

THE GQ EYE



1 HOUR AGO

Liberty Fairs Brings Made in America to Italy

BY LIZA CORSILLO



Photographs by Gianluca Zati. The sprawling Pitti Uomo tradeshow in Florence, Italy boasts every kind of menswear under the sun from exquisite suiting to insider indigo. In partnership with Pitti Uomo, Liberty Fairs, a bi-coastal menswear tradeshow, created a section of the show called *Born in the USA*. It hosts 22 American brands producing in the United States. We talked to Liberty Fairs founder Sam Ben-Avraham about Italian versus American craftsmanship, the demand for more local production in fashion, being a pescatarian in Florence, and which country makes a better cup of coffee.



Schott



What does "Made in America" mean to people outside of America? Does it resonate?

Yeah even in Italy, a lot of factories shut down and production has moved to Romania or China or North Africa. What I've seen in the last couple years though, is a lot of factories actually reopening again in Italy because of the demand for local production. So you know, I see third generations, where the parents moved the production to Eastern Europe and now the kids are coming back and we have a whole new brand that is made in Italy.

Italy is known for its outstanding craftsmanship. How does American craftsmanship compare?

Everybody has respect for what the Italians are doing that is really classic, but when it comes to casual or heritage the Americans do it best. Everybody who comes in here is very excited about what we are doing with Born in the USA. For example Schott Leather, a 100 year old company, still making their stuff in Brooklyn are showing right next to Knickerbocker who opened up their factory just four years ago also in Brooklyn. Everyone has their own beauty. The Italians have their own thing that only they do, the Japanese have their own thing that only they can do, and the Americans have their own thing that only they can do.

Where did the idea for Born in the USA come from?

Coming to Italy into a massive show like Pitti with over 2,000 brands, we wanted make sure Liberty made an impact. Bringing American brands that are all made in the USA makes a big statement. And is very in line with what's happening with trends in local production right now.

Tell me about Liberty's Pitti Uomo venue.

It's an old warehouse. This whole compound was basically an army base that was converted into a tradeshow facility about 50 years ago. Up until World War II, this whole compound was an army base controlled by the government. It's an old building that's been renovated a little bit with concrete walls, it feels kind of like loft New York design but in Florence.

Runway shows vs trade shows--how does a brand decide what is right for them?

I think in terms of marketing, runway shows and presentations are very, very effective. Trade shows are more where the actual business is happening.

How has social media changed fashion week and market week?

Ten years ago everything was behind closed doors, everything that was happening in the trade show world was only for the industry. Today, consumers will come to the store and be like, "Do you have the new thing that we saw..." They would know about stuff before we even know. So that is social media is very important to us in these trade shows.

What is your favorite thing to eat in Florence?

You know it's funny, I only eat fish and there's hardly any fish over here. Florence is very very, very well known for its meat. Obviously there's amazing pasta so I do the pasta. We do the pasta with truffles.

Is Italian coffee better than New York coffee?

Actually it's a very, very tough competition right now. I would say if you had asked me five years ago I would definitely vote for the Italian. Today it's a tough one. There are a lot of great coffee places in New York now. So I would say equal.

Do you play Bruce Springsteen at the fair?

Of course! Of course we do. We play mostly rock n' roll music. When you come into the booth you feel the Made in the USA.

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