

VANITY FAIR, November 19th, 2025

Brunello Cucinelli

**DIGNITY, JOY, GRACE, FAITH IN THE YOUNG.
THE PHILOSOPHER-ENTREPRENEUR SAYS:
THE TRUE REALIST IS THE VISIONARY**

BREAD AND BOOKS

Brunello Cucinelli, aged 72, designer and entrepreneur.

On 9 December the documentary-film about his life and values,

Brunello – The Gracious Visionary, directed by Giuseppe Tornatore, will be released in movie theatres.

Brunello Cucinelli

THE TRUE REALIST IS THE VISIONARY

GRACE AND RESPECT FOR HUMAN DIGNITY,
THE MOST IMPORTANT LESSON FROM HIS FATHER,
THE FUTURE OF FASHION:
THE PHILOSOPHER-ENTREPRENEUR DREAMS
OF A WORLD MADE OF STUDY, JOY
(AND SWEET BUNS WITH RAISINS)

by **Simone Marchetti**

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19 November 2025

Brunello talks to everyone. Even to the dead. “The last time,” he says, “I went to visit a man in the cemetery. He had been buried in 1976. I needed to tell him something, and I explained it to him in full detail.” In *Brunello – The Gracious Visionary*, a movie directed by Giuseppe Tornatore, filmed over two years and about to be released in Italian movie theatres on 9 December, Brunello Cucinelli engages in dialogue with those living beside him, those who are no longer here, and many others. It is an original and poetic experiment, blending cinematic historical reconstructions with documentary-style testimonies. The story begins in the country home where Cucinelli was born and where it all started, and culminates in the miracle of the eponymous brand, an Italian excellence that continues to grow despite the industry's crisis. We sat with the entrepreneur for a long conversation after watching the feature film in preview.

Let's start with the cemetery. Are you telling me that you go to graveyards to speak with the dead?

Of course. The last time it happened was when I purchased the farmhouse where I was born and raised. In the deed of sale, I discovered that the property included 108 hectares of woodland. It was

quite a surprise, because when we lived there as tenant farmers, the owner would not allow us to collect any firewood from that woodland to keep us warm. We had to cut it in secret. Can you imagine how cold it was in winter? Well, when I bought the farmhouse, I asked where the owner was buried. And I went to visit him. In front of his grave, I said: "Listen, we were quite happy in your house, but you wouldn't let us collect any firewood to keep warm. And I do not understand why. I hope that God protects you wherever He has placed you. But I must tell you: you were not exactly kind to us."

Much is said and written about you. But if you had only one sentence to introduce yourself, what would it be?

I would introduce myself in this way: "My name is Brunello. The dream that has guided my life has always remained the same: to work and live in order to foster the moral and economic dignity of the human being." Everything that was done to my father, the hardships we endured along the way—it all moved me deeply. To see my father humiliated, to witness it not in his words but in the quiet sorrow of his gaze, cut me to the very heart. And I have never forgotten it.

Tell me about your father.

I dreamt of him just the other night. Even in dreams he tells me the same things: "Brunello, you must be an honourable man, you must be a true gentleman." It was not the life of a country farmer that humiliated him, but the life as a factory labourer in the city. He left us at the age of a hundred. I remember, in his final weeks, he would say to his grandchildren: "I am at peace, I feel well, I just have a tiny little problem: my willy no longer... works." And they would burst into laughter. I, on the other hand, thought: "May heaven strike you, old man!" Seven days later, I said to my wife: "Before long, my dad will no longer be with us." On the Thursday he told me: "That's enough, I am done." On the Friday I remained by his side all day and then, at six in the evening, he slipped away. He closed his eyes, and I thought, dear God, his body is still warm. I stayed with him until Saturday morning. I spoke to him through the night: "Dad," I asked him, "where are you now? Do you see the Most Excellent Almighty Ruler of whom Saint Augustine speaks?" That very day I wrote him a letter. It ends like this: *My dearest dad, with my birth you discovered the love of life; through your death I discovered the love of death.* Saint Francis was the only one who used the expression "Sister Death". Neither Buddha nor Jesus did so. And I understand Saint Francis very well.

THE FAMILY BUSINESS

Federica and Brunello Cucinelli with their daughters Carolina and Camilla and Riccardo Stefanelli, CEO of the company and Camilla's husband.

"ONE SHOULD NEVER BE SEEN ARGUING: THE HOME IS THE PLACE OF THE SOUL, NOT OF FEAR."

Family has always been central in your life. Your two daughters work alongside you, and your wife has been your lifelong companion for 55 years...

Do you know how I describe my wife?

Tell me.

She is the first cousin of Schopenhauer. I am an incurable optimist, she is quite the opposite. She is not merely the companion of a lifetime; she has taught me endurance in the face of pain, understanding, and sensitivity. My daughter Camilla resembles her mother, Carolina takes after me. In the docu-film, she provides a counterpoint to me. The other day, I heard her end a work conversation abruptly, saying: "Look, this is how it's done!" She is exactly like me.

How does one hold family and work together for so many years?

One must be fortunate enough not to face great misfortunes. And one should never be seen quarrelling. I never saw my farmer parents argue. I told my wife straight away, as soon as we were engaged: the home must be the place of the soul, not of fear or hardship. If you don't agree, then we part ways. We have been together for fifty-five years, married for forty-two. Last night, I came home, smiled at her, watched the football match; she, on the other side of the room, watched her television shows. Then I lit the fire in the fireplace. She came in and asked: "What are you doing?" And I said: "I am watching the fire." If you have lived in a home with no electricity, as I did, the sight of a fire becomes as joyous as gazing at a sky full of stars. In the end, I live the life of a monk. And every evening we sit close together; I brush against her with my foot, I fall asleep while she is still reading.

You speak a lot about the soul. You say it must be nourished with the right food. What, then, is the proper nourishment and which is not?

Saint Benedict used to say that the mind is tended through study, and the soul through prayer and work. One must dedicate time to study and to the mind throughout one's life. Saint Augustine wrote: "Tidy up your soul, for it requires order each day, just as a room does."

And what, on the other hand, harms the soul?

"Judging others. One must never judge, not even when one does not understand or appreciate. Saint Francis never judged the Church; he did not contest it. He simply said: "I wish to live my way." If you do not judge, you do not quarrel. And if you do not quarrel, you live better. It is an education in embracing diversity. Rousseau wrote: "I can't even imagine that there exists a human being like myself."

All your days begin at half past six with a walk around the construction sites in the village where you live, Solomeo.

I make my rounds until eight. I enjoy playing jokes and pranks on the bricklayers and blacksmiths. I feel like those old men who spend the day standing and watching construction sites. Irony, lightness, and joyfulness are essential in life. Then I have my favourite breakfast: cappuccino and croissant. And if there happens to be a *maritozzo* (sweet bun) with raisins, just as when I was a child, then I am truly happy.

Let's talk about Tornatore's film. Among the many famous characters, there is a politician you know well: Mario Draghi.

Mario Draghi is without a doubt one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met. He never judges others, never utters an inappropriate word. He is gracious and possesses the sacred gift of clarity. I had hoped to see him become President of the Republic, but it was not to be. I love Mattarella, let me be clear. One day, when he was still in government, Draghi called me. He phoned and asked, "Would you like to speak at the G20?" And I replied, "Of course, I'll swim there if I have to!" I arrived in Rome two days early, locked myself in a hotel, living on bread and water, just to prepare for the big day. You see, I never write any of my speeches; I always speak off the cuff. I arrived at the venue and found myself sitting with him, Boris Johnson, Angela Merkel, and Emmanuel Macron. Draghi gave the introductory speech and read from his notes, wonderfully handwritten. A clear, fine contribution. I thought: Saint Augustine, lend me a hand! And then, as always, I stopped worrying and let my soul speak. As I delivered my speech, I saw Johnson staring at me with his dishevelled hair and Macron with his stern gaze. In the end, I looked at Draghi and realised I had done well.

Four of Us

Brunello Cucinelli with his wife Federica. Below, the couple's daughters, from left, Camilla, 43, and Carolina, 34.

You are famous for paying your workers above market rates. What do you think of a law guaranteeing a minimum wage?

Regarding the law on minimum wage, I cannot really comment. But I do know we must grant moral and economic dignity to work. And paying our workers a better salary does not affect our profits in a material way.

Yet today, there are vast fortunes, particularly in technology companies, held by entrepreneurs who have never been so wealthy, even as they cut jobs and multiply their profits

Some of them came to Solomeo. I gifted them the Golden Verses of Pythagoras. Three precious pages on how one should live. One principle above all: in the evening, before going to bed, review three times the things you have done during the day. If you did painful things, repent. If you did joyful things, rejoice. In any case, you should know that you will receive what you have given.

I HAVE FAITH IN THE NEW GENERATIONS AND SEE AN ERA OF RENAISSANCE ON THE HORIZON

Let's talk about fashion. The sector is in crisis, luxury goods prices have never been so high, and there is unprecedented distrust in the system. How do you view this situation?

One must read the scenario with a perspective of the last five years, not just the last two. From 2021 to 2023, luxury brands experienced growth and profits never seen before. Now, a natural adjustment is taking place. I would say that we have overreached with prices—and with profits as well. And this does not apply only to fashion. We must restore an ethics in profit, an ethics that is decisive, for capitalism can only advance in step with society as a whole.

The hardest moment of your life.

Difficult moments always depend on how you face them. If I must mention one truly challenging time, I would say the pandemic. On 12 March 2020, I held a worldwide call with my employees, and everyone was crying. I told them: "I do not know what is coming, but history teaches us that this will pass. We have enough funds for two years, and each of you will be paid their salary as usual. I ask only one thing of you: be brilliant, kind, and loving." Then, on the morning of 15 March, I opened the window of my house and saw the first swallows flying back after the winter. And I told myself: in the end, the swallows always return.

You, an incurable optimist, how do you experience war and the arms race in recent years?

I have a passion for history. As a fitting example, I would mention the Thirty Years' War, which ended with the Peace of Westphalia. That peace was not orchestrated by the great rulers but by the kings' collaborators. I know that these wars will come to an end. And I have faith in the young, in the new generations, and in their street demonstrations.

Would you have taken to the streets against war?

One day my granddaughter asked me: "Grandfather, how do you wish to die?" And I replied: "In the main square, waving the flag of peace and freedom." A few years ago, I conducted a research on what the wise elders historically said about young people — writings found on clay vases in Babylon, verses of Socrates, Seneca, Boccaccio... They all say the same thing: our young have no ideals, how will we end up? It is not true. I believe in the new generations, and I see an era of renaissance on the horizon. We have made progress in women's rights, LGBTQ rights. We must continue moving towards the future. Young people are leading us there.

The best lie you ever told.

When I sold the first sweater collections, I pretended that my dad ran a factory with 72 workers. Looking back, I would do it again, of course.

In the film about your journey, places and moments from your life are reconstructed. What was it like to go through them, in person, during the filming?

Tornatore had not explained the details to me. Then, during a shoot, I found myself in the kitchen of the country house, with my father asking my mother for bread, and children and cousins talking around us. I cried more during those scenes than I ever have in my life. My goodness, the dry grapes were hanging there, exactly where I saw them before falling asleep. And that hatch, through which the warmth of the barn rose, was still there, exactly where it had always been. It took us more than two years to make this film. A month ago, Giuseppe invited me to Rome to see it. It was a Saturday afternoon, and we said, "Today, we shall watch the film with poetry." I cried the entire time. Then, the following morning, Sunday, we watched it again with the script notes to see what needed changing. My goodness, I had written nothing. I told him, "Listen, for me, you must not touch a thing".

There are so many memories, so many celebrations, so many successes recounted in the film. What is the most beautiful moment?

Perhaps the celebrations for my seventieth birthday in Solomeo. As always, I gave an off-the-cuff speech for twenty minutes. Friends from when I was ten, twenty, fifty, sixty years old were all there. I could not lie. I spoke of courtesy and being gracious, which eventually became the subtitle of the film. I do not know why, but I am reminded of a phrase by Federico Fellini that I read above a studio set at Cinecittà. It says: *the true realist is the visionary*. He is absolutely right: what sense does life make without vision?

THE DOCUFILM

Two Oscar-winners - director Giuseppe Tornatore and composer Nicola Piovani - for *Brunello: The Gracious Visionary*, which recounts the life of the humanist entrepreneur. It will be released in Italian movie theatres on 9 December.