

# HOUSE & GARDEN®

*Hotels  
by  
Design*

*A guide to the most beautifully  
designed hotels in the world*

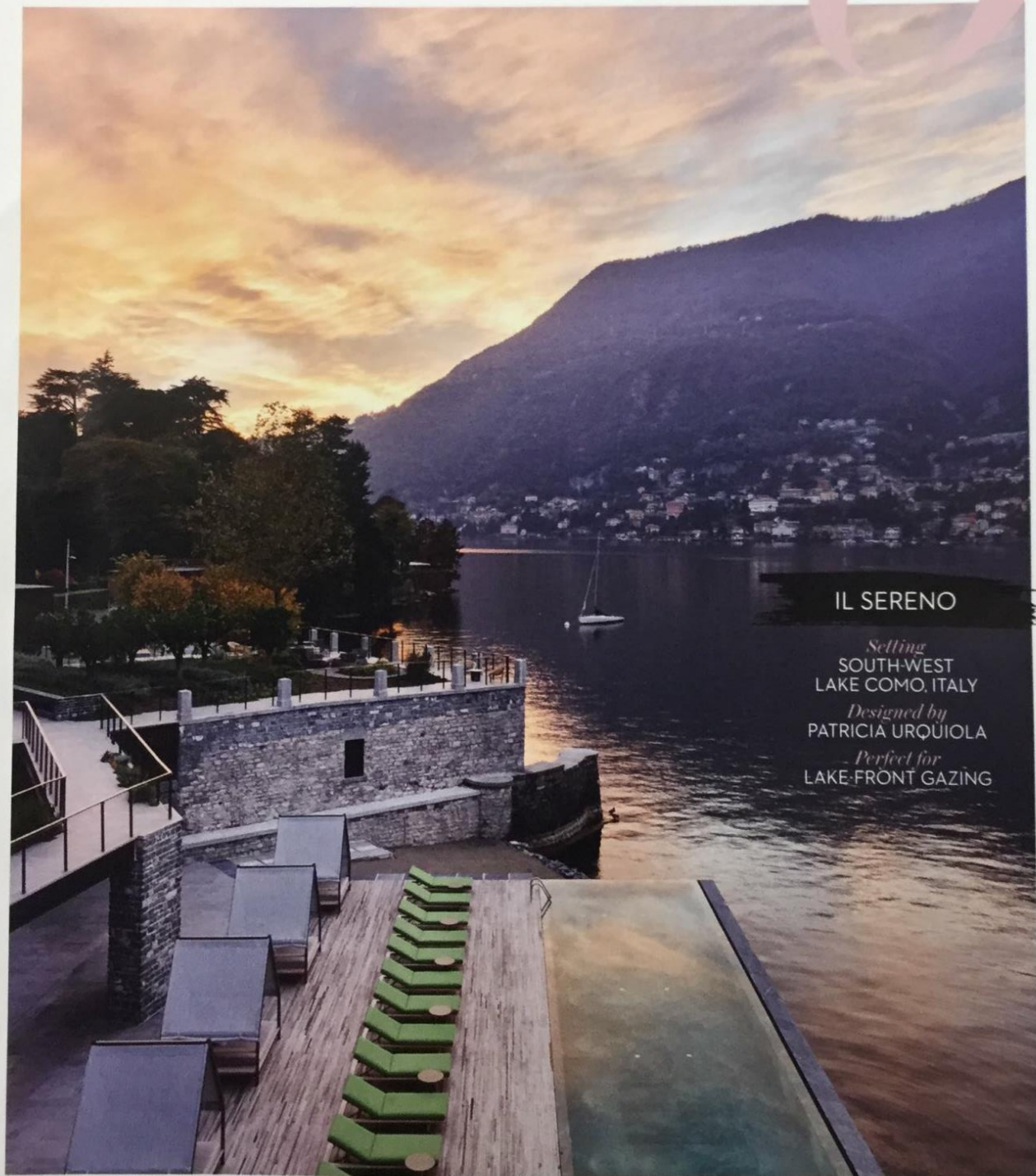
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HOTELS BY DESIGN

# MODERN COOL

*Bold, brave and INNOVATIVE, these are hotels for the TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY*



## IL SERENO

*Setting*  
SOUTH-WEST  
LAKE COMO, ITALY

*Designed by*  
PATRICIA URQUÍOLA

*Perfect for*  
LAKE-FRONT GAZING



IL SERENO

# HERE AND NOW

WITH ITS MODERN,  
RATIONALIST-INSPIRED DESIGN,  
MASTERMINDED BY PATRICIA  
URQUIOLA, IL SERENO IS  
SHAKING UP LAKE COMO'S  
HISTORIC HOTEL SCENE

TEXT **PAMELA GOODMAN** | PHOTOGRAPHS **DAVIDE LOVATTI**  
LOCATIONS EDITOR **ARTA GHANBARI**

**EXTERIOR**  
The hotel blends seamlessly  
into its lakeside setting

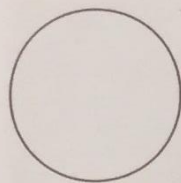




ENTRANCE LEVEL  
Several seating areas  
provide spots for relaxation  
near the bar and lobby







nly a hardened heart would fail to be touched by the allure of Lake Como: those green-cloaked mountains rising ever more steeply towards the Alps; that blue-black water plunging to unthinkable depths; those picturesque towns and villages, where bell towers chime and ancient cobbled streets

ascend in narrow stairways; and that craggy shoreline peppered with pastel-hued houses and the grand, Renaissance villas. Lake Como's role as a soothing retreat from urban life and the glare of publicity is as relevant today as it was in Roman times, when the destination first became fashionable. No wonder that a well-documented list of artists and writers, politicians and celebrities have since made their homes here.

For travellers it has always been the grande dames of Lake Como – Villa d'Este and Grand Hotel Tremezzo, to name but two – that have captured the essence and romance of the place. A nod to modernity seemed out of the question. Yet, last August, a bold, brave new hotel opened, singing the song of Italy in the twenty-first century.

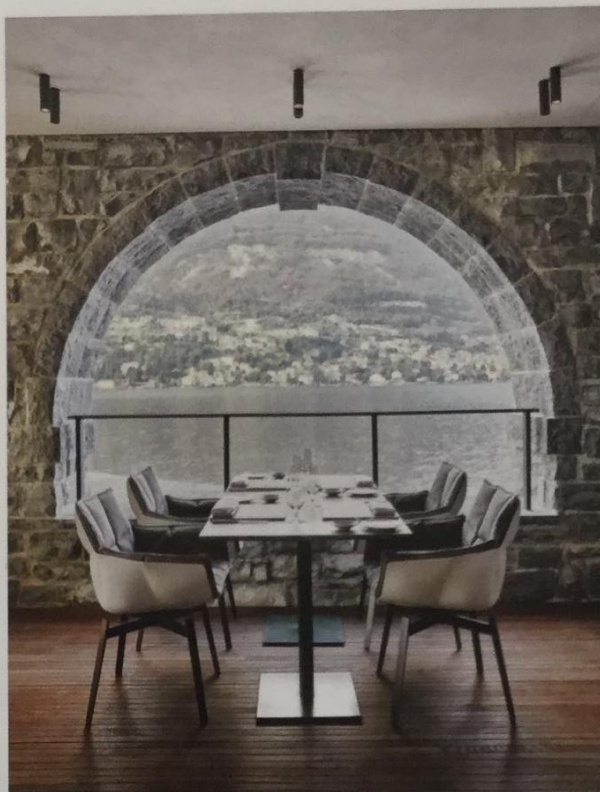
Il Sereno, which stands on the eastern shore of the left-hand leg of Lake Como, roughly opposite Cernobbio, is the brainchild of the cosmopolitan Contreras family who hail from Venezuela. To date, this is their second hotel, the first being of the same name on the Caribbean island of St Barths. Dramatically different though these locations are, the central ethos of both is the same, neatly summed up in a single word: design. As architects and engineers themselves, the Contreras love design, not superficial, gimmicky, here-today-gone-tomorrow design, but serious, dedicated, deeply professional design, to which end they employed Parisian designer Christian Liaigre for the St Barths hotel and Spanish-born, Milan-based Patricia Urquiola for Lake Como.

It goes without saying that Patricia is one of the most talented, influential and prolific interior and product designers of modern times, artistically affiliated to many of the greatest names in contemporary Italian design – B&B Italia, Alessi, Cassina and Moroso. With credits such as Mandarin Oriental Barcelona, W Retreat & Spa Puerto Rico and Das Stue in Berlin already to her name, her hotel pedigree was guaranteed, but Il Sereno was to be something special. This, after all, was home turf.

The result is a radical departure from the lake's traditional vernacular, or so it would seem until parallels are drawn with a somewhat out-of-place municipal building a stone's throw from the Renaissance cathedral in Como town. Casa del Fascio, designed by rationalist architect Giuseppe Terragni in the Thirties, provided the first kernel of inspiration for Il Sereno. Patricia, however, has reinvented its boxy geometric form, softening the look with sliding vertical wooden louvres to counterbalance the layered, horizontal structure, which allows for every one of the 30 bedrooms to have a balcony with a view. From the lake, the hotel blends unobtrusively into its setting.

On the inside, having passed a dramatic vertical garden created by living wall maestro, Patrick Blanc, the hotel reveals itself to be a showcase for all things Italian. Patricia hasn't merely dabbled with the look, she has dived into every detail – the floor

PATRICIA HASN'T  
MERELY *dabbled*  
WITH THE LOOK:  
SHE HAS DIVED  
INTO *every detail*





THIS ROW FROM LEFT  
A covered outdoor dining area on the  
lower level. More seating in the lounge  
area. A bespoke chair by Patricia



THIS ROW FROM LEFT  
A vertical garden by Patrick Blanc.  
The walnut and copper pipe staircase.  
A sitting area beside the front desk





**BATHROOM**  
Finishes are key in the bathroom suites, with bespoke matt white bathtubs and marble surfaces



finishes, the walls, the door handles, the taps, even the elegant matt white bathtubs have been designed to her specification. Not a cushion or a light fitting has escaped scrutiny.

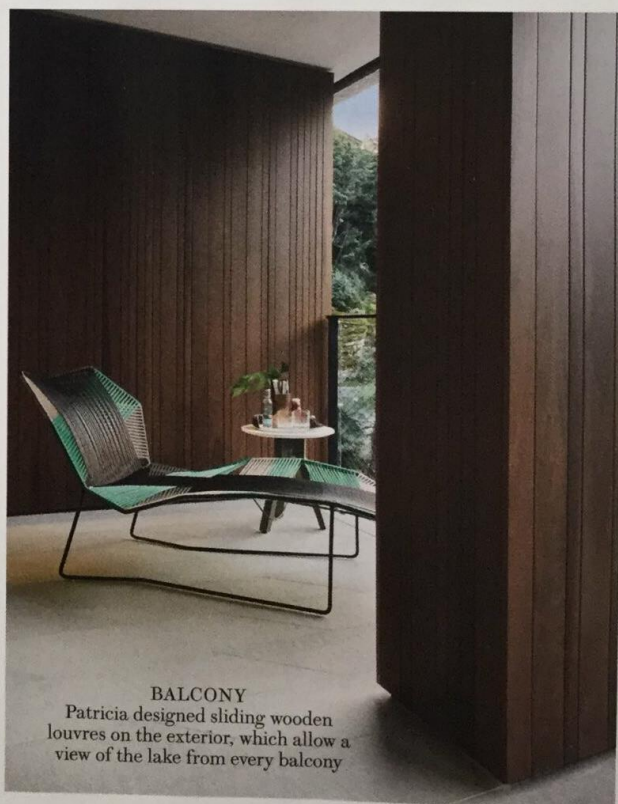
And then there's the furniture, drawn in part from existing collections of B&B Italia and the like, and in part custom-made or adapted specially for the hotel. On the whole, they are signature Urquiola pieces reflecting her lifelong interest in combining the skills of the artisan with the technology of industrial design. Outdoor chairs and deck beds, for example, combine modern plastics with traditional hemp or coconut, woven round steel frames for weather-resistant durability. Even the rugs and carpets, though machine made, have an artisanal quality. The overall effect is restrained, but never at the expense of comfort or, indeed, a softness of touch.

The highlight, however, is surely the central staircase, linking the lobby, lounge and bar area to the restaurant below. A glass-walled, square spiral of cantilevered walnut treads, encased within a cage of crossed vertical copper pipes, rises and falls with seemingly weightless elegance – a design statement that steals the show.

There are those, of course, who will never be accepting of Il Sereno's place on the lake, who will scoff at its modernity and step firmly back to the past. But those interested in the here and now, who embrace innovation and contemporary craftsmanship, will recognise this hotel as a triumph of design □

*Il Sereno: [ilsereno.com](http://ilsereno.com). Carrier (0161-492 1357; [carrier.co.uk](http://carrier.co.uk)) offers three nights from £1,595 per person, based on two sharing a Lario Suite, B&B, return flights from London Gatwick and private transfers*

**BEDROOM**  
One of the top floor penthouse suites, which is minimally decorated. Each has its own balcony



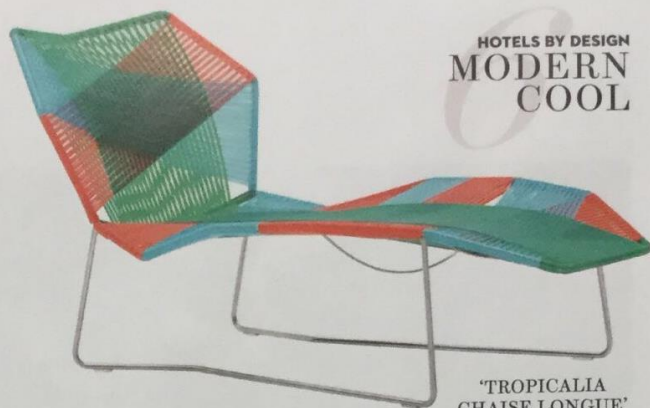
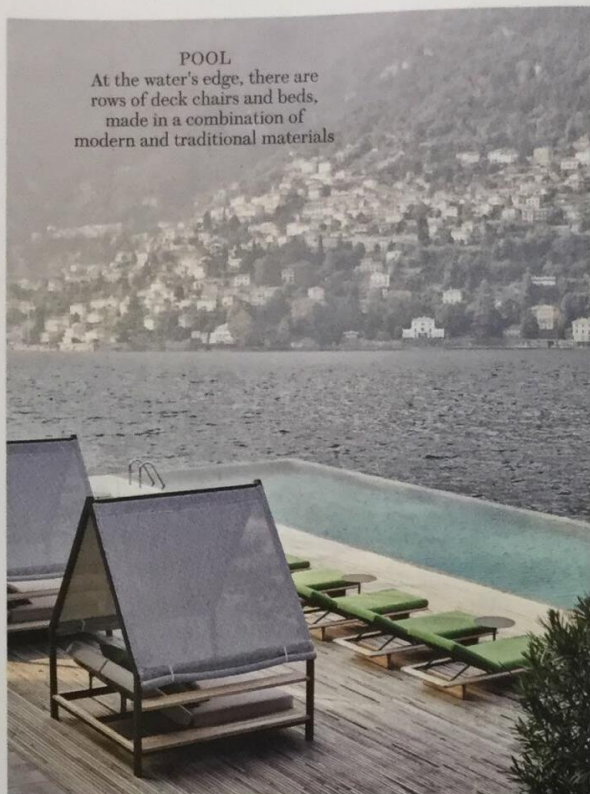
**BALCONY**  
Patricia designed sliding wooden louvres on the exterior, which allow a view of the lake from every balcony



HOTELS BY DESIGN  
MODERN  
COOL

POOL

At the water's edge, there are rows of deck chairs and beds, made in a combination of modern and traditional materials



'TROPICALIA CHAISE LONGUE' by Patricia Urquiola, 77 x 157 x 90cm, £1,860, from Moroso. [moroso.co.uk](http://moroso.co.uk)

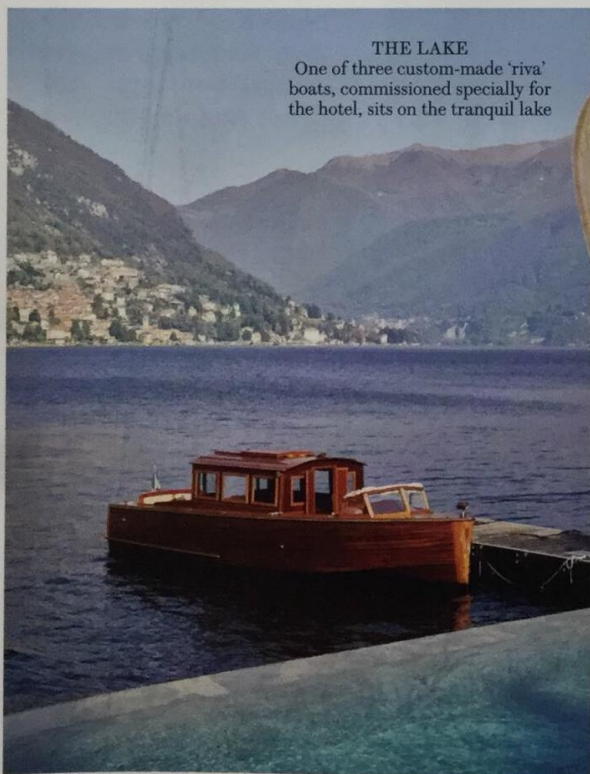


'1949 TABLE', by Piero Lissoni, 49 x 40cm diameter, from £1,020, from Cassina. [cassina.com](http://cassina.com)

'HUNTER GRAND FLOOR LIGHT', by Niclas Hoflin for Rubn, 130cm high, £760, from Viaduct. [viaduct.co.uk](http://viaduct.co.uk)

THE LAKE

One of three custom-made 'riva' boats, commissioned specially for the hotel, sits on the tranquil lake



'CRINOLINE CHAIR', by Patricia Urquiola, 156 x 102 x 80cm, £2,887, from B&B Italia. [bebitalia.com](http://bebitalia.com)

**GET THE LOOK**

Our pick of products to help you recreate the style of Il Sereno at home