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## Barberino's Steps Into the U.S Opening First Barbershop in New York

The Italian barbershop chain is landing on Madison Avenue, with a little help from The Art of Shaving's cofounder Eric Malka.



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Inside Barberino's first location in New York. COURTESY OF BARBERINO'S



There's a new barber in town.



Italian chain **Barberino's** is opening a barbershop in New York on Thursday, marking the first step of its expansion in the U.S.



Located at 520 Madison Avenue, the 753-square-foot space was formerly occupied by The Art of Shaving. It was one of that retailer's first units and closed its doors last month.



The passing of the baton between the two brands goes beyond the rental of the location since The Art of Shaving's cofounder **Eric Malka** is also involved in Barberino's internationalization strategy. He has become a shareholder in the company and serves as an adviser for its expansion in the American market.

Michele Callegari, who cofounded Barberino's with Niccolò Bencini in 2015, said the whole operation is the result of "an important star alignment." About two years ago, the Millennial entrepreneurs reached out to Malka as they saw similarities between their business model and the high-end brand Malka and Myriam Zaoui founded in 1996 and that **Procter & Gamble Co. bought in 2009.**

"He did in the U.S. what we're doing in Europe, so we reached out to him to ask for a feedback on the American market," Callegari said to WWD. "He has given us free mentoring for 18 months, as part of this sense of give-back that's part of American culture. And during this period, we got to know each other and realized we shared the same vision of this industry."

"He noted there's a gap in the U.S. and the spot left from The Art of Shaving was not filled," continued Callegari, adding that Malka "saw what we were doing in **Italy** and thought we were the right people to fill the void."



Niccolò Bencini and Michele Callegari, cofounders of Barberino's. COURTESY OF BARBERINO'S

Malka invested in the company last year, when Barberino's raised 3 million euros in a round of investments, which also saw the chairman and cofounder of Yamamay, Francesco Pinto, and former Italian soccer player Claudio Marchisio entering into the firm. The former serves as non-executive president on Barberino's board, the latter became an ambassador of the company.

Previously, the company raised about 1.5 million euros during the pandemic. While COVID-19 dented its performance in 2020, Barberino's doubled its revenues to roughly 2 million euros in 2021. Last year, it generated 4.2 million euros in sales.

"When we discovered Barberino's, it was clear to me that they were perfectly situated to spearhead the next wave of high-end men's **grooming** salons in the U.S.," said Malka, who today is at the helm of Strategic Brand Investments, an angel fund that provides capital and guidance for early-stage companies.

"The closure of The Art of Shaving Barber Spa in Midtown was the perfect opportunity for us to enter the American market and elevate the standard of men's **grooming** experiences in this area," he added.





The plan is to double the presence in New York soon and use these locations to test and adjust the business model, as well as to collect data aimed at raising capital in the second part of the year that could support a big rollout in the U.S. To this end, Callegari aims to raise between 5 million and 6 million euros to invest in the opening of stand-alone locations and shops-in-shop and into boosting the distribution of Barberino's-branded products in the wholesale channel as well as online.

"We're the biggest barbershop chain in **Italy**, and the ambition is to become the biggest in the U.S., too," said Callegari.

The Madison Avenue unit will reflect the interior concept of Barberino's salons in Italy, dominated by the brand's signature shade of pale green. It will feature three barber chairs and offer tailored services and products designed for American guests. These are aimed at accommodating diverse preferences and time constraints, with services stretching from 15-minute "Express" treatments to the hour-long "Splendidi" format.

To import the same quality as its domestic locations, an Italian barber will be at the helm of the New York salon, overseeing and training U.S. professionals. The company, which already operates the Barberino's Barber School training course in Italy, has implemented an apprenticeship project, fostering an ongoing exchange between barbers of different nationalities. Hence, Italian barbers will gain experience in Manhattan, while their U.S. counterparts will have the opportunity to train in Italy, with the firm facilitating the exchange by managing permits and providing dedicated accommodation.



**Products by Barberino's.** COURTESY OF BARBERINO'S

But for Callegari, the opening in New York is not only a business opportunity but a way to come full circle with his family history. In 1910 his great-grandfather Giovanni left Italy to become a well-known barber in the U.S. under the “Barberino” nickname.

“Having Italian roots is an asset but also a liability. With Made in Italy companies, we always feel we owe our great-grandparents and we can’t let them down. We feel this pressure that we have to honor them and do well,” said Callegari.

The success of the company so far stems from its modern, managerial take on a profession that is traditionally family run and often stuck in old-school ways in Italy. Cashless payments, extended opening hours and staff training are basic assets that many smaller barbershops in **Italy** were lacking and that Barberino’s brought to the category. Changing the paradigm to promoting an overall idea of investing time into one’s wellness and not going to their salons just from necessity also contributed to attracting a diverse male audience, which ranges from white-collar workers to students and tourists.



**Inside a Barberino's barbershop in Milan.** COURTESY OF BARBERINO'S

In Italy, the company counts 18 locations, including 10 units in Milan, in addition to salons in cities like Rome, Turin and Bologna.

It also operates an itinerant corner format, which this week will stop at the Rinascente department store in Rome for five weeks. The corner will then touch down at different locations of the Italian perfumery chain Pinalli, which has the exclusive for that distribution channel.

"Corners are a perfect format because they enable us to engage with consumers that usually don't stop by our locations," said Callegari, who eyes to replicate the move in the U.S., too.

The plan is to keep operating directly in Europe and the U.S. while working with franchisers in Asia and the Middle East. At the moment, Barberino's has a franchised barbershop in Seoul, but Callegari said there are contacts for possible openings in Japan, Qatar, Dubai and Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates.





Products by Barberino's. COURTESY OF BARBERINO'S

Meanwhile, on the product front tweaks are being made to turn some items into cruelty-free versions, with Barberino's switching to synthetic brushes or vegan leather **beauty** cases. In general, the range includes more than 30 products such as beard balms, wooden razors and accessories, developed in collaboration with leading Italian companies in the sector and available at its salons, corners and e-shop.

To support its expansion in the U.S., Barberino's also has introduced a dedicated website for American customers. To show some extra love to New York and celebrate the grand opening, customers visiting the barbershop between Saturday and Feb. 14 will receive a hydrating face mask and box of Venchi chocolate.

The tie-up with the Italian chocolate specialist is just the latest in a streak of collaborations. **As reported**, Barberino's released a capsule collection of men's grooming essentials themed after the popular British period gangster drama series "Peaky Blinders," following a partnership inked with Banijay Brands, part of the Banijay Rights company distributing the show.