



A Grand Hotel

An Interview with **Valentina de Santis**,
Chief Executive Officer, Grand Hotel Tremezzo



Grand Hotel Tremezzo suite view (left); exterior (above)

EDITORS' NOTE *With broad experience in hospitality management and cultural entertainment, Valentina de Santis graduated from the University of Milan in 2007 after completing three years of Bachelor in Business Administration and two years for her Master of Science in General Management degree. Her family has owned the hotel since 1975, bringing traditional hospitality from her Italian family throughout the years. De Santis is viewed as an inspiring and strong woman leading the spirit behind the storied Lake Como hideaway in the hospitality industry and has been nominated among the top five hoteliers in the world by Virtuoso advisers in "Best of the Best Award: Best Hotelier of the Year 2014."*



Valentina de Santis

PROPERTY BRIEF *With over 100 years of history, the iconic Grand Hotel Tremezzo (grandhoteltremezzo.com) is located in the heart of Lake Como, with unparalleled views of Bellagio and the stunning Grigne mountains. This art nouveau landmark, which sits adjacent to Villa Carlotta's famed gardens, is an authentic Art Nouveau palace that offers a warm inviting welcome and the delights of a true five-star vacation. Guests will be inspired by the romantic setting of the hotel's "La Terrazza" restaurant, without a shadow of a doubt the most beautiful on Lake Como. Additional facilities include three swimming pools, the most exclusive private beach on Lake Como, and over 20,000 square meters of private grounds, as well as T Spa, which offers exclusive treatments by ESPA and over 1,000 square meters of space dedicated to each visitor's relaxation and well-being.*

Will you talk about the history and heritage of Grand Hotel Tremezzo?

Grand Hotel Tremezzo dates back to 1910, so it's more than 100 years old, and was designed from the first moment to be a grand hotel, versus many of our competitors that started as villas and were converted to hotels.

This dream of a building comes from our capital of Bellagio, which sits just in front of us. It was a very special moment for Lake Como when luxury tourists were first starting to hit this destination.

In Bellagio, our founders were already managing a few small hotels there that were hosting especially big travelers who were on grand tours of Europe. Our founders embarked on a tour of the European capitals on an amazing and very romantic tour, which were typical of the 19th century. When they came back, they really felt the need to build a grand hotel such as they saw in the European capitals.

For this reason, they bought the best piece of land on the lake, because of the incomparable views. It belonged

to Villa Carlotta, which is a historical villa and botanical gardens that is now next door to us. It enjoys the most dramatic views that can be experienced on Lake Como and is in the heart of the lake.

This hotel opened on July 10, 1910, after a few years of construction. It was an uber-luxury grand hotel and very modern for the time because the owner's wife was focused on that. She was keen on learning about all the latest trends in the world. The hotel itself had two lifts which, for the time, was very modern. It was also luxurious in every other aspect.

Our set-up today is going to be different from what we had because the guests that used to stay at our hotel – and we have proof of this from the diaries of the founders – did not stay for a few days in our hotel like our guests do now. They moved into the hotel for a month or more, with their family and staff, with horses and carriages, and with their trunks and beautiful dresses.

The founding family, whose name was Gandola, organized different activities every day for the guests and participated in these activities themselves. They would bring them up to a mountain with staff or bring them out on the lake with boats, or organize activities in the hotel like roller skating. We were also one of the few hotels with tennis courts at the time, so we had a tennis teacher. They also organized parties every night.

Our guests were aristocrats from Europe. We hosted the Pope, as well. Many very rich families from Milan came here to spend the summer. It was a period of maximum splendor for the hotel.

The family kept the hotel for more than 10 years, but after the first World War, the wife got

ill and passed away. They had three children, so they didn't want to keep running the hotel without her. They sold it to a family from Milan that was not involved in the business before and they behaved in a completely different way; they weren't involved and they didn't keep it up to date.

These were the dark years of the hotel. It was never closed and they always had guests, but the second family just didn't invest much in the property.

My grandfather bought the hotel in 1973 and, because we are a small group, we had to do everything step by step, which included updating the property from scratch.

We started to invest in the property from the beginning to take it back to its antique splendor. When my grandfather bought the hotel, it didn't have bathrooms in all the rooms, so we had to completely upgrade every single detail. In 2010, the hotel's 100th anniversary, we focused on adding a beautiful spa, three pools, and five restaurants.

I feel Grand Hotel Tremezzo is back to its roots of being one of the leading luxury properties in all of Europe, not just in Italy.

Was it important to maintain the history while also making the property modern?

It was one of the crucial focus points. It's the main strength of the hotel. We didn't want to forget the past. Lake Como is such a magical place, especially in the luxury segment, because it has the romance and magic of the past. People come here and realize that 99 percent of the lake is identical to the way it was 100 years ago.

Having the opportunity to welcome guests to a grand hotel like we did 100 years ago with the same kind of hospitality, and offer them the possibility to touch history within the details, is part of the vision we have for the hotel.

At the same time, we are conscious that we are now in a different century and that visitors are looking for a very special experiential holiday.

As the property has grown, how important has it been for you to maintain that family feel?

One of the best compliments we consistently receive is how special and genuine the attitude of our staff is, because we are a family.

The hotel itself is one of the reasons why this has happened. ●