have the pasta with tomato sauce, loads of vegetables. Meat twice a week. It was a pretty healthy diet. I have always tried to look after my food, what I was eating, all the time."

When he turned 15, his family moved to the city, and from that point, he says, "I spent 10 years of my life at the café. When I wasn't there, it was jujitsu, tennis, football, skiing, gym. I would run, but they weren't called marathons; they were called long marches, and it was 15 to 20 kilometers. Just sports—that's the only thing I did then. And disco!" This was also around the time he discovered philosophy. "The first I came across was Immanuel Kant when I was 17, and I learned: Act always considering mankind, both yourself and the others. From Kant, I was referred to Socrates and Plato. I was brought up with the Greeks, they were the basis of my life, and I started to think about living in a balance. And I decided to break up life like Epicurus teaches us. Thirty-three percent you get from your parents—you inherit from them; it's not up to you to choose. Thirty-three percent is destiny. And the remaining thirty-three percent is up to you. You can't just go through life and hope that you're lucky. You have to work out and eat properly."

Decades have passed since those early revelations. He founded and built his namesake company, starting out with simple cashmere sweaters in 1978 before expanding into the sportswear and tailoring favored by the *Succession* set. (He took the company public in 2012, becoming one of the richest people in Italy.) He started and raised a family, with his two daughters (Camilla, 42, and Carolina, 34) and their husbands all working for the family business. He bought and restored buildings throughout Solomeo, a 12th-century hamlet that had fallen into disrepair over the centuries and now appears both ancient and brand-new at the same time.

He is, by any objective measure, a very busy guy, "but not *that* busy," he explains. Most days he rises at 5:30 and spends his morning exercising. The workday starts at 8 a.m. for him and the hundreds of employees who work in the headquarters, and at 1 p.m. everyone takes a 90-minute lunch break. Employees can head to the company's canteen, where they can eat a seated three-course meal, or they can go home and feed their families. Brunello typically drives the six minutes back to his pale yellow villa in the hills, and "then I take a 25-minute nap, naked. Just like we fellas go to bed for the night. I get up, I take my shower, and I'm as good as new. And then 2:30 to 5:30, back to work, and it is forbidden to overwork. That's it. So I have always had a lot of time to look after my body."

Which is critical for him, because in the world according to Brunello, "when your body is healthy," he says, "your mind and your soul will follow. And when you make decisions, you are smarter somehow." Brunello says he exercises about two hours a day—a mix of walking, swimming, strength training, boxing, soccer, and tennis—and he's evolved his fitness regimen as he's gotten older. "When I was 55, I was playing soccer with my friends, and I said, 'I have to play in a different way and slow down a bit.' And then I thought about the gym, and I said, 'I have to start using different weights—if it's too heavy, I'll get hurt.' Now I do the very same exercises as when I was 40, but they're lighter. I do my squats, but they're slower. It's the same kind of exercises but less intense."

The same principles apply to diet: "One needs to eat little—very little. I'm a little hungry, all the time. I always have an Italian breakfast. A cappuccino with a pastry and some jam.



Cucinelli plays tennis often, enjoying the social benefits as much as the cardio, agility, and mental challenges.



Then around 10, I have a small sandwich. At 1 p.m., pasta every day. Every single day. Maybe a salad or some vegetables. I'm not a great meat lover. At 4 p.m., a small snack, a piece of fruit or a piece of cheese. And then dinner, and I have close to no supper. When you have four courses and when you're 70, you don't sleep well. And the morning after, you weigh 300 grams extra."

Brunello knows this for a fact. "I weigh myself four times a day. Morning, before lunch, after lunch, before bed. When I see I'm one kilo more, I just eat less. I eat half of a half of a half. It's the biggest sacrifice of my life. If you asked me what my biggest sacrifice would be, it would be to go on a diet." He has never been on a diet, and he's not one for counting macros or overdoing it on supplements, either—"I am worried that my liver will suffer," he says. Four times a year, for one month, he takes three supplements (ginkgo biloba, zinc, and tribulus) three times a day. "For memory, for health, for sex. I follow the Charlie Chaplin treatment. He had a child when he was very old!" He also receives platelet-rich plasma (PRP) injections, a procedure in which a physician uses a patient's own blood to help heal other parts of the body. "They take the plasma out and they put it in my face and my hair, my hands and my chest," Brunello says, touching the relevant parts of himself. "I believe in regenerative medicine."

Cucinelli uses a breathwork practice called the Five Tibetan Rites to find calm and clarity.



On the day of my visit, I watch him work out in his home gym, a glass-topped solarium with a small lap pool, a treadmill and cable machine, some beautiful wood-paneled Nohrd dumbbells, and a white leather boxing bag embossed with his company's logo. I watch him put on his boxing gloves (also white leather, also

be-logo'd) and pound his fists together before he starts working the bag, shuffling his feet and stepping into every jab and hook. Afterward he takes a break to practice the Five Tibetan Rites, a series of breathing-guided yoga poses that have been around for centuries. He kneels on the gym's wooden floor, his posture erect and breath steady and low: in through the nose, out through the mouth, his hands at the back of his hips as his chest rises and falls.

Later that day, he delves into his other extracurriculars: He's helped fund an organization called the Himalayan Regenerative Fashion Living Lab to support sustainable fashion; he delivered a speech at the 2021 G20 assembly that he called "Humanistic Capitalism and Human Sustainability"; he's written an essay called "Technology, Humanism and Artificial Intelligence," available to read on his site; he's supported the development of various drugs to treat cancer and metabolic conditions.

How does he find the time to do all this while remaining a hands-on steward of his company and working out for two hours a day? He keeps the rest of his life very simple. "We need to work a fair amount, so we have time left for the body and the soul. Because for two or three hours of my day, I basically lead the same life as a monk. When I work out, or after that, I go out and take a stroll in the village, I look up at the stars, I look at a fire, and I get dizzy with beautiful thoughts. I wouldn't call it meditation. I spend time with myself. I spend time with my mom and my dad, who passed away. I want my head to be busy. I want to lead a normal life."

For now that means more swimming and tennis and napping and working closely with his daughters to ensure the company he has built remains healthy for future Cucinellis. "I want to live as if it's the last day of my life, but I want to keep planning as if I'll be here forever. I am a temporary guardian of this," Brunello says, waving at the factories and offices and village he built and rebuilt. "If you act and feel like an owner, you'll be scared that you'll lose it. But if you're just a guardian of this factory and the plant, you're free." To live simply, to let go, to look up at the stars in wonder: It works for Brunello. It might even work for you. ■

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