

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Luxury must invest inward and teach the craft to keep the craft

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*Zegna's master tailor at the Bespoke Atelier*

By JEN KING

MUSCAT, Oman Italian menswear brand Ermenegildo Zegna's business model safeguards artisanship and fine tailoring through a vertical supply chain that goes from "sheep to screens," according to its artistic director.

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The Zegna vertical supply chain starts with its sheep in Australia where it sources wool, to its workshops and retail network, down to consumers' screens in the form of digital marketing and communications. For the menswear label, "Mindful Luxury," the theme of Conde Nast International's Luxury Conference for 2017, means ensuring the future of traditional crafts for generations to come.

"Teaching the craft to keep the craft is my motto," said Alessandro Sartori, artistic director of [Ermenegildo Zegna](#).

The many hands of Zegna

During the "Crafting Modernity" session April 5, Mr. Sartori asked, on average, how many people does it take to create a single Zegna jacket? The answer: 500 people.

Those 1,000 hands all come together to construct a jacket, from the designer who drafts the initial sketch and the textile worker who weaves the fabric to the tailor's workshop to the in-store sales associates, are all integral parts of Zegna's supply chain.

Zegna's story is one of craft and the people who have dedicated their lives to artisanship. Mr. Sartori highlighted this by telling of a Zegna tailor, who recently retired at 80 years old after 42 years with the brand.

While the talent and expertise of that specific man will be lost, Zegna actively works to protect that knowledge by opening conversations between its young talent with its few, very experienced employees. The brand often hosts workshops for young talents led by experienced workers to pass on and teach their skills to the next generation.

The conversation between generations has also been expressed as the basis of Zegna's marketing efforts.

For example, Zegna is looking to forge a deeper connection with consumers through a participatory platform.

Zegna's spring/summer 2017 campaign marks the launch of the brand's "Defining Moments" initiative, which will

see the brand gathering men from different career paths for informal conversations. Kicking off the series are actors Robert De Niro and McCaul Lombardi, who talk about their personal experiences in the film industry.



*Mr. Lombardi and Mr. De Niro in Zegna's Defining Moments*

Mr. De Niro and Mr. Lombardi are both Italian-Americans and share an affinity for acting, giving them a shared frame of reference despite their age difference and their respective experience in the industry. While Mr. De Niro is a household name who has starred in numerous films and directed two, Mr. Lombardi is just starting out, with a couple of films under his belt including 2016's "American Honey" ([see story](#)).

There has been concern expressed about who will continue these artisanal crafts due to the younger generation's movement away from traditional handwork. Although this is a reality for much of the luxury sector, Zegna is seeing young talent return to crafts and an interest in being trained and taught these skills.

The result is an atelier of all different ages, and while there are high costs involved in maintaining a vertical supply chain, Zegna feels it is a key investment. Through talent investments, Zegna will be able to continuously safeguard the crafts, and those who hold the needed skills, that are essential to its menswear brand.

#### Modern traditions

Zegna's dedication to craft is not without its modern touches.

For example, Zegna purchased 30 antique looms from Japan, France, Italy and England. Although the looms cannot weave at a very fast pace, the machinery is able to create fabrics in various thicknesses.

Zegna has also modernized its antique looms with the addition of computer programming for efficiency and design creation.

This has allowed Zegna to expand its one-off client creations to include weaving bespoke fabrics for individual consumers. Essentially, Zegna's textile division has kept and united craft by combining traditional methods with modernity.

Modernizing craft has facilitated Zegna's launch of its Bespoke Atelier.

While Zegna has offered made-to-measure services based on model forms since the 1970s, never before has the brand enabled clients to design true bespoke pieces. Housed on the top floor of its Milanese flagship, Zegna's Bespoke Atelier will work with consumers to create one-off menswear for the ultimate expression of luxury service.



*Zegna tailor at work at the Bespoke Atelier in Milan*

Zegna offers 900 fabrics for suits, jackets and overcoats and more than 230 for shirts. The brand is constantly developing new fabrics at the Zegna Lanificio in Trivero, Italy, a specification that sets it apart from other bespoke tailors ([see story](#)).

Crafting modernity is the also the basis of Mr. Sartori's collection designs for Zegna.

"As my friend Alber [Elbaz] said, Creativity comes first," Mr. Sartori said. "But, we all need to save the craft.

"So, please, lets all help to teach and save the craft," he said.

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