

## Italia Independent goes back to apparel as CEO Carlino leads relaunch

By Gianluca Bolelli - March 21, 2017

The recent MIDO eyewear trade show marked the inception of Italia Independent 2.0, on the tenth anniversary of the eyewear label's founding by Lapo Elkann, Andrea Tessitore and Giovanni Accongiagioco (the latter left the company a year ago). "We are in full relaunch mode," said the company's new CEO Giovanni Carlino to FashionNetwork.

"We did several things right in the last few years, but we also made many mistakes, he admitted, and 2016 was the year in which we had to acknowledge them. We are now busy steering Italia Independent back to its roots, with a focus on product innovation, creativity and style, the numbers notwithstanding. When growth is off-track, disjointed and unhealthy, it cannot work, and this is actually what happened to us in 2016. Going back to our brand's core values is essential for us in the near future."



*CEO Giovanni Carlino and founder Lapo Elkann - Italia Independent*

"We are going through a restructuring process, focusing on priority areas and cutting out elements that are surplus to the business, appreciating the fact that, if mistakes have been made, they must be corrected," said Carlino. "For example, on the retail side we opened a series of high-profile stores, but some of them were not profitable, chiefly because their locations were off the mark (it is not simply a matter of opening in SoHo, but in the right location in Soho). We will stop opening new stores, and close down some of the less profitable ones, those in Bologna, Italy, and SoHo, New York, first of all."

Italia Independent's restructuring plan will also involve cutting some jobs, from

the current 140 employees down to 110, eliminating non-operational functions.

"Product design projects will need to put a premium on innovation once more, reducing the breadth of the range but keeping tighter control of the development process," said Carlino. "For example, we created a pair of sunglasses to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the FIAT 500 car: it's a beautiful product with huge commercial potential, but it must be followed up. The second collection we have created for Adidas Originals, for AW 2017-18, is excellent too, as is the new Italia Independent line called Me, Myself and Eye, in my opinion. At the same time, we must improve our ability to communicate innovation," added Carlino.

The label is also keen to return to apparel, with a well-calibrated collection to be introduced at the June edition of the Pitti Uomo trade show. It will not feature a full wardrobe, but will instead be "a capsule collection consisting of a sweatshirt, a tee-shirt, a hat and a keffiyeh, with a premium positioning directed at the top fashion stores in Italy and elsewhere. Another example of how to do less, but better."



*One of Italia Independent's latest designs*

The brand's prime market remains Italy, followed by Spain and Germany. "Entering the USA was one of our biggest mistakes, we went one step too far. We set up a local subsidiary which burdened us with excessively high costs even before we managed to develop the US market, affecting our bottom line

significantly. We now have a local partner in the USA, and we will adopt a more prudent approach. It is of course a highly interesting market, but there are also other regions we think we can develop satisfactorily. For example the Middle East and the UAEs in particular, where we are already doing business.”



*Italia Independent for FIAT 500*

Italia Independent is also busy strengthening its management team, and making changes at all levels, including its directors, with a spate of new appointments coming soon. "2017 will be the year of our rebirth, we will start from scratch and deliver a better business performance. We will focus on a smaller number of projects - still a remarkable number for a relatively small organisation - but we will take much better care of them."

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