

Salvatore Ferragamo

A regola d'Arte

Museo Salvatore Ferragamo

18 November 2010 – 7 March 2011

The latest surveys on the future direction of the market show that being increasingly counts more than appearance, that true wealth is having time, physical and mental well-being and the chance to live one's life serenely and to the full. The most sought-after products are those which are highly personalized and exclusive, meticulous in detail and workmanship, often the fruit of reconciliation between the work of machines and man, of harmony between the mind and the hand.

It is time, then, to restore value to work done by hand or with the intellect, but always with artisanal expertise, and to look to the past to reconstruct the new on solid foundations. The craftsman is not just one who works with his hands, but one who does his trade well, in a workmanlike manner, who puts a lot of personal commitment into it, who takes care over details, who is innovative, who thinks how much he could grow by improving his skills if only he had enough time, but above all, who is gratified by what he does. From this strong, countercurrent message from American sociologist and New York University professor, Richard Sennett, comes the inspiration for this exhibition. Drawing on the history of an Italian company such as Ferragamo, it would like to provide an opportunity to reflect on the values that have allowed an enterprise well-rooted in Florence's arts and crafts tradition to keep this DNA intact, even throughout the difficult transition to industrial production. Belief in sharing and developing skills, in craftsmanship intended not only as manual "know-how", but above all as a mental process in which passion for one's work, the desire to keep progressing, an obsession with quality and continual research into materials and technology side by side with well-established expertise based on one's Italian cultural roots, are tangible expressions of a zeal and dynamism that belong anywhere but in the past, that now more than ever represent elements of distinction and important levers for facing the future. Today's craftsman is the artist who plays the music, the shoemaker who operates and controls the machine at work, the young person who creates a new website.

The exhibition falls in 2010, a year that marks an important anniversary for the Ferragamo company, fifty years from the death of its founder and the moment when his wife, Wanda, and their six children took over the reins of the business.

A regola d'Arte

Following rapid success in the North American market as a result of Salvatore Ferragamo's creativity and genius, the company was established in Florence in 1928, rising to eminence in the international fashion market as specialist makers of handcrafted shoes for women. A new phase of development began in 1960, taking production from an extraordinary level of craftsmanship to an equally high level of industrial manufacture, one which over the years gradually included a total look in top of the range clothing and accessories, while maintaining its hallmark meticulousness and the appeal of craftsmanship, and contributing to the spread of this artisanal culture not only in the territory around Florence, but also in many other Italian cities.

The event which gave rise to this change was the arrival in 1960 of an order from the New York department store, Saks Fifth Avenue, for no less than 12,000 pairs of shoes instead of its usual order for 200 pairs. The shoe production system had to be extended and modified to include the use of machinery, which immediately raised daily output to 6,500 pairs. However, the Salvatore Ferragamo company intended holding firm to the principle that the use of machinery should be restricted only to less important operations, and that 60% of the shoe should still be made by hand. In just a few years, this beginning led to a radical transformation of the company's manufacturing, communication and investment strategies.

In its inimitable style, the Ferragamo family wanted to celebrate this period in an original way. Not by retracing the significant stages of an extraordinary company history with this exhibition, but by underscoring how much the management, production and distribution aspects of the company's growth and evolution have been due to the people who have worked at and for Ferragamo, and above all to the cultural and artisanal richness of the territory, particularly Florence, where the company has always operated, starting from the reasons for Salvatore's decision to transfer know-how from local craftsmen to the core of Ferragamo's production.

To thank Florence and its craftsmen, Salvatore Ferragamo has therefore decided to create a special prize for new Florentine artisanal enterprises that continue to believe in the potential of local craftsmanship combined with innovation and creativity.

The exhibition's opening coincides with the First International Cultural Heritage and Landscape Week, which, moreover, coincides with the Company Culture Week. The aim of this latter project, promoted by Confindustria Tuscany, together with CNA (the National Federation of Crafts and Small and Medium Enterprises) and the Mayor of Florence, is to reposition Florence at the centre of contemporary debate on the relationship between Cultural Heritage and Economy. From 12 to 20 November, the entire city will be the setting for over 150 events and activities, culminating in a 3-day International Forum (18 – 20 November) in which economists, politicians and directors of the world's most important museums will take part.

The exhibition route

The roots. The deep roots of a company such as Salvatore Ferragamo, in common with many other small and medium Italian enterprises, are like those of a great tree, an olive tree, so typical of the Tuscan landscape, to be exact: a family business, the story of a founder who was often a pioneer in his field, the extraordinary level of craftsmanship in its products and its strong attachment to its territory.

These values are illustrated by a family album with a series of images of the founder and his children, by a library where historic shoes created by Salvatore Ferragamo between 1920 and 1960 are like an archive to be consulted and studied, by fragments of the economic and cultural history not only of a company, but of the entire country. And by vintage photos that come from the extraordinary archives of Foto Locchi, another of the city's artisanal enterprises, also now in its third generation, showing the Florence Salvatore Ferragamo encountered on his arrival, with its artistic jewels (symbolized by a model of the Piazza del Duomo generously loaned by the Museo dell'Opera del Duomo) and its artisans' workshops, a city which in the Twenties was already cosmopolitan and fast-developing, as witnessed by the pages of 'Lacerba' magazine, founded by Giovanni Papini and Ardengo Soffici.

These roots are the basis of an internationally-known Italian company, but also of the city of Florence, which despite being the living testimony of a unique, inimitable culture of the past, is also the mirror of a live, dynamic present, where hundreds of workshops with a strong artisanal stamp still exist.

Craftsmanship is an inexorable harmony between the mind and the hand. A modern company's recognition and reflection of itself in the work, activities and products created by men and women particularly tied to the culture and history of a territory, leads to constant striving to keep the memory of this "know how" intact, and to renew that harmony between the mind and the hand that is like a melody of gestures and sounds. The great pianist, Stefano Bollani, plays his score together with a craftsman, a shoemaker who works and creates his masterpiece – a pair of shoes.

Products as an interactive installation. Some products that in yesterday's and today's Ferragamo story represent the company's creativity, research into materials and technological innovations, stand alongside the territory's traditional crafts, such as straw-weaving, Tavarnelle lace and leather-working, to become the subject of four interactive installations, where information, sketches, and photographic and audio-visual documentation interact with the public together with the products themselves, which can be touched as in an imaginary shop.

Some of the most significant, valuable products will be displayed in showcases together with documentation from the "Domenico Michelacci" Straw and Straw-Weaving Museum in Signa, which the Tavarnelle Town Council recovered from local private citizens.

From CAD to the store: a product for today. To recognize oneself in a territory and in an ancient crafts culture is not in contradiction with the unstoppable passage of time or with the many aspects of contemporary life and consumers' changing demands. Once upon a time, a product such as a shoe started life as a hand-drawn sketch and was made to measure entirely by hand. The use of original materials was a hallmark for Ferragamo, whose answer to the wartime shortage of hides was to introduce materials never-before used for fashion footwear, such as cork and cellophane. Nowadays there are constantly evolving technologies to help man in his work and improve it. The model is visualized with CAD.

Since the Sixties, enormous work has been done at Ferragamo to serialize made to measure footwear, to the extent of producing more than eighty fittings per model. Most of the manufacturing stages are done by machine, but the machine is always guided by man's experienced hand.

Today, the use of new eco-friendly or recycled materials is the great challenge being taken on by many fashion and design companies.

Ferragamo around the world. This section, which is also interactive, examines an essential aspect of Ferragamo's story – its openness right from the start to international markets, where the intrinsically Italian nature of the brand and its ties with the city of Florence, the symbol of Italian culture throughout the world, was a trump card.

Cinema. This section, devoted to entertainment, will house old and new films, a short by a young director and a cartoon, all of which have shoes as their common denominator.

A business made up of people. The story of the Ferragamo family business, like that of many other companies in Italy, is above all a story of people, of the men and women who have contributed to the life of the company with their decisions and their projects, from the founder to members of the Ferragamo family, from the craftsmen to the managers. Visitors can also become part of this world by leaving a photographic testimony, like some of the city's young artisans.

A regola d'Arte
Museo Salvatore Ferragamo

Under the Patronage of:
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Promoted and organised by:
Museo Salvatore Ferragamo
with
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Firenze

Opening: 17 November
Open to the public:
18 November 2010 – 7 March 2011
Times: 10.00am – 6.00pm
Closed on Tuesday
Entrance: 5 euro

Exhibition curated by:
Tommaso Fanfani, Stefania Ricci
Exhibition installation design:
Silvia Cilemrini
and Fabio Leoncini
Installation: Melaverde
Technological installation:
Informasistemi
Video design and direction:
Daniele Tommaso

Video production: Videocast
Stock photographs:
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Captions

1. Salvatore Ferragamo prepares a wooden last to fashion a model. 1950. Museo Salvatore Ferragamo.
2. Salvatore Ferragamo checks the work of his assistants at Palazzo Spini Feroni. 1950. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
3. 1955. A joiner at work in the Chapel of Palazzo Spini Feroni, headquarters of Salvatore Ferragamo since 1938. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
4. Wanda Ferragamo and her daughter Fiamma on the roof of Palazzo Spini Feroni, in a photo from the Sixties.
5. From the left, Fiamma, Giovanna, Leonardo, Wanda, Ferruccio and Fulvia Ferragamo with a model on the roof of Palazzo Spini Feroni in 1983. Photo David Lees.
6. In the early Sixties, Jerry Ferragamo, the founder's nephew, took charge of the transition from totally handcrafted production to the manufacture of shoes to measure on mechanized production lines.
7. Wanda Ferragamo, her children and grandsons, James Ferragamo and Diego di San Giuliano, in 2004.
8. Fiamma di San Giuliano Ferragamo in a photo from 1985. **The eldest of Wanda and Salvatore Ferragamo's children, she headed the leather division after her father's death.**
9. The San Frediano district as it appeared in 1934. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
10. A haberdasher's stall in Florence in 1935. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
11. Labourers working on the illumination of the Cathedral dome. **1936. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.**
12. The "chiccaio", a candy peddler, in 1937. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
13. A shoe-shine boy with his customer in 1937. **Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.**
14. The "trecciaiole" of Impruneta intent on weaving their straw creations. **1948. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.**
15. Outdoor fashion shots in Piazza Strozzi. 1955. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
16. Actress Sylva Koscina in Piazzale Michelangelo in 1956. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
17. Liz Taylor and Richard Burton on the Lungarno during their visit to Florence in 1966. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
18. A Florentine sculptor in his workshop in a photo from the Fifties. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
19. Porta San Niccolò in Florence in a photo from the Fifties. Historical Archive Data Bank Foto Locchi Florence.
- 20-23. Concert for 4 hands for piano and footwear dedicated to Salvatore and Wanda Ferragamo: musician Stefano Bollani on the piano, a master shoemaker on the footwear.
24. Manufacturing a woman's shoe. Gluing the upper for lasting.
25. Manufacturing a woman's shoe. Lasting the upper.
26. **Manufacturing a woman's shoe. Correcting the upper by hand.**
27. Manufacturing a woman's shoe. One of the stages of soling.
28. Manufacturing the Tramezza man's shoe. Correction and closure of the side part of the upper.
29. Manufacturing the Tramezza man's shoe. Correction and closure of the heel and side parts of the shoe.
30. The value of people, the employees of Salvatore Ferragamo Italia Spa: Settimio Cosci, the doorman of Palazzo Spini Feroni, for many years the symbolic guardian of the Company's transformations.
31. The value of people, the employees of Salvatore Ferragamo Italia Spa: the Historical Archive, custodian of the Museo Salvatore Ferragamo collection, and the archivists (Francesca Piani, Irene Zoppi, Maria Teresa Giovannini).
32. The value of people, the employees of Salvatore Ferragamo Italia Spa: Massimiliano Giornetti, Creative Director of the *maison*.
33. The value of people, the employees of Salvatore Ferragamo Italia Spa: Stefano Frasconi, Technical Manager women's shoes.
34. The Hides Warehouse.
- 35-37. **Some renderings of the installation project for the "A regola d'Arte" exhibition.**