

VALERIO CEVA GRIMALDI AND MARIA FRANCHINI
PHOTOGRAPHS: FERNANDO PISACANE

SECRET NAPLES



JONGLEZ PUBLISHING

MUSEO DEL TESSILE E DELL'ABBIGLIAMENTO 45 "ELENA ALDOBRANDINI"

18 Piazzetta Mondragone

- Metro: Line 2 Amedeo • Funicolar Centrale, Corso Vittorio Emanuele
- Tel: 081 4976104 • www.fondazionemondragone.it
- Visits Monday to Friday 9.30am–1pm and 3pm–5pm;
- Saturday 9am–1pm (but telephone in advance to check opening hours)
- Admission: €5

“ **A trip
through the history
of Neapolitan
haute couture** ”

Since 2003, the rooms on the first and second floors of the building occupied by the Fondazione Mondragone – set up in 1655 by Elena Aldobrandini, wife of the Duke of Mondragone and Prince of Stigliano – have housed the Museum of Textiles and Clothing. There are major collections by famous Neapolitan fashion designers, together with photographs and various documents that trace the evolution of local fashion from the end of the 19th century up to the mid-20th century. You can also admire beautiful upholstery fabrics, all manufactured in Neapolitan factories between the late 19th and mid-20th centuries, as well as robes and sacred objects from the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie a Mondragone, which is part of the foundation.

Be sure not to miss the fabulous garden whose beauty was praised by a number of chroniclers in antiquity – access is by a flight of steps in the courtyard. Outdoor concerts are organised here in summer.



TRADITIONAL NEAPOLITAN CHIC

The international fame of Neapolitan couture is due in part to the existence of London House, frequented by celebrities such as the princes of Savoy, Eduardo De Filippo, Vittorio De Sica and many others. The establishment was founded in the early 1930s by Gennaro Rubinacci, whose grandfather imported silk fabrics from the East in the first half of the 19th century.

PALESTRA “FITNESS & BEAUTY”

18

26 Vico Santa Maria a Cappella Vecchia

- Metro: Line 2 Amedeo • Funicular Augusteo
- Visits on request during opening hours
- Tel: 081 7646580



A sports venue in a deconsecrated church

In what is now the chic neighbourhood of Piazza dei Martiri, the early Christians built a chapel near a cave which, according to some writers (such as Jacopo Sannazzaro, see p. 27), was dedicated to the Egyptian god Serapis. Later, Basilian monks enlarged the chapel, which became a church and then a monastery. The complex then passed to the Benedictines and the Olivetans. In the 19th century, the monastery was sold to the Marquis di Sessa (owner of the neighbouring palazzo). The church itself was handed over to a religious congregation. Now deconsecrated, it has become a gym and sports centre, although the 18th-century stucco and the Gothic portico can still be seen.



CARAFÀ CAVES

19

30/M Vico Santa Maria a Cappella Vecchia, c/o Gran Garage

- Metro: Line 2 Amedeo • Funicular Chiaia: Parco Margherita
- Monday to Saturday open 24/7; best to visit during daylight hours
- Admission free



A magical site

A narrow tunnel and a winding lane lead to the Carafa caves – spectacular former underground quarries that were converted into a parking lot some decades ago.

To see their full extent, go up to the second level (artificially created to make better use of the space), from where you can appreciate the impressive height of the vaults supported by huge stone arches.

Since antiquity, the people of Naples have excavated the local yellow and grey tuff, a soft but durable volcanic stone that is ideal for all kinds of construction work. The Romans used it to build water tanks for their fleet.

According to some sources, during the Angevin domination in the 13th century this quarry supplied the materials to enlarge the port and build Castel Nuovo (New Castle, the royal palace of the time).

The Military Academy of Nunziatella, the Military Archives, the Madeleine bridge (which spanned the Sebeto river at the entrance to the city) and Palazzo Carafa (hence the name of the caves) were all built with tuff from these quarries.



THE OLD CITY AND ITS FERRUGINOUS WATER

The Carafa caves were cut into the hill of Pizzofalcone (formerly known as Monte Echia), part of the territory where, in the 7th century BC, the Greeks founded a place they named after the Siren Parthenope (see p. 153). In Roman times the hill became the setting for the sumptuous residence of General Lucullus, famous for his proverbial banquets. The remains of his villa are still visible from the most panoramic viewpoint of Pizzofalcone. The natural caves at the foot of the hill, inhabited in the Neolithic period, were closed in the 17th century. Monte Echia was the source of the ferruginous water much enjoyed by Neapolitans, which was collected and stored in earthenware pot-bellied jugs – part of the memories of old Naples – to be sold from small kiosks dotted around the city. The source, which was suspected of being polluted, was sealed off in the 1970s.

THE PRESIDENT'S ANTI-AIRCRAFT SHELTER 25

"Caving" (Speleo) tour organised by the Associazione Culturale Borbonica Sotterranea

4 Vico Grottone

• Funicular Centrale: Augusto, metro Linea 1 Municipio

• Tel: 366 2484151, 081 7645808

• mail@galleria borbonica.it

• www.galleriaborbonica.com

• Guided tours: Saturday and Sunday at 11am and 4pm (duration 2½ hours)



**Hoisted
by cable 35 m
underground**

The Caving tour organised by the Associazione Culturale Borbonica Sotterranea requires equipment that is provided by the association itself (helmet with lamp, overalls and harness). You start down a narrow 17th-century staircase that leads to the cisterns 35 m below. You then go through a maze of pipes and cisterns once used to supply the city with water, before reaching a bomb shelter used during the Second World War by the famous writer Curzio Malaparte and the current President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano.

Next is a small gallery with thousands of shells piled high, thrown out from a 19th-century goldsmith's that specialised in buttons and cameos: the workshop was located just above the tunnel and was linked to it by means of a well. Then you have to crawl along increasingly narrow tunnels belonging to the ancient Bolla aqueduct, where in some places there are mysterious (religious?) signs on the walls, probably made by the *pozzari*, the men who looked after the underground aqueducts. Finally, you cross a huge cave via a wooden bridge suspended 6 m above the ground and return by cable lift.

The association runs four different tours exploring this section of the "underground city": Standard (see p. 51), Adventure (*Avventura*) (see p. 56), Caving (*Speleo*) (see above) and 'Via delle memorie' (see p. 65). The Adventure option includes a raft ride through part of the tunnel, whereas the Standard tour lets you walk the full length of it.

HORNS AGAINST THE EVIL EYE

The number of Neapolitans who have never owned a red horn can be counted on the fingers of one hand. Even fewer have never mimicked horns, pointing the index and little fingers towards the ground, an automatic gesture for them as soon as they feel threatened by a curse, real or imaginary.

And the phrase "I'm making the *corna*" (sign of the horns) is used instead of "Touch wood". The people of Naples certainly didn't invent this symbol, which was once almost universal, but have simply developed it in their own way and perpetuated its use over time, to make it the ultimate "talisman".

Animal horns were displayed over house entrances as far back as the Neolithic period. They were believed to be a powerful natural weapon in driving out enemies and the forces of evil. By warding off misfortune, they brought happiness and therefore fertility, which was indispensable for survival.

Warriors in most parts of the world wore horned helmets and the animals that supplied the horns themselves became objects of worship.

In ancient Egypt, horns also became an attribute of female fertility: Isis, the Great Mother, a very popular deity in Rome and Naples, wore horns on her head with the Moon set between them. In addition, many goddesses are represented with a crescent Moon, an allusion to the horn.

The little Neapolitan version, in order to be effective, must be red, hollow, twisted, pointed and received as a gift. It derives from the Roman phallus, attribute of the god Priapus, a ubiquitous amulet in Roman culture. At Pompeii, phalluses were carved on doors, walls and even the cobbled streets. In people's homes, many objects were decorated with huge priapic symbols in marble or bronze. Women wore the symbol around their necks as red coral pendants.



With the coming of Christianity, propriety required the phallus to be replaced by a horn. In the Middle Ages, Neapolitan jewellers were renowned for their necklaces made from miniature red horns, which were exported throughout Europe.

CUCKOLD'S HORNS

Whereas to ward off the *iettatura* (curse of the evil eye, from Neapolitan *jettare*, to throw, or hurl), the two-fingered gesture points to the ground, pointing the fingers up at someone is to treat them as a cuckold. Originally this gesture branded a man as an ox and therefore impotent.

In Italy, Saint Martin, Bishop of Tours, became the patron of deceived husbands. Each city has its own legend to justify this practice. In Naples it is said that the husbands of unfaithful women would lock themselves in the Certosa di San Martino (Saint Martin's Charterhouse, see p. 371).

CORALS IN THE MUSEO ASCIONE

29

Ascione 1855 SrL - 19 Piazzetta Matilde Serao (inside Galleria Umberto I)
 • Metro: Line 1 Municipio • Funicular Centrale: Augusto
 • Visits on reservation • Tel: 081 421111
 • napoli@ascione.com • www.ascione.com



**A coral display
in the city centre**

In premises located on the second floor inside Galleria Umberto I, in the museum run by the house of Ascione, you can admire over 300 designs in coral, lava stone (very popular with Queen Victoria) and cameos – so many choice pieces from a production that spread over a century and a half from the early 19th century to the 1940s. The Ascione workshop is the oldest in the town of Torre del Greco (between Pompeii and Naples), world capital of coral and cameos.

Here you'll find a superb chain created in 1938 for Princess Maria José on the occasion of her visit to Naples; a precious coral necklace presented to Queen Farida of Egypt (two copies of this were made in case the original was lost); and a 1920 cameo considered to be one of the prettiest in the world, *Immortal Love*, by Antonio Mennella. Note also a splendid medusa in coral, emblem of the house, which alludes to the Medusa of Greek mythology whose blood turned into coral when she was killed by Perseus.

A browse through the information section will reveal corals of different types and provenances, ancient techniques for collecting the coral (which used to be found in abundance along the coast) and tools for working the precious material ... an entire room is devoted to cameos and the art of engraving them.



REPRODUCTION OF LOURDES GROTTA

7

Monastic complex of San Nicola da Tolentino
9 Via Suor Orsola

- Funicular: Centrale (Corso Vittorio Emanuele)



**A stone
from the original
grotto**

Built in 1618 by Neapolitan architect Gian Giacomo da Conforto, the monastic complex of San Nicola da Tolentino has a small shrine dedicated to the Virgin of Lourdes, as well as a reproduction of the cave in which she appeared to Bernadette Soubirous in 1858.

In 1873, the monks displayed an image of the Virgin for the first time in their church.

A group of the faithful, returning from a pilgrimage to Lourdes, brought back a statue of Mary which was installed on its present site and a stone from the grotto into which a marble plaque was set.



The monastery is also home to about 3,000 marble ex-votos. For lack of space, the monks are now obliged to refuse all new ex-votos that the worshippers continue to offer.

From the monastery belvedere you can enjoy a stunning view of the Bay of Naples.

NEARBY

A KITCHEN GARDEN DECLARED NATIONAL HERITAGE

8

The impeccably maintained kitchen garden of San Nicola da Tolentino monastery, laid out on two terraces, is always shown in old maps and sketches of Naples such as the famous "Tavola Strozzi" (on view at the San Martino Museum). The garden was declared national heritage in 2010.

EMEROTECA-BIBLIOTECA TUCCI

16

- Palazzo delle Poste – Piazza Matteotti – 2nd floor
- Metro: Line 1 Toledo • Funicular Centrale (Augusteo)
 - Tel: 081 5513845 / 081 5511226 • info@emerotecatucci.it
 - www.emerotecatucci.it
 - Open Monday to Friday 8.30am–6.30pm
 - Saturday 8.30am–2.30pm [except July and August]
 - Admission free
 - Some photographic reproduction is allowed



Newspaper library

The Tucci newspaper library, largely unknown to the general public, keeps 9,500 collections of newspapers, magazines and almanacs, mainly Italian but also French, English, German, Austrian, Russian, etc., published over the last five centuries.

Some 200 of these titles are thought to be the only copies in the world. A real treasure trove is held by this extraordinary library founded in 1909, for professional reasons, by a group of journalists (among them Vincenzo Tucci, correspondent of the *Giornale di Sicilia*, to whom the building was dedicated in 1953). The library moved to its present location in 1936 (previously it was in Palazzo Gravina, which used to be the central Post Office). It has been continually enriched with valuable donations from all over the world, becoming an international study centre of the first order. Periodically it organises literary meetings and round tables.

Furthermore, it publishes documents not for sale (the institution is non-profit), but for sending to researchers, universities and libraries around the world. The archives also contain secret military maps and documents, and signed letters from generals, politicians, writers and poets. Finally, you can visit a small postal museum displaying posters, prints and manuscripts of the 18th century. The very welcoming director, Salvatore Maffei, will be pleased to show visitors the otherwise unobtainable collection of the Neapolitan daily *Il Lampo* (1848–1849), a volume of rare news from various places (1692) and the first Italian edition of Vitruvius' *De Architectura* (1521). The spacious premises, whose showcases are packed with history, also has an art gallery where you can admire, among other works, a canvas by landscape artist Giuseppe Casciaro, *Grapevines*.

In 1999 the archives were declared to be "of remarkable historical interest" by the Ministry of Culture.



ISTITUTO MAGISTRALE ELEONORA PIMENTEL-FONSECA

22

Former Casa Professa

2 Via Benedetto Croce

• Tel: 081 2520054

• Metro: Line 1 Dante or Università; Line 2 Montesanto

• Funicular Montesanto

• Visits Monday to Saturday 9am–1pm



A rare edition

The former Casa Professa was a Jesuit monastery, another witness to their power in Naples. This beautiful building, now converted into a high school, adjacent to the celebrated church of Gesù Nuovo, still

retains the original library with its collection of 50,000 rare volumes, mainly journals and essays concerning the Jesuit Order.

The library, which is on the second floor, is accessed by a monumental staircase leading to a splendid carved wooden door surrounded by a marble portico. This majestic salon impressed all visitors at the time, who considered this library to be the most beautiful in the city (and there were many of them).

The ceiling has frescoes by Antonio Sarnelli (1712–1800), who was also responsible for the very fine patterns on the tiled flooring. The books are arranged over two storeys on shelves set into the walls and decorated with wooden mouldings (1730). The upper storey is surrounded by a balustrade of pierced wood, decorated with medallions and carved birds.

The ensemble was not completed until 1750: between 1685 (when the building was constructed) and the time that serious work began on the fixtures and fittings, chickens were even kept there.



BOURBON HALL OF FAME

25

Church of Santa Chiara

49/c Via Santa Chiara

- Metro: Line 1 Dante, Università; Line 2 Montesanto
- Open 7.30am–1pm and 4.30pm–8pm



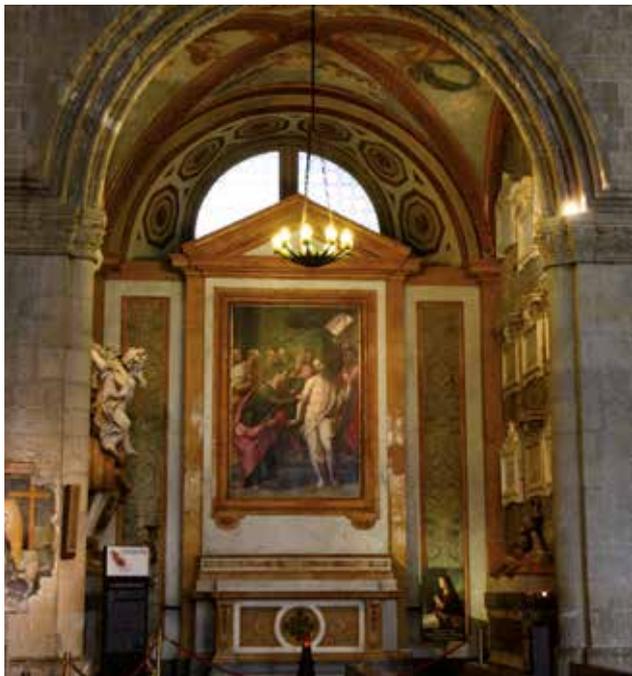
**One of
the rare souvenirs
of the Bourbons
in Naples**

It has not been established how the bodies of the last of the Bourbons of Naples – the exiled Francis II and his wife Maria Sophia of Bavaria – were repatriated in 1984 and interred alongside their family in the Chapel of Saint Thomas in Santa Chiara,

the church that had been chosen by the Angevin kings as their final resting place. This is one of the few reminders of the Bourbons in Naples.

For some time now, the reputation of the Bourbon dynasty (which ruled Naples from 1734 to 1860) is starting to be reassessed: it is known, for example, that the King of the Two Sicilies, Ferdinand II (died 1859), was so renowned for his liberal ideas that when the early unificationists offered him the throne of Italy he refused, faithful to his non-expansionist policy.

Religious ceremonies in honour of the kings of Naples are regularly held at Santa Chiara.



THE VIRGIN'S VEIL, GUGLIA DELL'IMMACOLATA

26

Piazza del Gesù Nuovo

- Metro: Line 1 Dante, Università; Line 2 Montesanto
- Funicular Montesanto



**A menacing
shadow
over the square**

The 30 m monument to the Immaculate Virgin, right in the middle of Piazza del Gesù Nuovo, is regarded as one of the most outstanding examples of Neapolitan Baroque.

Legend has it that if you look at the back of the Virgin's statue on top of the spire, you get a menacing feeling of being watched that can only be shaken off some distance away. The veil that covers her head does indeed seem to bear the outline of a face, staring at passers-by, which could be a carbon copy of death.



According to the most superstitious local residents, this sinister joke was orchestrated by the family of the Princes of Sanseverino, who had been forced to give up their palace to make way for the church of Gesù Nuovo on that site.

The Jesuits kept only the façade as a reminder of the greatness of the Sanseverinos, who were disgraced for joining a conspiracy against Don Ferrante of Aragon (King Ferdinand I of Naples) in the late 15th century.

WHEN THE VIRGIN BELONGS TO THE CITY AND NOT TO THE CHURCH

Every 8 December the city of Naples, represented by the mayor, pays tribute to the Virgin Mary by offering her a bouquet of roses placed in the arms of the copper statue by firemen on an extending ladder. The monument is owned by the city and not by the Jesuits who commissioned it, as indicated on the shield carved on the surrounding railings. This decision sprang from an agreement signed by Pope Pius VII and the Bourbon King Ferdinand I in 1818.

REAL MUSEO DI MINERALOGIA

35

8 Via Mezzocannone

- Metro: Line 1 Università • Bus: R2 from Napoli Centrale station
- Tel: 081 2535245 • Open Monday to Friday 9am–1.30pm
- Monday and Thursday 2.30pm–4.50pm also
- Guided tours by appointment: 081 2537587



Rare minerals in the Jesuit College

The Royal Museum of Mineralogy, founded by the Bourbon King Ferdinand I, is a spectacular place. A library has been installed in the magnificent 17th-century hall where the Jesuit College met and the first meetings of the Chamber of Deputies were held when Ferdinand II

granted the constitution of 1848.

Among the museum's 25,000 exhibits, note two hyaline (glassy) quartz

crystals from Madagascar, each weighing 482 kg (a gift to Charles III of Bourbon in 1740); several lava “bombs” from eruptions of Vesuvius; the fragment of a 7.5 kg meteorite found at Toluca, Mexico, in 1784; and cameos, a Neapolitan artisan speciality. Some of the cameos are carved out of lava stone, such as those depicting the faces of the Bourbon King Ferdinand IV and his wife Maria Carolina (sister of Marie Antoinette), and a satyr's head in white Carrara marble and quartz, the work of Antonio Canova.

NEARBY

MUSEO DI FISICA

8 Via Mezzocannone

- Tel: 081 2536256
- Open Monday and Thursday 9am–1pm and 2pm–5pm • Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday 9am–1pm

The Physics Museum has around 700 instruments dating from the 17th to 19th centuries: microscopes, electromagnetic, acoustic and mechanical devices, current testers ... Note the two astronomical telescopes, one of which was developed by the physicist and mathematician Evangelista Torricelli, inventor of the barometer (1608–1647).

36



NEAPOLITAN LOTTO: A HISTORY OF DIVINATION

In Naples, the lottery has always been a kind of esoteric practice where Christian faith and paganism intermingle. The choice of numbers calls on cabalistic laws or numerology derived from Pythagorean theories.

So the numbers you play must always be inferred from a dream, an exceptional event or a news story.

To achieve this you have to consult the *Smorfia* (Book of Dreams), which lists all the things that correspond to the numbers 1 to 90, in words and images, so that even non-readers can use it. This numerological interpretation is sometimes very complex, especially as winning combinations range from one to five numbers.

Neapolitans, particularly residents of the *centro storico* (historic centre), then sometimes turn to an *assistito* (helped by [God]): those whom it is believed communicate with the dead, who in turn are supposed to intercede with the Almighty to change their family's fortune by making them rich.

If there have been no dreams or significant events, the "assisted", a veritable soothsayer, always guided by the souls of the dead, generates words or actions – necessarily ambiguous – to which the punter will attach a meaning by consulting the *Smorfia* at home. The delusional nature of these predictions has given rise to a common way of describing someone who rambles on: in the Neapolitan dialect, they're "dishing out numbers".

Generally, the "assisted", who don't have the right to play on their own account, are only paid with a percentage of the sum collected for a successful prediction.

Having procured the "good numbers", to increase your chances you must invoke the Madonna, a patron saint, souls in Purgatory (see p. 288) or an imp called the *munaciello* (little monk). God is never directly responsible. Prayers may be spontaneous or follow a model such as this: "Today it's the Moon / tomorrow it'll be Mars / and my chance will come / it'll come by sea / it'll come by land / come into my dream without scaring me / three beautiful numbers make me dream."

Stories abound relating to the Neapolitans' unbridled love of the lottery, for example:

Charles Dickens describes how in 1845 he witnessed a rider fall from his horse. As the hapless victim lay in a pool of blood, a passer-by asked his age before even offering to help, as he needed a third number to play – the other two being 56 (a fall) and 18 (blood).

On 29 April 1994, when John Paul II slipped in the bathroom and broke his hip, the *ricevitorie* (lottery offices) were taken by storm. Everyone played 56 (a fall), 32 (the pope), 90 (broken hip) and 29 (date of the accident). According to the *Corriere della Sera* reporter who wrote up this incident, if all the numbers had come up, the state would have gone bankrupt.

The celebrated Neapolitan author Matilde Serao has written: "The

Neapolitans are sober, they aren't corrupted by spirits, they don't die of delirium tremens, they're corrupted and die of lotto."

When a law was passed in 1734 to ban gambling over Christmas, Neapolitans invented the family game of *tombola*. This custom, which still thrives around Christmastime, involves all levels of society. To play, the numbers 1 to 90 (engraved on small wooden cylinders) are extracted from a conical basket with a hole at the top.

The players buy one or more cards with fifteen numbers printed on each. The money collected makes up the pot, which is then divided into five prizes. As each number is drawn, if it appears on their card(s), the players cover it with a bean from the pile in front of them. The winner is the first to cover two, three, four or five numbers in the same row. The jackpot is won by completing a whole card. Each number is traditionally called along with its meaning. In the old neighbourhoods, where the traditional culture hasn't yet broken down, a transsexual, or an elderly woman, is always responsible for the draw.

