

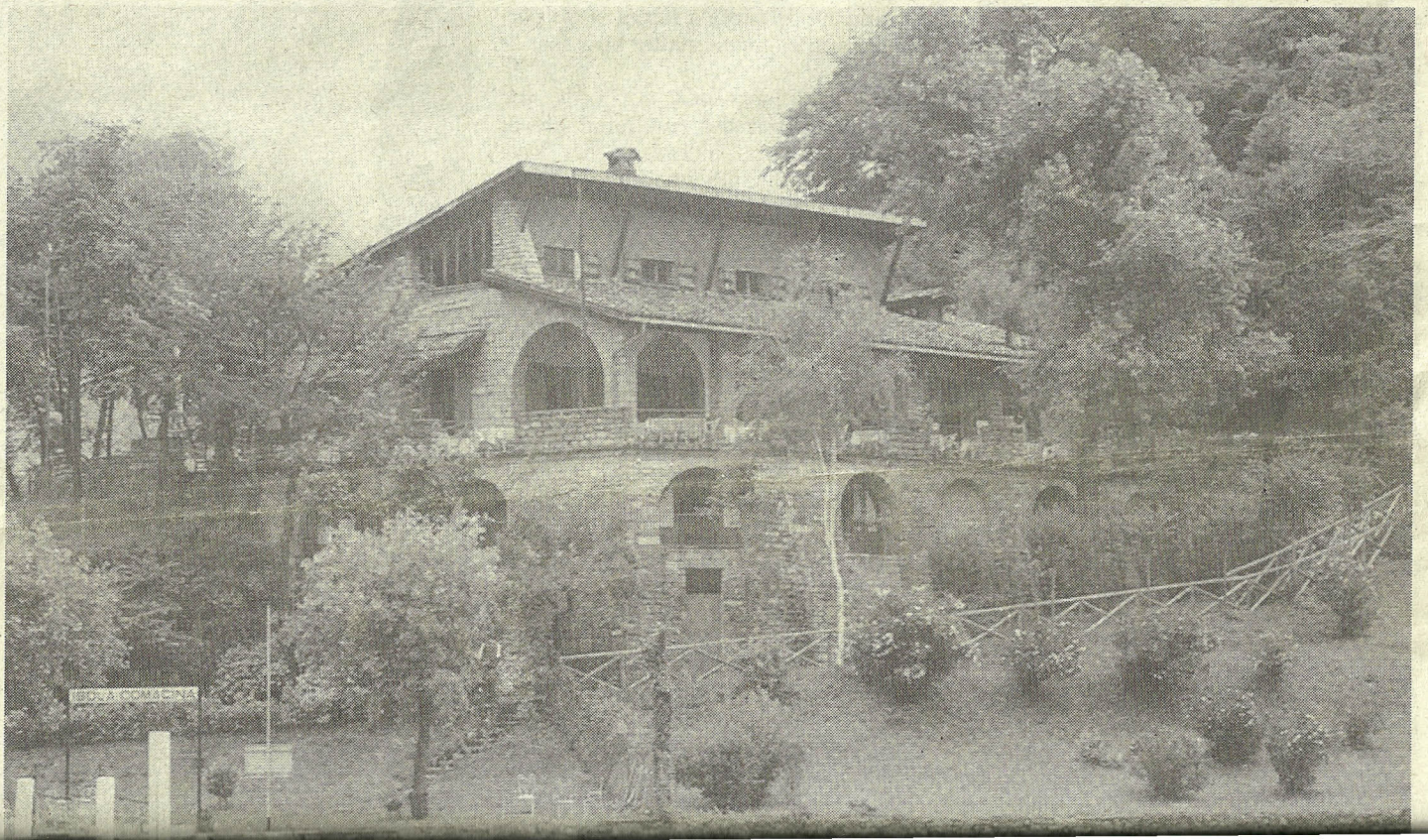
Food, Wine & Travel

THE ENCHANTING TRADITIONS OF LOCANDA DELL'ISOLA COMACINA

Editor's Note: The *Italian Tribune* Publisher's Tour of Italy continues to the Lake Region. Here, we visit Lake Como and the tiny island of Comacina, home to a very special restaurant called *Locanda dell'Isola Comacina*.

COMACINA, ITALY - As their tiny boat departs from Bellagio, those who have never visited Comacina have yet to discover the delights that lie ahead. Upon arrival at the island, which is virtually uninhabited and serves only as the setting for the Locanda restaurant, an inn, and several small buildings, visitors have a grand view of the surrounding Lake Como - a picturesque body of water located in Northern Italy not far from the Italian Alps.

Locanda dell'Isola Comacina is a dining spot unlike any other. The restaurant serves only one menu, six days a week. This is the very same menu that visitors have enjoyed since 1947 - not one change has been made in over 50 years. Owner Benvenuto Puricelli was born on the mainland in Sala Comacina and began a career in the restaurant business in 1963. He left Italy for several years, living and working at the Palace Hotel in St. Moritz, Switzerland; participating in the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Kingdom at



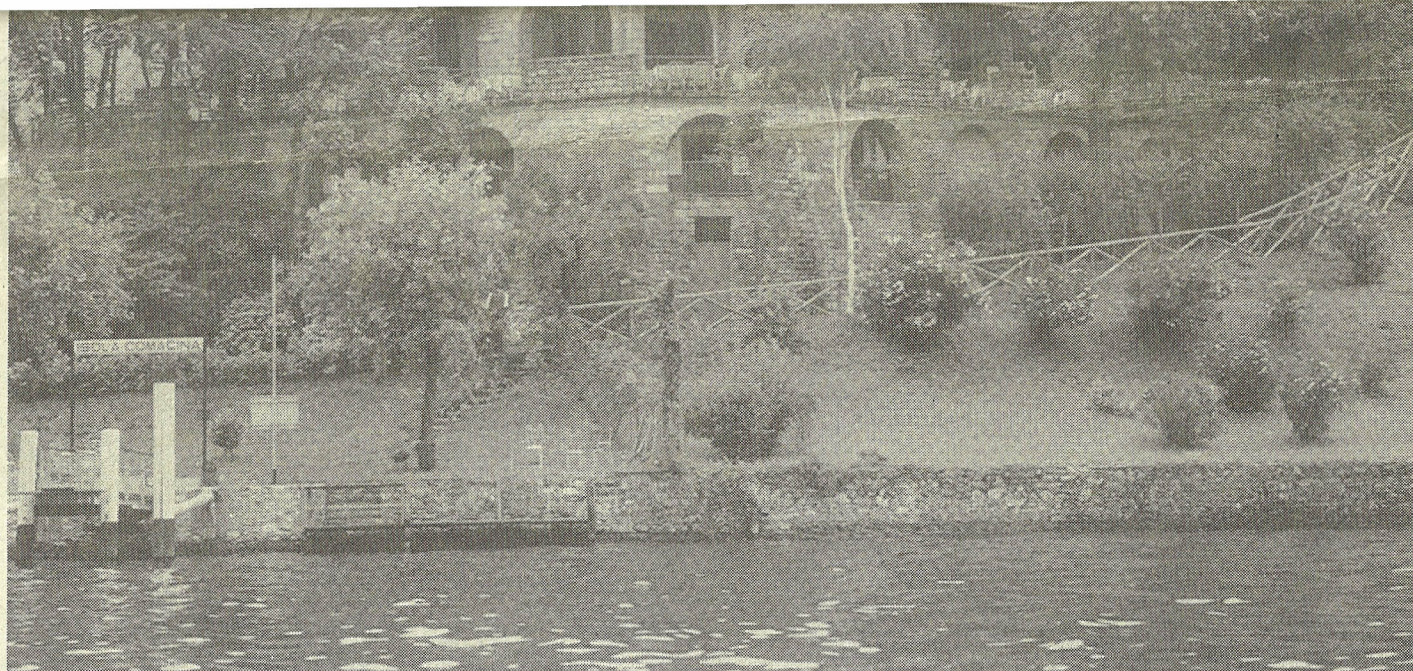
Locanda restaurant, an inn, and several small buildings, visitors have a grand view of the surrounding Lake Como - a picturesque body of water located in Northern Italy not far from the Italian Alps.

Locanda dell'Isola Comacina is a dining spot unlike any other. The restaurant serves only one menu, six days a week. This is the very same menu that visitors have enjoyed since 1947 - not one change has been made in over 50 years. Owner Benvenuto Puricelli was born on the mainland in Sala Comacina and began a career in the restaurant business in 1963. He left Italy for several years, living and working at the Palace Hotel in St. Moritz, Switzerland; participating in the 2500th anniversary of the Persian Kingdom at Persopolis; and cooking as executive chef at the Penthouse Club in London. He returned to Italy in 1976, where he settled in Comacina and succeeded Lino "Cotoletta" Nessi as proprietor of the Locanda restaurant.

The menu at Locanda is simple and nearly perfect, featuring typical, authentic regional dishes that vary only slightly with the seasons (the restaurant is closed every year from November 1 through March 1). Every dish is all-you-can-eat, and a white D.O.C. wine is served with the meal.

The first course is Antipasto all'Isolana. Each guest is served a slice of tomato, topped by a slice of lemon and seasoned with salt, oil, and oregano. Then, eight different fresh vegetables are paraded out of the kitchen - celery, carrots, baked onions, sweet peppers, courgettes, beans, broccoli, and French beans. Slices of Prosciutto di Praga and Bresaola della Valtellina (salted beef dried in special cellars) are heaped on a separate plate.

For the second course, Trota alla



LOCANDA DELL'ISOLA COMACINA, one of northern Italy's best eateries, is nestled on a gorgeous island in the middle of Lago di Como, Italy. The tiny island of Comacina is shrouded in local legend, having been cursed in 1127 by a mysterious poet, and since surviving numerous sieges and conquests throughout the years. Today, visitors to the island are enchanted by its beauty and by its haunting past.

Contrabbandiera, the chef serves fresh trout grilled on a hot plate over charcoal. The trout is boned and dressed at the client's table or in the kitchen.

Next is Rottami di Pollo in Padella, free-range chicken opened and "crushed," and then fried in an iron pot with oil. The chicken is served with salad.

The fourth course is called Grana all'Escavadora - a simple chunk of famous Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese. At the table, a piece of the cheese is cut from the middle of the wheel and given into

the hand of each dinner guest.

For dessert, guests are served Arance alla Castellana. Oranges are sliced at the table and served in an exquisite ice cream called *fior di vaniglia*. The entire dish is covered with *crème all'isolana*. The type of fruit served varies seasonally, usually peaches are substituted.

The meal's extraordinary finale is a Locanda tradition that is never broken. At the sound of a bell, Benvenuto himself enters the dining room adorned in a special wool cap. As he prepares the meal's finish-

ing touch in a large, copper pot at the table - coffee with brandy - he explains the legend of the island of Comacina.

According to local historians, the village of Comacina flourished and prospered even back during the period when the Lake Region was merely fjords of the Adriatic Sea. The Romans conquered the village and its inhabitants moved south, where they founded the two villages of Como and Vico - which eventually joined to form the present city of Como. (continued on page 26)

BROOKLYN & STATEN ISLAND
DINING GUIDE

PAGE 20

NYC'S LITTLE ITALY
Featuring Mulberry Street

PAGE 22

OUTSTANDING ITALIAN CUISINE
MANGIA BENE

PAGES 26 - 27

MANGIA BENE

OUR WEEKLY GUIDE TO FINE ITALIAN AMERICAN CUISINE

The Enchanting Traditions of Locanda dell'Isola Comacina

(continued from page 19)

Greeks arrived after the Romans, and when the Roman Empire converted to Christianity the early pagan temples built on the island were consecrated as churches. The five original churches on the island became a refuge for Christians and served as a fortress for the people when the Barbarians, hoping to conquer the region, wreaked havoc on the surrounding area. At this time, the Christian refugees began to build homes on the island and Comacina took the name Cristopolis, or "City of Christ."

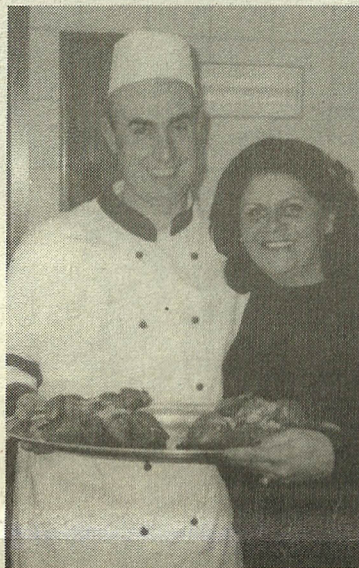
One of the refugees was the great Francilione, who fled to the island during the invasion of the Lombards. He brought with him a horde of treasure that he had been able to save from the vandalism of the Barbarians, but the treasure was soon coveted by Autharis, the husband of Theodolina, who directed his troops to besiege and conquer the island.

After six months of battle, Francilione surrendered to Autharis. Autharis granted peace and allowed Francilione to take refuge in Ravenna. The inhabitants of the island were spared massacre and were able to continue living on the land.

Throughout the years, numer-

Saint Domenica.

Little by little, Comacina's power continued to increase. During the famous Ten Years War, the island became Milan's ally in a struggle against Como. The island was, however, journeying to ruin and in 1127 an unknown poet known as "The Anonymous Cumano" cursed



CHEF ANTONIO OSTINELLI of Locanda dell'Isola Comacina presents the third course of his specially prepared dinner, *Rottami di Pollo in Padella*. He is pictured here with Marion

the island with the phrase, "Island, cursed by thou throughout the ages!"

Forty-two years later, Comacina was captured by Como, Queen of the Lake. Every fortification was destroyed, including the five churches and the island's castle. The inhabitants that survived the attack fled.

Years passed and grass invaded the ruins of the island, which passed from one ruler to another until it became property of the Bishop of Como in 1196. Later, Cardinal Durini attempted to recover Comacina from abandonment and turn it into a sort of earthly paradise. His noble quest failed.

Much later in 1911, Auguste Caprini of Sala Comacina purchased the last lot of land on the island, thus becoming the sole owner of Comacina. Upon his death, he bequeathed the land to King Albert I of Belgium. The little island was sacrificed with painful emotion during the sad years of World War I, but after the war Comacina was rightfully returned to Italy. In 1927 a royal decree placed the island under the rule of Princess Marie-José, daughter of Victor-Emmanuel III.

By this appointment, Comacina came to be governed by two



BENVENUTO PURICELLI, second-generation owner of the Locanda dell'Isola Comacina restaurant, is pictured during the end-of-dinner ritual. Adorned in a distinctive woolen cap, Puricelli recounts the legend of the mysterious island as he whips up an after dinner coffee for his guests after a symbolic ringing of the bell.

and allowed Francilione to take refuge in Ravenna. The inhabitants of the island were spared massacre and were able to continue living on the land.

Throughout the years, numerous dethroned kings and princes settled in Comacina, which had come to be known as an oasis of peace. Even saints settled on the island, as the quiet village was a perfect place to lead a life of meditation and prayer. Saint Abonde brought the Saint Euphemia cult to the island. Other religious iconic inhabitants include Saint Agrippa, Bishop of Como, and

CHEF ANTONIO OSTINELLI of Locanda dell'Isola Comacina presents the third course of his specially prepared dinner, **Rottami di Pollo in Padella**. He is pictured here with **Marion Fortunato**, wife of *Italian Tribune* Publisher **Buddy Fortunato**, who recently enjoyed a meal at the restaurant during the *Italian Tribune Tour of Italy*. Locanda, located on the island of Comacina, Italy, has been serving the same menu, six days a week, since 1947.

ly returned to Italy. In 1927 a royal decree placed the island under the rule of Princess Marie-José, daughter of Victor-Emmanuel III.

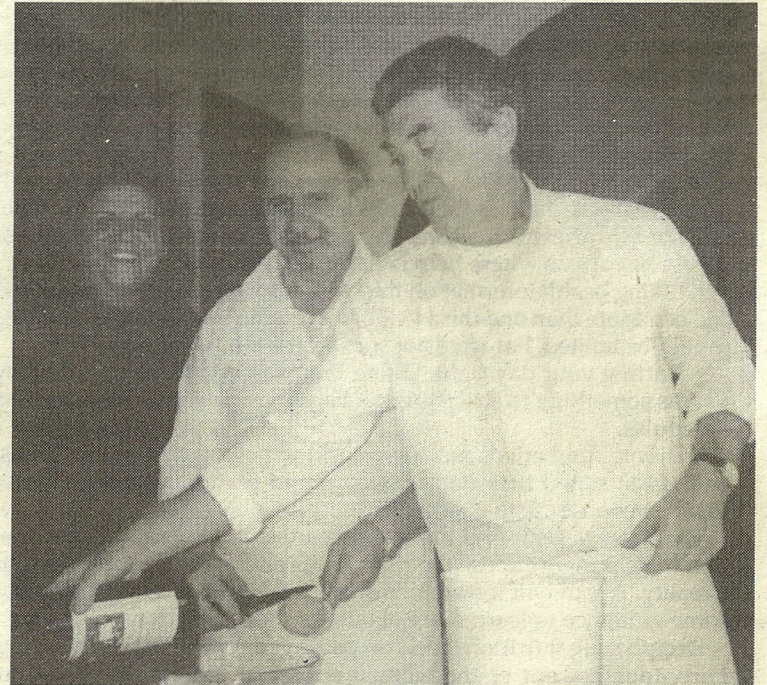
By this appointment, Comacina came to be governed by two commissions. The first, headed by the Minister of National Education and the Belgian ambassador, had its seat in Rome. The other, with its seat in Milan, was governed by the Fine Arts president and the Belgian consul, which proposed building homes on the island for Belgian and Italian artists. After the intervention of Eugene Brenna, the mayor of the island, three houses by the architect Pierino Lingeri were constructed.

Unfortunately, World War II prevented the completion of the project and the houses remained abandoned. It was only recently that the structures could resume their initial role, with help from the architect Paolo Candiani, President of the Fine Arts Academy.

An inn was completed during the mid-20th century, and since 1964 has offered peace to visitors. The flags of Italy and Belgium still fly outside the building. Today, Locanda restaurant owner Benvenuto continues to practice mysterious fire rituals to ward of the mysterious curse of The Anonymous Cumano.

Most recently, George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts and the rest of the cast of *Ocean's Twelve* visited Lake Como and Comacina after the completion

BENVENUTO PURICELLI, second-generation owner of the Locanda dell'Isola Comacina restaurant, is pictured during the end-of-dinner ritual. Adorned in a distinctive woolen cap, Puricelli recounts the legend of the mysterious island as he whips up an after dinner coffee for his guests after a symbolic ringing of the bell.



MARION FORTUNATO hopes to pick up some culinary secrets from the chefs at Locanda dell'Isola Comacina as they prepare a fantastic dessert tableside. The dish, *Arance alla Castella*, consists of fresh oranges, *fior di vaniglia* ice cream, and *crème all'isolana* liquor. Who knows, the dessert may just show up on a future Fortunatos' holiday table!

of the film. Their photos, along with photos of numerous other celebrities who have visited throughout the years, adorn the walls of the Locanda restaurant.

For more information, contact

Locanda dell'Isola Comacina by phone at 0344.55083 or by visiting the web site at www.locanda-isola-comacina.com. The restaurant is located at 22010 Sala Comacina, Lago di Como.

Ferrara's

Fine Italian Cuisine

OPEN

Tues-Sat 11:30am-9:30pm
Sun 12pm-9:00pm
CLOSED MONDAYS

www.ferrarascfe.com

MAJOR CREDIT CARDS ACCEPTED

518 ARNOLD AVE. • PT. PLEASANT BEACH

732.899.3900



*Steak • Seafood
Chicken • Pasta
Italian Pastries
& Delicacies*

*Little Italy Atmosphere in
Downtown Pt. Pleasant Beach*

UNCLE VINNIE'S

COMEDY CLUB

CALL FOR INFORMATION
ON OUR UPCOMING SHOWS
IN JANUARY

DINNER & COMEDY
SHOW PACKAGE

\$32.95/person
Reservation Required

COMEDY SHOW ONLY

Admission \$10.00/person
Reservation Strongly Recommended

DOORS OPEN AT 8:00 PM
SHOW STARTS AT 9:00PM

BYOB for Dinner and Show