

## Style

## A Lifestyle Brand



An Interview with Andrea Perrone,  
President and Chief Executive Officer, Brioni

**EDITORS' NOTE** After graduating with a degree in Law, Andrea Perrone began his professional career at Brioni, the company founded in 1945 by his maternal grandfather, Gaetano Savini, and his business partner, Nazareno Fonticoli. His began his work in Penne—home to five of the seven Brioni factories existing today—where he gained firsthand experience of the production sector, followed by a year in the United States, during which he dedicated himself to the commercial aspects of the American wholesale and retail market. In 1996, he returned to Rome to manage the three shops in the Italian capital. In 2003, Perrone was appointed Franchising Director and elected to the board of directors. Three years later, he became a member of the Brioni Group Executive Committee with the title of Co-Chief Executive Officer, responsible for Strategy and Distribution. In June 2009, Perrone was appointed the sole CEO of the group.



Andrea Perrone

**COMPANY BRIEF** Founded in Rome in 1945, Brioni ([www.brioni.com](http://www.brioni.com)) has 70 boutiques around the world, in addition to 400 wholesale outlets, and was named the most prestigious men's fashion brand in the United States in 2007, according to a survey by the Luxury Institute of New York. The company celebrates its 65th anniversary this year as an icon in international elegance for men and women.

**As a result of the economic downturn affecting all industries these past 24 months, how much of an impact did you see globally for Brioni and are you seeing a recovery?**

When we talk about the downturn, it's important to distinguish between the markets in which we operate. Traditionally, our brand has been anchored in the U.S. market and part of the strategy over the past four years was to counterbalance our U.S. concentration by expanding commercial distribution throughout the rest of the world.

Within the U.S. market, we should further distinguish between our retail and wholesale businesses. Our retail business was far less affected than the wholesale business, which relies heavily on the success of the major department stores.

Our performance in the European market was almost in line with the numbers from 2008. Although our operations in the Russian market

have been strongly affected, the most significant impact was at the beginning of the downturn.

Our younger operations in the Asian and Middle Eastern markets appear to have been relatively insulated from the brunt of the crisis. Even in 2009, our business in Abu Dhabi was quite strong, and I now consider Dubai and Hong Kong to be emerging markets in Asia for Brioni.

We are already witnessing a strong recovery in 2010. Our fiscal year figures show we're doing very

well in almost all markets where we maintain a presence, including the U.S.

**How do you define your target market today?**

It's still a very wide market and there is a small handful of firms that share the market space for products and services similar to ours. I like to measure a firm in our business by differentiating between the strength of its brand and the quality of the product it produces—metrics that, unfortunately, often do not directly correlate.

Measured in terms of the quality of the product, we are confident that we can match the artisanship of small skilled tailor shops, as well as any small niche brand.

In terms of the strength of our brand, we are incredibly proud of our historical, sterling reputation in the formal-wear business, but we are now stronger than ever in the casual-wear business and Brioni has increasingly developed a focus as a lifestyle brand. As we have throughout our history, we maintain a focus and devotion to our customers that has been the hallmark of the spirit of our business culture. In our view, it is quite simple: It's about listening to your customer and trying to deliver what they like and what they're expecting from your brand.

In particular, in the U.S. market—where Brioni is well-known as a formal brand—customers told us they wear our brand five days a week, but they wanted to see us offer more weekend-wear options. So we responded by expanding our collection and growing both our production size and our distribution. In the past four years, we've rebalanced distribution and the breadth of the collection, and today, casual-wear represents about 40 percent of our total revenue.

**Did the made-to-measure denim come out of that?**

Yes. Made-to-measure is a very important part of our business. We are one of the few companies that have the know-how and flexibility to customize any of our products in accordance with our customer's requests. We believe that if you want to distinguish your commitment to service, even denim should be made at the Brioni level in the Brioni way. We apply our same unyielding standard to the stitches, the fabric quality, and the details. Customers love our jeans and when we introduced the capability to personalize them, people could not believe it.

**You have also launched a fragrance.**

We launched our fragrance all over the world, and will launch in the U.S. in May in time for Father's Day. We reached an agreement with two of the most important and prestigious department stores in the U.S. market. Our fragrance is a limited edition product to celebrate our 65th anniversary.

The fragrance reflects the pillars of the brand: heritage, craftsmanship, exclusivity, and uniqueness. The bottle is manufactured by a glass company in Empoli, a town close to Florence that is renowned for its glass blowing heritage. The fragrance comes in a leather case with an embossed "B." The idea was to make something unique and timeless, so even when you finish the fragrance, you will have a beautiful keepsake to keep the brand in mind.

**In terms of custom-made or handmade, most often it is the older generation that appreciates that type of work. Is the younger generation excited about coming into the craft as well?**

We view it as our responsibility to educate existing and prospective customers on the importance of the Made in Italy label, because Made in Italy has been a mark of elegance and quality for so many years. It's our duty to not only take care of Made in Italy for the fashion and clothing business, but also to preserve and safeguard the concept of Made in Italy itself. We recently formed a partnership with the Italian editorial group Sky for a television program called *Italia Segreta*—Secret Italy—that provides viewers the opportunity to discover the stories and cultural treasures that may be lesser known but that make our country great. It's our duty as a very committed Italian brand to support our country. ●

*Brioni's luxurious products for women and men*