



2 FASHION: Big Interviews

Lap of luxury *Global*

From clothing to perfumery, we speak to fashion-world figures who are reimagining their sectors.

There's much talk about the luxury-fashion industry being at a critical point, as it faces challenges ranging from inflation and supply-chain complexities to consumer fatigue. Yet some businesses continue to innovate and grow their revenues, which requires creativity, clever marketing and the right values. We speak to leading figures working across every strand of the business, from C-suites to design studios and perfume laboratories, to find out how they are making it work.

THE CHANGE MAKER

Lorenzo Bertelli

Chief marketing officer and head of corporate social responsibility, Prada Group

On paper, Lorenzo Bertelli holds the titles of chief marketing officer and head of corporate social responsibility at the Prada Group, which involves shaping its communications efforts, leading its sustainability projects and maintaining its cultural relevance along the way. But his influence reaches much further. As the eldest son of Prada's co-creative director Miuccia Prada and its group chairman, Patrizio Bertelli, he represents the future of the Hong Kong-listed group, which consists of luxury fashion labels Prada, Miu Miu, Church's and Car Shoe, as well as the beloved Milanese patisserie Marchesi 1824 and Italian sailing team Luna Rossa. And there have never been more questions being asked about the future of the business, given its outstanding growth trajectory over the past five years.

At a time when the industry at large is contending with significant sales slowdowns and price resistance, the Prada Group exceeded all expectations in the first half of 2024 by posting a 14 per cent uptick in sales, with net revenues reaching €2.55bn. Miu Miu, best known for its irreverent designs, achieved a 93 per cent year-on-year retail sales increase thanks in part to increased distribution, multigenerational runway castings and a long series of commercial hits, from tennis-inspired clothing to shoes designed in collaboration with the likes of Church's and New Balance. That's why all eyes have turned to Bertelli Jr and the question of what comes next keeps being posed by market analysts, investors and customers alike. Will he take over as CEO? Can he maintain momentum? Are there future acquisitions in the works or will the family cash in on its success by selling to one of the bigger fashion conglomerates?

Time will tell, says Bertelli, who has by now learnt to dodge succession-related questions elegantly. Instead, he is maintaining his focus on the many projects that he is spearheading: scaling the new Prada fine-jewellery line that he helped to launch in 2022, overseeing all group marketing efforts and investing in the sustainability projects that will help to safeguard the company's future.

One of the schemes that he feels most passionate about is Sea Beyond, executed in partnership with Unesco and focusing on ocean-literacy education for children. The programme offers training sessions by Unesco climate experts to more than 35,000 secondary-school students and teachers from 56 countries, and holds an annual contest inviting the students to create campaigns promoting ocean preservation. This year, the group also worked with Philippe Starck to incorporate the Ideas Box he initially designed for Bibilothèque Sans Frontières into the Sea Beyond initiative: the mobile box containing everything from books to laptops and training materials, will travel the world and facilitate access to sea education for young people in vulnerable communities.

Bertelli, a new father, meets MONOCLE in Venice a few hours before going onstage to join a panel at the city's Ocean Literacy World Conference. He speaks of the importance of investing in children's education, establishing cross-generational dialogues and not always expecting instant results.

"We always talk about the younger generations as though older people need to be thrown away," he says. "But there is nothing stronger than the relationship between different generations. I have never seen bigger smiles on my parents' faces than when they met my daughter for the first time."

A philosophy graduate and former rally racer, Bertelli confidently dissects abstract topics and holds multilayered perspectives, much like his mother. He seamlessly moves from talking about the importance of optimism to fashion's complex effects on society and the psychology of luxury pricing. At the same time, he maintains a sense of pragmatism that allows him to make swift business decisions, execute the kind of marketing strategies that propelled Miu Miu's explosive growth and approach issues such as sustainability with realistic goals in mind. Here, he shares his take on the Prada Group's many cross-sector activities and leaves some clues about what might come next. — NT

You have overseen a wide range of internal sustainability projects, such as the launch of the popular Re-Nylon range. Why is it important to also invest in public projects and work with governments and organisations such as Unesco?

The main goal is to inspire future generations to behave better. We are always working with photographers and activists but we need the public sector to help us to deploy the educational content [that we're producing], especially when it comes to dealing with schools, which are public entities in most cases. The public sector isn't always as fast as the private sector but we need to all work together. Having everybody on the same page will be the biggest challenge.

The process can often be a bit boring when you start. You have to keep going, even though you might not see any results for another five, 10, maybe even 20 years. Politicians in particular aren't so patient but we need to invest in strategic projects that have longer timeframes.

Do you think that fashion businesses are well positioned to address broader social and environmental issues?

We can leverage the popularity of fashion and the way that it touches pop culture and society to make certain topics more attractive to people. How can you use the company as a communications medium to deliver messages that aren't related to products? Fashion can be one of the strongest mediums and can help to influence society. We need to think about it as an industry with big

"We can leverage the popularity of fashion and the way it touches pop culture and society to make certain topics more attractive to people"

pros and cons, with this being one of the pros. We have to try to reduce its environmental impact and play to its strengths to influence people to become more mindful.

What are some of the other key messages that you have been trying to convey using the Prada Group platform?

We need to explain to people that they should pay the right price for what they're buying. The problem with sustainability today is ensuring that it is no longer perceived as a cost. Customers need to understand the real value of an item of clothing or a bottle of perfume. We are coming out of a long period of illusion when the real cost of goods was not accounted for but somebody had to pay the price at the end. The illusion that everything could cost a few euros or that everything is accessible for everybody is over. This is the message that we need to reiterate: that, unfortunately, not everything can be accessible. It's the hardest message to relay to the consumer, so it's essential to do it well.

I was speaking with Matteo Ward [the CEO and co-founder of design studio Wråd] and he said that to explain the value of garments to people, you shouldn't start by talking about labour costs. You should explain how a well-made piece is better for them and their health, and put the focus on the individual to grab their attention. We're teaching the future Prada customer and it's going to be a long process. We have to start, then wait and see. We can be impatient; we don't start things if we can't see a shortcut. But we need to go back to investing money and time in things that will pay back in the longer term.

Has the way that you communicate with your customers had to change in recent years?

It's becoming harder but the challenge doesn't come from people not listening; it comes from the complexities of the market. We just have to do a better job. As for the mediums that you choose to communicate with, from digital to traditional, those are just the means to an end. I come from a racing background and we always used to say that it's up to the driver to make sure that the car is fast enough, not the car itself.

You recently announced you will be investing €60m into the group's industrial facilities in 2024 during the unveiling of a new knitwear-manufacturing plant in Torgiano, Umbria. How important is vertical integration for the Prada Group?

Since the 1990s, my father's entrepreneurial vision has been to invest heavily in verticalisation [of our supply chains]. We have been the first in this sector. It's a natural move for us. We're just continuing to employ the original vision. Maybe for others, integrated manufacturing is something new but, for us, it's a matter of continuing down the same path.

Has staffing factories become more challenging?

It's becoming harder to find skilled people and that's why we're once again investing in education, with the Prada Group Academy, where retired Prada employees get to teach new talent. It's an opportunity for them to keep working, to stay connected. It's a great example of conversation between generations. People often talk about the new generation versus the old generation but we rarely talk about how the two can work together.

What are your ambitions for Prada's fine-jewellery line, after such a successful launch?

Fine jewellery is now one of the fastest-growing categories for Prada and we're staying very focused on it. We started with a small business but with the right spirit. It was a new category for us so it was easier to make things right from a sustainability point of view and scale quickly, since we were starting from zero.

Is there an increased focus on growing these new, fashion-adjacent categories and touching different aspects of customers' lives?

If there is a true lifestyle brand, then that's Prada. We have so much to say in the worlds of the home, jewellery, technology, material innovation and sport, thanks to our partnership with the America's Cup. If you look at my mother's family history, designing jewellery and objects was already part of what they did so I don't see big gaps that we need to fill. Instead, we need to make the right choices and prioritise some categories. It's a constant evolution. We're always looking at where the biggest opportunities lie but we also need to consider what we enjoy the most. At the end of the day, we need to have fun. This has always been the spirit of my parents.

I do see a big opportunity in the world of sports with Linea Rossa [Prada's sportswear line, known for its signature red stripes]. This is an area of development that we will be strongly focusing on in the near future.

There's a lot of speculation about a potential sale of the Prada Group. How do you approach this?

We're focusing on ourselves at the moment and making strategic investments. If and when the right opportunity knocks on our door, we will, of course, look at it. It would be silly not to.

The Prada Group is growing but the industry is being challenged by macroeconomic and political issues. Overall, are you feeling optimistic?

I always say that it's a matter of the perspective you choose at any given moment. If you compare the current state of affairs to 85 years ago, when the Second World War broke out, the world does seem like a better place. Humankind is always improving.

pradagroup.com



PHOTOGRAPHER: Taemin Ha

THE CULTURAL AMBASSADOR

Woo Youngmi

Founder of Wooyoungmi and Solid Homme

Woo Youngmi, founder and creative director of Seoul-based fashion labels Wooyoungmi and Solid Homme, says that she has always done things recklessly. In 1988, when South Korea was just emerging from military rule, she debuted Solid Homme as one of the nation's first designed menswear labels, introducing new shapes and silhouettes into what was then a fashion hinterland. She didn't stop there. In the early 2000s she left Seoul, where she had achieved critical and commercial success, for Paris, where she re-established herself. "I just couldn't envision the next 20 or 30 years only working in Seoul," she says.

Woo arrived in the French capital without a game plan. She debuted her second label, Wooyoungmi, focusing on higher-end luxury, and became the first South Korean designer to take part in Paris Fashion Week. Within a few years, the designer became a respected figure on Paris's runways and established partnerships with department stores such as Le Bon Marché and Selfridges.

Today the Korean Wave has swept across the world and global audiences are familiar with the country's flair for sharp tailoring, as well as its catchy pop music, gripping films and innovative skincare. Woo, who has contributed to the phenomenon, remains a market leader: her Wooyoungmi shows are always oversubscribed in Paris and praised for offering fresh ideas on tailoring, workwear and, lately, uniform dressing. The brand has also been broadening its scope to include jewellery, accessories and womenswear and has opened a new Paris flagship on rue Saint-Honoré, a stone's throw from the boutiques of Chanel, Dior and Loro Piana – a signal of the designer's growing luxury ambitions.

MONOCLE visits Woo at her company's Seoul headquarters, where her autumn collection (a mix of wide-leg denim, tweed suits and drop-shoulder suede jackets) is displayed alongside tapestries depicting the work of Basque artist Eduardo Chillida. She tells us about her relationship with Paris, her design philosophy and her constantly evolving creative drive. — JSK

Why did you choose to move to Paris from Seoul when its menswear scene was then quite limited?

I didn't think in those terms. I just asked myself which city had an open mind for a young designer and the answer was Paris. People were saying that Milan was the centre of the world for menswear but that has changed since then. Still, I was very lost when I arrived. I had never felt that kind of helplessness up to that point but I had made up my mind so I jumped into it headfirst. I felt as though I was up against a huge wall but what could I do? I just had to keep going.

You were the first South Korean woman to design menswear and you have since expanded into womenswear. How did you make those choices?

Every designer's identity comes from within so it can feel uncomfortable to make something that one can't personally wear. But I found that if it isn't for me, I can be a lot more imaginative. I decided to start creating womenswear too but only after turning 60. When you put yourself in the frame of mind of thinking about what you want to wear, your designs can become narrow because you're projecting who you are and who you aspire to be. At this age, I feel fortunate that I can design womenswear without constraints.

Let's turn back to the 1990s, when South Korean men began having more disposable income and developed a taste in fashion. What was that like?

There was menswear before me but it was extremely conservative. I was almost committing heresy with my designs. People would say that it's neither feminine nor masculine, a kind of "soft" menswear. But I didn't give it too much thought. I was only 30. How much strategy do you think I had back then? I just did what felt right.

What do you think about the Korean Wave?

I see it as the culmination of various cultural categories such as K-pop, K-food and K-films. Over the past 70 years, South Korea has undergone rapid economic development but before that we had a long history that cultivated a unique culture. We had a wealth of content; it just hadn't been introduced to the world until recently. The fashion industry should ride this wave well. I hope that a group of designers who can represent and explain South Korean fashion – not just me – will form a strong, united presence in the global market.

You have been focusing on suiting and uniform dressing in recent collections. Why is the concept of a uniform becoming appealing again?

It's a reaction to the fatigue brought on by the long dominance of streetwear. There's a renewed appreciation for elegant, well-put-together clothing. Fashion, by its nature, is driven by a desire for novelty. But the key to sustaining a brand's identity lies in creating something new while not being carried away by trends.

Why did you decide to open your new Paris shop in such a prime luxury spot?

Our first shop was in the Marais, a youthful area, and it made sense financially. But I now felt that it was the moment to move closer towards luxury. But, for me, luxury isn't about price: I wanted to go up a level and that meant going to rue Saint-Honoré. That decision felt pretty reckless but once again we just went for it. wooyoungmi.com; solidhomme.com

THE CONNOISSEUR

Nuria Cruelles

Perfumer, Loewe

Over the past decade, Loewe has transformed from a dormant Spanish heritage brand into one of the world's most relevant luxury houses. This is largely thanks to its creative director, Jonathan Anderson, and the many ways in which he has revitalised the house's fashion business, with mesmerising runway shows in Paris, a growing range of accessories and a commitment to artisanal production.

Now, customers are equally excited about discovering the brand's perfume and home-scent collections. Driving the momentum is Nuria Cruelles, the nose behind Loewe Perfumes. Cruelles, who also trained as an oenologist, grew up smelling the delicate floral notes of Loewe Aire on many women in her native Spain. Today, she has been working to give the brand's original perfumes a new lease of life, as well as creating fresh hits. Much like Anderson, she has a flair for rule-breaking and is known to experiment with the most unconventional ingredients. She tells MONOCLE about the new formulas that she has been concocting and explains how she created one of the most sought-after home fragrance lines using nothing but the humble ingredients in her kitchen. — NT

What drew you to the world of perfumery?

As a child, I always found myself trying to guess what perfumes people were wearing. Over time, it became an obsession. I started by studying chemistry because being a perfumer is all about blending different ingredients and understanding chemical reactions. A perfume is alive. I spent some time travelling around Europe and, when I returned to Spain, Loewe called. It's a dream to work for the only luxury Spanish brand.

What does Loewe and the global recognition that it has received in the past decade mean for Spain?

We're all so proud. Through Loewe, we can show the world who we are, what we can do and the crafts that we specialise in. That's why we want to highlight ingredients from Spain in our perfumes.

Tell us about the new collection that you have been working on and its ties to Spain.

The idea was about having a single ingredient define a whole collection. We began by thinking about Spain and how to incorporate more of our values in the perfumes. The country is easily associated with the Mediterranean and aromatic scents but we wanted something even more special so we used rockrose from the south of Spain. It's a very rustic, balsamic odour. It's like discovering a rough diamond and having to polish it. When we are distilling it, we choose the cleaner, fresher facets of the ingredient to tailor it to

our needs. We turned it into something sophisticated. It's like gastronomy – a chef can take a few basic elements and create art.

Do you try to keep a dialogue going between the fashion and perfume sectors of the business?

Jonathan Anderson has always respected my expertise and what I can bring to the table. At the same time, his collections inspire us: the shapes, the colours and the textures of the clothes that you see on the runway all inform the perfumes.

Was the process of creating home scents very different to the way that you create perfumes?

We wanted to ensure a point of differentiation between the two. I wanted to use singular elements: the leaves of tomatoes, beetroot, cucumber. Translating this type of formula into candles that smell good when you burn them requires real skill. It's like architecture: the simplest structures are usually the most complex.

What scents would you recommend for different moments at home?

For relaxing in a bath, try the oregano line – it's calming, like lavender. If you're hosting a dinner, go for one of the tomato, cucumber or sweet-pea candles, something that matches the food. For the bedroom, I recommend our wasabi candle and the honeysuckle room spray.

Do broader market trends influence your work?

We want to be trendy but we don't follow trends. The key is to choose an ingredient and work around it. Dress it up and use it to create different textures and feelings. The perfume talks to you and it will tell you what it needs. You just need to listen.

Could you tell us about the day-to-day process of creating new formulas?

To create, you need peace and time. That's why I recently decided to move from the centre of Barcelona to the countryside. Now I grow tomatoes in my backyard. I wake up every morning to water them and I'm always walking barefoot with my children. You might smell the soil after the rain, along with some patchouli or magnolias that happen to be behind you, and you immediately get inspired. If certain smells work together in nature, I try them in the laboratory.

What's your advice for someone who wants to find their signature scent?

At Loewe, we offer a rainbow of options so you can choose different ones for different occasions. You can also combine them and create your own essence. Everyone can be an alchemist.

perfumesloewe.com

PHOTOGRAPHER: Ana Cuba



Seine Mutter Miuccia Prada ist die berühmteste Modedesignerin der Welt, sein Vater Patrizio Bertelli der mächtige Aufsichtsratsvorsitzende der Prada-Gruppe. Nun macht sich Lorenzo Bertelli daran, das Familienunternehmen zu übernehmen. Ein Gespräch über große Erwartungen

INTERVIEW
MICHAEL EBERT UND
SVEN MICHAELSEN

FOTO
MATTIA BALSAMINI

»Versuchen Sie mal, ein Re zu sein, wenn Ihre Mutter ein Revolutionär



A close-up portrait of a man with dark, curly hair and a light beard, wearing a dark suit jacket over a white shirt. He is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. The background is a solid, muted blue-grey color.

ebell n ne in ist!«

Lorenzo Bertelli hat Philosophie in Mailand studiert. Lieblingsdenker: Platon, Kant, Heidegger eher nicht.



LORENZO BERTELLI (*auf Deutsch*) Guten Tag, wie geht es Ihnen? Wie war die Anreise?

SZ-MAGAZIN Sie sprechen Deutsch?

Ein klein wenig. Meine Freundin spricht mit unserer Tochter oft Deutsch, deshalb versuche ich, besser zu werden. Ich will verstehen, was die beiden miteinander sprechen.

Ihre Freundin, Elena Micaela Basile, wurde in München geboren. Wie haben Sie einander kennengelernt?

BERTELLI (*wechselt ins Englische*) Bei gemeinsamen Freunden in der Toskana. Elenas Mutter ist Deutsche, der Vater Italiener.

Ihre Mutter, Miuccia Prada, ist die einflussreichste lebende Modedesignerin. Wie hat sie Sie angezogen, als Sie ein Kind waren?

In meiner Erinnerung war ich immer sehr feminin gekleidet, fast so, als wäre ich eine Mädchenpuppe. Aber man weiß ja, wie trügerisch unser Gedächtnis ist. Als ich vor etwas mehr als einem Jahr Vater einer Tochter wurde, habe ich in den Schränken nachgesehen, was ich damals tatsächlich anhatte. Ich hatte mich nicht getäuscht. Die Kleidungsstücke waren für Mädchen perfekt. Meine Mutter hat mich wie die Tochter angezogen, die sie nie hatte. Sie fand es wohl schade, dass sie es zu Hause nur mit Männern zu tun hatte. Ihrer Meinung nach hätten mehr Frauen der Familie gutgetan.

Sie bewahren die Kleidung Ihrer Kindheit auf?

Ja, mein Bruder auch. Viele unserer Kleidungsstücke stammten aus dem Familienbesitz meiner Mutter. Ihre Kinder ausschließlich in neuen Sachen herumlaufen zu lassen, hätte sie vulgär und stillos gefunden. Unsere Familie war eben schon früh für Nachhaltigkeit. Nichts wegwerfen, was noch verwendet werden kann.

Der Sohn von Donatella Versace war viele Jahre lang Punkmusiker. Wie waren Sie mit 16 Jahren gekleidet?

Ich trug Jeans und Polohemden von Lacoste oder Fred Perry. Meine Mutter fand es schrecklich, dass ich im typischen Look der Neunzigerjahre herumliefe. Aber von Kopf bis Fuß in Prada gekleidet zu sein hätte ich als Riesenpeinlichkeit empfunden. Ich besuchte staatliche Schulen und wollte so allerweltsmäßig wie irgend möglich aussehen. Bei jeder Abweichung vom Durchschnitt fühlte ich mich schlecht. Für meine Schulsachen hatte ich von zu Hause einen schwarzen Nylonrucksack von Prada bekommen. Ich hätte lieber einen farbigen Ranzen von Invicta gehabt, denn den hatten alle. In privaten Schulen sieht man oft Zehnjährige, die Kleidung mit sichtbaren Labels teurer Mar-

ken tragen. Meine Mutter findet es lächerlich, wenn sich Kinder an die Welt der Erwachsenen anpassen, indem sie teure Mode von Designern tragen. Deshalb hat Prada nie Kinderkleidung produziert.

Wo würden Sie heute Ihre Kleidung kaufen, wenn es Prada nicht gäbe?

Ich würde sogenannte White-Label-Kleidung kaufen, weil sie nicht so teuer ist und ich keine auffälligen Logos mag. Understatement ist mir in Modefragen lieber als Kleidung, die laut und aufgeregt eine Botschaft verkündet.

Weil Ihr Vater Patrizio Bertelli keine Labels auf Unterhosen mag, ließ er in den hauseigenen Produktionen mal Unterhosen ohne Label fertigen. Diese Modelle lagen wie Blei in den Regalen.

Im Innersten wünscht sich meine Mutter, das Prada-Logo wegzulassen. Sie weiß aber: Das würde das Ende unseres Unternehmens bedeuten. Konsumentenanalysen zeigen, dass für Menschen, die beruflich noch auf dem Weg nach oben sind, das Logo oft wichtiger ist als die Qualität und Ästhetik des Produkts. Sehr wohlhabende Konsumenten von Luxusprodukten bevorzugen, was Stealth Luxury genannt wird: verdeckten

lingselend und Hungersnöten umzingelt. Darauf reagieren viele mit einer Innenschau. Man zieht sich in sich selbst zurück und sucht nach spiritueller Erfüllung statt nach schneller Reizbefriedigung. Sensible Designer drücken diese Befindlichkeiten in ihrer Mode aus.

Gab es in Ihrem Leben eine Protestphase, einen Aufstand gegen die Lebenswelt Ihrer Eltern?

Ich bin mir gar nicht so sicher, ob diese Phase bereits zu hundert Prozent vorbei ist. Als Schüler kam ich mir zu Hause manchmal rebellisch vor, aber versuchen Sie mal, ein Rebell zu sein, wenn Ihre Mutter eine Revolutionärin ist!

Ihre Mutter gehörte einst der Kommunistischen Partei Italiens an und promovierte über die Bildungsarbeit der Partei.

Und dann hat sie anstelle der Gesellschaft die Mode revolutioniert. Sie ist entschiedene Feministin. Ihre Entwürfe sind ihre Stellungnahme zur Politik unserer Zeit. Aus ihrem großen Schatten herauszukommen hat lange gedauert. Zu innerlicher Unabhängigkeit und eigenständigem Denken habe ich erst als Student gefunden.

»Ich arbeite härter als viele, weil ich beweisen will, dass ich keiner dieser wohlstandsverwahrlosten Nichtsnutze bin«

Luxus, dessen subtile Details nur ein geschultes Auge erkennt. Das zeigt, wie aufschlussreich unsere Branche für die Analyse menschlichen Verhaltens ist. Mode ist ein anderes Wort für Disruption. Was heute der letzte Schrei ist, gilt morgen als altmodisch. Aus der Marktforschung wissen wir, dass Megatrends oft eine Laufzeit von zehn Jahren haben. Auch Stealth Luxury wird vorbeigehen. Sollten Sie spüren, was danach das neue Ding sein wird, stelle ich Sie sofort ein.

Welche anderen Megatrends beobachten Sie?

Als Corona vorüber war, wollten die Menschen endlich wieder ausgehen und Spaß haben – und das in neuer Kleidung. Zurzeit fühlen wir uns hingegen von Kriegen, Flücht-

Was sind die Schattenseiten, als Kind von weltweit bekannten Milliardären aufzuwachsen?

Vorgefasste Meinungen. Bevor Menschen mich persönlich kennenlernen, verbinden sie bestimmte Stereotypen mit mir. Ein Urteil über mich steht schon vor der ersten Begegnung fest. Immer wieder gegen diese Klischees anzugehen ist ein ermüdender Kampf. Und man muss aufpassen, dass das Selbstbild durch die Zuschreibungen anderer nicht verzerrt wird. Einen Vorteil habe ich allerdings auch: Ich arbeite härter als viele andere, weil ich beweisen will, dass ich keiner dieser wohlstandsverwahrlosten Nichtsnutze bin, über die die Medien so gern berichten. Ich gehe gelegentlich mit den Söhnen ande-



GROSSES ERBE

Erst wollte er Rallyefahrer oder Notarzt werden – nun soll er doch im Familienunternehmen wirken:
Lorenzo Bertelli wird bald die Geschäfte bei Prada führen



»Sea Beyond«, ein Projekt von Prada und UNESCO-IOC, soll das Wissen über die Weltmeere verbreiten und ihrem Schutz dienen.

Lorenzo Bertelli mit seiner Freundin **Elena Micaela Basile**, einer gebürtigen Münchnerin. Das Paar hat eine gemeinsame Tochter.



Erlöse aus dem Verkauf von **Nylon-Rucksäcken** wie diesem gehen an das Projekt »Sea Beyond«.



Die Mutter: Miuccia Prada ist ein Star der Modewelt. Derzeit schreibt ihr ursprünglich kleines Nebenprojekt Miu Miu Rekordzahlen.



Der Vater: Patrizio Bertelli gilt als kluger Geschäftsmann und Stratege. Er hat aus Prada einen weltweit erfolgreichen Konzern geformt.



Das Gebäude der Kunstsammlung **Fondazione Prada** in Venedig war früher eine Kreditanstalt für Arme. Der Künstler Christoph Büchel hat die Geschichte des Hauses für seine gesellschaftskritische Ausstellung im Rahmen der Biennale aufgegriffen.

rer sehr bedeutender Unternehmer aus unserer Branche Mittagessen. Uns eint, dass wir in den Unternehmen unserer Eltern arbeiten und unter Beobachtung der Medien stehen. Deshalb verstehen wir einander so gut. Natürlich sind unsere Unternehmen Konkurrenten, aber das bleibt bei unseren Treffen außen vor. Wir finden es viel interessanter, über Privates zu sprechen, zum Beispiel über die Beziehungen zu unseren Eltern.

Haben Sie inzwischen das Gefühl, von Ihrem Elternhaus abgenabelt zu sein?

Ja. Ich habe schon sehr früh angefangen, Rallyeaautos zu fahren. Erst als Amateur, dann als Berufsfahrer. Anfangs schlug mir das übliche Blabla entgegen: »Der Typ darf nur fahren, weil er megareiche Eltern hat, die ihm das Rennauto spendieren.« Deshalb wollte ich unbedingt beweisen, dass ich zu den schnellsten Fahrern der Welt gehören kann. Dass mir dieser Beweis bei Weltmeisterschaften mehrmals gelungen ist, halte ich für einen entscheidenden Meilenstein in meinem Leben.

Ihre Mutter gilt als die Intellektuelle der Gegenwartsmode. Können Sie ihr bei ihren konzeptionellen Exkursen folgen, oder denken Sie insgeheim, das klingt alles ein wenig spinös?

Meine Mutter und mein Vater haben jeweils ein Talent, das einzigartig ist. Ich kann weder eine Kollektion entwerfen, die vor den Augen der Welt Bestand hätte. Noch habe ich das finanzielle Genie meines Vaters, der aus einer kleinen Firma einen Weltkonzern gemacht hat. Es wäre sehr dumm von mir, die beiden auf ihren Feldern schlagen zu wollen. Mein Weg ist, ein Mittler für Exzellenz zu sein. Ich führe herausragende Köpfe zusammen, moderiere ihre Diskussionen und entscheide am Ende, wer die besten Ideen und Lösungen zu bieten hat.

Ihr 78 Jahre alter Vater bereitet seinen Abschied als Vorstandsvorsitzender der Prada-Gruppe vor. Sie werden demnächst sein Nachfolger. Haben Sie ein genuines Interesse an Mode, oder könnten Sie genauso gut eine Stahlfabrik leiten?

Ich kann mich für Mode begeistern, aber meine Eltern leben mir vor, dass die Welt größer als Prada ist. Das Unternehmen war nie der alleinige Daseinszweck der beiden. Nehmen Sie die Fondazione Prada. Meine Mutter würde sich schon lange am liebsten nur noch um unsere Kunststiftung kümmern, weil man mit Kunstwerken die Gegen-

wart genauer kommentieren kann als mit Mode. Zur Finanzierung der Fondazione muss sie aber Prada-Handtaschen verkaufen. Mein Vater würde am liebsten nur noch dafür sorgen, dass sein Boot endlich den America's Cup gewinnt. Aber auch dafür muss er jeden Tag sehr viele Prada-Handtaschen verkaufen.

Ihre Mutter hat nach dem Studium der Politikwissenschaften fünf Jahre lang ein Schauspiel- und Pantomimenausbildung bei Giorgio Strehler am Piccolo Teatro in Mailand absolviert. Sie haben Philosophie studiert, ebenfalls in Mailand. Wäre es nicht naheliegender gewesen, ein Fach zu wählen, das Sie auf die Arbeit bei Prada vorbereitet?

Meine Eltern haben mir freigestellt, was ich nach der Schule mit meinem Leben anfangen. Ich habe mich gefragt: Was sind deine Leidenschaften? Und welche von ihnen könnte irgendwann zu einem Beruf führen, der dich erfüllt? Möglichkeit eins war Chirurg auf einer Notfallstation. Eine zweite Option war der Rallyesport, eine Welt voll von Anspannung und Adrenalin, die ich früh kennengelernt habe, weil mein Vater von Motoren und Geschwindigkeit besessen ist. Und dann gab es da noch die Philosophie. Sie war schon mit 14, 15 eine Passion von mir, nur stößt mein Körper bei der Lektüre leider kein Adrenalin aus. Dafür hat sie den unschätzbaren Vorteil, dass sie dir für dein späteres Leben alle Wahlmöglichkeiten offenhält. Sie ist ein Mix aus Dutzenden Wissensgebieten und erteilt dir eine Lektion, die du nie vergisst: Du liest einen Philosophen und verliebst dich in sein Denkbäude. Dann liest du einen konkurrierenden Philosophen, und erst einmal gefällt dir überhaupt nicht, was er schreibt. Manchmal hasst du es fast. Früher oder später kommt aber der Moment, wo du denkst: Da und dort vertritt dieser Denker Positionen, die mich bei genauerem Nachdenken durchaus überzeugen. Du lernst, unterschiedliche Standpunkte und Perspektiven abzuwägen, und begreifst, dass morgen falsch sein kann, was heute jedem einleuchtet. Ich kenne kein besseres Training für die Arbeit bei Prada.

Wer sind Ihre Favoriten unter den Philosophen?

Platon, Sokrates, Kant und Nietzsche. Die größte Herausforderung in meinem Studium war, Hegel und Martin Heidegger verstehen zu wollen. Beim Lesen von Heideggers *Sein und Zeit* habe ich oft nur ahnen können, was er meint.

Welchem philosophischen Buch wünschen Sie eine große Leserschaft?

Platons *Der Staat*. Wenn Sie heute einen Leitartikel lesen oder einer Diskussionsrunde im Fernsehen zuhören, machen Sie oft eine verblüffende Erfahrung: Platon hat die gleichen Themen bereits mehr als 350 Jahre vor Christus analysiert – nur wesentlich klüger und fundierter. In meinen Augen ist es fahrlässig, die Probleme von heute lösen zu wollen, ohne die Denker der Vergangenheit gelesen zu haben. In der Technik gibt es Fortschritt, im Denken nicht immer.

zweiten Versuch passierte das Gleiche. Das nahm ich persönlich, so blöd konnte ich doch nicht sein! Im dritten Anlauf lief es dann endlich gut. In diesem Moment traf ich eine Entscheidung: Du willst Trophäen gewinnen? Dann gehören die nächsten Jahre deines Lebens dem Rennsport.

Wie unterscheiden sich die Egos in Rennsport und Mode?

Große Egos sind nicht das Problem, sie gehören bei Ausnahmebegabungen dazu. Ich

»Bei Rallyes habe ich gelernt, dass es nicht peinlich ist zu verlieren – danach mit einem gekränkten Ego herumzulaufen dagegen schon«

Platon, Kant, Nietzsche: Wie begegnen Sie dem Einwand, Sie seien für den Posten eines CEO zu kopflastig?

Ich bin ein kompetitiver Mensch. Herausforderungen sind für mich reines Adrenalin. Im übertragenen Sinn will ich bei Prada das beste und schnellste Auto der Welt entwickeln. Diese Wettbewerbsmentalität macht einen CEO aus.

Nach sieben Jahren als Profifahrer fingen Sie 2017 bei Prada an, erst als Leiter der digitalen Kommunikation, dann als Verantwortlicher für Marketing und Nachhaltigkeit. Fahren Sie nebenher noch Rallyes?

Ja, ich werde auch in Zukunft bei ein, zwei Rennen pro Saison mitmachen. Tempo 200 zu fahren und eine mehrstündige Konzernsitzung zu leiten scheinen getrennte Welten zu sein. In Wahrheit lernt man von einer für die andere. Mal muss man sich in Geduld üben, mal das Gaspedal durchdrücken.

Ihr Vater erzählte uns in einem Interview, er sei bereits mit 14 mit einem PS-starken Motorrad herumgebraust. Was ihm fehlte, war ein Führerschein.

Typisch mein Vater. Ich durfte mit 14 nur ein Moped mit 50 Kubikzentimetern haben. Mit 18 kaufte ich einen Fiat 500 Abarth, um Rallyes zu fahren. Im ersten Rennen baute ich schon in Runde eins einen Crash. Beim

mag den Umgang mit komplizierten Charakteren, die Ideen vortragen, die erst einmal schräg wirken. Oft sind es genau diese Leute, die Originalität und Innovation erzeugen. Heikel wird es erst, wenn große Egos zusammenarbeiten sollen. Das kann toxisch werden. Statt ein Team zu bilden, werden die Federn gespreizt. Ich habe den Ruf, solche Menschen über die Ziellinie zu bringen.

Produziert die Lektüre einer Prada-Jahresbilanz in Ihrem Körper ähnlich viel Adrenalin wie ein Autorennen?

Nein, deshalb werde ich wie früher mit meinem Motorrad in der Steilwand fahren, dazu kommen Freeride-Snowboarding und Heli-Skiing. Noch mehr als die Droge Adrenalin vermisst ich den direkten Zweikampf. Deshalb habe ich wieder angefangen, Fußball zu spielen.

Zu den Glaubenssätzen Ihres Vaters gehört, dass Niederlagen interessanter seien als Siege, weil man aus denen nichts lerne.

Das Credo meines Vaters stammt von den antiken Denkern. Meine größten Niederlagen waren zugleich mein größter Gewinn. Bei Rallyes habe ich gelernt, dass es nicht peinlich ist zu verlieren – danach mit einem gekränkten Ego herumzulaufen dagegen schon. Zum Verlierer wirst du erst, wenn du aufhörst, am nächsten Tag gewinnen zu wollen.



Ein weiterer Glaubenssatz Ihres Vaters lautet: »Ich halte Arroganz für einen notwendigen Treibstoff. Ohne die Überzeugung, besser zu sein als andere, schafft man es nicht nach oben.« In diesem Punkt widerspreche ich. Über mich wird vieles behauptet, aber Arroganz hat mir noch niemand nachgesagt. Ich erkenne meine Limitierungen und die von anderen. Vielleicht ist gerade das mein Schlüssel zum Erfolg. Meine Lieblingsrolle ist die des Underdogs, der alle überrascht und am Ende als Erster durchs Ziel geht.

Ihre Mutter beschrieb in einem Interview einmal den Grundwiderspruch ihres Lebens: Sie habe politisch linke Überzeugungen, sei aber zugleich der Kopf eines milliardenschweren multinationalen Konzerns mit 14000 Mitarbeiterinnen und Mitarbeitern. Gibt es auch in Ihrem Leben einen Grundwiderspruch?

»Versteht man unter Linkssein, sich für das Wohl einer Gesellschaft zu engagieren, bin ich ein Linker«

Wenn links zu sein bedeutet, sein Geld den Armen zu schenken, bin ich nicht links. Versteht man unter Linkssein, sich für das Wohl einer Gesellschaft zu engagieren, bin ich ein Linker. Lassen Sie mich auf Platon zurückkommen. Seine Staatsutopie basiert auf Gerechtigkeit, Moral und der Forderung, Politik habe dem Wohl des Volkes zu dienen. Für ihn ist ein Gerechter glücklicher als ein Ungerechter. Wer mehr hat, sollte mehr geben. Meine Mutter hat dem Schweizer Künstler Christoph Büchel im Rahmen der Biennale in Venedig das Gebäude der Fondazione Prada am Canal Grande für ein Kunstprojekt überlassen. Büchel hat das Gebäude mit riesigem Aufwand in ein bankrotttes Pfandhaus verwandelt. Für mich ist das eine Kunstaktion im Sinne Platons.

Die Besucher der Ausstellung werden mit einem Manifest begrüßt, das den Hinauswurf aller Plutokraten aus Venedig fordert. Damit ist auch Ihre Familie gemeint. Welche Reaktionen

haben Sie wegen dieser Provokation erreicht?

Die meisten Menschen, die mich angerufen haben, wollten wissen, ob man unser Gebäude denn wirklich kaufen könne. Sie hatten ein Transparent wörtlich genommen, das Büchel an der Fassade anbringen ließ. Darauf steht: »Vendesi«.

Sie sind bei Prada für Nachhaltigkeit und soziale Verantwortung zuständig. Was versuchen Sie im Sinne Platons zu erreichen?

Zunächst eine allgemeine Antwort. Alle Produkte dieser Welt müssen zu ihrem wahren Wert angeboten werden. Bisher betreiben viele Firmen Raubbau an Mensch und Natur. Die Folgekosten bezahlt der Staat aus Steuergeld, das die Gemeinschaft aufbringt. Das ist blanker Zynismus. Ein nachhaltiger Preis beinhaltet die Kosten für die Beseitigung der Schäden, die bei der Herstellung entstanden

sind. Was Prada angeht: Wir haben das Projekt »Sea Beyond« gegründet und uns mit UNESCO-IOC zusammengetan, um das Wissen über die Weltmeere zu verbreiten. Unsere weltweiten Bildungskampagnen sollen Kinder und Jugendliche inspirieren, weil wir die Erfahrung gemacht haben, dass vielen Menschen über 50 ihr Konsumverhalten wichtiger ist als die Krise der Weltmeere. Sie sind für unser Projekt verloren. Wir müssen Nachhaltigkeit bei der Jugend cool machen, andernfalls bleibt sie etwas für aufgeklärte Minderheiten. Bei Prada haben wir das Know-how, dass Menschen teure Handtaschen als cooles Produkt empfinden. Mit diesem Know-how sollte es gelingen, die Rettung der Weltmeere zu einer coolen Sache zu machen.

Was lassen Sie sich Sea Beyond kosten?

Ein Prozent des Jahreserlöses, den wir mit unseren Re-Nylon-Kollektionen machen.

Zur Erklärung: Die Prada-Rucksäcke bestanden früher aus Kunstfasern, die

aus Erdöl gewonnen wurden. Seit drei Jahren verwendet Ihr Unternehmen ausschließlich wiederverwertete Kunstfasern aus alten Fischernetzen, Teppichböden und Textilabfällen.

Re-Nylon kommt auch bei Schuhen, Taschen und Kleidung zum Einsatz. Wir verarbeiten mehr als eine Million Meter recyceltes Nylon pro Jahr. Deshalb überweisen wir einen beträchtlichen Betrag an Sea Beyond.

Wie hoch ist die Summe genau?

Das verrate ich nicht. Es würde unseren Konkurrenten Einblick in unsere Geschäftszahlen geben.

Die weltweite Kleidungsproduktion hat sich seit der Jahrtausendwende mehr als verdoppelt. Die Modebranche verursacht zehn Prozent der weltweiten CO₂-Emissionen – mehr als die internationale Luftfahrt und Seeschifffahrt zusammen.

Prada, ein Klimakiller?

Die größten Sünder sind Konzerne, die von Fast Fashion leben. Wir produzieren langlebige Produkte, die am Ende auf Vintage-Portalen im Internet gehandelt werden. Aber natürlich sind wir aktiv geworden – entsprechend Platons Imperativ: Wer mehr hat, soll mehr tun.

Vor zwei Jahren hat Prada umweltschonenden Goldschmuck aus wiederverwertetem Gold vorgestellt. Hat Ihre Kundschaft die Nase gerümpft?

Einige waren begeistert, andere nicht. Es braucht kluge Werbung und Zeit, um die Mentalität von Luxuskäufern zu verändern. Den größten Teil unseres Rohstoffverbrauchs macht die Lederherstellung aus, deren CO₂-Fußabdruck immens ist. Denkbar sind Ersatzmaterialien aus dem Labor, aber erst einmal muss man mit Marketing bewirken, dass solche Alternativen als cool gelten. Meine Mutter wurde zur größten Provokateurin der Modewelt, weil sie sagte, Luxus habe mit teuren Materialien wie Gold oder Krokodilleder nichts zu tun. Vielmehr gehe es um die Haltung und den Geist, mit dem ein Produkt gestaltet wird. So wurde ein schlichter schwarzer Rucksack aus dem Allerweltmaterial Nylon zu einer zeitlosen Ikone des Luxus.



Michael Ebert und Sven Michaelsen

interviewten Lorenzo Bertellis Vater Patrizio 2015 für das SZ-Magazin. Sie fragten den Prada-CEO, ob er in Sorge sei, dass seine Söhne zu verkrachten Partyexistenzen heranwachsen würden, die mit dem Geld ihrer Eltern prassen. »Nein«, antwortete Bertelli, »meine Kinder fliegen mit Ryanair. Das lässt hoffen.«



Lorenzo Bertelli (in German): Good afternoon, how are you? How was the journey?

SZ-MAGAZIN: You speak German?

A little bit. My girlfriend is from Munich. She often speaks German with our daughter, so I'm trying to get better. I want to understand what they are saying to each other.

Your friend, Elena Micaela Basile, was born in Munich. How did you get to know each other?

Though mutual friends. Her mother is German, her father Italian.

Your mother, Miuccia Prada, is the most influential fashion designer alive. How did she dress you when you were a child?

In my memory, I was always dressed very feminine, almost as if I were a girl's doll. But you know how deceptive our memories are. When I became the father of a daughter around a year ago, I looked in my wardrobes to see what I was actually wearing at the time. I was not mistaken. The clothes were perfect for girls. My mother dressed me like the daughter she never had. She probably thought it was a shame that she only had men to deal with at home. In her opinion, more women would have been good for the family.

Do you keep the clothes from your childhood?

Yes, my brother does too. Many of our clothes came from my mother's family collection. She would have thought it was vulgar and inappropriate to let her children wear only new clothes. Our family was in favor of sustainability - in the mean of not wasting - from an early age.

Donatella Versace's son was a punk musician for many years. How were you dressed when you were 16?

I wore jeans and polo shirts from Lacoste or Fred Perry. My mother thought it was terrible that I was walking around in the typical look of the 90s. But to be dressed head to toe in Prada would have been a huge embarrassment. I went to public schools and wanted to look as normal and understated as much as possible. Any deviation from the average made me feel bad. I had been given a black nylon backpack from Prada at home for my school things. I would have preferred a colored satchel from Invicta, because everyone had one. In private schools, you often see ten-year-olds wearing clothes with visible labels from expensive brands. My mother thinks it's ridiculous when children adapt to the adult world by wearing expensive designer clothes. That's why Prada has never produced children's clothing.

Where would you buy your clothes today if it weren't for Prada?

I would buy so-called white label clothing because it's less expensive and I don't like flashy logos. When it comes to fashion, I prefer understatement to clothes that proclaim a message loudly and excitedly.

Your father Patrizio Bertelli had underpants made without labels in his own production facilities because he didn't want any labels on his underwear. However, these models sat on the shelves like lead.

In her heart of hearts, my mother wishes she could leave out the Prada logo. But she knows that would mean the end of our company. Consumer analyses show that the logo is often more important



to people who are still on their way up professionally than the quality and aesthetics of the product. The top luxury consumers prefer what is called "Stealth luxury": concealed luxury whose subtle details can only be recognized by a trained eye. This shows how revealing our industry is for the analysis of human behaviour. Fashion is another word for disruption. What is the rage today is considered embarrassingly old-fashioned tomorrow. But we know from market research that megatrends often last for ten years. Even Stealth luxury will be over at some point. If you sense what the new thing will be after that, I'll hire you on the spot.

What other megatrends are you observing?

When Covid was over, people finally wanted to go out and have fun again - in new clothes. At the moment, however, we feel surrounded by wars, refugee suffering and famine. Many people are reacting to this with introspection. People are withdrawing into themselves and looking for spiritual fulfillment instead of quick gratification. Sensitive designers express these sensitivities in their fashion.

Was there a period of protest in your life, a rebellion against your parents' way of life?

I'm not so sure that this phase is one hundred percent over. As a schoolboy, I sometimes felt rebellious at home, but try being a rebel when your mother is a revolutionary!

Your mother was once a member of the Italian Communist Party and wrote her doctorate on the party's educational work.

And then she revolutionized fashion instead of society. She is a staunch feminist. Her designs are her statement on the politics of our time. It took a long time to emerge from her great shadow. I only found my inner independence and independent thinking as a student.

What are the downsides of growing up as the child of world-famous billionaires?

Preconceived ideas. Before someone gets to know me personally, he or she already associates certain stereotypes with me. A judgment about me is already made before the first encounter. It's a tiring battle to keep fighting this stereotype. And you have to be careful that your self-image is not distorted by other people's attributions. However, I also have one advantage: I work harder than many others because I want to prove that I'm not one of those neglected good-for-nothings that the media likes to report on. I occasionally have lunch with other sons from very important entrepreneurs in the sector, or we talk on the phone. What we have in common is that we work in our parents' companies and are under media scrutiny. That's why we understand each other so well. Of course, our companies are competitors but we don't talk about that when we meet. We find it much more interesting to talk about private matters, such as our relationships with our parents.

Do you now have the feeling that you are cut off from your parental home?

Yes, I started driving rally cars very early on. First as an amateur, then as a professional driver. At first, I was confronted with the usual blah blah: "That guy is only allowed to drive because he has super-rich parents who buy him the race car." That's why I was determined to prove that I could be one of the fastest drivers in the world. I consider the fact that I have managed to prove this several times at world championships to be a decisive milestone in my life.

Your mother is regarded as the intellectual of contemporary fashion. Can you follow her conceptual digressions, or do you secretly think it all sounds a bit spineless?



My mother and father each have a talent that is unique. I can't design a collection that would stand up to the eyes of the world. Nor do I have the financial genius of my father, who turned a small company into a global corporation. It would be very foolish of me to try to beat them in their fields. My path is to be a mediator for excellence. I bring together outstanding minds, moderate their discussions and ultimately decide who has the best ideas and solutions to offer.

Patrizio Bertelli, your 78-year-old father, is preparing to retire as the Chairman of the Prada Group. You will soon be his successor. Do you have a genuine interest in fashion, or could you just as well run a steel factory?

I am passionate about fashion, but my parents have taught me that the world is bigger than Prada. The company was never their sole purpose in life. Take the Fondazione Prada. My mother has long wanted to focus solely on Fondazione Prada, because works of art are a more accurate commentary on the present than fashion. But she has to sell Prada handbags to finance the Fondazione. All my father would like to do is make sure his boat finally wins the America's Cup. But even for that, he has to sell a lot of Prada handbags every day.

After studying political science, your mother trained in acting and mime with Giorgio Strehler at the Piccolo Teatro in Milan. You studied philosophy, also in Milan. Wouldn't it have been more obvious to choose a subject that prepared you for working at Prada?

My parents left it up to me what I wanted to do with my life after school. I asked myself: "What are your passions? And which of them could one day lead to a profession that fulfills you?" Option one was being a surgeon in an emergency department. A second option was rallying, a world full of excitement and adrenaline, which I got to know early on because my father is obsessed with engines and speed. And then there was philosophy. It was already a passion of mine at 14 or 15, but unfortunately my body doesn't release adrenaline when I read it. Instead, it has the invaluable advantage that it keeps all your options open for your later life. It is a mix of dozens of fields of knowledge and teaches you a lesson you will never forget: you read a philosopher and fall in love with his system of thought. Then you read a competing philosopher, and at first you don't like what he writes at all. Sometimes you almost hate it. Sooner or later, however, the moment comes when you think: here and there, this thinker represents positions that, on closer reflection, do convince you. You learn to weigh up different points of view and perspectives and realize that what makes sense to everyone today could be wrong tomorrow. I know of no better training for working at Prada.

Who are your favorite philosophers?

Plato, Socrates, Kant and Nietzsche. The biggest challenge in my studies was trying to understand Hegel and Martin Heidegger. When reading Heidegger's "Being and Time", I could often only guess what he meant.

Which philosophical book would you like to see as many readers as possible?

Plato's The State. If you read an editorial today or listen to a panel discussion on television, you often have an astonishing experience: Plato analyzed the same topics more than 350 years before Christ - only much more intelligently and soundly. In my opinion, it is negligent to try to solve today's problems without having read the thinkers of the past. There is progress in technology, but not always in thinking.

Platon, Kant, Nietzsche: How do you counter the objection that you are too top-heavy for the position of CEO?



I am a competitive person. Challenges are pure adrenaline for me. Figuratively speaking, I want to develop the best and fastest car in the world at Prada. This competitive mentality is what makes a CEO.

After seven years as a professional driver, you joined Prada in 2017, first as Head of Digital Communication, then as Head of Marketing and Sustainability. Do you still drive rallies on the side?

Yes, I will continue to take part in one or two races per season. Driving at 200 km/h and chairing a Group meeting lasting several hours seem to be worlds apart. In reality, you learn from one for the other. Sometimes you have to be patient, sometimes you have to put the pedal to the metal.

Your father told us in an interview that he was already racing around on a powerful motorcycle at the age of 14. What he didn't have was a driver's license.

Typical of my father. At 14, I was only allowed to have a moped with 50 cubic centimetres, for which you didn't need a driver's license. At 18 I bought a Fiat 500 Abarth to drive in rallies. In the first race, I crashed on the first lap. The same thing happened on my second attempt. I took it personally, I couldn't be that stupid! The third attempt finally went well. At that moment, I made a decision: You want to win trophies? Then the next few years of your life belongs to racing.

How do egos differ in racing and fashion?

Big egos are not the problem, they are part and parcel of exceptional talent. I like dealing with complicated characters who put forward ideas that seem strange at first. It is often precisely these people who provide originality and innovation. It only gets tricky when big egos have to work together. This can become toxic. Instead of forming a team, feathers are ruffled. I have a reputation for getting such people over the finishing line.

Does reading a Prada annual report produce as much adrenaline in your body as a car race?

No, that's why I'm going to ride my motorcycle on the steep face like I used to, plus freeride snowboarding and heli-skiing. Even more than the adrenaline drug, I miss the direct one-on-one competition. That's why I've started playing soccer again.

One of your father's beliefs is that defeats are more interesting than victories because you don't learn anything from them.

My father's credo comes from the ancient thinkers. My greatest defeats were also my greatest gains. At rallies, I learned that it's not embarrassing to lose - but it is to walk around with a bruised ego afterwards. You only become a loser when you stop wanting to win the next day.

Another of your father's beliefs is: "I think arrogance is a necessary fuel. Without the conviction that you are better than others, you won't make it to the top."

I disagree on this point. A lot of things are said about me, but no one has ever accused me of arrogance. I recognize my limitations and those of others. Perhaps that is my key to success. My favorite role is that of the underdog who surprises everyone and finishes first in the end.



In an interview, your mother once described the basic contradiction in her life: she has left-wing political convictions, but at the same time is the head of a multinational corporation worth billions with 14,000 employees. Is there also a fundamental contradiction in your life?

If being left-wing means giving your money to the poor, then I'm not left-wing. If being on the left means working for the good of society, then I am a leftist. Let me come back to Plato. His utopia of the state is based on justice, morality and the demand that politics should serve the good of the people. For him, a righteous is happier than an unjust man. Those who have more should give more. My mother gave the building of the Fondazione Prada on the Grand Canal to the Swiss artist Christoph Büchel for an art project as part of the Biennale. Büchel transformed the building into a bankrupt pawnshop at enormous expense. For me, this is an art project in the sense of Plato.

Visitors to the exhibition are greeted with a manifesto demanding the expulsion of all plutocrats from Venice. This also refers to your family. What reactions have you had to this provocation?

Most of the people who called me wanted to know whether our building could really be bought. They had taken a banner that Büchel had put up on the façade literally. It says: "Vendesi".

You are responsible for sustainability and social responsibility at Prada. What are you trying to achieve in the spirit of Plato?

First of all, a general answer. All products in this world must be offered at their true value. Until now, many companies have overexploited people and nature. The state pays the consequential costs out of taxpayers' money, which is raised by the community. This is sheer cynicism. A sustainable price includes the cost of repairing the damage caused during production. As for Prada, we founded the SEA BEYOND project and partnered with UNESCO-IOC to spread ocean literacy. Our global education campaigns are aimed at inspiring children and young people because we have found that many people over 50 care more about their consumption habits than the crisis in the world's oceans. They are lost to our project. We have to make sustainability cool with young people, otherwise it will remain something for enlightened minorities. At Prada, we have the know-how that people perceive expensive handbags as a cool product. With this know-how, we should be able to make saving the world's oceans a cool thing.

How much does Sea Beyond cost you?

One percent of the proceeds of the Prada Re-Nylon collection.

To explain: Prada backpacks used to be made from synthetic fibers derived from crude oil. For three years now, your company has been using only recycled synthetic fibers from old fishing nets, carpeting and textile waste.

Re-nylon is also used for shoes, bags and clothing. We process more than one million linear meters of recycled nylon per year. That's why we transfer a considerable amount to Sea Beyond.

How much exactly?

I won't reveal that. It would give our competitors an insight into our business figures.

Global clothing production has more than doubled since the turn of the millennium. The fashion industry causes ten percent of global CO2 emissions - more than international aviation and shipping combined. Prada, a climate killer?

The biggest sinners are companies that live off fast fashion. We produce long-lasting products that end up being traded on vintage portals on the Internet. But, of course, we have acted - in line with Plato's imperative: who has more should do more.

Two years ago, Prada presented environmentally friendly gold jewelry made from recycled gold. Did your customers turn up their noses?

Some were enthusiastic, others were not. It takes clever advertising and time to change the mentality of luxury buyers. Leather production accounts for the majority of our raw material consumption and its carbon footprint is immense. Substitute materials from the laboratory are conceivable, but first you have to use marketing to ensure that such alternatives are considered cool. My mother became the biggest provocateur in the fashion world because she said that luxury has nothing to do with expensive materials such as gold or crocodile leather. Rather, it was about the attitude and spirit with which a product was designed. This is how a simple black rucksack made from the everyday material nylon became a timeless icon of luxury.

Michael Ebert and Sven Michaelsen interviewed Patrizio Bertelli for SZ magazine in 2015. They asked the Prada CEO whether he was worried that his sons would grow up to be out-of-touch party animals who splurge on their parents' money. "No," Bertelli replied, "my children fly with Ryan Air. That gives me hope."

