



Italian Historical Society of America Newsletter

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BY JANICE THERESE MANCUSO

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Tutto Italiano Benvenuto a Tutto Italiano

Italy is known for its contemporary trend-setting designs in footwear, handbags, clothing (even though the past two years have brought some [controversies](#)), jewelry, furniture, architecture, automobiles, and so much more. Adding most of the country as a top tourist attraction, plus its food, wine, and other beverages, Italy remains a nation of enormous cultural achievements and worldwide contributions.

Apart from Italy's well-known products, though, are a few that may surprise. The popular eyeglass brand Ray-Ban was purchased by [Luxottica Group S.p.A](#) in 1999. Luxottica, located in Milan, was founded in 1961 and is now the largest eyewear company in the world. Its retail brands include Sunglass Hut, Sears Optical, Pearl Vision, and LensCrafters, among others. Luxottica owns EyeMed, a vision plan and benefits company in America, and is a sponsor of OneSight, "an independent nonprofit providing access to quality vision care." In addition to acquiring Ray-Ban, Luxottica owns other eyewear brands, and has [licensing agreements with numerous high fashion companies](#) starting in 1988 with Giorgio Armani. (Luxottica had partnered with Google in 2014 to design and produce the headwear, Glass.)

With its interest in eyewear, Luxottica has obtained a vast collection of optical wear and opened a [museum](#) that "houses a collection of original articles that illustrate the history of optics and eyeglasses from their origin to the present day." As with many other companies and along with government agencies in Italy (see news article below), Luxottica has made sustainability a priority. If you wear eyeglasses, Luxottica may be the source.

In 1924, [Balma, Capoduri & C. S.p.A.](#) (Società Per Azioni is Italian for a shared company) started manufacturing business supplies. Located in Voghera (about 45 miles south of Milan), the company registered the trademark "Zenith," and started producing staplers in 1926. The following year, Coccoina – an almond scented, non-toxic white glue – was introduced, and today it's a favorite for its eco-friendly attributes.

The design for a dome-shaped stapler "inspired by some models of cars very popular at the time" debuted in 1943. Five years later, the [Zenith Plier Stapler](#) became the newest product, and in 1990, an updated design – the [Zenith 590](#) – was produced. Last year, the [Zenith Gold Line](#) won the "Top Design Award" at the International Trade Show held in Bologna. Zenith staplers have a worldwide reputation as a quality product in design and performance.

The source of good produce starts in the ground, and [Franchi Sementi](#) in Bergamo (about 35 miles northeast of Milan) provides the premium seeds required for exceptional flavor. Established in 1783, and owned and operated by the seventh generation of family members, the company has more than 1,000 varieties, representing various regions of Italy and specializing in open pollination and organic seeds. The non-GMO seeds are noted for their high germination rate, a result of close monitoring of the environment – temperature and humidity – of the storage facility. Additionally, throughout the year, seeds are grown to verify their viability.

In 2013, Franchi Sementi (Seeds) was the first and only seed company to exhibit at

the Slow Food event, [Salone del Gusto in Turin](#). Franchi seeds for vegetables, herbs, and flowers grown in Italy are distributed worldwide and are known for their superior quality.

Exceptional design is an Italian trademark, but quality, sustainability, and resourcefulness are also part of the Italian brand.

(Thanks to Mary for sending information about the Zenith 590 that led to my research on other products that may not be well known as “Made in Italy.”)

[Vogue Italia drops photoshoots from January issue in green statement](#) (The Guardian; January 3, 2020)

[The Italian brands every owner needs on their superyacht](#) (Boat International)

[Top Italy Exports to the World](#) (2018)

Italian Women in History

The past few years have brought a greater recognition of women; and in recent years, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) education has also been garnering attention. Add women of Italian heritage to the elements of STEM and the results are these amazing women: [Trota of Salerno](#), [Laura Bassi](#), [Maria Gaetana Agnesi](#), and [Rita Levi-Montalcino](#). Read [Italian Women of STEM at La Gazzetta Italiana](#) for an overview of their accomplishments. Click on each name for exclusive biographies and resources posted on the [Italian Historical Society of America](#), sponsor of a series of Italian women biographies.

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Nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature six times from 1922 to 1925, [Matilde Serao](#) (1856 - 1927) was a writer and editor who cofounded several newspapers, and author of “more than forty volumes of novels and short stories” depicting “the lower middle class and working class life of Naples ...” A popular cultural figure and a proponent of cinema, “Serao was a role model for Italian women during the 19th and 20th centuries.”

After she died, interest in her works subsided, but as interest in women of all genres has increased, so has interest in Serao’s writings. In 2018, [Kazabo Publishing](#) issued its ebook [Heart Conditions](#), the first compilation of Serao’s stories translated into English. The collection of short stories showcases Serao’s pragmatic style of writing – her focus on the intricacies of life often complicated by the confusion of love. In one story she writes, “He loved himself too much to love someone else much.” In another, “She didn’t find him. Perhaps she didn’t know how to look for him.” In a game of assumed identities the conversation flows, “.. let’s look at each other for a long time and stutter a few incomprehensible words... When he talks to us, we’ll pretend to be distracted, I will stare at the water in my glass... And I’ll make little balls of bread...”

Each of the 20 stories – the last by [Grazia Deledda](#) – are filled with all the emotions of love; the women are strong and spirited; the men are quiet and contemplative; and like a puzzle, the words fit together to form the pieces of a relationship.

Heart Conditions is a wonderful Valentine’s Day gift, or a gift for anyone in or out of love.

From the Italian American Press

The books listed on the Italian American Press cover all genres and give you the opportunity to support authors of Italian heritage who write about Italian and Italian American culture, heritage, and history. Does your organization have a book club? If it does, select a book from the IAP for your next reading and discussion; if not, start one with a book from the Italian American Press.

Featured Author: Joseph L. Cacibauda

[*Not for Self: A Sicilian Life and Death in Marion*](#) traces the journey of Gaetano Valenti from Burgio, Sicily to Marion, Illinois. The book is based on the true story of a distant relative of the author, after he found the death certificate while researching for [*After Laughing Comes Crying*](#), his first book published by Legas about the Sicilian immigrant experience. Both are historical fiction, but both have been extensively researched for historical accuracy, and both provide a discerning view into the life of the Italian immigrant.

Author Interview (Excerpt)

What is the most important attribute of *Not for Self*?

The history presented not only of Sicily, but of Ellis Island, and the times and infighting of all the various factions within Williamson County is the important attribute. *Not for Self* is a chronicle of his life in Marion, Illinois in a period known as Bloody Williamson.

Why should someone read it?

I would say that one should read this book to learn that Chicago's gangland bootlegging era was not the most vicious times in Illinois.

How did you get involved with Arba Sicula?

[Arba Sicula is a non-profit international organization that promotes the language and culture of Sicily.]

I had written *After Laughing Comes Crying* and was looking for someone to proof read and edit the Sicilian and the Italian. I asked Dr. Cipolla if he would do that for me. He liked the book and invited me to have Arba Sicula publish it.

In *Not for Self*, you provide historical notes and an extensive list of sources.

How much of the story is fact, how much is fiction?

In my writing, I like to put my characters in the middle of actual historical scenes, like Forrest Gump. I would say the book is 50 percent fact and 50 percent fiction.

In writing *Not for Self* and *After Laughing Comes Crying*, did you find similarities in the stories?

Both of my characters are illiterate peasant farmers who tough out the rough times to get out of Sicily and to make life better for their families. I try not to sugar-coat these farmers.

[Read the entire interview on the Italian American Press.](#)

Italian American Heritage Project

The groups opposing Columbus Day have an organized agenda to eliminate it from America. Italian Americans need a nationwide program to battle the campaign to abolish Columbus Day or it will be lost; even though Indigenous People already have a designated day, and Native Americans have a day and a month to celebrate their culture.

Indigenous Peoples Day – August 9

Native American Month – November

Native American Heritage Day – The day after Thanksgiving

Visit the [IAHP website](#) to read my articles, learn about the lesson plans, see the resources I've used, and support my work. Donate for a cause – preserving Italian heritage and Italian American history and culture through education. [All donations are tax-deductible.](#)

Italian Art Exhibits

[*Verrocchio: Sculptor and Painter of Renaissance Florence*](#)

"First-ever monographic exhibition in the United States on Andrea del Verrocchio (c. 1435–1488), the innovative artist, painter, sculptor, and teacher."

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; Closes January 12, 2020

[Flesh and Blood: Italian Masterpieces from the Capodimonte Museum](#)

“A rare opportunity to experience the fierce beauty of art from the 16th and 17th centuries.”

Seattle Art Museum; Closes January 26, 2020

[Master, Pupil, Follower: 16th- to 18th-Century Italian Works on Paper](#)

“Showcases approximately 30 drawings and prints dating from the 16th to the 18th centuries.”

Georgia Museum of Art Saturday; Now to March 8, 2020

[Radical: Italian Design 1965–1985, The Dennis Freedman Collection](#)

“Examines Italy’s postwar explosion of disruptive design” through “furniture, lighting design, architectural models, paintings, and other objects.”

The Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; February 14 to April 26, 2020

[Raphael and His Circle](#)

Celebrates the 500th anniversary of Raphael's death with “26 prints and drawings from its own collection of works by Raphael’s contemporaries as well as four drawings by the Renaissance master himself.”

National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC; February 16 to June 14, 2020

Italian American News

[Charitable Choices](#) (Italic Institute of America; November 10, 2019)

From The US World Herald. (*Thank you, Ralph.*)

[Why Sunday Dinner became big for Italians in America](#) (December 5, 2019)

[Top “150” most common Italian last names in America](#) (November 16, 2019)

[Turturro: Why my parents stopped speaking Italian in America](#) (July 12, 2019)

News about Italy

[Photographer Captures Eerie Images of Venice Underwater](#) (PetaPixel; January 3, 2020)

[Venice Floods to Cost St. Mark’s Cathedral at Least \\$5.5 Million in Damage](#)
(Insurance Journal; December 30, 2019)

[France blocks export of Cimabue masterpiece found in kitchen](#) (BBC; December 24, 2019)

[Italy to put sustainability and climate at heart of learning in schools](#) (The Guardian; November 6, 2019)

Buon anno, buon tutto, buona vita,
Janice

Janice Therese Mancuso
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Founder, [Thirty-One Days of Italians](#)
Director, [Italian American Press](#)
Author of [Con Amore](#)
[Writer, Author, Researcher](#)

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