

“ We want to enrich the quality of people’s lives through the products and services we supply to our clients ”

JINRO NOMURA, PONTETORTO

Proud heritage

Specialist fabric manufacturer Pontetorto is celebrating its seventieth anniversary this year. The Prato-based company had a long-established reputation in the fashion industry when, in 1985, it became the first mill in Europe to produce fleece fabrics for outdoor brands. From this, it has developed a division of the business devoted to sports. Japanese textile group Daidoh acquired Pontetorto from the founding family in 2016 and Jinro Nomura moved to Italy to take up the role of chief executive.

What are the most important differences between Pontetorto in 2022 and the company that the Banci family launched 70 years ago?

One of the important differences is that the company has moved from being a family-run company to become a public company. I am a newcomer but my colleagues on the board of directors, commercial manager, Roberto DeMatteis, and chief technician and research and development director, Marco Toccafondi, have each worked in the company for more than 20 years. We have not changed things since the Banci family handed over the running of Pontetorto to Daidoh in 2016 and I do not have any concerns about the management of the company. We are grateful to all the clients, partners and employees who have supported the company throughout these 70 years. We are proud of having such an excellent heritage. We do not know exactly what the scenario was in 1952, but probably, just after World War II, the founders had a great entrepreneurial spirit, and I believe that spirit is still alive inside the company and in the hearts of our colleagues and employees. We spend almost all of our time, inside or outside the company, with colleagues. This means the company is like home and the people in the company are just like family.

A number of companies involved in developing sports and outdoor clothing have spoken of this part of the apparel industry coming through the years of the pandemic relatively well because, for example, people who had been confined to their homes for long weeks and months wanted to walk or run a bit more than before when they were able to go out. In what ways did this phenomenon affect demand for Pontetorto fabrics?

This is a paradigm shift in people’s lifestyles, caused by the pandemic. Yes, it has affected our sports lines very positively. We have worked very well with outdoor and sports brands. It’s a trend that began in the last year or so and we think it will be strong for years to come.



DIALOGUE

**Jinro Nomura,
chief executive of Pontetorto**

Linked to this, we know that some producers of fabrics with a high level of technical performance have become concerned about suggestions that many outdoor clothing products have been over-specified for most consumers. Are highly technical fabrics worth using in the garments ordinary consumers wear to play with their children in the park or take their dogs for a walk?

We have technical fabrics and we work with athleisure brands that make products for people to wear in their free time and at weekends. The main characteristic of our textile products is comfort and that is why they can meet any demand or any use. We have to have a two-way approach to this. If the technical properties we apply to fabrics represent danger in any way, we limit the technology’s use as much as possible, but there are some very high-tech performance properties that we can add just to increase comfort. People do not perceive the technology, they only perceive comfort. That is our target, to keep the technology simple enough for it to work in normal-use applications.

You have said in recent comments that one of the reasons Daidoh decided to invest in Pontetorto in 2016 was because of its strong commitment to research and innovation. Why does this commitment remain important to you today?

Daidoh has consistently prioritised the customer in pursuit of quality, since its foundation in 1879. Pontetorto had and still has a similar policy. We want to enrich the quality of people’s lives through the products and services we supply to our clients. It should be indispensable to be sensitive to new technologies and standards and bring them into our research and innovation in order to improve quality. I feel that this is important, not only in terms of the material or physical aspects such as design, colour and feel, but important in terms of how we spend our time of every day; I mean life itself. Daidoh chose Pontetorto because it offered creativity supported by a strong technological background. In Italy there are many creative companies, but they are not always supported by a high level of technical competence. We try to combine the two and so far it is proving to be effective.



We have seen several references to Pontetorto's desire bring young people into the company and train them to be a new generation of technical textile innovators. Please explain why this is important and tell us how you will achieve it.

The company must continue and young people who have fresh and flexible ideas should start to work with experienced colleagues in order to learn from their experiences, develop the same spirit of craftsmanship and a little of their sense of entrepreneurship. We are in contact with several schools to help us find this new talent. We like to have a mix of people; an inter-generational approach is part of our vision.

Which of Pontetorto's products is the most sustainable?

We have so many sustainable products it is difficult to say which is the best one. We can talk about sustainable products, of course, biofibres, special constructions and so on, but what is really sustainable is more than a single item. It's about the concept behind our manufacturing. We follow specifications in chemical use, energy use, discharge and so on and we are pursuing a circular approach. One of the most sustainable approaches is to produce fabric of good quality that will have a long lifespan. If you can supply a product that will last 40 years, it's definitely a product that is more sustainable than a product that will go to waste in three months.

If the global clothing industry consumes more than 40 million tonnes of fibre each year, it seems likely that options such as organic cotton, merino wool or recycled synthetic fibres will continue to account for only a small proportion of the total for years to come. What would you do to make change happen faster?

We have already started some circular-economy trials with our customers, for example by making fabric cuttings that previously went to waste into parts of garments. To make change faster at a global level, there needs to be some public, governmental structure to connect consumers, brands, suppliers and government agencies, I think. We are part of the Associazione Tessile Riciclato Italiana (ASTRI), the Italian association of recycled textiles. Through this framework, we have access to research on how to recycle textiles and new ways of recycling are emerging from this. We believe that you cannot work alone, that you have to have a network involving customers and suppliers. Then there is European legislation coming in 2025 that will help encourage recycling, for example by imposing taxes on virgin materials. This will be a real step forward. A lot of brands are becoming aware of this now and are asking for our co-operation in creating circular-economy projects, with more and more material being recycled and reducing the huge amount going to waste now. There is progress, even if it is slow. We are optimistic that the 2025 legislation will help this become a reality. 

Chief executive of Pontetorto,
Jinro Nomura.

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