

FINANCIAL TIMES

How to spend it

JULY 7 2012

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DUTCH CAPITAL





all over the shop

THE CULT SHOP

Riccardo Barthel

In Florence's bohemian Oltrarno district, an Italian institution is keeping traditional craft skills alive with stylish, shabby-chic pieces

In Renaissance Florence, patrons knew that a Ghirlandaio altarpiece was really the product of Domenico Ghirlandaio Ltd, a thriving firm that employed several specialists – some family, some not – under the watchful eye of *il maestro*.

If you were successful you were not so much an artist as a company director.

Riccardo Barthel keeps that tradition alive. It feels reductive to call his base, in Florence's stylishly bohemian Oltrarno district, a "shop". The evangelist of a particularly elegant brand of shabby-chic interior design that is *molto molto Firenze*, Barthel operates out of a warren of buildings around a large cobbled courtyard, his base since 1994, although his business has been going since 1976.

More than 20 staff, from carpenters to upholsterers, bronzers and restorers, share space with storerooms of antiques, architectural salvage (some restored or adapted) and new items. Even inside the shop proper, kitchen tables are pressed into service as desks, illuminated perhaps by an ancient Anglepoise that may or may not have a price tag, depending on whether it's become an old friend.

With Riccardo (pictured above right) dedicating most of his time to interior-design projects – which have included Chianti boutique hotel Villa Bordonni and an apartment for Zubin Mehta, chief conductor of Florence's Maggio Musicale orchestra – it's his son Francesco (pictured above left)

who increasingly handles the day-to-day business. "My father and I are interchangeable on any job," he says, with a hint of a smile, "though we've learned that it's best if we don't work on the same one at the same time."

Francesco sees the company's loyalty to Florence's still-vibrant crafts tradition as one of the keys to its success. Bringing craftsmen who had previously worked on commission into the fold was a logical move, he says, "as it means you can be more reactive, and also have the creative space to develop new projects" – such as the recently launched Merenda a Casa Barthel kitchen.

Though design projects are the company's core business, Riccardo Barthel is also a browser's paradise. It may seem odd to take back to London or Paris something that may well have originated there, but what you're paying for is Riccardo and Francesco's unfailing eye. Whether it's an old Italian cinematic spotlight-turned-standard lamp (€800, pictured below), a lived-in leather armchair (€2,600) or door handles (from €120, pictured above), it's hard to keep the "I want that" impulse at bay.

"My father started out when minimalism was all the rage," muses Francesco, as he surveys the clutter of a workshop that is also a defiant style statement. "But he always knew the tide would turn." **LEE MARSHALL**
Riccardo Barthel, Via dei Serragli 234R, 50124 Florence (+3905-5228 0721; www.riccardobarthel.it).



FOR GOODNESS' SAKE

Baubles with an edge

The traditional arts and crafts of Southeast Asia have served as inspiration for many designers, but for former investment banker Lynette Ong it was the local artisans themselves who prompted her to launch Edge of Ember, a philanthropic jewellery company. Ong collaborates with non-profit organisations based in Cambodia, Nepal and Vietnam that employ disadvantaged groups, training them in traditional skills. The artisans handcraft Ong's designs using reclaimed materials such as pieces from brass bombshells obtained from demining efforts in Cambodia and turned into intricate necklaces (from \$125), and discarded buffalo horns from Vietnam, which are polished and chiselled into bangles (from \$85). As well as providing employment, 10 per cent of sales are channelled into the company's Ember Project, a foundation that supports local healthcare, anti-trafficking and education initiatives. In September, Ong launches her second collection of jewellery, and is designing a range of scarves and cuff links for next year. *Edge of Ember, www.edgeofember.com.*

Vertu and its own reward

“Communication is one of the founding cornerstones of our brand, and through our partnership with Smile Train we hope to change the lives of children through corrective cleft lip and palate surgery. Over the past 12 years, Smile Train has provided more than 725,000 free cleft surgeries, as well as rehabilitative care, and Vertu has committed more than €1m towards this cause.”

Perry Oosting, president of Vertu

Constellation Smile, £3,400. www.vertu.com. For each phone sold, Vertu will fund one €200 operation



The right price of oil

Kahina's argan oil-infused products are much touted in beauty circles, and its list of philanthropic projects is impressive, too. The company's founder, Katharine L'Heureux, is adding to its beauty range this season, with a brightening serum, soaps and a home-spa set. She is also expanding its presence in Sweden, the Netherlands, Singapore and to Harvey Nichols' soon-to-launch Knightsbridge BeautyMART, which L'Heureux hopes will allow the company to further its charitable ventures. "So far this year I've bought 100 sheep – one for each woman in the village where we work in the Anti-Atlas mountains. These provide a source of dairy and wool, and once bred can be sold for additional income," explains L'Heureux. "We are also working to provide health insurance for women in a co-operative near Agadir, and will buy a fridge for a co-op near Tamanar to attract tourists to their café."

From £45 with a quarter of profits funding philanthropic projects. www.kahina-givingbeauty.com.

SIBÉAL POWDER AND LINDSAY MACPHERSON