

Let's explode a commonplace: the hat is not just a fashion thing.

The re-birth of this extraordinary product is sustained by motivations that go beyond evolutions in taste and customs, in that it is a phenomenon linked to humanity's cultural changes and changes in communication.

Its presence in our seasonal wardrobe is proof that it's senseless to think of the hat as old-fashioned just because of its deep roots in the past. One should ask instead why contemporary society, so different from yesteryear's, continues to be pleased with its existence.

Fashion can help us find answers only if we free it from superficial judgements based on purely aesthetic whims, recognizing its deep value as a human phenomenon for social equality and individual differentiation.

Today, in a system of products available in unlimited quantities, whoever chooses to put a favorite hat on his/her head can be seen as a person who cares about his/her personal image, but who's also careful in selecting rare and exclusive things, in accordance with his/her own way of living.

Satisfying these needs is the principal task of those companies who embrace the *Made in Italy* philosophy. Continuing along the path between what we were and what we are, 15 companies associated with the "Cappello di Firenze" consortium will lead us towards their idea of enterprise, where the heritage of the artisanal tradition of Florentine straw hats is united to the dynamism of today's marketing.

The *ensemble* covers the whole hatmaking process: producers, providers of raw materials and accessories, producers of machinery for manufacture.

The contemporary identity of the leading companies is tightly bound to the artisanal heritage of the area around Florence. From the first decades of the 18th century, Signa became the leading center of industrialized straw hat activity, thanks to the introduction of a new method for cultivating "marzuolo" grain, which required dense-packed sowing and an early harvest.

From this innovation, a new straw-braid for making hats arose; making them more prized for thinness, flexibility and luminosity, creating world renown for the so-called “Florentine straw hat”. Since then, Tuscan companies have lived through existential ups and downs, passing from periods of great development to others of deep recession.

In current times, the companies who’ve been able to survive these fluctuations have proven themselves to be receptive to changes dictated by fashion and by the economic courses of foreign markets, for the sake of their products’ exclusivity.

Continuing to manufacture hats in the present while retaining the secrets of a typically artisanal activity means preserving the skill of the masters who specialize in forming the piece, knowing how to choose the best materials and controlling the product’s conformity with the ideals of the past.

Today more than ever, the companies are obliged to safeguard the historical values of their own brand. In the spirit of local togetherness, in May 1986, the Consortium of the “Cappello di Firenze, within the context of the Straw Section and Cappello dell’Associazione Industriale di Firenze (Hats of the Florence Industrial Association) was organized and chartered.

Its mission is to oversee artisanal manufacture of Florentine hats, and to support their promotion and commercialization on international markets. The Consortium’s soul is the companies, and their faith in the historic values of the ancient art of making hats.

The industrialization of this art is carried out by brave, often ambitious families, who are as though entranced in their fastidious attention to detail and creative passion.

Their ability isn’t measured on the basis of success obtained, but on bold and noble attempts in which the perseverance of the individuals becomes an example of individual self-fulfillment to be shared with the collective.

Understanding this relationship permits rediscovery of the hat’s intrinsic value, a product that’s distinctive *par excellence* in the great artisanal *Made in Italy* tradition.

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