

# FLORIDA

INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

## PEOPLE 2011

25 INDIVIDUALS  
TAKING FLORIDA  
FORWARD

## BRUNELLO CUCINELLI

ONE-ON-ONE WITH  
THE CASHMERE KING

## FASHION STRONG

ELEGANCE WITHOUT FEAR  
+ HOT SPRING ACCESSORIES

## CHARACTER FURNITURE

DESIGN THAT TAKES  
THE SPOTLIGHT

# THE POWER ISSUE

APRIL 2011



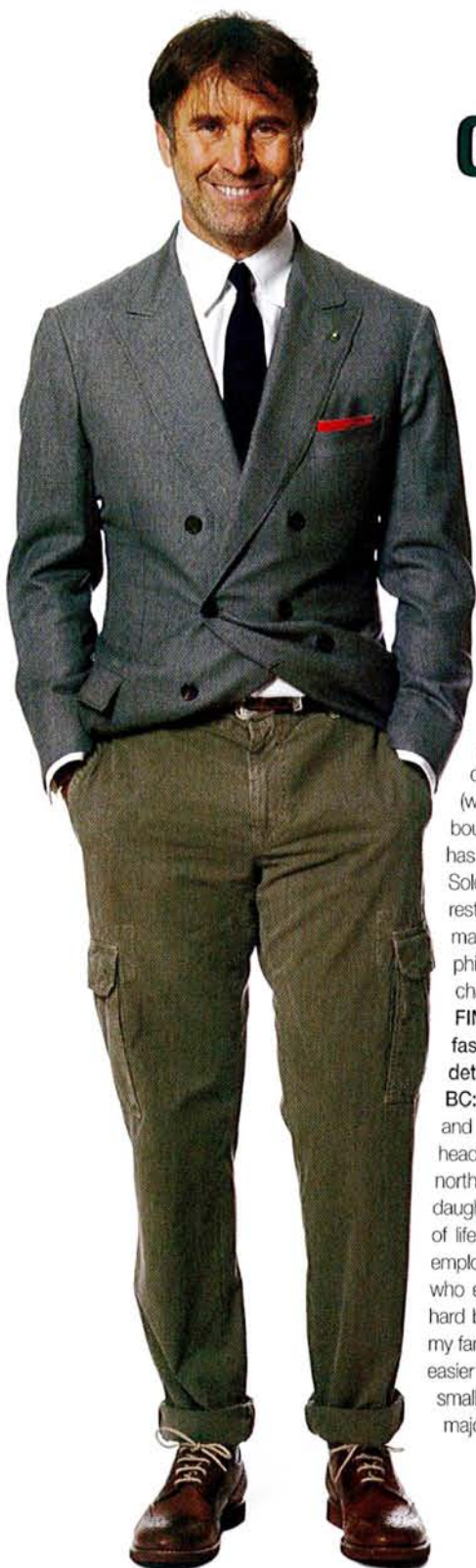
floridainternationalmag.com

PLUS  
WEEKEND GETAWAYS  
BESPOKE STYLE &  
BEAUTY ON THE GO!

# CASHMERE CACHET

Brunello Cucinelli brings his utopian approach to business and style

INTERVIEW BY ANETTA NOWOSIELSKA



Far away from the hustle and bustle of Milan, perched up high on the hills of Umbria, sits the small village of Solomeo. A testament to 12th century charm, this tiny hamlet is home to Brunello Cucinelli — both the revered luxury cashmere brand and its prolific namesake.

These two entities are intertwined like the roots of the olive trees that grow on the surrounding hills. Over the past 30 years, as his company has grown from a one-man shop to a 500-employee corporation with over \$200 million in yearly profits, Cucinelli (who has a store in Bal Harbour Shops and a boutique within Marissa Collections in Naples) has become a sort of unofficial custodian for Solomeo, pouring his profits and passions into restoring the old village. *FIM* caught up with the man behind the brand to talk cashmere, philanthropy, and his secret to success during challenging times.

**FIM:** You live so far away from the busy fashion centers. Is that an advantage or a detriment in any way?

**BC:** I've always been very attached to my region and especially to my town. Our company's headquarters are in Solomeo, near Perugia, in northern Italy, and I live with my wife and daughters next to the company. For me it's a way of life, and feeling more connected to both my employees and my company. I am also a man who enjoys the simple pleasures of life: working hard but leaving the office promptly at six to see my family or play soccer with my team. I think it is easier to find a proper balance when you live in a smaller village. I am just a flight away from all the major cities in Europe and abroad, so I think I

have a very clear idea of what goes on in Milan, Paris, and New York. But I like coming home to my charming Solomeo.

**FIM:** What sets Brunello Cucinelli apart from other cashmere brands?

**BC:** I would say design and styling. We dedicate ample time to researching new techniques each season, and that allows us to create modern and fresh collections. There are several cashmere brands, which keep their design very simple and focused on classic silhouettes, but we always try to have a larger offering, which will include interesting shapes and textures.



**FIM:** You do seem to approach design from a very cerebral place. Are there any other designers in your field whom you find inspirational?

**BC:** I've always been inspired by Japanese style for the attention to structure and details, but I have two favorites from the Western world. One is Ralph Lauren, whom I've always admired for his ability to create a lifestyle brand with keen attention to visual merchandising. He was able to create an empire with a very specific and identifiable aesthetic, which is internationally respected and recognized. The other is Hermès. With their focus on heritage and quality, they have created an iconic brand, which has now become a status symbol for all its admirers. I think these two companies are great examples of successful business models.





**FIM:** At a time when most luxury brands have been affected by the economic crisis, you were opening new boutiques. To what do you attribute your growing success in spite of tough economic conditions?

**BC:** At the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, just like most of the luxury companies in our sector, I wasn't sure what the future would hold. I did what I felt was the most important thing and gathered all my employees to talk to them about the state of the economic landscape. I promised them that no matter the uncertainty ahead, I was going to focus on them and their well-being. We are a ▶

This page, clockwise from top: Brunello Cucinelli inspects his coveted product; a workroom in the company's headquarters; looks for women from the brand's spring 2011 collection. Opposite, inset: a showroom at the brand's offices.

"We dedicate ample time to researching new techniques each season, and that allows us to create modern and fresh collections."





Above: Looks for men from the brand's spring 2011 collection. Opposite: Operations and various rooms at the Cucinelli factory (top) and an exterior view of the company's headquarters in Solomeo, Italy (bottom).

"humanistic" company and I wanted to really focus on the meaning of this term because I felt that if we invested even more in our people during this period, we would be able to make it through the challenging times. All of this, together with the positive outlook from the company as a whole, helped us stay profitable and actually have two of the biggest years of growth in our entire history.

**FIM: Your business approach seems to focus strongly on philanthropy. Is that a result of your humble upbringing?**

**BC:** The influence didn't come from my simple life as the son of farmers because I think that was one of the happiest moments I ever lived. It really comes from witnessing my father's struggle with a new work regime once we moved into the city and he went to work in a factory to try and elevate our status and financial situation. I still remember him coming home, with tears in his eyes, after being treated without dignity or respect at work. From that moment on, I decided that anything I did in life was going to have to be done with dignity, ethics and moral value.

**FIM: Some years ago, you started a restoration in Solomeo to help the village grow. How has the town evolved since then?**

**BC:** The project of restoration that I started almost three decades ago is a constant source of inspiration. We still contribute 20-percent of our profits to make this town more beautiful and to preserve it for future generations to come. The theater we built in 2008 was the last major operation we did in the town, but we have several projects in the works for the next three years. Every day I look at this beautiful hamlet and I am amazed at how the contributions from every person who has invested in our products have added bricks to these streets.

**FIM: Your advertising campaigns are every specific and evocative. What exactly is the message that you're trying to convey?**

**BC:** We're focused on a philosophy of life and a particular way of thinking. For us, it's important to communicate our values and ideals through our campaigns and then the product will follow.

**FIM: You have been bestowed with many honorary degrees and accolades. Is there a particular recognition out there you'd still like to get?**

**BC:** The degree in human ethics and philosophy that I received from the University of Perugia this past November is probably one of the most important awards I've received to date. It's hard to think that anything else will make me quite as proud. It was both a personal and professional achievement for me, but most importantly, it was one that I had the pleasure to share with my co-workers because without them and their dedication we would not have been able to accomplish all the things we did in Solomeo.

**FIM: How do you see the Bruno Cucinelli brand evolving in the near future?**

**BC:** I would like for us to always follow our DNA and keep our distribution focused and exclusive. On a more personal level, I hope to always contribute more to the people in my town and to continue the preservation project I started years ago, as I hope that it will transcend generations to come. □



