Tommy Hilfiger has won the 2019 Ischia People Award at Ischia Global Festival, Italy’s most famous independent film, art and humanitarian festival.

The famed American designer picked up the festival's silver seahorse statue at a ceremony where the noted Italian filmmaker Marco Bellocchio also received an award.

"No summer in my life is complete without spending time in Italy, with its beautiful coastline from Portofino to Taormina, and of course here in the Bay of Naples with Capri and Ischia. Io adoro Ischia. L'Isola Verde é bellissima," finished Hilfiger in Italian, using the local term for Ischia, The Green Island.
In a sporting gesture, Tommy even turned up in a beautifully crisp white linen suit by Isaia, the cool Neapolitan sartorial brand.

Born in Elmira, New York in 1951, Hilfiger is the fashion personification of the American Dream. He created his first boutique in his hometown with his own savings of $150 as a teenager, before going on to open his own fashion brand in Manhattan in 1985. His fashion house broke through the $4 billion annual sales barrier last year, as he rewrote the fashion business paradigm, with the industry’s most successful see-now-buy-now shows.

In the past three years he has partnered with the world’s number one model, Gigi Hadid; Formula One’s greatest driver Lewis Hamilton; and Hollywood’s most happening new star, Zendaya, to create giant global co-brand shows and successes.

A quarter-century ago, he created the Tommy Hilfiger Corporate Foundation to support at-risk American youth. He has also been highly involved in various charities including supporting The Music Industry Fights AIDS, The Fresh Air Fund, WWF, Save the Children and Autism Speaks, where he and his wife Dee Ocleppo are board members.

He and his wife visited Ischia on their luxury yacht Flag, named after his nautical-style logo. A legendarily hard-working couple, by 9AM the morning after receiving the award, Ocleppo was in the Naples factory that produces her acclaimed namesake accessories label.

In a busy week at Ischia Global Fest, rock star Bob Geldof also showed his controversial documentary, A Fanatic Heart, his personal vision of the Nobel Prize winning poet William Butler Yeats, as well as his counter-blast to violent Irish nationalism.

"In my view Yeats was the greatest poet of the 20th century, who sang the Irish nation into existence," said Geldof. His 100-minute film includes readings of Yeats poetry by Liam Neeson, Bono, Colin Farrell, Shane MacGowan, Van Morrison, Dominic West, Stephen Fry and Edna O’Brien.

Geldof also attacked nationalism and frontiers insisting that borders create conflicts, especially in Italy, where the extreme right-wing leader Matteo Salvini has become a key leader in the current coalition government, which has closed Italian ports to all ships carrying non-European immigrants.

Bellocchio also showed his much admired opus Il Traditore, his fictional recounting of the mafia war in Sicily in the 1980s, fought between the Corleonesi, led by Totò Riina, and the old Cosa Nostra. After moving to Brazil and then being extradited back to Italy, Riina betrayed his rivals to the police and eventually died in 2017, after a quarter-century in jail.

The projection was particularly prescient, seeing as this week Italian and American police mounted a gigantic coordinated crackdown in the USA and Sicily, with 19 people arrested, many members of the Inzerillo family, whom Riina had forced out of Italy in the bloody turf war.

In other action, Ischia Global Fest gave its top award to Lina Wertmüller, celebrating her career with a season of retrospectives shown throughout the island in seaside cinemas, town squares and the Regina Isabella hotel, where movies are projected onto a screen attached to a cliff face in a small bay.

"We could not be more proud to dedicate this edition of Ischia Global Festival to Lina Wertmüller, a truly courageous, friendly and anti-conformist personality," said Pascal Vicedomini, the founder and producer of the film festival – Italy’s one-man cinema aficionado who combines the erudition of Barry Norman with the energy of Monroe Stahr.

Steven Zaillian, the Oscar-winning scriptwriter of Schindler’s List, was this year’s chairman of the festival, in a season that attracted multiple Oscar winners, from directors Paul Haggis and Bille August to happening new actors such as Zoey Deutch and Alex Wolff.

By Godfrey Deeny