

VOGUE

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JUNE 2018

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HRH Princess Hayfa Bint Abdullah Al Saud

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THE SAUDI ISSUE

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Invisible VENICE



Escape the crowds of the biennale's galas and exhibitions to the Venetian Lagoon's oasis of serene style and native sustenance

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In *Invisible Cities*, novelist Italo Calvino describes a meeting arranged by an Arab trader between Marco Polo and Kublai Khan. Like Scheherazade, the Venetian explorer charms the Mongol emperor with story after fantastic story of the cities he's seen. When the Great Khan asks his guest why he never speaks of his native Venice, Polo answers: "Every time I describe a city, I am saying something about Venice."

Cities have as many versions as there are people to tell them. One's Paris is extravagant and romantic, another's is pouty and poetic. Nowhere is this more apparent than Venice, whose empire knew it could conquer more with seduction than intimidation. The Renaissance predecessor to New York, Singapore, and Dubai – Venice is enchantment.

Never more so than in summer. Amid the light glinting off the Grand Canal's gondolas and the Lido's beaches, for more than a century Venice has hosted its celebrity and fashion-packed biennales and film festival. This summer is no different, with headliners of architecture, theater, dance, and cinema filling the city from April to November.

Which also creates a problem: La Serenissima is anything but. Venice is drowning in its glory, swamped by the love of visitors in the tens of millions. They overwhelm the resident population, now a quarter of its former size. It is no wonder the title of this year's architecture biennale is FREESPACE.

But there is another Venice: a native's Venice invisible to the crowds on Piazza San Marco. A few minutes ride in a mahogany speedboat from the red carpets and black-tie balls, you'll have hidden treasures to yourself, sleep in elegant simplicity, and dine in private utopias surrounded by silent, endless skies. It reminds us that the Queen of the Adriatic is neither the only, nor even the original star to light the lagoon, whose northern reaches offer cultural and culinary riches.

The Veneti settled Torcello island around 1 500 years ago, two centuries before the Venetian Republic. Its importance as a trading center still resonates in the towering 11th-century cathedral with gold-leaf and glass mosaics influenced by Anatolia, the Levant, and beyond. On Torcello's lush farms and estates, grand palaces and public buildings stood, before they were relocated stone by stone to Venice. Here, in the sculpture-filled garden of a villa, Gianluca and Matteo Bisol discovered three vines of rare, rich Dorona grapes – the "Golden Grape" – thought lost forever in the flood of 1966.

"My father was surprised to see grapes grow in soil soaked with seawater," Matteo Bisol remembers. "We knocked on the door and the owner gave us a tour. That's when we saw the Dorona vines." That discovery became Venissa, a Michelin-star restaurant anchoring a concept of simple, sustainable luxury dedicated to enriching the local culture, cuisine, and ecosystem. In a 15th century convent on neighboring Mazzorbo island, Venissa is a walled paradise of grape and vegetable gardens, gourmet dining, and a design hotel. Working with local artisans, they created an installation of 60 gold-leaf Murano glass bottles for the 2017 art biennale's Luxus pavilion.

Venissa's chef, Francesco Brutto, a native of nearby Treviso, creates dishes rooted in local ingredients and tradition. Finely crusted sardines drizzled with vinegar-marinated onions provide a posh take on meals that fishermen pickled for long trips at sea. Amberjack, shellfish, rabbit, and beetroot are other staples

in Brutto's flavorful, colorful cooking. Nothing goes to waste. "The restaurant throws away less than my family of three," Bisol says, explaining how whole fish becomes reductions and sauces, and how vegetable peels roasted with squid ink make dramatic, delicious chips.

Over a wooden footbridge, on Burano island, Venissa's Casa Burano comprises renovated homes tucked in narrow lanes beside the locals. Thirteen casual-chic rooms offer canopy beds, vast bathrooms, and one unexpected luxury: the privilege to discover the island after hours. A popular excursion from Venice, Burano is known for exquisite lace and bright-colored houses. It hasn't escaped its sister's buzz. But with few accommodations, by teatime the masses have left it to its relaxed residents. Spend the night and you're one of them.

In the morning, explore the lagoon's polished jade backwaters. Flamingos, swans, and pelicans flock between tall grasses and far horizons. Channels accessible only by rowboat give rare glimpses of fishermen's shacks, crowded only with crab traps and smiling cats, protected from Instagrammers by neighborly devotion.

Back in Burano's lace museum, see how this delicate nature inspired masterpieces born 500 years ago from the intricacy of Arabian embroidery and fretwork. Originally a hobby for noblewomen, it drew the attention of Leonardo da Vinci. Louis XIV was crowned in Burano lace and brought its artisans to teach their rivals in Alençon and Chantilly. Today, Emilia Burano, one of the most respected names in this most venerated home of the craft, furnishes clients like Uma Thurman and the Sultan of Brunei with translucent cashmere shawls embroidered with silk, and bed, bath, and table linens for private jets, yachts, and hotels including Venice's Cipriani.

Creative director Lorenzo Ammendola recalls humbler days, playing outside the exclusive Locanda Cipriani restaurant while his

grandmother sold her stitchings from a folding table to glamorous foreign customers. Today, it's Ammendola's family who welcome diners at their own waterfront gourmet restaurant, Riva Rosa, where one very special table for two overlooks Burano's rooftops in complete privacy.

"I work with my heart in the past and my head in the future," Ammendola says over lunch of scallops, artichoke, and risotto (his grandmother's recipe), describing Emilia Burano's perhaps most unpredictable collaboration: with Aston Martin. "We share a passion for handmade," he says, "and a knowledge of how Aston Martin clients live. It's about capturing the emotional essence of high-performance luxury rather than making a derivative of automotive design." They refine the cotton seven times, sourced from a small farm near Giza, Egypt, where the workers wear white to minimize the risk of imperfections.

That collaboration led to others – a supercar body with Alfa Romeo, hotel interiors, exterior styling for mega-yachts – and the creation of Loram Design studio. "I had to differentiate the business because I couldn't do all that in the name of the lace," Ammendola explains, "but I could not have done any of it without what lacemaking taught me about detail and aesthetics."

As tourists wait for the departing *vaporetti*, pink twilight falls and the forest of souvenir stands disappears and sandwich shops switch off their lights. The piazzas gurgle quietly around trattoria tables, music, and neighborhood gossip echoing down the black-glass canals, although Ammendola says things used to be more vibrant here. Despite tourism's bounty, like Venice, Burano faces the challenge of people leaving to live on terra firma, as islanders call the mainland.

But the enterprising spirit of the Venetian lagoon has deep roots and, like their ancestors, people like Ammendola and Venissa's Bisol family see a city of opportunity. "The businesses now mainly cater to day-trippers," Matteo Bisol says. "But when you stay overnight, you eat fish from the local catch and fresh produce from the local farmers. You contribute to life here. A new restaurant has opened. It gives people a reason to stay. In Venice, you add to the problem," he says. "Here, you help solve one." □

“When you stay overnight, you eat fish from the LOCAL CATCH and fresh produce from the farmers”

Exploring the Venice Architecture Biennale

IN A CITY WHERE EVERY SQUARE METER IS METICULOUSLY PLANNED, THE VENICE ARCHITECTURE BIENNALE STUDIES THE CONCEPT OF FREE SPACE, QUESTIONING IT AND ITS QUALITY WITH OPEN SPACES AND VIA THE ABSENCE OR APPLICATION OF ARCHITECTURE. THE 63 NATIONAL PAVILIONS INCLUDE FIRST-TIME PARTICIPATING COUNTRIES SAUDI ARABIA AND LEBANON. DON'T MISS THESE EPHEMERAL STRUCTURES, OPEN UNTIL NOVEMBER 26 IN THE GIARDINI AND ARSENALE VENUES. LABIENNALE.ORG



SPECIAL PROJECTS FORTE MARGHERA WILL HOST EVENTS MASTERMINDED BY RINTALA AND EGGERTSSON ARCHITECTS THAT INVITE THE PUBLIC TO MOVE FREELY WITHIN THE SPRAWLING SPACE. MEANWHILE, THE APPLIED ARTS PAVILION IN THE SALE D'ARMI IN THE ARSENALE FOCUSES ON SOCIAL HOUSING WITH THE ROBIN HOOD GARDENS. COMPLETED IN 1972, IT IS THE FRUIT OF A COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE BIENNALE AND THE V&A MUSEUM IN LONDON. THE V&A ACQUIRED A PORTION OF THE ESTATE, BRINGING IT TO VENICE TO STUDY THE BRUTALIST SOCIAL HOUSING PROJECT.



FAR LEFT AND ABOVE THE LEBANESE PAVILION **LEFT** THE SAUDI PAVILION **RIGHT** ROBIN HOOD GARDENS IN LONDON



1 PIAZZA SAN MARCO 2 RIVA ROSA WATERFRONT RESTAURANT AND ACCOMMODATION ON THE ISLAND OF MAZZORBO 3 VENISSA RESTAURANT AND ACCOMMODATION ON THE ISLAND OF MAZZORBO 4 THE BELMOND HOTEL CIPRIANI 5 SANTA FOSCA ON TORCELLO ISLAND 6 THE LACE MUSEUM IN BURANO 7 VENICE HAS 177 CANALS SNAKING THROUGH THE CITY 8 CASA BURANO COMPRISES FIVE HOUSES ONCE OCCUPIED BY FISHERMEN AND LACE MAKERS



VOGUE

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