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PASQUALE NATUZZI JUNIOR, NATUZZI'S COMMUNICATION AND DEPUTY CREATIVE DIRECTOR, AT HIS TRULLO ON THE FAMILY'S PUGLIAN ESTATE. HE IS DRAWING ON LOCAL ARTISANSHIP, NEW TECHNOLOGY AND INTERNATIONAL DESIGN TALENT TO REINVIGORATE THE FURNITURE BRAND

Yours trulli

A Natuzzi scion launches his vision for the giant Italian furniture maker

PHOTOGRAPHY: JAMES REEVE WRITER: EMMA O'KELLY

'Where are the figs in the basket?' is the Natuzzi family motto, framed and on display in the company HQ in Puglia, southern Italy. While others opt for *carpe diem* or other well-worn rallying cries, this furniture-making dynasty uses figs as a measure of success.

It all started in the 1930s with grandfather Natuzzi. 'He was one of eight children from a poor and humble family, a carpenter with big hands,' recalls his grandson Pasquale Natuzzi Junior, the company's communication and deputy creative director. 'My father was a rebel and wanted to find his freedom. He would go off and claim he was making things happen, and my grandfather would say, "That's all well and good, but where are the figs in the basket?"'

Today, these 'figs' represent an annual turnover of €457.2m, making Natuzzi Italy's largest furniture company. With eight manufacturing plants (including five in Italy) and 394 stores all over the world, it's an impressive achievement for 77-year-old founder Pasquale Senior, the rebellious son who started selling upholstered sofas and armchairs from a tiny shop in the Puglian city of Taranto in 1959. Instead of migrating to the industrial heartlands of northern»

IN PASQUALE JUNIOR'S TRULLO, FURNISHINGS INCLUDE A PAIR OF 'ANTEPRIMA' ARMCHAIRS BY CLAUDIO BELLINI FOR NATUZZI AND THE BRAND'S 'MARTINI' STANDING LAMP

Italy as business grew, he moved just 60km to Santeramo in Colle, and 40 years on, a slick showroom and Style Centre has put this typical Puglian town, with its olive groves, rustic brick walls and ancient trulli houses, on the map.

Although 38 per cent of the company is owned by shareholders, Natuzzi still remains a family-run business. The three eldest of Pasquale's five children all work in Santeramo in Colle: Nunzia, the eldest, manages human resources; Annamaria heads up the Style Centre, co-ordinating a team of colourists, stylists and materials experts; and Pasquale Junior – or PJ – has recently been given his brand ambassador role.

Annamaria has worked at the Natuzzi HQ for 20 years and remembers being brought on site in her pushchair. PJ too was groomed from a very young age. 'My father would invite people round for dinner and introduce me. I would stand in front of them and tell them that one day I would like to be in charge of the company.'

A more charismatic young contender to the family throne would be hard to find. Witty and good humoured, and immaculately dressed in bespoke, monogrammed suits, 27-year-old PJ has injected the company with a dose of youthful energy. He is charged with repositioning Natuzzi from conventional furniture maker, known largely for its leather sofas, to directional lifestyle brand, and he goes about it with a breezy enthusiasm. He's a fixture on the party scene at furniture fairs in Milan, New York and London, and a vivacious networker, responsible for forging collaborations with young designers.

This year at New York's ICFE, 'Re-Vive', Natuzzi's bestselling leather reclining armchair, was reworked by American graffiti artists Edward Granger, Jon Burgerman and Hektad. British pattern pros Eley Kishimoto, Patternity and Camille Walala have also created limited-edition versions of the chair. The brand's latest collaborators include Maurizio Manzoni and Roberto Tapinassi from StudioMemo, Victor Vasilev, Claudio Bellini, Mauro Lipparini and Australian Jamie Durie, while 2018 will see the launch of a new collection, as well as collaborations with designers such as Marcel Wanders.

'When I [started working here], everyone was in a small space, not speaking. It was not



'Imagine a sofa that can detect your wellbeing, monitor your heart rate, tell you to slow down... a "caring" sofa'

a good atmosphere,' recalls PJ from his newly renovated glass office in the Style Centre. 'There was conflict. People were resistant to trying new things.' He brought in new faces, among them a pal from his DJing days who doubles as a product designer, and a new marketing team to build Natuzzi's digital profile and draw in millennials.

'My generation live in small spaces, so we never buy a piece of furniture with just one function. It must allow for eating, working and resting, for example,' he says. Integrated tech is a must too in an ever-connected world. 'Imagine a sofa that can detect your wellbeing, monitor your breathing and>>



AT NATUZZI'S FACTORY IN LATERZA, FROM TOP, A 'MENTORE' SOFA (SET TO BE LAUNCHED IN OCTOBER) SEEN UNDER CONSTRUCTION, AND A 'SUN' POUF, CURRENTLY BEING PROTOTYPED

heart rate, tell you you've got to slow down. Of course it's scary, but not if you look at it in a different way, as a "caring" sofa that's a companion.'

Natuzzi sees connecting with the internet of things and small-space living as key interior trends for 2018. In the Style Centre, fabric swatches, terrazzo samples and wooden finishes are chosen to chime with such trends and placed in one of three consumer categories, from 'sophisticated single' to 'career and family' to 'bourgeois prosperity'. Printouts of sofas, some resurrected from Natuzzi's archive of 4,000 pieces, are pinned on the walls. Smart textiles and foams including Climalite, an 'ultimate comfort' foam that Natuzzi has patented, sit alongside new tableware, vases, ceramics and perfumes with a Puglian feel. These 'prêt-à-porter' accessories first appeared in stores last year, and Natuzzi is drawing on the region's rich artisanal history for future products. 'Our land is full of natural sculpture, olive trees and sunsets,' says PJ. Clear blue skies, dramatic beaches and trulli (including PJ's own on his father's estate) have become seductive backdrops to Natuzzi's catalogues.

Rewind 25 years and Pasquale Senior was not looking to Puglia for inspiration. The heel of Italy was still a dusty, forgotten outpost. He turned his attention to Europe, the Middle East and the US. He started engineering components himself and specialising in leather, and his chubby, buxom sofas in an array of bright colours seduced Americans. In 1993, the company was listed on the New York Stock Exchange. 'My father was crazy at that time!' says PJ. 'He put shiny black floors and ceilings together with pink leather sofas, made sofas in every colour. Versace would come to the house to make him brightly coloured shirts.' (PJ took them to Ibiza and they never made it back).

Today, leather sofas are made under the Natuzzi Editions label, while Natuzzi Italia offers high-end, Italian-made furniture and accessories. Everything is conceived and developed in Puglia using the latest technology. In the Internal Quality Lab, a character resembling Q in the James Bond films puts each component through a series of rigorous tests. Leather hides are pounded by a device that mimics the impact of footprints before undergoing a colourfast test, involving exposure to 72 hours of fake sunlight. Metal samples are subjected to temperatures of -20 to 150°C, and are locked in a special machine with salt and steam to gauge corrosion levels.

In the nearby town of Laterza, the Natuzzi factory produces 1,500 sofas a week. Delivery trucks pull up by a roundabout planted with an olive tree. It's the company's new motif, appearing as an abstract circle on furniture and prints. And like Grandfather Natuzzi's figs, it's a metaphor for graft, endurance and success. ✱

natuzzi.com