



*lion*STEEL®

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1969 – 2019

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A living  
story

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*Stories are the residue left after we pass through.  
Not air, salt. What remains after we sweat.*

[Translation by Jim Hicks of De Luca, Erri “The Story of Irene”, 2015]

LionSTEEL  
*A family passion*

From left:  
Gianni Pauletta, Cesarina Bazzo, Gino, Massimo and Daniele Pauletta.





## December 1969 *Reach for the Moon*

The year 1969 was not just any old year. Never before had humanity detached itself so far from its roots as in 1969, with that magnificent flight to the Moon. It had hundreds of thousands of people glued to their television screens, all united in awe of that same mysterious, faraway land. Anything, it seemed, was possible. Maybe we could continue to Mars, even Jupiter, or on to infinity. The Far West had morphed into a far-off starry sky. Any man of goodwill could look up at that celestial sight and find his own lucky star.

"Well, if Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins can do it, I don't see why we can't", Gino thought to himself. He was including his wife, Cesarina, and their two children – soon to become three – in that collective we. Not a bad crew to make the giant leap.

The question that continued to go round and round in his mind, as is not uncommon for those who find themselves in the same predicament, was: "Should I set up on my own, or carry on working for someone else?".





## 1957 – 1969 *A twelve-year flashback*



Coat of arms with the Lion  
of the Republic of Venice

Every personal decision we make is the fruit of our past, a place or a moment in time. Maniago, as it was back then, almost certainly helped Gino to come to the right decision.

Maniago is in limbo, geographically speaking; a small city perched at the foot of the mountains, amid plains and peaks. It lies somewhere between subdued Friulian reserve and the cheery chatter of the neighbouring Veneto region. It is nestled between two extremes, forged by centuries of domination, first by the glorious Patriarchate of Aquileia, then by the Most Serene Republic of Venice. From the high ground that towers above it, if you turn your gaze southwards it glides undeterred over the delicately sloped plains that surround it. On a clear day, its vast desert-like gravelly riverbed blends into the Adriatic Sea, where the Venetian galleys once set sail on voyages to conquer the Mediterranean. To the north, the view is obscured by a rugged rock face, emulative of the Dolomites, that gravitates towards the city where the Colvera torrent bursts through, turning to gravel in an ardu-



ous gorge. Since at least the fifteenth century, the continuous, turbulent flow of these waters has been turned into the regular rhythm of the hammer, transforming craggy metal into blades.

When Gino was a boy, there was still an ancient agricultural civilisation of mountain dwellers that coexisted in Maniago, alongside the dozens of blacksmiths' workshops and fledgling industries. It consisted of farm animals, cattle sheds and herds that were moved every summer to the nearby grazing pastures at altitude. People coming and going, as well as tradesmen, passed through the city below: this was the lively hustle and bustle of life between the mountains and the flatland. Between small villages and the rest of the world. This was the climate of change, heading straight for the mid-sixties, which would go down in Italy's history as the Golden Age. The centuries-old knife industry was contaminated with new ideas and techniques that came from far and wide, in order to carry on doing what had always been done, but differently. Anyone who was passing that

way, then, would have discovered the authentic secret of 'made in Italy' production, that ingenuity that combines age-old magic with new inventions, becoming the art of thinking with your hands.

Gino had grown up immersed in that world from being a boy; he had begun to feel that burning fatal attraction to metal, wanting to tame it, to make it his own. On 1 January 1957, as a young man, he was taken on by FARM, *Fabbrica Articoli Reclame di Maniago*. His first pay cheque was for 4,000 Italian lire [about 2 euros], but it was enough to make him feel like he was somebody. It was here that he cut his teeth with tin openers, corkscrews and what we would today call other 'marketing gadgets'. Working with other business in his free time, he would learn the techniques he was missing, like how to make flick knives. One day, in his first months as an apprentice, he had the chance to put his rudimentary skills to the test. At a time of much ecological unrest, the Colvera torrent regularly regurgitated metal debris from the nearby factories. Hunters of yesteryear's brass were in no short supply, ready to recycle the torrent's offerings on the local market. It was a fortuitous rough piece of scrap steel Gino fished from those waters that was transformed into a little nugget, which he would use to carve his first blade. He would also add a horn handle in a moment of inspiration. While not



1 January 1957:  
Gino Pauletta  
on his first day  
at work..



perfect, the result provided a satisfying boost for his self-esteem.

In the years that followed, through to the prophetic year of 1969, alongside his day job he worked evenings, nights, Saturdays and Sundays on small odd jobs for some of the factories in Maniago. The family outhouse gradually transformed into a modest workshop, measuring just a few square metres. Here, with his friend Luciano, he burnished his blades. Here, the candid smell of the countryside began to melt into the pungent smell of metal. And so, Gino was able to even out his workman's wage, increasingly stretched after his marriage to Cesarina and the birth of their children. The orders, meanwhile, began to stack up and it became almost impossible to balance the two commitments. He had to make a choice. On the one hand, there was the immeasurable sway of his enthusiasm and a burning desire to do something all of his own. On the other, the meagre but assured prospect of a wage at the end of the month, topped up with the extras, to provide at least the daily bread. There are times when, what

makes the difference, what nudges you in the most courageous direction, is something that comes from within, a faith in your own ability, backed by fortuitous circumstances. After the first order from the firm Farfalli for a hundred or so corkscrews, along came another more conspicuous one for some four thousand pieces. This was another kettle of fish that required a whole other kind of commitment. It was now or never. "I'm going to set up on my own": this was Gino's final decision in what remained of '69. There was no going back. His wife Cesarina stood by him, after Luciano decided to go his own separate way, in a different sector. At that precise moment in time, in that intrepid year of voyages into space, Gino must have looked up at the sky and, among the billions of others, caught a glimpse of his own lucky star. Perhaps a little blurred, hesitant and quivering in the corner. It was too early for a name, that would only come a few years later. **LionSTEEL**.



The first "Pauletta Gino" company documents, including the all-important first invoice issued for a 4,000-piece order from Farfalli.



Models 96 and 98:  
some of the first serial knives  
made by Gino and Cesarina.

## The seventies *The first steps*

**A**stronaut Gino Pauletta had taken to the skies, with only the essentials in his suitcase.

The family outhouse would slowly but surely take on the form of an authentic workshop, while preserving some of its rustic charm which delighted customers, especially foreigners. They often asked Gino if they could take pictures to take home as a souvenir of that quirky place, suspended between two worlds. The orders, in the meantime, kept coming in. The first commissions to make knives from scratch arrived from Bruno Mas-saro, a firm in Maniago. This was good practice for Gino, who was responsible for the

whole production process, excluding tempering and sharpening. He only had his wife to count on in those early years, at a time when even just one employee would have been a luxury. Through her precious support, she allowed Gino to throw himself head first into production. Petite, but tireless and of moderate temperament, she took care of everything else, from assembling the knives to dealing with orders, shipments and invoicing. She also dealt with the complicated negotiations with the banks, during which, certainly in the beginning, she was quite ill at ease. In time, she learnt to manage the situation with courage and determination, often characteristic of women and lacking in men, too busy waging wars with fire and metal. Cesarina had her own elegant way with her hands, which she would let loose every now then with a quick touch-up during playful exchanges at the grinder with her husband. "When two people work well together, you can achieve as much as if there were at least three of you," Gino often says, visibly moved as he remembers just how much his wife matters to the business.



An irreplaceable companion. She left the company in 2012, but still today she manages to contribute with her pearls of wisdom and words of reassurance.

The family team-come-company, meanwhile, began to attract attention. Despite not having the means to stand on its own two feet on the market, the business received an increasing number of compliments and new customers kept on coming. And these were not just from Maniago, either. They came from other cor-

ners of Italy, as well as Austria and Germany, in particular from Nuremberg and Solingen, the blazoned capitals of the art of knife-making. During those long years of keeping its head down and powering on, the company went simply by the name of "P.G.", which stood for "Pauletta Gino". A somewhat rigid, blunt label with no hint of a brand identity or any marketing zest, concepts Gino would only become familiar with some time later. What mattered then was producing his samples to

the very highest professional standards for potential customers, and hoping that luck would be on his side. The wheels started to turn and orders even came in from Germany for 600 pieces a year, while the trust of local customers continued to grow. Gino was not yet at the stage where he could boast creations bearing his own brand name, but he felt great pride in engraving the words "Rostfrei Solingen" on his blades, and seeing those little gems leaving what was once his family outhouse with a respected stamp of German quality approval.

In particular, the anonymous company by the name of "P.G." was making quite a name for itself for its own production of multi-purpose knives with three key uses. They also caught the eye of some passing sales representatives, who showed willing to distribute modest quantities of the goods in the shops run by their customers. Gino knew he had to add value to those nameless objects to capture the market's imagination, and so he began customising them with decorative figures that were all the rage at the time, such as Venetian gondolas or other romantic representations of Venice.

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Petite, but tireless  
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"Venice, Venice!". That magical city some 75 miles from Maniago seemed to be calling Gino, inspiring him to give his creations a more dynamic slant. It was then that he remembered the stone lion, the one carved by his masonry ancestors, which had kept watch over the courtyard outside his house for many years, reminiscent of the ancient custodians of the Veneto region. As a boy he was afraid of it. You could just make out its jaws through its partially closed mouth. But as time passed and he got to know the untamed wild beast, his fear waned to the point that he would secretly caress its tail, for a better grip as he imagined sitting on its back. Inspired by this image and the fashion in Maniago at the time for naming companies after animals, Gino decided to add a lion icon to an already overcrowded zoo of company logos. But the lion on its own was not enough. And Gino felt constrained by the bounds of the Italian language, too. He needed to find something new and original, something that summed up all of the might of his magnificent metal creations, which he was learning to tame day after day.

He saw that age-old stone lion flash before his eyes and morph into a lion made of steel. He felt two powerful words fuse together into one brand name that roared in English: "LionSTEEL". He contacted Ruggero, a photographer and advertising agent who was just starting out, and asked him to turn his idea into something concrete, before it got away. It was, most likely, sometime in 1978.



Gino had understood the importance of a brand, a signature mark for his own products, which he was starting to make according to his own market intuition. The name "LionSTEEL" then became an image to identify with, that went into the body and form of his special creations, as a reminder of their value which grew day by day and was not to be lost. It was the magic word that conjured up what was behind the handles and blades, created with heart and soul, and a good dose of imagination. It had taken him ten years of hard work to take that decisive step. With this name, it was as though he were tempering his knives all over again, injecting them with an invincible spirit. It had taken him ten years, but it was only the beginning.

Opposite page:  
the lion statue that inspired  
the LionSTEEL brand name.





Model 110:  
the American dream.

## The eighties *The first taste of the market*

At the start of the eighties in Maniago, it was easier to understand what a product was than a market. In a geographical area limited more or less to the Italian border, the market was controlled by a small group of local businessmen. They had cheap access to the goodwill of numerous small artisanal enterprises, which were often pitted against one another. Little LionSTEEL was, too, caught up in the melee. Iron was pounded but the margins were narrow. Everyone was more concentrated on fulfilling orders and overtaking the competition next door than cultivating their own identity or style. But Gino started to have other ideas; he was

becoming increasingly aware of the need to create value around the product. That is why he had to start thinking for himself and look up from his workbench, where he was at the mercy of the same old traders who took it upon themselves to think on his behalf. With his head held high, he needed to learn to follow his nose and sniff out news ideas that tend to linger in certain places and at certain times. But to do so, he needed a change of scenery, beyond his own four walls. On a fleeting visit to Milan with his wife, Cesarina, Gino was struck by an extraordinary American pocketknife, proudly on display in a luxury store beneath the elegant vaults of Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II. He had an inspiration, right there in the heart of Europe's fashion capital, a favourite haunt for the ideas of change. He bought that single treasure there and then for the "extortionate" sum of sixty thousand Italian lire [about 30 euros], knowing it would be an excellent investment for studying some metallurgy anatomy. It was the original handle with inlays that had caught his eye: a seductive example of using two materials together, never seen



before in his neck of the woods. This was what he wanted to emulate. He had to copy it, with an added something extra. This is when the idea came to him: brass and olive wood together. He had hit the bullseye on the first attempt and so the legendary model 110 was born. It was sold to knife manufacturers such as Indiana for the tidy sum of 8,500 Italian lire [*about 4.50 euros*], take it or leave it! Now it was Gino who was calling the shots. This successful series taught him a lot. He learnt first and foremost how to organise a well-structured process with his suppliers, using industrial methods even at this early stage. He learnt how to negotiate, safe in the knowledge that he was offering something unique and exclusive. And he learnt to give less importance to turnover and numbers, and more to quality and margins. With what was left in his pocket, LionSTEEL was able to focus with greater conviction and peace of mind on its own very first sporting knives, which would go into circulation in the early eighties. Gino remembers those first LionSTEEL-branded ranges with pride, with their somewhat syn-

thetic “names”, that were actually numbers, indicating the year of production: 81, 85, 88, etc. His eyes light up as he remembers seeing the first lions screen-printed on his creations, and later those laser-engraved in the first workshop in the area to use this (then) futuristic technology, less than 20 miles away in Casarsa della Delizia.

The product's influence and prestige required a new business approach, taken on with baby steps and not without some trepidation. But thanks to the efforts of a talented sales representative, word started to spread. They were no longer knives from “that firm in Maniago, the one owned by Gino and Cesarina”. They were LionSTEEL knives. With some fame to their name, they took the decision to contact the first wholesalers, to open up to a larger market in a more systematic and far-reaching way.

The company grew, with measured levels of enthusiasm. In 1982 came the first employee, who would go on to work alongside Gino and Cesarina. Then came another three or four over the course of the next ten years.



Some of the classic models made by LionSTEEL between the 1980s and 1990s.

In 1988, they abandoned the old outhouse-come-workshop, which would later become a place for family gatherings. LionSTEEL moved to Via dei Fabbri, just a few yards from the Colvera torrent, taking over the old premises of a manufacturer of butcher knives, Rosa Bernardin. The company continued to grow but it was still missing the means and the mindset to

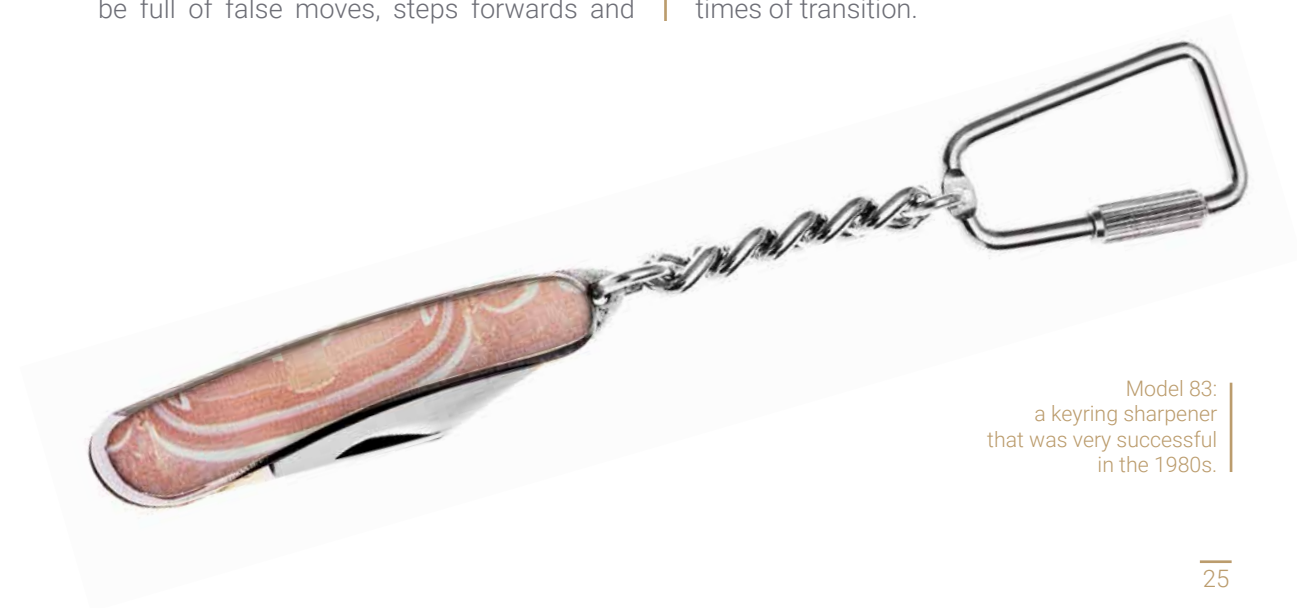
really turn things around. Its deep artisanal roots continued to create the same magic but, at the same time, they brought doubt and hesitation that held back a change in direction. On the one hand, there was Gino with his meticulous skill and craftsmanship. He continued to make his templates by hand using the somewhat acrobatic, experiential procedures of times gone by. His skilful eye allowed

him even to create prototypes for springs. On the other hand, that eagle eye that knew how to fathom out the most intimate and remote intricacies of the product was not well trained enough to penetrate the misty haze that was the market and the future. The hope and energy of the eighties led the way to a new decade, which would go on to be full of false moves, steps forwards and

as many steps backwards, in the midst of a murky cloud of old habits and resistance to change. The lion would lose its way, burning itself in the searing heat of the Sardinian sun, going off track in the post-war maze in the former Yugoslavia and getting caught up in the post-communist tangle of the former Soviet Union. No mortal sin, in those obscure times of transition.



In 1988, they abandoned the old outhouse-come-workshop and LionSTEEL moved to Via dei Fabbri, just a few yards from the Colvera torrent.



Model 83:  
a keyring sharpener  
that was very successful  
in the 1980s.





## The nineties *False moves*

We often find ourselves at a crossroads with a choice of two options ahead: the short, safe one of givens and customs we are used to, and the uphill struggle where nothing is a given and everything must be earned. Gino found himself at that crossroads in 1969. He decided to take on the challenge of the more arduous route. But in the early nineties, with three children in education to support and a slight sense of gratification looking back at his journey, Gino opted for the (seemingly) more straightforward route, the one recommended by others, and not the tougher path his instinct was telling him to follow. The safe option was perfecting his Li-

onSTEEL-branded sporting knives, working to improve their existing quality, to optimise production and bring the fruit of his labour to the market, with well-planned strategies.

The distraction from this mission came in the form of an (again, seemingly) appetising opportunity, which was to bring a seductive scent of juniper, salt and tradition to Maniago. An order came in from renowned knife-manufacturer David to make a model of the Sardinian pastoral *pattada* knife, which incidentally had become a souvenir for seaside tourists. After grappling with Nuremberg and Solingen, now Gino would be working to keep the Sardinian flag flying high. The success of this model, along with other *pattada* the company made for third parties, convinced them to create and market their own line. And so Figus was born, warmly welcomed on the market with a rush of orders.

By taking this seemingly smooth path, Gino put those pipe dreams of innovation to one side and the move was back towards a safe, low-key approach, transplanting a bit of the Friulian foothills to the uplands of Sardinia. Over the





course of the 1990s, the company made some 50 models of *pattada* which, alone, accounted for more than half of the company's turnover. Meanwhile, Gino and Cesarina's children had grown up and wanted to claim their seat at the table. Daniele had already been working in the workshop since 1986; Massimo joined him in 1992. Gianni would only become a part of the business in 1994, and almost by chance. He only went in to type up his dissertation on the computer... Within the walls of the family company, he was left spellbound by the irresistible magic of the blades, but also by the possibilities offered by modern information technology. He found his own entrepreneurial vocation, which guided him in reinventing an age-old craft in a new and innovative way. And so this youthful workforce joined Gino, Cesarina and their modest squad of workers,

injecting new energy into LionSTEEL, which would help it to stay afloat during the hard times ahead. The *pattada* strategy, it turned out, was actually leading the company down a dead-end path. The "easy option" was about to come up against a brick wall, which would cause the encouraging gusts of north-westerly Sardinian wind to cease. Some sizable *pattada* orders were not honoured with due payment, which really put the company's finances, and faith, to the test. They only managed to survive the blow thanks to the incredible resilience that only close-knit families know how to bring to the table. The unhappy ending to their Sardinian adventure full of hope was, however, not only down to chance or bad luck. There was a lesson to be learnt about the risks of being too reliant on the businesses of others and on trade discounts. The margins were laughable and the level of commitment required ended up suffocating authentic talent. As often happens after a knockout, the company got back on its feet, a little wobbly, and tried to find a solution, with numerous unsteady attempts to move towards new markets. Be-



Catalogue season started with the *pattada* knives, which would go on to underpin the sales of LionSTEEL-branded knives.

hind the nervous business exterior, there was a muddled but serious intention to face the rest of the world, standing on its own two feet, with its own newfound self-awareness. An intense season of trade shows and business trips abroad began in the mid-1990s. LionSTEEL took part in the trade fair in Brescia and, in January 1995, in the event in Las Vegas, joining a group of some 40 or so businesspeople from Maniago, navigating their way around Nevada in a minibus. LionSTEEL was the first firm in Maniago to arrive in Atlanta and take part in the Blade Show.

It was Gianni in particular who followed these trade routes driven by his knowledge of economics, his marketing flair and his fighting, front-line English. The trips became more and more frequent, to far-off countries like Brazil and towards new markets in Eastern Europe. These new horizons were still hazy, but they were right outside Friuli's front door. The fall of the Berlin Wall was in the process of converting a myriad of potential customers to the ways of capitalism, without too many platitudes. It was an occasion not to be missed. Gianni's compan-

ion for many of these eastern escapades was Giovanni Miniutti, a businessman from Maniago who had realised that the future lay beyond their own front doors. Together, they ended up in Moscow, in the turbulent Eltsin years, where they went around with covert, rocambolesque catalogues. Nonetheless, they were laying the foundations of a business, which still brings great satisfaction today. Together, they took on risky road trips in post-war Serbia, resisting the endless queues at the Hungarian border for goods passport checks, or sometimes forced to bypass bombed bridges over the Danube. In Belgrade, when the ruins were still letting off smoke, they were often paid off with thousand-mark notes they had never even seen before. In Novi Sad, they were put up in a bleak, fixed-up retirement home because the hotel they had booked was under military occupation. They felt like "business trips" out of a Kusturica film, in an unfathomable world at the mercy of strange and mysterious customers.

Nonetheless, during that period of survival, in the midst of an entangled bundle of confused uprisings, a hardy state of awareness was be-

ginning to take shape at LionSTEEL. You had to make your own work and take control of your own destiny. You had to invest. In 1999, the Pauletta family decided to buy their first machining centre, on the advice of a supplier friend. This was so they could carry out the full manufacturing process internally for their sporting knives, designed for Columbia River Knife and Tool (CRKT). It was just the beginning of a process of growth and development, which would continue for the duration of the following decade.

Giovanni and Gianni  
in Moscow.





Dart: the first knife  
designed by Gianni Pauletta.

## The two-thousands *I think, therefore I am*

After the unrest of the barbaric invasions, the Western world found itself in the sorry shadows of the monasteries.

There comes a time when we need to meditate, to recompose our identity and culture, digging out our true calling, buried after pursuing empty illusions. For Gino, the start of the 2000s was that time. It was the right time because of everything the lion had learnt from his mistakes and because of the conditions in which he found himself, both the adverse and the auspicious. A lack of liquidity and limited access to credit meant nothing could be wasted. Every penny spent was an investment that had to be maximised through rigorous manage-

ment. In LionSTEEL's favour, however, was the bond between an increasingly tried-and-tested team. Gianni took care of marketing and innovation; Massimo focused on reorganising production to adapt to the needs of modern times; and Daniele carried on the work of his parents, cultivating that manual skill that gives each product its *raison d'être*. Daniele, the first son to join the business, had been in training with his dad since he was a boy, handling relations with suppliers and local artisans, becoming a part of that fertile network of gestures, ideas and bonds that is the lifeblood of Maniago. From workshop to workshop, and artisan to artisan, he did his best to learn the local variant of the Friulian language, which was so different from the Italian he was used to speaking at school and at home. Today, to conquer the world you need to speak English but Daniele knows only too well that to really understand the deep secrets of Maniago's blades, you still have to be able to understand certain words found only in a Friulian dictionary. "In the beginning was the Word," and that goes for traditions and vocations too.





| Daniele Pauletta

Through pragmatic division of labour, the new generation took up the reins of the company, playing offence with all of their youthful energy and spirit. Gino and Cesarina continued to work alongside their children, adding that special, venerable touch like no other.

The first rule that was applied in that period was to diversify the business. Work on the sporting knives bearing the LionSTEEL trademark was consolidated, without abandoning production work for third parties. Traditional customers were joined by new ones who wanted to experiment with innovative products; these included some of Maniago's progressive thinkers, as well as American customers who continued to raise the bar with their requests. The tricky parts of those complicated challenges always taught them something new; it was about cultivating concrete opportunities to learn and grow, rather than jumping on short-lived fallacies that were going nowhere. This change of tack began to bear its first fruits, among which was Dard.

Dard was LionSTEEL's sporting knife, shot like an arrow towards the bullseye of the future,

encompassing all of the repressed momentum of those years of purgatory in its unbridled design. But product innovation, which sank its roots into Gino's organic beginnings, was in itself not enough. Deeper strategic levers needed to be actioned: process innovation, reorganisation of production, and marketing and communication used as tools to speak to other worlds. To move in this direction, a change of mentality was needed, and now. It was Gianni who took control of the situation, the first creator of a real revolution from within, which would spread to everyone else across all departments, like a plague of good.

That change inside the lion's head soon led to a change in the rest of its body. Each and every hard-earned penny was reinvested in new technology: design systems with new 3D programs, machining centres, numerical-control machines, and equipment that had never been seen before. The old hydropower which had moved the hammers and grinders of Maniago for centuries is, today, used by LionSTEEL for extraordinary processing techniques such as water-jet cutting. It is incredible to think how

this evasive, fluid substance, when sprayed at thousands of bars of pressure and mixed with minuscule particles of granite sand, transforms into a scalpel capable of cutting through great thicknesses of steel with surgical precision. Water, stone and metal. The substance of history repeats itself, creating new magic out of old misfortunes.

In order to really make the most of these powerful tools, work had to be done on another decisive factor: organisation. First of all, it was out with everything that was not strictly necessary: products that did not add value or bring in profit, irrelevant or unmanageable product variants, and outdated or dispersive processes. The various parts of the beast had to be connected up in the most logical and fluid way, finding the shortest route to join up the two extremities. IT and automation were needed to manage increasingly complex scenarios, first with suppliers and ever more diverse "inspirers", then with the immense potential and demands of a globalised world. In recent years, robotisation of the production process has been a decisive and symbolic milestone

on this ongoing journey. The Pauletta family still remembers the beginning with a certain poignancy. The sight of the anthropomorphic robot in action attracted mixed emotions. For the first time, it had replaced the sight of human hands at work in their factory. On the one hand, there was a sense of childlike excitement watching that first dance with technology; on the other, a sense of trepidation that always accompanies the transition into no-man's land, between the past that has gone and the future that is just coming into view.

With brand-spanking new products, an agile, slimmed-down body and a lean new self-awareness, only the boldest step remained for the lion to take: exploring the vast plains of the market, without wasting too much energy, to avoid making the same mistake as in the previous decade. The LionSTEEL price list had already been streamlined at the global level in the nineties. This far-sighted moment of transparency and clarity would later pay dividends, eliminating the need for laborious, wild adaptations and consolidating the company's professional image. With this credit to their name,

they left their reservations and insecurities behind them, and began to break through in the parallel universe online. They were among the first in Maniago to really take this opportunity seriously. They began listening in on online forums and discussion groups about sporting knives, before there was even talk of social media. Listening is always the best way to learn, to absorb ideas and see what other people are talking about. As a regular visitor to the Mil Combat Knife Forum (MCKF), Gianni came to know its moderator, Michele Pensato, also known for being a designer by the name of "Molletta". A partnership, and friendship, was formed. Michele was a very capable technical mind with a broad vision, who knew his way around the world of knives. This contributed significantly to turning the company around and, even today, continues to bear fruit, yielding creative results.

The MCKF, along with other forums both in Italy and beyond, provided stimulation and fuelled new ideas. Together with LionSTEEL's ripe industrial experience and Molletta's insatiable appetite, it pushed them to dare to do

more, to surpass the limits of technology that, until then, had been considered insurmountable. They even managed to slice up blocks of special-purpose steel, taking on those audacious processing jobs that would later give rise to the SR model. That burning desire to be contaminated by new ideas and to take risks was what contributed to bringing out a side of the company that had been hidden for some time: the courage of a lion.



Designer Michele Pensato  
known as "Molletta",  
also the founding father of the MCKF Forum.  
This precious collaboration marked  
a turning point for LionSTEEL.



| SR-1 Damascus

## The twenty-tens *Rebirth*

The year 2010 was a special one, thanks to an inspirational dream that occurred a few months before.

In the summer of 2009, after spending a pleasant evening with friends, Massimo had a eureka moment. While asleep, he saw a powerful and recurring image of a knife handle that was made in one single block. It rotated on itself, almost as though admiring its own identity: "Look at me! I'm all in one piece! I'm just one single block!". "Our subconscious communicates with us through dreams / fragments of buried truths"<sup>1</sup> and perhaps even fragments of buried opportunities, images that we have dreamt of for

who knows how long but never brought into focus with our eyes open. Massimo's dream was perhaps the completion of a process and a project that had been brewing inside him for some time. He had perhaps been influenced by discussions with Gianni and the ideas that had been bounced around the online forums, which washed through the factory like waves of new life, stemming from an innate passion which tied him to the most intimate fibres of the steel and blades. The morning after, he put pen to paper and, with the help of Simone, Gianni and Michele, his idea turned into a prototype. In the first half of 2010, the prototype was developed and production started. And so the SR1 model was born. With those two initials "S" and "R"<sup>2</sup>, it screamed unrestrained creativity, no holding back, something never seen before. Lion-STEEL's SOLID® Knife technology was also born with the SR model. SR was much more than just a product; it was a revolutionary way of making knives, with monolithic handles milled from a single piece of titanium, in search of that extraordinary continuity in the



material which is the secret behind both its resistance and its aesthetic beauty.

That stroke of genius, perfected over months of hard work and involving the whole company, did not go by unnoticed. In June 2010, at the Blade Show in Atlanta, the SR1 was awarded a prize that would change the future of LionSTEEL: the “Most Innovative Imported Design”.

Their understated stand, resigned to insignificance despite its appearance in Atlanta every year, was suddenly overcome by an unknown magnetic force that attracted potential customers never seen before. They were curious to find out more about the outsider from Maniago. “Who are you?”. “Where are you from?”. “How long have you been in the sector?”. “Please can we see the handle?”. “Unbelievable!”. What was clear from all of these questions was that they wanted to find out what was behind that expression *most innovative* that had captured their imaginations. While Gianni was trying not to get caught up in all the hype, what he had managed to see was that, in fact, he had

not “made it”, that was not the final destination. This was really only the beginning. The company would go on to build its brand up around that crowning moment, carefully swathing it in intangible value like layers of cloth interwoven with concrete details of stories that needed to be told and brought to light. It was not enough to do a good job. It was about really communicating what it was that they could do well, in all of the world’s languages. Boasting to the people they met in the streets of Maniago about who-knows-what exceptional talents would get them nowhere, they had to get out of their den and confront the big players, with their head held high, taking defeats in their stride and using them as building blocks for future victories. An intensive trade fair season was about to begin for LionSTEEL. No more unrehearsed forays abroad, but real targeted campaigns to conquer new markets, with the knives of their brand communication sharpened and at the ready, forging their own style and identity day after day. Nuremberg, Abu Dhabi, Atlanta, São Paulo, Moscow, Las Vegas, Taipei



TiSpine  
with a SOLID®  
titanium handle.

LionSTEEL’s SOLID® Knife technology: a revolutionary way of making knives,  
with monolithic handles milled from a single piece of titanium.



TRE Damasco |

and more: every year they attended at least five or six of the most strategic trade fairs for their product and brand positioning.

In ten years, LionSTEEL won ten awards at the Blade Show in Atlanta, including “Overall Knife of the Year” four times and the “Manufacturing Quality Award” three times. It also succeeded twice in winning best company and best product in the same year, the first being in 2014 with TiDust. Even on that occasion, the key to their success was an ability to imagine and produce something completely original and a desire to use revolutionary processes. “SR”, *without restraint*: no holding back. Take the handles made by melting titanium powder using a laser – these were the first knives in the world made with aerospace technology! From the sleek SR made all in one piece to the minuscule mineral fragments of TiDust, LionSTEEL wanted to prove to itself that it could challenge the material, coming at it from diametrically opposed angles.

In 2017, with more than twenty or so employees and the need for a bigger and more

organised space for new product lines and a state-of-the-art warehouse, the company moved to new premises in the Molino di Campagna district of Maniago. The new location, in the old street “Via La Mola”<sup>3</sup>, would serve as a constant reminder of Maniago’s artisanal vocation, repeating that mantra-like image of a hand skilfully guiding the blade as it is caressed by the turning stone, to create its cutting edge, the product’s sharp inner core.

Meanwhile, yesterday is now today, and today is already tomorrow; the present continues to flow like the meeting point between past and future, like a place in life and in our conscious that keeps alive the miracle of continuity, of stories that evolve, yet remain true to themselves at heart. Of memories that are enriched, while nothing is forgotten.

Today, the factory is becoming an increasingly autonomous organism, in mind and body. Its parts are increasingly connected together, actioned by a clear idea, shared among thirty or so people. In order to deal with change, people need to be a part of it. A

team with a leader. But something that goes beyond the individualism of the single artisan, which gets you nowhere. Sometimes, the Pauletta family ask themselves what the company might look like in just a few years' time and try to see how it might evolve, without ever claiming to have all the answers. That would be impossible. They do their best to carry on putting into practice what has worked so far, to preserve, consolidate and pass on all of the knowledge and experience that have allowed LionSTEEL to grow. They work hard to preserve that order and method that have helped them through the darkest times. But this discipline has a deeper, more profound purpose, which goes beyond its own confinements: creating the right conditions for peace of mind, that environment where you can still think with your hands and design with your eyes and fingers, rediscovering the original, primordial sense of "digital", continuing to shape and mould things without constraint, as though they were an extension of your own happy thoughts and visions.

As the economist Julian Lincoln Simon wrote, "The main fuel to speed the world's progress is our stock of knowledge, and the brake is our lack of imagination". This is a truth well known at LionSTEEL. In its own small way, this modest family business has succeeded in conquering a small slither of the world because of its ability to maintain the fine balance between knowledge and imagination.

Behind the rational structure that increasingly inspires and guides the workflow in the different departments, Gino continues to be active, his bright eyes twinkling with the same passion. He has a young apprentice working by his side who will inherit the legacy of his work, to ensure that nothing is lost. Today Gino is retired, a free man, happily engrossed in doing what he loves most. In the soft light that streams through the large windows at the new premises, he creates unique one-offs: artistic pens, vintage knives and other metal creations that seem to flourish from his safe hands. His lifeblood. From the family outhouse in 1969, the journey has been a



ROK:  
the evolution continues.





BestMAN, a traditional knife  
revisited by LionSTEEL.

real space odyssey of its own, yet the commander emeritus has never forgotten his roots, and the talent he was given on Earth. And everybody knows how precious that is. Everybody knows that this calm and stealthy freedom is the heart of the company. You

cannot put a price on it. Even Gino and Cesarina's grandchildren, the sons and daughters of Daniele, Massimo and Gianni, have lots of questions about their future. Most often they ask: "What will we be when we grow up? Who will we become? Will we be the guardians of

the new technological era 4.0, or creative craftspeople like grandad? Will these be two separate worlds or will there be a sort of living osmosis that, today, we can't quite imagine yet?".

Perhaps only the lion holds the answer, as he creeps out unnoticed to explore the starry night sky over Maniago, listening to the silent replies that fall from the moon.



Gino  
still hard  
at work.

1- T.N. Own translation of the Italian lyrics of "Caffè de la Paix" by Franco Battiato.

2 - T.N. "SR" stands for "senza ritegno" in Italian meaning "without constraint".

3 - T.N. Millstone street.

His hand  
skilfully guides the blade,  
caressed by the turning stone.





## *A brief tour of the company*

**F**ifty years of history are what build a company's identity, interlaced with methods, tools, people and places. LionSTEEL's new premises encompass our journey of growth and all of the decision we have made so far.

Light fills the spaces and a calm green view lies outside the window. We aspire to create order and balance between privacy and transparency. This is how we do things; this is our style and the way we aspire to be.

The different spaces in our world of work are brought together by the same company spirit. We would be delighted to take you on a brief journey through our company, to show you the most important aspects of our work: **design, production, assembly, organisation and marketing**. These are the five pillars of our today and tomorrow, every day.





## DESIGN

*“Start by doing  
what’s necessary,  
then do what’s possible;  
and suddenly  
you are doing  
the impossible.”*

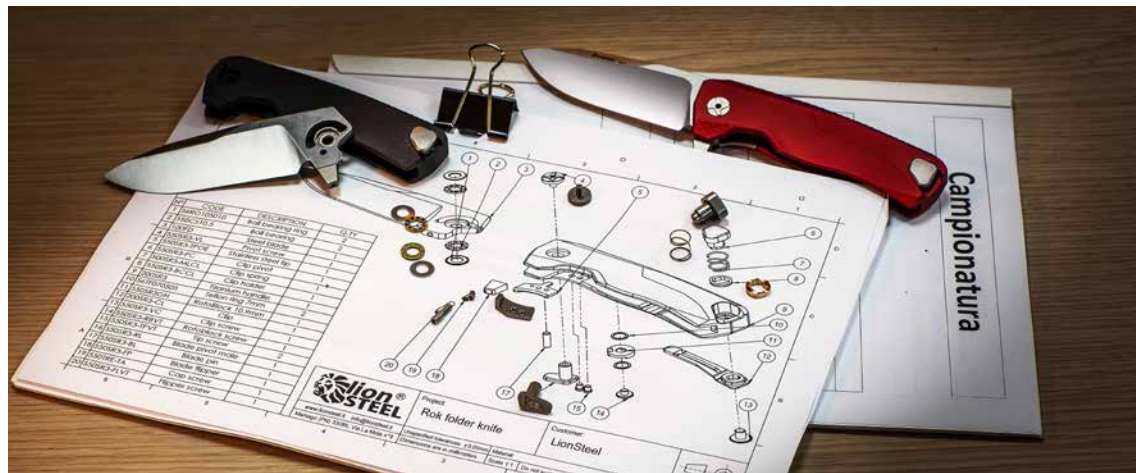
Saint Francis of Assisi



Designing means, first and foremost, simplifying the transition between idea and production on an industrial scale. This means understanding and knowing how to use the right tools.

This is why LionSTEEL has the most up-to-date design devices and programs, both for 3D product modelling and for parameterising and optimising processes, by sharing and in-

tegrating technical information. Only by using a methodical and efficient design platform can you find the time and headspace to tackle the real challenges. Whether on paper or in a prototype, they continue to crop up today in the discussions and debates that form the basis of deep and meaningful relationships between people and their ideas.



Massimo Pauletta and Simone V.



## PRODUCTION

*“The future  
is something we build.”*

Tim Berners-Lee





## —SKILLED HANDS AT WORK—

LionSTEEL's awareness of what is behind progress and innovation has led it to invest heavily in overhauling its production system. For over two decades, the company has been undergoing a radical transformation, with increasingly advanced machining centres, robotics recently introduced into the production cycle, and new processing technologies such as water-jet cutting and milling of single pieces for the SOLID® Knife.

At LionSTEEL, what matters is not the machinery in itself, but rather having complete internal control of the processes that make the products unique and give them their value, after undergoing rigorous quality controls. To be linear and efficient, what is important in terms of strategy is to have a simple production layout, so as to be increasingly streamlined, and to train staff, so as to synchronise the human eye with the logic of the machine.











## ASSEMBLY

*“Great things  
are done by a series  
of small things  
brought together.”*

Vincent van Gogh





In a sector that has advanced rapidly from an artisan to an industrial scale, there is still a moment in which the human eye and human hand prevail. When the product is assembled, and the knife takes on its definitive shape, that human touch is still what is needed.

Today, every product is assembled almost exclusively by female workers, in the wake of a tradition that has always seen the female touch as indisputably superior, and still very far from being emulated in the era of industry 4.0. In this department, where the overall end quality of the product is decided, Lion-STEEL has tried to create the feel of a tailor's workshop: light, bright and quiet, it is a place that gives you room to breathe. Time almost seems to stop here, while timeless beauty continues to be created.







## ORGANISATION

*“Obtaining  
maximum movement  
from minimal shift.”*

Pietrangelo Buttafuoco<sup>4</sup>



An important step towards industry 4.0:  
CNC machinery wired and managed remotely by the technical department.

Today, LionSTEEL operates around the world, from the United States to China, and Germany to Russia, and has online dealers in countries such as Finland and Sweden. The company's global dimension, the need to industrialise products that have high-quality content in many variants, and its articulated supplier structure have stimulated LionSTEEL to develop an organisation that is able to manage workflows efficiently, both to and from the company, and those in house. New digital tools are used to rationalise the warehouse and how it is managed. The full production process can also be monitored in real time, flagging up critical issues and the availability of machinery and resources, so that orders can be planned with the utmost precision. Our next goal is to ensure product traceability along the full production chain using a barcode system.



LionSTEEL stand  
at the Nuremberg trade fair:  
organisation is key  
to a global presence.

4 - T.N. Own translation  
of the Italian original.



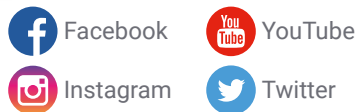


## MARKETING

*“Find the market niche first, and then make the remarkable product – not the other way around.”*

Seth Godin





If you want to sell on the market, you need to interact with it, cultivating and consolidating your brand, and seizing external input. You also need to keep a strong hold on your own identity, while keeping up with new trends. Ten awards in ten years at the Blade Show in Atlanta are testament to Li-onSTEEL's drive to keep challenging itself, to leave a lasting mark on the world of sporting knives. An online and offline presence are what fuel visibility and ensure communication is systematic rather than occasional. These efforts are supported by participation in trade fairs and involvement in strategic networks such as MIKITA, a project run with other businesses in Maniago. We can only conquer the market as a united front, working with one another both within and beyond the company, cooperating with other businesses and really listening to the customers of today and tomorrow.





TiDust: exemplary innovation by LionSTEEL.  
The handle is made by melting titanium powder using a laser.  
It is the first knife in the world made using aerospace technology.

## INNOVATION

*“Design, production,  
assembly, organisation  
and marketing:  
these are the five solid  
pillars of our company,  
thanks to which  
we are ready to take on  
the biggest challenge:  
that of innovation.”*

LionSTEEL



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## SOLID<sup>®</sup> Knife

LionSTEEL made its first Solid Knife back in 2010, which marked a turning point for the company. Creating a new Solid Knife is always an exciting time; with ROK, we really raised the bar in terms of overall quality.

The frame is made by milling a single solid piece of titanium or aluminium, which makes the handle a single, strong part of the knife.



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## ROTOBLOCK

This safety mechanism was created with the first Solid Knife: it locks the blade in place while the knife is in use, so there is no risk of it accidentally closing.



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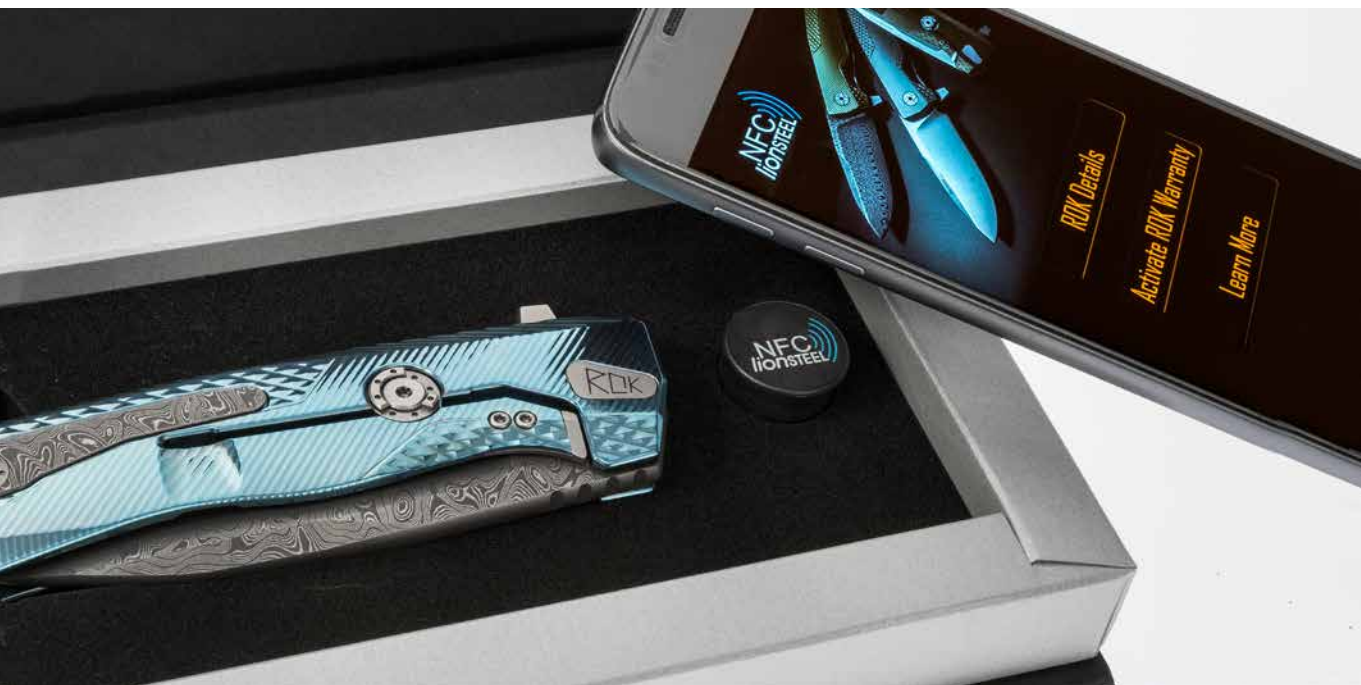
## ReF *(Removable flipper system)*

You choose how you want to use your knife: you can unscrew the flipper using a torx if you don't need it, and insert the second screw included in the box in its place. The screw fits perfectly in the hole at the bottom of the blade.





NFC technology has been adopted for different payment methods and logistics systems using cards and smartphones. Here, you can use it to check the ROK product details, activate the warranty, contact customer services and find out more about LionSTEEL.



## H.WAYL *(Hide What Annoys You Lionsteel)*

This system makes it easier to pull out your knife and put it away in your pocket. The clip is hidden when using the knife and you can't feel it pressing against the palm of your hand when holding the knife.



### International AWARDS





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*I am convinced that people do not come into our lives, or our businesses, by chance. Every encounter is important for the growth of both parties. Our first 50 years in business have confirmed this belief. This is why I want to thank everyone who dedicates a significant amount of their time to us, from the very bottom of my heart. This time is precious, to learn from one another, to improve as colleagues and as people, and to cultivate a creative future together that has real value.*

Gianni Pauletta, CEO

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## Thank you

to the LionSTEEL team, in order of years of service:

Gianluca D.T.  
Michela C.  
Giovanni C.  
Sofia M.  
Angelica Z.  
Simone V.  
Evelin A.  
Vittorina T.  
Marco U.  
Mirko F.  
Caterina P.  
Isabella C.  
Ika C.

Valentina V.  
Gabriele L.  
Jessica B.  
Ivan C.  
Davide V.  
Andrea M.  
Nicholas Z.  
Gluco M.  
Andrea G.  
Teo M.  
Gian Battista C.  
Patrick T.

### And to:

Rorita Z., retired  
Loredana T., our first employee

---

## And thank you

to our customers and suppliers,  
as well as all of the people and businesses  
we work with on a daily basis.

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