

# CONFALONIERI MATITE *for three generations the passion and expertise in producing wooden cosmetic pencils*



INTERVIEW WITH LUCA CONFALONIERI, CEO

Confalonieri Matite, a company whose philosophy, ever since its foundation, has been based on caring for the environment, its employees and the users of the cosmetic pencils they make, has its headquarters in a magnificent villa surrounded by mountains covered by trees and flowers.

**EXPORT MAGAZINE: Schwan-Stabilo has recently put waterproof wooden cosmetic pencils on the market, underlining the importance of offering products that are eco-sustainable and at the same time performing and waterproof. What are your thoughts on this?**

**LUCA CONFALONIERI:** *If you are referring to the interview recently given to Premium Beauty News by Mrs Dagmar Chlosta, Chief Market*

*Officer of Schwan Cosmetics, I can only thank her for having highlighted the reasons of a choice... which our company made ten years ago.*

**EM: What were the reasons for this choice?**

**LC:** *Historical reasons, which are part of the DNA of our family. My father made graphite pencils and coloured pastel crayons for schools, absolutely only in wood. My grandfather was also born with wood, for example making rulers for offices, products used by tailors to draw their patterns, as well as cases. If it is true that wood is a noble material, it is also clear that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were no other materials available.*

**EM: Was the fact of having continued this tradition, not adding other articles made from other materials, a marketing decision?**

**LC:** *When I started our business at the end of the 1960s, I immediately started with the concept of offering quality products; as early as 1969 we were selling cosmetic pencils with leads that followed the American FDA rules. Confalonieri Matite has the luck not to be in an industrial area surrounded by cement; there are trees, mountains and flowers around us and we have no intention of damaging the fantastic environment we are in, in the valley of Chiavenna. Incidentally, I would like to mention my paternal grandfather, Guido Confalonieri. An executive of the Italian Post Office, signs of real entrepreneurship. The production included chalks for all purposes, from the office to school and tailoring. My maternal grandfather was no less an entrepreneur, because he developed the whole supply chain of silk on the river Adda, from the cultivation of mulberries to silkworms, to the reels of silk thread for the production of stockings and also, during the war, parachutes. I am speaking of the past to give an explanation*

*of the decisions and the values that are still fundamental for me, representing the third generation of entrepreneurs. During the war, our factories gave work to the women whose husbands were at the front or who had been widowed; we still employ many young women. For me, being entrepreneurs means, as well as producing income, an indispensable factor for the good evolution of the company, taking pleasure in doing something for others, giving work in our valley, in particular to women, who represent the majority of our workforce. My objective is and always will be to apply, in my business as well, 'ethical' behaviour towards the environment and people.*

**EM: Is it important for you to promote eco-sustainability?**

**LC:** *Definitely; we always have to think about how a product will be disposed of after use and it is not as simple as you might think. We try, for all the different components, to use raw materials that are as least aggressive as possible, doing careful research amongst the best producers in the world. With the exception for the varnishes and the caps, wood is the material we use and it can absolutely be defined natural and eco-sustainable, i.e. recyclable.*



**EM: Where does the wood you use come from?**

**LC:** Until today it has come from California; the most suitable type of wood for us to use is incense-cedar, now American. This is why recently we have been doing a study, with the consultancy of the National Research Council, to find a material produced in Italy that is at the same time the result of a cultivated forest. In this way we can be increasingly in line with our objectives, including the important one of implementing a real eco-sustainability, for example by reducing the pollution derived from long-distance transport.

**EM: What is it that makes the quality of Confalonieri pencils stand out?**

**LC:** In the first place the extreme attention paid in the manufacturing of the leads, of which all the raw materials are certified. We have separate production departments for the traditional leads and for the organic and vegan ones. Some types of leads are produced by extrusion, others by pouring, with the possibility of infinite variations of texture and colour. You only have to think that we can produce 10,000 different colours. The quality of our pencil goes hand in hand with the flexibility of production; we go from traditional standard pencils to the possibility of making pencils in the sizes and colours requested by customers. Customization is what allows the various brands to stand out on the market and, especially

today, it is important to be fast on offering articles that are always new. Our company can supply from 2000 pieces for each article, by colour and for each size, in 90 calendar days. This allows us to satisfy every type of customer, large, medium and small. Our quality is based, as well as on technology and an aesthetic sense, on two essential elements, on 'expertise': we have always made pencils and in the same area, aligning the production cycle with those solutions that can be put into practice only with the experience of life and work. Many of the processes that we use in production were created in our factory, by our employees. People who are passionate about their work and who are an integral part of the technology and of the company.



**EM: You recently took an important step, with the enlargement of the factory. Are you thinking of adding other product categories?**

**LC:** I repeat that Confalonieri Matite was founded to produce wooden cosmetic pencils, this is our DNA and it cannot change. We have doubled the space to allow for a greater production capacity of cosmetic pencils and to be able to dedicate, as said

earlier, a separate section for organic pencils. Allow me to make an observation; there are very few factories in the whole world that make cosmetic pencils; but how many manufacturers of lipsticks and eye shadows are there? Thousands, without a doubt... I repeat our firm intention to devote ourselves to what we know how to do well, thanks to a family tradition which is continually renewed.

**EM: Producing quality requires a commitment on several fronts, do you agree?**

**LC:** Of course; it's not enough to say, we produce in Italy, or are 'made in Italy' as usual. Extreme attention has to be paid to raw materials; many of these have not been developed for the production of cosmetic pencils, I am referring for example to the pigments, to the oils and to the waxes normally used for lipsticks, eye shadows or mascaras... We have to experiment and check continuously. An important commitment that we take every day is to provide a fast and flawless service to our customers, independently of the volumes requested, and this is feasible only by

counting on a high specialization of our personnel and on the advanced technology of our machinery. We have divided production into ten sectors, for each of which there is a manager; all report to a technical director whose scrupulousness is exemplary. For a few years we have been supported by the general manager, so that every step taken to manage and develop the company is pondered and sustainable. Squaring the circle can be complicated,

the important thing is to carry on Italian creativity and be capable of producing, maybe differently from others, but always pleasant in the way and in the results, wooden cosmetic pencils, depending on the new trends. Waterproof? We've been making them for at least 10 years...

**EM: How much do you make for the Italian market and how much for abroad?**

**LC:** Today sales are divided 65% for Italy and 35% for abroad, with the future objective of increasing export keeping the quality and service that distinguish us. Everything that is marked Confalonieri Matite comes out of the warehouses of our production site, in the heart of the valley that is so full of meaning for our family.

**EM: We have heard about the initiative 'Confalonieri for Children'. What is it exactly?**

**LC:** Always driven by the intention to do something for my neighbour, and having received so much from life, I decided to create a foundation that dealt with communication between youngsters, between the ones that live here and others who come to spend a weekend or holidays at the foot of the Alps. An exchange of culture and experiences so that they can become friends, spend time together, appreciating an area that is so 'fertile' not only from the material point of view but also the spiritual one. Today, when the Internet at times takes over from traditional communication, to the point of becoming, in extreme cases, considered an addiction, coming to see us, regaining old values, from nature and good food helps us to recover a human dimension. A message of optimism that I wanted to give young people through our foundation.