In the most traditional of Italian ways—over great food—the Camera Nazionale della Moda Italiana (CNMI), led by chairman Carlo Capasa, welcomed the New York press to a sumptuous lunch feast Wednesday to promote the upcoming fifth annual Sustainable Fashion Awards in Milan.

The event returns live on September 25 after a physical hiatus during the pandemic in 2020. The Italian fashion organization took the opportunity to announce the nominees of the Bicester award, the ceremony's celebrity host, and restate its mission of establishing a concrete set of guidelines for the fashion community across the globe to adhere to.

Held at Casa Cipriani on South Street in lower Manhattan, the lunch was made possible in collaboration with the Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI) of the United Nations, a program of the International Trade Center, and with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, the Italian Trade Agency, and the Milan City Council.

Desiree Bollier, chair and chief merchant of Value Retail Management and creator and operator of The Bicester Collection, a luxury multi-discipline shopping destination, joined Capasa for the event. The retail group partners with the CNMI and sponsors the Bicester Collection Award for Emerging Designers, one of the twelve awards to be given.

"Part of our DNA and raison d'etre is to support talent – fashion, art, and music at large. We are committed to this, and one of our values is innovation," Bollier said before announcing this year's finalists: Torlowei, Nkwo Onwuka, and Themoiré (the former are both Nigerian brands and the latter Italian).
Bollier explained the winner would display and sell their collection at the eleven Bicester Collection Villages across Europe and China. Additionally, they will have the opportunity to design an exclusive range of products to be sold at the group’s U.S. affiliate properties, The Ozone boutique in San Diego, and the Isles Lab concept store at the UBS Arena.

Winners also receive a year of mentorship to guide them through the business aspects of helming a collection.

“When the 2008 financial crisis hit, we realized young designers would not survive if we didn’t step in and support them. So, we established the Creative Spot pop-up for designers to display and sell their collections. Over time we added a mentorship program to help designers with practical matters such as contracts, leases, and other non-creative decisions,” continued Bollier. Previous designers to benefit from the program include Richard Quinn, Tiziano Guardini, Mary Katrantzou, Christopher Kane, and Erdem Moralioglu.

Also in attendance was Riccardo Vannetti, who serves as CNMI’s strategic projects director. He announced the evening’s host, Rossy de Palma, as a multi-hyphenate in cinema, fashion, music, modeling, and performing arts with a personal commitment and passion for philanthropy in sustainability, human rights, and environmental justice. Vannetti also confirmed the location as Milan’s Teatro alla Scala and other details for the approximately twelve awards to be given out. Winners are selected based on their commitment to sustainability in its highest meaning pertaining to vision, innovation, commitment to craftsmanship, recognition of differences, circular economy, human rights, and environmental justice.

Besides Capasa, the panel of twelve judges includes Dame Ellen MacArthur, founder and chair of trustees, Ellen MacArthur Foundation; Simone Cipriani, head and founder of the Ethical Fashion Initiative at the International Trade Centre, chairperson of the UN Alliance for Sustainable Fashion; Federica Marchionni, CEO, Global Fashion Agenda and Kerry Kennedy, President Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights.

The New York lunch was the last stop on a global tour promoting the awards that included meeting with The Fédération de la Haute Couture et de la Mode in Paris; the German press in Munich; and the British Fashion Council in London. The aim was not only to spotlight and familiarize foreign press with the event, which took place live in 2017, 2018, and 2019 and then digitally in 2020, but also to reiterate the need for a cohesive approach to all pillars of sustainability as outlined by CNMI. These include design, raw material choices and their processing.
pillars of sustainability as outlined by CNMI. These include design, raw material choices and their processing methods, distribution, marketing and sales practices, management systems, contribution to the national economic system, business ethics, transparency, and education.

In his welcome speech, Capasa talked about CNMI's early days of getting Italian powerhouse brands such as Giorgio Armani, Gucci, Prada, Valentino, Versace, Bottega Veneta, Fendi, Moncler, and more, on board with sustainability goals.

"Italy produces 70 percent of the world's luxury goods, so we have a huge responsibility, giving us the right to help establish guidelines. It's the second largest business sector in Italy, valued at 100 billion euros in wholesale sales yearly, which is 250 billion euros on the market," he explained while also making light of his country's current political woes.

Alluding to the belief that cooperation isn't the Italians' strong suit, he said initially; the brands were wary of sharing their practices with one another.

"Once they started to get to know each other and discuss sustainability, they realized you must all do it together, or it doesn't exist. The whole chain must be sustainable with the whole community working together. Now they share new innovations they discover. There is new cooperation that was not in fashion before," he continued, pointing out the shared production and distribution chain.

The CNMI worked with the United Nations Ethical Fashion Initiative and the Ellen Macarthur Foundation to give a framework of rules and guidelines. From this, the ESG (Environment, Social, and Governance) due diligence table was created by EFI in collaboration with the CNMI.

"Now we have over 92 percent of the Italian supply chain using the chemical guidelines; that's 67,000 production and 60,000 distribution businesses using it.

"We must share the rules; it has to be part of the whole system, not just by brand or country. Let's cooperate on these practices and set up a system that works for all. We can build upon the Fashion Pact," noted Capasa adding, "Fashion sets trends, so if we start as an industry, others will follow."

By Roxanne Robinson

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