

# Ideas from Massimo Osti

Five years ago, Massimo Osti - the shy creator of world famous men's clothing brands such as Stone Island and C.P. Company died. For connoisseurs the garment engineer is an icon because of his unequalled ideas. His heirs are preparing a book about his innovative work and exclusive brands. Bright travelled to Italy and was granted entrance – by high exception – to the Massimo Osti Archive.

“Why don't you come over to Bologna for a few days?”  
“You can search in Massimo's image and clothing archive for the things you are looking for”. This unexpected invitation by Osti's son Lorenzo brought me to the North Italian city, where the first warm sun had just made the snow disappear. I'm staying in an authentic hotel near Piazza Maggiore in the old city centre. The next morning Lorenzo is waiting for me in the lobby. During the car trip that follows, I am happy that he did not pick me up on his Vespa!

Lorenzo takes me to an anonymous building in suburban Bologna and a small sign outside says 'Massimo Osti Studio'. “This is it”, Lorenzo says. His mother and sister welcome me inside. Together they manage their father's mind-blowing legacy and his work. Not only the archive, but also the interior of Osti's original studio: lots of books, images, shop and sales displays and other (branded) paraphernalia. In the back there is an old C.P. Company jacket hanging on the wall pressed between two Plex-

iglas plates. On the glass doors next to it I read 'Massimo Osti Archive' and I feel as if I am entering a holy temple filled with thousands of silent witnesses of Osti's genius.

## Dye bath

The Italian clothing designer Massimo Osti (1944-2005) created groundbreaking fashion works during the 1980's and 90's by combining his revolutionary textile innovations and painting techniques, with functional ideas from mainly military clothing. The combination of new materials, colours, functional aspects and magnificent details, characterize Osti's work. Originality and functionality are the mainstay of his story. This made Stone Island and C.P. irresistible for many people. Five years after his death, Massimo is still an important source of inspiration for everyone who is involved in making clothing. Without knowing it, each and every one of us probably owns an item that was somehow influenced by Osti.

In the late 1970's Osti founded the Chester Perry Company, which was named after a character in the comic strip 'Bristow'. →



A private-photo of Massimo Osti during the testing of his Ice Jacket. In a way, Osti was unique, with a continuous need to innovate, change and improve. The Ice Jacket is a perfect example of that, as it typifies man and brand. Osti's heirs are working on a biography, which will be released in the near future.

Stone Island cap/poncho based on military concepts of multifunctional garments. This example could be worn, and modified into a tent. Osti applied this principle often. It has been produced in green and was also available in white.



Because of trademark issues Osti changed the name to C.P. Company in 1981. A year later Osti produced his first collection for his new brand Stone Island. Osti's wife Daniela came up with the name, 'Isola di Pietra' in Italian. In Stone Island (SI) Massimo had the perfect brand to execute many of his ideas. The brand, with its highly recognizable label on the left sleeve, evolved into what might be the most innovative clothing brand ever. During the eighties and nineties, today's head of design at G-STAR, Pierre Morisset, owned several clothing stores, he was a big client of Osti. "As a shop owner I really enjoyed it when his new collection arrived, beautiful products which actually sold themselves even though their prices were high. It was so beautiful, so highly qualitative and after many years it only became more so. It never bored your customers and there are very few products with that exceptional class".

Osti turned the textile industry on its head with his innovations. He processed glass, brass and steel in his fabrics and was far ahead of his time. The innovation started in the early seventies for Osti, who was a graphic designer at the time. He experimented with printing techniques on textile and brought the serigraph, four-colour printing and the photocopy to T-shirt design. This was new at the time, and printers were reluctant to do it for him but it became successful, as we now know. While Osti was already experimenting further with fabrics and colours he discovered the effect of a one-dye bath on fabrics made of two different fibres. This became Osti's first important textile innovation: *il tinta in capo*, or *garment dye*. Tjerk Brink, who has been SI and CP agent in the Netherlands since 1979, vividly remembers this: "Osti made a jacket in a fabric that consisted of two different fibres, canvas and nylon. He put the complete jacket into a red dye bath. Canvas and nylon react differently to the dye, providing a very special effect. That is basically what *tinto* was. It was a huge innovation at the time but a standard procedure in fashion ever since".

#### Super-thin rubber-layer

In Bologna I am granted highly exceptional access to Osti's clothing archive. Pamela Parenti, who reorganized and documented the whole collection, is fully at my service. "But first take your time to look

around" Lorenzo says. Before the lights are switched on I immediately see some Reflective Jackets, like cats-eyes in the dark! Then the lights are turned on, I am perplexed, it is overwhelming. Almost six thousand pieces of clothing, garments and other products are in front of me. Only after a while do I humbly take my first steps. There is historic material everywhere; I am in awe at seeing pieces labelled 'Personal Massimo Osti'. I am overwhelmed at seeing those hundreds of jackets and coats that I've never had, and never will have; I am in the middle of Osti's career!

I see old SI-items made of off-white tent cloth, printed on the outside with a clear white water repellent layer. And SI Marina jackets with their white lines surrounding the cuffs, sailor's buttons with anchors on, horizontal striping, classic anchor and nautical motif prints, all made of the famous *tela stella*: truck cloth. Osti printed the outside of it with an anthracite grey synthetic layer. "In fact", Tjerk Brink explains, "Tela was not only innovative it was also the predecessor of the famous *raso gommato*. Initially it looked sturdy and stiff, but by wearing the garment it started to live, show colour differences and adapt more and more to your body shape. Each item just became more beautiful and personal. That was Osti, you always needed to get used to it first, because it was so new but then you were devoted to it".

In 1983 the famous *raso gommato* (officially called *raso ray*) was introduced. Again a new material innovation, a texture printed with a permanent super-thin rubber layer on the inside. The advantages were that it was waterproof, windproof and because the rubber layer was on the inside, the outside of the garment could be in any colour. With *raso* Osti revived the good old raincoat or Mac, now being able to make any design waterproof. With *Raso*, an important part of the functional layer concept ever since, Osti made his Stone Island immortal.

In the archive I see early SI winter jackets, some without the sleeve badge. I catch myself touching and caressing these rare oldies; I even talk to them as if they were extinct animal species.

# MASSIMO OSTI ARCHIVE



Glass entrance doors to the Massimo Osti Archive and right behind it a large photo of the famous Flatiron building in New York where C.P. Company opened a flagship store in 1991. The archive holds over 50 thousand samples documented and sorted, silent witnesses of Osti's numerous dyeing experiments, which he kept safely.

Massimo Osti Studio year 2010: where past and future meet. The studio contains Osti's DNA, literally and figuratively. Here, Osti's son, daughter and their mother work on new projects in the spirit of Massimo. The furniture of his old studio surrounds them, son Lorenzo sits at the head of the table.



A few meters further, I see the items which embody Osti's findings and innovations for C.P. Company, such as rubber wool and rubber flax, manufactured materials bringing linen, cotton and wool to life. Lorenzo Osti: "Massimo loved the personal character of a garment, unique patterns of use, ageing, discoloration and signs of wear or two identical shirts each of which discoloured differently'. That's the personality Osti wanted to give his products. Thus, he made a virtue of a necessity (discoloration by wearing and washing garments) something that is now often called the 'vintage look'.

**Temperature sensitive**

In 1987 Osti came up with a revolutionary SI-product, the Ice Jacket. This jacket changed under the influence of temperature change, a principle based upon a highly technical temperature sensitive material. Harry Wonder, owner of clothing store The Globe in Arnhem: "The first winter version of the Ice Jacket was white and changed to blue as soon as it became colder, that was an unprecedented revolution". Antonella Sevi ni has worked with Osti for over 30 years and remembers how he tested the first Ice Jackets personally: "In and out of the cold sea water for hours and hours to see if it reacted as he wanted it to. That was Massimo, working solo until it was perfect". Pierre Morisset also remembers the first colour changing jackets vividly: "It was technically very special, it went far beyond innovation, this was absolutely *to the moon!* Osti was the first to apply such a highly technical principle in clothing, he was an architect, an engineer."

The Ice Jacket astonished the clothing industry worldwide. Osti gained respect from contemporary designers such as Giorgio Armani and Paul Smith and celebrities like Sting who turned out to be huge fans (and later collaborated with Osti on the Rainforest Foundation line of clothing). At his peak in the early nineties Osti opened a C.P. Company store in the Flatiron building in New York. Meanwhile he worked on his next innovation, the Reflective Jacket, which he presented in 1991. With this jacket he evolutionized the dynamics of reflective

strips from firemen's uniforms into a jacket that was made completely of reflective material (available in red, yellow, silver, blue or green) and that also protected against electro-magnetic fields. This had never been done before, industrial garments for Bering Sea crab fishermen transformed into designer clothes! Lorenzo: "These jackets contained a layer of minuscule glass particles. Just imagine, glass in clothing, that was Massimo!"

**Military inspiration**

After I had tried on one of Massimo's personal Reflective Jackets, I slowly browse the huge number of military items. There are jackets, coats, vests, gas mask bags, shirts, T-shirts, combat jackets, parkas, headgear, body warmers, belts and 100 pocket vests. Osti personally preferred military clothing and was a master in mixing product details, in 1995 he told Arena: "I love the grace of British uniforms, England had good taste and elegance and America had the practicality." Osti used military materials and details thoughtfully, pockets, collars, fastenings, constructions and texture combinations. He took military classics such as the M-65 field jacket or the N-3B snorkel parka and just added to it. Paul Harvey, who succeeded Osti and designed Stone Island between 1995 and 2007: "Massimo didn't get inspired by military clothing to have all of us dress like soldiers, no, the reason was that the practical characteristics of military clothing has been developed and altered by use over decades. Those garments are unequalled when it comes to practicality. By doing this Massimo opened the door to the incredible detailing in military garments".

The ultimate example of Osti's fusion is his camouflage Ice Jacket from 1985 in which he combined the temperature sensitive material with a camouflage print. The summer version changed colour from khaki to camouflage when the temperature rose and the winter version changed from camouflage to brown when the temperature fell. Agent Tjerk Brink remembers that Massimo himself was very fond of the Ice Camo: "I remember him wearing that jacket all the time".



Stone Island Ice Jacket in N-3B (parka) style with rope system and inner jacket. Note the materials, colours and details such as the layered hood.



Stone Island camouflage Ice Jacket during colour change. At room temperature this is camouflage but that changes at lower temperatures to a brown colour. The upper part of the photographed jacket has been in a refrigerator.

Il tinto in capo (1979): One of Osti's first innovative dye techniques where garments made of different fibres were dyed. The materials reacted differently to the colour, which gave the item an exceptional effect.

Raso Gommato (ca 1984): At Massimo Osti Studio they call this Raso Ray. Osti lines the inside of fabrics with a thin layer of rubber making it wind and waterproof. This has been tried on the outside too in a metallic colour.



An original Goggle jacket 1989 (Massimo Osti Archive). C.P. Company redesigned the jacket completely for the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the jacket in 2009.

In the archive I find a liner with an electric thread through it. The plug is still present, “heating system” says Lorenzo, “Massimo wanted to use the idea to heat biker suits, he had that worked out quiet far but the concept never took off. Later he used the typical pattern of the thread through the liner in a prototype jacket for London Fog, a brand that was exclusive for the United States”. And then there are the trousers. “Military trousers also have many smart details”, Lorenzo says. “Functional solutions, materials and constructions aimed for specific use, very long zippers in the legs, inserts and elastics, shutters to protect closures and braces. A pair of ski pants is not hard orange because it looks cool, but because the colour is highly visible in the snow, it had a function”.

In 1989 Osti presents what might have become his most famous jacket for the Mille Miglia road race: the C.P. Company Goggle Jacket. The three quarter length jacket with lenses in the hood was inspired by a Japanese military jacket that had a collar that could be zipped up as a mask in front of the face with a lens in front of each eye. There were two C.P. versions: Explorer, similar to the Japanese jacket and the Mille Miglia, which had the mask in the hood and a watch viewer glass in the left sleeve. The jacket was designed for use in vintage open top cars and takes account of the position and movements during driving. For its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the jacket has been redesigned for an even better adaptation to the driver’s anatomy recognizing seating position and movements and being treated in Gore-Tex.

#### Three jackets in one

Ask any Stone Island fan what makes the brand so unique and you’ll probably hear that one winter jacket is in fact three jackets! Osti made winter jackets and coats that consisted of an outer jacket and a removable inner jacket, an existing military concept. Osti took this a step further and made a separate jacket (with its own closure) of the liner or inner jacket. Thus, the winter jacket was wearable as a complete piece, but the inner jacket and the outer jacket where wearable separately too. For this concept Osti designed optimum

combinations in materials and colours. For example an outer jacket (often a *raso*) in army green with a shimmer black inner coat. Or a navy blue outer with a silverish inner, a cream outer with a yellow inner, an Ice camo with a red inner or a yellow outer with a baby blue inner.

To fasten the inner jacket into the outer jacket, Osti used a system based on another military item, a leather leg protector, or gaiter. This had a system to fasten and adjust consisting of a row of leather loops which were connected through each other from the top downwards. Effective, handsome and in our time completely unknown as a fastening system. Osti integrated this principle in the very first Stone Island winter jackets. The rope-loops were attached to the inside of the outer jackets and corresponded with holes on the edge of the inner jacket. Each loop was put through a hole and attached to its upper one at the inside of the inner jacket; the last one was closed with a knot. With this system the layers were attached in a sturdy way, and very importantly, in a new and beautiful way. This is still an important part of the current Stone Island brand.

#### Kevlar and gadgets

In the early 1990’s Osti left Sportswear Company, the mother enterprise of SI and C.P. He started his own brands, like Left Hand (1993), Massimo Osti Production (1994), and ST.95 (1995). Once again he launched textile innovation, some of them had military ambitions Thermojoint for instance was nuclear radiation resistant. The circle would have become complete if Osti would had been asked to develop military clothing but it never came that far. In 1999 he created trousers for Dockers (the ‘Equipment for Legs’ range) using Kevlar. In cooperation with Levi’s he created ICD (2000), a collection of jackets that was succeeded by ICD+, technical jackets with integrated mobile phone, mp3 player, remote control unit and headphones. It is not unthinkable that in another time this man would create a jacket to protect against certain diseases (swine flu for example?).



Rubber Flax (1987): Developed after tela stella and raso gommato. Linen, cotton and wool are processed in a bath filled with liquid rubber, instead of being printed on the outside (tela) or inside (raso) the bath gives the garment a completely new look. It emphasises the natural features of the fabrics, makes them water repellent and in a new way form fitting, it adds more personality to each piece the more it is worn.

Ice (1987): After a long time of experimenting Osti succeeds in producing clothing that changes colour when the temperatures changes. Osti was fascinated by transformation and change, both very rare principles in clothing. The Ice Jacket is still the top-notch jacket every season, the summer version is now called the Heat Reactive Jacket.



Reflective (1991): The functional and waterproof material contained a thin layer of microscopic glass particles that reflected even the slightest light, the jacket also protected the body against electromagnetism.

Micro (1993): Developed for Left Hand. Microfibres and nylon are squeezed together during an ancient paper production process. Micro has the visual appearance of deerskin.

Pierre Morisset: "I remember that I heard the news, my hero, dead. But I knew that he would live on through his work, his ideas, the unequalled innovation, the high technical level and the quality of his products, I have never seen anything that could even come close. Massimo Osti was, and will forever be, my biggest inspiration".

#### Devotion

During my last day I take an extra good look around the archive, where I find another brilliant SI-prototype. I think of Paul Harvey's words: "Osti's products were never banal or trivial and always asked the wearer for something extra, devotion. It was expensive but one didn't follow any fashion or trend, one showed love for quality, for innovative products, functional products, originality and beauty. Devotion might be the most important Osti-value". Harvey was right. The last few days those rare Reflective Jackets gave me nervous tics. There was a camo Ice Jacket that was so beautiful it kept me out of my sleep for nights, and still does. I suppress kleptomania. I talked to the '83 SI-jacket with rope-system and inner jacket that spent its days on an old and too thin plastic hanger. Afraid to forget, and to possess it all just a little bit, my iPhone makes lots of small clips of the endless rows of jackets. Ancient black tela's and white Stone Island trousers with the badge at the back on the waistband. An anorak made of isolation blanket, umbrellas, shoes and luggage, gas masks, Goggle Jackets, blankets, waistcoats, knitwear, Left Hand, Production, sailing outfits, nautical wear, tents and Hawaiian shirts. And for a long time I stand still and silent next to the proof of Lorenzo's story about his father's love for blue shirts with different degrees of fading and wear on them, they are all there right in front of me. And I also film the more unique stuff, the Stone Island golf bags, ski's, skiing gloves, military coveralls, lots of pilots suits, knits and astonishing prototypes with or without the Stone Island badge. "Enjoy every second" I say to myself. "Let it all in, save it, breath it, lock it up somewhere in your brain, you will never be closer to Massimo Osti".

"Massimo was the first to combine three concepts, fabric innovation, dyeing innovation and the idea that functionality itself has beauty", Paul Harvey explains. "Today this sounds evident and trivial but at the time it was far from that. His innovations and ideas were so strong that they were almost immediately absorbed by the perception of the consumer of the eighties and nineties. He radically, and forever, changed everyone's view on clothing". Harvey also remembers Osti's way of working. "His way of thinking and working at Sportswear Company is still there and makes it the best creative production facility in the world. The original staff as well as the many people who came after all wanted, and still want, just one thing, to open up new horizons and be pioneering and innovative, season after season. Every product must be real, genuine and beautifully made and that is what Osti stood for, and that is still at the heart of the company.

Son Lorenzo is involved in a new brand called MA.STRUM and the first collection will be available in The Netherlands this autumn. "Together with designer Donrad Duncan we create clothing that has Massimo's innovative spirit". The archive is our inspiration as it was for Massimo. "After Massimo's death my mother, my sister and I tried to find a way to keep his heritage and spirit alive in a new initiative, to us, this seemed the best way. Our highly technological times, with the speedy progressions, new materials and endless intelligent solutions, would have been an endless playground for Massimo. Who knows what he would have invented. At least we made his life and work the source of something really new".

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Stone Island skiing trousers. A perfect example of functionality with its very high zips in the legs, braces and a colour that is highly visible in snow as well as natural terrain.