

2007 BEDDING YEARBOOK

The year in review

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Magni family: Big idea, small-package product

By David Perry

PRATO, Italy — The idea came to him several decades ago, one Christmas season in Milan, where he was admiring the shopping carts full of packages. Was there, he wondered, a way to fit a mattress into a small package?

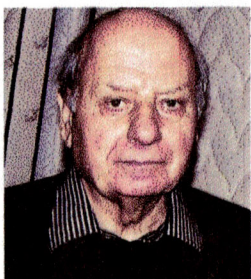
Giuliano Magni, a mattress maker from Prato, thought about the question for years. After much experimentation with compressing techniques and various foams, he came up with the answer: A vacuum-packing system.

The finished beds that roll off the assembly lines at Magniflex's factory here every three seconds have an appointment with a machine that brings one ton of weight pressing down on them. It reduces their size by 90%.

Then the flattened mattress is rolled and sealed in an insulating film, and is ready for shipment. When the compressed beds are opened in the consumer's home, they quickly regain their original shape.

The vacuum-packing breakthrough, which the company patented, helped propel Magniflex to a growth spurt in the 1980s. Suddenly it could ship mattresses cost effectively almost anywhere. The technology launched Magniflex on the road to becoming a worldwide bedding powerhouse.

It marked a dramatic change in fortunes for a man who got into the mattress business after World War II by delivering mattresses made by his mother from leftover textile scraps.



Giuliano Magni founded Magniflex in the 1960s and still goes to the factory.

In the early 1960s, Giuliano began to make mattresses in a room at his house in Prato. A small factory followed, and then a larger one.

Giuliano Magni, 67, can still be found on the factory floor, but the company is largely run by his three sons. Fabrizio, 40, is the production manager while Alessandro, 38, is the general manager and Marco, 30, is the global sales director.

The three brothers talked with a Furniture/Today reporter in the company's second-floor conference room, which affords a view of the rolling Tuscan hill in the distance. Marco, who has traveled extensively and speaks several languages, served as translator.

Fabrizio, who has been with Magniflex for 20 years, said he brought "more control and organization" to the production process. The changes he in-

roduced years ago increased production from 800 pieces per day to 4,000 per day. Further refinements have moved that figure to the current level of 6,000 pieces per day. Capacity is 10,000 pieces per day.

Alessandro, also a 20-year veteran with the company, has worked in sales, production and administration. "He ran the company alone for 12 years," Marco noted. Today, Alessandro serves, in effect, as president. During the meeting he occasionally took a quick break to sign documents brought to him for his approval.

Under Alessandro's oversight, Magniflex changed its image and expanded its markets from local to international. He also started the company's Materassi & Materassi retail chain in Italy, introducing lifestyle bedding displays. Before, he said, some stores displayed mattresses in vertical stands.

Alessandro also introduced the "pharmacy of sleep" approach in which the company tailors products to specific consumer needs. "When you have problems sleeping," he said, "you come to see us. We don't sell a mattress, we sell a mattress for you."

Marco said the brothers are



Sitting on a mattress made with 22-carat gold fibers at the Magniflex showroom in Prato, Italy, are brothers and company managers Fabrizio, left, Alessandro and Marco Magni.

an effective team. "I am their eyes in the market," he said. "They are the mind and the arms of the company. They can find the products and materials we need."

As an example, he cited the company's 22-carat gold fiber mattress. The idea came from Marco, who was impressed with the vast wealth he saw in Dubai. His brothers made the gold bed a reality.

