

# THE SALVI FACTORY

The **Salvi factory and Museum** are located high in the Valle Varaita of the Italian Alps in the tiny, picturesque village of **Piasco**. An hour drive south-west of **Torino** and a three hour drive south-west of Milano, Piasco is surrounded by vineyards, ancient houses, small friendly towns, and a breathtaking mountain backdrop. The small village is very proud of its world-famous harp company, and welcomes Salvi visitors with clearly marked signs and images of harps.

The Salvi Company is made up of a complex of buildings which house the museum, the design studio, the business offices, and the harp factory. The factory hums with skilled workers each performing their specialty on a particular aspect in the manufacture of the harp. The two factory buildings are where the story of Salvi Harps really takes on meaning. There is so much to see.

On the first floor of one building, red spruce for the soundboard is received from the **Fiemme Valley**, (the same valley used by **Stradivarius** for his violins), and maple and spruce for the frame arrive from Canada. The wood arrives here after several years of aging. The wood is cut into all of the rough pieces we will see later in assembly in the second building. It is this first building, however, where one can really see old world craftsmanship meet the technology and innovation that have made Salvi a leader in the harp manufacturing industry for over 50 years. Salvi uses computer-aided design and cutting on wood used in the ribs of the sound board as well as the knee block of the harp. The wood is tested for exactness using computer imaging.



Across the room, the work benches are covered in glue dribbles where wood has been laminated together for strength. Nearby there is rack filled with columns that have just been roughly-cut. The **columns** look like large square q-tips at this point. It is difficult to imagine that this large piece of wood, which is clearly labeled Apollo, will ever look like the Romanesque light-catcher of the finished product. In this room, there are saws, clamps, and large tools wherever you look. The ceilings are high, and the wood goes on forever. It smells very clean, with a savory smell of freshly sanded wood, and a thin layer of saw dust covers the front of my red suede shoes as I walk upstairs to visit the research and development department.

The **research and development team** is immersed in their designs and projects. From early in the morning, until late in the evening, **Giorgio Peirano, Armando Belmondo**, and their team bustle back and forth between their computers and the factory floor checking for precision in the manufacturing and quality-control processes. Every part of the harp must meet the exact specifications that were designed, and the final instrument is tested for acoustic fidelity using state-of-the-art acoustic equipment. There is an excitement in their voices that never stops. With one new idea, they set off on a new exciting adventure. This department is also constantly working with each department in the factory to assure continued innovation and quality. This department is so much fun! With this level of passion and love it is incredible to think of where harps will continue to progress in the future.



From the research and development department, we walk down a large hall past the central break area, which of course in Italy, is a giant espresso vending machine (makes great espresso).

The door on the other side of the hallway opens to the gilding and painting department. Three women inside this room carefully apply delicate sheets of gold to two columns and a base. There is no hand painting happening today, but this would also occur here. The parts get several layers of gold leaf before they are completed and polished. The **women** who work in this room are very friendly and happy, and they seem to love the camera.

Next door to the gilding department is the harp testing room. It is here, where all harps come which have been completed. The harpist plays each harp and listens for any buzzes, pedal noise, or action movement. She sends back any harp that needs adjusting. Her words are very important to both the production department and the research and development department. She takes great pride in assuring the harps she tests are “just right”. Inside her room is the **new Iris**.

The Iris has been updated with a new soundboard which creates a beautiful tone.

I have been excited for months to try it. The harp sounds gorgeous. The sound is very full, not too rich and not too bright in the top end. The notes have clarity and yet the sound carries extremely well. This harp is incredible!

Next door to the harp testing room is the final production department where harps are finally getting their strings, and pedal harps are fitted with actions. Next, further down the hall, harps receive regulation. Here, five regulators each have their own rooms, and they are hard at work. The rooms are all extremely efficient and clean. The people who work here are always joking and have great big smiles and laughs.

In the midst of all of this activity, in the large center of the room there are harps being boxed for shipping, and also warehouse shelves full of interesting things: sheet music, CDs, posters, and so much more.

On the second floor of this building are offices for everyone from accounting to sales, to the managing director. The offices are always busy. People speak many languages as they plan events, sell harps, order parts, or arrange for shipments.

In the second building, we see how the harp is built from the beginning. The harp is not just one piece of wood, but many, many different pieces and processes that come together to make each instrument. Here wood is cut, aged for several years, carved, assembled, finished, gilded and regulated over countless hours of hands-on labor. There is a great feeling of camaraderie between the craftsmen of all ages who displayed tremendous pride and passion in their work. It isn't big machines that form the harp, but individual people, often several from the same family, who shape and create the various pieces.

At one workbench, it is a site to see the **Arianna** made.

The artisan works on very small sections a time. With a look of intense concentration, using both hands to steady his inlay tool, he carefully pieces together the beautiful different kinds of wood into their characteristic patterns. He is so proud to share moments on camera and lets the lens catch a glimpse of the magic.





The next workspace belongs to a young man who is carving an Iris base.

Carved completely using hand tools, shaving by shaving the wood is cut away to reveal beautiful leaves and flowers. In his hands the pattern gradually emerges becoming intricate flowers and pattern.

The carved wood eventually will be covered in pure gold leaf.

Just around the corner, his mother, covered in sanding dust, smoothes out the inside of a column preparing the harp for

the pedal mechanism. She likes to speak what Salvi means to her. She works every day with her own son and daughter. **Salvi is truly a family career.**

Closer to the back of the room, there are rows of lever harps waiting to go through the final finishing before they go to assembly.

There are desks for sanding the outside of the body and desks for applying stain. There is also a large, clean spray booth, about the size of a carwash, where layers of clear polyurethane finish are applied, over and over to each harp, giving them a strong protective, beautiful finish. The pieces are hung from a track in the ceiling and are moved along this track to the drying area.

The spray booth is the domain of a single person who is responsible for this phase of the process.



As you leave the finishing department, you start to see harps really taking shape. When you enter the room, there are three long aisles filled with separate harp parts. In the last aisle, the small pieces are literally coming together into instruments. No longer just a crown or a neck, piece by piece, the harps are covered in clamps and measuring tools larger than the harps themselves. At the end of the aisle, one craftsman very carefully drills holes through the base readying this part for the rods and pedal assembly. At the other end of the aisle, a different craftsman is putting tuning pins on a Livia as she measures the lengths very carefully.

Across the complex from the factory is the **Museo dell'Arpa "Victor Salvi."** This is the first museum exclusively for the harp world. Located on the second floor of one of the factory buildings, the room is filled with harps of all shapes and histories. The collection houses early instruments, some carved into animal shapes, along with showing the development of the mechanism to its present form. There are harps of some of the seminal artists who contributed great impact to the artistry of harp evolution. We will come back to the museum in the next section of the newsletter.



The **Salvi Concert Hall** is located in a large room next to the museum. This room is also used to show an informative movie which chronicles the history of Salvi, and explains the process of harp manufacture.

Downstairs from the concert hall are two huge rooms that make up the Salvi showroom. When the doors first open to the showroom, a Victor Salvi 50th Anniversary harp glistens in the fine beam of golden sunlight. There are two gorgeous Apollonias, along with the entire collection of harps

made by Salvi. Every harp calls out to be played. Moving through a second door finds even more harps on display. Set in a beautiful room with warm wood, floors, glittering chandeliers, and sumptuous blue curtains, this is truly a harpist's heaven. Imagine two large, beautiful rooms filled with the most beautiful harps in the world.

Just a five minute drive from the factory, up a very steep windy hill, is the **Hotel Castello Rosso**. This Hotel is an old castle which has been renovated into a very comfortable bed and breakfast hotel. It sits on many acres of beautifully landscaped land that winds around the top of the hill and provides a very good view of the mountains, the village, and the countryside. The hotel is perfectly romantic, and was the perfect place to stay while visiting where our beautiful harps were born.

For a guided video tour of the factory, go to:

**Salvi Harps Factory Tour**

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko1WqYrEZEK>)

You can also see some parts of the factory on Catrin Finch's History of the Harp Series, also on You Tube:

**The History of the Harp - Part 1**

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WPylNyV3-4E>)

**The History of the Harp - Part 2**

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6zw9v6px9x4&feature=related>)

**The History of the Harp - Part 3**

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pQSo9sHaK2g&feature=related>)

**The History of the Harp - Part 4**

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5SZbXJB8ze8&feature=related>)

**The History of the Harp - Part 5**

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJu2U3logWg&feature=related>)

**The History of the Harp - Part 6**

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qz-68d2P8Gc&feature=related>)

## The new Salvi Harps website is now online!

In addition to the American Salvi Harps website ([www.salviharpsinc.com](http://www.salviharpsinc.com)) Salvi Italy has a beautiful new website.



[www.salviharps.com](http://www.salviharps.com)