

The Salvatore Ferragamo Museum 'comes of age'

Eleven years on from its inauguration within the edifice of Palazzo Spini Feroni in 1995, the Museum is being enlarged and moved down to the pillared, cross-vaulted basement, in parts of the building that still show its mediaeval origin. The building dates back to 1289, when Geri Spini, banker to Pope Boniface VIII, ordered the building of a larger and more sumptuous residence for his family, and for his own personal prestige, in an enviable location on the right bank of the river Arno.

Made necessary by its growing popularity and the need to develop further dialogue with other museums in Florence, this extension of the Museum comes at a very important stage in the history of Ferragamo. The Company is preparing to celebrate 80 years of business in Italy, having been founded in 1927 when Salvatore, the shoemaker born in Bonito in 1898, came back to Italy. He had left for the United States in search of fortune at a very young age and had now returned to his home country a well known personality described as the 'shoemaker to the stars'.

He could boast a shop in Hollywood that was favoured by all the top film actresses; his hand-crafted footwear, all one-off pieces in fact, fetched dizzying prices and were photographed by the leading fashion magazines of the time. Partly through nostalgia for his family and partly because he couldn't find enough locally skilled shoemakers to meet his numerous orders, Salvatore decided it was time to return to Italy. He chose Florence as his new home and business base because it was a world famous symbol of Italian excellence, culture, art and artisan creativity. Salvatore first opened a workshop in via Mannelli, on the outskirts of the city, and after ten difficult years, following the dollar crisis in 1929, he was able to relocate to the centre of the city, occupying one of its most impressive buildings, Palazzo Spini Feroni, which he bought in 1938 and is currently the headquarters of Salvatore Ferragamo Italia and its Museum.

The birth of the Museum and its aims

Opened in 1995 by Wanda Ferragamo and her family, the Museum was designed to show the public the history of the brand's founder and his creations – footwear viewed by museums and experts worldwide as no less than works of art.

Since the mid-Nineties, the Museum has organized many exhibitions and other initiatives, not only featuring the achievements of one man but also reflecting the Company's interest in contemporary movements – art, design, entertainment, communication, information, social trends – that influence the style and form of how people dress and live.

In recognition of the cultural value of the Museum and its intense cultural activism, in 1999 Salvatore Ferragamo was given the coveted **Guggenheim Business and Culture Award**, granted every year to companies that make outstanding investments in the world of culture.

Today, the company is a member of Intrapresae Collezione Guggenheim, an association of companies supporting the Peggy Guggenheim Collection in Venice, while the Museum is active within Museimpresa, an association grouping Italy's major museums.

The exhibition space

The interiors are designed to create a warm and welcoming atmosphere – like that of a home – and at the same time use state-of-the-art display techniques to make visits enjoyable and instructive, especially for young people. The Museum is dedicated, in fact, to the young, who are always hungry for sources of inspiration and stimulus.

Ticket proceeds will go towards funding annual scholarships for young footwear designers.

The exhibition: Creativity in colour

“Colour is part of our being: each of us has his own”.

Le Corbusier

The theme of the exhibition that celebrates the re-opening of the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum is colour in the footwear of Salvatore Ferragamo, works of art that speak through their colours and mark their true identity.

The Museum has shown the public many and richly diverse aspects of Salvatore Ferragamo’s work, mostly through its biennial exhibitions. For example, one focused on his propensity for a variety of materials, from ‘poor’ to luxurious; another, which toured worldwide, displayed the footwear Ferragamo created for Hollywood film stars and other jet set people, such as Marilyn Monroe and the Duchess of Windsor.

Two years ago, the Museum exhibited nearly 400 patents that Ferragamo registered over his career. This veritable treasure was discovered in the State Archives in Rome and demonstrates how Salvatore saw shoes not as mere accessories but as objects of design demanding the experimentation of new constructions and technologies.

This time the criterion of choice is colour, because colour is such a fascinating theme and so complex that we cannot even form a conception of it without referring to a range of academic disciplines including physics, chemistry, physiology, psychology and philosophy.

No one doubts that the world appears to us in colour. Yet it is hard to give a univocal definition of it. Nature is visible in an extraordinary wealth of colours. Leaves, flowers, minerals, animals, the sky – they are all parts of a flow of colours in motion. Also characterized by colour are the objects that men create: clothing, architecture, street signs, advertisements, art, everyday objects in shops. So our perception of contingent reality is in ‘technicolor’.

Throughout the history of clothing, colour has been used to express differences in social standing, sex, occupation and religious beliefs. In ancient Rome, purple was a symbol of consular power, while in China imperial robes were yellow. In any given period, colours may conceal what seem irreconcilable contradictions. Black, for example, is on one hand the colour of modesty, absence and parsimony, yet on the other it represents seduction and celebration.

In our modern era of fashion for everyone, colour codes seem to be getting simpler, though they are still one of the pillars of fashion, a distinguishing mark that's immediately recognizable. For many fashion brands, colour can gradually become a sort of logo.

Yet in spite of the importance of colour in the history of fabrics and clothing, there has been very little direct treatment of the subject, apart from a few notable exceptions. This is why two specialists were invited to contribute to this catalogue. Colin McDowell, an internationally renowned fashion expert, who has written extensively on the subject of colour and fashion; and Stefano Fabri Bertolotti, an historian of philosophy, who answers the simple yet fundamental question: what is colour?

Salvatore Ferragamo and colour

The main reason, however, for choosing this theme stems from looking at the ten thousand footwear models in the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum. Following the creative use of various materials, you immediately notice the wealth of colour in Ferragamo shoes.

What characterized Ferragamo's style right from the outset was his use of colours. Salvatore sometimes used pale colours, half tones, pastel shades, but only when a customer asked for them or to follow a general trend in current fashion. His own colour palette preferred strong, bold colours that broke away from traditional *fin de siècle* whites, blacks and browns. He used them on their own or in original geometrical patchworks in which bold juxtapositions of colour highlight the dynamic of a shoe's shape and the nature of the materials used.

Avant-garde art movements were a continual source of inspiration for Ferragamo, from the Futurists to the Fauves and Sonia Delaunay. It would be wrong to underestimate his southern Italian, Mediterranean background and the importance of being born in a country full of such intense, vibrant colours. In addition to his Italian origin, Ferragamo was also influenced by his professional experience in California, a society deeply influenced by Mexican culture, where colour is a fundamental element.

The final reason for such sensitivity to colour was Ferragamo's love of diversity, his desire to make shoes that weren't merely secondary aspects of an overall look but a key element in defining style, elegance and personality.

No surprise then that he was combining banal black and white in geometrically patterned uppers, with a Cubist look or with optical effects, some ten years before op art. It also explains the vivid blue, the emerald green, the moonlike silver and the solar yellow turning to gold. Not to mention ruby red, a symbol of life and energy, Ferragamo's favourite colour, the closest match to his passionate nature; or his penchant for multicoloured designs, reflecting a desire to shock and to be always ahead of the times.

Virtual visit: from 6th December 2006, the *Creativity in colour* exhibition can also be visited virtually, by going to the Ferragamo website (www.ferragamo.com).

Users can stroll around the digitally recreated Museum and click on works in the exhibition to find out about them. The virtual visit, which employs real time 3D technology, has been made possible by Exhibits3D, a software system developed by Panebarco & C. and distributed exclusively by CRC srl.

Audio-guides: inside the Museum there is an audio-guide service in Italian, English, French and Japanese. Guided visits may be booked for groups of over ten people.

Catalogue: published by Sillabe, with texts by Stefania Ricci, Colin McDowell and Stefano Fabbri Bertoletti.

Stefania Ricci has been the director of the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum since 1995, is the author of articles and books on fashion and teaches history of 20th century fashion and history of footwear at Polimoda in Florence.

Colin McDowell, a journalist with the

'Sunday Times', is one of the most authoritative historians of fashion and footwear and has written numerous articles and books on the subject. Stefano Fabbri Bertoletti teaches history of philosophy and is a writer and consultant on philosophical subjects.

Exhibition design by Silvia Cilembrini and Fabio Leoncini of Studio RBA, Florence, a firm of architects founded by Prof. Remo Buti. They have taken part in numerous design exhibitions and designed a number of exhibitions for the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum, including *Walking Dreams. Salvatore Ferragamo 1898-1960* in the Museo des Bellas Artes, Mexico City.

Opening hours: 10.00 am to 6.00 pm everyday except Tuesday, when the Museum is closed all day.

Entrance: from Piazza Santa Trinita 5r, Florence, tel. +39 055 3360 456/455, fax +39 055 3360 475.

Tickets: € 5

Bookshop: the Museum Bookshop sells books, postcards, gifts, stationery and shopping bags.

Ferragamo's Creations

A number of famous shoe models, the originals of which are preserved in the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum, have been reproduced specially for the re-opening of the Museum in its new premises and the *Creativity in Colour* exhibition. The shoes are extremely precious and veritable symbols of femininity and creativity.

They were created by Salvatore Ferragamo for famous, seductive women in the Forties and Fifties and include the silk velvet platform sandal for Ava Gardner and the 11 cm heel court shoe that Marilyn Monroe wore in Billy Wilder's *Some Like It Hot*. All the shoes, that come in two variations, are made entirely by hand using original constructions, lasts and hides.

Also reproduced are two models that were famous in the history of Italian design: the 'F' wedge sandal, which in its 'invisible' version won Ferragamo a Neiman Marcus Award (the Oscar of the fashion world) and the 'kimo' with its interchangeable sock, which first appeared on 12th February 1951 in Florence, alongside Schuberth dresses in the very first Italian fashion show.

These shoes represent the history of Italian fashion and style. Today they are collector's pieces, the beginnings of a truly exclusive limited series to be sold in Salvatore Ferragamo's Florence store.

In addition to the shoes, reproductions have also been made of four bag models that helped write this segment of Ferragamo's history. There is the famous top-handle crocodile bag with the 'Gancino' ornament, in Salvatore Ferragamo's favourite colours – golden brown, yellow, red, bright green – which can be admired in the *Creativity in colour* exhibition and in its futurist, clear plexiglass version with interchangeable inner linings, showing the 'kimo' concept applied to bags. The collection is further enriched by a small bag with a chain that can also be used as a belt. This is an invention from the early Nineties and is made of gold kid, multi-coloured suede and crocodile. And also the bag decorated with gilt shoe-shaped charms created for the first exhibition on the history of Salvatore Ferragamo, held in Palazzo Strozzi, Florence, in 1985.

The original label

These special products, 'revivals' in fact, also carry the original Ferragamo label inside – 'Ferragamo's Creations' – dating from 1927 and designed by the futurist Lucio Venna.

On sale alongside the bags and shoes there will also be scarves, ties, costume jewellery and 'cult' items recalling the history of the brand in various ways: they are accessories of unique personality, a joy to own and give to others.

Connecting directly to the Salvatore Ferragamo Museum

Such special products clearly required a special place. So an area inside the Salvatore Ferragamo store, connecting directly to the Museum, was created. It's called 'Ferragamo's Creations' and is styled like the Ferragamo *atelier* in Palazzo Spini Feroni in the Forties and Fifties, its baroque rooms having "the atmosphere of a refined yet homely drawing room" – to quote Salvatore Ferragamo himself – "where customers feel they are special guests and where every woman can feel she's a princess and every princess a queen".

For further information:

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