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# Italy: The Vespa Museum

The history of the famous scooter named after the wasp



I always knew the iconic Vespa was the most stylish way to swoop through those narrow Italian streets. But I'd never before appreciated that a key part of the design was to make its riders look good when they arrived.



The Vespa museum in Pontedera, Tuscany is a love letter to engineering's contribution to fashion. It invites Vespas from around the world to join in with one shiny, sleek Vespa party. There's the Vespa that travelled around the world, there's a racing Vespa, there's a giant Vespa, a diamond studded Vespa and the Blue Peter Vespa from an English television programme. There's a bumble bee Vespa and a newspaper Vespa, a flower power Vespa and a futuristic Vespa.

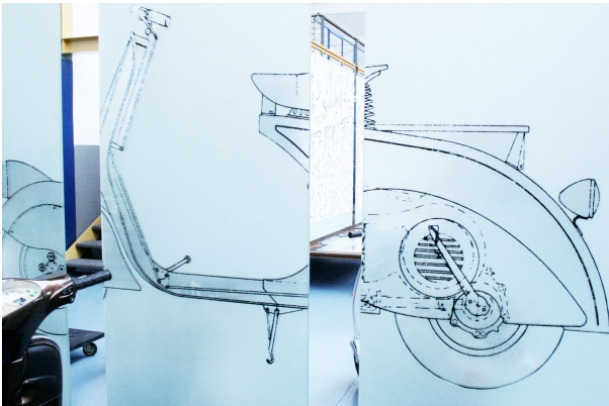
There's also, perhaps more importantly, the story of the Vespa.

At the end of World War II, aeronautical engineer Corradino d'Ascanio found himself living in a country with a ten year ban on military manufacturing.



Elsewhere, plant owner Piaggio found himself with the remnants of a ruined engineering factory and an irritating habit of getting mud on his trousers while riding his motorbike.

It was meant to be. Piaggio hired d'Ascanio and they both got to work. After a few shiny prototypes the Vespa was born. Its unique design had gears on the handlebars, a single metal chassis and an easy way for riders to rest their feet on the platform instead of straddling an unwieldy mechanical beast. Splash guards even protected those tailored Italian business suits.



Either from the Vespa's narrow waist or from the buzzing of the engine, the motorbike reminded both men of a wasp. Hence the name, Vespa, which means wasp in Italian.

After wandering through and appreciating the engineering, there's the chance to buy plenty of souvenirs for friends and family at home. Books, T shirts, postcards and even small models of the Vespa are available.

There's also, the unmistakable reinforcement of the message I already knew: that Vespas are cool.

► [www.museopiaggio.it/en/museum.html](http://www.museopiaggio.it/en/museum.html)

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