

Vera: The Big Apple and Other Designs

By Nina S. Hyde

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By Harry Naltchayan—The Washington Post

Designer Vera with her broken arm in—what else?—a Vera scarf sling.

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If more than half the kitchens in America today are bright yellow, it is because Vera Neumann—better known as just Vera—started designing accessories for the kitchen and bath in bright colors, particularly yellow and orange, more than 20 years ago.

Vera was in Washington yesterday to present a program at the Smithsonian Institution relating the original inspiration for her designs, her paintings and their translations into clothes and products for the home.

“The kitchen and the bath were always the drabest rooms in the house,” Vera said. “The poor woman at home all day, she just had to have some color. Even just with a bright colored apron.”

Vera figures that yellow has been successful because it is easier to live with than most other colors. “Besides, I’m a sun person,” she said. “I always have pushed yellow and orange.”

Her first print splash was the big apple, first success-

ful in 1945 as a golden delicious (yellow) and secondly as a mackintosh (red). This year she revived the red apple print, doing it both on linen and plastic.

At Vera Industries, the print in a blouse, a placemat, a scarf, a sheet starts as a painting. “I think in the shape of a canvas,” she said. “I always paint or sketch, and then I see how the design might work into other things.” (Fortunately she can paint with either hand; she just broke her right arm in a fall.)

Vera’s major source of inspiration comes from her travels and the folk art she collects on each trip. Her newest collection to be introduced shortly is based on a plane trip from Ibiza, where she owns an apartment, to Majorca. “As I flew over Ibiza, the windmills looked like sunflowers,” a print she uses as a scarf, sportswear and a poster. The braided palms, carried in Easter processions in Ibiza, will show up as a print for placemats, linens, blouses and shirtdresses. Some prints never span the range of designs. “I couldn’t

use a string of garlic print for dresses, but it was great for kitchen accessories,” Vera said.

Vera sought some way to use the Smithsonian as inspiration for a poster which she gave to the Smithsonian Resident Associates to use to raise money for their scholarship program. She settled on the pendulum around which she presented her program last night for members of the Smithsonian Associates and Fashion Group.

Vera now licenses her designs to Burlington, which uses them for sheets and pillowcases. Shortly, her prints will show up in underwear (“Please call it underwear”, she said, the word lingerie just isn’t right”) for Formfit Rogers. Even having turned down the use of her designs in paper products, swimwear, umbrellas and vinylized wall coverings, the business of Vera still reportedly totals more than \$80 million at retail.

Her own best customer, Vera changes her kitchen and bathroom designs twice a year when her new patterns come out. “I like to see how they wear,” she said. “Not in the washing

but how they wear on the eye.”

She changes the art around her houses about as often. “If you don’t change

the art around you, it becomes less important to you,” she said. “After a while you don’t see it at all.”