

The Times Shopper

The Master Tile Makers of Lisbon

By JENNIFER MERIN

Lisbon's Old World charm is greatly enhanced by the city's cobblestone streets, many of which are patterned with alternating dark and light stones, and by the mosaics of lovely, colorful *azulejos* (tiles) that adorn the buildings outside and in.

These tiles have floral designs, geometric patterns and animal motifs and are sometimes fitted together to form large figurative murals. They are a patchwork of color throughout the city. Even when they're old and faded or somewhat crumbling, or when sections have been replaced with contrasting colors or patterns, the work creates an air of cheerfulness and *joie de vivre*.

While wandering through the city's twisty little streets, I commented to a Portuguese companion that I found the tile-fronted buildings absolutely enchanting.

"They're very practical, really," he replied. "They make life much easier. We don't have to paint."

Moorish Legacy

Paint? Who would want to? The Portuguese have found such a lovely and stylish way to be utilitarian. Tiles have been a part of the Portuguese architectural scene since the Moors dominated the Iberian Peninsula centuries ago. Today, *azulejos* are manufactured with many of the ancient patterns and with techniques similar to the ones used years ago.

Sant'Anna (more formally known as Fabrica de Fianças E Azulejos Sant'Anna) is one of Lisbon's most traditional tile manufacturers. The company has been in business since 1741. The showroom and shop (91 Rua do Alecrim, phone 32-25-37) occupies a dusty, unpretentious building.

Inside, the walls are a mosaic of sample tiles and the floor space is filled with tile-topped tables, fountains, planters, umbrella stands. There are also beautiful ceramic bowls, jars, candlesticks, chandeliers and figurines. These are all handmade at the Sant'Anna factory (96 Calçada da Boa Hora, phone 63-82-92).

It isn't usual for customers to visit the factory, but they may make special arrangements to do so with the shop's helpful sales staff.



Sant'Anna ceramic objects are on display in Lisbon shop.

The factory is a family-run operation employing about 100 artisans. Quality control is guarded at every stage of manufacture. After the tiles are pressed into shape and baked, they are checked for strength by a worker tapping two tiles together. The factory resounds with the ceaseless rhythmic clinking of the tiles being tested. Perfect tiles are sent off for painting.

The formulas for glazes are a guarded company secret. Painters use a pattern stencil but the work is done freehand, producing the variations that keep designs alive and fascinating. The factory's best painters are assigned to special projects such as murals and, most

popularly, name plaques or name and address plaques. It takes about two months for special orders to be filled.

Sant'Anna tiles are sold in the United States by Country Floors, a nationwide chain of stores that imports tiles from around the world. In their agreement with Country Floors, Sant'Anna is restricted to the sale of only 200 tiles per customer on certain designs, and they must be for personal use.

But the price is right. The tiles cost \$1.50 to \$6 in Lisbon; in the United States, \$6.50 each and up. Special-order name plaques usually have 6 to 10 tiles and cost \$30 and up, depending upon size and

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Cruise T
Of The Car

If we showed you a different Caribbean—one that's fresh to your eyes—on a ship the likes of which you've never seen before, would you be tempted to come back to the islands this summer? On

STARSHIP'S

