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Capri sun. CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: Frolicking by the rocks in the Marina Piccola; Capri's biggest, oldest coral necklace, at Alberto e Lina; La Parisienne's chiffon designs.



BY LYNN YAEGER

TEMPTATION ISLAND

Fendi bags, Malo wraps, Frette linens—not to mention those legendary pants: designer brands are only part of the worldly enticements on Capri

For some people, the most vivid impressions of Capri concern the color of the Grotta Azzurra or the breathtaking view from the front seats of the famous funicular. Not me. I'm haunted by a 70-carat aquamarine I encountered at Alberto e Lina, the island's preeminent jeweler. I visited the shop my first afternoon in town and received what I'm convinced is the exact same

welcome given to celebrities and dignitaries who have walked in over the last five decades.

"Sit down! Sit down! We take care of you!" Lina Federico instructs me, motioning to a sumptuous side chair. "Look out the window! You see, everybody stops to see our things." Indeed, two voluptuous, overripe ladies with hennaed heads and skintight dresses are staring >>



The next morning I explore Via Roma, a street with a peculiar mix of merchandise: exquisite coral jewelry and hand-smocked baby dresses along with racks of cheesy T-shirts and Pinocchio key rings. At the famous da Costanzo sandal shop, the readily proffered business card shows a 1959 photo of Sophia Loren and Clark Gable lolling outside the store, and the place still has a funky old-fashioned appeal. So it comes as a bit of a disappointment that you can buy its wares on the Web at www.capridream.com. Still, it's more fun to order them in the shop and have the shoes made while you wait. "Every year we create new styles," says the pro-

With every luxury, natural and retail, at hand on Capri, it's easy and surprisingly delightful to feel, at least briefly, like a bird in a gilded cage

prietor, showing off a pair of delicate, flat-soled pale blue sandals decorated with a band of Swarovski crystal hearts.

Strolling through the famous Piazzetta, I turn into Via Le Botteghe, a narrow back street that still houses linoleum-floored barbershops and cobblers. They're a reminder that when the last hotel closes in November, when the last heiress has downed the last Campari at the Quisi Bar, Capri is a place where real people live.

At Angela Puttini, an exquisite jewelry shop with one-of-a-kind designs, the owner looks up from a chat with her neighbor the cheese-monger to explain the cupid cameos in the window. "I make *putti*—cupids—because my shop is named for my mother, Angela Puttini!" she exclaims. "We try to produce singular pieces—and we don't make a lot. We want people to have something distinctive from our Capri." I desperately want something from Angela's Capri, but I'm afraid the massive, cameo-centered gem-studded gold rings, heavy as brass knuckles, would live in my jewelry box instead of on my hand.

As the most glamorous of tourist towns, Capri is full of items intended to be bubble-wrapped and taken far, far away. Giftware shops tend toward faux naïf, hand-painted gewgaws: ceramic plaques that say *CAVE CANEM*, glass animals, clocks and pots and crocks. After five or six of these exhaustingly quaint places, it's a pleasure to wander into the resolutely un-cute Raku Capri. The stock, mostly minimalist glassware and ceramics, looks more Swedish than southern Italian. Though there are glass-beaded silver necklaces, most of the merchandise is intended to dress your table: austere giraffe-necked vases, moody

Murano glass tumblers, candles shaped like dishes with quivering wicks.

Down the street at Lady Capri, I'm not at all sure which half of the schizophrenic merchandise is right for me. The pink linen embroidered smocks, an island staple and frumpy anywhere but here, seem intended for a diamond-dripping dowager. The crocheted string bikinis look more appropriate for her voluptuous debutante daughter.

Having spent the morning exploring the back streets, I stop at the Piazzetta's Gran Caffè Vuotto for a *limonata* (according to Shirley Hazzard's book *Greene on Capri: A Memoir*, Graham Greene used to hang out here, long before Frette coverlets and Malo pullovers took up residence), head over to Via Vittorio Emanuele, and meander down past those irresistible windows at Alberto e Lina. I'm completely seduced by the offerings at Amina Rubinacci, where the specialty is knitwear—cloudlike cashmere in every shade of the spectrum, made up as plain pullovers or cardigans, or elegant rugby shirts rendered in pink and apple-green stripes and closed at the neck with two tiny pearl buttons. Just down Via Camerelle, La Conchiglia Libri & Arte is another Capri original: a bookstore-gallery run by Ausilia Veneruso, a jaunty woman with black hair, tiny glasses far down her nose, and the air of a literature professor. The shelves are filled with a combination of contemporary books on Capri, some »



A Fendi bag and the Faraglioni Rocks—this must be Capri. CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: The view from Anacapri of those famous craggy zones; Sara Aprea, the owner of Raku Capri; a collector's edition Fendi silk baguette, using images of the island woven on seventh-century handlooms.



who's to argue? "Here is Jackie Kennedy in the capri pants I make," she says, her voice like a tiny bird, turning the pages of a well-worn scrapbook just like the one at Alberto e Lina. "Here is Oona Chaplin, Fredric March, Yvonne DeCarlo."

Suddenly she snaps to attention. A couple of serious customers in the casual garb favored by 21st-century socialites—he's in a Tommy Hilfiger T-shirt, she's in semi-transparent white shorts and a straw hat—express an interest in special-ordering a two-tone chiffon, crystal-buttoned jean-style jacket in just the right shades of royal blue and cherry. Though the exchange takes place in Italian, it's easy to understand why La Parisienne has been in business for almost 100 years. Bolts of fabric are coming up from the basement, and di Fiore has a keen look on her face and a tape measure in her teeth.

I could watch them debate the nuances of silk shades for hours, but the sun is lowering over the Gran Caffè Vuotto, and I need to hurry across the Piazzetta, down Via Vittorio Emanuele, past the Quisisana and over to "Worth Avenue," where a gladstone is waiting to be wrapped well enough to withstand a funicular ride to the harbor, a ferry across the bay to Naples, a cab to the Naples airport, a short hop to Rome, and a 10-hour sojourn in an overhead compartment across the Atlantic. ■

THE FACTS

SHOPS

Alberto e Lina 18 Via Vittorio Emanuele; 39-081/837-0643.

Fendi 8 Via Camerelle; 39-081/837-0871.

Da Costanzo 49 Via Roma; 39-081/837-8077.

Angela Puttini 23 Via Le Botteghe; 39-081/837-8907.

Raku Capri 4-6 Via Le Botteghe; 39-081/837-0165.

Lady Capri 47 Via Le Botteghe; 39-081/837-0289.

Amina Rubinacci 13-15 Via Vittorio Emanuele; 39-081/837-7295.

La Conchiglia Libri & Arte 18 Via Camerelle; 39-081/837-8199.

La Parisienne 7 Piazza Umberto I; 39-081/837-0283.

Russo Uomo 8-10 Piazzetta Quisisana; 39-081/838-8208.

HOTELS

Grand Hotel Quisisana 2 Via Camerelle; 39-081/837-0788; www.quisi.it; doubles from \$255, including breakfast. Miles of marble, truckloads of crystal, and a high-wattage crowd.

Relais Maresca 284 Via Provinciale Marina Grande; 39-081/837-9619; www.relaismaresca.it; doubles from \$157. The 27 rooms in this seaside hotel are furnished in elegant Mediterranean style.

La Scalinatella 8 Via Tragara; 39-081/837-0633; www.scalinatella.com; doubles from \$370, including breakfast. Everything the Quisi isn't: discreet, refined, romantic.

Capri Palace Hotel & Spa 14 Via Capodimonte, Anacapri; 39-081/978-0111; www.capri-palace.com; doubles from \$250, including breakfast. Some rooms have private pools; all teeter 1,500 feet above the sea.



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