

THE HAND *of* FASHION.

POST LUXURY //

1st/Edition

—
many
hands
make
great
work!
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Create **without** destroying



Ilaria Venturini Fendi
of Carmina Campus
learning how to
bead with a Maasai
community on the
Ngong Hills in Kenya
Photo: Chloe Mukai



Designer Ilaria working on a collection of canvas bags embellished with recycled shuka, the traditional Maasai blanket

The development of the **Carmina Campus** project, an accessories and furniture brand established by Ilaria Venturini Fendi to ‘create without destroying’ has mirrored the development of the ITC Ethical Fashion Initiative itself. **Grant Fell** and **Rachael Churchward** visit **I Casali del Pino** where Carmina Campus is based to learn more about a project that also shares the mantra ‘Not Charity, Just Work’ Images: **Chloé Mukai** and **Grant Fell**.

In the midst of our thoroughly magnificent sojourn to Rome in July this year, ostensibly a trip to attend **AltaRoma AltaModa** and to spend some time with the ITC Ethical Fashion Initiative’s Simone Cipriani and Chloé Mukai, we were asked if we would like to meet Ilaria Venturini Fendi, one of the project’s staunchest supporters. We had already been taken by Simone and Chloé to have a look at her store RE(f)USE inside a **Fendi** family owned building on Via della Fontanella di Borghese in Rome’s upmarket shopping precinct. Nestled among an enclave of luxury brands the specialty store features fashion and design made exclusively with recycled or reused materials and is a key component of Ilaria’s expanding Carmina Campus project. There was one small problem; we had met Simone and Chloé on a Monday morning for cornetto and coffee and in Rome in mid-Summer many stores in the area were yet to open on a Monday morning. “Oh, let’s see if you can go out and see her the day after tomorrow then, she has a beautiful farm,” Simone suggested whilst looking at Chloé with a can-you-get-that-organised look. In

between shows, events and meetings over the next two days I began to assiduously garner as much information as I could about Carmina Campus, after all Ilaria was a daughter of the famous Fendi family, a family steeped in fashion history, a great Italian house. I would need to know my baguette from my bag bug at the very least.

I learnt that she was the youngest daughter of Anna, one of five Fendi sisters who transformed the brand post World War 2 into a global fashion powerhouse within which Ilaria’s sister Silvia Venturini Fendi remains the head accessories designer. Ilaria had been entrenched in the business as a shoe designer and Accessories Creative Director of the Fendissime line when she had something of an epiphany and felt an overwhelming desire to leave the city and lead a more simple, holistic and agrarian life. Consciously turning her back on the fashion industry she purchased I Casali del Pino, a beautiful farm situated on ancient Etruscan land northwest of Rome. Farming was as much in her blood as fashion via her father Giulio Venturini, a passionate outdoorsman who died when



Some workers from the Ethical Fashion Initiative Nairobi Hub were trained by the best artisans in Italy thanks to the collaboration with Carmina Campus.

she was young. It was here at the farm she launched the seed of Carmina Campus in 2006, a brand that aims to ‘create without destroying’ by making handbags, jewels and furniture out of reused materials.

“See you guys in the hotel foyer at 10am,” said Chloé, “we will grab a taxi”. We were excited as the week in the fabulous city of Roma had been extraordinary, a broad feast of historical, architectural, cultural and epicurean delight but a trip into the Italian countryside sounded perfect, although surely that would be an expensive taxi ride? We were surprised that the trip took little more than 30 minutes passing a string of fruit and flower shops and semi-rural, semi-suburban enclaves along the way. The farm was surprisingly close to town. Upon arrival we entered through a hooped gateway embellished with the words ‘Floracult’ in iron and a driveway lined with that most fabulously iconic tree of Roma, the Stone or Umbrella pine. Floracult? I wondered if we might perhaps be entering the ‘greenest’ place in Italy but we were not met by daisy-haired Roman flower children upon arrival but a lovely warm, smiling woman called Elisabetta Facco instead. Elisabetta explained that ‘Floracult’; was a massive three day nature and culture event which had recently been held on the farm, hence the sign was still up. Set on 174 acres of lush countryside I Casali del Pino is magnificent. Ilaria and her team have lovingly restored a number of the buildings on the site, a process that has not been as easy as she would have liked due

to the historical importance of the site and the buildings and the fact ancient Roman and Etruscan archaeological sites pepper the landscape. An overwhelming sense of ‘organic’ pervaded the warm summery air in a very warm and welcoming way.

Elisabetta ushered us in through a side door of one of the beautiful brick buildings on the farm and we meet and greet Ilaria and commercial/logistics manager for Carmina Campus Roberto Palagetti. The Carmina Campus showroom is resplendent with many accessories, mainly bags, several pieces of furniture, a number of sculptures and art pieces and numerous textiles and fabrics – all of it made from recycled or up-cycled materials. We give Ilaria a copy of *Black Magazine* and I begin to extract my dictaphone, thinking we have perhaps one hour maximum to get some sort of story. Ilaria spys the device and suggests she may get nervous and will not be able to stop talking too quickly in Italian. We are fine with this as my Italian is fledgling at best and there is clearly so much to see here, so much creativity, craftsmanship and style. Rachael and I are both struck by the quality of the construction of a number of the bags and the easy way in which the bottom of a soft drink can becomes a feature of a bag that can sell for up to 1,200 euro. Two of the sculptures are genius: A table made from an old gas station forecourt light works as exactly that, a table and a light, and a droopy Snoopy-esque dog made of shredded car tyres standing about four foot high in the corner is plain cute. We begin to realize that Carmina



Opposite above:
Finding new ways
to reuse materials.
Here, kanga off-cuts
are ironed and folded
to create add-ons
for Carmina Campus
bags Opposite (left):
A beautiful wooden
bath and olive oil tin
seat in one of the hotel
rooms at I Casali del
Pino. Above: A material
storeroom at Carmina
Campus, everything is
still alive, still has a use!

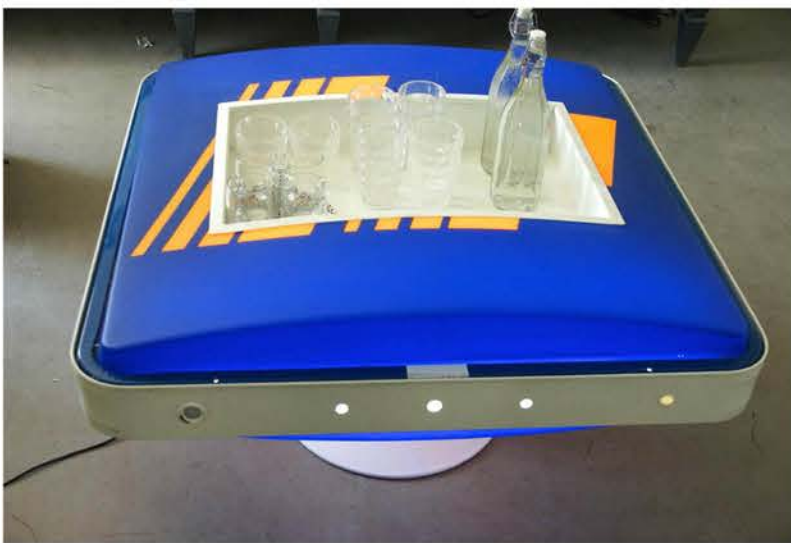
Campus is rich with creative thinking as well as responsible attitude.

The farm itself is a picture of sustainability. Beneath the ubiquitous pines its rolling hillsides are populated with Sarda sheep. These long-haired, handsome sheep produce milk which Ilaria, in turn, makes into a Mozzarella cheese made of sheep milk instead of cow's milk. Much of the food that sustains the team working on the farm is grown there, including honey from numerous hives. It was in fact her honey-making bees that first led Ilaria and Carmina Campus to the ITC Ethical Fashion Initiative in a roundabout way. The University of Rome asked her in 2007 to share her apiarist skills with a group of visiting beekeepers from Cameroon. As a thank you for her time the beekeepers thanked her by gifting a hat made by artisans in Cameroon. Intuitively, Ilaria turned the hat on its own head, as it were, and made it into a bag. This single item reignited a desire to once again use her Fendi-born design skills but this time around in a way that is in keeping with her new life as an agricultural entrepreneur and an environmentally forward-thinking woman by reusing, recycling and creating without destroying. Thus followed a trip to Cameroon to find out more about the hat, the artisans and perhaps to get them to work on Carmina Campus products but many ethical and social questions quickly confronted her; questions of humanity over business. Enter Simone Cipriani and the ITC Ethical Fashion Initiative, which was then in its formative years as well. The ITC EFI were able to offer an ethical business model that fitted perfectly with Ilaria's aspirations and a considerable number of artisans to ensure the work was

done. It was, and still is, a match made in an ethical and sustainable heaven.

Just inside the Carmina Campus workroom is a hallway leading to several other rooms, large repositories of materials, fabrics, leather, off-cuts and fittings. The hallway is lined with several hundred bags down one wall, Carmina Campus prototypes and vintage items. These rooms are resonant and resplendant with an undertone of the artisanal history of Italy itself, after all the Italians really are a race rich with great artisans. "Let's go for a tour," Ilaria says, "I will show you what we are doing with the farm." We head outside and toward a large building with three beautiful conical turrets along one wall which Ilaria explains are solar chimneys - a sustainable system for heating and air conditioning. This is the convention centre and exhibition space, a perfect building to use in conjunction with the large courtyard outside for an event like Floracult. Ilaria mentions that they sometimes hold film evenings in the space and gestures to a set of prayer/genueflecting seats near the front of the room, "and some locals also use the room for Mass." The wood and metal finishing on the building is exquisite and perfectly suited to the age and history of the surrounding buildings. Next we go outside to the remains of a stable, elements of the ancient city are visible in its walls and floor, a much newer, yet still antique metal children's roundabout sits in one corner. Like everything and everywhere in Roma, history is omnipresent.

We then move to a fabulous two-story building which had traditionally been used as the farm workers quarters. The building has



Opposite:
Clockwise from
top left: A gas
station sign
becomes a light/
table. Like a
flower the fabric
is reused and
grows once again,
here as the front
of Carmina's best
sellers, the Tetris
bag. Ilaria outside
the conference
hall. The drawers
of an artisan. A
Carmina Campus
carry-all.
Above: The
boutique hotel
built within the
former farm
worker's quarters.

been lovingly restored to its former glory and opened in September as a beautiful boutique hotel. I Casali del Pino is a destination of sorts, housing two restaurants on site as well as hosting events like Floracult. Inside the hotel each room has been developed with the utmost care and creativity. It is apparently a Fendi-wide trait to collect ancient tiles and in many of the rooms in the hotel these are laid into walls, floors, bathrooms – once again artisans have been at work. Within the hotel's many rooms there are once again, examples of Carmina Campus ingenuity. A couch made of plane seats has been resuscitated from its airline heyday with fold-out table still intact and operational for ease of eating, writing or a laptop perhaps. In another room a Mercedes Benz headlight has been extracted, and sans car, shaped and turned into a useful room lamp. Surrounding all of this ingenious thinking and responsible action is a sense of style, a sense of class intrinsic to one called Ilaria.

We briefly meet two of the friendliest donkeys known to man who ee-aw across the paddock and we give the particularly talkative Bruno a pat before jumping into Ilaria's jeep for a trip around the farm. We see an ancient 'swimming pool', Roman walls amidst bush that once housed water and perhaps,

occasionally, a real toga party. An ancient bridge, hand carved in the side of a hill is all that is left of a road, a 'way' similar to the Appian Way, upon which Etruscan merchants would travel with their goods to Rome and perhaps the archaeological jewel on the farm, an ancient Roman spring/well, tiled into a hillside and still working.

We return to the farm and are invited to lunch with Ilaria and her team, which we gratefully accept: our 1-hour interview has become a three hour tarriance with great people in a great place. We eat in Ilaria's provincial kitchen meets dining room, and we eat beautiful Italian food; cheeses made on the farm; we share loaves of home made bread, vegetables and salad greens grown on the farm, cold meats, fabulous wines and Rachael wonders across the table at me "Are we in a film?"

As we leave there is an overwhelming feeling of warmth and a sense that we have been immersed in something very good, very honest, very organic. Something that may be steeped in history and culture but is also forward-thinking and very much about the culture of the future.

