

Lifestyle

Clothes Make the Man



An Interview with Michael Reslan, Founder, Michael Reslan

EDITORS' NOTE *Clothier Michael Reslan worked with Beltrami and was later hired as a salesman in Brioni's first state-side boutique, where he became a creative manager and eventually assumed the role of Executive Vice President and Director of Retail USA before creating his own brand, Michael Reslan (www.michaelreslan.com). His boutique – a custom suit atelier that provides the highest quality garments and shoes that Italy has to offer as well as of those of his own label, MR – sits high above Fifth Avenue in Manhattan and is an oasis for elite clients who may help themselves to a drink at the store's bar.*



Michael Reslan

You had a long and successful career with Brioni, one of the leading brands in the industry. What made you feel it was the right timing for the creation of the Michael Reslan brand?

I wanted to bring it back to where it all began. This business is in my DNA and the clients that I have served became friends over the years. These guys travel the world and seek the best of the best.

Big corporations have design teams that design a certain number of pieces for the season, but they are not on the frontlines, in touch with clients. I was content with Brioni until the management changed. I knew there would be a void in this industry, because they were going into sportswear – where the money is. I wanted to go in the opposite direction by serving customers who want the very best the world has to offer in an environment that is luxurious and, most of all, comfortable.

Michael Reslan is designed for people who want the world and want it now. There is nothing you can tell our clients that they don't already know.

Where are you getting product and how have you taken that to a different level?

I'm armed with between \$150 and \$170 million worth of buying experience in my tenure with Brioni – 12 years worth of buying. So I went back to Italy and started dealing with the same people that I was dealing with and they met me with open arms.

For instance, I go to a sweater company and I may see 25 styles that they have for the season from their own design team. I pick one or two, size them up, fine tune them a bit, change them to what I like, pick the colors, and buy; I do the same thing with the shoes and the shirts.

There is not one single thing that makes everything across the board the best, so you have to scout – you have to do the legwork and put all of these things under one roof so your clients can enjoy one-stop shopping for the best from the who's who in Italy. There is no one in the world that makes better garments than the Italians, because there is passion and integrity involved. Italians started with little artisan shops but most people are not really touching that area now – they're looking for the big places.

When somebody starts at the beginning, it's about a connection, a trust, a commitment, and an appreciation but once they become too big, integrity suffers and the product is affected. So I'm bringing it back to where it all began.

You have a beautiful space on Fifth Avenue in midtown Manhattan. How important is that in serving the clients and providing that luxury experience?

The clientele we're dealing with – the who's who around the world – are people for whom others may have to wait for months for a 20-minute appointment. It's why I sought out a place like this – I know it's what they want.

They come in and sit for hours; this is their leisure time. They can smoke a cigar on the balcony, they can have any drink they want, and they can use their electronics or do their own thing. I try to give them a moment to relax and be happy. I never try to sell them anything. But if they want something, I'm here for them.

Are there moments when you have to pinch yourself to realize what you've created?

I ask myself, how did I do this? But I believe life is a reflection.

You can't tell the people we're dealing with anything, because they see everything. When they shake your hand, they assess you in two seconds. They have to buy you before they buy the product. What makes us unique is that we are sure of ourselves and our product, and of the needs of the clients we're serving.

We don't have to prove much because if we are true to these things I've touched on, they can see it.

There was a time when people talked about a more casual lifestyle. Is there an appreciation of luxury today?

There is nothing wrong with dressing in a sporty mode. But there are tiers in life – there is a suit and then there is a suit. I'm not talking about a suit for \$200 and a suit for \$10,000 – it's not about the money. It's about how elegant it is and what fabric it is made from. So it's not just the price – it's the quality and the feel.

In today's world, are clothes still really that important?

Yes, the clothes always make the man. When you're well dressed, you walk differently, you act differently, you smile differently, and you enter the room elegantly – not loudly. You don't have to say anything in the boardroom but people ask who you are. You look like a superstar.

Clothes are important.

How do you avoid venturing into too many areas and losing your core focus?

We called this company Jet Setter Clothing LLC because we are dealing with jet-setters. We have to understand the lifestyle of all these people: what hot spots they frequent, what furniture they like, and who the architects and designers of the world are in every area in their lifestyle.

Once you know that and you feel there is a void in an area of the lifestyle that they seek, there is nothing wrong with a clothing brand making a great sofa and putting their name on it. Not to mass sell it, but it's important to show and for me to keep up with lifestyle.

The extension of a brand should not be about putting your name on perfume or eyewear because that sells a lot; it's more than that. If you focus on elegance and don't have dollar signs in mind, the dollars come in. It's all about integrity. Once you remove the integrity and passion from something that you're doing, then you're not in the lifestyle business – you're in business for business. ●

Luxurious indoor and outdoor space at Michael Reslan (above)