



2 BUSINESS: Uniforms

How Older's uniform approach is helping firms to look the part *Milan*

Launched in Paris, developed in Milan and supplying handsome uniforms for companies around the globe, Older is a workwear brand that actually kits out workers. We speak to the founders giving businesses a distinctive look.

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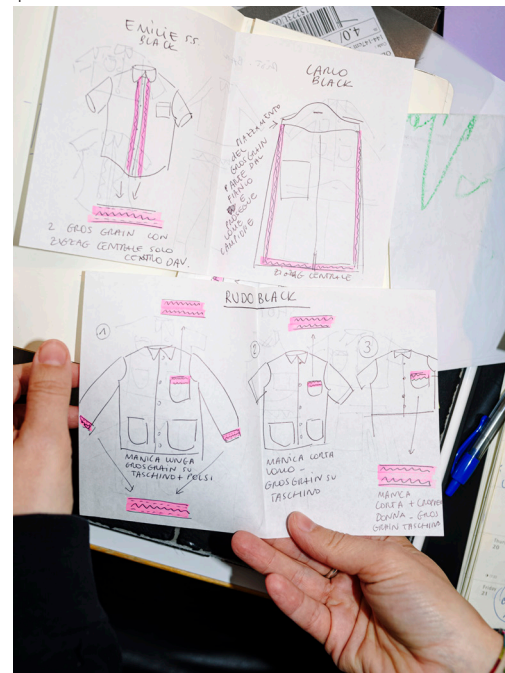
Morten Thuesen has a specific soundtrack for uniform fittings. Up on the fifth floor of a period apartment building just off Milan's Corso Indipendenza, 1990s Japanese ambient music is spinning on a record player stationed on top of a striped Carolino drinks trolley made by the studio. In one corner of the showroom and living space, near a reupholstered Anfibia sofa from Alessandro Becchi, models are trying on the studio's latest bespoke collection: "Made in Italy" uniforms for positions from front desk to outdoor agent, made specially for the spring reopening of Belvedere Hotel on Lake Como.

Hospitality uniform supplier Older's unwritten mission statement is to get away from stuffy looks pedalled by bigger, more traditional firms. Founded in Paris in 2013 and relocated to Milan since 2019, fashion school graduates Thuesen, originally from Denmark, and his Tuscan partner Letizia Caramia head the operation. The pair met working for Alexander McQueen in London before moving to France.

Business has been what Thuesen modestly calls a "slow, steady burn". In the past 12 years, Older has built up a staff of nine and more than 400 clients, including 10 Corso Como in Milan, Sushi Park by Saint Laurent in Paris, The Hoxton Hotel Group in London and DDD Hotel in Japan. "We've never had a PR or spent on marketing," says Thuesen, explaining that the brand has grown by word of mouth. "It has been incredible."

Older's approach immediately appealed to Giulia Manoni, Belvedere's co-owner, who attended the final fitting for the collection with her friend, the hotel's management assistant Alice Bellomo. Coming in blacks, greens and blues depending on the job, the uniforms are striking, with pleated details that reference the hotel's architecture. That's not to say that Older puts style over substance: the pleats have been sewn in such a way that they don't need ironing and the outdoor jacket's hood and sleeves can be removed to suit the season. "The other companies are very regular and the fabrics not very nice," says Manoni. "Plus, I make choices based on the people behind the project."

Manoni isn't the only person to have been won over by Older's founders. If attending a fitting feels like you've



1. Founders Morten Thuesen and Letizia Caramia
2. Belvedere Hotel final uniform fitting
3. Outdoor bespoke jacket for Belvedere
4. Apron that transforms into a tote, originally designed for lighting brand Flos
5. Uniform sketches by Caramia
6. Older x Terroir wine bag

Older around town

With buyers from Switzerland to South Korea, Older also has a diverse clientele on its doorstep in Milan.

1. **10 Corso Como**
The concept store changed ownership last year. The new leadership decided that its staff needed a new visual identity – cue Older's bespoke, all-black uniforms for the café, shop and gallery space. 10CorsoComo.com

2. **Yapa**
Yapa uses Older's Olafur aprons for staff in its open-plan, customer-facing kitchen. Three front-of-house staff wear Older's Matteo trousers. "They're not heavy," says owner Matteo Pancetti. "They're beautiful." ya-pa.com

3. **Terroir**
Gabriele Ornati, owner of the food shop that opened in 2017, gladly stocks Older's clothes, plus a bag he designed with them collaboratively. Staff wear the Hans aprons and Rudo jackets, the latter with a bespoke woven logo label. terroirmilano.it

4. **Officine Saffi Lab**
This "lab" near the Isola neighbourhood is the commercial arm of the ceramics design foundation of the same name, its clients include Bottega Veneta. Director François Mellé calls his staff's Older aprons "stylish but also functional". officinesaffilab.com

5. **Sandi**
In this small, family-run restaurant with a twist (see *Issue 187*), kitchen staff wear Older's white Cuban shirt and Harry trousers; front of house wears the Rudo jacket in navy and Giulia trousers in grey. Via Francesco Hayez 13



Staff at Yapa get to work in their cross-back fastening rope-tie Olafur aprons, an Older classic



Decked out in Older at Officine Saffi Lab



Yapa's Matteo Pancetti and staff



10 Corso Como's bespoke Older uniforms



Terroir founder Gabriele Ornati with his father, both wearing Older

At a New Year's Eve dinner in Copenhagen, Thuesen and Caramia hit on a gap in the market: good-looking garments at the sorts of places they liked to visit


been welcomed inside their home, that's because you have: the couple live in an adjoining part of the apartment with their young son. Matteo Pancetti, co-owner of Porta Romana's Yapa restaurant, whose staff wear Older uniforms, remembers visiting and bonding with Caramia over shared Tuscan roots. "It's very urban, it's minimal," he says of the Older look. "I've always compared it to a Carhartt for the kitchen."

Still, things could have been different. Older started as a ready-to-wear fashion brand in Paris but the couple grew increasingly disillusioned with the scene. At a New Year's Eve dinner in Copenhagen, surrounded by chefs and architects, they hit on the idea of uniforms, noticing a gap in the market for good-looking garments at the sorts of places they liked to visit. "It came out of need," says Caramia. "And we needed a good idea."

Older now has 75 EU-made pieces in the permanent collection, not to mention bespoke options. But the founders had to learn a lot on the way. With their first client, Restaurant 108 in Denmark, they soon realised that cotton uniforms didn't stand up to chefs' scrutiny. Since then, Older has developed a stain-resistant fabric that is easy to care for. The permanent collection uses a gabardine sourced near Rome, which mixes organic cotton with recycled polyester in three weights and six colourways.

You will see these uniforms in establishments all across Milan, from the bespoke all-black look of retailer 10 Corso Como to the beige aprons used at ceramics producer Officine Saffi Lab and the long-sleeved navy Rudo jackets, complete with woven logo labels, worn by staff at gourmet food shop Terroir. But Older's uniforms aren't always about the most visible member of a hospitality team. Thuesen says that the studio's utility belt, the Frits, is the studio's "love child". And equal attention goes into the outfits for room cleaners and dishwashers. "Those are two of the most important positions," adds Thuesen. "I like the idea of them becoming iconic."

As Older continues to move in new directions, including a recent B2C uniform capsule collection with Japan's Facetasm, it remains committed to growing organically, with no outside funding and with the couple very much at the centre. "Letizia is very creative and Morten contributes the intellectual and research part," says Valentina Ciuffi, curator and co-founder of Milan Design Week's Alcova platform. Ciuffi commissioned Older to make uniforms for her staff and even featured a large Older-made cabinet in last year's show – a reminder of the studio's design versatility. Today its furniture is represented by Milan's Nilufar gallery, while the pair recently wrapped up a silk-screen exhibition at Milan's Dropcity.

Despite the need to try new things, though, Older's founders still come back to uniforms. "If we get bored, we do something else," says Caramia. "But we always happily return. Ultimately, what we love most are clothes." —  olderstudio.com