

Tradition & Innovation: Italian Womenswear in Perspective

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August 8, 2020

Summary

This report aims to elucidate the rich history and cherished meaning behind "Made in Italy". The phrase, "Made in Italy", naturally evokes a sense of high quality, elegant aesthetics and sophisticated taste. Today, the "Italian look" led by big names such as Gucci, Versace or Ferragamo is much sought after. Milan is, alongside Paris and New York, considered a top fashion capital.

Nevertheless, Italian Fashion was minor and far from influential until 1945 and the concept of "Made in Italy" was only introduced in the 1980s through a campaign by Italian commercial organizations. Furthermore, over the last decade, many famous Italian brands were sold to a foreign conglomerate, while also hiring un-Italian creative directors. Unlike the US where garment requires to be entirely made in the US to earn the "Made in USA" logo, the "Made in Italy" tag is inconsistent about labelling requirements, which can be used even when only the finishing touches like sewing on buttons were performed within Italy.

Given this dynamic, what then accounts for the prestige of Italian goods? In what way did Italy acquire the fame and aesthetics that contribute to their flourishing fashion economy? This paper analyzes how Italian women's wear has evolved throughout history from Roman times to the present day. Beginning in antiquity, succeeding sections document the depth of Italian tradition. I explore the reconstruction efforts in the twentieth century by Futurists and Fascists, culminating in the transformation of the tradition into the new Italian women's wear houses. The report concludes with a glance at the challenges which lie ahead for the future.