

Hospitality



A Passion for Venice

An Interview with **Francesca Bortolotto Possati**,
President and Chief Executive Officer, **The Bauers**



Bauers Il Palazzo facade (left); the Royal Suite bedroom and living room (above)

EDITORS' NOTE In 1999, Francesca Bortolotto Possati, granddaughter of Arnaldo Bennati, became the Chairwoman and CEO of The Bauers Venezia.

COMPANY BRIEF The Bauers (www.bauerhotels.com) has set an exceptional hospitality in Venice since opening its doors in 1880. Originally, the hotel was known as the Bauer-Grünwald. Today, The Bauers is run by a third generation of the Bennati family. Completed in late 1999, The Bauers has been reconceived as a property with two unique personalities in one building: the Bauers L'Hotel, a luxury, five-star hotel in art-deco style with a contemporary look and feel; and the Bauers Il Palazzo, an opulent boutique hotel reconfirming its 18th-century identity while giving guests an opportunity to experience the life of Venetian palazzo living, with most rooms offering terrace views. In spring 2005, Possati made an additional restoration investment and added a new extension to The Bauers Hotel. This annex, the Bauers Casanova, is a 16th-century home next to The Bauers hotel, and allows guests the opportunity to choose the intimacy of an elegant, private residence with all the amenities of its five-star host. Possati also planned and implemented a careful restoration of a 16th century convent. The new Bauers Palladio Hotel & Spa is a relaxing retreat harmonizing the ancient structure with the wellness culture of today in a blend of large gardens, cool tones, and modern luxury with Venetian flair.



Francesca Bortolotto Possati

How has The Bauers evolved?

My grandfather built the contemporary hotel and at the end of the 1940s, the hotel opened its doors. It soon became a place where everybody met. He also maintained its tradition of being independent so as to use it as a point of business relations.

He passed away in the 1980s and I inherited The Bauers and other estates, and decided to take the challenge and reinvest and start after 20 years to make The Bauers as it used to be when my grandfather was alive. This meant not only a huge refurbishing – over \$100 million – but also conceiving a new identity and separating the hotel into two different properties with two entrances, two services, and two different feelings.

One is urban, located in the center of the city on the way to San Marco, and the other is more like a sophisticated boutique.

I started in 1999, and by 2001, everything was done. Immediately afterwards, I fell in love with another location.

I moved into the Giudecca Island next door to Cipriani, and consequently I added an old convent and turned it into a 50-room boutique property and slowly started getting a few other buildings within the three-acre garden space and the park for a total of 79 keys.

The last property I refurbished was Villa F, which was abandoned for 60 years and dates back to 1400. At the time, it was a private villa and then it became a chic pensione; now there are 11 residences with hotel service. It is completely gated with a pool and butler service.

Villa F offers the ultimate luxury in Venice. It is a true Venetian residence equipped with the comforts and services of a five-star hotel. The property overlooks Saint Mark's basin and is surrounded by a verdant garden. Guests can choose among one or more of the 11 beautifully restored residences located inside the villa. It features some of the best views of Venice, a meditation pool, and 24-hour butler service.

Do the properties complement each other?

They all have a different feeling and identity. The Bauers is urban; the Palazzo is a sophisticated Venetian palace; the Palladio is a resort with a beautiful spa and garden, and a slower pace; and the Villa F is exclusive in that it's long stay.

Being an interior designer of all of my properties, I undertook the concept and styles, enhancing the identities of each single property.

How much of a focus have you put on the food and beverage offering?

Having gourmet F&B in a five-star hotel is mandatory, but it's not necessary revenue; it can be marketing at some point. Venice is slightly different than other cities, because it's known for its typical chic trattorias, and there aren't many restaurants "with an 'R.'" I was one of the first to invest in a chef, and put an effort into having something beyond regular food.

So we try to offer something a bit different from typical Venetian cuisine.

It's a challenge to uphold since Venice cannot count on a big business market for lunch

and dinner, which is an economic value for a hotel restaurant.

With your clientele, do you need a spa offering?

I do believe strongly in having a spa. I was one of the first to conceive of a spa in the San Marco area at IL Palazzo, but it is only with the opening of Palladio Hotel & Spa resort that I embarked on creating a state-of-the-art 500-square-meter spa with eight treatment rooms and a panoramic relaxation room.

I did not choose to have a spa brand. I preferred to invest in highly trained therapists who can personalize treatments, only using products with carbon-neutral ingredients, so that our treatments make a unique experience more valuable.

Over the past five years, we had numbers going up by word-of-mouth and focused marketing based on our clients' knowledge of quality and value, which confirmed our strategy.

What is most important when it comes to hiring?

It can take quite some time to find a professional team that knows how to work together and be respectful of everyone's efforts and dedication, one that is focused on hitting the target and meeting deadlines. It is important to insist on the highest level of quality and to keep motivation high. Our training of the newer generations is designed to ensure that everyone's efforts are focused on meeting our goals.

Do you ever take time to reflect on what you have created?

I'm not just a hotelier – I'm an entrepreneur who likes to create emotional and cultural experiences through hotels. Of course, I am very proud and appreciate the achievements. Nevertheless, I believe this comes about via a consistency in your projects. I am always looking out for new challenges, and to investigate new places and have new adventures.

I became very involved in the art world over the past five years, commissioning several artists with installations for The Bauers spaces and gardens and, for two years, we have dedicated a historical XVI century space to host contemporary art on a temporary basis, like a pop-up gallery within the Palladio Hotel & Spa at the Giudecca. In February, the only Assouline shop in Italy is opening at The Bauers. So I'm always evolving to welcome different people, and interesting partnerships and sponsorships. ●