

The World of...

Gildo Zegna



Gildo Zegna, the 60-year-old, fourth-generation CEO of Italian fashion house Ermenegildo Zegna, has been visiting Canada since Harry Rosen first invited him here in the 1980s. In those days he was head of Zegna North American, “and I travelled with a big trunk containing wool, cashmere, patterns, books, all to tell the Zegna sheep-to-shop story,” he recalls. Born in Turin, Zegna now lives in southern Switzerland and commutes to his office in Milan – when he isn’t hopping the globe, meeting customers and seeing old friends, as he did in September 2016 during a visit to Harry Rosen’s Bloor Street West store.

“Aside from my everyday vehicles, I have two vintage Lancias. There’s a 1955 Aurelia (the year when I was born) coupé. It was the Porsche of those days. It’s incredible, the mechanicals of that car, how smoothly it drives. For fast driving, I have the 1969 Lancia Fulvia coupé. It’s fantastic, even driving on snow.”

“I like to travel. Recently, I revisited Lisbon. I hadn’t been back in many years. It’s like Barcelona 30 years ago. It’s a city totally reborn. Discoveries like that make you feel good, how an old city can be turned around and become a very energetic and interesting city.”

“You can’t focus on too many sports. My favourite sport is skiing, downhill and cross-country. I learned to ski when I was four, so it comes naturally. A few years ago, I got back into tennis. Several hours of tennis on weekends keeps me fit, active, on the ball. I also enjoy trekking in the mountains.”

“Great families make great companies, and great companies make great families. If the family is united and works well together, the business will have an advantage. If the business prospers, it’s easier for the family to grow and stay united. The same applies in difficult times. Every company and family goes through them sometimes. In difficult times, one helps the other.”

“I still love my tie, which is the Zegna Duo, a two-colour knit tie I’ve been wearing for many, many years. It’s an informal tie. You look proper, but you are wearing something casual. I’m the one who created it. Unfortunately, it doesn’t seem to be very popular in the States [chuckles]. But I keep wearing it. I think it is for the happy few.”

“I enjoy wearing deconstructed clothes. I like wearing a suit feeling like I’m wearing a sweater, wearing a jacket like I wear a jumper. That’s my casualization of suits. This is my look.”

“I have energy that sometimes surprises me, but it keeps me going, young in spirit and in action. I think it must be in the genes, and liking what you do, getting excited by the good things that happen every day.”

“You try to live every single moment in the positive. You try to detach yourself when life is negative. You ask, ‘Is this really bad?’ ‘How can we fix it?’ It’s attitude. Maybe I lived better when I was younger, but now I worry less.”

“How does it come? Half is your genes, half is your mind. I’m a disciplined man, and I turn the negative into the positive. I remember my grandfather was like this, my father was like this, so I probably inherited it from them. But you have to practise, discipline yourself. Sport, family, the fact that I like the business, it all helps my balance.”