

Over the

Rainbow



by Amy Stavis
www.mepra.it

MEPRA

Sp.A.

IDEAS FOR LIVING

Four generations of the Prandelli family have reverently produced flatware, serveware, and cookware in Lumezzane, a verdant picture postcard valley nestled at the foothills of the Italian Alps. R+D innovation has generated a variety of unique finishes which has garnered MEPRA global glory. This year Mepra celebrates 70 years as a trailblazing ground-breaker...and the U.S. is ripe for expansion.

full metal jacket



The finish is what initially catches your attention to Mepra flatware. The dishwasher-safe technology - PVD (physical vapor deposition) - was 15 years in the making before Mepra brought product to market. PVD coats the stainless with titanium to achieve finishes in gold, bronze, champagne, rose gold, black, and rainbow.

In PVD, ions of titanium are deposited on the surface of the cutlery through a vacuum process. It's not electroplating, which is a chemical process that coats the metal with a thin layer of another metal through electrolysis. PVD is a physical process that results in an extremely durable and uniform compound. This technology has been developed for the aeronautics industry and is used to cover shuttle panels to make them more resistant. This tech was developed for the hospitality industry to withstand repeated use and dishwashing, and is resistant to scratching and corrosion. Moreover, the color never changes or fades.

M

MEPRA, the made in Italy metals producer, is celebrating 70 years as a family enterprise, a feat made even more impressive given the alarming alacrity for outsourcing among Italian metals manufacturers. "It's a big achievement and a big challenge at the same time," says Luca Prandelli, representing the fourth generation of his family and currently overseeing North America sales. "We need to keep our strong roots, we need to never be satisfied, and we need to keep seeking new concepts," he says. "Innovation and tradition dance together in the creative process of our ideas." The Prandellis love to draw attention to their made in Italy prestige. "It's part of our DNA," he proclaims. "Each of our collections incorporates and conveys the Italian culinary lifestyle. I'm proud and lucky to be part of the business and carry on the family tradition. I feel responsible for developing the company and leaving it to my children even more successful than when I got it."

Mepra has become familiar for its uniquely finished flatware, testimony to inventive R+D. Prandelli concurs: "R+D is what makes this all possible," he enthuses. "We believe in making beautiful items, but we strongly believe they should be made to last. My great-grandfather, Giambattista, the founder of Mepra, used to say, 'The real luxury is not only for special occasions', meaning that it is wonderful to own something very fine, but only if it's made to last and you can use and enjoy it every day."

A commitment to R+D ensures Mepra remains at the fore of innovative manufacturing. Eduardo Artidello is the company's U.S. president. "There are very few real manufacturers left," he says. "There are plenty of brands, but everybody sources. We want to be a well-known brand as well as premier manufacturer. Mepra's ability to innovate and think outside the design box - always



testing and creating things - is thanks to a staff of engineers. You know, Luca's father has an engineering background, so this area is very important to him. It's talent like this which is so inspiring and allows Mepra to make old things new. Because at the end of the day, we're all simply reinventing the fork."

Reinventing the fork means continual R+D reinvestment, about 8% of turnover targeted back to the drawing board. "That's one of the highest ratios in the industry," Prandelli proudly exclaims. "This investment spawns creativity, design, and quality in everything we do. From the quality of the raw materials to the flawless finishing, these are signatures of Mepra." This commitment to bettering techniques and fashioning new finishes is what sets Mepra apart from other producers, according to Artidello. And



Mepra flatware, which started as brass, is known for its hand-polished finish. "They use the highest quality materials in the marketplace," says Artidello. "Quality is not a statistic for Mepra; it's part of the equation. They've had classic patterns in MOMA for years because the Italian architecture looks as relevant today as when it debuted."



sales confirm that. Mepra is sold in 75 countries and has won numerous international design awards. The company has come a long way since its founding in post-war Italy 70 years ago by a trio of brothers.

Technically, Mepra's founding predates that 1947 date. There were three other Prandelli brothers who built a factory at the start of the 20th century, in 1901, and became metal fabricators. The facility, in the industrial village of Lumezzane, about an hour east of Milan in the Alpine foothills, is a region once rich in stainless production thanks to resources (mountain ore) and proximity to the river which powered the mill and cultivated a profuse pool of skilled workers.

[Fun fact: metal production in this region dates back to ancient Roman times when slaves used the ore mined from the mountains to

forge swords.]

After the war, in 1947, the three sons of one of those Prandelli brothers founded Mepra and started producing brass flatware. Giacomo handled production; Felice sales; and Pietro, a one-time school teacher, accounting. The company name, Mepra, is a more user-friendly amalgam of **Metallurgica Prandelli**. The brothers built a modernized plant and with resources flush after the war quickly found solid footing. Through the second half of the 20th century, Mepra flourished, extending production to stainless then to holloware, cookware, and silverplated flatware. In the '80s, stainless was combined with new materials – plastic, glass, wood, and porcelain. Within a decade accomplished global designers came to Lumezzane to work at Mepra, eager to flex their design muscle.




The 42 Mepra flatware patterns generate 70% of U.S. sales; cookware and accessories contribute the rest. Although there are more than 3,000 total SKUs, only the top sellers are stocked here. The most popular finish is ice gold (shown at the bottom of page 75 in the ARTE pattern), similar to a brush or matte coating; the bestselling pattern is LINEA, shown at right, in the gold version. Every pattern is available in every finish. Most recently, vintage finishes that resemble pewter, developed for the foodservice division, are finding success. (See the bottom of page 78; foodservice is a robust area for Mepra, and there's much overlap between the two divisions.) Five-piece flatware sets range from \$30 to \$200. "We're continually upping the design game," says Artidello. "The great thing about our flatware designs and finishes is most of the time people choose our flatware first and then the plate. It's usually the other way around." There are three in-house designers and a network of freelancers, a mix of established names and emergent designers. "Inspiration comes from many areas," says Luca Prandelli. "Trends in furniture and fashion, requests from our customers, new technology opportunities, or out of the box ideas from young designers." One or two flatware designs debut annually.



Today, the 70,000-square-foot factory houses 60 workers. "Each worker has a passion for the product they produce and takes pride in their work," affirms Prandelli. Artidello, the one-time Stoezle Glass exec, is pretty impressed with the Mepra business model. "This family doesn't think short-term," he says. "They think in generations. When they do



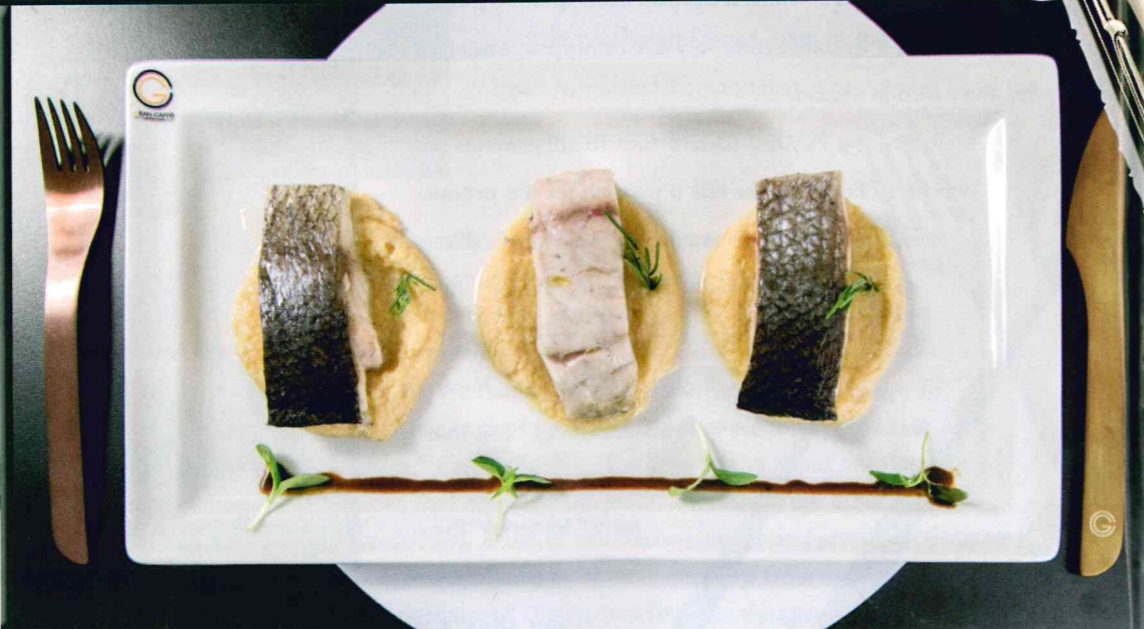


Flatware, Mepra's star category, is available in 37 colors and a variety of serving pieces, \$12 to \$100.

Cookware, \$40 to \$400, and accessories, including trays, teapots, napkin rings, wine coolers, chargers (the most popular item), \$20 to \$1,000, round out the assortments.



Giambattista Prandelli works alongside his son Luca. "I'm very proud of carrying on my family tradition and seeing my son walk the same path my father and grandfather have walked the last 70 years," says Giambattista. "For us, Mepra is not just a job; it's part of our life and family, as well as the 50 families who help us every day achieve our goals. They're part of our success and we feel responsible for them. We're a very large family...most Mepra workers are second, even third, generation."

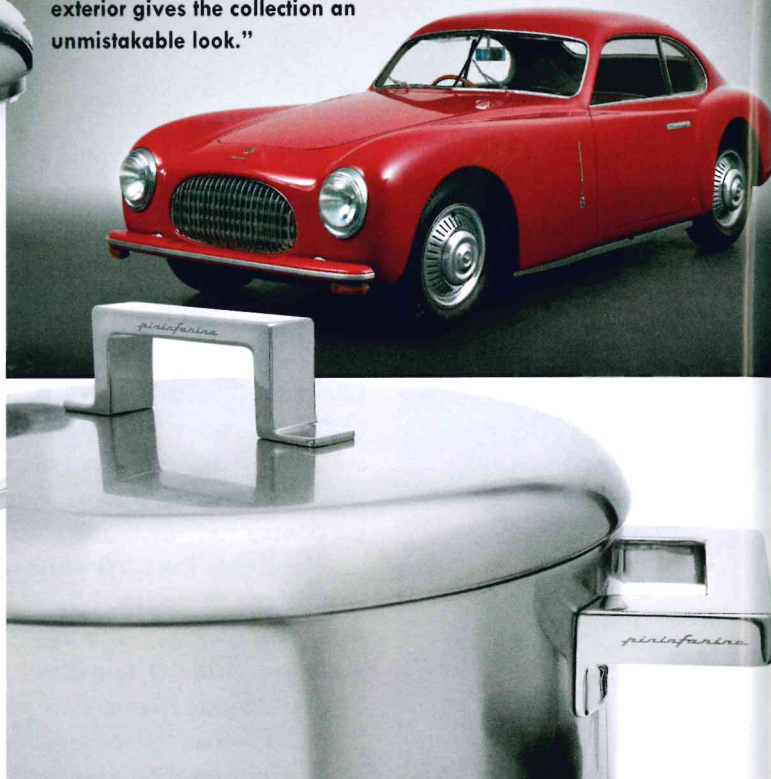


something, they're thinking about the impact to the next generation; Americans tend to operate on a quarterly basis. The Prandellis are committed to their highly skilled workers, many second and third generation." These execs fully comprehend the leverage of the made in Italy hallmark and won't stray from that core competency. "People associate Italian products with quality – Ferrari, Gucci, Ferragamo," says Artidello. "That works to our advantage. There's a lot of cheap stuff everywhere and the economy is always a concern, but people will pay for Italian-made quality, and it helps that we have a full range of price points."

That 75-country export grid is led by Germany, Spain, and Japan. "The world loves Italian goods," Artidello acknowledges. His boss concurs: "All around the world Italy is known for food and design and we bring these two things together through our flatware, cookware, and serveware." It's their intention that the U.S. top the export list before too long. "The U.S., along with Asia, is our faster growing market," says Prandelli. "Most of our business is still in Europe, but many of our investments are for growing our North American business. Our brand is growing fast, but we still see a lot of potential. American customers like our design, our creativity, and the quality that goes with being made in Italy."



Mepra has partnered with Italian car design firm Pininfarina (Ferrari, Alfa Romeo, Peugeot, and Maserati have been clients) to create STILE cookware. "It's the perfect balance between shape and function," affirms Prandelli. "STILE brings elegance to the kitchen without foregoing functionality, making the cooking experience more satisfying." The pureness of the lines and the clean, essential geometries shape a collection in which function and style reach the perfect balance, according to Prandelli. "The lid – characterized by rounded lines – recalls the pot shape, guaranteeing a perfect integration of elements and conveying the idea of a single, extremely compact body. The contrast between the shiny finish of the handles and the satin-finished exterior gives the collection an unmistakable look."



Artidello was tapped in 2010 to advance the stateside agenda. For years he had walked by the Mepra booth at the Frankfurt Fair and was duly dazzled. "I was a big fan," he admits. So when the opportunity arose to help crack the U.S. market he jumped on board. "I wanted to introduce a European company to the U.S.," he says. "I knew I could grow this business despite challenges like currency fluctuations. There are many European brands in the U.S. having difficulty, but Luca has a firm understanding of the American market and has never said, 'This is the way we do it in Europe', because that often doesn't work here." Prandelli had a good grasp of the market because Mepra has had a successful OEM business here for decades. "A lot of brand producers, many of whom you know, like the dishwasher-safe finishes we're capable of producing," says Artidello.

Dne of Artidello's first challenges was adding an A-list network of reps to the payroll; that's taken a few years to accomplish. "The biggest hurdle was finding the right people to tell the story to the right retailers," says Artidello. "Our challenge has never been having high quality product. Our challenge has been getting the right customers. And when you're starting at zero – because no one likes to pioneer anything – it's not easy get the right reps. It takes time." Over the last seven years, Artidello established a network of reputable reps who have helped him double sales year to year, moving well toward Artidello's goal of being an independent subsidiary, servicing most of his customers directly. "It's all part of the plan