

MARESCA: HISTORY AND TRADITION WITH A FUTURE-ORIENTED OUTLOOK

With Maresca we inaugurate an editorial project that will continue with the next editions of Fotoshoe 30, discovering the most important company realities on the horizon of footwear production, which have chosen Expo Riva Schuh as the privileged showcase for presenting their products to a public of professionals.

It all began in 1927 in Mantua, in an agricultural zone belonging to "Lower" Padania which, with the arrival of winter, made it difficult to find work outside of the brick kiln factories employing most of the area's habitants. However, the young entrepreneur Giovanni Bellini had an idea, an idea that from thereon out would change his life and take him far: to use the great supply of poplar wood in the area to his advantage, and recycle the rubber used in bicycle tires to create clogs with a nailed upper, which could then be sold 'door-to-door' in a fifty kilometer radius.



Lorenzo, Chiara, Giovanni e Michele Bellini.

Accordingly, he creates an immediately successful company, and not long after, a small footwear store is opened. However, it is not until post-war 1945 that the Fratelli Bellini brand is created, substituting the production and sales of wooden clogs with recycled upper, with women's leather shoes and sandals with rubber sole, which within a decade are being exported throughout Europe and around the rest of the world. After a period characterized by the production of the Camper brand's sports shoes with polyurethane soles, in 1967, the Maresca (Mantua Resin Footwear) brand that we know today is launched, specialized in the production of PVC sandals and boots.

To this day, passion and tenacity are an integral part of this company, with a pinch of the Bellini family's geniality, and in 2000, the entrance of its fourth generation into the

company was celebrated. At the head of the company, we can find Giovanni Bellini, Sole Administrator, with his partner and brother, Armando, and Giovanni's three children: Lorenzo, with a degree in Business Economics, who is the Marketing Manager; and Michele and Chiara, with high school diplomas as footwear stylists-pattern makers from Milan's Ars Sutoria school, who are currently the Technical Designers of Maresca in the 'PVC' and 'sanitary slip-on' areas.

Now, as in the past, this company from Cizzolo (MN) is a rarity and 'black swan' in the panorama dominated by the sector of housecleaning products, as clearly demonstrated by its personnel training that requires significant time and energy, since it takes place almost exclusively inside the company, without all the advantages of the entrepreneurial realities present in the footwear districts.



Notwithstanding these difficulties, however, Maresca today represents a successful reality in the Italian footwear panorama, and is considered a leader in the production of PVC boots and sandals (for hunting and fishing, the rain, snow boots, for the seaside and the pool, and galoshes), as well as anatomical leather slippers with polyurethane soles for sanitary and domestic use proposed by the Saniflex brand, which was created in 1990 and has been patented around the world. The turnover over the last two years has exceeded the total amount of 10 million Euros.



The company also produces more than 5 thousand pairs of PVC boots and sandals per day, along with 4 thousand pairs of leather slippers with injected soles, which are destined to both national and international mar-

kets, and large-scale retail in particular, including Italian wholesalers and international brands of high fashion. The production facility in Cizzolo occupies a productive area of more than 12 thousand covered square meters, with 60 workers, who had even arrived at 150 in number during the Eighties. To these numbers can be added the workers of the Bell-Dan facility, opened in Romania in 1999 for the production of low-end PVC boots and sandals destined more or less to the domestic market. Production for third parties includes not only high fashion designer lines and the brands of 'Maresca' and 'Saniflex', but also the 'Troklò' brand (professional clogs with high technical and researched content including EN ISO 20347:2012 certification), and 'I mascazzini' (shoes-socks for children with an insulating sole). Besides footwear manufacturing, Maresca is also specialized in the sales and assistance with machinery used to produce PVC, with strong joint ventures created over the years with companies in Albania, Romania, and Brazil.

The company's descendants, just like the founder Giovanni, guide the company today in the spirit of innovation, fearlessly facing global changes. "In 2005, the market had come to a crossroads," -Lorenzo Bellini tells us, " - that pointed towards the segment of safety footwear, which was chosen by many of our competitors, or the luxury sector, which at that time was a niche market. We chose to go in the latter direction, creating items in PVC destined to the most important names in high fashion, and the results proved our choice to be correct. In 2010, the luxury segment accounted for 70% of our turnover, with a record company turnover of more than 13 million Euros". "However, it was not easy", - continues Lorenzo Bellini, " - Our machines were conceived to produce large quantities and this was not conducive to the production of small luxury quantities. Additionally, we went from a range of colors that was largely made up by the black, blue, and green of the hunting and fishing boot and seaside sandal, to a range of Pantone colors, which today counts more than 4000 different shades, representing a significant investment, both in terms of the line of models and in the creation of sample runs".

However, as with all company and human histories, this was naturally not the only moment in which the company found itself at a crossroads, which required an important decision to be made regarding its future. Another important moment arrived in 2010 when, faced with a record

turnover linked to the exponential growth of the luxury market, the Bellini family asked itself if the time for expansion had arrived. "After careful reflection, we voted on a 'time-out' for a few years to see how the situation evolved, trying to make the most of the situation with the actual dimensions and workforce already in place, and this allowed us to not pay too high of a price with the arrival of the economic crisis, which instead had repercussions on our competitors", continues Lorenzo Bellini.

Today, the luxury industry represents 40% of Maresca production, while the remaining 60% is represented by the production of PVC slippers and leather soles with the Saniflex brand.

In any case, it is the experience matured in almost 10 years of specialization in the luxury market, which has allowed Maresca today to launch a new ambitious project: the creation of the new Chiara Bellini brand destined to the medium to high-end and luxury markets, which after a trial run in 2013 in the Russian market, will debut this coming august with a bona fide collection for the Spring-Summer 2015 fashion season at theMicam. "The name Chiara Bellini is a tribute to our sister," - comment Lorenzo and Michele, " - who in 2013, when we were working on the creation of this new brand, gave birth to her second child, Margherita. Additionally, we wanted a name that would bring to mind the Italian spirit of a 100% Made in Italy product".

Chiara Bellini, in fact, is dedicated to the high-end segment of the market with a PVC product that has been crafted and entirely finished in Italy. "The Chiara Bellini product", - Chiara tells us, " - is a very meticulous product from a stylistic point of view

and in its details, characterized by a combination of PVC with other materials, like leather and metallic accessories. The footwear line is completed by original 'ball-shaped' and 'city' bags, which are once again made of colored PVC. Young women and men, who love to play and be daring with fashion, are the main targets of this line, but in the collection there are also products aimed at a certain 'continuity'. These products are meant to be worn every day, either at the seaside or in the city, and are fashion products that are very far from the classic rain boot or beach sandal proposal".

Other important news for 2014 is that the online sales channel www.maresca.it, inaugurated last May, is providing its first feedback on market preferences, while a new online "dedicated" platform has been created for the Chiara Bellini brand.

A premiere showing of this designer brand's Spring-Summer 2015 collections will take place at Expo Riva Schuh, in Riva del Garda.

