

Made in Italy



This image: Finished statue being packaged at Franco Comploj

Left: Bear, standing (maplewood, natural finish) by Franco Comploj

Right: Our Lady of Lourdes in maplewood by Franco Comploj

Image © www.franco.it

Woodworking VAL GARDENA, BOLZANO

Winters in Val Gardena, Italy's far northeast, are long and cold. And this is how woodcarving was first born in the area more than 400 years ago: as a means of spending time during the bleakest months, using readily available natural resources productively. Over time, the skills and reputation of the area's carvers grew and their sculptures became sought-after artworks, especially the religious pieces. Today several manufacturers maintain the woodworking tradition here, and their workshops and stores are perfect for learning more about the craft for which the area is known.

Franco Comploj (www.franco.it) is one of the companies still creating woodworks in Val Gardena, today run by the third and fourth generations of the family who founded the business in the early 1900s. "Woodworking is our origin – it is what we are, and we do it with passion," says current manager Franz Comploj, describing the craft's importance to those who keep the tradition alive today.



Image © www.franco.it



Carver at work at Franco Comploj

Feature by Jenny Oldaker



Lace-making at La Perla, Burano



Every last detail is created by hand



Exquisite lace examples at La Perla Gallery, Burano

Lace-making BURANO, VENETO

Venice packs a substantial creative heritage into its labyrinthine streets, and this artistic ethos spills out onto the islands of its lagoon, where Murano is famed for its glass and Burano is a centre of lace-making excellence. The island's first lace dates back to around 1500, its origins linked to the island's fishing heritage and the manufacture and repair of fishing nets. When the women of the island began to transfer their net-mending dexterity to lace-making, the fine works they created garnered interest across Italy and beyond, and this delicate material was soon in demand by the great and the good across Europe, from the Medicis to the Tudors.



Burano's lace story can be explored at the Museo del Merletto (www.museomerletto.visitmuve.it), as well as the workshops that still create handmade lace, like the La Perla Gallery (www.laceinvenice.com), owned by the Bon family, which are must-visits for understanding this ancient craft and its relevance today.

La Perla Gallery on the island of Burano



Image © www.violintonarelli.com



Violins CREMONA, LOMBARDY

The stringed instruments made by the luthiers of Cremona are among the most celebrated and coveted in the world. The golden age of the craft began in the 1500s, and the city's fame as a centre for excellence was sealed with the instruments made by Antonio Stradivari in the late 1600s. This master luthier was famous in his own lifetime and is even more so now, with his violins routinely fetching millions of pounds at auction.



Today the tradition of the luthier continues in Cremona and is a major part of this engaging city's heritage – so much so that it even features on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage. The process of hand crafting these beautiful instruments is painstaking, and the industry faces competition from luthiers outside Italy, including countries where high-volume production means the resulting pieces can be sold more cheaply. However, handmade Cremonese violins are so unique and special that it seems likely that they will forever retain their revered status among music lovers.

Daniele Tonarelli at work in his Cremona workshop



Daniele Tonarelli has been a Master Violin Maker since 1997

Image © www.violintonarelli.com

Jewellery VALENZA, PIEMONTE

There are plenty of places across Italy where jewellery is a finely honed and important art. But Valenza, in Piedmont, is the place that can boast the highest number of artisan gold and jewellery businesses in the country, and as a result this town is famed for its high-quality, hand-wrought products and is a magnet for jewellery aficionados the world over.



Francesca Ungarelli of Valenza jewellery maker Vendorafa (www.vendorafa.net) explains why this is such an important centre for Italian jewellery: "Since the tradition of handcrafting jewellery began here, a lot of things have changed, like the introduction of state-of-the-art techniques, factories and so on, but one thing has always stayed the same: the handcrafting skills passed on through generations of goldsmiths, and the exceptional level of handcrafting. This authenticity and exceptional quality makes our district unique in the world."



The art of handcrafting jewellery at Vendorafa in Valenza

Image © @StudioDue

Above: The Dune Cuff, an iconic piece, entirely hand-hammered. Inspired by the dunes of Dubai and handcrafted in 18k yellow gold and round brilliant diamonds. By Vendorafa (www.vendorafa.net)

Image © @StudioDue



Beautiful marbled papers at Giulio Giannini, Florence



Giulio Giannini holds workshops where you can try paper marbling

Paper Marbling FLORENCE, TUSCANY

As the 'Cradle of the Renaissance', this city is famous for many creative pursuits, some of them still practised here today. One of the most spectacular is the art of paper marbling, or *marmorizzazione*. Although it is thought to have originated in East Asia, the technique was adopted here in the 16th century and workshops still flourish in the city, and marbled stationery and other items make beautiful souvenirs.



"For sure we [in Florence] contributed to developing this tradition," says Maria Giannini of artisan workshop Giulio Giannini (www.giulioiannini.com), which opened in 1856 as a bookbinders and today continues the city's paper marbling tradition. "Because we still practise it, this technique of decorating paper is nowadays recognised as 'Florentine paper'. Like any other craft, it is an expression of our culture, and it brings beauty into our lives." Giulio Giannini also offers demonstrations and workshops, a wonderful, authentic experience to complete any Florentine trip.

GET INVOLVED

For a better understanding of any traditional craft, there's nothing like direct experience, and wherever you're staying there's likely to be an artisan happy to share their craft with you in person. The advent of online platforms like Italian Stories makes it easier than ever to share the skills of craftspeople across Italy.

"This new kind of travel opportunity enables tourists to connect with Italian artisans face to face, and also lets artisans share their skills and passions" explains co-founder Eleonora Odorizzi. "The objective of Italian Stories is not only to preserve the craftsman's knowhow, but also to create a new relationship between manufacturing, craftsmanship and tourism, centred around face-to-face meetings between real people."



Mosaics with Miranda

From mosaics with Miranda in Lazio to crafting jewellery with Roberta in Puglia, there are a multitude of unique opportunities to choose from. Keeping Italy's ancient crafts alive is vital to retaining those links to its cultural past, and learning more about these techniques makes for an unforgettable travel experience. Make time on your next Italian trip to explore the local crafts – you certainly won't regret it!

➤ More info: www.italianstories.it



Jewellery making with Roberta

Image © A. Miserochi for Italian Stories

Image © A. Sicuro for Italian Stories

Ceramics DERUTA, UMBRIA



Many Italian towns produce beautiful ceramic items, but none are as famous as Deruta – the ‘town of potters’. Like many of Italy’s traditional crafts, the production of majolica in Deruta goes back to the Middle Ages, fuelled by the abundance of clay in the surrounding hills. While various studios still create the town’s distinctive ceramics today, remains of the ancient pottery kilns can also be seen in the town, offering a vision of the early days of this colourful craft.

Deruta’s pottery heritage, passed down through the town’s generations, displays a rare mixture of tradition and innovation, and the craft continues to evolve today, through workshops like Grazia Maioliche (www.ubaldograzia.com), which has been in operation since 1500 and is an ideal place to get a feel for this incredible art. You can also learn about this ancient craft at the Regional Ceramics Museum of Deruta (www.museoceramicadideruta.it).



Image © www.ubaldograzia.com

Ceramics by Grazia Maioliche in the ‘Deruta fondo giallo’ range



Skilled artistry at Grazia Maioliche in Deruta

Image © www.ubaldograzia.com



Deruta’s majolica production goes back to the Middle Ages

Image © www.ubaldograzia.com

MUSEUMS TO VISIT

Learn about Italy’s creative traditions through the museums dedicated to them – here are some artisanal highlights:

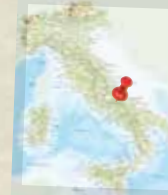
- **THE MURANO GLASS MUSEUM**
 Fondamenta Giustinian 8, 30141 Murano, Veneto
www.museovetro.visitmuve.it
 The largest historical collection of Murano glass in the world, including world-famous pieces, plus an in-depth history of the craft.
- **MONTAPPONE HAT MUSEUM**
 Piazza Roma, 5, 63835 Montappone, Le Marche
www.museodelcappellomontappone.it
 A museum celebrating the history and culture of the traditional craft of straw hats, which have been manufactured in the town for hundreds of years.
- **INTERNATIONAL BAGPIPE MUSEUM**
 Via Santa Maria, 1, 86070 Scapoli, Molise
www.museodellazampogna.it
 Dedicated to the artisan traditions of the zampogna (bagpipe) for which Scapoli is famous, this museum has examples from Italy and around the world.
- **INTERNATIONAL FOOTWEAR MUSEUM**
 Castello Sforzesco, 27029 Vigevano, Lombardy
www.museocalzaturavigevano.it
 The art of shoemaking in Vigevano is thought to go back to the 14th century, and this museum tells the story of the town through the evolution of its most famous product.
- **AMALFI PAPER MUSEUM**
 Via delle Cartiere, 23, 84011 Amalfi, Campania
www.amalfipapermuseum.com
 Discover the history of handmade paper – and Amalfi’s role in its production – at this atmospheric museum set inside an ancient paper mill.



Vittorio Piscitelli is a traditional ironworker in Frosolone

Image by Heather Crombie

Steelwork FROSOLONE, MOLISE



Right off the beaten track, tucked away in the little-visited region of Molise, you’ll find a town famed for its handcrafted steelworks. Frosolone has been a centre of excellence for cutting implements like knives and scissors for many years – once the whole region was a hub for the production of these items, and now this pretty town remains the only place in the area that still plays host to factories and workshops that forge all kinds of blades and cutting tools.

Frosolone is a beautiful place to visit in its own right, and as well as the workshops selling the locally made knives and the like, you can also visit the Museo dei Ferri Taglienti (Museum of Cutting Tools) for a complete picture of the craft for which the town is known. A ‘Market-Exhibition’ of Knives and Scissors is held in Frosolone each August too, making this a particularly good time of year to visit and buy one of this unassuming town’s world-class products.

Image by Heather Crombie

Vittorio Piscitelli with knives he has made, Frosolone



A finely honed Frosolone blade

Image by Heather Crombie



These tiny baskets of produce look good enough to eat!

Image © Getty

Image © iStock

Presepi NAPLES, CAMPANIA



Via San Gregorio Armeno in Naples is also known as ‘Christmas Alley’. The simple reason is the concentration of craftsmen creating intricate nativity scenes – presepi – on this narrow, atmospheric strip. The shops are full of handmade scenes and these days it’s not just the traditional nativity figures that are sold – all manner of sculptures can be found, from caricatures of celebrities to naturalistic animal designs. The pieces are usually crafted in terracotta and are expertly decorated – the whole neighbourhood is a great place to wander to drink in the spectacle of hundreds of tiny (and large!) figures and faces gazing from shop windows. In some stores you may even be able to see the craftsmen at work. Quality along the strip can vary, with some shops selling mass-produced souvenirs rather than individually crafted pieces. Price is a good indicator of quality and craftsmanship, and to ensure you’re getting an authentic work, try to buy directly from the maker.



Expertly crafted, these figures have a dynamic quality



Image © Gabriele Maltinti (www.sardegnaturismo.it)

Basket being hand crafted in Sardinia



Image © Alessandro Addis (www.sardegnaturismo.it)

Colourful baskets of Castelsardo

Basket Weaving CASTELSARDO, SARDINIA

Although basket weaving is a craft that takes place in various Sardinian towns, Castelsardo is the one that also plays host to the Museo dell'Intreccio Mediterraneo – the Museum of Mediterranean Weaving (www.mimcastelsardo.it), so it's a great destination for learning more about this ancient craft. Besides the plethora of information and examples that can be found in the museum you'll find evidence of this craft throughout the town's streets – from the baskets that hang outside local shops to the craftswomen who still weave baskets using the techniques passed down through the generations, using the traditional materials of the area. For Castelsardo these include rushes, grain or dwarf palm, while weavers in other parts of the island work with different materials, and the shapes and styles of baskets also vary depending on the location – a contrast you'll notice if you're travelling around different parts of Sardinia.

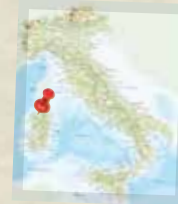
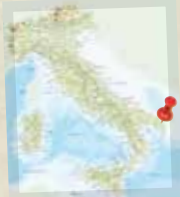


Image © ARET Puglia promozione/Andrea Ruggieri

Artist working on cartapesta sculpture, Lecce

Cartapesta LECCE, PUGLIA



Forget the paste and newspaper efforts of school projects... the *cartapesta* or *papier mâché* of Lecce in Puglia is an intricate art form, a far cry from the primitive craft with which we're familiar. It began here in the 17th century, as craftsmen began using the cheap, basic materials that were available in order to sculpt sacred works. Not only were they inexpensive to make, but by using materials like paper, straw and rags, the statues were light to transport and could be easily carried during religious processions. Interestingly, the first to adopt the craft were the city's barbers, who modelled statues between haircuts.

Today the art of *cartapesta* remains extremely important to the city and you can take a closer look at its production in city's various workshops, like Cartapesta Riso (www.cartapestariso.it), or at the cartapesta museum inside the Castello di Carlo V (www.castellocarlo.it). Religious *cartapesta* sculptures can also be seen in churches throughout Puglia. 📌

Cartapesta workshop, Lecce



Image © ARET Puglia promozione/Andrea Ruggieri

Cartapesta model, Lecce



Image © ARET Puglia promozione/Andrea Ruggieri