

Industry News

Magni family: Big ideas, small-package mattresses

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%.



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

ing Tuscan hills 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

introduced 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 life-



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.

style 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

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.

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.

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 recently talked with a Furniture/Today reporter in the company's second-floor conference room, which affords a view of the roll-

Exotic materials star in these mattresses

By David Perry

PRATO, Italy — Gold, silver, soybeans, crab shells, seaweed, tree fibers, bamboo, corn and castor oil are some of the exotic materials that Italy's largest mattress producer uses in its mattress lines.

Castor oil?

"Some people don't want to sleep on petroleum-based products," explained Marco Magni, global sales director. "This is an environmentally friendly, non-allergenic product. The foam is breathable."

Castor oil, which is used to produce a memory foam product, is just one of the natural ingredients the company uses in its beds, producing a broad line of mattresses it ships to more than 40 countries.

"In Tuscany, nature rests," is one of Magniflex's tag lines. But nature doesn't rest until it has yielded some of its more unusual creations to the bedding maker.

Take crab shells. They are incorporated, in processed form, into the Crabyon fabric that covers one of the company's new mattresses. Magni says the fabric is anti-bacterial, dust-mite resistant and promotes



Magniflex's Marco Magni shows a new foam pillow produced using castor oil.

better circulation. Seaweed, meanwhile, is used to produce fabrics that have temperature-regulating qualities.

The company uses soybeans to fashion foams and fabrics with anti-bacterial qualities. Bamboo fabrics provide "a comfortable sensation of dry freshness, particularly useful in the summer," while corn fabrics also tout a natural story: "Corn fibers are extracted from the plant through natural fermentation of vegetable sugars, thus minimizing the emission of harmful substances contrib-

uting to the greenhouse effect," the company says.

Ditto for the Lenpur fabric that covers some Magniflex beds. It is extracted from trees cultivated just for that purpose, thus "respecting the environment." The Lenpur fabric facilitates the absorption and release of liquid and moisture, thus regulating the body's temperature, according to Magniflex.

Magniflex also touts a health message with ticking that incorporates vitamins, including A, C and E.

The company uses various materials to create different selling stories, thus targeting its products to a variety of consumers.

Gold and silver fibers are used for their luxurious and anti-static qualities. The company's flagship product is its Gold mattress, featuring 22-carat gold threads and retailing at \$24,000 in queen. An accompanying pillow, with a 22-carat gold cover, retails at \$1,000.

Foam bedding accounts for 95% of its production. The company says foam is a superior cushioning and support material.

Magniflex's foam offerings include its Memofoam line of visco-elastic foam, which is 90% pressure sensitive and 10% heat sensitive, Magni said. That means consumers can find their natural sleep positions more quickly than with competitors' visco products, he said, and they can change positions more easily.

The company also offers WaterLattex, a special type of latex foam that it developed.

Magniflex uses its Airyform technology to allow air to circulate freely through its mattress cores. The vent chambers, running from top to bottom, help keep the sleeping surface cooler, the company says.

Magniflex emphasizes the importance of a good night's sleep and says it aims to help people get that sleep.

"In the same way a good diet nourishes the body, rest nourishes the mind," Magniflex says in its corporate statement. "We actively research and conduct studies in the area of sleep and relaxation, as well as present articles for several journals on the topic. The technical staff of the company give life to their products, trying to better people's quality of rest."

Tuscany plant pops out wide array of bedding

By David Perry

PRATO, Italy — One of the world's most productive mattress factories sits in this northwestern corner of Tuscany.

Founded over 50 years ago, Magniflex takes its name from the Magni (pronounced MAN-ni) family, and the "flex" that's a hallmark of good bedding. Since 2001, the company's headquarters and factory have been in a 330,000-square-foot facility along the main highway that leads through a valley of 1 million people.

This part of Tuscany has been known for centuries as a source of high-quality work. Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael worked in nearby Florence. So did Filippo Brunelleschi, whose famous cupola soars over the Duomo in the heart of Florence.

Magniflex, whose slogan is "mattresses of the highest quality," uses the cupola as an image in some of its marketing materials.

Prato, 11 miles northwest of Florence, first attracted fame as a center of the wool industry over 700 years ago. Today, Magniflex still uses wool in some of its mattresses, but also offers a sophisticated array of beds that feature fibers fashioned from everything from



A worker at the Magniflex factory boxes a vacuum-packed mattress for shipment.

gold and silver to soy, corn, seaweed and even crab shells.

Most of the fancy ticks cover foam mattresses, produced in a variety of designs, in materials ranging from latex and viscoelastic foams to the company's unique "WaterLattex," a combination of water and latex, plus high-tech polymers.

The factory's 180 employ-

ees produce about 6,000 mattresses per day, most of which are exported to more than 40 countries around the world, including the United States.

That production, achieved in about 10 hours of work, is well above the output of some of China's biggest bedding factories, which ranges from 2,000 to 4,000 pieces of bedding per

day. It is also higher than the output of Tempur-Pedic's new 800,000-square-foot factory in Albuquerque, N.M. Tempur-Pedic officials believe that factory, opened earlier this year, is the largest in the world. It will be able to produce up to 60,000 mattresses per month, according to Tempur-Pedic officials.

Magniflex officials say daily capacity at their factory in Prato is 10,000 mattresses.

The factory achieves high production through automation, proprietary production equipment, vertical and horizontal conveyer belts, a just-in-time production system — and a diet that consists mostly of foam mattresses.

The foam cores are made at Magniflex's foam pouring and fabrication facility in Milan and shipped to Prato. There they are slid into mattress shells, sewn on three sides.

The covers are sewn shut and the beds head to the compression machines, where one ton of weight flattens them to one-tenth their original size. They are then rolled and sealed in a special insulating film.

In that state, the mattresses resemble oversized sleeping bags. The film keeps them clean, and the beds' compact shape cuts shipping costs, plus makes them easy to carry into

tight living quarters.

When the beds are opened, air rushes into the foam and the mattresses quickly regain much of their original shape, according to Magniflex. The company says it takes about 24 hours for the beds to fully regain their original resilience.

Magniflex pioneered the vacuum-packing process, which helped propel the company's growth in the 1980s. "The Original Vacuum Packed Mattress" is a trademark.

About 90% of Magniflex's production consists of foam mattresses.

"If you ask us what we believe in in terms of product," said Marco Magni, global sales director, "we believe in foam." The company's foams are certified to be free of toxins and allergens, he said. Various foam mixes are used to create foam cores with different properties.

Foam is a more hygienic material than others used in mattresses, Magni said. It breathes and it expels liquids, thus promoting healthier sleep, he said.

Magniflex isn't quite a spring-free factory — about 5% of its beds use innersprings. But foam will continue to be the company's main support and comfort material for many years to come, Magni said.

Magniflex takes on U.S. market with Soho store

By David Perry

NEW YORK — Magniflex, Italy's largest mattress producer, has taken a big step here with the opening of its first U.S. store in Manhattan's trendy Soho district. If it does well, more could follow here and in key markets across the country.

The company's unique assortment of mattresses, some of which are covered with exotic ticking fashioned from gold and silver fibers, brings a fresh offering to the U.S. bedding scene, company officials believe.

"We have comfort you can't find in the U.S.," said Marco Magni, global sales director, who has traveled extensively in the United States and attended the store opening here earlier this year. "We are doing something different."

In an interview at company

headquarters in Prato, Italy, Magni admitted Magniflex faces a big test in the U.S. market.

"The United States is a very strategic market," said Magni, one of three brothers who run the company, which was founded over 50 years ago. "If you can succeed in the U.S., you can succeed anywhere in the world."

The family's name is pronounced MAN-ni, with a silent "g," and the company is MAN-ni-flex.

About 20 million people in 45 countries sleep on Magniflex mattresses; 80% of its output is exported. Key international markets include Japan, Spain, Germany and Russia.

The company believes the



David Poggesi, left, of textiles supplier Casa Poggesi, and Marco Magni of Magniflex stand in the Casa Poggesi showroom in Florence, Italy. Italian linens from Casa Poggesi are among the offerings in Magniflex's first U.S. store in New York.

time is right to bring its better sleep message to this country. A successful launch in Soho could bring additional Manhattan stores, said Magni. Other cities he said offer potential are Miami, Chicago, Los Angeles and San Francisco.

The New York store features

eight mattress models, including the new Geo-Ethic, a soy-based organic mattress. Retailers for mattresses generally are from \$1,299 to \$3,999 in queen. The store also carries a full range of Italian linens under the Casa Poggesi brand.

Magniflex makes mostly foam bedding, with an eclectic mix of products topped by the flagship, \$24,000 retail, 22-carat gold model, which has a matching 22-carat gold pillow retailing at \$1,000.

The company says its Memofoam visco-elastic technology will relieve pressure faster than competitors' models, using weight sensitivity rather than body heat to provide conformity.

And it says its Airyform technology allows for better air circulation, promoting a cooler sleep surface.

Magniflex entered the U.S. market last year, but takes a new step with its store at 59 Crosby St. here. The company already operates stores in Tokyo, Dubai and Florence, and will open another soon in Singapore.

The company has a major retail presence in Italy, with 45 Materassi & Materassi (Mattresses & Mattresses) stores, most operated by franchisees. By the end of next year, the company hopes to have 100 stores in Italy.

Henry Burney and Irwin Pearl, two U.S. sales veterans, are developing Magniflex's U.S. dealer network and are working with a dozen U.S. sales representatives to build the brand.