

# ABELLIMENTO

## *An Exquisite Slice of Italy in Lake Geneva's Downtown*



by Sabine  
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A single step through the door of Abbellimento in downtown Lake Geneva is a journey; the world seems to slow down just a tad, beautiful, artisan-made, handcrafted items draw the eye and the Italian music adds the final touch of ambiance. It is a remarkable feeling, like you've stepped through the doorway straight into a shop in an Italian village with all of its welcoming, intimate charm. Exactly the effect owner Kathy Francke was looking to create when she first was putting together her vision of the shop a year ago, before opening the doors in November of 2008.

Inspired by their anchor product line, Vietri, the Abbellimento story shares some similar attributes. Vietri, a 25 year success story providing high-quality, handcrafted products for the home through designs from all areas of Italy, while promoting the essence of the Italian lifestyle, was founded by three women on vacation in Italy who fell in love with handmade artistry of the Italian dinnerware being used by the local hotel during their stay in the Amalfi area of Italy.

The mother, Lee Gravely, had invited her daughters Susan and Frances on a much-awaited trip to Italy, and to satisfy the family curiosity, they arranged to meet the artisans and tour the factory where the dinnerware was made. After spending several days becoming friends with the smiling Italians, they were so impressed by them they decided to start a company to bring these amazing handmade items to the American market. That initial foundation grew into their representing over 40 manufacturers' handmade items from all areas of Italy.

Intimately familiar with the Vietri line as one of many she represented while working in sales, Abbellimento owner Kathy Francke knew she wanted to make the line part of the very foundation of her shop. Having traveled to

Italy and like Vietri's founders, having fallen in love with the welcoming Italian culture, there was never a doubt that she wanted to create a primarily Italian based store. She also wanted to give the Vietri line a home by surrounding it in an ambiance and supporting product lines that catered to the same handcrafted, high quality and exceptional beauty that Vietri is known for. Abbellimento is the culmination of that passion.

Already a success story of its own, Abbellimento earned the distinction of being named Villa Vietri by February 2009, only four months after opening their doors. They are one of only 13 shops nationwide to share this distinction. The honor is given to shops achieving exceptional selection, service and display of Vietri within their store. There is no doubt that Abbellimento excels in all of these areas.

Vietri is known for its handcrafted ceramics and earthenware, including dinnerware, home decor, flatware and glassware from over forty manufacturers across Italy's many regions. These manufacturers employ artisans who handcraft every piece. Apprenticeships for artisans can last up to 15 years, and achieving master status takes a lifetime of accomplishment. The Vietri line is as varied as the regions it represents from simple solid color dinnerware based on early peasant pottery with a special glazing technique to make the pottery look aged, to elegant patterned ornate styles and brightly colored styles painted with timeless Italian themes.

Juliska, the newest addition to the Abbellimento family, is handcrafted dinnerware from Portugal with "accessible luxury" as their motto "providing outstanding value without compromising style." Juliska is a collection of linens, lighting, ceramics and glassware based on six centuries of European design heritage, depicting design styles, emblems and patterns from those time periods. Handmade, like the Vietri

product line, the designs demand a meticulous artisan attention to detail to be recreated with such distinctive beauty.

Beatriz Ball, another of the boutique's anchor lines, is handmade, highly polished aluminum serving pieces and decor from Mexico, whose several step process means eleven pairs of hands create each piece. Reminiscent of silver serving pieces, Beatriz Ball has a smoother flowing style and extra brilliant shine. While brighter in appearance than traditional silver, there is certainly no other process that has ever displayed aluminum with such richness and breathtaking appeal. Not prone to tarnishing, these gleaming serving items can go directly from freezer to oven to table with an unsurpassed functionality, elegance and luxurious flair.

Simon Pearce, the remaining anchor line at Abbellimento, is glassware that was originally started in Kilkenny by an Irishman who brought the line to Vermont in the 1970s. Mouth-blown at the eco-conscientious, completely hydro powered plant, this glassware is renowned for its striking clarity and rolled edges. The exceptional clarity of these pieces is due in part to the use of barium instead of lead, for a final "clearer" look. Capturing and reflecting light with the sparkle and shine desirable in high quality glassware, Simon Pearce is simple grace with clean lines and warm curves. The rolled edges give the pieces additional durability and a soft, decorative final touch that is distinctive of the line. The company's goals are simplicity, clarity, quality and individuality, which is certainly the perfect description of the pieces on display at Abbellimento.

Kathy Francke is meticulous in choosing distinctive quality lines of home decor for the supporting cast to the four anchor lines. French linens are among the shop's must-have basics to go along with the beautiful dinnerware, glassware and serving pieces. Carrying

Garnier-Thiebaut, Beauville, Couleur Nature, and Provence, each line has exceptional quality and beautiful style choices. Garnier-Thiebaut dyes each thread singly before the linens are woven; giving each finished piece a vibrant depth of long-lasting color. Chosen for their beauty, quality and stunning ability to complement the anchor lines, there is surely a linen selection for every decor and taste. Many of the linens can also be ordered poly coated for easy maintenance.

Palecek, a home decor line is another fine name that graces Abbellimento. Based in the San Francisco Bay Area, Palecek is a preferred national and international wholesaler of handcrafted furniture, accessories and lighting. Inspired by a network of artisans from around the world, Palecek creates its signature look by combining the best natural materials with top quality construction, resulting in pieces that function beautifully in both residential and hospitality environments. Palecek achieves its trademark look by pairing exquisite natural materials with the intricate skill of weaving to create countless design possibilities. Inspired by each unique material—from abaca and rattan, to leather or recycled metal—the results are an organic beauty that is distinctly Palecek. Offering everything from award winning innovations to custom designs, Palecek is for anyone looking for decorating ideas that will be highly versatile and stylish and yet timeless.

French cotton throw rugs in brilliant colors with their fade-proof easy care and durability have been popular additions to the shop as well.

In bringing all things particularly Italian to the shop, Abbellimento also carries Bella Cucina, a line of Italian specialty foods. Interestingly, Bella Cucina too was founded by someone wanting to bring the true flavors of Italy to the table, with all that extensive Italian meals with family and friends means in terms of its highly social atmosphere and close-knit camaraderie. Another line, Cucina offers home fragrances, hand lotions, diffusers, candles, and dish washing soap in food related fragrances. If you love the smell of fresh coffee, fresh lemons, these are just a few of the flavors of Italy that Cucina has to offer.

Abbellimento is also adding other handmade, artisan quality Italian items to their selection. Extending their focus on home decor, Roma Moulding, a line of handmade picture frames, photo frames and framed mirrors are one of the shop's newer additions.

Exquisite jewelry handmade by a woman in Venice is another of the latest discoveries Kathy Francke has brought to the shop. She is continuing her mission to find other unique handcrafted Italian products by working closely with the Italian Trade Commission and continuing to network with her Italian suppliers.

Abbellimento's appealing ambiance and exceptional selections are the basis on which they build their customer service and service offerings. Kathy believes in having more customer care staff than average for a shop of Abbellimento's size, so her staff can take their time with each customer who may want to understand more about each of the product lines. They are also cognizant that customers may want assistance in putting together a decor or several complementary lines to complete a table service.

Shopping for gifts, gift baskets and Abbellimento bridal registry are other areas where the staff is on hand to offer their expertise, eye and assistance.

Vietri has been a strong supporter of Abbellimento's vision and goals. On their November opening day, Vietri sent two Italian gentlemen from its top ranks in Florence to do demonstrations in the store. Gabriele and Maestro Stefano demonstrated how they make the "Bellezza" dinner pattern to the delight of the shop's visitors. Maestro Stefano used the 50 lb. clay slab Vietri had shipped from Italy for the occasion to make a sculpture of Old St. Nick which he presented to Kathy Francke at the end of the day. With over 300 visitors in the shop throughout the day, it was a huge success. Kathy says of the day, that the visit by the gentleman was a great honor and she was particularly pleased that Gabriele expressed that he felt like he was at home in Italy when at the shop.

Upcoming on August 22nd, Frances Gravely, one of the co-founders of Vietri will be doing a founder's day event in honor of the

store's Villa Vietri status. The day will feature a morning seminar on entertaining with Italian style and two Italian cooking classes. Frances Gravely will be holding the seminar and classes next door to Abbellimento at Sopra Bistro. The seminar and classes will have limited seating so reserving a spot in advance will be required. Frances Gravely will also be signing Vietri pieces at Abbellimento throughout the day.

Abbellimento will be pre-ordering Vietri items for customers from July 25 through August 9th. During this two week, pre-order period, Vietri will be available at Abbellimento for a 20% savings. For more event information, or to place an order to be signed by Frances, please call the store.

As Kathy Francke looks to the future, she would love to see the shop continue to grow and bring even more wonderful handcrafted Italian items together. Current plans to implement e-commerce are also already underway. Like the in-shop experience, Kathy doesn't want to compromise her ideals and wants to offer a top-notch online shopping experience to customers. Future special days and events are also hoped for and the possibilities are fairly endless. Being so new, this is a shop worth visiting periodically just to see the new things being discovered and added to the selection.

Abbellimento is a 16th century word for decoration, ornament or embellishment. Lake Geneva's Abbellimento is an inspired boutique in a class of its own, a true ornament on an already popular downtown. From the ambiance starting at the front door to the lovely garden area just beyond the back door, every detail has been meticulously cared for and the shop offers the chance to embellish your life Italian style, an opportunity you shouldn't miss!

Vietri and Simon Pearce can be ordered online at [www.abbellimento.com](http://www.abbellimento.com) <<http://www.abbellimento.com/>>

Gift wrapping is complimentary at Abbellimento and shipping is available.

Abbellimento is located at 728 West Main Street, for more information contact 262-248-1900.