

BAZAAR Harper's

On the outskirts of Rome there's a strange and stunning suburb called EUR. Conceived in the 1930s to host the 1942 World's Fair that never happened, it was completed in the 1960s and is rich in pristine colonnades, arches and white marble. It's heart-stoppingly beautiful and extremely modern, and it is where much of *La Dolce Vita*—that hymn to Italian glamour—was shot.

It is no coincidence that the Tod's factory in the small town of Brancadoro, near the Adriatic coast—white with huge windows and endless rows of columns—is eerily reminiscent of EUR. For the genius of Tod's is to turn the idea of *la dolce vita* into a lifestyle—and one that's achievable only by the very elegant and the extremely rich.

Until recently, fans of the brand, and its vision of what being an Italian really looks and feels like, had only been able to wear Tod's impeccable Gommino driving shoes on their feet, or carry one of its curved, sculpted little bowler bags on their wrists. Then, in September last year, Alessandra Facchinetti, the label's new director, launched its first clothing collection at Milan's contemporary-art museum and a space as white and g as anything in EUR or Brancadoro. For this, more a performance than a catwalk show, she sent the square-jawed, pristine Magdalena Frackowiak down a Modernist staircase onto grey-carpeted runway. Frackowiak was wearing a long-sleeved, oxblood T-shirt in calf-skin with a matching pencil skirt and Gommino shoes and carrying a white leather Sella bag. She followed by models in a restrained colour palette of black, white, putty pink, cream and red. They wore punched poplin skirts, and leather shifts that flowed like cotton. Billowing white shirts worked with slim trousers. Hair was tied in loose ponytails and every look was as cool, elegant and exactly right as a chilled Bellini on the Lido. This is what the Tod's woman wants to look like. 'That first look was the stand-out one from the show for me,' says Facchinetti, draped over a plush dark-green sofa in her Milan office. 'It said everything I wanted to say about the show. That was what it was about.'

For this was Facchinetti's challenge: to take a label famed for its shoes and to invent the fashions to go with them; to dress the woman from the feet up. 'The stories were built around the accessories,' she says, her own legs encased in beautiful leather boots and a brown poplin skirt, a huge gold-filigree brooch pinned to her black poplin shirt and her dark-brown hair in a ponytail as relaxed as those on her catwalk. 'There had to be a certain lifestyle embodied in the clothes, and the feeling of luxury, obviously. The ability to use leather like cloth.'

'Alessandra combined our dream of the Italian style of life with a great quality of design and a true femininity,' says Diego Della Valle (or Mr DDV, as he is known to his staff), the president and CEO of Tod's. 'But the thing that's really important is that she's an Italian woman of great style and creativity herself, and so she's a good ambassador for what we're doing.' So exactly does Facchinetti embody the brand that furniture and lights, indeed the very sofa she's sitting on, were taken from her own home and atelier and transported to the show space to give journalists and buyers a sense of the interiors the Tod's clothes would and should be worn in.

Facchinetti is undeniably a woman of great style and creativity. She has the same intense blue eyes as her father, Roby Facchinetti, a 1960s rock star who, in the manner of Italian music stars, is huge in Italy and totally unheard-of here. 'He's still singing,' she confirms, laughing slightly ruefully. Her brother is a DJ, and, as a young girl growing up in Bergamo, just north of Milan, she trained to be a ballet dancer. Fashion soon took over and she left home aged 17 to study at Milan's Istituto Marangoni. After graduating, she went to work for Miuccia Prada at Miu Miu, where she stayed for seven years. 'It taught me everything,' she says now. She followed this with a stint at Gucci, where, when Tom Ford left, she briefly took over as creative director. She then had a couple of difficult seasons in the same role at Valentino, after Valentino Garavani himself stepped down in 2007. At the time, she claimed never to don a pair of jeans, and to wear flat shoes no more than twice a year, identifying herself with the label's red-carpet aesthetic of full-length gauze and ruffles, flowers and frills, and punishingly high heels. These days, she dresses more in keeping with the brand she now embodies. 'I have started to wear

The building itself is a futuristic mix of factory and gallery, with a staircase in the shape of a hippo's mouth by Ron Arad; a giant Felice Limosani globe in Tod's signature warm orange; and mobiles by Jacob Hashimoto that flutter in the breeze whenever anyone opens one of the giant glass doors.

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