

Style

Elegance Is Not a Uniform

An Interview with Giampiero Bodino, Group Art Director and Member of the Board, Campagnie Financière Richemont SA and Art Director, Alfred Dunhill, Ltd., London

EDITORS' NOTE A graduate of the Institute of Applied Arts and Design in Turin, Italy, where he specialized in art styling, industrial design, and architecture, Giampiero Bodino began his association with the Richemont Group in 1990. His design work has extended across most of the group's brands, encompassing watches, jewelry, accessories, and writing instruments. In February 2002, he became Creative Director for Richemont and a member of the company's Strategic Product and Communication Committee. He was subsequently appointed Creative Director for Cartier, and in February 2004, he became Group Art Director and a member of the Richemont board.



Giampiero Bodino

COMPANY BRIEF Founded in 1893 and based in London, Alfred Dunhill, Ltd. (www.dunhill.com), produces and distributes high-quality leather goods, writing implements, timepieces, fragrances, and menswear. The business was developed for the motoring market by Alfred Dunhill after he inherited his father's saddle company. Its first collection included car horns and lamps, leather overcoats, goggles, picnic sets, and timepieces. The company is currently owned by the Swiss luxury-goods company Compagnie Financière Richemont SA.



One of the keys to success for any company selling to the public is how its products are designed. In the case of Dunhill, there are many new ideas in your brain. Will you share some of them?

They are still in my mind. It takes time to develop new products. Some products take longer than others, of course. For example, to produce a bag doesn't take a lot of time, whereas producing a watch takes much longer, because of the technology involved. To make a new watch takes one year, minimum.

As a result, it's too early for me to talk about our new products, but I can say that we believe the moment has come to make more jewelry for men, which also takes a long time to develop.

How is your role as Art Director defined?

I'm not just in charge of design. I also give style direction in the stores, for the catalogs, and in other areas too. It's more of a global position in that respect. It's important to us that families of products match each other. Our menswear needs to look right with the bags. That's why I try to control everything in this arena. All the products should fit together. Dunhill prides itself on offering very nice clothing and very nice bags and accessories as well. This is fundamental to a brand like ours. We can't have a leather jacket that doesn't fit with the leather bags.

And for businessmen, the briefcases fit with the suits?

Exactly. I don't want to appear arrogant, but for me, it's logical. If I was a businessman and I liked Dunhill, because of its history and so on, I would want to be able to come to Dunhill to buy a blazer, but also to buy a suitcase or a briefcase.

Are you planning to introduce any innovations?

I am very attracted by fashion, but I have always said that I don't want to work for a fashion brand, because fashion is something that changes all the time. Fashion has a rhythm – the rhythm of time and the rhythm of life. So it's compulsively changing. What I would like to introduce at Dunhill is a new interpretation of classicism, with a touch of fashion, but not the kind of fashion that changes for the sake of change.

Classic fashion?

Yes. If I'm a customer and I find a nice hat at Dunhill, I will love my hat, and I won't want to change it next year just because fashions change.



Next year, I will still want to be able to wear it. Two years from now, I will want to be able to wear it. I will want to love that product for longer than six months. Our products have class, and that's reassuring to the customer. In a way, fashion tries to impose personality on people. I would really like people to feel that, at Dunhill, they can express their own personalities.

They can do this easily through the custom department, where you make bespoke suits.

Exactly – in all the major cities. We also have ready-to-wear suits.

Dunhill is very well known for sportswear, especially for motorists.

That's correct. We have every possible type of clothing that a motorist would want to wear, plus accessories. It's part of the Dunhill tradition. We also have a lot of products for golfers. For instance, we have introduced a new bag that has a lot of useful technical elements. It's not just nice to look at. We can do fantastic things with leather, metal, fittings, and so on. Sometimes the products we create for sports inspire other lines of clothing and accessories.

One of the interesting things about Dunhill is that you have products that are not necessarily intended for men with 32-inch waists. Some of your products are designed for those who are a little larger in certain areas.

That's correct, and I insist on that. We believe that everyone should be able to find items of clothing they look good in, no matter what size they are.

You are somewhat of an expert on watches, having created a number of limited-edition pieces that have now become collectors' items. What plans does Dunhill have for future timepieces?

I think watches are very important for a brand such as Dunhill, not least because a watch is something that a father can give to his son. Watches are different from other types of accessories, because they tell you the time. I know that

Dunhill Christmas barware collection 2006 (left); Red Ostrich foot Rollagas lighter with Sidecar Alligator pattern sterling silver fountain pen (above)



The Dunhill iPod Nano and iPod Video cases

we are surrounded by things that tell us the time: the computer, the mobile phone, displays in the street – everything tells you the time. So some people might think that a watch may not be necessary. But I don't think that's true, because looking at a watch is an emotional way of finding out the time. Getting the time from a watch makes you remember how you got that watch – where you bought it or who gave it to you. A time display on a mobile phone can never do that. That's why I like Dunhill watches to be simple, but with a great deal of character. After all, watches should seduce you.

And a watch is the only really expensive piece of jewelry a man can wear, isn't it?

That's true, although cufflinks are a very satisfying piece of men's jewelry too.

What has happened to people all over the world who have become less interested in wearing a suit and a tie, and more interested in being casual all the time? It makes some large multinational corporations wonder if they're losing their class. Will we ever return to the elegance of Fred Astaire and Cary Grant?

Personally, when I get a chance to dress like Fred Astaire or Cary Grant, I feel very, very hip. It's very pleasant. It's very nice. Ultimately, elegance is not a uniform. Some people think that being elegant is about wearing a blue suit. I

don't agree. I think that there are moments in life – certain situations – when it's better to be dressed in a certain way, and there are other moments when it's better to be dressed differently – perhaps more comfortably. Along these lines, I think that the Fred Astaire look is suitable for certain occasions. Maybe not at eight o'clock in the morning, but for a nice evening event, a very elegant lunch, and other select occasions. And for people who could never dream of looking like Fred Astaire, Dunhill offers a few other opportunities to feel like a movie star from the '30s and '40s – nice pullovers, for example.

You personally create so many of the company's successful products. That must make you – and your friends and family – very proud.

Yes. I do feel proud about what I have achieved. Before joining Richemont full time, I worked in a freelance capacity. A moment came along in my life when I had the chance to design for Gucci with Tom Ford, for Versace with Donatella, and for the brands of the Richemont Group. This was all before the year 2000. It was amazing, because I was jumping from one subject to another, from one brand to another. There was a lot of creativity in the different brands and it was very, very exciting. Because Dunhill belongs to Richemont, I also have a lot of opportunities now.

As you touched on earlier, Dunhill gained its original fame by designing products for people who loved cars: clothes, leatherwear, accessories, and even shoes. Will there be a day when there will be an actual Dunhill car?

I'm not sure that's necessary. I mean, cars are already made so well by the best carmakers, like Bentley. I think it's great that Dunhill is related to that world. It's very good; it's perfect. However, there's quite a distance between designing products for people who love cars and designing an actual car.

What about just one model. Think of the public-relations value.

I trust in real things, not just public relations. If something is done purely in order to create a buzz, personally I'm not very interested. I know that it works, but honestly, I'm not interested at all.

Not even for a short time?

Occasionally, yes.

Where do you like to spend your vacations?

Italy.

What do you do for fun?

I very much enjoy drawing and designing things. Design is a perfect activity for me, because I can use my hand and just draw and draw. I also like painting very much. I paint a lot and I exhibit my work. I find that extremely exciting. Other than that, I enjoy being by the sea. That's fundamental for me.

You seem to have a very independent spirit. Will you always do what you think is right, no matter what anyone else thinks?

Yes, I am very independent; that's true. And my independent mind helps me when I have to jump from one subject to another, from one client to another. One question that people sometimes ask me is this: How can you design for Prada or Gucci, and at the same time design for Mont Blanc? I think it's very simple. When I design something, I don't design just for myself. A little bit, yes, but basically I just try to interpret what that brand means. Or I think about products that brand doesn't yet have and how I can help the brand to create them. That's how I am able to jump from one subject to another, and from one brand to another.

Because each brand has its own identity?

Exactly. As we say in Italy, at the roots of the subject there is the brand. So the products are not about me, they are about the brand. Creative people are often considered to be self-absorbed, and always thinking of themselves. This is not the case with me. I don't care about me; I just care about brands and how they can express themselves best. How brands can do things that they've never done before.

Many young people like design and must dream about becoming as successful as you. But there are only a very small number of top positions in the world for talented designers. How can they succeed when there is so much competition?

My advice to young people who want to get to the top of the design world is spend the same amount of energy on all the things you design, no matter how important the project is. So whether the product is small or is very important, be generous with your creativity. I think generosity is very important in all design work. So young people who get the chance to design something should do the best that they possibly can, no matter what they are designing. This is a simple rule, but I think it's very important. ●



Bulldog, Tweenie Devil, and Scottie Dog cufflinks from Dunhill's Christmas 2006 collection (below)