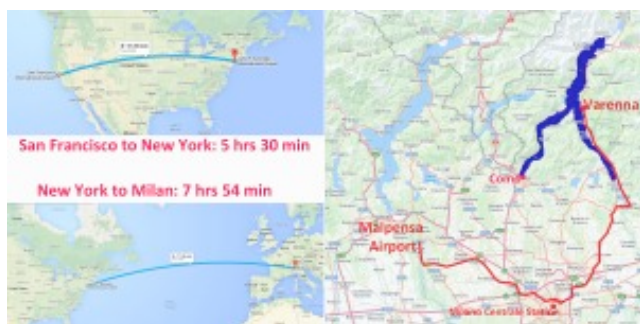


Varenna, 2015: We're Back — This Time It's Different



American Airlines brought us to New York, where we stayed overnight. Then -- back on the plane to Milan. This is our sixth visit to Varenna, but this time it is different. This time Gretta and I have two old friends with us, Lew and Rita Bell -- well, uh, I hope they will pardon the expression "*old friends*" . . . it's not that they are *old*, not exactly, I mean, same age as me, you know, we've been friends for a long time, through a lot, you know: **Old Friends**, right? The point is that on this return to Varenna, they were with us and, borrowing a line from Robert Frost, "that has made all the difference."



I met Lew in the dorm at Santa Clara University back before . . . well . . . back before Richard Nixon was elected to a career of making "one thing perfectly clear," almost a full year before *Woodstock* and *Abbey Road*, and before I had any idea what it might mean to have a 'brother.' Gretta and I had been telling Lew and Rita about this tiny village we keep visiting on Lake Como in northern Italy since our first visit in 2001.

Finally, they decided that they needed to go with us, perhaps to verify that we had not been exaggerating the sweetness of this place (take a look at "*The Sweetness of Doing Nothing — Il Dolce Far Niente*" at: <http://convivio-online.net/?p=271>).

So, that was that. They were going with us. We are thrilled that we made it so.

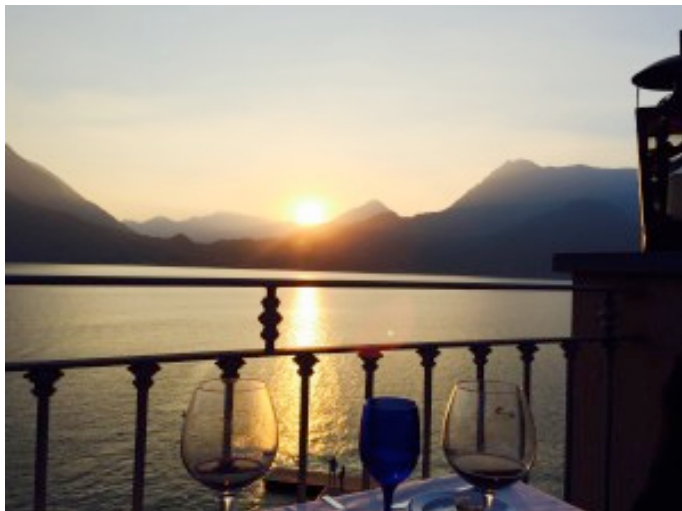
After landing at Malpensa International Airport, we took the usual 63-minute train ride from *Milano Centrale* train station to *Varenna/Esina/Perledo* station. That is usually an easy process, but this time *Milano Centrale* was quite a bit more of a complication than usual. With so many people (millions, they say) in town for the World Expo here in Milan, it took some effort to board the train even with our advance-purchased tickets. But, once we got on board, the view of the Italian countryside along the way was as delightful as ever; so we're not complaining. Once in Varenna, *Albergo Milano*, our 'home' in Varenna, is only a few minutes from the train station (OK, so is everything else in Varenna) and, as we approached our little 'street,' just a narrow stone alleyway (pictured here), everything seems to be just as we left it. The 'streets' that are parallel with the lakefront are alleyways like the one on the left. The 'streets' perpendicular to the lake are stone stairways, like the one on the right.



After a rest, it was time to achieve our first major goal: dinner at Egidio's *La Vista* restaurant at our usual dinner table on our own terrace at *Albergo Milano*. The food and the wine? Well, Egidio's kitchen is still terrific.



As is typical in this part of Italy, the dinner table is yours all night, so we enjoyed the evening mist, a spectacular sunset, and the sounds of music as the stars came out. Click on the link below for a few seconds of [Dinner at LaVista](http://convivio-online.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Dinner_at_LaVista.mov). http://convivio-online.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Dinner_at_LaVista.mov

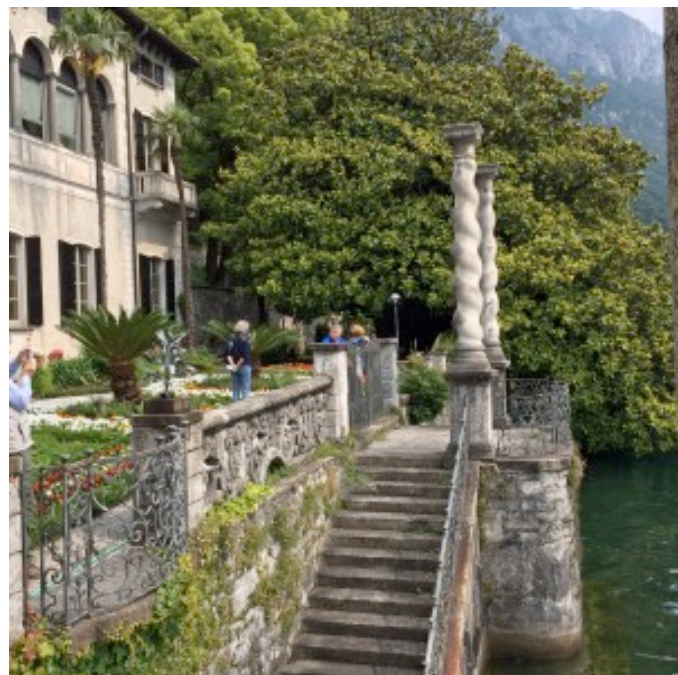


The following night, just about twenty yards down our 'street,' we found another sweet dinner table at *Borgovino*. They put us 'out in the street,' eh? (Do I detect a bottle of French Rosé from Provence on the dinner table? Shhhhh!



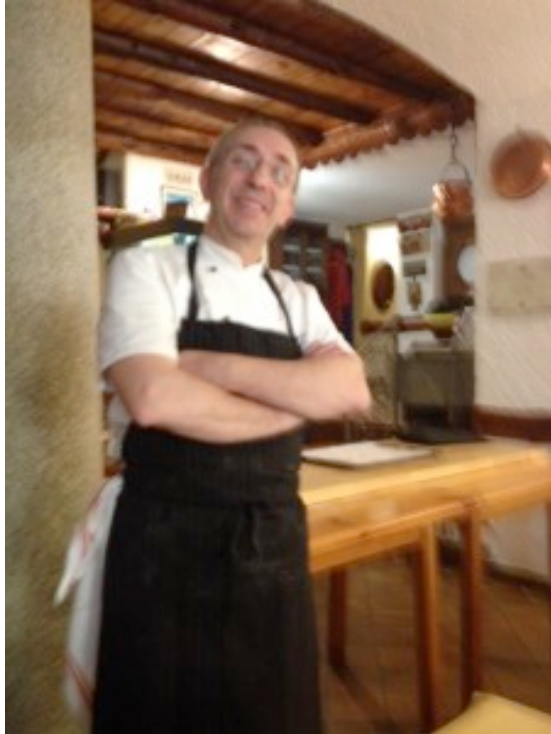
Villa Monastero

Of the many beautiful places here around what they call 'mid-lake,' we also spent an afternoon wandering the length of Villa Monastero, along the southern edge of Varenna. Here are a couple of images (that's Lew at the top of the ancient stone stairs).



Moreno's Cooking Class at Il Caminetto

Gretta and Rita spent an afternoon at Moreno's cooking class up the hill at his restaurant. *Il Caminetto* is located on a winding one-lane road up the hill behind Varenna. They drive to Varenna's town square to pick up their guests, because they don't trust tourists to negotiate this road successfully (once you get on this road you can see why this is a wise decision). Moreno taught them everything one needs to know about tortellini.



Click to hear a bit of [Moreno's Lesson](http://convivio-online.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IMG_1865.mov) about the history of Italian noodles (warning: it's shocking).
http://convivio-online.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/IMG_1865.mov



Rita, already a storied chef, tries her hand at making tortellini. And click here for a bit of Rita video:

http://convivio-online.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Rita_makes_tortellini.mov

And the product:



And, of course, Bellagio

The original Bellagio (not the fake one in Las Vegas) -- just a fifteen-minute ferry ride across the water.





Lew & Rita (left) at lunch outdoors at Albergo Firenze in Bellagio; Gretta (right) expressing surprise at having wine from southern France (our next stop) here in Italy.



So, after five days, we say goodbye to Varenna and board a high-speed train to Antibes on the French Riviera. Our next installment of *ConVivio* will come from southern France.

See you there.