

**MATTEO AND LORENZO have something in common: they both work to make fashion more sustainable**  
by GIACOMO TALIGNANI - photo by ADRIANO RUSSO

**Ward with his projects, Bertelli in his company. They didn't know each other, we enabled them to meet up**  
- photo by BRIGITTE LACOMBE

## interview

Put them at the same table and they will form a party. They already have the programme: fashion that is more sustainable and therefore able to give things their right value once again. If that were the case, «my mother Miuccia would also join the party», jokes Lorenzo Bertelli, an executive at Prada, smiling beside Matteo Ward, founder of Wråd and author of *Junk: Armadi pieni*, a documentary that puts the spotlight on fast fashion and its by now renowned lack of sustainability.

They did not know each other, so we enabled them to meet for the first time: a discussion on the future of the fashion industry between someone such as Ward, who came from fashion but who has left it to tell of its dark side, and someone such as Lorenzo, who, ever since he became Head of Corporate Social Responsibility for the Prada Group, has increasingly invested in sustainability projects such as Re-Nylon (recycled plastic waste to produce garments) and Sea Beyond, an educational programme on the oceans. It could be said that there's a spark between them.

GIACOMO TALIGNANI: What is your first memory of nature?

MATTEO WARD: «I'm half from Seattle and half from Vicenza. For four months a year my father would take me to live among bears, rivers with salmon and trees, travelling on horseback. My relationship with nature has always been symbiotic. Returning to Italy, I suddenly missed the aromas, sounds and love for those places».

LORENZO BERTELLI: «For me - I only realize now - something must have been triggered with skiing, which has always been my passion. I remember a first winter, perhaps aged 10 or so, in which there was no snow but daisies: it was traumatizing. I believe that moment was the first triggering of my awareness of the changes and balances of nature».

«After the Rana Plaza I began to ask myself questions. And I understood that you could do politics with fashion»

GT: And with fashion? You were practically both born inside it.

LB: «For me, as a child, it was just my parents' job. Still today, not being a designer, I don't believe I have my own creative fashion ideas. But travelling with my parents sparked a curiosity about cultural thought behind the aesthetics of things».

MW: «My father produced technical clothing: for me it was annoying because the house was invaded by samples. And then, since we already had them, I was forced to use those products, even if I didn't like them. Growing up, I became convinced that I would never work in fashion. I wanted to be a politician. But in the end I became entangled, a bit by chance».

GT: When did fashion and nature combine?

MW: «At the moment when I understood that you could do politics through fashion. When, in 2013, Rana Plaza collapsed (the textile factory in Bangladesh in which there were thousands of victims, *ed.*) I wondered what I was doing. Before I had never asked myself where, how, with whom we produced jeans or t-shirts. I began to ask questions and it all began».

LB: «Whereas for me it was a path. There was already the family's cultural thought on sustainability, but I noticed that it had not permeated the whole company; there was a lack of awareness. So I tried to bring the theme into Prada more methodically».

GT: Today, however, fast fashion is increasingly exploiting the planet's resources. Should we set ourselves some limits?

LB: «We and fast fashion are different. But in general, I can say that to find a balance again the most important thing is to change consumers' mentality. Either the policies change it or else companies do so privately. We must see sustainability not as a cost, but as a means of giving things their right value back. If capitalism works well, then it will be the greatest

accelerator towards sustainability. Everyone must know that if they buy a cotton t-shirt for 5 euros there's something that's not right: that can't be the right value. Till now a part of the world of fashion has closed its eyes to the welfare of people and to sustainability for the sake of making people buy cheaply. But that isn't right anymore; we must dismantle the big illusion that we can all afford everything».

MW: «I agree with Lorenzo, often in schools they tell me that a dress is too dear. But aren't we used to the fact that in fast fashion everything costs too little? We're forgetting the real value of the human and natural resources used to make something. The first step is to reconsider the value of a product, but this story must be told well».

«Today everyone must know that if they buy a cotton t-shirt for 5 euros there's something that's not right»

GT: How is the change communicated?

LB: «Communicative capacity is the problem of this historical period. But history teaches us that we can succeed: in food, for example, it has happened. Today you know that if the prices in a restaurant rise it's because quality food costs. But communicating sustainability is more complex».

MW: «As children they tell you you mustn't waste food, the same must be done with fashion. But whereas with food there's a more rational approach - unless you're like me and can't resist chocolate (he laughs, *ed.*) - in fashion purchasing is an emotional issue. We must apply the awareness of the operation of the brain when we buy to the creation of campaigns that can inspire virtuous behaviour».

GT: Can politics help in this?

LB: «It's madness to think that today a private person can do it alone without the public. Politics is useful, but it should rediscover the dimension of doing things that are right».

MW: «I've found my political partner! I agree, there are spheres that politics can no longer ignore. It must deal with the impact of fashion on resources, with the fact that 8% of skin diseases are caused by contact with toxic substances, by the management of all that fast fashion waste that we don't see because we throw it away on the other side of the world and it's spread out in layers in Ghana or in Chile. To stop ultra fashion the French have understood the importance of legislating: fashion is at the centre of political agendas. Why don't we do it in Italy too? Luckily, even if with timid steps, the EU is trying».

GT: What is the role of social media?

LB: «They excite me, but I don't use them much, some I haven't even downloaded, but I must admit that they help boost awareness of sustainability. Let's use them well: like other technological discoveries they can show the idea that you can generate profit with sustainability».

MW: «Today on the brands' sites there's always a page on transparency and traceability, something that didn't exist a few years ago. Do you know why? It came about from a hashtag (*#whomademyclothes*) launched on the socials to ask about the origins of clothes. It has involved more than half a billion people and suddenly not only the companies have adapted, but now also the European Commission is thinking about directives on traceability».

GT: How do we make sustainability cool?

LB: «By communicating it well. We must explain that you're cooler if you dress sustainably. The true revolution will be the new generations, who are already understanding it. We have the intelligence and the technological knowledge to live in balance with the Earth, but we must adapt. When consumers became aware of the food eaten at fast food restaurants, they changed that sector: The same can happen with fast fashion».

MW: «When I go into schools and I describe how an organic shirt is made, they become distracted. Whereas if I simply tell them that the same t-shirt makes them look cooler, they all want it. We work on this communication and focus on durability. Let's always remember that the elephant in the room is a system that produces 150 billion clothing items every year: it's too much stuff and made very badly».

LB: «Not only, we always show the youngsters new references, alternatives to distinguish what is better or worse, to grow. I'll give you an odd example: once a boy and a girl entered Fondazione Prada and at the gate, not recognizing me, they asked me where the magic mushrooms were. At the beginning I didn't understand, then I realized they were talking about the mushrooms by artist Carsten Höller, an artwork in the Tower. For me this was very satisfying: through the brand we had encouraged people diametrically opposed to the type of museum culture to visit something new, to give them alternatives».

GT: Express a wish: what world would you like to see for 2050?

LB: «As a new father, I would like the word sustainability to become everyday for the children of the whole world. And for Italy not to be just the country where everyone talks about food, but where everyone discusses how to benefit the environment».

MW: «I hope to be unemployed (today he is a sustainability consultant, *ed.*). It will be good if the word sustainability is normalized in 2050: it will mean we've learned to give sacredness and the right value to things». ■

Captions

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OPENING

Right, Lorenzo Bertelli, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility for the Prada Group.

Left, Matteo Ward, entrepreneur and campaigner involved in the field of sustainable fashion.

ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Right, a frame from the documentary

*Junk: Armadi pieni* realized by Matteo Ward for *Will*.

Opposite page, images from the Prada Re-

Nylon project by *National Geographic*

Creative Works. Following page, a whale shark and a huge plastic bag.

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**PROFILE**

*Lorenzo Bertelli, aged 36, is the son of Miuccia Prada and Patrizio Bertelli. A graduate in philosophy and a rally enthusiast (he has participated in the world WRC) and skiing, he has sat on the board of directors of Prada since 2015 and occupies the position of Head of Corporate Social Responsibility for the Prada Group. Last October he became a father to Athena.*

*Born in 1986, Matteo Ward is an entrepreneur involved in the field of sustainable fashion. Born to a mother from Vicenza and an American father, he studied International Economics at the Bocconi University and Business Sustainability Management at the University of Cambridge. After six years at Abercrombie & Fitch, he resigned to commit himself to "changing the fashion system". Today he is Managing Director and co-founder of Wråd, the benefit corporation.*