

ICON'

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Da Vinci's spirit



Christmas tales tell of confidence and faith in the good. This is also the story that José Eisenberg knows how to tell, but his is true. SUSANNE OPALKA listened.

It's morning, ten o'clock, the world is fine in Monte Carlo. Two dogs lie at his feet, he looks at the Mediterranean Sea.

Together with his son, he leads the fortunes of their family business, Eisenberg Paris. Father, José, 75, is CEO. Edmond, 31, takes care of international strategy and design of the brand's digital appearance. Eisenberg Paris stands for scientifically sound, anti-ageing, luxury skincare. This high-tech cosmetics brand is sought-after among connoisseurs in almost all countries of the world. A classic success story? Nothing would be less true.

José was born in Bucharest in 1945, the only son of textile entrepreneurs, Sally and Marcel Eisenberg. The family had ancestors in Germany, who in the 18th century moved to the Great Wallachia, the name of the region in the south of Romania. In the post-war era, the Eisenbergs lived in constant fear. "We lived on twelve square metres, knew only pressure and repression. I left school and had to help provide for our family." Son Edmond expresses it more drastically: "My father was a street child." In 1958, he managed to escape to Italy with the help of a guaranteeing relative in Paris. Arriving in Florence, stateless, without any education, the 13-year-old found a job with a restorer. He fetched cigarettes for the employees, brought them coffee and newspapers. "But the most important thing was that I was surrounded by art. This studio was like a Renaissance space. I was a child, but I was so attracted to the sculptures, the paintings, the beauty. At some point I was allowed to touch the objects, which allowed me to feel connected to Leonardo da Vinci's 15th century Florence. It was the beginning of happiness in my life."

The boy soaked up knowledge, passed his high school diploma as an independent candidate and earned his first real job at 21, the Gucci family hiring him as a designer. He designed model after model but, from May 1968, there was a revolution in Italy. "No matter what I designed, it remained on paper, no one was there to produce it." So it was time to improvise. In Basilicata, the poorest region of Italy ("not even the mafia was interested in anything"), he opened a small studio. His plan: "Here the women understood something about sewing, manual labor - and they urgently needed an income." The small studio for high fashion was becoming a bigger and bigger business.

In 1970, the young designer received a call from Werner Otto personally.



"I want you to design for our catalog!" José Eisenberg, who had never heard of Otto, let alone a catalogue, flew to Hamburg and made an offer: "I'll do this for you free of charge." His condition: "I also produce what I design." Neckermann, Quelle, Horten - they all came. 75,000 jobs were created. Production of the Otto catalogue changed the history of southern Italy. Awarded honorary citizenship by the Italian President, the autodidact went to the USA in 1974. At MIT in Boston, he delved into the world of artificial intelligence. Soon he had 120 scientists under contract to develop the first personal computer with its own software and removable keyboard. They were internationally successful - until IBM came along. Finally, in 1985, entrepreneur Eisenberg took over a laboratory in Switzerland, where they wanted to produce a fountain of youth elixir: "I found it absolutely absurd that they used animal cells in skincare formulas. Animals are a different species, their cells don't match human ones!" Eisenberg adopted an innovative discipline: "Biotechnology. 13 years of research later, we discovered three molecules that work like a code to program skin cells!" Patented in 160 countries, the resulting Trio-Molecular® formula" contains three naturally occurring molecules that, when combined, regenerate the skin and supply it with energy and oxygen. The first three products were launched in May 2001.

Today there are about 200 products in the Eisenberg line in addition to make-up and artistic fragrances.

The unconditional love of art, beauty and technology, a Da Vinci spirit that drove the father - and which he has passed on. Edmond Eisenberg, who studied theatre in London parallel to his International Business studies, is also a virtuoso violinist, pianist and composer. Let's see what else he does.

This jar is the result of a fantastic life story, that of José Eisenberg and his son, Edmond.