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“Not just a mill”

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Ocrim SpA of Cremona, Italy is a company with a difference. While well-known around the world for its advanced flour milling equipment and innovation its the flair for connecting people through reflection of all that is best from Italy – fashion, food and philosophy – that is a more cerebral in its attraction. "Friends, let's set sail, let's challenge the unknown ... cognizance and intellect will accompany us." This, is the mantra that Alberto and Sergio Antolini – who we interview here - adopted when establishing the family business Paglierani, which led to the beginning of their 'adventure' for Ocrim, founded in 1945. Here, we reflect their philosophies and views on flour milling from their successful Ocrim 'open days 2022' which highlighted 'Wheat, Flour and ...' held in mid-September this year.

First, we asked Sergio, "What were key moments that brought about the formation of Ocrim and what are the main tasks each today?"

My bother Engineer Alberto took the lead and today, after countless successes, he still holds that position in the world of work and in the world of Ocrim; leading with integrity and as a central point.

Loving one's work and making one's work loved is a rule for Ocrim, as well being the basis of any democracy.

For Ocrim, taking care of work is the pinnacle because in work there is not only the economic reward but a much more intense reward, which each of us finds in ourselves. Rediscovering our identity and rediscovering our independence.

This reward is the mystery of work, and the foundation is a right and whoever undermines this right violates a sacrilege.

The commitment and duty to ensure a business progresses is not limited to the expansion of markets but extends to research, development, safety at work and everything that is applicable to preserve our planet.

We asked Alberto, "When growing up were you both always together and always interested in the milling industry? Did your parents encourage you to enter flour milling or were there alternative options?"

Sergio and I have grown up together since childhood. The milling sector is a niche sector and, precisely for this reason, it is fascinating. It gives you the opportunity to experiment and research in an alternative way. Of course, there would have been other choices for our professional life, but we got on the Paglierani and Ocrim 'trains' and we never wondered how it would have gone if we had chosen others.

My brother Sergio and I have always been very close, also thanks to our parents and to an education based on the value of the family and, in general, on loyalty and respect towards others.

Ours is a particular story, because our father was an elementary school teacher before embarking on a successful entrepreneurial career. This 'versatility' from a professional point-of-view, has led him to be a more curious and enterprising person than the norm and he transmitted these characteristics to us in full.

Both Sergio and I followed in his footsteps, which led us first to Paglierani and then also to Ocrim. Now the two companies are the world's top players in the packaging and milling sector.

He also addressed the questions of, "What were the key moments that brought about the formation of the company Ocrim?"

About 15 years ago Ocrim found itself in a moment of difficulty; as often happens to many companies. We, with Paglierani, were Ocrim suppliers at the time. Only today can we say that we found ourselves in the right place at the right time. And, here we are. My brother, Sergio, as president and me as CEO.

Before my brother Sergio, our father was the president of Ocrim. We have all worked hard to make Ocrim what it is

today; an 'enlightened' team formed not only by our family, but by a large family of nearly 300 people. Our main tasks today are to direct, guide and protect this great company. Make it grow and enrich with values and knowledge.

We are at the helm of both Paglierani (Poggio Torriana, Rimini - Italy) - where my brother Sergio is CEO, while I am a director.

The two sister companies share objectives and choices and above all the same modus operandi which is based on a correct and safe working concept in order to offer excellent Italian-made products to our entire audience. My brother and my task, regardless of the roles we play, is to nurture and strengthen this 'industrial philosophy' every day, without which we would be a fair copy of others.

How did you both manage throughout the Covid Pandemic in terms of maintaining a working company with many staff to provide the support your global customer-base needed?

In February 2020, suddenly we had to deal with the COVID 19 pandemic. Today, scientifically speaking, we have made great strides around the world, but just over two years ago it loomed a huge suffocating question mark over everyone.

And the first city to be deeply affected was Cremona.

In Ocrim, however, we wasted no time and, as soon as we learned about the pandemic problem. We set up the Risk Mitigation Committee, made up of some heads of departments, in order to make official decisions shared with the competent bodies outside the company, for the protection of workers and the work itself.

Ocrim, in fact, did not stop in those days. We had to reinvent our work for ourselves and for our customers, approaching a new way of working and interacting with the outside world. We have put in place all the safety systems to protect the staff present in the company from any risks and we have provided the necessary means to those who have worked from home.

In that complex period, we also intensified the production of videos - you will remember the 'Ocrim pills' - with purely emotional content, designed with the sole aim of bringing us closer humanly to our customers.

Cremona is the home of the famous Antonio Stradivari Violin. Ocrim promotes a strong image of Italian style and artistic design. Is this image making flour milling industry more fashionable both locally and internationally? Will this encourage younger people to join our industry?

Yes, that's right, we are lucky enough to be in the city of the violin. This 'fortune' entails a fame and a circle of artists from all over the world which allows a provincial city, such as Cremona, to feel as cosmopolitan as a big city.

Lutherie is an art, as much as we believe milling is. In fact, the expression 'milling art' is used. Perhaps this is precisely why we have often made the violin represent us. The violin made in Cremona is known and exported all over the world and is an icon of Italian style, as much as the products of Ocrim.

I remind you of our 2020 advertising campaign, the content of which showed a musician playing a violin. And again, our



Sergio (left) and Alberto Antolini
Picture taken at Ocrim's new factory looking
across the Farmhouse to the new Milling Hub

latest event "Wheat, flour and ..." was closed with a flourish by a musician who played Antonio Stradivari's 'Vesuvius' violin in the auditorium of the Museo del Violino in Cremona.

And certainly, more generally, design, art, music or other artistic languages offered by Italian culture, which we at Ocrim know and use for our image, can constitute an appeal towards young people who intend to undertake the milling road. But, in my opinion, there are also some different factors to consider.

In general, in this postmodern era, we perceive the need to return to the old trades, because nowadays they are considered vintage and therefore fascinating, but revised in a modern and innovative way. And for the new generations all this constitutes a challenge.

We believe this is the main reason why more and more young people are approaching the milling reality. Many of them, apply to work with us and I believe that this is due to the fact that Ocrim is part of an ancient and niche sector, but which uses all the most innovative and alternative means to build its products and to disclose its image. All this for them is very 'cool.'

Sergio, what has the research for your recent book (Argonauta*) highlighted to you about modern diets?

Reconnecting to the ancient model of Hippocrates, the founder of Western medicine, food establishes the human being as omnivorous, identifies with one food culture rather than another, recalls the diet received as a child and together identifies and gives shape to identity.

We are no longer faithful to taste because our brain, our ancient memory, is disoriented as is the kitchen from the table - which has passed on to television. Chefs have become more important than artists, poets, sculptors and musicians.

We no longer cook. Instead, we use frozen dinners,

precooked foods, with the loss of taste hijacking our brain so it can no longer identifies what it likes and what it doesn't.

What do you consider is the main issue the industry must overcome if it is to meet the food needs of a growing world population?

The historical moment we are going through is really very difficult.

Today, more than ever, there is talk of the problems related to climate change, there are serious ongoing conflicts that are upsetting the political and socio-economic balance of the world. And these are just two examples, but nevertheless emblematic.

Some things we could have foreseen in time, probably, but not others. If everyone in his/her small way did everything possible to make daily life more sustainability, a big step forward would be made. A culture based on sustainability would lead to an improvement in the climate, health, raw materials and so on.

We at Ocrim have been doing our best for some time now to improve ourselves and improve our work. We have been applying strategies ranging from energy saving to the use of environmentally sustainable materials. It's nice to have summer weather until November here in Cremona, but unfortunately this is an indication of a change that has a negative impact on everything, starting with the crops.

If we do not start from this principle and from this awareness, if this aspect is not protected in the first place, we have lost from the start. And for this reason, we at Ocrim have been moving forward in this direction for some time.

*Argonauta - originally published as a Italian language book, translated versions have been serialised in Milling and Grain magazine. (See 2022 issues - 01, 03, 05, 07, 09, 11)