

OTB's Renzo Rosso: 'Fashion is a difficult market at the moment; wars don't help; young people must learn to endure hardship'

OTB Group chairman and founder, the Veneto-born entrepreneur [Renzo Rosso](#), spoke to the young winners of the 2026 edition of the [ITS](#) contest for young fashion designers, warning them about the rigours of the effort required to achieve lasting- rather than fleeting- success, and he stressed the difficulties and complexities of today's global fashion ecosystem.



"ITS is different from other contests because it's mostly young people coming straight out of school who take part. They're very green; they haven't yet experienced frustrations, humiliations or difficulties, so they come to the contest with a completely pure sense of calm," Rosso said. "I like to observe them and listen to what they have to say. Because who better than young people can sense the fashion system's needs ahead of everyone else?"

"Today, customs and ways of living are changing rapidly. The fashion system is changing too. I love creativity in general; I believe it should be the foundation that underpins everything. Yet today it's often expressed in strange ways. Sometimes you see collections that don't represent the brands, but are merely the result of corporate pressures and market dynamics.

And this trend can lead designers astray," Rosso continued. "I, on the other hand, am proud to say that awards are part of OTB's DNA. When I bring in new creatives, I take them to the historical archives and show them our past creations, then ask them to take those values and develop them in their own way. I think the companies I represent do exactly that. Instead, today those starting out in fashion are under crazy pressure to put out more and more products—products, products—with the risk that, in the end, the creative through-line gets lost."

"I love these young people; it's great to bring them in to work with me. And I'm lucky, because my group includes many companies, and as each has a distinct touch and personal style, I can direct them to equally different houses. The skill lies in putting them in the right place," added the Veneto-born entrepreneur, who gave a clear message to the 10 ITS 2026 winners when they visited [Diesel](#)'s headquarters.

"Creativity isn't about the success of a single sample collection or a single season. Becoming a figure in fashion means suffering, making mistakes, working; it's a great sacrifice," he said emphatically. "So don't think that making three T-shirts with a cute graphic or a great piece of outerwear is a success, because today a collection is made up of many things. First, there's ready-to-wear, ranging from trousers to jackets, coats and knitwear; then you have to design bags, accessories, jewellery, and if you want to become a creative director you also have to think about styling, about your muse, about how to dress them from start to finish—so not just four garments. And then there's communication, social media... there's so much to do and to oversee. So, to become an important person in this line of work today, you really have to make a lot of mistakes—and have a lot of curiosity."

Responding later, on the sidelines of the meeting, to a question about the current state of the fashion world, Rosso noted that fashion in general is "a very difficult market. Certainly the current war isn't helping us, because at this precise moment we have around forty stores closed," he revealed. "And then people are travelling much less and store traffic has dropped sharply. So this will be a major blow for our entire sector. We hope it ends soon."

"The moment is certainly not the best," he reiterated. "Then, of course, we defend ourselves, because we're bringing all our weapons to bear. The most powerful weapon right now, where we are investing a lot of resources, is clienteling—that direct, personal relationship with the end consumer."

According to Rosso, "This interaction with the customer makes it possible to build loyalty, which has, of late, somewhat disappeared. You have to know your end consumer very well. You need to know who they are, what they do, their habits and customs, whether they're doing well or not, their birthdays. If you establish a real relationship, you're in a much better position to carry your vision forward and build the loyalty that keeps them engaged with your brand."

Turning back to the ITS finalists, Rosso told them that "even today, at the youthful age of 70, I keep travelling the world. I go into competitors' stores—of course they know me—and, quite calmly, I ask the people who work there what's working and whether there's anything the market is asking for," he said.

"In essence, you need to have a deep knowledge not only of my products, but also of those of my colleagues, and of the differences in needs between countries. Each is different in tastes, trends and desires. Today, to create a line and be successful globally, companies must constantly interact with the different countries where they operate, because right now every country needs to feel an integral part of a collection. Otherwise you risk producing a range of items that's an end in itself. Especially in China," Rosso specified, "where the government has adopted measures that favour consumption of local brands to the detriment of international ones. The only way to enter—and be appreciated in—a country like China is to create a connection with the end consumer."

Rosso, perhaps realising he'd sounded a bit harsh, also had words of comfort for the young finalists: "Ours is a beautiful, fantastic line of work. We in fashion are lucky, even if this business has become increasingly complex, because we have the opportunity to dress the most fascinating women, the most handsome men, the most distinctive personalities in the world. So it's a unique job. Our industry is truly special. Arm yourselves with good will and you'll definitely get there!"

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"Barbara Franchin is a truly fantastic person who works incredibly hard. ITS is a bit like a child to her," Rosso concluded. "I have to thank her for that drive. I like ITS, which I have been contributing to for many years and will continue to support as OTB Group, because it is a student project. I try to take part in as many fashion contests as possible, because they channel new creativity."