



An Insightful Journey To Italy's Campania Region Through the Eyes of New York Interior Designer Daniele Perna

Daniele Perna (April 15, 2008)



"Culture is Italy's oil, and it must be exploited." Gianni De Michelis, Former Minister of Labor, Italy



"Traveling in Italy's Campania region, where my great grandfather Giuseppe Perna immigrated from, is like visiting a living museum. Everything you perceive is a piece of art and history. Having the opportunity to visit factories that have produced and designed silk textiles for over two centuries is a re-affirming experience. Mostly, I was intrigued by the parallel relationship one can find in the design patterns of the fabrics to those of the regions tiles, interior design and architecture. Design is design: the principals remain the same, regardless of scale, scope or objective." Daniele Perna, Principal Designer, Daniele Perna Designs.



Byzantine tile detail, Cathedral of Amalfi; blue angel in mosaic, Positano; Byzantine tile detail, Cathedral of Amalfi; majolica tile, La Tonnarella Villa, Sorrento; detail from 1966 street mural, Sorrento.

Designer Danielé Perna, along with 19 other adventurous U.S. architects and interior designers, was graciously invited to Italy's Campania region on a silk trade mission organized by the Italy America Chamber of Commerce (www.italchamber.org [2]) in collaboration with the Province of Caserta and the Association of Provinces and Chambers of Trade and Industry (I.R.V.A.T). The trip was financed by the Region of Campania. The five-day event began with a press conference at the magnificent Italian Baroque Theater at the Royal Palace in Caserta, where the President of I.R.V.A.T., Mr. Michele Lomuto welcomed the international guests with an emotional speech charged with his excitement for the unfolding event. In it's second year, this event will help the region's silk manufacturers propagate sales to U.S. interior designers and architects, and will inevitably stimulate trade.

After the Press Conference, delegates were given a tour of the palace during which a guide detailed the history of the silk trade developed by Bourbon King Charles IV in the 17th century. Following the tour, the delegates were invited to the restaurant Le Colonne for a historical dinner. The meal was an authentic Bourbon reproduction of a typical menu served to the King and court at that time.



Photos: (clockwise)

steel gate doorknob, Amalfi; silk fabric from Giuseppe De Negri & C. SRL, Caserta; SIOLA ALOIS S.R.L.'s ARGO silk CHIMERA collection, Caserta.

In the following days, the delegates were taken to some of Europe's oldest and most renowned silk factories and showrooms (8 in total) to view brocades, damasks, lampasses and lliseres in both historical and contemporary patterns. Visits included a viewing of each factory's line of silk textiles, a history of their origins, light regional fare and often ended with a tour of the factory where the actual silks are produced. They were hosted by factories such as TESSECI S.R.L. Tessitura Serica Cicala



(www.tesseci.it [3]) founded in 1875 by the Cicala family, which has been operating for 4 generations. A signature of the factory is the application of classical, traditional and modern designs using new technology at an ancient bourbon-weaving mill in San Leucio of Caserta. Another factory, SIOLA ALOIS S.R.L.'s (www.siola-alois.com [4]) philosophy is "to create beautiful innovative contemporary lines while conserving an entirely hand-crafted production process, successfully combining tastefulness, refinement, creativity and artistic passion." Noted for providing silks used in the White House interior, the factory Giuseppe De Negri & C. SRL (www.gdenegri.it [5]) has its family knowledge rooted in the art of silk since 1789. The brand has been successful for more than one century in silk and the manufacturing of rich fabrics.



After the factory tours, delegates were invited to journey to the beautiful and vast Amalfi coast to spend the last day at one of Italy 's finest hotel's, Hotel Santa Caterina. (www.hotelsantacaterina.it/eng/home.html [6]). A Visual paradise, each room is furnished in a different style of early 20th century pieces, Vietri multicolored ceramics, and color palates, with a modern and traditional flare of fantasy. The hotel sits at the top of a impressive cliff side, surrounded by orange and lemon groves. It is an enchanting period building in which light, space and color are an integral part of architecture. The designers and architects arranged among themselves a walking tour of each room they occupied, which revealed a cross section of interior design styles, themes and colors.



Photos: (top) view of Sorrento from La Tonnarella Villa at dawn; (bottom) cliff side view of Positano and majolica tiled dome of the church of Santa Maria Assunta.

At the completion of the event, Danielé Perna was captivated, impassioned and revitalized by his experience. He continued his journey, driving down the Amalfi coast to Salerno, before backtracking to Vietri Sul Mare, Positano and Sorrento, each hillside village impacting him and contributing to his design sensibility.



In addition to a number of stops, Mr. Perna visited the Pottery factory Artistica Ceramica Solimene designed by Architect Paolo Soleri in 1951.

(<http://www.arcosanti.org/project/background/soleri/main.html> [7]) “The building itself is reminiscent of a piece of textile design, a tactile facade with thousands of round protruding forms fabricated in earthenware in a terra-cotta color. The Visual effect is similar to the pattern and rhythm of the traditional terra-cotta roof tops you see throughout Italy and brings a historical context to the building’s aesthetic.” The pottery factory (www.ceramicasolimene.it [8]) , has a vast array of floor tiles, dishes, sculptures, etc. and has drawn travelers to the small town of Vietri sul Mare for decades.



factory Artistica Ceramica Solimene in Vietri sul Mare, designed by Architect Paolo Soleri in 1951.

In Sorrento he was a guest at the beautiful and hospitable La Tonnarella (www.latonnarella.it/ [9]). The residence was originally the summer Villa of the Gargiulo family built in 1930 and later transformed into a Villa hotel. Approaching the main entrance one assumes that they are entering a small hotel. Past a small foyer, there is a sign pointing in the direction of a set of hand carved posts. Turn left and walk through a humble hallway to a set of stairs moving downward, at the bottom the entrance is crowned with a dramatic Moorish arch, a Venetian sconce fixture and walls painted using a Naples cream-color. Walking past the entrance you arrive at an intimate interior with a stone renaissance style fireplace, a mahogany front desk and vast arches leading to a sitting area. A second arch leads to the main dining room there the interior opens up to a bank of large windows with an exquisite view of Sorrento's undulating mountains and the sprawl of historic Architecture throughout the coast line. The hotel and rooms have been renovated (though they are not updated on the hotel's website), into a blend of magical nooks and coves, painted in rich Mediterranean colors with majolica floor tiles in brilliant colors and patterns. There is vast assortment of Majolica tiles (www.latonnarella.it/maioliche [10]) framed in cast iron hanging on the walls all through the Villa that are reproductions of antique tile patterns exclusively made for La Tonnarella. Most rooms have a large terrace, with cobalt blue lounge chairs, blue and white striped beach umbrellas, and offer spectacular views in every direction.



Tonnerella Villa, Sorrento

Photos: La

Mr. Perna dined at the Restaurant Il Buco, Sorrento, (www.ilbucoristorante.it/ [11]) in a interior with a cobblestone vaulted ceiling, crenelated molding with simple ceiling light fixtures that echoed it, featuring designer cuisine of Chef whose sir name is also Perna. The restaurant itself is set several steps down from the Piazza San Antonio in a former monastery building that dates to 700 A.D., with fine damask linens, sleek silverware and elegant wineglasses to go with a superb wine list, offering a variety of regional and intercontinental wines. The meal was a masterpiece of simplicity, good



ingredients, and balanced dishes all with a designer's presentation, and serviced by a knowledgeable and friendly staff.

Restaurant and Piazza San Antonio, Sorrento

Photos: Il Buco

In Sorrento, the stylishly hip hotel, The Minerva, (<http://www.minervasorrento.com> [12]) situated high on the sea-shore, commands a view of the entire Gulf of Napoli. Built in 1875 and reconstructed in 1932, it was later enlarged in 1993 and was near completion of an interior renovation during Danielé's visit. Danielé explains, "I was walking down the hill from the Villa La Tonnarella and I noticed that the interior of the Minerva was under construction. I walked in the door and was excited



to see a colorful contemporized southern Italo-Moroc design completed in the lobby. A construction worker approached me and asked politely if he could help me. I explained to him that I was a designer from New York City and loved the design work. He immediately became excited and decided to give me a tour of the entire hotel, pointing out details and opening room and balcony doors to provide a full experience of each interior. I left the hotel with a wonderful feeling, not only because I received a personal tour. In that moment again I was reminded why Italy is a great country and why excellent design has a prominent position in society here. The people have great heart, a respect, a deep understanding and genius for aesthetics and want to share the fruits of their labor with a stranger walking down the street and the world.”



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Danielé Perna Designs www.danielepernadesigns.com [13]

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Links

- [1] <http://newsite.iitaly.org/files/1663daniele-perna-photo-italy-architecture1208190986jpg>
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- [8] <http://www.ceramicasolimene.it>
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