

UMBERTO TIRELLI AND TIRELLI COSTUMI

In Italy, the economic boom that followed the Second World War also extended to the motion picture industry. The Cinecittà film studio attracted to Rome major international productions, and the demand generated by this was combined with Italy's high-quality, creative craftsmanship. A number of motion picture costume houses, which gained world-wide fame, were established in the country.

Born in 1928, **Umberto Tirelli** acquired his tailoring skills at the studio Satroria d'Arte Finzi, which makes costumes for La Scala Opera in Milan. When Tirelli began working in the Finzi studio at the age of 27, costumes were then being made there for the opera *La Traviata* (1955), directed by **Luchino Visconti**. From this began a friendship between Visconti and Tirelli, based on a deep artistic understanding and respect. Later, Visconti sourced the costumes for almost all of his films from Tirelli.

During his years in Milan, Tirelli became acquainted with director **Franco Zeffirelli** and costume designer **Piero Tosi**, among others. They attracted Tirelli to Rome, and he began working at the theatrical costume house Safasi, which was famous for its high-quality tailoring skills. All costumes were hand sewn. In Milan, Tirelli acquired extensive knowledge of materials, and at Safasi he learned the importance of craftsmanship.

The *La Dolce Vita* street, Via Veneto, with its movie stars and paparazzi, made Rome into the Hollywood on the Tiber in the 1950s-60s. At the same time, alta moda (haute couture) had found an eternal city. In this atmosphere, Umberto Tirelli opened his own theatrical costume house. Its first production was *Tosca*, directed by **Mario Bolognini** with costume design by **Anna Anni**, for *Rome Opera*.

HISTORICALLY PERFECT COSTUMES

The importance of craftsmanship and details later distinguished Tirelli from many other high-quality motion picture costume houses. Previously, the costumes of historical films had always reflected the fashion and character of the production's own period. Tirelli, however, strived for historical perfection in his costumes. Tirelli wanted the cut of the costume and the weight of the materials to compel the actor to move in a way appropriate to the period in question. He read old manuals, researched costumes in museums, and looked for information in libraries and archives. He bought and took apart original 18th-century women's and men's outfits in order to understand the cut and materials used in them.

Unwavering professionalism combined with a deep knowledge of fashion history and the pursuit of perfection quickly made Tirelli an important partner for many costume designers and directors from the ideation phase of productions. Through materials, he gave life to drawings scrawled for scene sketches. In costumes made by Tirelli, the actors felt "dressed" not "dressed up".

The 1970s were a busy time for Tirelli. Many of the best-known directors and costume designers of that time trusted in him. Luchino Visconti's monumental *Ludwig* (1973) brought costumes made by Tirelli their first Oscar nomination. The studio's first Oscar win came from the costumes designed by **Danilo Donati** and made by Tirelli for **Federico Fellini's** film *Fellini's Casanova* (1977).

Since then, the costumes made by Tirelli Costumi in collaboration with various directors and costume designers have garnered countless Oscar wins and nominations as well as other notable film industry awards up to the present day.

After the death of Umberto Tirelli in 1992, **Dino Trappetti**, a partner from the beginning, took over the running of the studio and, under his leadership and following the course set by Tirelli, the studio has continued to grow. Numerous young costume designers have learned their trade in Tirelli's studio, and later they have returned to Tirelli to create their own productions. Training young people has been part of Tirelli's philosophy from the very beginning. Together, Tirelli and Trappetti created an institution that guarantees the future of the studio and its collection and enables its craftsmanship to be passed on to future generations.

Source: *Glamour – Famous Gowns of the Silver Screen*, 2020



Teresa Stratas' dress from Franco Zeffirelli's film *La Traviata*, 1983. Costumes: Piero Tosi.
Photo: Giorgio Benni. Tirelli Collection.



F. Murray Abraham's suit from Miloš Forman's film *Amadeus*, 1984. Costumes: Theodor Pištěk.
Photo: Claudia Primangeli. Tirelli Collection.



Dress from Federico Fellini's film *Fellini's Casanova*, 1977. Costumes: Danilo Donati.
Photo: Claudia Primangeli. Tirelli Collection.