



CENTURION Preview

FALL 2017

Cashmere, silk and leather

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**CENTURION**  
FALL 2017



# Crafts- manship woven in cashmere and silk

TEXT: CLAUDIA FLISI  
PICTURES: CLAUDIO BADER

White walls. Spotless surfaces. Stylish interiors. Self-monitoring machinery. The futuristic feel of Zegna's headquarters in Trivero, Piedmont, and Mantero's production center in Como suggest companies with a modern outlook and a focus on the future.



That makes sense, since both Zegna and Mantero are leaders in their market sectors – Zegna in woven textiles and clothing, Mantero in silk fabrics and accessories. Theirs is a modernity steeped in centenary traditions. Zegna’s office complex includes the same building it occupied when it was founded in 1910. It has expanded to incorporate additional structures and has a campus feel. Mantero, founded in 1902, still owns its original building in downtown Como dating back to 1928. In 2016 it moved operations to a larger purpose-built headquarters in nearby Grandate, where its original fabric printing facilities had stood. An irony of their success is that neither relies on raw materials from domestic suppliers. Italy used to have sheep farms and silkworm factories, but not today. Zegna’s superfine merino wool comes from Australia, its vicuña and alpaca from Peru, its kid mohair from South Africa. Zegna’s cashmere, that elusively soft product of Kashmir goats in harsh climates, and Mantero’s raw silk, spun from the humble mulberry-eating silkworm, are furnished by China, the world’s top supplier of both materials.

But Italy is the undisputed world leader in the manufacture of high-end textiles such

as cashmere and silk. Entrepreneurship and family traditions help explain why.

#### LIKE GRANDFATHER LIKE GRANDSON

Back in 1910, a young entrepreneur named Ermenegildo Zegna founded a wool mill in Trivero, Piedmont. His vision, at the age of 18, was “to produce the most highly-valued textiles in the world in an ethical way, through innovation and selection of the best raw materials directly in their country of origin,” notes the company’s current CEO, grandson of the founder and also named Ermenegildo.

According to Mr. Zegna, his company is the only brand in its sector to have “total control of our supply chain, starting with the raw materials and extending through quality control and distribution.”

In 1902, Riccardo Mantero opened a silk depot in Como. The city was already a center for sericulture, and he decided to base his silk business on “product versatility and unremitting quality.” Today Franco Mantero is CEO of the company; he is the founder’s great-grandson. He likewise emphasizes the importance of vertical integration: “We control the entire process, not only the printing but fabric preparation, finissage, coloring, packing, and shipping.”



**Many silkworms and mulberry trees are needed to produce the lush silks for Mantero textiles. It takes 100 silk cocoons to make just one silk tie, 630 for a shirt.**

“Printing, coloring, finissage, packing and shipping: We control the entire process.”

Franco Mantero







Zegna's "valued textiles" include superfine merino wool, vicuña, and alpaca, as well as butter-soft cashmere.

"We blend avant-garde technology with a high level of craftsmanship."

Ermenegildo Zegna

#### HAND VS. MACHINE

Quality control is essential in a production process that calls for 500 pairs of hands for a single Zegna suit, or up to 40 different colors in a Mantero tie.

Zegna mandates three separate quality inspections done by hand, as well as others done by machine. Mantero also invests heavily in technology, yet certain aspects of production continue to be done manually to maintain quality. "It takes a good seamstress 45 minutes to hand-hem a scarf, for example," says Franco Mantero. "You need class, patience, and the ability to do it right without ruining the silk. If we did it by machine, that process would take five minutes."

Zegna's Trivero factory is a whirl of shiny high-tech equipment, but artisans are present at every stage, monitoring, controlling, adjusting, correcting, sewing. Mr. Zegna takes pride in "our capacity to blend avant-garde technology with a high level of craftsmanship."

The two are interrelated, he insists. "For us, technology is the most important tool we have to transform raw material into something totally new." That has been true since 1930, when cashmere threads were added to wool in small amounts, to impart softness and warmth. Today's technological ad-

vances have made possible a coat or jacket made of 100 percent cashmere.

#### INNOVATION CREATES FASHION

Mantero also works with cashmere and other fibers, weaving them with silk into new combinations. "Cashmere is a great fabric for foulards and shawls in the winter," observes Franco Mantero, "but the best results for printing colors are on silk. What makes silk so special is its luminosity. That makes it different from all other fabrics, and much more beautiful. For me, it is magic."

Technology and artistry help weave that magic into 3,000 textiles a year for Mantero, few of which continue beyond a year. "We create a huge number of products with a brief life," reports Mr. Mantero. "This is the fabulous world of fashion."

Zegna also develops new textiles made possible by technology, notes Mr. Zegna. Some recent examples are Cashmere Double, a double-faced cashmere with fine cashmere on one side and a heavier woolen cashmere on the other, and Cashco, a combination of cashmere and cotton. The most recent innovation is Pelle Tessuta (woven leather), a process of "weaving" subtle strips of nappa leather as if they were fabric and using the finished product to make ultra-soft leather





**One-fifth of Mantero's employees are dedicated to product development – research, color, design – as the company presents about 3,000 new textiles a year.**



**Zegna's high-tech factory includes three separate stages of "high-touch" quality inspections done by hand.**



## WHAT MAKES QUALITY CASHMERE?

The quality of raw cashmere can be measured by:

- **Diameter, as denoted in microns.** Cashmere is no more than 18 microns and quality cashmere is 14–15 microns. (By comparison, human hair is 75 microns.)
- **Cleanliness after combing,** since guard hair fibers from the goat's top coat can get mixed up with the duvet during combing and lower the value.
- **Length:** The longer the fiber, the more luxurious it is.
- **Uniformity of the fiber.**
- **Feel:** The younger the goat, the softer the duvet, and the feel of Mongolian duvet is said to be superior to that of goats from other countries

accessories. Zegna and Mantero focus on research and development (R&D) partly because global competition compels them to do so, but also for a reason closer to home. Italians spend more of their income on clothing than practically anyone else in the world. To survive, Italian manufacturers must satisfy this demanding – and possibly the world's most sophisticated – domestic market.

A citizen of both the US and Italy, CLAUDIA FLISI lives in Milan. She writes for dozens of publications including The International New York Times and airline magazines.

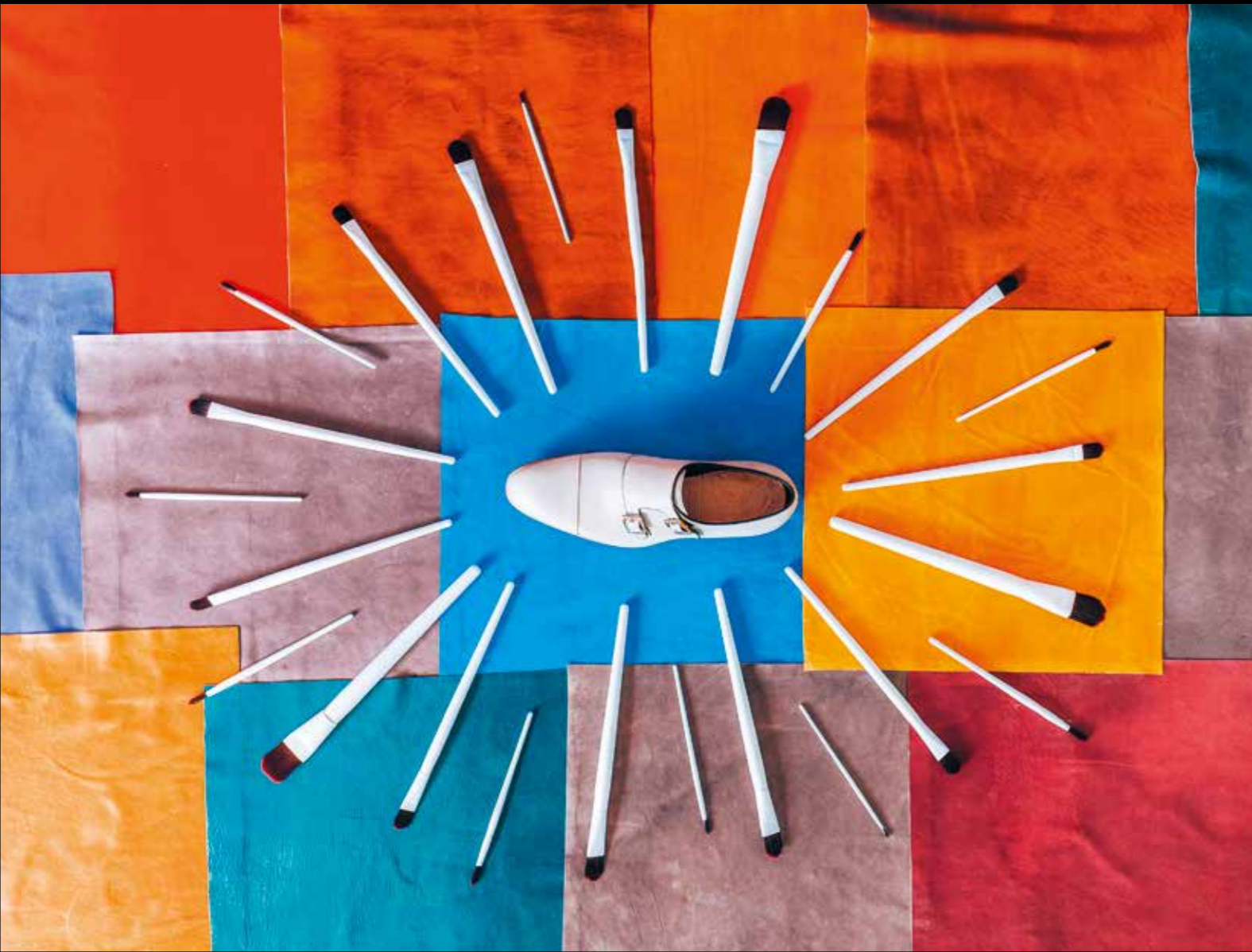


# Santoni: speaking about bespoke

INTERVIEW: CLAUDIA FLISI

Giuseppe Santoni is CEO of Santoni, an Italian shoe company founded in the Marche in 1975. It makes high-quality shoes for men and women, but is best known for the hand detailing and rich leather colorations of its men's footwear.

**Santoni employees are artists, not workers, claims CEO Giuseppe Santoni. The result is "classic but never boring".**



**P**lease tell us a little about your background and preparation for your role as CEO.

I never thought of doing anything else than inheriting my parents' business. When my father Andrea Santoni founded the company, it was a very small workshop, but he had the ambition to create one-of-a-kind shoes. I grew up in my father's workshop, watching him working together with the artisans in search of beauty and perfection.

I know well the process of manufacturing a shoe, which is helpful for me in my job as CEO. I became CEO in 1990, at a young age. I had the absolute support and trust of my father, which let me expand our business by entering new markets to distribute our fine products. My first target was the USA. To meet this goal, I travelled extensively in search of the best partners. Next came other important markets, like Russia, Japan, Europe, and the Middle East. I really love all aspects of my job and am very much involved in everything from design to marketing to sales.

**Every upscale manufacturer extols quality and all Italian artisans emphasize tradition. What makes Santoni special?**

The ability of combining excellent quality with contemporary design is our main strength and the secret of our success. We are inspired by the classic, but we always propose it in a contemporary way, thanks to continuous esthetic research and the ability to add unique detailing. We combine tradition and innovation, quality and design, craftsmanship and research, classicism and modernism. Our customer is an open-minded person, a globetrotter, in contact with different cultures but with an individual style. A person who doesn't follow trends but wants to create his own style by choosing unique objects with an intrinsic value. Most of all, our customer is a person looking for true quality who can recognize an excellent product.

## GIUSEPPE SANTONI



Giuseppe Santoni's father Andrea founded the company in 1975. Giuseppe took over the business in 1990 when he was barely 22, and transformed the respected Italian brand from the Marche region into an international presence by emphasizing craftsmanship and quality. Giuseppe's experience in all phases of shoemaking – from design to marketing to sales – has helped in this expansion, as has his personal enthusiasm for travel. A focus on excellence, innovation, and tradition has led to collaborations with Mercedes-AMG and Swiss watchmaker IWC Schaffhausen.

**What makes Italian leather products and shoemaking different from those of other leather-export countries?**

Italians have quality and creativity in their DNA, this is undisputed, and luckily we are 100 percent Italian! What we propose to our client is the true "Made in Italy". The heritage, the craftsmanship and the artisanal skills we embody are perfectly combined with innovative design and rich details expressing sophistication and perfection.

**What are the phases of leather production in which you are specialized?**

We have many outstanding artisanal techniques, like stitching or cutting by hand, but the most renowned one is the Velatura, our exclusive technique of coloring leather by hand – not a piece of leather but the

finished shoe. It's really like art! Our master craftspeople employ original tint recipes to apply many different layers of color to the leather in a process that may require hours. This slow, exacting process guarantees that every pair of shoes has a unique, irreproducible patina. The training process is long and it may take several years before you can be considered skilled in the Velatura technique. We believe that our identity lies in the essence of this authentic art – the culture of making things, the savoir-faire as a vision, as a philosophy of everyday work. Santoni products come to life through techniques that have been passed down from one hand to another, and our innovation stems from tradition and experience.

**Are these traditional manual skills not dying out?**

There are still young people who want to learn a craft, and passing on this knowledge is key to offering a product that is regarded as a work of art. Which is why we have established a School of Crafts within our company. The training process has a primary position in our plans, and it is based not only on technique and manual ability, but on passion, devotion and awareness. Our people work not only with their hands, but with their brains and their hearts.