



The Italigente stand at GDS in Düsseldorf in September. The brand is now present in 17 high-end retail outlets and is preparing for further expansion.

CREDIT: RENE TILLMANNMESSE DÜSSELDORF

Welcome to the Slow Shoe Movement

Italigente is a men's footwear brand that, in spite of the name, has its roots in Sweden. Founder, Marcus Ericson, has a long tradition in the footwear industry. His family firm had been importing shoes into Sweden since 1945, but he sold up in 2005 and, while he had his hands full with a young family, devoted some time to planning his next move. He moved slowly, which is deeply significant considering the outcome.

The new brand, which taps into Italian craftsmanship (the clue to that is in the name), is what Mr Ericson describes as the footwear equivalent of the Slow Food Movement, an organisation that wants us to enjoy natural, local, fair, fresh food in season, and which grew out of an Italian initiative in the 1980s.

Italigente shoes are handcrafted in Italy, using only special materials such as premium boxcalf leather. Each pair takes a week to make.

"With Italigente we want to reach a quality-conscious audience and let people discover and experience the sensation of wearing good shoes," Mr Ericson says. "I miss the quality from the time when I

ITALIGENTE: A RECENT HISTORY

The new brand had its world première in September 2007 at the Grand Hotel in Milan and has since been launched by a number of premium retailers across the world.

Italigente shoes are available in the Netherlands from Dungelmann, in Belgium from Carmi Chaussures, and in Germany from Breuninger. The first production was sold to Nordiska Kompaniet in Stockholm and World Footwear Gallery in Tokyo. The shoes are also present at high-end tailors Spencer Hart, in Savile Row, London.

started to work with shoes at the age of 14. I loved the smell of the leather; at that time there was a genuine smell of leather in every store. I think a lot of men now wear bad shoes. Mass production has become more important in recent years than true quality craftsmanship."

“...technically speaking...”

Taking the Italgente Business Casual (BC) Uno as an example, the shoe has an easy, contemporary look, allowing the wearer to “make a statement effortlessly”, according to the brand.

It has modern brogue perforations for visual impact and coloured laces to add extra visual interest. The shoe has an anatomic last design, is lightweight, flexible and soft.

A soft compound footbed absorbs shock and returns energy. Premium calf leather linings help move moisture away from the skin to keep feet cool and dry. Quality reinforcements inside provide a stable walk and solid fit. The outsole is rubber for maximum traction and abrasion resistance.



The Business Casual (BC) Uno. Italgente says too many men these days wear bad shoes.

CREDIT: ITALGENTE

He describes his brand’s design philosophy as contemporary classic with a modern twist, and at the heart of it is his insistence on using only the very best leathers he can find. He sources it from Italy’s best tanneries, using premium raw hides of German or French origin. He explains that the sole leather goes through “a completely ecological process”, which takes 90 days. The formula of the tannins involved is a secret, but he confirms that extracts of chestnut play an important role. The upper leather parts for each shoe are cut by hand and even the processes for dyeing and polishing the leather are slow.

He places great importance on sustainable values and champions a full product lifecycle approach, which means also paying attention to what happens to shoes when people have finished wearing them. This resonates with a new generation of consumers, he believes. He explains: “The younger generation, it seems to me, is looking for more quality and a longer life in products. They are beginning to realise that it’s better to buy less, but better. So many of the shoes on the market today are no more than holes to put your feet in. But if you put your feet in contact with natural materials instead, you’ll feel better. The same applies to the food you eat and to the walls and floors of your house; natural is better.”

He offers another example of this. A tanner in Sweden, Tärnsjö, has won a worldwide reputation for producing high-quality saddlery leather, mainly leather straps and harnesses that go next to the horse’s skin. “You have to use leather for this,” Mr Ericson says, “because a horse would never go near polyurethane.”

Part of the play on words he went for in choosing his new brand’s name is that this new attitude among consumers (human ones) is a much more intelligent one. People are “returning to quality” he says, and are beginning to pass this on to retailers. “How is it

possible that almost every European footwear brand that used to offer good quality now focuses more and more on image instead? They, too, have to come back to quality. When I got back into the footwear industry two years ago, people told me it would be impossible for me to launch a new global brand from scratch. Well, I don’t want to launch a global brand. I want to develop a philosophy. I want to bring quality back into footwear.” 🌐



Italgente founder, Magnus Ericson, says he wants to develop, not a brand, but a footwear philosophy. CREDIT: ITALGENTE