

MARIKA COMOTTI

# INNOVATION AND STRATEGIES

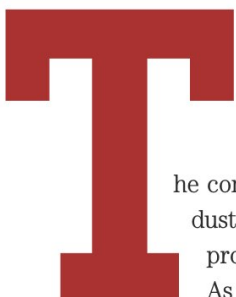
for the electric wire  
harness connector



Overview of CS production



*Winning partnerships for a shared commercial growth on international markets and capability of constantly innovating products, both standard and special. These are the two highlights of CS for its entrepreneurial development next years.*



The connector for the household appliance industry goes on in its innovation pace, from the product to the underlying industrial logic.

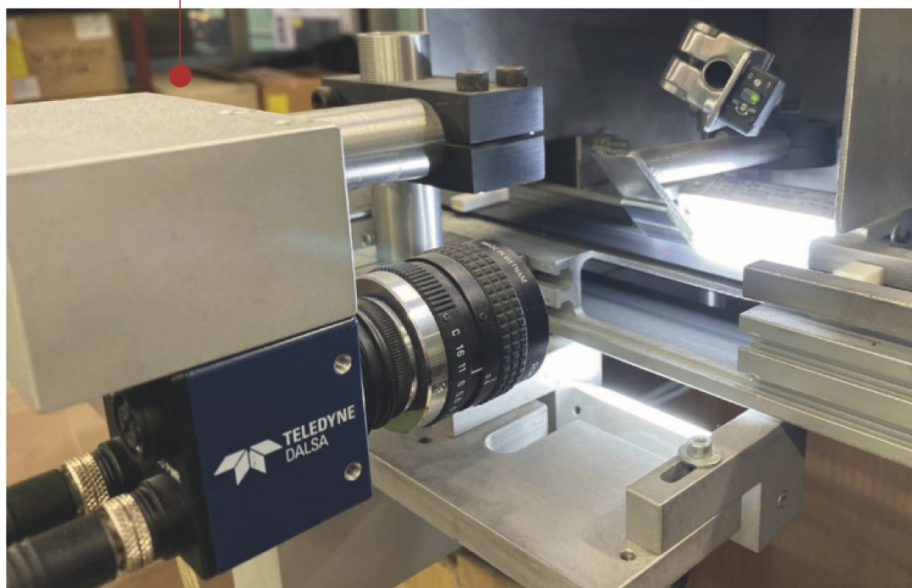
As witnessed by the experience of CS, rigorously (and proudly) made in Italy production plants at Cernusco sul Naviglio (MI), a commercial branch CS Colombo Usa Inc. in New York, and the will of growing further and dealing with more and more demanding international markets. As explains Silvano Colombo, President of the USA subsidiary and Senior CFO of the Italian parent company. "Since the Seventies onwards connectors have become the core business of our manufacturing reality, established in 1956 in the tool design sector and afterwards, since half Sixties, integrating the subcontracting plastic material moulding and actively taking part in the development and growth of the Italian industrial reality at the peak of the economic boom. At around half Seventies, the meeting with entrepreneurs operating in the commercial market of connectors facilitates the start of what today is our "core business". We duly underline that the education and the experience of the founder, our father, is essential for all we are able to do nowadays. Colombo Sergio was one of the Italian pioneers, specializing in the tool making sector. His attentive and severe education has trained employees and collaborators who have taken part in the development of CS, as we know it today, and most of them have worked for 40 years honourably.

When the founder passed away, the baton was deservedly passed to my brother, the engineer Stefano, who is successfully prosecuting the technical/managerial activity, cornerstone of our items' production, combined



**Silvano Colombo,**  
Senior CFO of CS and President of CS Colombo Usa Inc

**Connectors'**  
quality control



with broad knowledge gained along the years and the currently available technology.

The prosecution of our growth in terms of volume, available items and sales, has consequently developed new strategies.

In 1993, we started the collaboration with the multinational manufacturer of metal terminals E.E. Escubedo, with headquarters in Girona, Spain; partner for the resale of our products in Spain and the distribution of theirs in Italy and in the United States. A collaboration that is going on still today, involving both standard products and special designs: we design the connector and Escubedo the terminal; solutions then marketed autonomously or as a single partner for the wire harness providers of big players.

This global shared strategy allows us to operate actively on all main European markets, in South East Asia, in China, Australia, Mexico, Brazil and Canada. Currently, we rely on a single foreign commercial branch in the United States while in Italy we work through agency relationships and a distribution network for abroad to direct customers and to customers that buy our product, combine it with theirs and, afterwards, resell it.

#### **Are you working at the further improvement of these sales strategies?**

We have evaluated it, we think a direct presence on the spot with our team is necessary, at present, we believe



it is more important focusing resources on new technical projects. The direct presence facilitates the commercial rooting for some markets but we need a reference Italian person who manages the branch together with a local operator who knows the market adequately. One of the major issues we are facing in this phase is the recruiting of new generations working as sale resources side by side with our historical commercial representatives who, due to age reasons, will soon retire from the professional activity. We believe in fact that, even in the era of social networks, the agent's constant presence close to customers is the winning strategy, especially in a Country such as Italy with high industrial fragmentation that is still worth 40% of the market for us. Concerning this, we are also evaluating the idea of engaging in the company a specific professional entrusted with marketing, also digital, who can actively support agents in their activity of contact with customers.

**Have you ever thought of producing directly abroad, too?**

We exclusively produce in Italy, where we can rely on extensive know-how, proven experience and constant research and development. We in-house manufacture all tools through a forefront toolshop division equipped with NC machines and CAD technical design systems connected to the business network and to machine tools. What is designed by the technical office is in-house produced and with the support of external subcontracting companies that, still in Italy, produce for us using our tools, the raw material we supply and packages. In the past, we tried to start a manufacturing activity in the United States through a local company but results were not up to expectations, both owing to organizational matters of the United States labour market and because of a different, also cultural, acceptance of the market itself.

**What kinds of solutions do you offer to the household appliance industry?**

It is opportune to underline our economic and commercial decision results in the missing participation in the varied and fragmented market of Insulation Displacement connectors, or IDC, known as RAST 5, 2.5 etc. The reason is that, despite the dimensional compatibility and of polarization keys provided for each article, al-

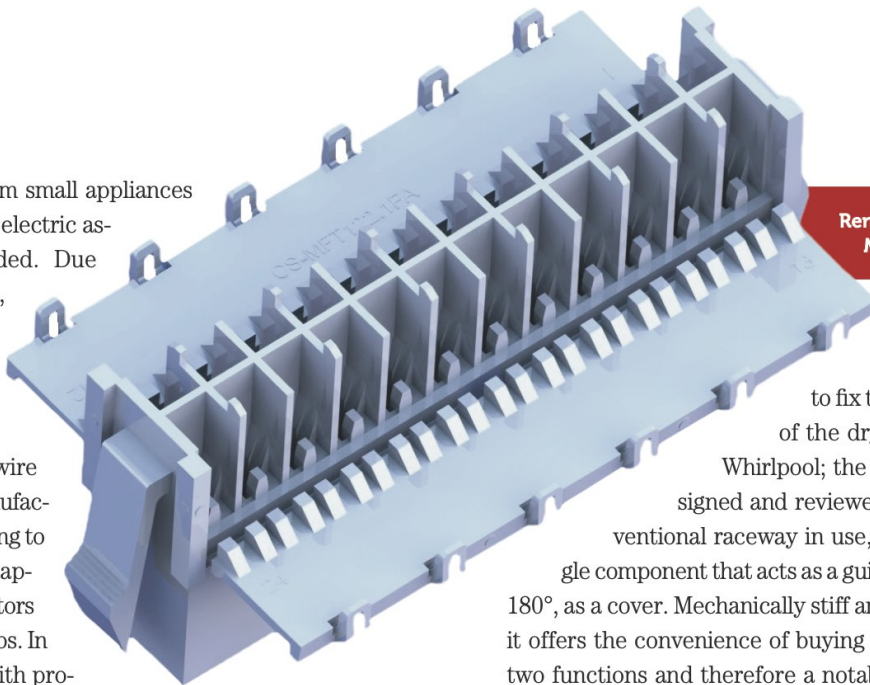


**The new raceway** to fix the wire harnesses of Whirlpool dryers

though the initial idea spread among primary manufacturers of assuring the interconnection among products, at the start of single productions everyone has created his own version, then compelling the wire harness manufacturer to an irreversible choice. Irreversible because the equipment – expensive – to assemble connector + terminal and to carry out the connection or displacement of the insulation is different for each manufacturing company. In addition, who “adopts” the insulation displacement has small tolerance margins and a price per “way” that is defined and controlled by the final customer or OEM industry. For this reason, as CS, we mainly propose crimping connectors and terminals, which provide higher use flexibility and are exploited for most



electric wire harnesses; from small appliances to OEM and for any kind of electric assembly, RAST series included. Due to this choice, any medium, small or even big wire harness provider can propose itself as an alternative. Generally speaking, we sell products to the reference wire harness suppliers of the manufacturers that use them according to their needs for the different appliance types, from refrigerators to washing machines and hobs. In terms of design, we work with producers that issue the product approval; we materially know the final destination and the type of use or of wire harness in its whole. It is customary that sometimes the same wire harness or the same demand appears in different distant nations. Our brand on the design is anyway a warranty of reliability and quality. Outstanding part of our activity is focused on the implementation of “custom” or special products. This niche calls for design skills and knowledge that widely exceed the mere copy of an existing product. As CS, we absorb the equipment cost, provided that the production remains in-house. We do not sell tools, incidentally. Last year, for instance, we manufactured a raceway



Rendering of MFT connector

to fix the wire harnesses of the dryers produced by Whirlpool; the product, fully designed and reviewed versus the conventional raceway in use, consists of a single component that acts as a guide and, rotated by 180°, as a cover. Mechanically stiff and easily installed, it offers the convenience of buying a single part with two functions and therefore a notable saving of time and money, two key conditions in a market that is constantly pursuing efficiency.

**Have you studied, or are you studying, further innovative solutions for the connector?**

We constantly work at the chasing of competitor products’ imperfections, improving – wherever possible – terminal locking systems, user-friendly insertion and so on. In the case of a particular series, MFT, we have worked on the improvement of mechanical safety performance by intervening in the terminal housing part. Our competitors provide for the use of a second part intended for this purpose, to be purchased separately as second-

**“We produce in Italy, where we can rely on know-how, experience and research”**

ary safety, in addition to the connector’s cost. On the contrary, we have directly integrated into the connector one or two (it depends on the number of ways) safety closures through the construction of a wing to be bent for locking stably the terminal inside its seat.

Concerning this series, we are expanding the number of items with details that nobody proposes on the market and we are in advanced design phase for a company operating in various sectors but with a focus on state-of-the-art accumulators for future electric cars. This design will provide for the exclusive use of our connectors, purposely manufactured, and of terminals with flash gilding, they too hardly found and then purposely manufactured.

**EXPERT IN WIRE HARNESSSES**

For over forty years CS, a sale branch in the United States with headquarters in New York, has specialized in designing and manufacturing connection systems and protection housings for electric wire harnesses; besides, it can provide custom solutions for connector-metal terminal applications, it can design complete connection systems with full compatibility and interchangeability with other systems manufactured by competitor companies.

The catalogue production includes quick connect insulating housings, connectors for LK terminals, connectors series RAST 5 crimping, 5 mm-pitch connectors for printed circuit boards series DSB, 8 mm-pitch connectors series P8, 2.54 mm-pitch connectors series 254, 3.96 mm-pitch connectors series 396, automotive connectors and other products for wire harnesses.