

The Concierge

TIPS FOR TOURING HERE AND ABROAD

Weaving a tale in Florence

Europe's oldest silk mill dates to the 18th century

By Neece Regis
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

FLORENCE — Across the Arno River, away from the tourist-congested streets around the Duomo, you'll find the residential neighborhood of San Frediano. Once there, it's easy to stroll past the courtyard of Antico Setificio Fiorentino without suspecting the wonders hidden behind its ochre walls and metal gate. As the oldest silk weaving mill in Europe — one that operates completely with historic hand-operated and semi-mechanical looms — the atelier is one of the better kept secrets of Florence.

In operation since 1786, the mill was formed as a cooperative of sorts for noble Florentine families, including della Gherardesca, Bartolozzi, Corsini, Pucci, and Agresti. In the days when each family maintained its own looms with their own distinctive patterns and fabrics, it made sense to move production out of the home and into a workshop where artisans could gather under one roof.

Today, under the stewardship of Florentine menswear label Stefano Ricci, the mill produces the same exquisite fabrics it did during the Renaissance, using the same meticulous and labor-intensive methods. Rows of wooden looms on a terra cotta floor display delicate silk, linen, and golden chenille threads en route to becoming geometric and floral-inspired bolts of sumptuous fabrics with equally luxurious names: Ermisino, Filaticcio, Lampasso, Damaschi, Broccati.

The mechanical looms are a wonder. Card-board punch cards, reminiscent of a player piano's preprogrammed notes, determine the fabric's elaborate patterns while producing a rhythmic clack-clack-clack as wood shuttles speed back and forth. Also on view is a unique vertical warper inspired by a drawing made by Leonardo da Vinci. Unlike modern warpers, which extend horizontally, this machine stands tall, and spins thread exclusively for trim, ribbons, and braiding, a task accomplished on a nearby 17th-century braiding loom.

However, it's the showroom at the end of the tour that's a showstopper. Bolts of richly colored and patterned fabrics compete for attention with samples that are casually strewn across tabletops. A library of ribbons, meticulously arranged by color, line bookshelves like novels from another age. Heavy damask curtains, tied open with thick silk braids, reveal piles of plump and tasseled pillows.

The silk mill is an active business, filling orders for interior designers, five-star hotels, the mega-yacht world, and anyone with a budget for their hand-produced goods. With prices starting at about \$322 per yard, it's not a place for souvenirs. For that reason, drop-in visits are not allowed, and there's no schedule for daily tours. My hotel, Il Salviatino (salviatino.com), smoothed the way for me to visit, with friends, arranging transportation and a guide who could



PHOTOS BY NEECE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

translate. We were happy to use the hotel's services, part of what seems to be a growing trend for properties to offer authentic "experiences" in addition to bed and board. If not taking advantage of a third-party option, visits can be scheduled online, for approximately \$115 per person.

Antico Setificio Fiorentino, Via L. Bartolini, 4, 50124 Firenze, 011-39-055-213861, anticoseificiofiorentino.com

Neece Regis can be reached at neece-regis@gmail.com.

At Antico Setificio Fiorentino, wooden looms display delicate silk, linen, and golden chenille threads en route to becoming geometric and floral-inspired bolts of sumptuous fabrics.

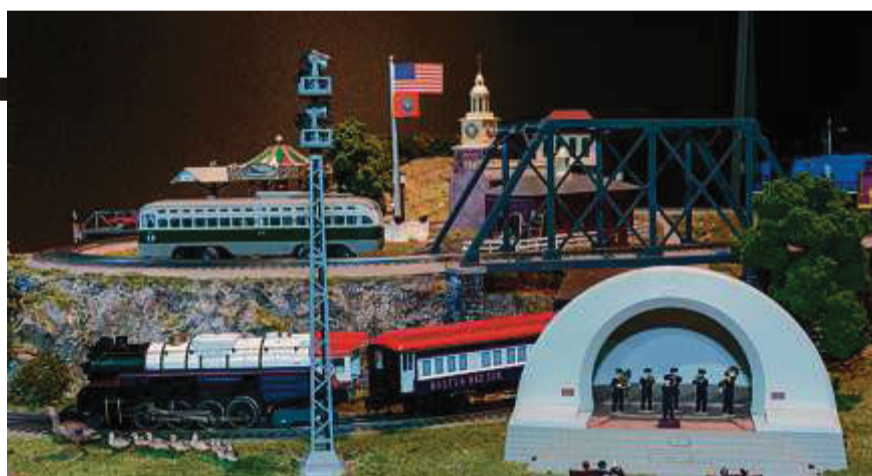
HERE

BOSTON WELCOMES TRAIN EXHIBIT

See model trains travel across snow-covered New England landscapes during a new exhibit at the Museum of Science, Boston, called "All Aboard: Trains at Science Park." The exhibit, showing through Jan. 6, includes three model trains of different scales that travel along a 24-by-34-foot model railway, passing through wintry landscapes that include iconic Boston landmarks. Interactive experiences enable guests to lay tracks, design and engineer layouts, and move trains by hand or push-button controls. Access to special exhibit is included in regular admission: \$23 ages 3-11; \$28 adults. 617-723-2500, www.mos.org

CELEBRATING AN INNOVATIVE BOATBUILDER

Visit Cambridge's MIT Museum to learn how one of the university's earliest graduates affected the boatbuilding industry and created six America's Cup winners, among other innovative vessels. "Lighter, Stronger, Faster: The Herreshoff Legacy," on show through May 2021, highlights the work of N.G. Herreshoff (class of 1870) who, with his brother John, built the first modern catamarans, the first torpedo boats for the US Navy, the country's first steam-powered fishing vessels, and America's Cup boats. The exhibit includes objects from the museum's Hart Nautical Collection, the Mystic Seaport Museum, the Rhode Island Historical Society, and Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry. See models, art works, and historical documents, and an interactive digital vi-



sualization of the collection. Admission: \$10 adults; \$5 seniors and 17 and younger. 617-253-5927, www.mitmuseum.org

COOL PROGRAMS AT LOCAL HOSTEL

Learn about the Europe's famous pilgrimage routes, find out how to make hummus, and meet people from around the world during upcoming events at Hostelling International Boston. The hostel hosts Cooking as a Second Language Dec. 1 (noon-3 p.m.) when Colin Daly, founder of Boston's Just Hummus, explains the cultural history of hummus, and shows you how to make this healthy dish. World-traveler Kathleen Peters runs the new workshop "Travel 101: Exploring Pilgrimage" Dec. 4 (6-8 p.m.), which highlights Europe's historic pilgrimage routes, such as Spain's Camino de Santiago and Italy's Via Francigena. She discusses how to pack, travel logistics, and more. All programs free, but reservations recommended. 617-536-9455. www.hiusa.org/hostels/massachusetts/boston

THERE

VISIT THE WEST COAST'S PORTLAND

If you're heading to Oregon, check out The Hoxton, Portland, which opened this month in a historic 1906 building in Old Town Chinatown. The 119-room hotel has two restaurants, a rooftop eatery with stunning city views, several public spaces, and The Apartment, an events space that hosts cultural events. Choose from four 1960s West Coast room styles: shoebox, snug, cozy, and roomy, all with free water, Wi-Fi, an hour of free calls to anywhere in the world, a mini



fridge, and daily breakfast delivered to your door. Rooms start at \$115, double occupancy, and include breakfast. 503-770-0500, www.thehoxtton.com

EXPLORE TUSCANY ON TWO WHEELS

Cycle Tuscany's historic gravel roads on a new 8-day cycling adventure that crisscrosses Italy's famous Chianti region. The trip, offered by Virginia-based Tourissimo and Ride and Seek, passes through medieval hilltop towns, and by abbeys, wineries, and the Tyrrhenian Sea. Be ready for steep climbs and winding descents when you join this trip Sept. 14-21. Riders cover 20-70 miles per day, for a total of 315 miles, and stay in boutique hotels and an agriturismo (translation: authentic Italian farmhouse). Rates start at \$3,995 per person, based on double occupancy. 857-997-0051, www.rideandseek.com/tour/tuscany-stradebianche

EVERYWHERE

SAFEGUARD YOUR CAMERA LENSES

Many lens caps accidentally pop off and do little to protect your lens when you're traveling and exploring. Kuvrd's new Universal Lens Cap holds on tight and creates a protective shield around your lens that safeguards it in wet or dusty conditions. The super lightweight and flexible rubber cap stretches around the front of virtually any lens and protects it from the elements. It's waterproof and dustproof and

adds a thin cushion of support in case you bump your lens into a tree or doorway while on the go. The Universal Lens Cap works well for protecting your lens during transport, too — slip one cap over the front of the lens and one over the back, and then pack the lens into your suitcase or dry bag, for instance. When you're shooting, the lens cap can easily squish down and slip into a pocket. \$30 for one to \$150 for 10. www.kuvrdcamera.com

HIT THE BACKCOUNTRY WITH THIS PACK

Mammut's new Spindrift 14-liter pack looks like a PFD, with its bright-orange color and unusually slim, curved fit, but while it won't keep you afloat in the backcountry, it will provide you with all the pockets and features you need for a short, off-piste adventure. Stash a hydration bladder and lunch in the rear compartment, your shovel, probe, and First Aid kit in the main front compartment, and your skins and snacks in extra-large hip-belt pockets. One pocket on the hip belt contains a windshield jacket that you can slip on without removing the pack—a slick feature. The Spindrift also comes with plenty of loops, cords, and straps for attaching skis and poles. \$199.95. <https://us.mammut.com>



KARI BODNARCHUK