FEDERICO PRATESI DISCUSSES FAMILY, HOME AND THE WORLD’S MOST LUXURIOUS LINENS

For over a century, Pratesi linens have dressed the beds of the world’s rich and famous. From Ernest Hemingway to Elizabeth Taylor and Coco Chanel, the family owned company has built a dedicated and legendary clientele over the years due to the impeccable quality of its linens. Continuing the tradition of excellence, today the luxury linen maker is run by the fourth generation, overseen by Federico Pratesi, with whom our colleagues at Luxury Portfolio International® had the opportunity to discuss the history of the family business.

LP: How did the Pratesi tradition begin?
FP: A century-old Tuscan tradition saw women and young girls gather in groups to embroider the most exquisite linens by hand. At the turn of the century a young wine merchant, Remigio Pratesi, my great grandfather, observed them and had an interesting idea: What if he hired these girls to work for him? He would be able to select fabrics and styles of embroidery from around the world, and thus sell a unique product. It was an idea that would transform the fortunes of the family and under the guidance of the next two generations made Pratesi a name of passion and a legend of luxury. Remigio’s son, Brunetto, started selling their linens to English merchants in the port of Livorno and the ever-increasing requests prompted an evolution that made him become, in the following years, the major supplier to the chic holiday resorts of Forte dei Marmi, Italy. In Forte dei Marmi, the first store was opened in 1945 followed by a fabulous store on Via Montenapoleone in Milan in 1958. Brunetto’s son, and my father, Athos, had a brilliant entrepreneurial mind, as well as a strong desire to make the Pratesi name known worldwide. He was conscious of a very delicate balance: preserving his father’s personal touches while bringing their product to untapped markets.

LP: Pratesi has had its fair share of high-profile clients – have you had any particularly memorable experiences with one of your well-known clients that you could share?
FP: I remember walking down Madison Avenue with my father and we were stopped by an eccentric gentleman who loved my father’s orange Casentino coat. Neither my father nor I spoke English at that time, so we didn’t understand. After a cappuccino at Sant Ambreous, we went back to our shop and happened to meet the same character, but this time we were properly introduced by our store manager. It was then we realized he was Mr. Andy Warhol, an aficionado of Pratesi. After thanking him for being a fan, my father had an identical Casentino coat with the same notched fox collar made for him. As a thank you, Mr. Warhol gifted the painting “Stardust Shoes” to our family. It still hangs in our dining room.

LP: Your family home in Tuscany, Villa Lunardi, was recently featured in Architectural Digest – will you talk about what that home means to you?
FP: Yes, it was an honor to be featured in AD! Although we all love our own places, Villa Lunardi will always be our home where my family’s roots are, where we all belong to and have great memories. Once every three months we have our family reunion there. It’s like a family forum where everyone feels free to express their opinions on family, personal and business matters.

LP: What is your favorite memory of the home?
FP: The parties! Our house at 7 a.m. is beautiful and chic, but when it’s ready to hold a party it is magical! The guests and the wine do the rest.

LP: You’re a father of two – are you grooming a fifth generation to take over the family business?
FP: Yes indeed. I am proud to be a father to Margherita and Athos. The mission though has already been accomplished as Carolina, the daughter of my sister Isabella, has recently joined the company. And Margherita, my daughter, is helping out, as well. In fact, she has helped me type this lovely interview.
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