

need to know

As publisher of *The Pink Book: The Hottest Guide to Living in Lower Connecticut* (www.devonfleming.com), I find myself drawn to products with a decidedly European aesthetic. The pleasure of such finds lies in the high level of detailing on even a simple napkin or vase, or the seemingly effortless melding of quality and style in a refurbished French antique mirror or set of embroidered pillows. And I can't underestimate the joy I find in browsing in a setting that makes me feel as if I'd been transported into a quaint but chic shop in France or Italy. Here are three companies you need to know of if you, too, seek a European-style shopping adventure here in Fairfield County. **BY DEVON FLEMING**

DISTINCTLY EUROPEAN

Three Fairfield County shops whose goods—and settings—will make you feel transported to France or Italy



Dovecote, Westport

Dovecote, a charming Westport shop full of mid-19th-century (and beyond) furniture and furnishings, offers another European-inspired retail experience. During owner Sarah Kaplan's many trips around

the world, she would "make pilgrimages to a host of different shops for different things," she says. "I'd remember that this store carried the best candles, while another carried the best pillows or table lamps. My concept for Dovecote was to create a store that had all the items I loved in one place."

The beautiful space Kaplan conjured from that dream holds a wide array of interesting goods old and new, from sofas and original artwork to antique tables, stylish photo frames, and the luxury stationery line Mrs. John L. Strong. "I don't believe being stylish needs to cost a fortune," Kaplan says, adding that she likes the challenge of having great products at every price point. Her venture is evolving: Dovecote 62 (jewelry) recently opened in an adjacent store, and Kaplan has just launched Interiors Dovecote with partner Brooke Crew, with offices next to the shop.

Kaplan travels to France up to five times a year, scouring the antiques markets for both unique pieces and general inspiration. "I don't have grand plans when I travel," she said. "You find what you find, and I never say 'never.' Something I wouldn't buy last year might look great this year. You have to be willing to take risks." On a recent trip she bought an interesting old and scratched bench with Lucite legs. She took it to Artistic Upholstery, in Norwalk (203.849.8907), to be restored. Artistic offered to manufacture similar furnishings with Lucite, Kaplan gave the go-ahead, and a wildly popular line of custom furniture was born. "The Lucite pieces are a wonderful combination



FAR LEFT: Dovecote customer favorites include a new line of hand-finished, Italian leather, canvas-backed pillows in snakeskin, crocodile, and metallics, from TSHome.

LEFT: A stylish vignette showcases an inviting array of goods sourced from local producers and European markets.

of classic and modern, which kind of describes Fairfield County today," Kaplan says.

Kaplan focuses intently on the shopping experience itself. "Nothing here is an accident, from the music to the scent of candles. It's all important," she says. Kaplan affords her staff ample time to spend with customers in order to create a no-pressure, pleasant environment. "You can have great taste, but if you don't have the best people to sell and help, that great taste doesn't matter," she says.

56 Post Road East, Westport, CT 06880
203.222.7500; www.dovecote-westport.com



Juliska, Stamford

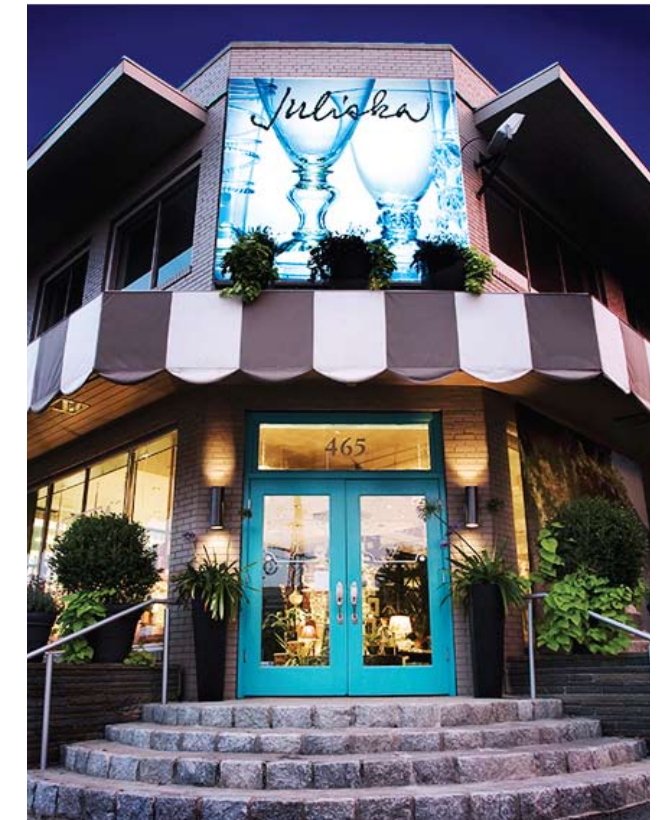
The Juliska Flagship Store and J Cafe, on Canal Street in the antiques district of Stamford, is a treasury of casual yet chic European-sourced tableware, glassware, table linens, lighting fixtures, and more. The British-born owner—wholesaler and retailer Dave Gooding (with whom I've worked on some Juliska party planning)—has created a unique retail environment that includes a café, constantly changing merchandise, and a four-times-a-year change of color scheme to keep the atmosphere fresh.

"Our focus is very fresh, modern, and European; we've designed the shop to showcase the Juliska lifestyle," Gooding says. On view are 800 to 900 Juliska-designed items (including the new collections of black-glass drinkware, vases, and tableware) and related decorative products like stylish coffee-table books, premium stationery, Turkish jewelry, and baby-gift items. The building, the company's only retail store, is home to the firm's design studio; Juliska's business is largely wholesale to 800 luxury retailers across the nation.

"All Juliska products are designed in-house, by our two designers, and then manufactured in Europe," says Gooding. The glassware is mouth-blown in the Czech Republic, the ceramics come from Portugal, and the hand-embroidered linens are Italian. "We see a trend toward less formal, more casual—yet chic—dining styles. People are looking for practicality and style. They don't want their tableware to be too 'precious'—there's a movement away from perfection toward character and a handmade quality.

"We design what we love. We don't conduct a lot of market research, we just listen to our customers," Gooding says. His focus (like that of many generations of European designers), he declares, is "on inspired design, not numbers." >>

465 Canal Street, Stamford, CT 06902
203.316.9118 or 888.414.8448; www.juliska.com



TOP AND ABOVE: A shimmering, glass-beaded koi-pond fountain displaying Juliska glassware is one of many focal points in the company's sprawling retail store in Stamford. Designed to epitomize CEO David Gooding's desire for a "stylish and upbeat European aesthetic," the shop carries all of Juliska's tableware products, as well as other gift items.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KEN STABILE

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOEL CIFES



LEFT: The sleek, modern interior of AKDO's 10,000-square-foot showroom in Bridgeport displays the fashionable and inspired tile and stone designs imported by the company and sold to-the-trade by more than 300 dealers in the New York metro area. BELOW: Mosaic-tile patterns (left to right) Revolve Carrara, Shadow Blend, Umber Blend, and Tweed Oasis Blue.

AKDO, Bridgeport

To create a Southern European atmosphere in your home, consider using an abundance of natural stone and tile reminiscent of building materials in Italy and Spain. AKDO's wide array of tile, stone slabs, natural stone, and mosaics imported from around the world provides wonderful options for creating kitchens, patios, baths, entryways, and other rooms with Old World elegance—or, if you prefer, colorful, detailed styling.

Based in Bridgeport, AKDO sells only to the trade, but the company welcomes tradespeople and their clients into its 10,000-square-foot showroom, which is equipped with specialized racking systems that let customers see and touch many of the tile patterns and more than 3,000 stone slabs. The on-site, 100,000-square-foot warehouse and distribution center allows AKDO to turn around orders quickly.

While the intricate custom mosaics produced through its sister company in Istanbul have come to be AKDO's signature, the firm's in-house-designed product lines run the color and pattern gamut. While some customers choose neutral colors to create a peaceful environment, others desire more modern patterns in more vibrant colors.

Many designs are classic, but others might be considered "modern classics," notes AKDO's marketing manager,

Katherine Pacholyk. Taking cues from the fashion industry, AKDO has brought patterns such as argyle, plaid, and houndstooth into its collection. "We try to emulate fashion, but not in ways that are too trendy," Pacholyk says. "Our designs address recognizable fashion ideas we can see every day and on the runways." For example, mimicking many of today's fashion accessories, AKDO offers a porcelain material that has metallic iridescence.

Large-format stone—24-by-24-inch planks of natural stone that, when installed, create a wood-floor effect—is popular at the moment. AKDO has also noted a strong interest in its three newest collections, introduced in 2007: Fusion, which incorporates natural stone with glass; Circles, natural stone in patterns of circles and dots; and Horizons, a versatile, more geometric modern collection. ❖

1435 State Street, Bridgeport, CT 06605
800.811.2536; listing of dealers, www.akdo.com

