

Bavarian Fashion Made In Italy

FRITZ UNÜTZER ON HIS PASSION FOR CREATING THE PERFECT SHOE

BY CORNELIA MARIOGLOU | JUNE 15TH 2012 | 09:47 AM

What began in 1989 with the first collection Unützer – Handmade in Venice, has today developed into an internationally successful premium leather goods manufacture. A mere 30 kilometres from Venice, in an attractive complex of off-white buildings, 50,000 pairs of Unützer shoes are produced each year.



Fritz Unützer with his 1972 Rolls Royce Shadow 1

Fritz Unützer Senior, the father of the current owner of the business, opened a shop on Munich's luxury shopping street Maximilianstrasse in 1948. Years later, his son began manufacturing shoes bearing the family name after receiving an offer to buy a shoe factory in Italy. He lives in Brighton, England and travels regularly to the factory in Fosso, Italy and to Munich, where the family business is based.

Fritz Unützer Junior himself has an appreciation for beautiful things, like classic cars, as evidenced by the 1972 Rolls Royce Shadow 1 he calls his own, and which was specially converted for the presentation of the Unützer Golf collection in the courtyard of his Fosso shoe manufactory. Our interview begins with a brief digression on Unützer's hellenophile streak: He loves Greece because the country once had a Bavarian king, but also because his own wife inherited what he considers her Greek beauty from her Athens-born great-grandmother.



Fritz Unützer inspecting leather in the factory

CENTURION: YOUR FAMILY WAS RUNNING A SUCCESSFUL FASHION BOUTIQUE, SO WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO START MANUFACTURING SHOES INSTEAD OF CONTINUING THAT BUSINESS?

Fritz Unützer: I was almost 21 when I began working for Church's in London, and a passion for creating the perfect shoe gripped me.



SO TODAY YOU CAN STAND NEXT TO A SHOE MAKER IN THE FACTORY IN FOSSO AND SEE WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED?

Yes, certainly. Our shoes are hand made and production is very time-consuming. By the time a pair of ballerinas are ready to be shipped it takes almost one hundred work stages and there's always room for improvement.

ARE YOU PLANNING A COLLECTION FOR MEN?

We are planning a men's collection which will become part of the regular collection. Of course men's shoes don't change with fashion the way women's shoes do. Styling the lasts is very complex, as I am primarily interested in the quality, similar to the standard provided by Church or Alden. Fashion doesn't really come into it. Primarily, the shoe has to fit, then it has to be versatile – and of course it should be durable. With Mariella, our shoe designer who learned her trade with us and, after a brief detour with Bally, is now back, we will make it work.

HOW DO YOU SEE THE UNÜTZER BRAND?

I can't really say yet for men, but for women we deliver a quality product, which is classical, but to a certain extent continually new and of its time.



AND THE NUMBERS VALIDATE THIS APPROACH?

Yes, we are satisfied, but we want to increase our business abroad. And we have set ourself high goals with the men's collection. We won't be reinventing the wheel, but we aspire to create a soft, flexible shoe that doesn't make you sweat, give good support and that is available in different widths. Men tend to live in their shoes much more. Men own three pairs of good shoes on average, in addition to trainers, casual shoes and moccasins. Women have...

[At this point of the conversation, Unützer's wife interjects: "50 pairs of shoes!"]

Yes, of course we also want to produce the best quality for women, but we see women buying shoes they will never wear or shoes they just find amusing or pretty. That, of course, just doesn't happen with men.

SPEAKING OF FASHION AND TRENDS: IS A SENSE OF TRENDS A FAMILY TRADITION FOR YOU?

Not so much trends, but there are things that are above fleeting trends, because we don't compromise on quality.



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