Elsewhere in Milano: Giuseppe Zanotti, Aspesi, Sergio Rossi, Bulgari and Drome

By Godfrey Deeny  -  1 March 2022

No trip to Milan is complete without a tour of showroom presentations, with over 100 this season, testifying to Italy’s careful yet significant exit from the pandemic. Though, everyone is clearly braced for another downturn in the global economy due to the invasion of Ukraine, and deep concern for any suffering in that country.

We caught up with five brands, in ready-to-wear and accessories - Giuseppe Zanotti, Aspesi, Sergio Rossi, Bulgari and Drome - where the leitmotif was very definitely about restoring optimism in fashion and in greater society.

Giuseppe Zanotti: From Covid to cobra
Few creators have weathered the Covid storm with better bonhomie than Giuseppe Zanotti.

A proud independent, Giuseppe had to close 50 stores during the pandemic, as his global revenues fell from €180 million annually to barely €100 million last year. Yet, we found Zanotti in his usual upbeat manner, as he presented a great new collection in his Via Montenapoleone show space.

“I really wanted to create a festive winter collection, after all we have lived through, two horrible years. So this collection is dedicated to events, parties and cocktails. So, people can finally laugh, that's why we have strass and light, to go a long way from the streetwear to an elegant woman. I want a tall, strong woman on platforms. That’s my thinking,” said Zanotti over coffee on his terrace.

Hence for rock 'n' roll-loving ladies he showed satin platform pumps with hyper shiny crystal heels and soles; faintly crumpled sequined booties; candy-floss faux-fur spiked-heel boots and the shoe of the season – the posh bovver boot, which Zanotti draped at the ankle with chunky golden chains.

How, one wondered, has he survived as an independent, while so many other Italian footwear brands have sold out to investors?

“For the moment! Maybe it’s because I never wanted to do a deal with the devil. I like to be small and focused. But who knows? I am not a teenager! But the key thing is we produce ourselves with great artisans all done in our little universe of San Mauro Pascoli,” he insisted.

Though his greatest innovation was his most techy. A series of Cobra sneakers in lime green, black and gold or white and gold, where the serpent curled about the sole.

Looking ahead, Giuseppe is hoping for a less twisty path: “The world is in a very complicated moment. China is still closed with quarantine. The USA is doing very well. But who knows what this war will bring!”

Aspesi: Genderless groove
"I loved the idea that women always used to come to Aspesi and buy men’s pieces. So, I wanted to continue that idea in genderless fashion," explained the house’s creative director Lawrence Steele.

In his latest presentation, Steele showed fall/winter women’s ideas with menswear already presented in January, and had guy and girl models tour the sunny show space on Corso Venezia.

Steele tapped into a major trend, the Nordic sweater, and his were the best in Milan, notably the blood-orange red sweater version cut large enough to be a dress, or laid-back dude weekend version in black and gray. Though the key story was the Aspesi Fundamentals, techy parkas and neat puffer vests and jackets, created in a genderless range, and available from XXS to XXL. Picked from the Aspesi archives, they looked trim and smart on guy and girl models – working Steele’s take on the genderless groove.

Sergio Rossi: Penthouse glamor
The vote for the best presentation this week in Milan has to go to Sergio Rossi, who took over the truly remarkable 29th floor Eden Skyhouse apartment on the city’s main drag, Via Vittor Pisani.

Architectural critics sometimes referred to the street as Ayn Rand/The Fountain Head territory. The apartment, with 360 views over the Alps, included a huge stone fountain featuring sea serpents and cherubs, set in a white marble pond. Located in the Torre Breda, which when built in the early '50s was Italy’s tallest skyscraper, and a symbol of post-war renewal.

An ideal setting to introduce the house’s new artistic director Smyrniotaki. She was just appointed at the end of January; and even had her first Evangelie Smyrniotaki x Sergio Rossi capsule on display.

Hyper glam, just like the penthouse, with candy-floss pink feathers on slingbacks; high heels finished with diamanté ropes and knots; suggestive patent leather booties with toes so razor sharp they look like you could shave with them. Plus, the Sergio Rossi take on the footwear of the season, the tractor sole bovver boot.

“It’s been a difficult few years for everyone, but we have come through the tunnel,” said Riccardo Sciutto, CEO of Sergio Rossi.

Last year, the brand posed annual turnover of 60 million euros. This year Sciutto is predicting high double-digit growth.

“And being here, feels like a good omen,” beamed the natty CEO, attired in an all-white corduroy suit.

Bulgari: From Pirelli to Bocconi
Further north in the Ayn Rand 'hood, Bulgari presented its latest ideas on the top floor of perhaps Italy’s most famous modern building – the Pirelli Tower. Recently remodeled in a curling interior bar, and an apt space for the collection, which was centered around the iconic *serpenti*, with their mesmerizing snake heads.

Serpents glowering from evening clutches or snaking around half-moon ellipse bags. Though the coolest bag was the new Serpentine vertical tote, with a structured silhouette created in calfskin, and a snake handle twisting sinuously. With its thin removable leather shoulder strap, for cross-carrying, the bag is available in black or opal ivory.

In a busy Milan, Bulgari also debuted its Bulgari B.Zero1 Aurora Awards, which is clearly something of a mouthful, inside Italy’s top business school - Bocconi. Though a truly laudable event, designed to shine a light on a new generation of happening creatives, in a house where the majority of its workforce is now women.

Among the multiple awards: Sharon Stone rewarded Italian actress Alice Pagani, who allocated the sum donated by Bulgari to the Italian Red Cross. Rita Ora awarded the young Albanian designer Nensi Dojaka, who donated the Bulgari funds to UNICEF UK to support programs for refugees. While Kylie Minogue rewarded the young English...
UK to support programs for refugees. While Kylie Minogue rewarded the young English rapper Little Simz, who sent Bulgari’s prize funds to Future Dreams UK to support research on the secondary breast cancer.

Another brand rebounding from Covid is Drome, a Tuscan label that favors polite rock ‘n’ roll style. Its latest lookbook references David Bowie’s Thin White Duke.

Referencing ’80s dance music and made in lots of leathers – from glossy red patent leather to belted trench-coats to smooth, creamy lambskin bustiers and pants, the collection managed to have rebel attitude and yet a dressed
Designed as a desk-to-disco wardrobe, Drome may not be very revolutionary, but it has a great sense of girls-who-just-want-to-have-fun chic. Creative director Marianna Rosati has a definite viewpoint, as seen in her multi-fold lookbook magazine, named Drome Lost Club, the cast shot as if entering a backstreet nightclub.

With one Milan flagship and some 150 points of sales internationally, Drome has weathered the worst of the pandemic. The mood of a brand on the move palpable in its showroom on Via Jesu. Located across the street from the main Versace palazzo, which seemed like another good omen.