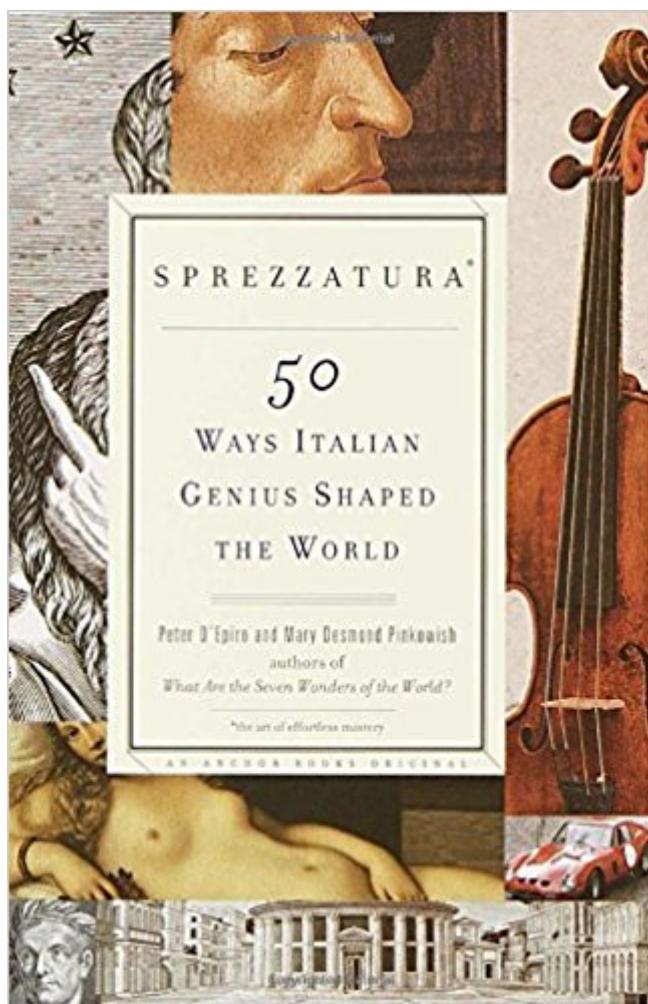


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# Sprezzatura: 50 Ways Italian Genius Shaped The World



## Synopsis

A witty, erudite celebration of fifty great Italian cultural achievements that have significantly influenced Western civilization from the authors of *What Are the Seven Wonders of the World?* The word "sprezzatura," or the art of effortless mastery, was coined in 1528 by Baldassare Castiglione in *The Book of the Courtier*. No one has demonstrated effortless mastery throughout history quite like the Italians. From the Roman calendar and the creator of the modern orchestra (Claudio Monteverdi) to the beginnings of ballet and the creator of modern political science (Niccolò Machiavelli), *Sprezzatura* highlights fifty great Italian cultural achievements in a series of fifty information-packed essays in chronological order.

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## Customer Reviews

"Everyone knows the difficulty of things that are exquisite and well done," the Renaissance philosopher Baldassare Castiglione once remarked. "So to have facility in such things gives rise to the greatest wonder." Italians call that artful facility *sprezzatura*, a term, Peter d'Epiro and Mary Desmond Pinkowish maintain, that well describes the nation's genius. They have reason to celebrate: Italy, after all, has exerted an influence in world affairs and culture all out of proportion to its size and population, and has done so for hundreds of years. Among the authors' subjects are the navigators Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Giovanni Verrazano, whose transoceanic voyages changed the course of world history; Andrea Palladio, the architect whose theories have guided designers and builders to the present day; Claudio Monteverdi, whom the authors call "the father of modern music," who gave the world not only fine operas but also the modern orchestra;

Enzo Ferrari, the great automaker; Roberto Rossellini, the often overlooked pioneer of New Wave cinema; and the anonymous Roman engineers who built aqueducts, sewers, and roads that still stand today. Though short on interpretation (d'Epiro and Pinkowish offer little insight into why Italy should have produced such an abundance of inventive, often daring men--and women, though only a few figure in their pages), this anecdotal collection of biographical sketches is a pleasing entertainment for admirers of all things Italian. --Gregory McNamee

In the early 16th century, Count Baldassare Castiglione penned his famous Book of the Courtier, synthesizing the ideals of the medieval courtly gentleman with the new "Renaissance man." Above all, the courtier should exhibit the qualities of grace and sprezzatura, which D'Epiro and Pinkowish accurately describe as "an assumed air of doing difficult things with an effortless mastery and an air of nonchalance." In 50 bite-sized chapters that are as delicious as they are short, D'Epiro and Pinkowish (What Are the Seven Wonders of the World?) take readers through a whirlwind tour of 25 centuries of culture and history on the Italian peninsula. From the calendar and Roman law to the Montessori method and Enrico Fermi, readers can delight in the defeats and accomplishments of a most varied group of men and women. Most books extolling the Italians conveniently delete the dark side of Italian history; this one honestly leaves in many of the more brutal details. The writing is engaging, and the authors' lively and descriptive style almost compensates for a lack of illustrations. One of the book's great merits is that it will surely stimulate readers to return to their Ovid, Livy, Dante and Boccaccio; in addition, one can gain greater appreciation for such masterpieces as Rossellini's Rome, Open City and Giuseppe Di Lampedusa's The Leopard. Although the authors only hint at it, sprezzatura is anything but effortless: mastery of any skill requires more perspiration than inspiration. Or, as D'Epiro and Pinkowish point out, the "social mask," or the "disjunction between appearance and reality," is "the very patina of civilization." Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

If you know me, you know that I am very proud of my Italian heritage. I have often said if you take the 15th century contributions made by Florence to the western world they would rival, if not exceed, the contribution of some nations for all time. If one were to look at the entire history of Italy, you could see that the contributions are beyond any other nation. As you can see, I have a great love for the land of my ancestors. I am passionately interested in the history of Italy as well as the culture. I have read multiple Italian histories. What I enjoyed about this book is that it provided a good survey of both. The book is a good starting point for anyone interested in history. Each of the 50 chapters is

a concise discussion of important contribution Italy has made to the world. It gives the reader a taste of interesting topics that they can then go on to research in more detail. If there is any criticism that I could make of the book is that it is a summation. So, when the author describes the Roman contribution to architecture, he discusses architecture in general. This, however, is a minor criticism of the book. If one were to discuss all the contributions Italians have made to architecture, it would fill a book in and of itself. The same is true for each of the chapters. There are just too many contributions made by Italy to be discussed in detail by any one book.

Sprezzatura offers the American reader unfamiliar with the accomplishments in Italian history, literature, nuclear science, medicine, and fashion that have contributed to our present reality. The book offers a richer outlook on the Italian cultural heritage, one that goes way beyond what is offered as Italian culture by programs like the Sopranos and films that focus almost exclusively on Italian-American gangsters.

One of the charms of this unique book is the ability to meander over the centuries, letting your mood choose the entry, and yet feeling a sense of context, because of the authors' tight chronological organization. The writing is lively, and I appreciated the avoidance of idolatry. Appreciation yes, but with a healthy sense of distance.

This is a must-have book in the library of the casual reader of history! We in the U.S. and the world need to understand the rich legacy we have inherited from our Italian predecessors. This book gives us a look back in time at the initiation of many principles and policies now in use all over the world. The arts have much to thank the Italians for. This book is written very well and in a style the reader can easily understand and appreciate.

I'm actually surprised how well D'Epiro presents Italian culture in this book. The chapters are short and the reading isn't pedantic. The book is good anyone learning about Italy's cultural development. I definitely recommend this book for anyone willing to learn more art.

Bought this book to replace my old copy . Each " Genius " is presented in a very clear way , with facts , no embellishment. I am very proud of my background maybe a bit opinionated .

A wonderful survey of things Italian with a flair. Easy reading, informative, interesting.

One of my favorite books. It's amazing which everyday innovations came out of Italy. [e.g. the fork, high heels, the basis for French cuisine etc. ]

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