

LAKE COMO – THE HEIGHT OF SOPHISTICATION AND STYLE

By Fiona Sanderson

The Luxury Channel's two new favourites on Lago di Como are Il Sereno and Villa Pliniana....



Il Sereno (Image courtesy of Patricia Parinejad)

One of Lake Como's most recently opened hotels, Il Sereno, is quite simply stunning and somewhere that you must stay if you want a really first class hotel and a romantic adventure by the Italian lakes. The hotel is both stylish and sophisticated – and no wonder, since it was designed by Wallpaper* Designer of Year 2015, Patricia Urquiola. Located along 450 feet of Lake Como's legendary Eastern shore, the property is surrounded by dramatic views of the Italian Alps and idyllic small towns, and even features its own private beach and boat dock with three special Cantieri Ernesto Riva boats.



Meanwhile, Milan restaurateur and Chef Andrea Berton, whose impressive CV boasts Michelin starred kitchens, is at the helm of Il Sereno's signature restaurant, Ristorante Berton Al Lago. Awarded its first Michelin Star within only a year of operations, the restaurant's exquisite menu pays tribute to the rich and diverse area of Northern Italy by taking the finest ingredients of the local region and creating contemporary homages to traditional cuisine.



Il Sereno (image courtesy of Patricia Parnejad)

The hotel comprises 30 spacious rooms, ranging from 650 square meters in size to The Penthouse at 2,000 square meters, with floor-to-ceiling windows and views over Lake Como. There is a spa too, situated under the original, old arches but without doubt the highlight is the 60-foot-long heated freshwater infinity pool, which is suspended over the lake. Il Sereno is certainly set to indulge the senses with this newly launched and incredibly tranquil haven of rest and recuperation, where treatments have been designed to harmonise and relax both body and soul.



Whilst the spectacular views of Lake Como and the surrounding scenic mountain ranges demand your attention outside, it is the centre of the hotel that really takes your breath away once inside. As you walk in, your eyes are drawn to the stunning staircase that serves as a truly striking focal point. Made with natural materials including walnut wood, the large steps are encased in bronze and effortlessly “float” as you stand before it. The dark and beautiful veins of the walnut wood complement the stone found throughout the hotel. An exciting starting point for the design in the rest of the hotel, which is also highly contemporary. Patricia Urquiola has used largely natural materials, including wood, stone, wool and other fabrics, and the overall effect is both dramatic and refreshingly timeless. Urquiola has also used colours that reflect the lake and environment. I was particularly struck by the 2,000 square foot penthouse, which had huge windows incorporating breath-taking views of the lakes, floors which were inlaid with Venetia terrazzo flooring, and glamorous stone bathrooms.



Il Sereno (Image courtesy of Patricia Parinejad)

I was looking forward to my lunch overlooking the lake and to tasting Andre Berton's cuisine, which certainly didn't disappoint. With more than 27 years of industry experience, Berton is a well-known and respected restaurateur who has won four Michelin stars across three restaurants in Milan. The menu, I am told, encompasses the crossroads of the distinct regions near Lake Como including: the lake with its fish and aromatic herbs; the mountains of Valtellina which are renowned for incredible wines, cheeses and meats; and the nearby Pianura Padana which is well-known for its risotto. I chose the starter of "Cardoncelli" mushrooms, lotus root, and little onions all sweet and sour with fresh mint pesto but you could have alternatives such as the marinated cod, crispy cabbage and umeboshi plums. I followed this with watercress ravioli and Venus clams, and then Berton's famous tiramisu with a warm topping. All to die for and utterly delicious.



I would have liked to have stayed longer and been able to retreat to the Penthouse suite with its floor-to-ceiling windows and views over the peaceful waterfront for a little Sunday relaxation but my appointment with Samy, the General Manager, to see Il Sereno's sister property certainly did not disappoint. A short boat ride away, Villa Pliniana is no doubt one of the world's most exclusive properties for hire in a completely private setting, tucked away on the shore of Lake Como. Villa Pliniana has all the right ingredients – luxury, security and privacy for the world's top millionaires. I hear Mark Zuckerberg was one of their most recent guests.



Built in 1573, the Villa has over the years hosted many artists, scientists and monarchs such as Leonardo da Vinci, Bellini, Volta, Napoleon and Queen Margherita of Savoy, to name just a few. Renovations have been going on for several years and this historical Villa has been gracefully restored to its former splendour, with the addition of a spa and heli-surface.



This 16th-century palazzo is located in an estate as expansive as the accommodation. The main villa offers ten exquisite bedrooms within four large apartments, while three additional villas provide a further nine bedrooms. Altogether, Villa Pliniana can accommodate 39 guests. Two lavish ballrooms are equipped to host events of up to 200 guests, while the stunning waterfront gardens can accommodate up to 500 guests for large weddings and events. The estate has its own private spa with covered heated pool, Jacuzzi, Turkish bath, Scottish showers, sauna and a lounge area. It also has a heliport, on-site parking and a large jetty.



Under the management of the new Il Sereno Hotel, Villa Pliniana without a doubt has the same luxurious feel that I found in Il Sereno. The interiors, again designed by Patricia Urquiola, include elaborate Venetian terrazzo-style floors and painted wooden ceilings. Villa Pliniana is also home to the piano on which Rossini wrote the opera *Tancredi*. Perhaps the incomparable surroundings will inspire you to write your own masterpiece!



If real privacy is what you are after and you have the budget to match, you can hire Villa Pliniana's private villas for you and your guests (not so much open to the public, the Villa is a buyout grand palace for those with deep pockets, or who are looking to hold their wedding there). Il Sereno's suites, meanwhile, are the perfect place to relax and enjoy the beauty of the lake. Both properties are very unique, and utterly special.



About The Sereno Properties On Lago di Como

Suites at Il Sereno Lago di Como are priced from €750. For more information, go to www.ilsereno.com. For more information about Villa Pliniana, go to www.villapliniana.com. All Sereno Hotel properties are members of Leading Hotels of the World and Virtuoso.