



Two weeks ago Georgia and I were in Milan to do the buying for the Fall/Winter season for Pucci and Livio di Simone. We think you will love these collections next fall.

We took a side trip to visit the Carlo Barbera mill above Biella which produces the fabrics for our Luciano Barbera collection. The Luciano Barbera line has been our hands down best seller in



Santangelo & Sandridge. Georgia has always loved it and we have had the women's collection in the store since the beginning. While we don't have the men's collection, I have bought several items for myself on buying trips. We wanted to see why it is so special and arranged to visit their mill outside of Biella.

To give you some background, Biella is a several hundred year old city in the foothills of the Alps about an hour and fifteen minutes west of Milan, on the

way to Torino. Many of the great mills are in the immediate area around Biella. Loro Piana, Ermenegildo Zegna and Cerruti are all around Biella. (We had lunch in Biella at a wonderful little Restaurant called the Prinz Grill. It was the first restaurant we've ever been to which had not only a Carta dei Vini but also a list of its mineral waters. La Carta del'Acqua!)

The Carlo Barbera mill is about 20 kilometers up in the mountains from Biella. Carlo Barbera bought the mill in 1950. It had been producing white flannel during the Great Gatsby era before the war because it had a pure mountain stream next to the mill when it was hard to purify water and you needed pure water to make white flannel. The site is like something out of a fairy tale.

After Carlo bought it became the diversified producer of luxury fabrics which it is today. Carlo is 94 years old and still comes to the office every afternoon. The mill produces fabrics which are used by Brioni, Chanel, Hermes, Jil Sander and other luxury goods producers.



Carlo's son Luciano now runs everything. He started the Luciano Barbera label in the 1970's which uses predominantly the fabrics from the Carlo Barbera mill.

Enrico Pincin gave us background and then a tour of the mill. He explained how the process began at the purchase of the merino wool in Australia. The fibers must be long and of the right texture. They only buy wool when the best product is available.



When the wool gets to Biella they spin it into yarn. After it is spun it is necessary to allow it to rejuvenate for three to twelve months. They store it in a humid *cave* like a wine cellar underneath the mill which has a natural spring which runs under the floor. Unlike any of the other mills except some very old ones in England they store the yarn in wooden and not plastic boxes. They believe that is better for the yarn because it allows the humidity to interact with the yarn naturally. Enrico is a wine connoisseur and he compares the use of the wooden boxes to French oak barrels for aging wine.

Eventually, the yarn is taken upstairs to be woven into fabric, dyed and finished. According to Enrico the process is “fifty per cent industry and fifty percent craft”. The mill has modern computerized weaving machines and fifty year old machines for finishing the final product. Many processes are still done by hand.



The next time you're in the store take a close look at the Luciano Barbera fabrics. You'll see why they go to so much trouble and will better appreciate the quality and feel of their wools and cashmeres.