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"People are jealous because I am free."

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Filippo Sorcinelli

Dubbed the “Pope’s tailor,” the designer behind Atelier LAVS makes ecclesiastical vestments for the Vatican and salacious perfumes for the masses

BY CAROLINE REILLY

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Filippo Sorcinelli fell in love with the beauty of the Catholic Church as a child in Italy’s Marche region. “I remember seeing the paintings on the wall, the statues, the separate wardrobes for the vestments,” he says, describing his local parish. Today, parishioners around the world feast their eyes on Sorcinelli’s own artistry. As the founder of Atelier LAVS—Laboratorio Atelier Vesti Sacre—he designs and constructs the ecclesiastical vestments, furnishings, and accessories for the Catholic sacred liturgy, including garments for Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis.

Sorcinelli video-calls me from Milan, Italy, with his boyfriend, who helps us translate. At 50, Sorcinelli has an almost otherworldly presence. He’s draped in a simple all-black ensemble, with a shaved head, a dense black beard, and inky eyes.



Filippo Sorcinelli created Pope Francis’s sacred garments for his first Mass as pontiff, in 2013.

The idea for Atelier LAVS, which Sorcinelli founded in 2001, started with a favor to a friend. At 23, Sorcinelli was working as the organist for the cathedral he’d grown up attending when a friend was due to take his vows and be officially ordained as a Catholic priest. “I told him, ‘I will make your sacred vestment for that day,’” recalls Sorcinelli. He enlisted the help of his seamstress aunt and older sister to create his first design.

Today, Sorcinelli distinguishes his creations by incorporating historically accurate Gothic design elements, such as selecting precious gems and decorative patterns based on the type of Mass and specific cathedral where the garment will be worn.

“Twenty-five years ago, no one was doing this kind of thing. Now everyone wants to copy him, but no one can,” Sorcinelli’s boyfriend says with a proud smile. “It’s because Filippo studies history. When we go to church together, or to a museum, he is always taking photographs of vestments from the Middle Ages.”



Sorcinelli and Cardinal Camillo Ruini.

It’s that exceptionalism that caught the eye of the Archbishop of [Genoa](#), who first wore one of Sorcinelli’s garments during a televised address in 2003. After that, the orders poured in. He was quickly dubbed “the Pope’s tailor.”

In 2007, he got a call from the Vatican, with whom Sorcinelli has now worked dozens of times. He created Pope Francis’s sacred garments for his first Mass as pontiff, in 2013. This cream-colored vestment, Sorcinelli says, was uniquely challenging, as the Pope is known for his restraint. “A simple garment is more difficult to make than a complex one.”

Sorcinelli has since expanded his brand to include a perfume line, which was born from the popularity of one of Atelier LAVS’s hallmark practices, packaging all its vestments with incense. The scents, like his vestments, include nods to history and artistic research, running the gamut from a Notre Dame–inspired perfume to what Sorcinelli describes as “perversion-themed” fragrances, such as Popper-Pop and Slightly-B!tch.

These sex references have drawn ire from some who find it hard to reconcile Sorcinelli’s proximity to the Catholic Church with his sexual openness. But Sorcinelli is unfazed by these criticisms.



Atelier LAVS’s perfume line includes fragrances such as Popper-Pop and Slightly-B!tch.

“People are jealous because I am free,” he says.

On his personal Instagram, Sorcinelli posts images of himself shirtless, showing off his intricate line tattoos, which wind around his muscular arms and torso. “It’s normal. It’s just the language of the body,” he says. “If you see Michelangelo or Raffaello, you see the body.”

Catholics, Sorcinelli believes, are not a monolith. Every Catholic has their own passions, convictions, and realities, which very well might threaten conventional ideals. “One thing is to be a Catholic. Another is to be a fanatic,” he explains.

“I hope that I will leave a sign for the future with these things that I’m doing,” says Sorcinelli. “My art, the way I live—[I hope] the churches will be full of people like me.” ☺

Caroline Reilly writes for GQ, Vanity Fair, and The Washington Post

Photos: Alessandro Levati/Getty Images Entertainment/Getty Images (portrait); courtesy of Filippo Sorcinelli (all others)



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