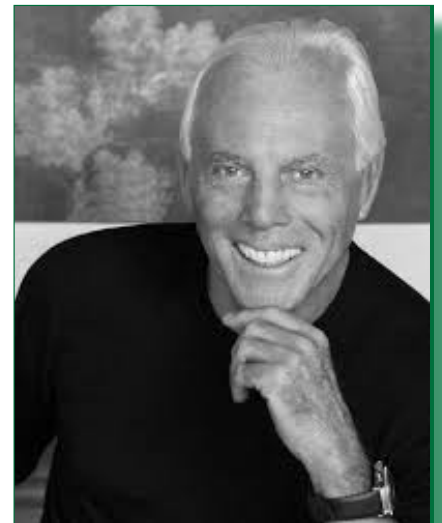


GIORGIO ARMANI  
(B. 1934)

*July's essay continues our recent theme of Italian importance in modern design. This month we focus on the life of Giorgio Armani, who was born on July 11, 1934. (Thus, in a couple of weeks, he will celebrate his 83rd birthday). He is an Italian fashion designer, particularly noted for his menswear and for his clean, tailored lines in his clothing styles. He is also credited with pioneering red-carpet fashion. He formed his company, Armani, in 1975, and by 2001 it was acclaimed as the most successful fashion design company that Italy had produced, with an annual income of \$1.6 billion. As of May, 2017, Armani's personal fortune was estimated (by Bloomberg) to be over \$8.07 billion.*

Giorgio Armani was born in the northern Italian town of Piacenza, a small industrial town south of Milan. His father, Ugo Armani, was an accountant for a transport company; his mother was Maria Raimondi Armani. The family was a typical Italian family of the time, poor and struggling through a tough life. Ugo worked long days; Maria was a stern taskmaster at home. Giorgio recalls that although his parents loved him, they rarely showed affection or warmth toward the children. He was the second of three children: an older brother, Sergio, and a younger sister, Rosanna. The 1930s and '40s were a difficult time in Italian history. Giorgio and his two siblings experienced the hardships of World War II firsthand. It was a time of unremitting poverty and insecurity—bombings in the night meant that, as children, they had to be led from their beds into shelters. Two of his young friends were killed in one of these bombardments. As he related to *Harper's Bazaar* magazine: “We were poor and life was tough. The cinema in Milan was a refuge—a palace of dreams—and the movie stars seemed so glamorous. I fell in love with the idealized beauty of Hollywood stars.”



Following the war, poverty and personal hardships continued rampant in Italy as families struggled to regain their lives. The Armani family was no different. Giorgio's father lost his job and was imprisoned for 9 months because, like so many other Italians, he had held Fascist sympathies. His brother, Sergio, had to go into hiding for several months as well. Giorgio was seriously injured when he and a group of teenage friends found a bag of explosives, which they threw on to a lighted brazier to see the fireworks display. He almost lost his eyesight and had to lie in a shaded room for 3 weeks with both eyes closed. (Even today, he still wears sunglasses when he is in the merest light because of this damage to his eyes, although many people mistakenly jump to the conclusion that this is an expression of his vanity).

At an early age, he developed an interest in anatomy. As he told *The Guardian*, he would make “dolls out of mud with a coffee bean hidden inside.” He would then operate on the doll and excise the bean with a kitchen knife, giving himself marks 1-10 for surgical precision. While he was attending secondary school at the Liceo Scientifico Respighi in Piacenza, he read A. J. Cronin’s *The Citadel* and decided to pursue a career in medicine. He enrolled in the University of Piacenza, but after two years, in 1953, he left the University after he realized medicine—specifically the sight of blood—was not for him. He also realized that he was not a terribly good student at that time because he had difficulty synthesizing ideas.

After leaving university, he had his military obligation to fulfill. Because of his medical background, he was assigned to the Military Hospital in Verona, where he attended numerous operatic and dramatic productions at the Arena (*right*) during his free time. He soon got his first taste of fashion. “I was doing my military service and I had 20 days off on vacation in Milan,” he explained to *Time* magazine. Through a friend, he got a job at a department store. “I started assisting the photographer, designing the windows and things.” He found that he really enjoyed this work, and he decided to drop his career goal of medicine in order to go into fashion and design.



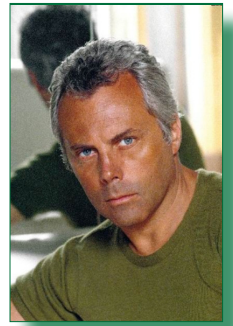
Upon completion of his stint in the armed forces in 1957, Armani found a job as a window dresser at La Rinascente, a department store in Milan. He went on to become a seller for the menswear department, where he gained valuable experience in the marketing aspect of the fashion industry. In 1961, he was spotted by Nino Cerruti (*left*) and hired as the designer for Cerruti’s new menswear line, Hitman. His skills were in demand, and for the next decade, while continuing to work for Cerruti, Armani also freelanced, contributing designs to as many as ten different manufacturers.



In the late 1960s, when he was still feeling unsure of himself and the direction of his personal and professional life, he met Sergio Galeotti, an architectural draftsman, who was to become the biggest influence in his life and in his work. They met in Milan; Galeotti was also a provincial boy who was excited by the opportunities of the city. Armani found in Galeotti the reassurance, the love even, that had been so absent in his childhood home. This personal and professional bond lasted for many years.

In 1973, Galeotti persuaded him to open a fashion design office in Milan, at 37 Corso Venezia. This led to a period of extensive collaboration, during which Armani worked as a freelance

designer for a number of fashion houses. The international press was quick to acknowledge Armani's importance following the runway shows at the Sala Bianca in the Pitti Palace in Florence. The experience provided Armani with an opportunity to develop his own style in new ways. He was now ready to devote his energy to his own label, and on July 24, 1975 he founded Giorgio Armani SpA in Milan, with his friend Galeotti. The eagle became the famous insignia for the Armani label. In October of that same year, he presented his first collection of men's ready-to-wear for spring and summer 1976 under his own name. He also produced a women's line for the same season.

*Sergio Galeotti*

Armani established an innovative relationship with the fashion industry, characterized by the 1978 agreement with Gruppo Finanziario Tessile (GFT), which made it possible to produce luxury ready-to-wear clothing in a manufacturing environment under the attentive supervision of the company's designer. In 1979, almost a decade after he founded his own clothing line, he founded the Giorgio Armani Corporation. He began producing for the United States and introduced the Mani label for men and women. The Armani label became one of the leading names in international fashion with the introduction of several new product lines, including G. A. Le Collezioni, Giorgio Armani Underwear and Swimwear, and Giorgio Armani Accessories. In the early 1980s, the company signed an important agreement with L'Oréal to create perfumes and introduced the Armani Junior, Armani Jeans, and Emporio Armani lines, followed in 1982 by the introduction of Emporio Underwear, Swimwear, and Accessories.

A new store was opened in Milan for the Emporio line, followed by the first Giorgio Armani boutique. Armani's concern for the end-user culminated in the development of a more youthful product line with the same level of stylistic quality as his high-end line, but at a more reasonable price. Because of the democratic nature of the Emporio line, Armani felt that he had to make use of new and unconventional advertising methods. These included television spots and enormous street ads, together with a house magazine that was mailed to consumers, the faithful Armani Eagle wearers.

While his designs were popular in Europe, Armani hadn't made a big splash in the United States. He felt that a relationship with the movies was essential, both to promote his fashions and to provide a stimulus to creativity. In 1980, he was able to make an important breakthrough on this front. His clothes were worn by actor Richard Gere in the movie "American Gigolo" (1980), and this generated interest in Armani fashions in the US. Armani designed costumes for more than one hundred films, one of the most important of which was "The

Untouchables” (1987). He also provided much of the wardrobe for the hit television series “Miami Vice” (1984-89), starring Don Johnson.

The enormous buzz that Armani carried in the United States during the ‘80s was primarily due to his roster of celebrity clients. He became one of the first designers to actively seek out celebrities to get his fashions advertised, beginning with super stylish coach Pat Riley (*left*) when he was with the Los Angeles Lakers. Soon, many top Hollywood stars started wearing Armani on the red carpet at award shows, including Michelle Pfeiffer, Jodie Foster and John Travolta, among others. In 1982, Armani became the first fashion designer since Christian Dior in the 1940s to appear on the cover of Time magazine. That caused the ire of fellow Italian designer Valentino, who failed to understand why he was overlooked.



For the non-celebrity, business professionals Armani fashions became a symbol of success during the 1980s. They especially sought out the

brand’s “power suits.” Armani’s idea was to take the terror out of fashion with a “new look.” To accomplish this fashion statement, he took the “skeleton” out of the traditional Savile Row suit, did away with the lining, moved the buttons, changed the proportions of the lapels, softened the shoulders, and, voila!, invented what became known as “the deconstructed jacket.” He gave fluidity where previously only stiffness had been.



His suits were “smart” for both men and women, making a statement about personal elegance and style just like the planes and the cars that the executives who wore them travelled in. With the rising feminism of the 1970s and early ‘80s, he was also able to appeal to female executives who were looking for professional, fashionable classic clothes along with his style of “casual chic.” Female executives bought Armani just as their male counterparts did for the stylish “power look” that these fashions provided. It is often said he introduced gentleness to men and strength to women in his fashion designs.

With demand high, Armani and Galeotti were able to grow the business, and in 1983 they modified the agreement with GFT. They began to produce both the Mani line for the US and the high-end ready-to-wear line (rechristened Borgonuovo 21), after the address of the company’s headquarters in Milan. However, in 1985, Armani suffered a great personal and professional loss when he lost his longtime personal partner and business associate, Galeotti, to complications from AIDS. While some thought that the business might suffer after



Galeotti's death, Armani showed the world that he was just as talented as an executive as he was as a designer.

During the late 1980s, Armani continued to expand commercial horizons and licensing agreements. He opened Armani Japan and introduced a line of eyeglasses (1988), socks (1987), a gift collection (1989), and a new "basic" men's and women's line for the US known as A/X Armani Exchange (1991), that represented Armani's attempt to break into the US mass market, offering lower prices for the relaxed chic clothes.

Expansion of the Armani line continued frenetically during the later 1990s; Giorgio Armani SpA introduced sportswear, watches, eyeglasses, cosmetics, home, and new accessories collections. In 2000, the 25th anniversary of the brand, there was a flurry of investment activity, including stock sales and the acquisition of other companies to provide new manufacturing capacity intended to increase Armani's control over the quality and distribution of his products.

He also prepared to break into the Chinese market by opening his first store in China, a small shop, in 1998. Chinese expansion continued during the years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; the small shop in Beijing was followed by a flagship store in Shanghai in 2004 and more stores to follow (reaching 40 by 2011). Hotels became a 21<sup>st</sup> century interest as well. Armani opened his first luxury hotel in Dubai in 2010 (*right*), followed by his second in Milan in 2011.



#### ARMANI TODAY

At the end of 2015, the last year that figures were available, there were 2,983 points of sale in more than 60 countries across the globe. These stores are divided into different brand sales: 165 Giorgio Armani stores, 338 Emporio Armani stores, 754 Armani Collezioni stores, 238 A|X Armani Exchange stores, 880 AJ Armani Jeans stores, 198 Armani Junior stores and 56 Armani/Casa stores.

Like other high-end fashion designers and companies, Armani has begun to consolidate his brands. In February, 2017, he announced that beginning in Spring, 2018 he would use only the Giorgio Armani, Emporio Armani, and A|X Armani Exchange names. Armani Collezioni and Armani Jeans will be blended into those three main lines. As Giorgio described the new organizational venture: "We are rethinking our stores. I don't believe in a strict separation of

categories, jackets all in one place, skirts all in another, pants in yet another. ... There was too much confusion with so many collections; times have changed and we have to evolve.”

The last point of the quote exemplifies why Armani has become one of the richest and most successful Italian fashion designers. He has been able to read the marketplace, evolve his designs and company, and bring fashionable clothes to changing generations of professional and ordinary buyers over his lifetime. He revolutionized fashion by changing the definition of men’s power suits, by altering the way women dressed, and by proving that “luxurious” doesn’t mean “uncomfortable and busy.” Synonymous with understated chic, Armani and his eagle logo have soared through fashion history.

*Adapted by James J. Boitano from: Biography.com; Successstory.com; Infomat Fashion Website; Askmen.com; Wikipedia.com; Armani, Giorgio. “10 Questions for Giorgio Armani.” Time Magazine, Online edition, Feb. 12, 2009. Huckbody, Jamie. “Giorgio Armani: the Man, the Style and the Brand.” Harper’s Bazaar, Online edition, March 2, 2009. Mackenzie, Suzie. “The Gentle Touch.” The Guardian, Online Edition. December 10, 2004. Zargani, Luisa. “Giorgio Armani Restructures Brands, Rethinks Distribution.” Women’s Wear Daily (WWD), Online edition, February 27, 2017.*

