

GARDENS & VILLAS OF THE ITALIAN LAKES

SATURDAY 30 APRIL – FRIDAY 6 MAY 2011 (7 DAYS)

LECTURER: SYLVIA RICHARDS & JAMES HILL

£1995

- A week of horticultural bliss set amidst marvellous lakeside scenery
- Wonderful gardens in a variety of styles
- Visit timed to coincide with the Azalea and Rhododendron season
- Villas with remarkable interiors and art collections
- Private visits, some including lunch with the owning families



Isola Bella, from the seventeenth century engraving by Marc'Antonio Dal Re

OVERVIEW

Lakes Orta, Maggiore and Como: the magnificence of the scenery combining alpine peaks with cool lake water, dotted with islands full of princely villas and lakeshores garlanded with exquisite gardens have long conspired to draw poets, artists, gardeners and perhaps, next April, you too?

We shall visit all the famous horticultural sites and see villas and gardens that are not on other itineraries. On two occasions we shall be entertained to lunch by the owning families.

The visit will be led by Sylvia Richards, who lives on Lake Maggiore and who has led many horticultural groups in the past, ably assisted by James Hill, our resident Italian tours director.

ITINERARY OUTLINE

Day 1: Saturday 30 April – We fly from London Heathrow midmorning with BA arriving at Milan Malpensa in the early afternoon. We drive to **Lake Maggiore** and check into the lakeside 5* **Hotel Villa Arminta** just outside Stresa, directly overlooking the Borromeo Islands, for a three-night stay. The hotel has an excellent swimming pool. Dinner will be in a local restaurant on Isola dei Pescatori to which you will be taken by private launch.

Day 2: Sunday 1 May – The day begins in splendid fashion on **Lake Maggiore**, travelling by private launch to visit the **Borromeo Isles**, starting with **Isola Bella**, almost unreal in its beauty. The island is entirely dominated by the Borromeo family palace and its extraordinary formal, terraced gardens. The palace has recently undergone a magnificent restoration and extra rooms have been opened. The gardens need little introduction as they are the most famous formal gardens in northern Italy and are *immaculately* maintained. We then go on to **Isola dei Pescatori** for a group lunch and in the afternoon we visit **Isola Madre** where the villa and gardens are delightfully informal. The style of the garden reflects a more relaxed approach with many fine trees and shrubs. The villa is not so grand as that seen earlier in the day and it was clearly designed to be a place to “unwind” rather than a place to entertain. We return to our hotel and the evening will be free.

Day 3: Monday 2 May – After a leisurely breakfast we drive along Lake Maggiore to **Pallanza** to visit the garden of the **Villa Taranto** where the fecund imagination of the original Scottish owner, Neil MacEachern survives with plantings of great originality, albeit now overlaid in places with the less imaginative “intervention” of its present municipal curators! After our visit we continue on to **Stresa** where there will be some extended free time for lunch, which is not included. In the late afternoon we will leave the hotel for a scenic drive to **Lake Orta** where we shall visit **Orta San Giulio**, a most charming lake-side town. We shall have an excellent dinner in a charming local restaurant.

Day 4: Tuesday 3 May - We cross Lake Maggiore by ferry and drive on to visit a villa of great interest, **Villa Cicogna Mozzoni**, where we shall be entertained to lunch by the Mozzoni family. This villa was transformed from a medieval hunting lodge into the retreat of a renaissance scholar-aristocrat, and little has changed since then. The gardens are utterly charming and are laid out mostly as a series of formal areas utilizing still water, framing hedges and some gently use of colour. There is also a more relaxed area where many fine roses roam freely over wall and hedge. The villa itself has some wonderful interiors from the renaissance quarters of the original hunting lodge to more formal, seventeenth century interiors. We then travel on to **Lake Como** for a stay of three nights at the 4* Hotel Belvedere in **Bellagio**. The hotel has an excellent swimming pool. The evening will be free.

Day 5: Wednesday 4 May - Our visits on Lake Como begin when we cross the lake from Bellagio to **Tremezzo**. **Villa Carlotta** is a Neo Classical gem which sits on the side of the steeply rising landscape, looking down on the lake. It contains a totally unexpected and superb collection of sculptures by Canova and many of his contemporaries. The gardens are laid out as a series of gently paced terraces and these should be ablaze with the Spring colour of azaleas and rhododendrons. There are also many fine trees and shrubs. We return to Bellagio where there will be some free time for lunch, which is not included. We then visit the nearby gardens of the **Villa Melzi**, another marvellous Neo Classical building (this part of the lake was much favoured by Milan's "great and good" in the early nineteenth century) where the park offers shady lake-side groves, with fine specimen trees and shrubs and a remarkable private mausoleum chapel. The evening will be free.

Day 6: Thursday 5 May – In the morning we cross the Lake and then drive town the western shore to visit **Villa Pizzo**. Formerly the summer villa of the Austrian Viceroys who ruled from Milan, the Counts Pizzo have transformed the formal gardens with much English-style planting laid out along a long, lakeside frontage – truly enchanting!. After some free time in **Cernobbio** for lunch, which is not included (some might like to try the magnificent Villa d'Este?!), we travel back up the lake to visit **Villa Balbianello**: setting, villa, the art collections and gardens – for many it is as close to Paradise as one could wish. We return to Bellagio and later that evening we shall have our final dinner in an excellent local restaurant.

Day 7: Friday 6 May - Our last visit of the week will be to **Villa Sommi-Picenardi** where the family will host us for lunch amidst their stuccoed rooms and marvellous terraced gardens. We then continue on to Milan Malpensa for our flight early evening flight with BA to London Heathrow.

PRACTICALITIES

Price £1995

Deposit £200

Price without flights £1795

Single Supplement £399 (Double for Sole Use)

Optional Supplements Lake View Aminta – first come basis for Lake View. Junior Suite with Lake View £330
Lake View Belvedere - Classic £90, Superior £150 Deluxe £210

Hotel 6 nights with Breakfast as follows: 3 nights at the 5* Hotel Villa Arminata on Lake Maggiore & 3 nights at the 4* Hotel Belvedere on Lake Como

Tour Manager James Hill

Flights British Airways

Outward: **BA562** Depart London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1200** arrive Milan (Linate) **1505**

Return: **BA567** Depart Milan (Malpensa) **1855** arrive London Heathrow (Terminal 5) **1955**

Price includes 2 Dinners & 3 Lunches with water, wine & coffee, all local transfers, entry fees & gratuities

Not included Travel to & from Heathrow, 4 Dinners and 3 Lunches.

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