

In Full Bloom

by Silvia Bombardini



photo: Stefano Galuzzi

Those of you not too busy sulking over Coachella this April might have grabbed the chance to visit Milan's Salone del Mobile 2015 — and if you were there, you wouldn't have missed the Marni Mercado de Paloquemao, a fruity banquet of pineapple, guanabana, zapote, and curuba brought in from Colombia to tempt us with its different flavors, the same way the Italian brand has done from the start. But if you did indeed miss it, fear not: unlike the hyped festival the market was only the latest installment of Marni's low-key, worldwide, and leisurely year-long series of happenings to celebrate a very important milestone. Defiantly in-between up- and offbeat, with neither ads nor flashy logos, for twenty years Marni has dressed pragmatic yet emotional, intelligent and independent women. We got in touch with creative director Consuelo Castiglioni to learn more about them, and the key elements of Marni's longevity.

Silvia Bombardini: Unlike other Italian labels you don't flaunt it, but family as a business model and value discretely sits at the core of Marni. Looking back now that the brand has grown out of its teenage years and

splendidly into its twenties, what would you say has been the biggest advantage, or joy, of working alongside your nearest and dearest? Consuelo Castiglioni: We are a very close family and also enjoy spending our free time together. When it comes to work, I feel this is the perfect situation: a protection, but also a direct exchange of ideas and feedback. Now the younger generation is also involved, represented by my daughter Carolina as Special Projects Creative Director. She brings in her vision and ideas and this is important to us. Carolina is responsible for all special projects, and among these the one related to Marni's twentieth anniversary! We've called it Marni Prisma, as it consists of a series of events in different cities around the world, each revealing a facet of Marni, distinctive for its prismatic character.

SB: In 1994, you transformed fur from showy to simple — subtly subverting the unspoken rules of the bourgeois world, Marni's silent elegance brought emotion to the luxury market, and a breath of fresh air. Do you recall your very first show? CC: At the time it wasn't easy. The collection was mostly fur and leather, as the company of

my husband's family produces furs. I had a very different approach, the materials were treated as fabrics, very light and modern, and it was well received by press and buyers.

SB: You've said before that the Marni woman dresses for herself, rather than to be seen. This implies a certain measure of confidence and hints at a longer commitment to her style than others might have. A bit like love over lust. Which would you imagine to be the most cherished item in her wardrobe? CC: It's difficult to pick out just one; I know that Marni's pieces become timeless favorites that one keeps on using while mixing them with new collections.

SB: You call them *repertoires of possibilities* for your customers to individually choose from, without the obliging push of advertising to point them this or that way. It highlights the creativity of wearing, for women who don't like to be told how to dress. Have we finally tired of the sort of fashion that comes as a set of rules? CC: I think the woman that likes Marni is independent and coherent in her style by interpreting the clothes and not being overwhelmed by them. For sure it is a niche clientele, but I can see that women today are more into an individual style, mixing different designers with brands like H&M for example.

SB: A mastery of textile experimentation and the intuitive pleasure that comes with unusual juxtapositions of textures and fabrics have always been a signature touch of Marni — your summer fur made of chiffon and canvas for spring really is a perfect example of this. Where did the idea for this particular piece come from? Could you talk us through the early stages of your creative process? CC: My design process often starts with fabrics. I am fascinated by how different textures can change the silhouette: in this case it was the layering of fabric cut in tiny bands that create a vertical texture reproducing a print. Research is very important in my work. The Spring/Summer 2015 collection was a crescendo — it started with white toile and canvas to which embellishment and decoration were gradually added.

SB: Pragmatic but sensitive, not defined by age: the Marni niche has grown organically, transversal and loyal. Boutiques in globalized styles are blooming around the world, now along with flower markets to celebrate throughout the year the brand's twentieth birthday, as you say. Thinking about expansion, what will be the next step? CC: To continue as we are now, working well and coherently with design, research, and quality as our key elements.

SB: There's so much to treasure in the past, but Marni Prisma has indeed set out to be a celebration that looks ahead. How about the next twenty years? Can we hope for Fussbett sandals and trunk bags even in SS35? CC: Sure, why not?!

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