

# FROM LUCERNE TO LUGANO

Switzerland Beckons

It started with a photograph. A two-page spread years ago of Burgenstock so captured my heart with its natural beauty that I knew I had to see for myself this Alpine Mountain Resort overlooking Lake Lucerne. —By Laura Tanna

THE BURGENSTOCK HOTEL OVERLOOKING THE LAKE LUCERNE, PHOTOS COURTESY OF BURGENSTOCK HOTEL



Learning that film star Audrey Hepburn had married at Burgenstock in 1954 only increased my desire. So in June 1989 we flew to Zurich, drove the hour south and arrived at the hotel just in time to have dinner on our terrace overlooking the lake. At 10 p.m. it was light and the sound of cow bells remains with me still.



THIS PAGE: CHATEAU GUTSCH; LUGANO ARTE E CULTURA. OPPOSITE PAGE (T-B): SWISS HORN ON MT. PILATUS; VIEW OF LUCERNE FROM CHATEAU GUTSCH, PHOTOS BY LAURA TANNA



though a floor to ceiling glass wall of LAC looking onto the lake and mountains beyond is as stunning as any artwork in the exhibitions. Now that Swiss banks adhere to more rigid international rules Lugano's allure lessens in that sector and cultural tourism like that of Lucerne is taking on a larger role in the city's future.

Sunday Italy beckons. Twenty-seven years ago we'd stayed at the Grand Hotel Des Iles Borromees in Stresa, a magnificent art nouveau establishment built in 1861 across the road from Lake Maggiore, and just a few minutes boat ride to Isola Bella, with its beautiful island palace and gardens. This time my husband wanted the comfort of making the Splendide Royal the base from which we could make day trips to other lakes. Concierge Lia reserved our lunch on the terrace at Hotel Des Iles Borromees and with a map and instructions we drove west from Lugano to the coast of Lake Maggiore, then down along the lake to catch a ferry across the lake and around to Stresa.

It's 500 years since the Reformation began in Germany and its effects in Switzerland created immense turmoil. Nothing brought home to me more vividly the power and wealth of the Catholic Church, when the Church and the State were one, than when I first visited Isola Bella. Banking and merchant wealth made the house of Borromeo one of the three most powerful families in Milan. Carlo III began work on a palace for his wife in 1632. Construction was interrupted by the plague so that sons Cardinal Giberto III and Vitaliano VI finished the palace while a nephew completed the gardens in 1671. It became the playground for European nobility. Even recently a marriage of Italian nobility took place since the family retains living quarters there. The rest of the palace and gardens are open to the public.

With so many, many more tourists than on my last visit, I'm glad Maurizio Brugnoli, the Concierge at the Grand Hotel Des Iles Borromees, arranges a private boat taxi to whip me over to the island. I admit to feeling like royalty when the boat later returns for me and scores of tourists are left at the pier waiting for the ferry.

History has it that Caroline, Princess of Wales, so fell in love with the place that she wanted to buy one of the other Borromeo islands but had to settle in 1815 for living on Lake Como in Villa d'Este, which is now a world-class hotel with marvellous gardens. But having already enjoyed a stay there we are happy to remain in Lugano at the Splendide Royal. Next morning we set out heading south into Italy, passing Villa d'Este and drive the SS340 north along the western coast of Lake Como, a drive which convinces us of the formidable beauty of the Italian lake district – clear blue sky, jagged mountains, riots of red flowers, cafes along the lake. This is life extraordinary.

Our destination is Villa Carlotta near Tremezzo. Originally the estate and gardens of wealthy silk merchants who developed the property and villa in the late 17th century, it was later given by Princess Marianna of Prussia as a wedding gift to her daughter Carlotta, who sadly died after childbirth in 1855, just 23 years old. Today a foundation runs the museum and 20-acre botanical gardens, open to the public. Spring, when rhododendrons, azaleas and roses bloom, is magnificent but all kinds of plants abound, including bamboo and jungle enclaves with paths clearly marked. Wear walking shoes. The museum, noted for sculptures by acclaimed Antonio Canova, also displays paintings, furniture, tapestries, and jewellery. Lake and mountain views from the third floor, plus a café on the side, complete the visit.

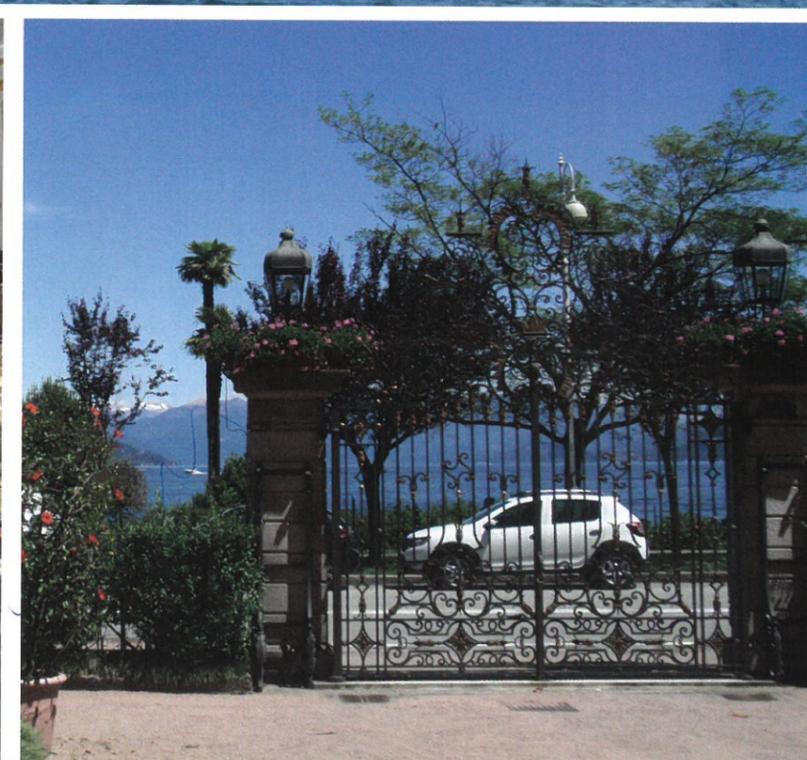
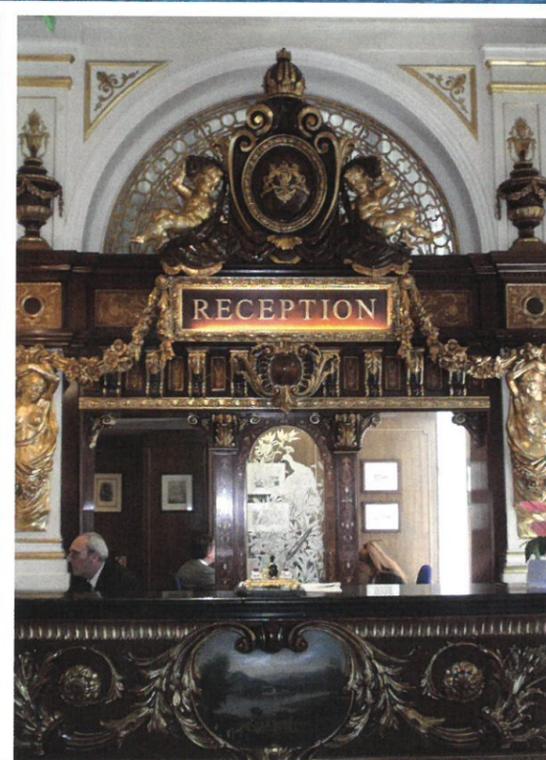
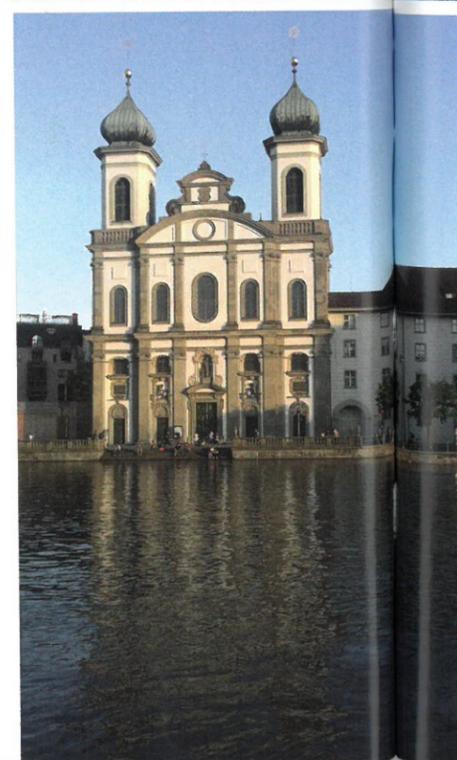
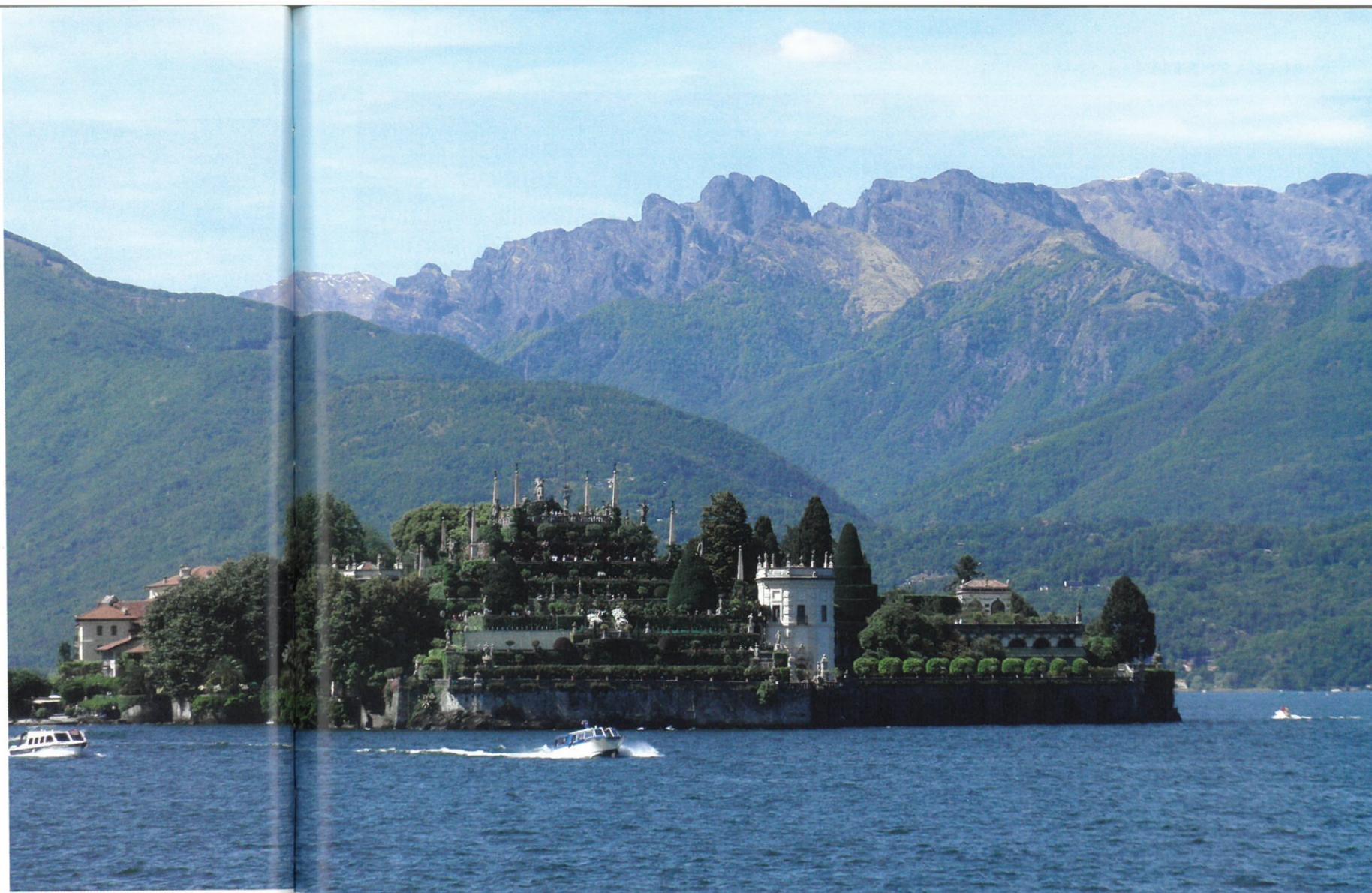
We've enjoyed dinner at Capo San Martino in Paradiso heading back into Lugano and pizza at Ana Capri above the train station, but we return to La Veranda for our last night and despite Mr. Rossi's wish for us to try the specialties of his chef from Calabria, bridging southern Italy and southern Switzerland by using ingredients from both places, I cannot resist the multi-course Belle Epoque menu to end a most memorable northern and southern Swiss experience. JP-A17

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ater I learned that Franz Bucher and Josef Durrer in 1873 opened the Burgenstock Hotel igniting a long history of glory and decay as two world wars disrupted everything they created. Friedrich Frey-Furst and later his son revitalised the resort as the Burgenstock Club so that everyone from India's Prime Minister Nehru and Germany's Chancellor Adenauer to Sophia Loren and Sean Connery made Burgenstock the place to be in the fifties onwards. Hoping to recapture the splendour of our earlier stay, we booked a May 2017 flight to Zurich, then discovered that Qatari investors had bought Burgenstock, undertaking a massive renovation with plans to reopen in August 2017.

Instead, we settled into the Palace Luzern Hotel, the only five-star hotel right on Lake Lucerne, with a tree-shaded lakeside walkway for strolling into the town centre. Their seafood restaurant sounds intriguing but our first night we enjoy a lovely dinner on the terrace of Hotel des Balances, better to view the Jesuit Church, Switzerland's first Baroque Church north of the Alps. Building began on this church in 1666 as part of Catholic Lucerne's fight against Protestants during the Counter-Reformation. Our view also includes Chapel Bridge on the Reuss River. Lucerne's main landmark sports a watch tower and paintings on the interior ceiling depicting the city and country's great history. Originally built in 1333, it was rebuilt in 1993 after a disastrous fire. Also known as Kapellbrücke in Luzern, these spellings reflect that we are in the German-speaking Canton while elsewhere French, Italian and Romansh languages are spoken in Switzerland.

In my quest to hear cowbells, a half-day tour beginning at Starbucks in central Lucerne takes me fifteen minutes by bus to Kriens, then on a panoramic gondola to Frakmuntegg and finally to a four-person aerial cable car where I sit with a millionaire IT businessman and his wife from the States and a former security guard from New Zealand. As we gently bobble our way up the mountainside – yes, I stop the conversation so that we can listen to the bells of cows grazing nearby. We arrive at Mt. Pilatus in the Alps and I walk to the summit with Chinese visitors, admiring an incredible vista of snow-capped mountains, green farms and blue lakes below. There's even a three-metre long horn being blown by a musician on the terrace, and lunch in the circular Hotel Bellevue before we descend on the world's steepest cogwheel railway to Alpnachstad where we cruise for an hour with Iranian and Japanese visitors on the Lake of the Four Cantons back to Lucerne.



THIS PAGE: THIS PAGE: GENERALMANAGER GIUSEPPE ROSSI HOTEL SPLENDEIDE ROYAL, PHOTO BY LAURA TANNA. OPPOSITE PAGE (T-B): ISOLA BELLA IN LAKE MAGGIORE; JESUIT CHURCH ON THE REUSS RIVER; RECEPTION AT GRAND HOTEL DES ILES BORROMEES, VIEW OF LAKE MAGGIORE FROM TERRACE AT GRAND HOTEL DES ILES BORROMEES RESTAURANT, PHOTOS BY LAURA TANNA

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A Jamaican-Swiss friend has taken the convenient one-hour train ride from Zurich, joining us for dinner on the Terrasse at Palace Luzern. Lucerne boasts a modern train station with connections to major cities in Switzerland and beyond making this city of 81,000 people an attractive locale, largely agricultural rather than industrial. Museums abound, including the Rosengart Collection with 21 artists represented, especially Picasso because of his friendship with Rosengart. The Lucerne Culture and Congress Centre hosts two symphonic orchestras and the Lucerne Festival for classical music in the summer is renowned. You could enjoy Fasnacht with masquerades and bands frolicking in the city streets for Carnival earlier in the year or come for jazz in July or blues in November. Lucerne is alive with cultural activities, including alternative music happenings. There is also a Casino next to our hotel.

From our hotel balcony I look to the foothills where Chateau Gutsch gleams white, like a Disneyland turreted affair, slightly faded on closer inspection, a hotel with restaurant and bar overlooking the old town walls, watch towers, and a panoramic view of town and lake. But the hotel is not convenient for walking around town. There's no point in telling you about Palace Luzern Hotel because a Chinese investor has bought the place which closes November 2017 for an expected 18-month renovation. I just wonder if their spa is going to keep the huge bronze 1.2 ton singing bowl with a swinging bar that gongs as you try to relax in a hammock above. They're very proud of this, but it seems a bit bizarre. My last night with dinner on the balcony watching Alpine peaks across the lake slowly alter from glistening white to rosy lavender as the sunset is absolutely sublime.

Lugano is another story. Located in southern Switzerland on Lake Lugano with proximity to Lake Como to its East and Lake Maggiore to its West, Lugano is the perfect place to enjoy Swiss orderliness and Italian joie de vivre. You might stay at the Villa Principe Leopoldo, a Relais & Chateaux Hotel in the hills above the city, or at the Grand Hotel Villa Castagnola setback in a garden father around the lake from the town centre. But it is the Hotel Splendide Royal, a five-star establishment in a Belle Epoque palace, to which discerning guests return. It looks directly onto Lake Lugano across the street and is an easy walk along the lake to Piazza della Reforma, the town centre.

What also makes the hotel so splendid is the superb management, from delightful Chief Concierge Giovanni Lia, to remarkable General Manager Giuseppe Rossi. A native of Naples, Mr. Rossi came to the Splendide Royal



(L-R): CHIEF CONCIERGE GIOVANNI LIA AT HOTEL SPLENDIDE ROYAL, SIMONE RAGUSA, SOMMELIER AT LA VERANDA RESTAURANT. PHOTOS BY LAURA TANNA

when he was 20, after attending hotel school in Rome from the age of 17. He had the good fortune to work under General Manager Anilo Lauro, of whom Mr. Rossi says: "Some people decide to be generous. He was born generous." Late at night, after work, he would talk to the young Rossi until two or three in the morning, analysing the day's work, transferring to him the essence of what he had learned: "never have limits to please guests, anticipate their needs." Lauro then told him to leave for more experience. Rossi took his advice working in England, in France at the famed La Reserve de Beaulieu, in Geneva at La Reserve de Bellevue, at the Kempinski in Munich and Frankfurt, the Quisisana in Capri, learning English, French, German and then in 2007 the call came from Mr. Lauro for Rossi to return to the Splendide as General Manager.

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Driving from Lucerne on the A2 highway, even through our only day of rain, is a pleasant four and a half hours to Lugano. We are rewarded by the most beautiful, magical rainbow arcing over Lake Lugano as we dine at a window table in La Veranda, the hotel's superb restaurant where the convivial and expert sommelier, Simone Ragusa, delightfully navigates us through a 100-page Carta dei Vini, complete with maps of each wine's origins. We send a glass of our wine to the pianist whose music enhances this enchanting evening.

Meanwhile Concierge Lia organises a private car and driver for our next morning tour of the Canton of Ticino, heading south around the peninsula to the picturesque village of Morcote, a drive reminiscent of the French Riviera. Then off to Mount Bre for panoramic views of the entire city, lakes, Bernese and Vallese Alps. For those without a car a funicular leaves every half hour from the Cassarate/Monte Bre bus stop.

I use the afternoon to visit LAC — Lugano Arte e Cultura — the modern art and cultural centre just a ten-minute walk from the hotel. Each of the three floors presents an excellent international exhibition,

