

SEPTEMBER 25, 2009

Lake Geneva & Abbellimento, our newest VIETRI Villa

I said one last goodbye to my view of the wide Mississippi River and four receding bluffs as I left my hotel and La Crosse for a drive with Markus to Lake Geneva, Wisconsin, the Newport of Wisconsin. Corporate giants of Chicago built their mansions on Lake Geneva in the early 20th century and so have followed more two-home-plus families for their summers near the gorgeous lake. The Wrigley Mansion, seen on Lake Geneva from down town, looks like a miniature Metropolitan Museum.



The town is another “English village” with hanging baskets and planters of mixed flowers at every turn. My destination in Lake Geneva is Abbellimento, opened only a year ago by a special young woman, Kathy Francke, who was a VIETRI sales representative before opening her dream store. Kathy sold VIETRI to all our stores in Wisconsin. One day, while visiting our customer in Lake Geneva, she learned that the owner was ready to close her store and join her retired husband in a constant vacation. Kathy took the plunge, restoring an antique store right on the main street, and having Italian artisans to demonstrate their crafts on Abbellimento’s first day open.

Her jewel box of a store is filled with VIETRI and I was there to formally celebrate the Grand Opening of Abbellimento's Villa VIETRI status. We are having a private cocktail party in the store this Friday night for invited guests.

The two windows and front half of Abbellimento are full of VIETRI. Are we in Italy?

Italian music lilts over the sparkling shelves of Murano Perl Glass and every dinnerware collection VIETRI carries, gorgeous planters and urns, handpainted wall plates and platters, and colorfully handled flatware mixing with each place setting sprinkled throughout the store. I am thrilled with Kathy's great taste! She has extraordinary friends as well.

A favorite guest of the evening is the willowy, graceful lady who had retired from her former VIETRI store and who was clearly so very pleased with Abbellimento and Kathy Francke. I detected her motherly pride to see her own store's spirit continuing.

Frances Gravely
VIETRI Founder

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2009

VIETRI Villa Abbellimento in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin

Today there is a brunch at the hip Italian restaurant next door to Abbellimento, followed by my signing purchases and greeting guests during the day in the store. Once again, I'm smitten by the beautiful and natural people of the Midwest. I want to return here for a vacation with my whole family.

At the delicious Italian brunch is a young couple who have driven for almost two hours to arrive at 9 a.m. in Lake Geneva. He had visited Milan about seven times as a model of haute couture. She could have been a model herself. Their love for each other is inspiring as we gather after my talk on Italian style and entertaining.

Kathy Francke has clearly won the loyalty of Lake Geneva customers in just one year. The three events are filled with VIETRI and Abbellimento devotees, including a wonderful collection of devoted family and friends. Even a bird flew into the store bringing good luck and excitement to our Saturday!



A favorite customer is an Italian lady who quoted her “Nona” -grandmother - with sweet reminders about how to live beautifully. “I am so proud to own beautiful VIETRI,” she would say, as she asked me to sign special pieces for her.

It’s always a particular thrill for me when store staff asks me to sign their VIETRI purchases at the end of my visit. I love to write expressions in Italian that match the particular individuals. It was hard to tear myself away from writing to my new Abbellimento friends in order to make my 5:50 p.m. flight from Milwaukee back to North Carolina on this Saturday.

I recommend that you readers consider a driving trip to the lakes of Wisconsin and Michigan, staying at waterside Inns and B&B’s between visits to charming villages. I can’t wait to return.

If you decide to fly there first, take a jacket and small blanket for the flight. Airlines are not heating the planes like they used to, perhaps to save on energy costs. I ended up buying a blanket for \$5 and dreaming of the warmth of Midwesterners. I count our VIETRI blessings for these customers and colleagues.

Grazie mille, amicie di Michigan e Wisconsin, e tutti del mondo!

Frances Gravely
VIETRI Founder