

On the Italian job

In the wake of the pandemic, Italians are forging new paths in the reconstruction of their lives. We talk to three pioneers in the fields of food, economics and fashion.



Nicola Farinetti,
CEO, Eataly

Eataly's first food hall opened in 2007 in Turin and last year the company reported more than half a billion euros in revenue. Its mix of artisanal Italian food and drink on the shelves and in its restaurants, cafés and gastronomic workshops under one roof has seen a steady rollout in Italy, with more than a dozen domestic branches, as well as sites from Tokyo to Toronto. CEO Nicola Farinetti, son of founder Oscar Farinetti, oversees operations from Milan. — IC

What is your outlook for the coming months?

We are very optimistic. We've recently opened another location in Japan, we are going ahead with our next US site in Dallas and we hope to open our first London branch in the near future. We have plans for an outpost in Silicon Valley and have our sights on opening in Berlin, Madrid and Vienna.

What are the challenges facing your business?

Approximately 50 per cent of our revenue was from in-store dining so we've been coming up with new ways to reach clients. In places such as Milan and Rome we are working to boost the offerings on our website that are not just the standard selection of goods. Shoppers can order seasonal or limited items – it somewhat replicates the experience of going to the market.

What positives do you see?

A growing interest in quality foods prepared sustainably. In lockdown people got interested in cooking and learning about ingredients. Our shops were among the few accessible, pleasurable shopping experiences and we pride ourselves on making attractive spaces where people can learn a bit of the backstory behind great Italian brands. We invest in skilled personnel – from butchers to bakers – to transmit knowledge to the customer so one can learn, for example, how cattle are raised and how meat is prepared. Elsewhere you don't see supermarkets putting the same effort into hiring.

How important is the Slow Food philosophy to your business?

It's an added value. The milk used to make cappuccinos served in our Chicago branch is different from that used in New York. Also, when it comes to our locations abroad, we are not simply importing quality Italian foodstuffs such as pasta or cheese. Fish and meat are sourced locally, as are vegetables, because we search out the best quality growers and promote sustainable producers. Our aim is to transmit the best of Italian food culture, but also to bring in growers from surrounding communities.
eataly.com



Francesca Bria
President, Italian
Innovation Fund

Governments are turning to experts such as Francesca Bria for advice on rescuing economies in the wake of the pandemic. She is the president of the Italian Innovation Fund, honorary professor at UCL in London and former chief technology and digital innovation officer of the city of Barcelona. Bria believes that the public needs to be given a strategic role in shaping the country's prosperity: rebuilding the economy and sharing in future profits. Here she shares her insights on how to reconstruct and remodel Italy for the future. — FE

“We need a social contract for a digital society. We should call it a Digital Green New Deal”

What is digital sovereignty?

We should be able to set the direction of technological progress, put technology and data at the service of people and direct technological development to solve the most pressing social and environmental issues – the climate emergency, energy transition and public healthcare. We need a social contract for a digital society. We should call it a Digital Green New Deal because it is about using digital technologies to attain both social and environmental sustainability.

Digital and green – why do they go together?

By coupling a digital transition with a Green New Deal we can break the binary logic that presents us with only two scenarios for digital: Big State – the Chinese and Orwellian model – or Big Tech – Silicon Valley surveillance capitalism. Big State strips people of individual liberties; Big Tech creates data monopolies that will eventually run critical infrastructure such as healthcare or education. Neither is an option for a democratic Europe. I advocate a third way: Big Democracy. A democratisation of data, citizen participation and technology at the service of society and the ecological transition. I have tried to do this in Barcelona, turning municipal data into a common good, co-owned by all citizens and redefining the smart city to serve its people. If Europe fails to regain digital sovereignty, we risk becoming digitally colonised by both China and the US.

How can the Italian Innovation Fund contribute to this?

The Innovation Fund has more than €1bn to regenerate the Italian productive fabric and support talented young people. Our goal is to boost the Italian innovation ecosystem and direct it towards strategic missions and emerging technologies such as AI, next-generation chips and quantum computing to support the recovery and renewal of post-pandemic Italy. Aligned with the new industrial policy programmes in Europe, such as InvestEU and Next Generation EU, with massive resources for research, innovation and digitisation linked to the green transition, the strategy is clear: to move forward with a pan-European perspective. Europe stands at a crossroads: we can advance a new digital humanism that refuses Big State, Big Tech and the Tech Wall between China and the US. Europe can put technology at the service of people and make it a right and an opportunity for many instead of a privilege for a few.

Angela Missoni,
Creative director, Missoni

A symbol of the dolce vita born out of Italy's post-war economic boom, Missoni transformed the country's fashion by riffing on what was dynamic and new in the era. The industrial technology that radically updated artisan weaving traditions, the abstract and kinetic revolutions of modern art and a growing international outlook for this family business all bolstered Missoni's groundbreaking collections in a dizzying rainbow of zigzags and stripes.

Founders Ottavio and Rosita Missoni kept control of the company even as the success of its ready-to-wear grew wildly in the decades following its birth in 1953. Today, with daughter Angela Missoni as the brand's creative director and president, the family's vision of a global fashion house remains intact – and is helping Missoni through another transformative time in Italy's history.



“We're fortunate to have inherited a brand from my parents that was founded on the principle of living well, rather than on making as much money as possible,” says Angela. Of course, that doesn't mean that Missoni has completely shied away from big market moves: the company sold just over 40 per cent to the FSI equity fund in 2018 to augment the brand's worldwide presence. But the latter remains a minority stakeholder and, most

importantly, it's a partner that “shares our vision of moderate growth over time,” says Angela.

Despite its considered approach, Missoni has also had the guts to experiment: during Italy's lockdown, with a need to prepare for an uncertain future, the company took the bold step of appointing a CEO, Livio Proli, a first for the brand after a brief experiment in 2015. Proli is the first executive to have power over all aspects of the brand and to be able to execute changes quickly. Angela says, “We decided that we were going to start back up after the quarantine with a positive leap forward.”

That leap includes Proli's overhaul of the company's structure to ready it for growth in new markets, an expansion of menswear for 2021 and an international sales network for the brand's sister line, M Missoni, headed since last year by Angela's daughter Margherita Maccapani Missoni. The brand has hired its first executive in China to spur sales and shop openings in what remains a reliable market as American sales continue to struggle.

Relying on a network of stockists and online sales, rather than only flagship stores, has helped the brand weather the toughest months. Despite the challenging climate, Angela maintains that there are positive lessons to be drawn. “At least during lockdown we saw that the possibility to change – for us, for society – exists,” she says.

One of the modifications Missoni is eyeing up is a rethink of the runway show format; as the cycle for releases gets tighter and tighter, Angela believes that collections should be shown to the public when they hit the shops. “This period of change will help rewire fashion,” she says. This is a time of intense strain on the fashion system in Italy, but members of one of the country's most emblematic industries are collaborating to thrive. “We're very united in fashion in Italy,” says Angela. “And it's interesting to live through a revolution.” — LR
missoni.com