



# LUXURY AND HISTORY ON LAKE GARDA

Tucked away in seclusion on the shores of Lake Garda in Gargnano - described by the writer D.H. Lawrence as "one of the most beautiful places on earth", stands out a 1892 neo-gothic mansion, formerly summer Villa of Italy's Feltrinelli family, went down to history as the official residence of Benito Mussolini during the years of the Repubblica di Salò, from 1943 to 1945. Bob Burns, the founder of Regent International Hotels and devotee of elegant hotels, recently turned this Villa into a charming

hotel with a very unique appeal. Noted as a bold innovator in the hospitality industry, Bob Burns has redefined travellers' expectations of luxury hotels. Having opened the Regent Hong Kong in 1980, he introduced the large, ultra-luminous marble bathroom to the hotel industry and made sure that each Regent Hotel followed suit (including the Four Seasons Hotel New York, Bali and Milan which were Regent Hotels while under construction). Looking forward, Burns believes that the small, highly distinctive hotel that creates an environment of comfort and relaxation will become the preference of experienced travellers in the years to come. After five years of restoration at a price tag of \$30 million, Villa Feltrinelli features exquisite accommodations

complete with state-of-the-art sound systems that reflect its new owner's passion for music. The hotel also offers fine dining, an outdoor swimming pool hea-



ted at 27 degrees, a lawn for concerts, a croquet green, and ancient limonaia structure, an excursion boat and, of course, immediate access to all the

pleasures of Lake Garda and its surroundings. The villa, visible only from Lake Garda, embraces the fairy-tale look of an "Italian castle" brightly painted in



Venetian gold and terra cotta, with scalloped pediments and turrets adorning the structure. Scattered throughout the well-manicured grounds are four individual guesthouses and a limonaia protecting a grove of lemon trees. While the dramatic exterior creates a strong impression when guests enter through the wrought iron gates, the elegant interiors embodying all the spirit style and elegance of a family home are equally impressive. At Villa Feltrinelli, Burns has also carried the more typical services and amenities of a luxury hotel one step further. Each room offers an LCD television screen, with a DVD/VCR player on request. The hotel's bath-

rooms are supplied with a pump system providing the best water pressure in the area, and the hotel features a "four-pipe system" for heating and cooling the property on demand, thus making the Villa the only historical property in Italy with this system. They also have heated marble floors, gigantic deluge shower heads in luxurious Ketcham shower stalls, Lefroy-Brooks nickel-plated bathroom fixtures, a Jacob Delafon cast-iron French triple-porcelain bathtub, builtin cabinetry to comfortably contain personal items and Italy's legendary Acqua di Parma toiletries. In the tradition of elegant turn-of-the-century homes, Burns has revi-



ved the service of a personal butler to unpack guests' luggage for those who desire it. The task of creating an ambience of the summer home of a privileged Italian family with a penchant for travel and discovery was the responsibility of Pamela Babey, of the San Francisco design firm Babey Moulton Jue and Booth. Babey and her team respected the history of the villa and worked within the parameters dictated by the Italian Historic Preservation authorities. In Italy, a historic property, when sold, still contains the original furnishings which are required to stay within the home itself or be donated to a museum. All furnishings must be documented and restoration kept in character with the original style. Babey was inspired by a magnificent original structure that contains 17 intricately painted ceilings, priceless frescoes, an imposing marble staircase flanked by 10 - foot-high 18th century gilded mirrors (gifts from the Borghese Palace in Rome) and stunning stained glass windows: a two-years long restoration task that became a labour of love for eight Italian women, recent graduates of Italy's finest art schools. Restoration was also carefully carried out on 70 pieces of original furnishings.





With these as her foundation, Babey created a cleverly eclectic, luxurious "family home" retreat showcasing the very finest quality materials, yet dotted with original historic artefacts and often surprising whimsical objects of art.

**Interna Contract** have been asked to supply the entire furniture array, soft furnishings also included, along with lighting, accessories and so on: over 2000 different items, among which a number of rare period

furniture pieces, which they at Interna Contract have most accurately restored. Each guestroom at Villa Feltrinelli embodies a unique personality, is painted in a distinct colour and sprinkled with original antiques from the original family home. Seven guestrooms in the main villa feature fresco ceilings hand-painted in the 1890's by the Lieti brothers. The Villa's 13 rooms -between 450 and 700 square feet, two of them with terraces - have a rightful claim to



grandeur and sophisticated charm. The guesthouses have a wonderful Italian country charm and outdoor patios perfect for gatherings.

The Casa dei Fiori, a the three-storeyed guesthouse, offers two one bedroom suites, averaging between 850 and 1500 square feet and an additional single guestroom.

The Casa Rustica features three guestrooms averaging 500 square feet. The ground floor unit with a beautiful wooden per-

gola covers the outdoor patio. The top two floors offer rat views of the lake. La Limonaia is a one three-storeyed unit offering one bedroom, a sitting room and a large outdoor covered patio. Averages 800 square feet. Bob's Boathouse is a two-storeyed house with an equipped kitchen, dining area, living room with fireplace and outdoor patio, averages 1600 square feet; on the second floor the bedroom has a private outdoor terrace.

Personal details such as silver

picture frames filled with old black and white prints of Lake Gsrda and famous names and faces from the early 1900's can also be found in each room.

In fact, in one eerily ironic twist, a photo taken by Inge Feltrinelli, the last owner's wife, and found in the home shows Winston Churchill exiting a New York co-op building. When Burns saw the photo, he realized that Churchill was exiting the building where he currently resides in Manhattan.

