

B Business Briefing



Foot in both camps

UK — RETAIL

Much has changed for luxury retail in the past few months: for London footwear and accessories brand Miista, the pandemic brought about a rethink of its business model. Its studio, boutique and head office have all moved into a former tannery and shoe factory in the East End neighbourhood of Bethnal Green. These changes give a tangible sense of where Miista's products come to life.



Galicia-born Laura Villasenin founded the brand in 2010 to bring the traditional skills of Spanish shoe-making to London. After seeing growth in sales in 2020, she learnt that “people will buy online but they also want to view fashion as part of an experience”. This new venture seeks to do just that, by bringing desks, product displays and a photography studio into one space. “We’re trying to break the mould and reflect the world that we’re living in now.” — GBN
miista.com

Rising tide

ITALY — SHIPBUILDING

Fixing its eyes on the horizon beyond the choppy waters of the pandemic, the Italian yachting industry is reporting some encouraging news. At Azimut-Benetti, new CEO Marco Valle will lead the company as it charts a course of expansion by introducing nine new boats in the next 18 months. Imperilled Perini Navi, meanwhile, has agreed an investment deal with Blue Sky group that it hopes should allow it to continue sailing.

Elsewhere, luxury and superyacht specialist Sanlorenzo increased its order backlog by 8 per cent to a value of €600m. Its executive chairman, Massimo Perotti, has been at the helm for the past 15 years and has overseen growth in annual revenue to nearly €500m. He is optimistic about a quick recovery. “We have a different environment to the financial crisis of 2009. Now oil is cheap, inflation and interest rates are low and there’s lots of liquidity.” — IC



PHOTOGRAPHER: Dan Wilson. IMAGES: Guillaume Plisson



You’ve got mail

USA — F&B

Online wine sales have skyrocketed this year, with certain retailers experiencing growth of up to 300 per cent. But when it comes to mail-order wine, producers have to work harder to make their customers feel as though they’ve bagged something special. One vineyard doing it right is Ovid in Napa Valley. Those lucky enough to be on its mailing list are notified of new small-batch releases. For wine-maker Austin Peterson, this model enables him to cultivate relationships that are enriched through tours and tastings. — HRS
ovidnapavalley.com

Star attraction

TAIWAN — AVIATION

Taiwan’s Starlux Airlines barely got its first flight off the ground before air travel came to a standstill this spring. The premium start-up carrier debuted with lie-flat seats, gourmet meals in Business Class and routes to a handful of Asian cities in January. It was well funded and came with big plans.

Now after a quiet period, Starlux is back and bolder than ever. In August the airline offered one of the first “flights to nowhere”, a sky cruise that sold out in 30 seconds. In early October it put on moonlit flights along the Taiwanese coast, complete with Michelin-starred dishes and panoramic views. It has also restarted flights to Macau and Penang.

The airline has a knack for whipping up excitement: it has announced big plans for 2021, including still-underwraps long-haul destinations on Airbus A350s. What’s more, those A350s will feature true First Class in addition to Business, just as most airlines cut premium offerings and scale back ambitions. In an industry in need of excitement, it seems Starlux is taking off. — GL

Open book

SPAIN — RETAIL

Opened in 1962, Ona was, at that time, the only shop in Barcelona to sell books in Catalan and became a meeting place for the Catalanist resistance under the Franco regime. After closing in 2010, it reopened three years later at a new site. But journalist and businessman Tatxo Benet was convinced that it had even greater potential and, two years ago, he started plotting to reinstate it as the centre of the city’s cultural scene. “The idea is to make the best, most modern bookshop in Barcelona,” says Benet.

Cue a new location – opened in May – with a well-stocked selection of Catalan literature, a children’s section, art books and a café. Above all, Benet wants to return Ona to its roots: it now hosts poetry readings, book signings and talks. “Bookshops shouldn’t just sell books,” he says. “They should be a centre for culture.” — JWE
onallibres.cat