

At an age when

most men have retired to a life of comfort and leisure, Giorgio Armani, 74, somehow still finds the energy and inspiration to constantly reinvent. His powerful global fashion empire includes the highly successful lines Giorgio Armani,

Emporio Armani, Armani Exchange, Armani Su Misura, and Armani Privé. As if that weren't enough, his myriad collaborations and dizzying array of projects—from skin care to timepieces, from hotels to furniture and electronics—all showcase the design maestro's wide-ranging talents. In his eyes, this was a natural progression. "I have a very specific aesthetic that comes from my belief in elegance and simplicity," Armani said. "I got to a point where I started to wonder whether I could extend this approach to other areas."

The reference points necessary for success in such multiple disciplines stem from his varied enriched upbringing. Before the native of Northern Italy's Piacenza ever dreamed of fashion design, a young Giorgio absorbed valuable lessons of hard work and creativity during his family's World War II struggles. Watching his mother make clothes for her children using repurposed parachute silk left a formidable impression on the boy. It wasn't long before he became fascinated by anything requiring the use of his hands. "My love of sober, discreet, understated clothing came, subconsciously, out of that childhood memory, of my mother's ability to send us off to school, well-dressed, though with what little she could afford, since we were a poor family," he said.

Later as a young adult, he felt stifled in his homeland, which at the time offered few career options for men. "You needed to become a notary, a lawyer or a doctor," he said. An uncle in the wig making business gave him a backstage tour of a theater performance and afterwards Armani briefly toyed with the idea of being a thespian. But he quickly dismissed it. "Becoming an actor was an impossible dream," he said. "It was another world, far from the expectations of a middle-class family."

Instead, Armani began his studies in medicine at the University of Piacenza, and took his first step in fine arts by dabbling in photography. After graduation, he served in the Italian army infirmary for two years before getting his first job in the fashion industry as a buyer and window dresser for La Rinascente, one of Italy's premier department store chains. He then went to Nino Cerruti, where he quickly made a name for himself designing menswear. After being encouraged by his good friend Sergio Galeotti to branch off on his own, the two founded Giorgio Armani S.p.A in 1975.

It didn't take long before Armani's fashion became recognized and admired, especially in Hollywood. In 1978 when Diane Keaton accepted her Best Actress Oscar for her seminal title role in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*, she did so wearing

one of his jackets. The market at the time was ripe for his foray into women's fashion, since his liberated woman's power suits symbolized society's shifting views on women in the workforce. Leading men also benefited from Armani's striking creations. *American Gigolo*, starring Richard Gere, would not be as memorable without the sexy, arresting Armani suits the actor wore in one of his most iconic and controversial roles. Shortly after, Armani's business exploded, especially in the US.

Still most widely known for his work in fashion, Armani has repeatedly capitalized on this exposure and leveraged his success to allow him entry into other design fields. Two years ago, the strategic alliance between Giorgio Armani S.p.A., and Samsung Electronics ushered in a new era of design in consumer electronics. One of the world's most recognizable fashion perspectives—Armani's sleek elegance and strong architectural lines—was positioned alongside Samsung's cutting-edge technology. (For more, see "A Dynamic Duo," pg 20)

Branching into consumer electronic product design for most clothing designers would have been a stretch. But for Armani—an agile, forward-thinking designer—it was a natural progression. "Today, fashion has expanded to encompass our way of life, not just how we dress, but



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Young at Heart: Giorgio Armani as a child with his mother, Maria Raimondi. (Below) A young Armani as a soldier in the Italian army.

