

ELLE DECOR

A
WORLD
OF
STYLE

Special
Issue

THE BEST
OF OUR
INTERNATIONAL
EDITIONS



PORTUGAL
PARIS
ST. PETERSBURG
& MORE

ARTEMEST

A new website brings old-world Italian craftsmanship—everything from glassware to silver to jewelry—right to your door

It has never been easy to get your hands on one of Costanza Paravicini's plates. The Milanese artisan still makes hand-painted ceramics the way they were produced in Italy centuries ago, by painting her designs—from garlands to snakes to family crests—directly onto raw bisque. She does this freehand, using only powdered pigment and water; any errors must be scraped off the porous surface with a blade. After glazing and firing, the final result is tableware of extraordinary color and sheen, exuding what Paravicini calls the pulsating *vibrata* that distinguishes a handmade object.

Like so many other Italian artisans, Paravicini has always conducted business the old-fashioned way. She does not advertise

or take phone orders. Clients visit her in her Milan workshop, which is tucked behind the courtyard of her family home. And she has never sold online—until now.

Last fall, Paravicini became one of the nearly 100 craftspeople to partner with Artemest, a new e-commerce platform selling Italian home goods, design objects, art, and jewelry—including custom commissions—to customers around the world. You can order a leather-bound journal made by Maria Giannini, a sixth-generation Florentine bookbinder; crystal drinking glasses by the Locchis, whose previous patrons included the Medici; or a six-foot gilt-wood mirror hand-carved by Daniele Nencioni, who copied the design from the frame of Michelangelo's *Doni Tondo* at the Uffizi.

The site is the brainchild of Ippolita Rostagno, the Florence-born, New York-based designer behind the fine jewelry line Ippolita. And to hear Rostagno tell it, her motivation was less about creating a business than about



Milanese ceramist Costanza Paravicini at work.

PARAVICINI



Orizzonti dinner plate.



Serpi dinner plates.



Francesco Della Femina's Square brass chair.

DELLA FEMINA



Della Femina with his Quintet Ensemble table.



Aztec brass candelabra.

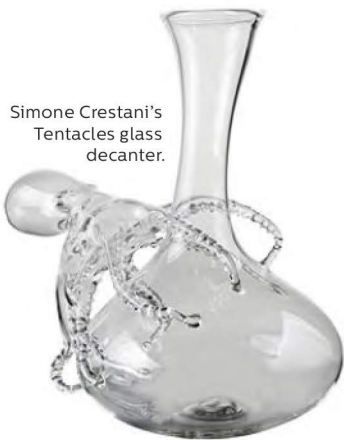


Black Spider table, made of iron and antique tiles.



Ejermann crystal fish glasses, by Tuscan glass-smith Moleria Locchi.

LOCCHI



Simone Crestani's Tentacles glass decanter.



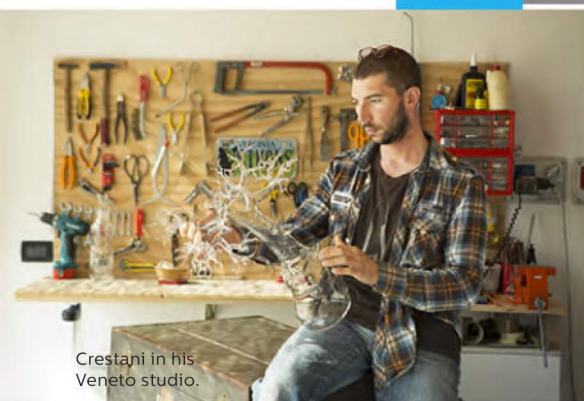
Il Salmone glass sculpture.

CRESTANI

storefronts, so she found most of the workshops by word of mouth. Often it was one artisan recommending another. An additional reliable source was the *aristocrazia*: "If you meet a count whose family china has been made by the same people for the past century, that's probably a good bet," Rostagno says. And though there are plenty of old-world crafts represented on Artemest, there's nearly as much to satisfy modernist tastes as well, from minimalist brass and iron furniture by Francesco Della Femina, an architect and designer in Campania, to whimsical glass art pieces resembling rabbit and chicken carcasses by Venetian craftsman Simone Crestani.

In certain cases, Rostagno's instinct for what contemporary customers crave has helped update an artisan's offerings. She suggested that Murano glassblower Fabiano Amadi offer his goblets and vases in glossy black, for instance, and that Giannini bind a selection of her house's most extraordinary papers, creating what Rostagno calls "a dream inspiration book for any designer."

By providing this type of consulting and the logistical supports of marketing, shipping, and customer service, Artemest promises to free up the artisans so that they can focus on what they do best. "These people are passionate about making beautiful objects," says Rostagno. "We just need to connect them with the people who appreciate them." CATHERINE HONG



Crestani in his Veneto studio.



Blue Murano glass goblets and, right, a black glass vase by Fabiano Amadi.

AMADI



Antonino Sciortino's iron Principessina chair.

keeping these people *in* business. "Artisans like Costanza are keepers of centuries-old techniques, and workshops like hers are disappearing every day," says the designer. Blame the economic downturn, the globalized marketplace, or the fact that fewer young Italians are interested in learning the trades, but the fact remains that Italian artisanship is in "a state of crisis," as she puts it. And the domestic market for handmade goods is simply not large enough to sustain the industry.

Last year, Rostagno took a leave of absence from her jewelry company to spend six months crisscrossing Italy by train in search of artisans to join Artemest, each of whom she has personally vetted. Many of these craftspeople do not have their own



Centerpiece bowl by Ceramica Pinto.

...AND MORE



Gold-plated earrings by Madina Visconti di Modrone.



Sciortino's Metallo vase.



Florentine bookbinder Maria Giannini.

GIANNINI

Her Tecnica photo album of leather and marbled paper.



LEFT: Wood sculptor Daniele Nencioni in his Tuscan studio. BELOW: Nencioni's Louis XIV-style Tavolo Francese table, made of gold-finished pine.

NENCIONI



GIL GILBERT, ARTEMEST