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# Specialty Fabrics

# REVIEW



## CRAFTING SHADE

*Emilio Petrongolo describes  
a typical work day at Ombrasole  
as being in a "continuous creation  
mode," focusing on custom  
quality and innovation.*

### ONE OF A KIND

planning for profits

### PERFORMANCE WITH STYLE

up-to-date upholstery

## 2019 SPECIALTY FABRICS SHOWCASE

PART 1

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IFAI MEMBER SINCE 2011

MOST VALUED BENEFIT  
Credibility with clients

# CRAFTING SHADE

OMBRASOLE DESIGNS, MANUFACTURES AND INSTALLS AWNINGS OF ALL TYPES FOR NORTH AMERICAN CLIMATES—MANY OF WHICH FEATURE EMILIO PETRONGOLO'S CUSTOM AND PATENTED MOTORS.

**E**milio Petrongolo can trace his fascination with canvas and sewing back to his childhood in Italy, where his grandmother made jute bags for storing wheat. Petrongolo, director of R&D and marketing at Auvents Ombrasole Awnings, says, "It left a lasting impression on me," inspiring him to start his own sportswear company at the age of 22 with a staff of 150 employees.

He sold the sportswear business at 26, and translated his interest in fabrics to the awning field, where he worked for many years with Italian companies. The awning field was booming in Italy in the 1980s, he says, and eventually he was asked to transfer to Canada to develop the North American market. "I worked for a few years importing Italian products, but a few years later I realized that I had a stronger passion for manufacturing. With my extensive experience I can design any retractable product instead of importing from Italy, so the customer can have the best quality with a competitive price."

In 2009, Petrongolo and Jocelyne Jabre opened Ombrasole in Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Their mission was to design and locally manufacture awnings that are easy to maintain and can withstand the harsh conditions of northern climates. "We are proud to have created products for sunny days that can withstand snow and ice," Petrongolo says.

Jabre, president of Ombrasole, oversees strategic planning, executing marketing campaigns, analyzing results and running operations. The products designed and manufactured by Ombrasole include motorized fixed retractable awnings, awnings for terraces, motorized retractable pergolas and aluminum garden furniture. All Ombrasole products can be used for residential or commercial applications.



My greatest accomplishment will always be the satisfaction of our customers, who greatly appreciate our products for their modern look and ease of use.

*Emilio Petrongolo*

#### MEETING CUSTOMER DEMANDS

“Nowadays, clients want innovative products, and it’s for that reason that we continuously update our products to meet client demands. We manufacture products with extruded aluminum and stainless steel accessories. This unique combination gives our products an added value compared to other combinations.”

Petrongolo describes a typical work day as being in a “continuous creation mode.” He says, “Being old school, I always carry my pencil around, so that whenever I have a new idea, I write it down immediately.”

Some of those ideas include the Cobra Crank, created and patented in 2000. The crank facilitated the opening and closing of folding arm awnings and was sold at IFAI shows. Petrongolo discontinued selling the Cobra Crank a few years ago because Lithium batteries had become excessively expensive compared to electric engines.

In 2009 he designed the Attico, a fixed motorized retractable awning. The Attico awning replaces stationary awnings that require the canvas to be removed in winter and replaced in the spring. “Thanks to its fixed structure with a retractable canvas, it became a huge success,” explains Petrongolo. “The canvas descends by gravity and can reach the ground. In winter, the canvas retracts into an aluminum box—a protective covered hood—so no handling is required during the winter.”

In 2016 he developed the Capriccio model, a fixed awning with motorized canvas for opening and closing, using a remote control and an integrated gutter system so rain can’t drip between the two sections. Capriccio is a product for commercial applications and high-end homes. “In 2017 we carried out a successful project with this product in the heart of downtown Montreal,” notes Petrongolo.

In 2018, Petrongolo designed and manufactured the TCL roller shade, with no zipper on the sides, which can be manual or motorized—another “touch free” option for customers. “No technician is needed. It’s very simple for anyone to use,” says Petrongolo.

#### CHALLENGES AND REWARDS

Striving for continuous innovation is a cornerstone of the Ombrasole business, says Petrongolo, especially because meeting customer demand is such a big challenge. “Nowadays, people travel a lot, navigate the internet and, often, they come along with their own designer who has specific ideas. These ideas are not always easy to execute because of



technical constraints. We always try to find a common ground and give them advice so they get a satisfactory and sustainable final product.”

Ultimately, Petrongolo says, “My greatest accomplishment will always be the satisfaction of our customers who greatly appreciate our products for their quality, modern look and maintenance-free features.”

Petrongolo encourages forward thinking in his industry peers. “I would like for people in our field to be open-minded about new products and not be afraid of change. It definitely is a challenge to make customers try new products when they have been using the same model for the last 20 to 30 years.

“Manufacturing awnings is a demanding field,” he adds. “We have to keep up with the latest technology available and modernize the workplace.” This includes buying the best equipment and training Ombrasole’s 30 employees. Petrongolo says, “Employees, no matter what their status in the company, need to be involved in the projects, and their work needs to be valued. We continuously train our employees, so they stay motivated and efficient.”

Petrongolo says membership in IFAI has given Ombrasole great credibility with customers. The professional network provided by IFAI is also an important aspect of membership. Petrongolo says the annual Expo show is especially efficient because “IFAI helps us meet with different suppliers at the same location, which is very convenient for us time-wise and money-wise.”

In the future, Ombrasole has plans to expand its presence in the U.S. market. Petrongolo notes, “American awnings companies will benefit from our high-quality products, fast delivery and very low cost, since the Canadian dollar is low compared to the U.S. dollar right now.”

Rebecca Post is IFAI’s editorial director.



## Snapshot



### CREATIVE SPACES

The Ombrasole team recently created the roofing over a suspended terrace in downtown Montreal using the Capriccio awning system. Close to La Grande Roue de Montréal (open to the public since September 2017, it is the tallest Ferris wheel in Canada), the Ombrasole roof covered a 3,000-square-foot area, creating a space for marriage ceremonies and receptions.

“The architect of that project chose the Capriccio after he thoroughly studied it and compared it to other European products,” explains Emilio Petrongolo, marketing and R&D manager at Ombrasole, Montreal, Quebec, Canada. Of the Capriccio, he says, “We were not afraid to put a new product on the market when we know that it has a lot of advantages over European products.

“It was a huge challenge for us to meet the installation schedule. We had to coordinate all orders with our suppliers so that the delivery of the required raw materials arrived in time to move forward as quickly as possible,” says Petrongolo.

For Petrongolo, the project represents an extension of his business values. “Ombrasole’s philosophy is to always be different from others by not only selling outdoor products, but also by offering unique and sustainable shade solutions. No mass production! We are craftsmen, and every manufactured product is unique.”



What is an area of your business that has changed due to your experience?

Our garden furniture line is going very well. A lot of cut aluminum is wasted in the awning manufacturing process.

This is usually picked up by recycling companies. However, I came up with the idea of recovering these pieces and making outdoor furniture of difference sizes. Then I use Sunbrella® acrylic fabric to make the cushions. Customers can arrange the color of their furniture to make it fit with their awning or outdoor space.