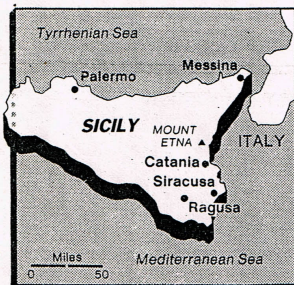


Shopper's World

**Summery Sicily
 Captured on Cloth**



The New York Times/Feb. 15, 1987

By MARY TAYLOR SIMETI

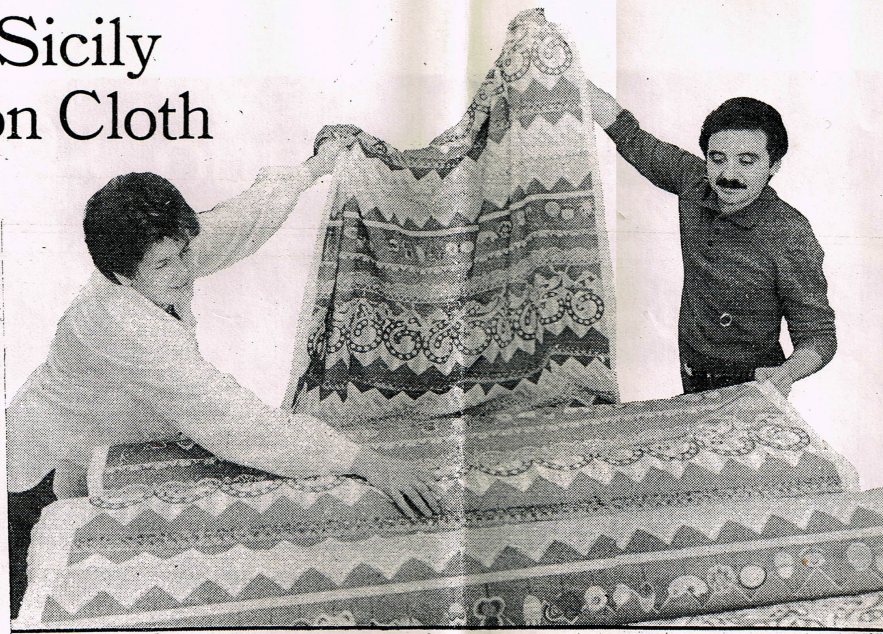
There is something in the air in Sicily that stimulates the foreigner to creativity. The best Sicilian art — the Greek temples, the Byzantine mosaics, the Arab-Norman churches — bears witness to the fullness of expression that foreign cultures attained after they had invaded the island.

It is not surprising, then, that some of the handsomest fabrics being produced on the island today are designed by a foreigner, a young woman from Switzerland named Regina Hildebrandt, who draws her inspiration from Sicily's dramatic landscapes, its exuberant flora and its centuries-old artistic traditions.

In Impressioni di Sicilia, the company that produces her fabrics, carries good-looking, inexpensive items such as placemats, potholders and aprons, which fit easily into a traveler's suitcase. But the fabrics are also suited for interior decoration. Customers choose the design and color, and the fabric is silk-screened by hand.

The company has an unusual history. Ms. Hildebrandt had only a limited experience in technical design when she first came to Sicily in 1965, to direct a craft program run by the social reformer and writer Danilo Dolci at the community development center outside of Palermo. There she met Leslie and Doris

MARY TAYLOR SIMETI is the author of "On Persephone's Island" (Knopf), which will be issued by North Point Press in paperback next month.



Letizia Battaglia/Franco Zecchin

Regina Hildebrandt and Tonino Ciaramitaro use scenery from the Sicilian landscape in their designs.

Tillet, design consultants with a studio in New York. Although the Dolci program folded, the desire to learn silk-screen remained, and in 1973 Ms. Hildebrandt flew to New York for a three-week crash course at the Tillet studio. She and two young Sicilian architectural students, Rosario Rotondo and Tonino Ciaramitaro, set up shop in Palermo, in a wrought-iron and glass fin-de-siècle photography studio behind the Church of San Domenico, in the heart of the old city.

The early years were full of mishaps — a first shipment of tablecloths to Switzerland whose designs came off in the wash; yards of material charred in the heat-processing because the oven they themselves had built couldn't be regulated, even after they installed a thermostat acquired from a local manufacturer of bakery equipment.

Finally they borrowed the money to buy a proper oven, but it was too large for the studio. Relocation was in order.

Impressioni di Sicilia now occupies the stables and storerooms of an 18th-century

villa belonging to the Baronessa di Santocanale in Partanna Mondello, the fashionable summering area on the western outskirts of Palermo. Their printing tables run the length of one cavernous storeroom. Jasmine, bougainvillea, palm trees and other examples of the rich Sicilian mixture of Mediterranean and tropical vegetation surround their apartments and inspire some of Ms. Hildebrandt's most striking designs.

The acanthus, which blooms in a tall spike of pale pink flowers, the caper, as decorative as it is flavorful with its sprays of coin-shaped leaves and delicate blossoms, the maidenhair fern and the dwarf palm are printed in the vivid colors of the Sicilian spring on a white or natural background. The material is cotton muslin, for curtains, and heavier cottons or cotton and linen blends that are well-suited for summer slipcovers. A few of the floral prints — the geranium, the pomegranate and the dwarf palm — are available in plastic-coated versions to be cut into tablecloths for carefree summer dining.

Another series of prints is based on the Sicilian landscape. Imaginings of the scenery of the past — the arched windows and slender minarets of a city scene from the Saracen period, or a seascape complete with Greek warship — decorate amusing and attractive aprons, the towel-size muslin scarves that European women wrap over their bikinis. Etna, the gigantic volcano on Sicily's eastern shore, decorates a beach bag. A marine view of the Aeolian Islands is reproduced on magnets intended for sliding panels to be used as shades or space dividers.

Two thousand years of Sicilian art have contributed a wide variety of motifs: coins from the Greek colonies of Camarina and Zela, a lion's head from a temple ruin spout, a piece of antique lace. Still another design, an intricate network of birds and branches, is derived from a polychrome wooden ceiling in Palermo's 13th-century Palazzo Abbattellis. Particularly interesting design is based on the elaborate votive offerings of bread that

**Where to find
 the fabrics**

Impressioni di Sicilia (telephone 533086), at Villa Santocanale, Via Partanna Mondello 78, 90151 Palermo, welcomes visitors, and anyone who wishes to see the complete collection of designs or discuss a special order can telephone for an appointment. Since it is somewhat difficult to find, one of the staff will arrange to meet you in the lobby of the Mondello Palace Hotel and drive you to the studio.

The fabrics differ in price: cotton muslins, 59 inches wide, are about \$30 to \$38 a yard; upholstery cottons, 59 inches wide, about \$38 to \$50 a yard. The plastic-coated fabrics, in a 56-inch width, are about \$44 a yard.

The placemats cost \$6 to \$8 each, oven mitts \$6 to \$8, potholders \$3 a pair, aprons \$15.50 each, summer bags with an Etna design \$15.50.

The following stores carry fabrics and finished goods produced by Impressioni di Sicilia.

In Palermo: L'Albero del Cotone (585403), Via Gaetano Daita 19, and Bottega Caleca (no phone), Via Gaetano Daita 24.

In Catania: L'Albero del Cotone (375979), Via Martino Cilestri 1.

In Syracuse: L'Albero del Cotone (64233), Via Tevere 47.

In Ragusa: Decorum (45210), Via Napoleone Colajanni 33. M. T. S.

Sicilian women bake for St. Joseph's Day. Delicate line drawings of saints and angels, and flowers printed in bright red or orange, all on a white background, are made into entertaining sacks to hang on a kitchen wall and fill with long loaves of Italian bread.

The latest series, designed with curtains and slipcovers in mind, uses geometric decorative motifs from Greek vases as simple yet elegant borders. Specially processed dyes give an antique patina to the colors, in this case earthy tones: the dusty browns, golds and blues of summer in Sicily.

As often happens, some of the designs that to the foreigner's eye are the more original and beautiful are the ones that have had less success in Sicily, and given the scale on which Impressioni di Sicilia operates, the whole range of designs is never in production at one time. But this small scale permits the studio to accept orders for any of their designs in the colors and fabrics of the client's choosing, even for very limited quantities. ■

C'è qualche cosa in Sicilia che stimola la creatività. Il meglio dell'arte in Sicilia, i templi greci, i mosaici bizantini, e le chiese arabo-normanne testimoniano la pienezza dell'espressione che le culture straniere raggiungevano dopo aver invaso l'isola.

Non c'è da sorprendersi allora se qualcuno dei più piacevoli tessuti prodotti sull'isola siano stati prodotti da una straniera: una giovane donna svizzera di nome Regine Hildebrandt che trae ispirazione dai drammatici paesaggi siciliani, e dell'esuberante sua flora e dalle secolari tradizioni artistiche siciliane. Impressioni in Sicilia, la ditta che produce i suoi tessuti, crea oggetti gradevoli e non cari come: servizi americani, grembiuli, presine che trovano posto facilmente nella valigia del turista. Ma i tessuti si adattano anche alla decorazione degli interni. Il cliente sceglie disegno e colore e il tessuto viene stampato a mano.

La ditta ha una singolare storia, la signora Hildebrandt aveva una limitata esperienza di disegno tecnico al suo arrivo in Sicilia nel 1965, quando viene a dirigere un programma artigianale portato avanti dal riformatore sociale e scrittore Danilo Dolci in un centro poco fuori Palermo. Là incontrò Leslie e Doris Tillett, consulenti di designers con uno studio a New York.

Nonostante che il progetto di Dolci si fosse concluso, rimaneva il desiderio di imparare la tecnica della serigrafia e, nel 1973, la signora Hildebrandt volò a New York per un corso intensivo di tre settimane presso lo studio dei Tillett.

Lei e due giovani siciliani studenti di architettura, Rosario Rotondo e Tonino Ciaramitaro, hanno messo su un laboratorio a Palermo in uno studio fotografico fin de siècle tutto in ferro battuto e vetro, dietro la chiesa di San Domenico al centro della vecchia città.

I primi anni furono pieno di disavventure; una prima fornitura di tovaglie per la Svizzera scoloriva ai primi lavaggi. Metri e metri di tessuto si rovinarono durante il termofissaggio perché il forno, costruito da loro, non poteva essere ben regolato rispetto alla temperatura persino dopo l'installazione di un termostato acquistato da un rivenditore di attrezzature per forni. Impressioni in Sicilia adesso occupa le stalle ed i magazzini di una villa del XVIII secolo appartenente alla baronessa Santocanale a Partanna Mondello, luogo di villeggiatura alla moda ai bordi ovest di Palermo.

I loro tavoli da stampa corrono lungo un cavernoso magazzino. Gelsomini, Bougainvillee, palme ed altri esemplari della ricca miscelanea vegetazione mediterranea e tropicale avvolge i loro appartamenti e ispirano alcuni dei più accattivanti disegni della signora Hildebrandt.

L'acantus che fiorisce con alti steli e fiori di un pallido rosa, il capperò, così decorativo quanto odoroso con i suoi getti di foglie in forma di moneta e delicata fioritura, capelvenere. La palma nana sono stampati nei vivaci colori della primavera siciliana su un fondo bianco o greggio. Il materiale è mussola di cotone, per tende, o di cotone più pesanti e misti cotone/lino che sono ben adatti per rivestimenti.

Alcune delle stampe floreali, (geranio, melograno, palma nana,) sono disponibili anche in versione plastificata come tovaglie per spensierate colazioni estive.

Un'altra serie di disegni si ispira al paesaggio siciliano; immagini degli scenari del passato, le finestre ad arco e gli smilzi minareti di una scena cittadina del periodo saraceno; un paesaggio marino completato da un'antica nave guerriera greca decorano piacevoli ed attrattivi pareo di mussola della grandezza di un asciugamano che le donne europee avvolgono sui loro bikini.