

FASHION

Women-led Italian Sustainable Fashion Brands to Know

● Vernisse, Skin of Nature, Bragoon and Tu Lizé have launched in the past few years with sustainable and socially charged values and a lifestyle proposition.

BY MARTINO CARRERA

MILAN – After two years into the pandemic, cliché statements about the emergency representing an opportunity to retool one's business values and find renewed energy seem to be actually true.

Since February 2020, a lot of young names have emerged, capitalizing on the opportunities provided by the direct-to-consumer business model, aligning their brands with sustainable and socially charged values and drawing up plans for lifestyle propositions that transcend fashion products.

In a country where female-led entrepreneurship has lagged behind, for cultural and political reasons, Italy's fashion world provided a few good examples over the past two years with a number of women-helmed labels gaining steam.

WWD sat down with the women behind some of these fashion projects.



Tu Lizé cofounders
Beatrice Selini and Camilla Lorenzi.

TU LIZÉ

Like many fledgling projects, Tu Lizé started out as a pastime for Camilla Lorenzi and Beatrice Selini, who never really viewed fashion as a job opportunity despite hailing from a family that runs an accessories manufacturing company.

A chance meeting of a thrift hunter who sold military garb led the duo to go all in on upcycling, adding colorful crocheted sleeves and soon attracting praise from friends and acquaintances. This prompted them to establish the brand in 2021 and introduce their first collection for spring 2022, attracting orders from around 30 premium retailers in Italy.

"We've always been passionate for vintage pieces and when we found the military jackets we decided to twist them by injecting femininity and romanticism in them via crochet," Lorenzi explained. She acknowledged that the use of military garb in the current scenario given the war in Ukraine has taken on a different meaning, but she underscored that the vintage quality of the pieces is what matters most to them, rather than the specific pattern they bear.

The duo presented their second collection during Milan Fashion Week in February, an opportunity to boost international visibility. They made new



retail contacts in France, Germany, Switzerland and also Bergdorf Goodman, which came to know the brand via a street-style image of a girl wearing the signature Tu Lizé parka. Wholesale distribution is still in its early stages and is supplemented by an e-commerce site.

"Buyers' response was exceptional; I think this is not a product you can easily find," Lorenzi said. "We launched during the pandemic when probably the market was craving for something new and we delivered just that."

The fall collection expanded on the signature, revisited military parka and jumpsuit, introducing a new gray iteration, but was also filled with ready-to-wear pieces, resulting in a full-fledged lineup. Although their commitment is to continue to capitalize on the upcycling component, the creative duo is eager to develop a brand that can be recognizable beyond their signature outerwear.

VERNISSÉ

Young fashion designers are increasingly tapping into craft to unleash their creativity and develop responsible business models. Rome-born Eugenia Penta and Francesca Filipo launched Vernisse in 2019 out of their passion for vintage and archive deadstock fabrics.



Vernisse, spring 2022



Vernisse cofounders
Francesca Filipo and Eugenia Penta.

"These are timeless clothes [that] don't follow any trend and adapt to different women and body shapes."

FRANCESCA FILIPO, VERNISSÉ

"Each collection is built upon the textiles we find, and our goal is to make them look contemporary and modern," Filipo said. "These are timeless clothes [that] don't follow any trend and adapt to different women and body shapes," she added, noting how practicality is top of mind.

Further marking their sustainable bent, buttons come from a Milan-based supplier that has been around since the 1970s while packaging and gift bags are made from scraps of organza and other fabrics, often sourced from leading textile firm Ratti.

Vernisse launched d-to-c, releasing different drops throughout the season and manufacturing goods on a made-to-order basis that has helped the duo stay consistent with their eco-friendly bent and grow business sustainably.

Flanking its e-commerce site, the brand has already held trunk shows across key international cities such as Paris. "It was essential for us that customers experienced the brand firsthand, so that was the natural first step to set up distribution outside the digital channel," Filipo said.

Pop-ups are also seen as a great business enabler. Vernisse was part of "The Italian in Paris" pop-up shop held at the hôtel particulier Le Molière last December and developed a festive-themed capsule collection for hip retail destination Modes in which devoré velvet, faux fur and '80s Luxex fabrics conjured a party look. The duo said similar activations will be launched going forward. ▶

"Discovering how rich textile companies' archives could be triggered us to develop a circular economy project and develop timeless and trendless clothing," Penta said.

Their entire collection is crafted using vintage scraps, trims and accessories, and the pair acknowledged the challenges in sourcing textiles available in sufficient quantities to keep up with demand. They partner with about 10 silk and woolen firms, based in the well-known textile district of Como, Italy, and occasionally in France, but continue to go hunting for private fabric collections via vintage and antique dealers and source raw textiles that are overprinted and dyed.



Bragoon's cofounders from Simona Orsini, Luisa Fachini and Marella Pessina.

BRAGOON

Single product brands may be hard to scale — except when they come with a lifestyle proposition. Case in point: Bragoon's tag line "Let It Rain" epitomizes the brand's cheerful mood that can be adapted to different projects.

Born out of personal desire to combat the rainy day blues, cofounder and creative director Luisa Fachini, a Milan-based scooterist, developed rain-proof overpants that bear psychedelic and vintage prints and are crafted from PET-derived fabrics. They are unisex, unisex and unisex.

Joined in her business venture by friends Marella Pessina and Simona Orsini, e-commerce head and general manager, respectively, Fachini wanted to offer a good reason to embrace Milan's rainy and gray sky days with an upbeat mood. Launched at the end of 2020, the brand soon introduced its second product — gaiters in the same patterns — and the three businesswomen are now aiming to test the waters with an outerwear piece called "Above," which they just introduced as part of a partnership with So.De, a Milan-based ethical social delivery service to which they supplied uniforms, including a hooded parka.

More tie-ups with unexpected partners are in the pipeline, Orsini said. "We love orchestrating different projects and venture outside our core [fashion] business.

Bragoon is not just products but a design and sustainable project [that] can easily adapt to different fields," she explained.

As part of their sustainable commitment, the three cofounders are looking to shorten the supply chain, which involves several players spread across Italy, as well as to find eco-friendly alternatives for coating.

"We think sustainability should be embraced holistically, and we're committed to support ethical labor [initiatives] and a responsible pipeline. We want to team up with partners that share our values," Orsini said.

Despite launching amid the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, Bragoon has managed to attract customers on its e-shop and scoop up distributing deals with local retailers including Wait and See, Eral 55, Tenhoa and Bici&Radici, a bicycle and flower shop in northern Milan.

SKIN OF NATURE

It took Elena Beraldo a five-year trip to Hong Kong to draw up a plan for the launch of her Skin of Nature label.

Interested in sourcing eco-friendly man-made fibers, she moved to Asia in 2017 where manufacturing for such materials is more advanced and where she learned about the supply chain and the hurdles in developing recycled fabrics.

"The brand is sort of a combination of my passion for fashion and for nature and sports activities, so there was no chance I could do a line without it being sustainable," Beraldo explained. "Back in 2017, sustainability was not the pressing topic it is today, and it was hard for me to find courses to learn more about it, not



Bragoon's collection of overpants.



Skin of Nature founder Elena Beraldo.

to mention companies that were already where I expected them to be in terms of green credentials."

In 2020, together with a small Hong Kong-based design team, she launched the brand, tapping into the activewear and yoga sector. The first collection of yoga sets crafted from regenerated polyester was named Aquatilis and was developed in partnership with marine biologist and underwater photographer Alexander Semenov. It served the purpose of presenting the brand to customers, Beraldo said, hence its simple designs and the use of Semenov's images as prints, obtained via waterless techniques.

"My goal is to turn the brand into a lifestyle proposition and not necessarily tied to activewear or the yoga lifestyle," Beraldo said. Case in point: The second collection bowing this year is dedicated to windbreakers and rainproof outerwear, offering four designs crafted from Fulgar's Amni Soul Eco biodegradable nylon.

The brand first gained traction via e-commerce and events organized in the Hong Kong area, where Beraldo also experimented with unusual distribution channels, including hotels, wellness centers and restaurants. "I think that catching customers in unexpected locations can trigger their curiosity to discover who we are," she noted.

In addition to online distribution, Skin of Nature is sold in a few concept stores in Hong Kong and soon will be available at a five-star hotel's spa, as well as at Coin Excelsior in Italy. The founder expects to scale up wholesale and visibility via events in Italy and tie-ups with e-tailers. ■



Skin of Nature's "Different Kind" collection.

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ELENA BERALDO, SKIN OF NATURE