

Amedeo Scognamiglio

Love, Lemons, and Light



For over 20-years, Amedeo Scognamiglio, along with his partner, Roberto Faraone Mennella, developed one of the most iconic jewellery brands seen around the world. From Sex and the City to Tik Tok, Faraone Mennella jewellery has an iconic and enduring style. Following Roberto's untimely death in 2020, Scognamiglio is finding the way forward, through friendship and his love of Italy, to continue the brand's legacy and to honour Roberto's talent. Sometimes poetry captures the spirit better than words.

Limoni by Italian poet Eugenio Montale,

"Listen to what I'm telling you: the poets awarded laurels only appear to move among plants whose names are rarely used - box, privet or acanthus - but that's not me, I love the roads that end up in grassy ditches where in half-dried puddles boys grab a handful of emaciated eels: the lanes that follow riverbanks, descend through tufted watercanes and open out into orchards, groves of lemon trees. Here miraculously pain has turned to pleasure and the sounds of war are silenced, here even the poorest of us can have riches in the smell of lemons."



TLmag: What does gold symbolize for you, as an Italian artist? What attracts you to it?

Amedeo Scognamiglio: When Roberto and I decided, in 2001 in NYC, to launch a jewellery collection, we knew almost nothing about industry; we had an embarrassingly small budget to fund it and no idea about sales strategy. All we had, though, was a clear vision of what the jewellery looked like: fluid design, large scale, sexy shapes in shiny yellow gold! Gold represented for us Italy, a sunny day in Capri, Sophia Loren in Sorrento, La Dolce Vita on via Veneto. And yellow gold, 20 years later, is still the fundamental aesthetic canon of the brand.

TLmag: What has brought you to open a flagship store in Capri after opening spaces in the most iconic boutiques of the world, such as Bergdorf Goodman, Barneys, Neiman Marcus, Dover Street Market, Harrods, Luisa Via Roma?

A.S.: The brand was born under a good star, for sure: in just a few months from its inception, Faraone Mennella was stocked in the most iconic department and concept stores around the world. After a few years, we felt the need to open our own boutiques, to express our soul fully and independently. We first opened in London, in Knightsbridge in the Fall 2011 and in Summer 2012, the Capri flagship. A couple of years later New York City. But Capri was a "homecoming", our desire to bring back the brand to its roots, and maybe instinctively was our own personal longing for home. Capri closed the cycle of those two young Neapolitan friends who moved to New York following their "American Dream", and finally coming back happy and having achieved it. Capri is now the core, the centre of everything Faraone Mennella is about: love, inspiration, community, style.

TLmag: Could you tell us about the collaboration with Marialaura Rossiello? She has done the interior and design for the Faraone Mennella Store?

A.S.: Marialaura is from Torre del Greco, where we are from, and has been a close friend of ours for decades. In fact, during a period of our life we were all inseparable; the heroic times of our youth, 20-plus years ago, when we were happy with nothing, spending entire days and long nights laughing and dancing. The time of *Spensieratezza*, which literally translates into "the time when we have no worries". After University in Naples, Roberto and I moved to New York and Marialaura to Milano: Our lives separated there, while we all started to build our careers. But friendships from our youth are the strongest and purest.

After Roberto passed away in June 2020, I spent a lot of time with Marialaura in Milano, and having gone through the same tragic experience, losing your loved one and also the business partner, I found



someone who could actually understand my personal loss and my confusing feelings towards the business. I suddenly found myself alone to run a company I started with the love of my life, and that "impostor's syndrome" started to kick in, and it felt almost paralyzing. That's when Marialaura came to the rescue, motivating me not simply to continue the brand, while I was almost ready to give up on it; she said to me "Now you must double down, start fresh, do something completely new. Show everyone you are not going to give up, give a strong signal that you are keeping the dream alive, on your own." It was only a matter of hours, when I asked to her to reimagine the Faraone Mennella boutique in Capri, giving her carte blanche in doing so. Nobody else could have understood my state of mind better and more profoundly than her, having gone through the same difficult loss and process of choosing between shutting down Studio Irvine without James, or continuing in his memory, but in her own right and with her own personal creativity. No other architect could have better interpreted the soul of the brand than someone who danced "Staying Alive" with Roberto in a small dance club in Naples 30 years ago. "If you don't want Faraone Mennella to become a memorial site, you must find the courage to reinvent it completely!". And she did it beautifully, creatively, respectful of the brand's identity and Roberto's legacy. This project is a tribute to real friendship and conscious design.

TLmag: Your collaboration with Roberto Faraone Mennella began in New York City in a kind of fairy tale way, with a coincidental introduction through Sex and the City that launched your successful brand. Could you talk a bit about this powerful 20-year collaboration and how you see the brand moving forward?

A.S.: Roberto and I could never define our relationship: We were each other's first love; lovers, partners in crime, best friends, business partners, brothers, each other's support system and family. Starting a company together wasn't a "business plan", but the ultimate excuse to stay together, forever. The "alibi" against insidious questions. It worked out, after all. Creatively, we were completely compatible, each filling up the other's flaws. What all clients, friends, editors, employees always said after spending just one hour with us was "You guys finish each other's sentences", as always happens when two people reach that heart and mind connection. The first 10 years of the brand's life have gone so fast, in a tourbillon of red carpet events, celebrities, personal appearances in all luxury stores of the planet, dinners with CEOs and lunches with Editors in Chief. It was so fast, we didn't have a personal life, but also that was exactly our personal life; our beautiful 5th Avenue Showroom was our home, our team was our family, and our clients and editors were our friends. I now see it as the biggest blessing one might have. I never thought I could celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the brand without Roberto next to me (and

without Roberto designing the event to the smallest details), but in his honour I will celebrate his life and our dream just as he would have loved to do. I sincerely think Roberto will be regarded soon as one of the greatest Italian jewellery designers of all time, among icons like Elsa Peretti and Aldo Cipullo.



TLmag: What is the symbolism driven by the new Lemons Jewellery Collection?

A.S.: After renovating the boutique, I was truly tortured by the desire of creating an exclusive collection for Capri: I didn't want to design new jewellery for Capri, I want to offer to our clients visiting the island something in gold to bring back as a cherished memory of an unforgettable holiday. A new chandelier earring, or a fabulous gold cuff wasn't the answer to that purpose. It had to be something, handcrafted in gold and locally in-house, that any woman or man would want to grab to either wear during their dreamy vacation or bring back home as a luxury souvenir. One evening I had the vision, after asking myself "what's the first image you see when you think about Capri?" Boom, a lemon grove manifested in front of my eyes. It was the "aha moment", the eureka. I quickly searched the web to see if someone else had had my same idea in jewellery: I was almost shocked to discover I was the very first one. Of course, it had to be gold with a simple touch of green for the leaf. I wanted to be simple, natural, and yet luxurious like only gold can be. It's a magnificent little object d'art, I am very proud of it, and I can see it worn by women, men and even children. Lemons symbolize the sun, light, health, and summer. Around the world, they call to mind images of the Amalfi Coast and Capri. Sometimes, the greatest ideas are the simplest ones as well. And, as a designer, what makes me the happiest is being the first one to do it. From now on, Faraone Mennella and Lemons, with Capri, will always be remembered together.

TLmag: You are also a master craftsman making carved cameos. Would you talk a bit about this passion and talent?

A.S.: My family has been carving Cameos in Torre del Greco (near Napoli) since the mid XIX Century; except for my ancestor who started the tradition as a master carver himself, the following 5 generations were never carvers, having moved on to build a sizeable business, exporting these little works of art in America and Japan. Here I come, 150 years later, asking my Dad one day to let me carve cameos. I was just 14 years old, but I had this strong calling for the craft, after growing up in our house watching my mom drawing the famous silhouettes on oval pieces of sardonyx shells, still smelling like the Caribbean waters of the Bahamas. My first attempts were obviously tragic, but my father supported me and didn't mind me ruining beautiful and expensive shells in order to learn the technique. Just a couple of years later my cameos were good enough to be sold to some of our clients, who never knew I was the carver (my young age would have undermined the true value of the work). Moving to NYC, after finishing my Law School studies in Naples, gave me the opportunity to understand a very simple fact: If I wanted to continue my family tradition and keep it alive, something had to change. Cameos were revered by everyone as mesmerizing small treasures of Italian craftsmanship: But not everyone would buy them because they were too traditional and out of fashion. That's when I started to revolutionize Cameos, by keeping the craftsmanship intact, but changing the aesthetics for a contemporary woman who doesn't wear brooches like her grandmother did. When I opened the first Amedeo shop in New York City, my mission was to never show brooches and women's profiles. Instead you would find large cocktail rings made of ebony with a large cameo featuring a monkey or a skull; oversized earrings of carved Rhinos with their horn in diamonds; today, in my shop, one of the best sellers is a pink baseball cap with a hand-carved cameo featuring Medusa set in sterling silver finished in blue ceramic; my modern Tiaral Cameos used to be referred to as "grandmas jewellery", now among my most avid collectors I have Spike Lee, Rihanna and young tiktokers. The latest frontier though has been the release, a month ago, of my first NFT collection: Cryptocameos, from the Roman Empire to the Metaverse. It has been a sensational success, and now digital art is not just a funny distraction from the physical jewellery collection, but a real and very successful independent branch of my company. They are now available on Opensea, of course.

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