



T H E S T O R Y T E L L E R

Tony Giallonardo tells a good story. Sitting next to him in armchairs of reassuring substance, with a warming fire close by, he begins ...

On this occasion the tale is about a man's quest for excellence having determined early on in life that, ultimately, quality always prevails. In other words, this is the story of Giallonardo's life.

That is a life so far. He'll write an autobiography one day, he promises. Right now, Giallonardo is preoccupied with Ottouomo, a luxury service which could in time require a recalibration of standards and, in many respects, represents the culmination of his experiences to date.

Once upon a time? Let's be mindful that for all the fantasy of luxury, for which Giallonardo expects Ottouomo to quickly enjoy an international reputation alongside other respected retailers, he is about making dreams a reality. So some facts: born in Torino, Italy and aged 56 in June, Giallonardo first showed his flair — literally — in the 60s, when dressing at home for church. Heads turned, he laughs.

When the family moved to Toronto in 1972, Giallonardo scored a job in retail, selling clothes. Most important for him personally, were terms that ensured he enjoyed a 30 per cent discount on his own purchases. Working next as a fashion buyer, which meant regular visits to Italy, he savoured an insight into the secret behind his home nation's colonisation of men's fashion during the 80s.

Store management on his adopted home city's prestigious Bloor Street then gave him a final understanding of how quality prevails. The customer who spent CAN\$450,000 in one visit to the 8,000 square foot Versace store — a transaction which Giallonardo oversaw — confirmed that.

This experience, and the dot.com boom/bust from which Giallonardo rebounded — "I always do" — has all been groundwork for Ottouomo, the next chapter. The plan is for around 15 locations worldwide offering only the absolute best to select clients — by appointment only — in luxury's key areas: clothes, jewels, interiors and accessories. The first

Ottouomo premises will be on Grosvenor Street in London. The city has the same postal codes as Toronto, Giallonardo jokes.

The lessons of life, which have helped Giallonardo's progress to this point of departure, are inevitably wrapped in stories. Never judge a customer by appearance is a strongly held credo; a shoeless, threadbare man loitering outside a store Giallonardo managed back in Toronto was welcomed in despite fears he might be a 'bum'. He left having spent tens of thousands on clothes — and some shoes!

Punctuality is a watchword. Giallonardo always aims to be early. Back in his formative days working in the world of fashion, he incurred a \$10 fine for being late and a warning that next time it would also be \$5 for every half hour off the clock. Only a few days later Giallonardo slipped again — just the two hours — and was fired.

A lesson was learnt. An extension of his belief in good time keeping is that 'what you put in you get out'. To substantiate this, Giallonardo borrows the story of Wayne Gretzky. Perhaps the greatest ice hockey player of them all was also a grafter, notes Giallonardo. Or as Gretzky puts it: "The highest compliment that you can pay me is to say that I work hard every day, that I never dog it." Equally, Giallonardo maintains that you have to be good to be lucky. All the more so at 'the great one's' level.

Giallonardo's permanent smile is a contrast to those in fashion who think a frown is timelessly stylish. "I am always in a good mood", he insists. "I have always tried to do things my way and my greatest blessing is that this seems to have worked. You create your own destiny."

Looking back Giallonardo recalls the 80s and into the next decade. This was when he realized who he really was, he recalls today. "I am honest and natural. I hope that people can see the passion in my eyes. I think so. I find myself invited to join entourages because there is a belief that I bring a sense of the positive."

Also a gift for storytelling ...