



ITINERARY 2 • VILLAS AND MANSIONS

VILLA FLORI

An exceptional gift for a wedding that should have been no less exceptional itself, but which turned out otherwise. Villa Flori was built in 1859 by the Marquis Giorgio Raimondi as a wedding present for his daughter Giuseppina, promised bride of the “Hero of the Two Worlds,” Giuseppe Garibaldi. Indeed, the hotel has a room dedicated to Garibaldi, the main architect of the Unification of Italy, boasting the tiled stove and lacquered wooden wardrobe that furnished the general’s room when he was in residence.

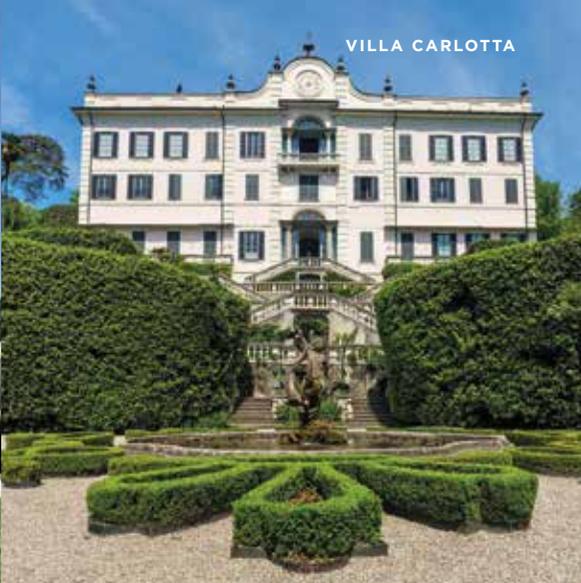
As his building site, Raimondi secured one of the most panoramic positions on the western branch of the lake, with a view that stretches from the villages of Torno and Blevio to the Dome of Como Cathedral. A fervent patriot, he was enthusiastic about his daughter’s marriage, even though his future son-in-law was 52 and she was 18. Less happy was Giuseppina, who loved another soldier, Luigi Caroli. Only when the latter left her did she agree to marry her older suitor. They had met on June 1, 1859, five days after Garibaldi’s victory against the Austrians at San Fermo, near Como. They married on January 24, 1860 in the chapel of another villa belonging to Raimondi, in Fino Mornasco, and separated that same evening; when they returned to their rooms, Garibaldi left a note accusing his wife of loving another. Despite the general’s immediate departure, Giuseppina refused to dissolve the marriage until 1880, as a means of defending her reputation.

Meanwhile, in 1865 her father sold the villa to the Flori family, in whose hands it remained until it was again sold. It became a hotel in 1958 and, in 2011, underwent a total renovation that re-incorporated the splendor that had characterized the original structure. The hotel’s restaurant continues to bear the Raimondi name, along with the 19th century charm of the villa when it was first erected.

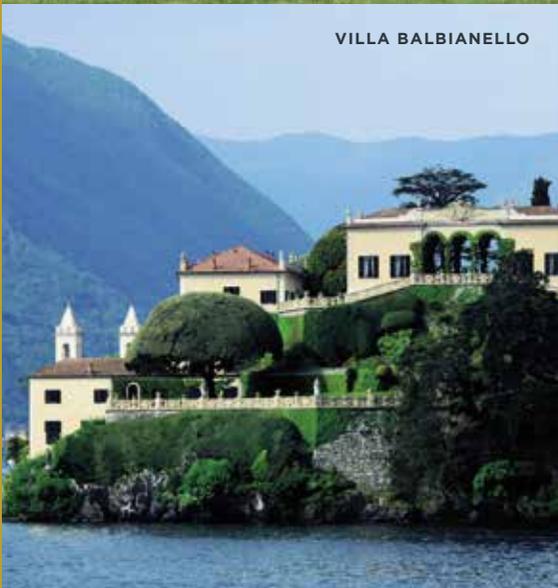
VILLA OLMO



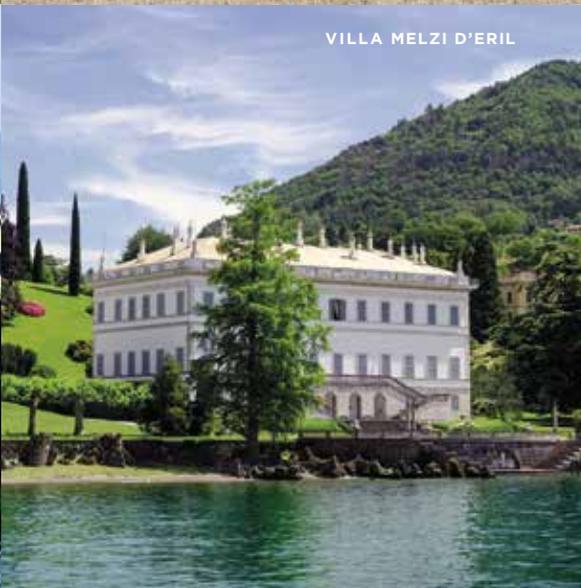
VILLA CARLOTTA



VILLA BALBIANELLO



VILLA MELZI D'ERIL



VILLA OLMO

Designed by architect Simone Cantoni in the Neoclassical style, Villa Olmo is the most imposing of the villas on the western branch of Lake Como. It was commissioned in 1782 by the Como nobleman Innocenzo Odescalchi to occupy land where, according to Giovan Battista Giovio, humanist and friend of Odescalchi, the home of the Latin poet Caninio Rufo once stood - one described in a letter by Pliny the Younger. Among Odescalchi's notable guests were Napoleon Bonaparte and the poet Ugo Foscolo. In 1824, the villa passed to the Marquis Giorgio Raimondi, who built the nearby Villa Flori. One hundred years later, the Municipality of Como acquired the property and now uses it for exhibitions and events.

VILLA CARLOTTA

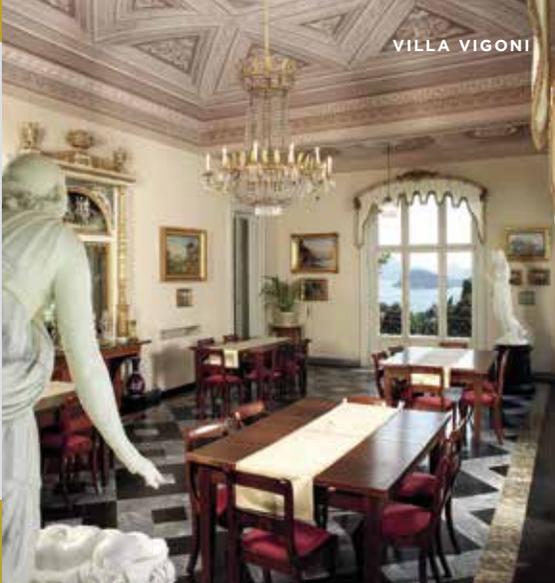
Built in the last decade of the 17th century in one of the most famous locations on Lake Como ("Then we'll go to Tremezzo, it will be divine," said Greta Garbo in the 1932 film *Grand Hotel*) Villa Carlotta is an example of Baroque style. It is renowned both for the art collection displayed throughout (including several sculptures by Canova and his school, such as *Amor and Psyche*, and *The Last Kiss of Romeo and Juliet* by Hayez, and for its vast botanical garden. Since 1927, Villa Carlotta has been run by a foundation that ensures its preservation and accessibility to the public.

VILLA DEL BALBIANELLO

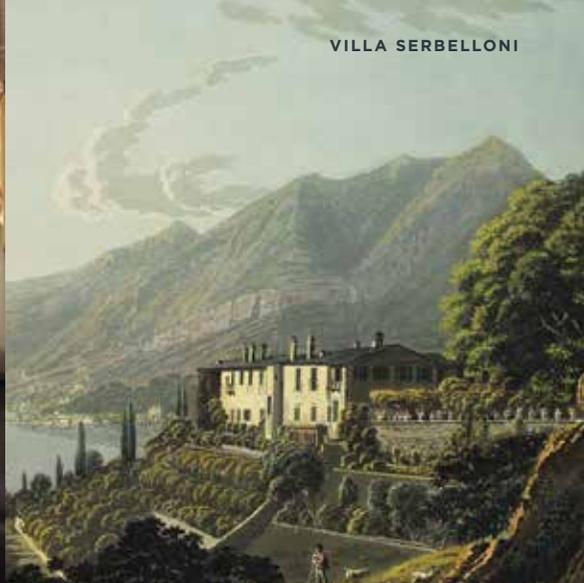
The Lake Como villa most beloved by filmmakers - among the movies shot there, John Irvin's *A Month by the Lake* (1995), *Star Wars: Episode II - Attack of the Clones* by George Lucas (2002), and *Casino Royale* by Martin Campbell (2006) - is in Lenno, on a spectacular position at the tip of a promontory, the Dosso di Lavedo. Built in 1787 by Cardinal Angelo Maria Durini, it was acquired in 1971 by the mountaineer and explorer Guido Monzino, who 27 years later bequeathed it to FAI (Italian Environmental Fund) along with his collections. The villa is open to the public.

VILLA MELZI D'ERIL

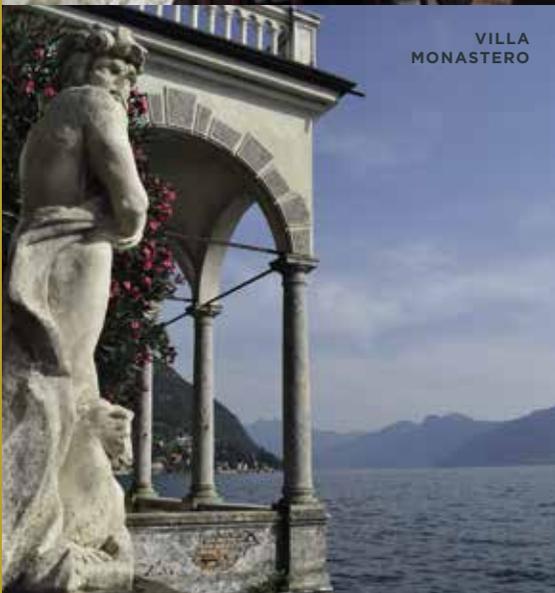
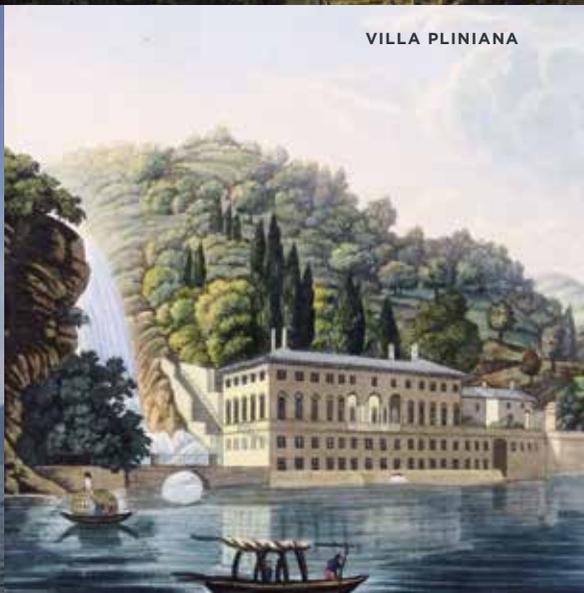
Built in the Neoclassical style between 1808 and 1810 for Duke Francesco Melzi d'Eril, vice president of the Italian Republic under Napoleon, the villa is famous for its English gardens (now open to the public) that extend for 800 meters along the shore of the lake, from the village of Bellagio to the hamlet of Loppia. Two films have been shot there - *HUNTED SUMMER* (1988) and *FRANKENSTEIN UNBOUAND* (1990) - both inspired by the "cursed summer" of 1816, which Mary and Percy Shelley spent on Lake Geneva. The sojourn produced the former's masterpiece *Frankenstein*.



VILLA VIGONI



VILLA SERBELLONI

VILLA
MONASTERO

VILLA PLINIANA

VILLA VIGONI

Those in search of Europe's roots can find them at Villa Vigoni. Since 1986 it has been the home of the Italo-German Center, founded after the last owner, Ignazio Vigoni, left the property to what was then West Germany because it was the homeland of Enrico Mylius and his wife Federica Schnauss; the couple gave the villa its current form in 1829. It was thanks to them that the greatest writers of the two countries, Goethe and Manzoni, made each other's acquaintance, an event immortalized in the statues and paintings at Villa Vigoni. The art collection is particularly rich in the works of Hayez, and the park is a splendid example of early 19th-century garden design.

VILLA SERBELLONI

"Da Vinci walked through these rooms and libraries where we walk with books and cups of tea," wrote the Chilean poet Germán Carrasco, one of the many artists from around the world who have been guests of Villa Serbelloni. Owned by the Rockefeller Foundation since 1959, it stands on the promontory in the center of the lake in an elevated position and vaunts a venerable history. The villa was built in 1486 and rebuilt the following century on the spot where it is thought that Pliny the Younger's Villa Tragedia stood in Roman times. John F. Kennedy was a guest there in June 1963.

VILLA MONASTERO

An example of the eclectic style of the Belle Époque grafted onto a 17th-century structure, the 14 rooms of Villa Monastero represent four centuries of the Lombard aristocracy's history. Since 1953, it has been home to a congress center for the promotion of excellence in physics, through whose halls more than 60 Nobel laureates have passed. The park features a botanical garden that winds for two kilometers along the lake and then continues to the village of Varenna by way of the "Lover's Walk," a cantilevered walkway over the lake, ideal for a romantic idyll.

VILLA PLINIANA

The most mysterious of Lake Como's villas takes its name from an intermittent spring studied by Pliny the Younger and Leonardo da Vinci, over which the structure was built in 1573 by Giovanni Anguissola, governor of Como. The grandiose villa was the inspiration for the manor inhabited by the reclusive protagonist of *Malombra*, the novel by Fogazzaro (1880) and film of the same name by Soldati (1942). It is cited in three works by Percy and Mary Shelley, who tried to rent it in 1818. From 1843 to '51, the lovers Count Emilio Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Princess Anne-Marie Berthier lived there. Some say their ghosts still haunt its halls.