

Once upon a lake

Owned by the same Italian noble family since the 1700s, the **Villa Sola Cabiati** in Tremezzo on Lake Como is filled with objects dripping with history.

By Freya Herring Photographed by Paul Barbera



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THIS PAGE: in the Sala Degli Stucci, the main fresco by Francesco Conegiani depicts Virgil's Aeneid; the ornate stucco is by Murzio Canzio. OPPOSITE PAGE: view of Lake Como from Villa Soldati, with La Grigna mountain in the background.

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THIS PAGE: the front façade of the 16th-century villa. OPPOSITE PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: the lobby walls are covered in frescos; balberds (weapons behind drums) from the 1571 Battle of Lepanto; breakfast is served in the dining room; one of the bedrooms in the exclusive villa.



In the 1932 movie *Grand Hotel*, Great Garbo seeks to entice her lover with the words, “We’ll go to Tremezzo. I have a villa there. The sun will shine... We’ll be happy and lazy.” We can’t all be like Garbo, sporting a villa in Tremezzo — one of Lake Como’s most exclusive villages — but we can get a taste now that the lake’s most prestigious hotel, the **Grand Hotel Tremezzo**, has added the **Villa Sola Cabiati** to its portfolio. The six-bedroom villa is now the hotel’s most luxurious suite, frequented by royalty and Hollywood stars.

“The **Villa Sola Cabiati** is one of the great, iconic villas on Lake Como,” says Valentina De Santis, whose family owns the **Grand**

Hotel Tremezzo. “Lake Como is dotted everywhere with beautiful villas, but few of them have special historical value. Most of them are now open to the public, but the **Villa Sola Cabiati** is not one of them — it’s the only one that has always remained private.”

Built in the 16th century, the villa was renovated by the noble Serbelloni family when they purchased it in the 1700s. It has remained in the family ever since. “When they acquired it they added two wings, upgraded the façade, and added the marvellous Italian gardens that are in front of the villa,” explains De Santis. “They also called in important Italian artists — the frescos are from the school of [Giovanni Battista] Tiepolo.” »



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THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM RIGHT: *the villa's pool; guests can enjoy boat trips on Lake Como as part of their stay; the property from the rear.*
OPPOSITE PAGE: *the Sala Degli Stucchi offers views overlooking the lake.*

« Walking through the gardens and into the villa, you enter into a lobby dripping with grandeur — ornate stucco and pastel-toned frescos are surrounded by antique furniture. Upstairs, overlooking the lake, the Sala Degli Stucchi features frescos on the walls and ceiling that depict Virgil's Aeneid. Here, guests enjoy long, lingering lunches with windows wide open to the glistening blues of the lake. The rest of the afternoon might be spent lazing by the pool set among the rambling Tuscan-style gardens behind the villa. When you stay here, everything is covered — including your own private chef and a boat for trips around the lake.

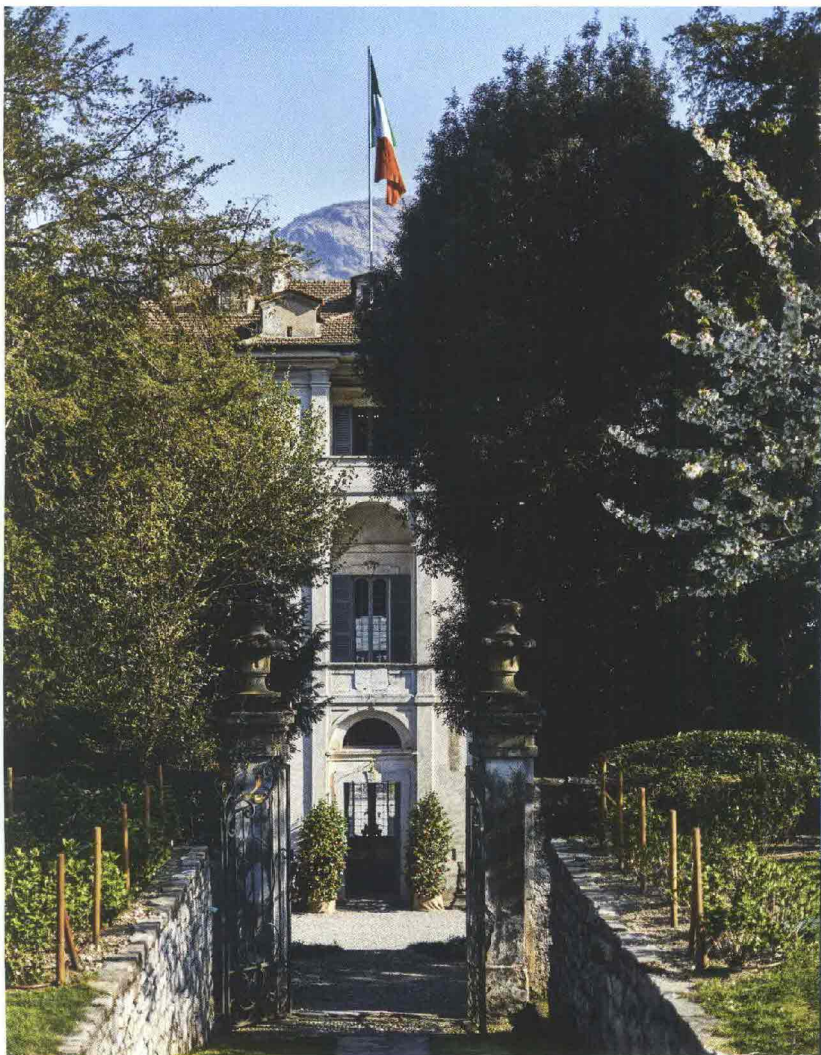
The villa possesses private museum rooms that can be explored with a guide. A highlight is a bed that once belonged to Napoleon Bonaparte, whose bedroom was moved to the villa in its entirety from the Serbelloni family's Milanese residence during

World War II. "One night, hiding everything, they moved all the furniture from Napoleon's bedroom in Palazzo Serbelloni," De Santis recounts. "Shortly afterwards that wing was bombed and completely destroyed. They saved it." Even the clothes of Napoleon's wife, Joséphine de Beauharnais, remain, tenderly folded in a chest.

Every object and room seems to tell a story — from the halberds used at the Battle of Lepanto and black Pietro Giovanni Mantegazza violins played at the 1780 funeral of Holy Roman Empress Maria Theresa, to the perfectly preserved upper apartments of poet Giuseppe Parini and mathematician-cum-astronomer Paolo Frisi, who spent their summers tutoring the child Gian Galeazzo Serbelloni. Each of today's guest suites projects its own personality — some feature walls lined with silk; some are bright and uplifting, others are dark and sombre.

For De Santis, the villa offers something few hotels can. "Staying at the villa means you take a step back in time; to really live like 200 years ago. The villa breathes its history everywhere, and you are living that history." *VL*

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