

# Food Wine & TRAVEL

## THE PUBLISHERS TOUR - UMBRIA

# SPELLO AND BEVAGNA

The Italian Tribune Publisher's 2008 Tour of Italy was one of the most exciting trips yet! Readers, you are invited to join us as we begin our journey through La Bella Paese - from Umbria to Sicilia. Over the next several weeks we will chronicle the highlights of the trip in words, photos and of course - recipes. This week we begin in the Region of Umbria, where the Publisher's Tour group began their sojourn in the medieval towns of Spello and Bevagna. Next week we will take in Perugia, the capitol of Umbria, where chocolate is king!

Spello affords a magnificent view of the Umbrian plain, and is home to numerous churches from different periods as well as examples of Augustan architecture. But the walled city's most important feature is an annual festival, celebrated there since the early 1930s, known as the *Infiorate*.

*Infiorate* means "decorated with flowers," and that's exactly how visitors will find Spello during the festival, which celebrates Corpus Domini each August. Artists and members of the community join together in honor of the religious holiday to decorate the festival's procession route with carpets of flowers, each one depicting a different scene or design. The *Infiorate* is a sight unlike any other - a work of art you have to see to believe.

Each year, the residents of Spello gather to share their respective roles for the *Infiorate* in harmony. There are many jobs for festival participants, including finding and picking the flowers, caring for and preserving them, weeding and selecting petals, drawing and designing the carpets, creating structures to shelter the unfinished carpets from the elements of the weather, setting up lighting systems, and much more. The actual preparatory process is very long, usually at least a few months and sometimes almost a year.

After months of work, carpet designers toil for a full day before the Sunday morning procession, bent to the ground, placing millions and millions of petals in just the right places. Chemical treatments, paints, and other non-natural materials are prohibited from the decoration processes.

The carpets are protected with zeal and extremely well cared for, not to be touched or walked upon until the day of the procession.

The results of such hard work are the magical, floral masterpieces that recall both ancient and modern art, full of cultural fascination with historic and present-day themes. But many agree that the true masterpiece of *Infiorate* is the coordination of the people.

On Sunday afternoon, the Bishop of Spello leads the procession along the *Infiorate* carpets. In the evening, prizes are awarded to the designs that are the most beautiful.

While in Spello, guests should visit the Porta Consolare, an incredible city gate begun during the late Roman Triumvirate and finished during the early years of Caesar Augustus's reign of the Empire. The triple archway features three statues that date to the Republic and the Julius-Claudius era. Another important site is the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore, dating back to the 13th century and featuring the famous Baglioni Chapel adorned with frescoes including *Annunciation* and *Nativity* by the master Pinturicchio.

Just as Spello is known for the amazing *Infiorate*, nearby Bevagna is known for its custom of historic papermaking, or *La Cartiera*. While most Umbrian towns are built upon the region's gently sloping hills or into the side of larger mountains, Bevagna is nestled in one of the area's scenic valleys. The town's architecture retains its medieval appearance, and the neighborhood streets reflect the layout of historic Rome.



MASTRO CARTARO Francesco Proietti is a professional in the art of *La Cartiera*, the tradition of original papermaking as it was when it began over six centuries ago. Today, Proietti and other experts still make paper by hand from pieces of cloth. Bevagna administration and residents ensure that no minute detail is left unchanged from the historic, fundamental process.



DURING INFIORATE, elaborate carpets made from millions of flower petals are laid through the streets of Spello. The carpets are carefully guarded and preserved for the procession on the final day of the festival, when they can be first walked upon. Paint, chemicals, and other unnatural substances are banned from use in the making of the carpets.



# THE ART OF LA CARTIERA

The art of *La Cartiera* upholds the tradition of original papermaking, as it was when it began over six centuries ago. The paper was, and still is, actually made by hand from pieces of cloth. Bevagna administration and residents ensure that no minute detail is left unchanged from the fundamental process, including the setting of the work.

Ancient caves that remain from eras gone by are where *La Cartiera* takes place today. After pieces of cloth and rags are first weighed and sorted according to size and quality, they are taken to a cave for the next stage of sorting. The "rag-and-bone" man selects the prime pieces of cloth according to their various materials - linen, hemp, and cotton - which are then broken into smaller pieces. The new groups are called *scrollature*, *acrapatura*, or *sceglitura*, respectively to the materials.

Next the rags are stirred into a vat of hydrated lime for three days, and then transferred into a hydraulic pile where they are hammered to a mushy, paste-like substance. The paste is then placed in a vat of water, into which a worker dips a mold and filters the paste. The paste-mold, which is now imprinted with a watermark of a specific brand name, is laid on a piece of felt to dry.

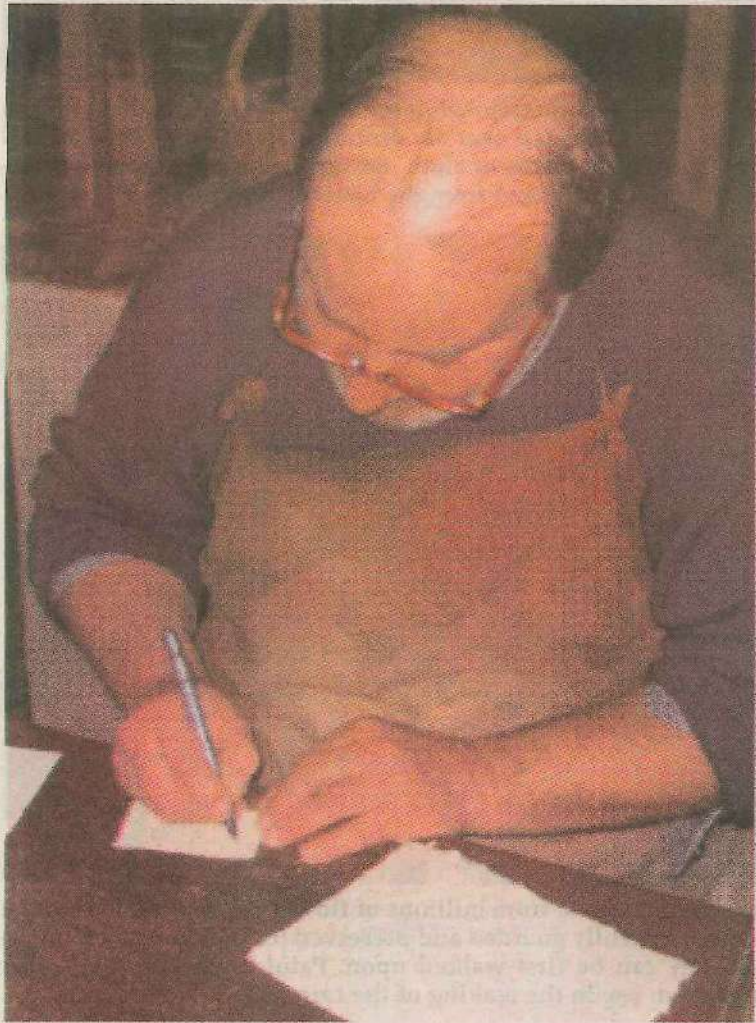
When the paste is dry, it becomes a thick, luxurious sheet of paper. The sheets are cut from the felt and then undergo a process called *colatura*, which treats them with a jelly (or "animal glue") that is obtained from scraps of hide from a local tannery. After being glazed, the sheets of paper are folded by workers called *cialandratore* and assembled in reams. Many artists and tourists visit Bevagna to buy these incredible creations, a preservation history in its true form.

A great spot to visit in Bevagna is Piazza Filippo Silvestri, one of the most harmonious town squares in Umbria. Flanking the square are several important structures and monuments, including the Palazzo dei Consoli. The gothic palace was built in the 13th century as the seat of the local government, and since 1886 has housed the opulent Teatro Torti.

Every March, *Primavera a Bevagna* celebrates the end of winter with many Medieval-themed exhibitions, concerts, and other special events. During the last week of June, the town hosts their annual *Mercato delle Gaitte* festival, which dates back to the Medieval times and is based on the ancient laws of *Liber Statutorum antique terrea Mecanie*.



MASTRO CARTARO Francesco Proietti of La Valchiera, explains the medieval process of paper making to the publishers tour group and as their guide Dott. Maura Baldoni translates.



UN COSI PER RICORDO - Maestro Proietti autographs a gift made from the paper he demonstrated to the Tribune group.



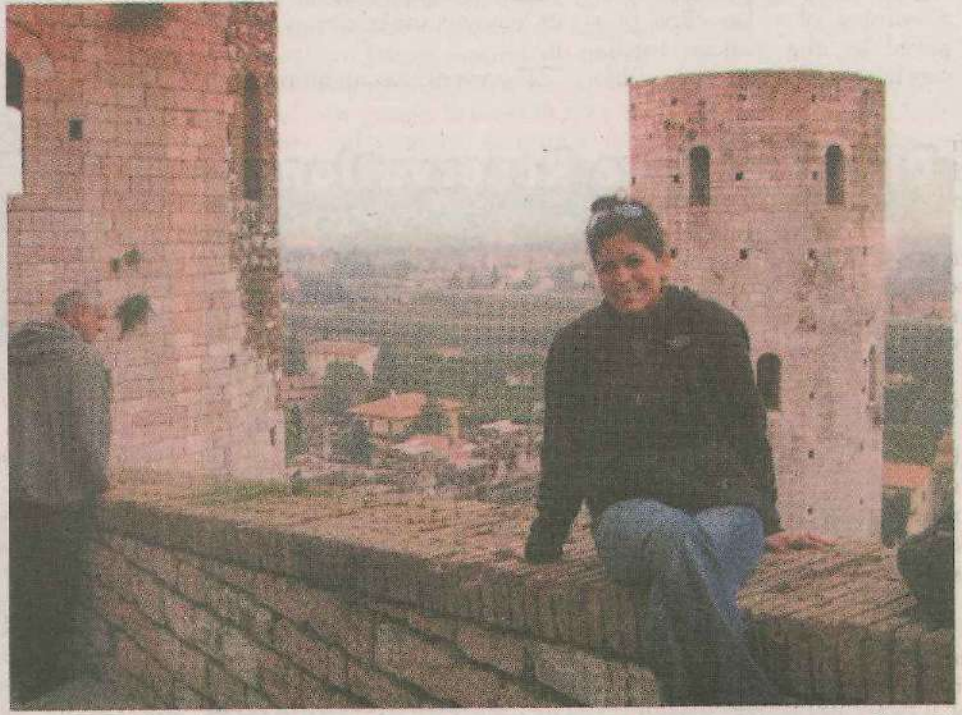
WOMAN SPINNING COTTON during the *Mercato delle Gaitte* festival



# PUBLISHER'S TOUR BEGINS AN UMBRIAN JOURNEY



PIAZZA FILIPPO SILVESTRI in Bevagna is highlighted by this magnificent marble fountain and the Gothic Palazzo dei Consoli built in the 13th century.



THE WALLED IN CITY of Spello is the backdrop for Christina Daunno who celebrated her 30th birthday with a trip to Italy.



DUE CHRISTINAS - Christine Donato, right, and Christina Daunno pose in front of a shop they found bearing their name.



ROBERT AND BARBARA SARGENTI enjoy Bevagna, the medieval town in the region of Umbria.



FELLOW TRAVELERS stop for some 'prodotti tipici' of verdura and frutta on the way to the center of Spello.



WALKING the quaint cobblestone streets of Spello are members of the Italian Tribune Publisher's Tour.



TIRED OUT after a long day of touring, the group relaxes at the base of the Gothic fountain of Bevagna. Notice there is always room for shopping bags! From left are Joan Alagna, George and Jean Falco, Buddy and Marion Fortunato and Christine Donato. In back are Robert and Nino Donato.