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THE PBS TRAVEL SERIES WITH KATHY McCABE

DREAM OF ITALY®

FEBRUARY / MARCH 2021 A DREAM OF PUBLICATION VOL. 20 NO. 2

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Dream of Italy, the membership travel magazine covering Italian travel and culture, is published 6 times per year. Delivery by mail is \$97 per year and a one-year digital membership is \$77. All memberships include online access to more than 175 back issues dating back to 2002. Join online at www.dreamofitaly.com

Editorial feedback is welcome at kathy@dreamofitaly.com

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ISSN: 1550-1353

Dream of Italy

P.O. Box 2025
Denver, CO 80201

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Editor's Note



While I clearly believe it is important to *dream of Italy*, I know it is just as important to try to make those dreams come true. For this issue, I profile those who made their own *dream of Italy* come true, whether that meant moving to Italy, living there part-time or bringing Italy home.

This is the overarching theme of my new PBS special, *Dream of Italy: Travel, Transform and Thrive*, which will be coming to American TV screens in June. I plan to bring you more of these profiles in coming issues and you will find many in the companion book that will be released along with the special.

First, my dear friend Becky Munson is a wonderful example that sometimes our big "dream" doesn't hit us over the head until a little bit later in life. She has a life many might envy, but it is a result of meeting constant challenges and being fearless.

Ashley Bartner, and her husband Jason, have owned their *agriturismo* in *Le Marche, La Tavola Marche*, for 14 years, almost as long as I have been publishing *Dream of Italy* (18 years). I've always admired their commitment to their business and life in Italy. I'm hoping this is the year I finally meet them in person.

I keep saying we need more stories of men and Italy, and John Henderson fits the bill. He had a longtime dream to move to Italy and seems to be living his best life in *bella Roma*. I was anxious to ask him why he thinks more men don't make the move on their own.

I hope you are as enchanted as I am by the serendipitous story of how Susan Gravely came to co-found VIETRI and bring her own *dream of Italy* home to the United States.

Have you made your *dream of Italy* come true? I'd love to hear about it. Email me at kathy@dreamofitaly.com

Kathy McCabe

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A Dream to Live TUSCAN

Photography by Andrea Migliorati

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How many people can say that they met at a cocktail party hosted by Frances Mayes at her iconic villa, *Bramasole*? Well, my friend Becky and I can!

We were filming the cocktail party in October 2018 for the *Dream of Italy: Tuscan Sun Special* for PBS and Frances invited *Vittorio Camorri*, who brought his American business partner, Becky. Becky is the founder of *Live Tuscan*, 7-day, 10-day and 14-day immersive trips based in *Cortona*. (She recently added the Amalfi Coast to some itineraries.)

Becky has a joyful and calm spirit and we hit it off immediately, not only for common love of Italy, but also for our mutual interest in metaphysics. You might say neither of us think that it was an accident that we met. A few months later, Becky extended a gracious invitation for my (now late) father and I to join one of her weeks in *Cortona*. My father, who was nearing the end of his life, came alive that week, and those memories and Becky and *Vittorio's* kindness, will always be deeply etched in my heart.

Becky found her *dream of Italy* in a most interesting way. She now splits her time between North Carolina and *Cortona*.

Kathy McCabe: How did you fall for Italy and Tuscany specifically?

Becky Munson: Well, my whole life has been Italy because my mother is 100% Italian and her father was born and raised in Rome and that's all she knew. We were raised to believe that being Italian was a gift. We were really, really blessed to be Italian.

I was always Italian but never had a dream of starting a business in Italy. That fell on me. Destiny pushed that onto me on my very, very first trip to Tuscany.

I had been to Italy before, but that was to Rome. But I was invited to a cooking class in Tuscany with six other women that I knew. We went to cook with the incredible chef Faye Hess. She lives in in the tiny town of *Mercatale di Cortona*.

Within 24 hours of arriving, I knew this would be my passion and my life for the rest of my life. I didn't understand it. All of a sudden, I sensed it. You can't say you heard a voice because you don't hear it, you just know it. It is a knowing. It is a boom. "You will do this for the rest of your life."

KM: This wasn't your dream all along?

BM: This was no plan for me. People say, "Oh, you made your dream come true." It is a dream. It is mine and it has come true. But I have to tell you that it wasn't something I set out to do. It wasn't a goal. It happened to me.

That's when I met *Enzo*. He picked us up that next morning. I already had the vision of what I wanted it to



Vittorio, Becky and Enzo

be and it's exactly what I have now. But I sat in the front seat; I asked him a million questions. I'm still in the front seat asking him a million questions.

We got back to the house and everyone else was writing recipes and I'm writing a business plan, which I have never done in my life. I never owned a business. I was home with my kids.

KM: How did you meet your other partner *Vittorio*?

BM: Well, I got back to the States and I spent hours upon hours on the computer looking for what I saw in my head. I needed a house that suited many, many, many specifications for the American traveler, also for my vision of what I wanted it to be.

When I called about that house, *Vittorio* picked up the phone. I said, "I'm Becky and I am going to start a business in Tuscany and I would like to see this house." We had a meeting and he told me, "Whatever you can dream, I can create it."

Ten years later, it is the three of us. We all are just firmly committed. There's a purity in what each of us bring to it.

KM: I've experienced your magnificent hospitality for myself and I've been traveling in Italy for 26 years and I've never experienced anything quite like it. The dinners at *I Pagliai* are beyond anyone's imagination—creative, mind-blowing table settings, delicious and creative food (I'll never forget the sunflower-shaped bread), live music. What do your guests experience during their time with you?

BM: They feel awe. They feel moved. I have people in the vans every day who cry. They get teary-eyed because I have the music playing for the specific scenery that's going by outside. Every sense, all five senses are engaged all the



Dinner at I Pagliai



I Pagliai

time. So you are on a high, a sensory high the whole time.

They fall in love again. They are changed. They expect something very topical, but it becomes very personal very quickly. I believe that people come to me for a reason. That they are drawn to me.

Somebody told me a couple of years ago, we were “the *Camino* of Tuscany.” The *Camino*, meaning the *Camino de Santiago*. You get so much emotion and bonding with each other.

KM: Going back to how you came to this work, have you been struck so hard by something before?

BM: I have never had anything happen to me like this before. I have never had a powerful intuition or voice or knowing. That’s why I was able to start a business in a country where I didn’t even speak the language. I just was fearless. I just thought, “I’m doing this. The way will come. The way will appear. I’m only going to keep taking the steps.”

The first year I only had one group. I launched my website six months after I came back from the cooking class.

My first year and a half, I cooked for all the groups. The second year, there were no guests. It was like a hot air balloon that was just bumping along the ground, it wasn’t getting any lift.

My prayer was always and still is, either encourage me or redirect me because I am open either way. Encourage me or redirect me. It never failed. I got encouragement almost immediately. I’d get another booking . . . I knew the path was clear.

I was pretty fearless. It is a learning curve. The learning curve never stops. I still have a learning curve when I go. It has been 10 years. I still will find out

something and be like, “Oh my gosh, this culture is going to kill me. Seriously, this is what we have to do to do this?” Or, getting a ticket being parked here because that’s something I didn’t know about.

I remember the first time I went to the grocery store and I didn’t put gloves on and I squeezed a peach.

KM: Oh dear God . . .

BM: Yeah. She was yelling at me for touching the fruit, squeezing the peach. I brought my bag of peaches to the front and I didn’t weigh them and put the number on them. And I was just like, “This is just so much.”

KM: When did you end up deciding not just to travel back and forth but to live in Cortona part-time?

BM: It was in mid-2016. When I left *Cortona* over the years, it became harder and harder to leave. Then eventually it became like Velcro ripping apart, it just ripped me apart and my family would say, “You can’t be trusted. Just whatever you say or do for a month when you get back, you can’t be held accountable.” Because I wasn’t myself. I was just like, “I need to be there.”

That January I went back and I thought, “OK, I’m staying for six weeks. Two months max. I’m going to learn the language. I’m going to study the language every day. Every day I’m going to get up and I’m going to walk a different street in *Cortona* so I can see every street.”

I was there in the rain and the gray. I fell in love with *Cortona* when no one was there. I got to know so many people. I got a lot of street cred because I was there in the winter. 🍂

For more information, visit www.livetuscan.com



A NEW LIFE on the FARM

Ashley and Jason Bartner's love affair with Italy is intertwined with their own love story: As newlyweds, these New Yorkers visited Italy in 2005 and decided to take a leap of faith in starting an *agriturismo* in a 500-year-old farmhouse in *Le Marche*.

They live in the region full-time, running *La Tavola Marche*, which is composed of a B&B, a farm, and a cooking school using ingredients grown on-site. The Bartners pushed themselves out of their comfort zone not only by moving to Italy, but also by trading in the big city for country living, where they have learned to farm and garden.

Kathy McCabe: Did either you or your husband have a *dream of Italy*, or not really?

Ashley Bartner: Not really. It wasn't anything on our radar. We were just doing the regular grind in New York. We didn't come from families that traveled. This wasn't like, well, we always thought we would move internationally or abroad. This just happened. We thought it was the right time in our life for a change. And I think that was more than anything, what we were looking for.

We first came to Italy in 2005 on our honeymoon, and a year and a half later, we were living in the house that



La Tavola Marche

we are still in today. So, we moved here in December of 2007. Italy checked things off on our list, like: learn a new language, start a garden, get our hands dirty, make our home our castle.

KM: What surprised you the most about moving to Italy?

AB: I think what surprised me the most was how welcoming the people in our area were. I mean, we knew; we both worked in hospitality for years. So, the business itself wasn't going to be a big surprise. Jason knew the kitchen; I knew the marketing and the hospitality. The garden was going to be something that we were eager to learn, and the country living.

KM: So, backing up, your *dream of Italy* started in 2005. How the heck did it end up in *Le Marche* of all places?

AB: Everyone kept saying go to *Umbria*, it's the next Tuscany. But that wasn't what we were looking for. We wanted something a bit more off the beaten path, and something where we were learning from the locals.

So then, we started to hear about and hone in on *Le Marche*. The prices were a little bit lower because *Le Marche* has long been very much a region for farming. The strategic thinking was not only financial but to consider what might work for our customer, the traveler. If we are starting to look in *Le Marche*, how far are we from train stations and airports and the breadbasket of Italy and *Emilia-Romagna*, and these different kind of food trips. We thought, "Well, this could be an undiscovered part that we could guide travelers through."

KM: I totally think of you guys as farmers now, so you were not farmers or gardeners before?

AB: We never had a garden. We didn't grow up with parents with gardens or anything. So, we just asked a lot



Ashley serving drinks

of questions. And that was welcome. Also, we came at a time where the people our age in Italy were going away from the country life, and they weren't so interested in knowing these old recipes or spending time on a Tuesday at 10 in the morning to go forage for wild greens.

So, we ate it up and [the locals] didn't seem to care who they were sharing this information with. They were just happy to share it. I think, for Jason, that's been one of the most fulfilling parts of doing this, is learning to become self-sustainable, just growing your own food and being proud of that and starting it from seed and then finishing it at the table. And that feels really good.

KM: Can you summarize what *La Tavola Marche* is?

AB: *La Tavola Marche* literally means "the *Le Marche* table," because we feel the hub of Italian life is at the table. So, that's what our goal is, is to bring people around the table, and to get to know the culture through the food and through the people, and for a real slice of life of the Italian countryside. Not just pasta and sauces class, but making sausages from scratch or a whole hog butchery. It's a bit more of a full experience.

KM: Does it matter that you're American or not? In a way, does it bring people who wouldn't be so adventurous to *Le Marche* because you're there?

AB: I think so. I think there's a comfort when you know that you're so far from home. Again, I use the stupid



Ashley and Jason with guests

phrase “off the beaten path.” When you’re so far off the guidebooks, that you want to have someone there who you can ask all your questions to, there feels a little bit of something of home about it, whether it’s that we have actual queen-size beds instead of twins pushed together or whatever it may be, but there’s a connection that’s tangible because we have the common language.

KM: I have a feeling that you and your husband have inspired a lot of Italian dreams from guests who have come to see you. Are there some guests you remember whose lives changed not just by coming to Italy, but also by coming to your little corner of the world?

AB: Yes. Guests have come out here, seen what we’ve done, and were just inspired by taking a change and a risk in their life. One guest went back home and opened a haberdashery shop, because he thought, “If [Ashley and Jason] can move to Italy and learn a language, and do something over there, why can’t I open this shop at a town that I live in, already doing something that I enjoy?”

KM: I know you’ve also inspired at least one guest to move to Italy and I’m planning to interview her. You also run workshops on moving to Italy. What’s the common challenge for people wanting to move to Italy?

AB: I think sometimes, it is unrealistic time frames. People are in one of two categories: moving in 18 months



Ashley and Jason

or in five years. And most of the people who want to move in five years, we say, “Great, you guys are smart. You’re planning ahead. Who knows what could be going on by then? But at least, you got the ball rolling for figuring a lot of this out.” The 18 months, it’s like, “Well, I hope you have money and are ready to rock and roll.”

We always say have a time frame and work backwards. If you give yourself the time and work backwards and you say, “Okay, I could start collecting some of these documents right now that aren’t time-sensitive.” And then, as it gets closer to my visa meeting, I know I need to get these things that are going to expire. 🍷

For more information, visit www.latavolamarche.com

JOHN HENDERSON

RETIRING *in the* ETERNAL CITY

American journalist John Henderson dreamed for years of moving to Italy before he eventually retired in Rome. His move came in phases starting with a sabbatical from his sports writing career. John is one of the few American men we know who have made the move to Italy on his own. He now shares his life with his Italian girlfriend, *Marina Pascucci*.



Marina and John

Now that he's living in the Eternal City, he has learned to deeply appreciate Italian life: good food and wine, friendships with locals, soccer and the unexpected beauty tucked away in every little corner of the city.

Kathy McCabe: I know a little of your story, but how did you come to fall in love with Italy?

John Henderson: It goes back to the year 2000. I had just covered the Sydney Olympics, my first Olympics, and really loved it but was really burned out on sports writing. In our contract with *The Denver Post*, you can take a year sabbatical and have your job guaranteed when you get back. So I talked to this guy and he told me how great it was spending six months traveling around Italy.

My girlfriend at the time was a radio reporter and she was also burned out at her job. We set out for November 2001 to move to Rome, and then 9/11 hit. We went there for a year; we loved it so much that I got two extensions on my sabbatical.

I ended up staying 16 months, and then the U.S. invaded Iraq in March of 2003 and the dollar started to drop against the euro. We fell in love with Rome so much that when we left, we vowed we would return forever.

Well, I couldn't find a job, and in 2010 my girlfriend and I broke up. And I said, "Okay, I'm just going to save my money and retire." In the meantime, during all these years, I kept going back and forth to Rome to visit, to see old friends, just to improve my Italian, to get a feel for living there some more as it changed economically. In August of 2013 I reached my financial goal, in December 2013 I got my visa and in January 2014 I moved.

KM: Do you have the elective residency visa?

JH: It is *residenza elettiva*. That gives you permission to live in Italy for a year. After a year you need a *permesso di soggiorno*, and that's when you've got to show proof of



John at the Colosseum

financial stability, insurance and housing contract. It's basically permission to live here, as long as I don't work.

KM: You just knew when you were in Rome, you wanted that city life, right?

JH: Yeah. There are so many more museum openings and wine tastings and politics. The pulse.

KM: But you plan to stay?

JH: Oh yeah. I will die here. I can't think of any place else I'd rather live.

KM: Tell me your impression of the lockdown in Italy. What does it say about Italian culture?

JH: I remember after the first week, people were getting on their balconies and holding candles and singing Italian songs. That was moving. I mean, everybody came. I really felt like I was part of the Italian people, part of the Italian culture that everybody was really coming together



John at home in Rome



John and family at an A.S. Roma game

to make each other feel like, “Look, we’re going to get through this.”

KM: What is it that you have discovered about Italians?

JH: I generally do think Italians care more about each other than Americans do. I think they are willing to sacrifice more than Americans are. I think all of Europe is like that. I always tell people in Italy, in America you learn to work, in Italy you learn to live.

KM: Which is beautiful. What ways do you think Italians live?

JH: They love their spare time; they love to go out. Even parents. They love their food and wine; they love to sit outside and drink and talk all night. And they love their two weeks in *Sardinia* in August. It’s spare time, food, wine and beauty. Those are the things they value.

KM: Tell me about beauty.

JH: The beauty is in the architecture; in the cities. Living in Rome is like living in an outdoor museum—everywhere you go, you see artwork. You’re in a rainstorm in the *Piazza del Popolo*, and you’re running into the *Chiesa de Maria Del Popolo* and you see three *Caravaggio*, authentic ones.

KM: You moved to Italy as a single, American man. We don’t hear a lot of stories of that. Why do you think that is?

JH: I think American women are more adventurous than American men. I think they’re more willing to take chances. American men get settled and they’re more identified by their salary and their position, and they don’t want to lose that. I’m also unique in that I never married. I have no wife, no ex-wife, no kids. So that helped a lot. I

know a lot of men who asked me how I did it and that’s what I tell them, and it pretty much disqualifies them on all four counts.

KM: What about making Italian friends?

JH: I found that pretty easy as I found Italians very open. That’s my experience. I got welcomed into homes.

I’m a big soccer fan. I’ve got an *A.S. Roma* key chain, and I show this around town and they say, “Oh, *forza Roma!*” I even get discounts in the public markets. This gives me a way to bond with the locals.

And be humble about the United States. All cultures want respect. Treat them as equals, be curious, they will always answer your questions, learn.

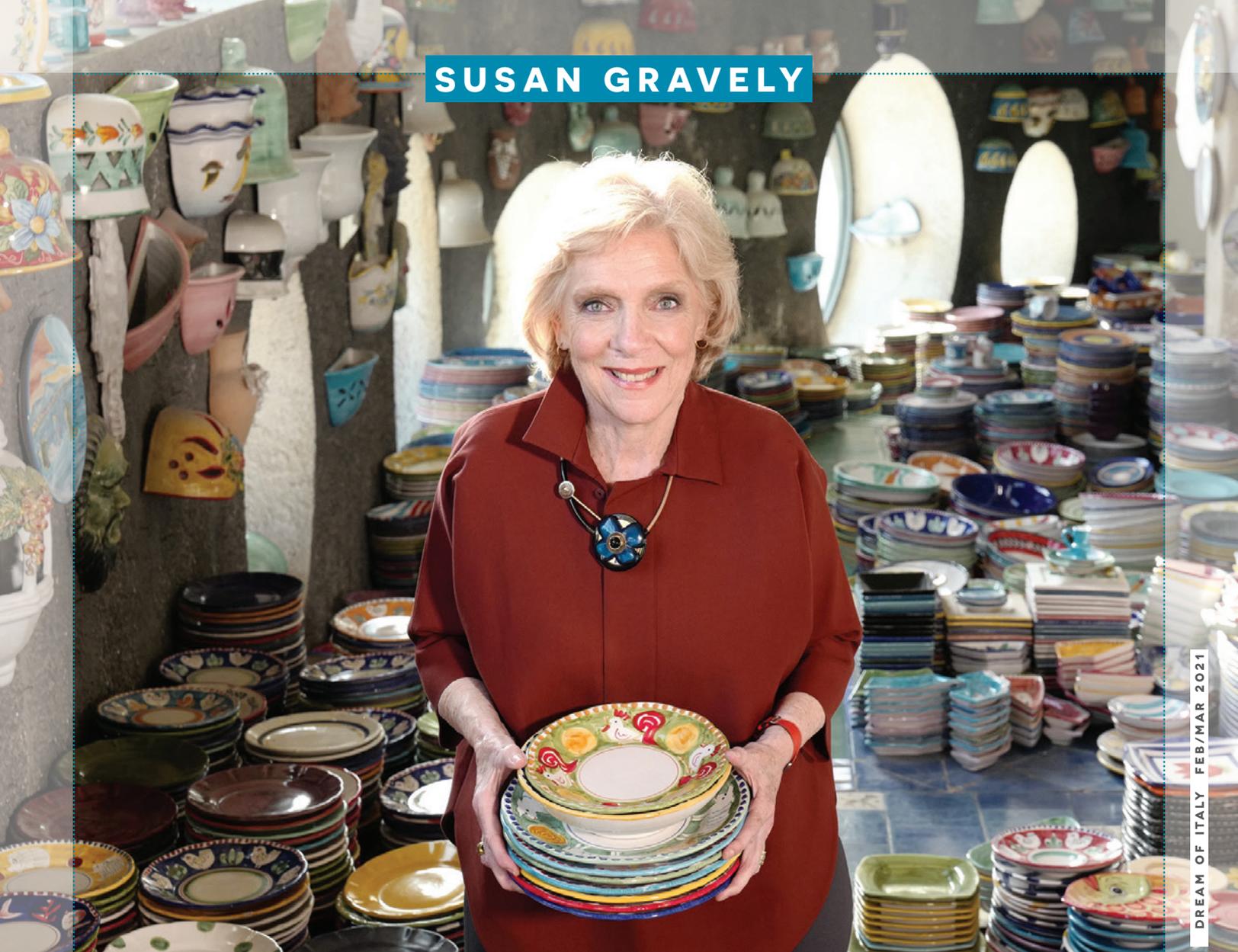
Then don’t be afraid to throw a party and invite every Italian you know and have them invite a friend.

KM: Do you think living in Italy, living in a new culture helps you age better, cognitively?

JH: Yes. Well, cognitively I’ve also learned, and this is true, if you’re learning a new language it is a great way to keep your mental capacity going, you’re always learning. I think it helps fight off dementia and Alzheimer’s, it really does.

Also, living in Italy as an expat, you never feel like you’re getting old because every day you see that you have a new experience, you pass a new restaurant you want to try, you read about another town in Italy you want to visit and everything is so close. I always have something to look forward to. You never feel like you’re in a rut living here. 🍷

For more information, visit www.johnhendersontravel.com

A photograph of Susan Gravelly, an older woman with short blonde hair, smiling and holding a stack of colorful, patterned ceramic plates. She is wearing a dark red jacket and a necklace with a large blue and white pendant. The background is a pottery shop filled with stacks of various ceramic dishes, bowls, and plates in different colors and patterns. The lighting is warm and focused on Susan.

SUSAN GRAVELLY

BRINGING ITALIAN CRAFTSMANSHIP HOME

Susan Gravelly's first trip to Italy nearly 40 years ago was filled with serendipity. After arriving on the Amalfi Coast and falling in love with the intricate patterns on their hotel's dinnerware, Susan, her mom Lee and her sister Frances found themselves struck with passion for the handmade ceramics.



Italian craftsmanship



Left to right: Susan, Frances and their mother Lee

When they returned to the U.S., they decided to start a company to wholesale and distribute the Italian-made ceramics to an American market, and in 1983, VIETRI was born.

Today, VIETRI is still going strong selling Italian dinnerware, tableware, and home and garden décor. All of the pieces are handcrafted, authentic and made with love by local artisans and factories in all parts of Italy.

Continuing her love of Italy, Susan also recently started writing holiday-themed children's books starring *Babbo Natale* (Italy's Santa Claus) and animals, who teach children lessons about love, friendship, taking care of the earth and cooking.

Kathy McCabe: What is it that is so magical about Italy and the Italians?

Susan Gravelly: I've always said when I've taken people to Italy, or been with people, there are two types: those who look down and those who look up. The ones that look up are the ones who see the world and feel the world and sense their environment. And the ones that look down are missing everything. Italians look up.

You look up so that you don't ever stop loving the moment and the full picture. That's luckily what's happened in my life and to the people I work with here and in Italy.

KM: Tell me about your first trip and what impact that still has today.

SG: So the background story is that my father was in

international tobacco, being from North Carolina. We had a standing globe and he'd show Rocky Mount, North Carolina, and the words as a child I always remembered are, "Look how small the world is. You're only a plane ticket or a phone call away."

My father had rheumatic fever as a little boy; he ended up dying at 60 of a heart issue. But two years later, I was in New York at the New York School of Interior Design. My sister was in design and just had her second baby, and my mother said, "I want to take the trip [to Italy] that your father and I planned."

During the flight, my sister went into business class to go to the bathroom and met this Italian who was from Florence and said to us, "Here's my phone number; when you're in Florence give me a call. Here's my favorite restaurant in Rome."

We tried his restaurant in Rome. We then went to *Positano*, stayed at the *Il San Pietro* [Hotel].

When we ate [at the hotel's restaurant], we went down through the hills, and it opened up into an enormous room carved out of the hillside with white cotton fabrics, beautiful dark towels, art everywhere and then bougainvillea all over the ceiling, opening up to the dining room with peach-colored tablecloths and all the plates with different patterns.

We were mesmerized, so we hired a driver who spoke English, went to the [ceramics] factory in *Vietri sul Mare* and within three days went from, "We need to buy for ourselves. We need to buy for our friends. Gosh, should we open a retail store?" to having drinks with a couple from New York who were in luxury clothing manufacturing

who said, “Listening to you girls, you need to design, and you need to wholesale and distribute.” And that was the seed.

So we then talked to the factory, and I still have the original piece of paper that we negotiated the price.

[My sister] Frances and I thought, “We can handle it.” So I went back, we did all the work, we then negotiated everything. That was May. When we went back in September, *Fabio* went with us, *Fabio Puccinelli*.

KM: Is this the guy from the plane?

SG: The man from the plane becomes our agent in Italy.

KM: Wow. And the name VIETRI?

SG: We saw that word and if you reverse the syllables in Italian, *tre vite*, three lives: mama, Frances and me starting the company. The first factory we worked with was in the town of *Vietri sul Mare*. It was the perfect name and we felt like once people can pronounce it, they will remember it.

KM: You work with factories all over Italy. I know you have a special story from the town of *Nove* in the *Veneto* region.

SG: I had been told by the mayor that they wanted to give me the key to the city, and I thought that was just wonderful and I hadn't told anybody. I was just going, and I thought it was going to be at his office. My mother heard about it as did my husband and they said, “we're coming.”

They closed the entire *piazza* and had opera singers from Milan. They had tables lined with white cloths everywhere. There were over 250 people there. They had this big tent in front of the art museum. I had to give the acceptance speech in Italian. My Italian is pretty good now, but it wasn't as good then.

These are the kind of memories I have after working with factories in Italy for almost 40 years and establishing relationships.

KM: How can people use products like yours to live like an Italian at home? Let's start with the table.

SG: You do not worry about perfection, first and foremost. It is about creating an environment that you are comfortable in, because your table represents your life. I set the table differently every time I use it depending upon who is coming, the season and the meal. I use old and new VIETRI products. I sometimes mix the dinnerware yet keep the placemats and napkins the same colors.

Other times, I use different bowls and platters for serving. I think of our guests, or the day Bill and I have



VIETRI dishes

had, and many times, the table setting comes from that. I love things perfectly imperfect. Yes, perfectly imperfect is what Italy and Italian homes feel like to me.

KM: What are some other tips for finding Italian inspiration in your home?

SG: Today, many American homes are very clean and white. There is a sense of orderliness and exactness to this look. Many contemporary Italians are repainting their walls to white, but I sense a bit more cream in their white color. It makes homes warmer and gives a feeling of welcome. Accent with wonderful rugs, and never forget the old books that mean something and the tokens from trips that can be put on walls as art.

Art is key—new, old, fine as well as handmade. Imperfection is perfection from an Italian's point of view. Mix what you love together on a wall, or on a table. For the table, it should be no more than three items. It is about warmth and touches of a few colors of Tuscany—wheat, saffron, some green and maybe a touch of paprika or red. 🌿

For more information, visit www.VIETRI.com

DREAM OF ITALY

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Denver, CO 80201

Specchio

Ed ecco sul tronco
si rompono le gemme:
un verde più nuovo dell'erba
che il cuore riposa:
il tronco pareva già morto,
piegato sul botro.
E tutto mi sa di miracolo;
e sono quell'acqua di nube
che oggi rispecchia nei fossi
più azzurro il suo pezzo di cielo,
quel verde che spacca la scorza
che pure stanotte non c'era.

Mirror

And suddenly on the trunk
buds break open:
a green newer than the grass
which soothes the heart:
the trunk already seemed dead,
bent on the ravine.
And everything seems like a miracle;
and I'm that rainwater
that today reflects in the ditches
a deeper blue its piece of sky,
that green that splits the crust
which even last night wasn't there.

—Salvatore Quasimodo (1930)

