

PRADA

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## FASHION

Those who downplay the importance of the **fashion industry** do not understand its impressive economic impact. In 2022, **revenues in Italy totalled EUR 96.6 billion**, the best result in the last 20 years. But it is not just a question of figures: we are witnessing a **constant flow of innovation**, in which Italy plays a key role worldwide.

We have asked some of the protagonists of this change to tell us about it. **Lorenzo Bertelli** of Prada, explains to us the key role of sustainability and innovation, the brand **Alessandro Gherardi** talks about how he strikes a balance between technology and craftsmanship, companies such as **RRD** and **Manifattura Mario Colombo** about how they do research in the field of technical and sartorial skills, and **Certilogo** about how to get the best out of artificial intelligence.

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### The planet can be saved by working together

Interview with: Lorenzo Bertelli

Text: Federico Ferrazza

Art: Annalisa Pagetti

*Companies must make sustainable choices and check that this is done throughout the supply chain, for example by exploiting blockchain. But unity of intent between public and private is indispensable.*

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The meeting with Lorenzo Bertelli ends with a football metaphor: “I am a young man in a team of experienced champions. Now we are winning and there is the right alchemy. And as long as things continue like this there is no need to change. Then it will happen, and naturally”. Born in 1988, he is the eldest son of Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli (the second, born in 1990, is Giulio), the two people who made Prada the luxury and fashion giant it is today. And he is the designated heir “when the time comes” to take over the company whose CEO has since the beginning of 2023 been a manager with an excellent CV: Andrea Guerra, formerly executive chairman of Eataly and CEO of Luxottica.

Lorenzo holds a degree in philosophy from Milan's Vita-Salute San Raffaele University and has been on Prada's board of directors since May 2021. For the past four years he has held the position of head of marketing for the company and in 2020 he also took on the task of leading all corporate social responsibility activities, including environmental sustainability, about which we will talk a great deal.

His studies can be guessed at from the way he reasons, from the way he talks about what he does for the company today: his answers always contain that lateral approach typical of those who try to look beyond numbers and corporate strategies, while trying to have a perspective from above and imagining possible businesses which do not yet exist.

**Lorenzo, this issue of Wired is dedicated to the excellence of Italian innovation. Is ours an innovative country?**

"It depends: there are bubbles, isolated cases, which have few competitors anywhere in the world."

**And what is missing?**

"An overall vision. Innovation is a process that needs to be governed. And to do this we cannot only look at the present. We need a long-term view, we need to understand where we want to go and use innovation as a tool to achieve the country's goals, both individually and collectively."

**Can you give me an example?**

"Let's take the whole discussion about electric cars. We often hear opposing positions because batteries pollute and we don't know exactly how to dispose of them. But in an overall assessment, it is also necessary to emphasise all the benefits of reducing pollution, particularly in cities. For example, if people get sick less because they breathe better air, are the benefits for the health system calculated? A broad view holds it all together and makes it possible to evaluate the effects of choices in the medium to long term."

*"One of our core values is **environmental sustainability**. And thanks to innovation and technology we are implementing several projects that allow us, once we understand and quantify our **impact on the planet**, to start **reducing** this impact."*

**What is innovation for you and for a company like Prada?**

"It means first and foremost efficiency. Innovation processes serve to gain time to do something of greater value or to do better what was already being done before. This extra time is also useful for getting new ideas and perhaps considering taking other directions, developing new lines of business."

**What does this mean in practice?**

"One of our core values is environmental sustainability. And thanks to innovation and technology we are carrying out several projects that allow us, once we understand and quantify our impact on the planet, to start reducing it. In order of time, the latest one we have launched is Eternal Gold within our jewellery collection, for which we use one hundred per cent recycled gold, a choice that has been followed by other big brands in the sector. In addition to this, we have now decided, in

order to reduce hard labour in the mines and the exploitation of resources, that a large part of the diamonds we use will no longer be mined but made in laboratories.” (A billion years of evolution condensed into three weeks: each diamond will be made to order, specially created for each creation, reads a Prada note, *ed.*)

**Still on the subject of sustainability, luxury and fashion are known to us all through the big brands. Yet the supply chain is very long, starting with who processes the raw materials. How can it be ensured that all steps be environmentally sustainable?**

“There are several technologies that allow this. One of these is blockchain (a distributed information registry, which uniquely and immutably certifies transactions and traces goods, tangible or otherwise, *ed.*), on which we relied to found Aura, together with other luxury brands (Mercedes, Lvmh, Otb and Richemont, *ed.*). It is a consortium that – by exploiting blockchain – allows its members to track raw materials throughout the supply chain, to make sure that the work to produce an item is done according to environmental sustainability standards.”

**In your business decisions, how important is consumer demand for greater environmental awareness?**

“A great deal. We want to drive change and be a leader in this field. We do this, for example, through the Sea Beyond project, in cooperation with Unesco. It is an educational programme dedicated to sustainability and the circular economy for a network of schools on an international scale. The aim is to educate and raise awareness among the younger generations towards a more responsible and aware behaviour towards the ocean and its resources. We finance it using 1% of the proceeds of the Prada Re-Nylon collection, which marks the conversion of virgin nylon production into regenerated nylon.”

**In the past, still at Prada, you were in charge of the digital sector as Head of digital communication. What did that experience teach you?**

“Many things. I understood a lot more about the cause-effect relationships that determine business trends. I strengthened my marketing skills. And then I realised that there is a huge problem for those who involved in communication.”

**Which is?**

“We communicate badly. Especially those who have to convince someone (companies, politicians) of the goodness of what they are doing. Communication is effective when the recipient perceives the object of communication as advantageous. And this does not always happen. Culture, for example: nobody explains to people that culture is advantageous for them.”

**Why do you constantly refer to the public sector?**

“Because the challenges we face – and I am thinking in particular of the protection of the planet – can only be overcome together, in forms of collaboration between public and private. Capitalism, if it only focuses on money, can only be negative. Whereas if we understand it as a way to make the world cleaner, capital becomes the greatest accelerator at our disposal.”

**You are also a rally driver. What has this sport taught you?**

“The team game. And, above all, to accept defeat.”