

FOOTWEAR

## How and why I am launching my luxury footwear brand

June 8, 2020



*Prota Fiori Azalea slides. Image credit: Protia Fiori*

By [Jennifer Stucko](#)

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**  
Plus: Just released  
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

After working for years in luxury fashion, I reached a point in my career where I felt unfulfilled with the direction of where my professional life was heading.

I had been managing a beautiful heritage luxury men's footwear brand, A. Testoni, when the time came that they would sell the company to a large conglomerate, somewhat breaking my heart to share the 100-year-old shoemaking craftsmanship built by a Northern Italian family that had become very special to me to a big company.

At the same time, I was developing personally and my lifestyle and values were no longer aligned with my career goals which I had set so long ago.

This moment in my life triggered some soul searching for a couple of years, where I took a time-out to assess who I am, what my values are and where I would like to go.

This was not the traditional route taken by many, although I have never been one to follow the cookie-cutter path, and I have always done so fearlessly with deep trust in myself and trust in the process.



*Jennifer Stucko is founder/CEO of Prota Fiori*

### Roots

I am a fourth-generation Italian immigrant, with both Italian and American citizenship. My ancestors moved from Piana Di Monte Verna, Italy in 1901 to Brooklyn, NY. They worked in shoe-making, paper and doll factories.

My grandfather Angelo owned a laundromat in Brooklyn and my grandmother Mildred sewed all of the family's clothes in a tiny apartment with four children.

I've travelled to 18 out of the 20 regions of Italy discovering food, wine, culture and craftsmanship, studying my roots. Italian culture has always been in my blood, along with working hard to live the American dream and now I have reached a point where I can give back to Italy.

I like to think that I live a sustainable lifestyle in the sense that I enjoy living.

I have been practicing yoga and meditation for nearly a decade. I value my relationships and connections, maybe too much. I practice a holistic way of life as much as possible. I love living "la dolce vita" lifestyle even in the States. A crisp espresso with biscotti and aperitivo always make me smile.

Being outdoors in nature brings me a sense of peace and stillness. The gifts of nature are priceless and so crucial to our well-being that I cannot imagine a happy, healthy life without a beautiful planet. I live for the scent of fragrant florals, the Italian seaside and citrus trees.

### Mind the gap

With all this being said, my fondness for my Italian heritage, culture and craftsmanship, plus my personal values and lifestyle revolving around health and wellness, spirituality and sustainability, it only made sense that I marry these elements to build out my future.

At the same time I identified a gap in the market in luxury and sustainability.

I had been following the rise of athleisure, and sneaker direct-to-consumer sustainable footwear brands such as Rothy's, Tom's and All Birds.

However, the luxury sector with which I was so familiar was not catching on to the sustainable trends.

The incumbent luxury footwear brands did not have the agility and speed to approach a new business model that was focused on sustainability at its core. This had previously left the consumer with no options in luxury footwear and exposed a bigger issue to me which led me to a pivotal question: "How will Italian luxury shoemaking stay relevant to consumers demanding authenticity and sustainability?"

Prota Fiori was born out of the combination of what I cared about, what I knew about and what consumers were asking for.

Prota Fiori is a women's luxury footwear brand created on the ethos of sustainability, fully sourced and made in Italy. The brand is a reflection of my personal values and beliefs. We represent Italian craftsmanship, environmental consciousness and social impact, luxury and innovation, inclusivity and, most importantly, authenticity.

Prota Fiori translates to "protect the flowers." Why this name? Because I was inspired by the joy of giving and receiving flowers, making arrangements and spending time in the garden.

I love the scent of fresh soil and the beauty of watching a seed grow into a bloom. To me, flowers signify hope and beauty and that is what we represent as a brand.



*Prota Fiori Rosa stiletto. Image courtesy of Prota Fiori*

Our shoes are made in Le Marche, Italy which is about four hours south of Milan off the Adriatic Coast. This is a very unique region in Italy known for the birthplace of shoemaking, and the best area to make luxury women's footwear.

Selecting our family factory in Le Marche was very important.

For example, if I am looking to taste the best Barolo in Italy, I will go to Piedmont where Barolo originates from. Can I drink Barolo in Tuscany? Sure, but it will not taste like the one from Piedmont.

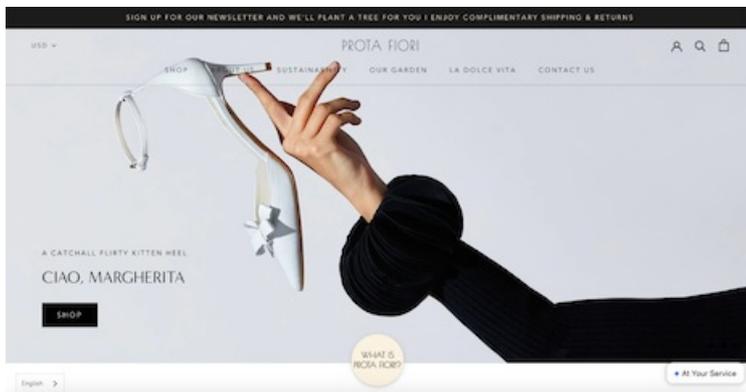
With footwear, you can make a shoe anywhere and say it is "luxury," but in Italy we know that Le Marche is the best region for making this type of footwear with a dense population of highly skilled craftsmen that have been there for decades.

We are launching with three styles that represent our aesthetic: clean, modern and timeless. The silhouettes are an open back slide, a kitten heel and a stiletto.

I have chosen white to represent a rebirth in Italian footwear with a sense of honesty and path to the future.

Our price points are attainable considering the high quality of the shoe and the competitive landscape. Our retail range is between \$385 to \$595.

In the near future, we will be expanding our range to more casual offers fit for the health and wellness and outdoor fanatic. We are effortlessly luxurious.



*ProtA Fiori Web site homepage. Image courtesy of ProtA Fiori*

## Direct to customer

ProtA Fiori is a direct-to-consumer brand, with strategic pockets of opportunity for partnerships with retailers, influencers and celebrities aligned with our values.

In the first year of our launch we are selling through ecommerce, social media and direct activities such as intimate trunk shows in select markets.

We also offer private styling consultation sessions which allows our customer to book appointments virtually or in person with us as they shop.

As we grow we will expand into more direct channels on our path to profitability in a smart, strategic way.

In the end, the customer will tell you what you need to do, and I am excited for this process.

## What is sustainability to ProtA Fiori?

To me, sustainability is creating something that meets the needs and wants of the present without compromising the well-being of our humanity in the future.

While that may seem vague to many, to me it means that we have a higher purpose to do business for good.

At ProtA Fiori, that starts with product and manufacturing.

Our first collection is made out of upcycled apple skins and grape skins, all produced in solar panel facilities made out of the residuals from the post-production of apple juice and wine.

Our goal is to make 100 percent fully sustainable products, and while we are not there yet, we are on our way.

Which brings us to our Italian manufacturing.

We are working to preserve Italian craftsmanship by making our shoes with the highly skilled, third-generation luxury shoe craftsman of Italy and applying these sustainable materials in new ways.

## To B or not to be

Sustainability goes beyond our supply chain it is in our heart and soul of everything we do.

I work directly with the B Corp Clinic at North Carolina State University's Poole College of Management to achieve B Corporation status in the future, which will allow ProtA Fiori to hold itself accountable for all business practices environmentally, socially and economically.

Another exciting component is our partnership with Treedom, a Certified B Corp, which allows ProtA Fiori to plant a forest of trees at a social impact forest in Catania, Italy with social, economic and environmental benefits.

This partnership brings sustainability to life with each purchase.

In our first year, we will be planting up to 100 trees, which we are gifting to our first 100 customers. With this tree, the customer will be able to track its growth for life directly and truly see their impact. As we grow, our tree planting will be directly tied to our revenue and our commitment will increase.

How did I build this? I took a risk and made the conscious decision that this would be my purpose.

I would make it my mission to preserve what is important to me, the well-being of our planet in a beautiful, eloquent and tasteful way.

I applied my expertise, passion and knowledge to the concept with determination and trust, with the support of my network I had built over the years.

My background was key to get to where I am at today and where I will be going with Prota Fiori. I have learned so much through my years at Giorgio Armani, Ralph Lauren, Valentino and A. Testoni.

At A. Testoni I served as U.S. general manager at a young age, which sparked my entrepreneurial spirit as I had rebirthed the company in the United States.

I have also lived a life with many surprises which has taught me to go after what you want because you do not know what tomorrow brings.

I created a smart team that believed in myself just as much as I did, and slowly but strategically formed an advisory board with executives and dear friends from companies such as Graff, Casper, Forbes, Saks Fifth Avenue and L'Oreal to complement my expertise to build a cohesive and effective team.

This team would allow me to execute the company's vision with utmost expertise and with the long-term goal in mind to develop a strong in-house coworker base that has the experience to create a scalable, sustainable business for growth.

It is always important to surround yourself with the right people as there is no "I" in team.



*Prota Fiori Margherita kitten heel. Image courtesy of Prota Fiori*

#### Capital idea

On another front, I knew that I had to raise capital to build this company.

To be frank, there has been lots of blood, sweat and tears, as I had never financially prepared to start my own company. But I never let money get in the way.

This meant that I had to truly put myself out there in the most vulnerable way possible to move forward.

Vulnerability has taught me some beautiful things about human nature and without channeling its power, I would not be here today.

I have been fundraising now for about nine months and, as a female founder, I can confirm that there are challenges as a woman raising capital, often silenced, and I stand firm that I am committing to making a positive impact on this issue.

I have women on my cap table, women on my board and women on my team. My investors are all angels, figuratively and literally, as they are part of the change that I would like to see happen. They believe in me and they believe in female leadership.

One day I look forward to being on the other side of the table and investing in another woman and her company. I did not have the foresight to see this barrier, but it is there, and I am happy to be breaking it each and every day.

MY VISION AND HOPE for the future is that the fashion industry will become less polluting and will harness its star power to make positive changes in the world on all fronts.

If the industry has the ability to influence fashion trends through celebrities and influencers, then it has the power to play a positive role in protecting the planet. That is the mission at Prota Fiori. That is a real privilege and responsibility for the industry and I call on each and every person in this community to join us, as there is no time like the present.

*Jennifer Stucko is founder/CEO of [Prota Fiori](#), a New York-based eco-friendly footwear brand for women. Reach her*

at [jennifer.stucko@protafiori.com](mailto:jennifer.stucko@protafiori.com).

## 1 thought on “How and why I am launching my luxury footwear brand”

1. Evelyn Mannino says:

June 8, 2020 at 2:11 pm

I am so proud of you Jen!!! To follow your dreams to execution is truly a reflection on the passion you hold. Although we worked together for a short period of time, you always inspired me to be true to who you are and believe in what you do!!!!  
Wishing you tons of success.

---

© 2020 Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your [feedback](#) is welcome.