

# The Art of Venetian Silk Weaving

LUIGI BEVILACQUA HAS BEEN WEAVING SILK IN VENICE SINCE 1875. WE VISITED THEM AND TALKED JACQUARD WEAVING, THE FASHION WORLD'S INTEREST IN CRAFTSMANSHIP AND HOW THE COMPANY CAME IN CONTACT WITH THE SWEDISH MARKET.



WE ARRIVED BY BOAT, travelling along Venice's Grand Canal. All of a sudden we saw *Bevilacqua* engraved into a facade. The time-hallowed silk weaving mill. Out we got and walked round the block to the entrance to which we had been referred. The silk weaving mill has occupied this very spot since 1905. We were met in the hall by one of the brothers and proprietors, Alberto Bevilacqua. He was clutching two books in his arms, one about the company history and the book by Margareta Ridderstedt on Venetian silk damask and Swedish 20th century artists.

It was Alberto's great grand-

father Luigi who found the silk weaving mill in 1875. Alberto's father Cesare, Captain to the King of Sweden, was married to a Swedish countess, which opened doors into Sweden. Resulting, for example, in an order for Stockholm City Hall for which Maja Sjöström had designed the textiles (1916-1923). The Swedish Royal Family has on several occasions ordered silk both for interiors as well as for gala dress. Other important clients include the Swedish studios, such as Licium, which designed and ordered silk for ecclesiastical textiles.

Over the following 150 years the company has seen its ups and downs. Yet despite world wars, shortage of materials and competition from cheaper textile production, this company has survived and produces high quality textiles on the to date 18 original 18th century looms with Jacquard devices fitted later. Located outside Venice is a mill with older mechanical looms and Jacquards. The same pattern can be woven up by both

mills, with a difference in weaving width and pricing.

Three of the looms in the handweaving mill are in use for a joint project with Pierre Frey, the production of a plain red, utterly smooth velvet for the Royal Palace in Dresden, which after 33 years of renovation work is now open to the public.

The pile warp, wound onto a mass of spools, forms the velvet pile by means of a process in which a metal rod is inserted to create loops. These loops can be cut into a pile or remain as loops. Different effects are brought about depending on how the light falls. The same shade looks dark in the cut velvet and light in the loops. Seven weavers were at work on this project at the time, with the younger learning from the more experienced.

Creations for the fashion industry include the exclusive *soprarizzo*, the term for a velvet with cut and uncut loops.

– Fashion is a form of communication. It is through craftsman-

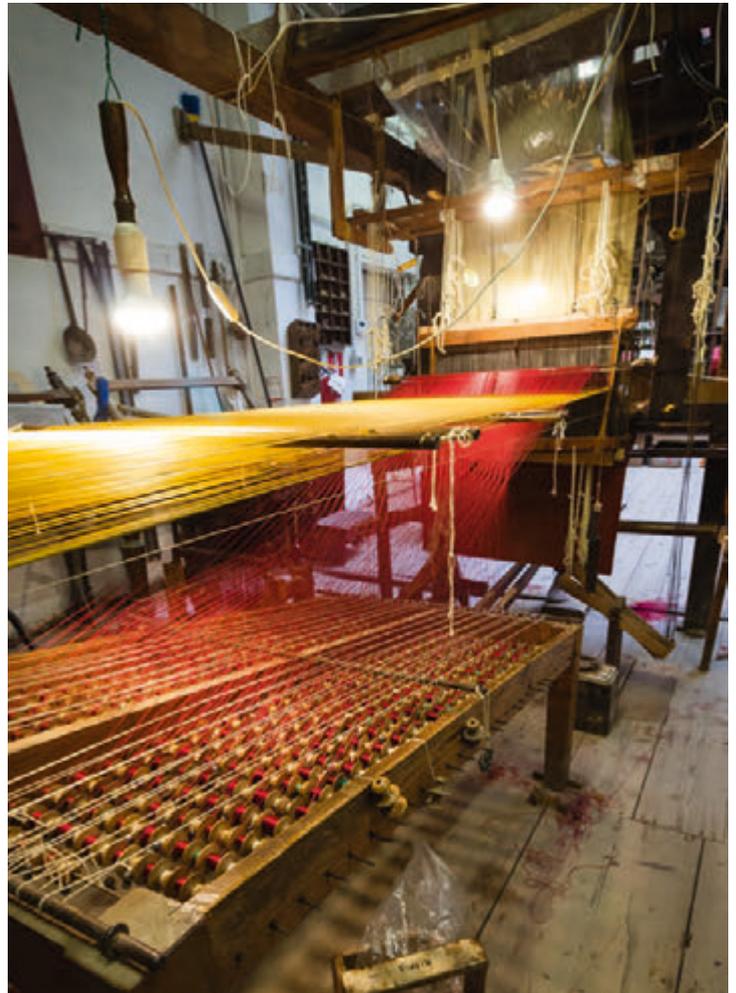
ship that what we do acquires its status. Now as well as earlier on. He mentioned Dior as one of the pioneers, showing us some pictures of the time a fashion show was put on during a carnival.

When Ingeborg Skaar renovated Sten Kauppi's chasuble in Sunne church, it was Bevilacqua silk she used. The original pattern had been woven at Bevilacqua and it was possible to have it rewoven on the mechanical looms, at a lower price per metre.

A *soprarizzo*, based on an original, was handwoven for the Kremlin in Russia. This took months of preparation to get it all operational. Two weavers were working alongside each other at the 60 cm weaving width. Alberto told us that the quote was for 40,000 euro, though it had cost the company at least 80,000 euro.

– But we did it. Always counting the cost is not possible. That way one wouldn't be undertaking the near impossible, the very things we can achieve.

**Top left** Giulia Incipini weaving a soprarizzo velvet. **Right** Pile warp on spools.  
Chasuble by Sten Kauppi, renovated by Ingeborg Skaar with Bevilacqua silk. Exclusive fabrics are woven for the fashion houses.



GÖRAN LIDÉN