

people to  
know  
**GOING GLOBAL**

For Christian Colombo, coming home to work for the family business offered bigger opportunities than he expected.

**LIKE MANY EUROPEANS,** Christian Colombo speaks more than one language.

But he might be considered somewhat of an overachiever even by European standards, as he is fluent in not two or three, but six languages: English, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Catalan and his native Italian.

“My mom is Scottish and my father is from Northern Italy, so we always spoke both English and Italian at home,” he says.

He honed his Catalan and Spanish while attending university in Barcelona, Spain, where he studied industrial engineering, and his French while working in Bordeaux. And he studied Portuguese while working in both Brazil and Portugal.

Colombo grew up in Varese, Italy, about 35 miles north of Milan. Located at the foot of the Italian Alps, the town is home to Ficep, a manufacturer of steel fabrication equipment, which Colombo’s great-grandmother started in 1930. The company is also heavily invested in software; it was one of the first companies to combine software and steel fabrication equipment and created/installed its first CNC line in the 1960s. Ficep also owns 100% of Steel Projects, a product life-cycle software company for the steel fabrication industry, fully oriented to BIM-based fabrication.

And the company has stayed in the family throughout its history. All four of Colombo’s great-grandmother’s children worked there, his grandfather became president, his father is the current chief of the executive committee, his sister is the chief financial officer and Colombo himself is the vice president of operations. Ficep currently employs around 550 worldwide, approximately 360 in Italy.

Over the years Colombo has developed a passion for steel fabrication management software. It started during his thesis work at university, for which he presented a project on “Simulation of Steel Fabrication Shops.” But despite his interest in fabrication and his family connection to Ficep, joining the company wasn’t a given for him. “At first, I didn’t want to join the family business,” he recalls. He was more interested in striking out on his own path and getting away from home. So he spent some time in

Barcelona, working as a consultant for industrial process operations and specializing in discrete simulation.

After a while, though, Varese—and Ficep—began to beckon, and so he returned home with the idea that he’d give the family business a try for a year. Before going back to Varese, though, he spent nine months at the company’s subsidiary in France, in the after-sales and assembly shop. Sixteen years later, he remains with Ficep and is raising his family (he has two boys) in the town where he grew up. “My kids even go to my old school,” he laughs.

Returning to Varese and starting work with Ficep was also an educational experience for Colombo. In the beginning, drawing from his industrial engineering background, he worked primarily with servicing machines. From there, he moved on to sales and business development and credits his evolution and success at Ficep to his mentors.

“I have direct access to the industry’s most knowledgeable people,” he explains. “I’m very lucky to have had two great mentors on different sides of the business. One was our technical director, Giorgio Frigerio, and the other is our sales director, Edoardo Fusi. No one knows the world of steel like him.”

In addition to the professional development experience he’s gained, coming back home has, perhaps ironically, also allowed Colombo to see even more of the world. He travels extensively, looking for new markets, setting up subsidiaries and building awareness of the Ficep brand. He enjoys the travel, although he notes that he rarely has time to get out and truly take advantage of the surroundings when traveling for work. The U.S. tops his list in terms of business culture. “There is more of an emphasis on return on investment there as opposed to just first cost,” he says.

When he is able to travel for pleasure, Spain, South America, Australia (where his wife is from), Japan and the U.S. are some of his favorite destinations. He loves Colorado and Utah for heli-skiing, a sport he has always enjoyed—even if nowadays, since his kids were born, opportunities are more rare. Brazil and Central America are his favorites for the summer. The weather, surroundings and culture are nice—and he can practice his Portuguese. **MSC**

- Colombo, dressed for business—and the elements, with his wife, Catriona, at Mont Blanc.

