

Apulian no punches – Edinburgh's Salento celebrates the best of southern Italy's artisans

Artisan craftspeople from the heel of Italy are enjoying a new market for their unique products – 1,800 miles away in well-heeled Edinburgh.

Puglia, the region which stretches to the south eastern tip of Italy and is known as Salento by locals, is a mix of diverse cultural influences and boasts a thriving artisan community.

Lynne Roberts, who spent 12 years living in Puglia (also known as Apulia) before returning to Scotland, is championing the fine craftsmanship to be found in one of Italy's most beguiling regions in her Salento shop in Edinburgh's Dundas Street.



Salento owner Lynne Roberts in her Dundas Street shop – picture Stephen Rafferty

Many of the producers are personal friends of the Salento owner, or friends of friends, and the shop's unique selling point is that ebullient Lynne can almost certainly give a life history of each craftsman, and often show photographs of the goods being hand-produced in Pugliesi homes and farms.

But through the misfortune of opening for business just two months before Covid-19 engulfed the world and heralded lockdown, Lynne is yet to be able to take a salary and is just keeping her head above water.

Kilmarnock-born Lynne said: "It's been two very hard years but I'm just delighted to still be here because everything in the shop is made by people that I know really well, who have been friends of mine for a long time or are friends of friends.







Salento champions southern Italy's artisan craftspeople – pics by Stephen Rafferty

“Most of my suppliers are just tiny family businesses or individual people who are doing something they are really passionate about. I was fortunate to live in Foggia in the north of Puglia but the bit that I really fell in love with was Salento in the south.”

Edinburgh's Salento carries a wide range of ceramics, lighting, table linen, perfumes, baskets, textiles, jewellery and plant pots which are typical of the region and unlike some other shops, the goods are shipped direct from the artisan producers, rather than bought en-masse at trade fairs.

Italophile Lynne spent years travelling in the north of Italy as a buyer in the handbags and shoes trade before settling in Puglia where she ran a variety of businesses, including a restaurant, bar, underwear shop and motorcycle hire business.

Salento's stock is almost exclusively sourced in Puglia, but also includes products from a small number of suppliers based in Sardinia, Sicily and Capri.

Lynne added: "With a background in retail when I worked for Habitat, as well as a buyer in the shoe and handbag business, I wanted to bring something completely unique to Edinburgh.

"I love shops and I had been watching the growth of independent retail and saw that momentum in that kind of shopping was building up. I could see that people increasingly wanted to buy from independent shops and I spent three to four years looking around Edinburgh for the right location and getting to the point where I could actually do this.













Artisans at work in Salento with original products Edinburgh-bound

"I am working on a website but having a real bricks and mortar

shop was very important to me because I want to be able to tell clients 'this lamp is made by Luigi and here is a picture of him in his olive grove with his cats, or here is the girl who made those ear rings you are thinking of buying'.

"It want customers to be able to find out something about the story behind the product, to see the brushstrokes on a piece of ceramic and feel the thumbprint on a lamp, which underlines the authenticity of what they are buying."

Lynne had planned to be open for business before Christmas 2019 but delays caused by renovations to the shop meant she didn't open until January 2020 and she sensed something life-changing was about to happen.

She said: "I knew something was going down because one of my suppliers works in the north of Italy very close to Codogno, which was the first town to be shut down when Covid emerged, and there was a ban on travel and people could not leave their homes.

"Within two months of opening I had to shut the shop. As a new business start-up I was not eligible for any of the Government financial support and I have only been able to keep going thanks to the support of my partner. I shop at Lidl, I don't buy any clothes and we don't go anywhere – but on the plus side I do have really nice customers and I get the chance to showcase these brilliant and unique craftspeople."

**Salento is at 44 Dundas Street, Edinburgh. Tel 0131 259 2943
Insta: @salento_edinburgh**