

WWD

Here and below: A rendering of Buccellati's Valenza 2 workshop.



A Buccellati Macri bracelet.

ACCESSORIES

Buccellati Unveils Expansion Plans to Meet Demand

● Amid a resilient jewelry market, the Italian company is set to expand its production facilities and workforce, reinforcing its commitment to craftsmanship and luxury.

BY LUISA ZARGANI

MILAN – The luxury industry may be slowing down, but jewelry is the most resilient category and high jewelry is overperforming, according to the fall 2024 Bain Altgamma market study. And Buccellati is responding to the growing demand with a plan to significantly expand its production facilities.

Over the next three years, the Milan-based jeweler is expecting to grow its workforce by more than 500 employees across seven workshops producing jewelry, silverware and watches. The expansion reflects Buccellati's growth and development in Europe, North America, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific.

Buccellati's jewelry production workshops are based in Italy in the Milan, Como and Valenza districts, while its silversmith factory is located in Zola Predosa, near Bologna, and watchmaking is based in Chiasso, Switzerland.

The company will expand its storied workshops in Via Brisa, Milan, and at Valbrona and is acquiring two Gioi workshops in Italy's jewelry hub, the Valenza district, employing more than 50 artisans. Known as Valenza 1 and M2M, the number of artisans will rise by 80 when the move is made to a new facility currently under construction, known as Valenza 2.

"Valenza is the heart of jewelry, where you have a lot of different manufacturers and a lot of different workshops. Zola Predosa is kind of a renovation, a big extension but it was already an important original workshop for Buccellati, while Valenza 1 and Valenza 2 are two new projects which are based on two workshops," explained chief executive officer Nicolas Luchsinger.

He said the buildings will have the same "kind of Buccellati feeling," aligned

with the stately Milan headquarters in a building designed by famed Milan architect Piero Portaluppi, reproducing the minimalist design in the workshops, also a reflection of the decor of the brand's stores worldwide.

"Valenza 1 is a workshop we bought and we kept the workshop where it is. We just did a little bit of renovation of the building, updated security requirements, we created the places for the artisans to have breaks," Luchsinger said. "We are very careful in the projects of the well-being of our employees."

A new workshop, Valbrona 2, will be built in the Como district, employing more than 100 artisans. This workshop will focus on the engraving work typical of Buccellati, as is showcased in its bestselling Macri collection, with its brilliant-cut diamonds set in tiny star-shaped rosettes.

"Valbrona is a historical location where the Buccellati family had their workshop, it's a very quiet, very picturesque village close to the lake of Como but it's not a center of jewelry. Production there is an exception," Luchsinger said. "And it's a very discrete building, nobody knows what it is. But everyone loves to go to Valbrona because it's next to the lake of Como, which is this image of Italy, what they expect. So it's always a very successful trip," he said while smiling.

Luchsinger, previously president of Asia-Pacific at Van Cleef & Arpels, was appointed CEO of Buccellati in April, succeeding Gianluca Brozzetti, who was named executive vice president. The brand was founded in 1919, is now designed by third-generation heir Andrea Buccellati and his daughter Lucrezia, and is known for exquisitely engraved and openwork jewels, handmade with traditional goldsmith craftsmanship dating to the Renaissance. The brand is recognized for its tulle, lace and twisted thread motifs, as well as for its silverware.

Buccellati will upgrade offices and facilities at Zola Predosa's silverware production workshop, expanding its team to 30 artisans. Here the brand has created a museum "to explain our history of silver-making." The company bought

back historical pieces and has an archive of pieces and silver molds, "an incredible library with all the molds of every piece of flatware we have done since Buccellati started to do silver. So now, if you inherit flatware from your grandmother, and unfortunately, you only have 11 spoons because you lost one, you can come back to us and we can go to this library, find the mold from your spoon, even if it's over 50 or 100 years old, and we recreate it," the CEO said.

In a WWD interview in November, Luchsinger said he was eyeing a further expansion of Buccellati's retail network, which comprises 73 stores around the world, and the development of the brand's home and silver corners. By sales, jewelry makes up the lion's share, followed by watches, and then home.

The Chiasso watchmaking workshop will move to a new, larger location in the same district. It will grow to more than 50 watchmakers, engravers, setters and production staff.

There are currently 52 artisans in Milan and a total of 159 in the Buccellati ateliers.

Asked about financial details of the investments and the increase in production units, Luchsinger said that, as per parent Compagnie Financière

Richemont policy, he could not disclose them, but that it "obviously will be a strong, strong increase of production."

In Milan, the focus is on the high jewelry and unique pieces, while in Valbrona, the artisans are specialized in working gold. The Hawaii necklaces are produced there, for example. The Hawaii collection was the brainchild of founder Mario Buccellati and, created in the 1930s, it continues to be a bestseller with its tiny gold circles formed of threads, hand-twisted one by one and then intertwined. The Opera line, with its delicate tulle decoration, one of Buccellati's signatures, is made in Valenza.

Luchsinger said investments were channeled into improving the comfort of the artisans, their work stations "with the right light, with the right tools and everything. We really studied what they need when, at the time of the production of a piece of jewelry, they have everything handy so that everything is well-organized, also the flow from engraving to radiating to polishing, that they can move from one place to the other in the most convenient way as possible."

Finding artisans is "a challenge" so Buccellati has several collaborations with different schools, including Milan's Scuola Orafa Ambrosiana since 2022, which it helps support. "Here we find young, motivated talents who are interested in jewelry-making, but we have to train them for six months, before they can work with us," he said.

In addition, several new partnerships have been in place since 2023: with For.AI in Valenza; the so-called "Adopt a School" project run by the Altgamma Foundation; with the Scuola dell'Arte della Medaglia di Roma, and with the Accademia Orafa Italiana di Catania.

Luchsinger said "there is a lot of interest for young generations to work in the jewelry field, which is very encouraging. Even myself, I sometimes say I would love to do this job. They do incredible, amazing pieces. They use techniques which, without them, would disappear. They always do different pieces, so it's not like a very repetitive job and they work in a very nice environment, so all these things make it a very attractive profession."

