

**Zeitschrift:** The Swiss observer : the journal of the Federation of Swiss Societies in the UK

**Herausgeber:** Federation of Swiss Societies in the United Kingdom

**Band:** - (1984)

**Heft:** 1812

**Artikel:** The changing magic of the Ticino lakeland

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**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-688074>

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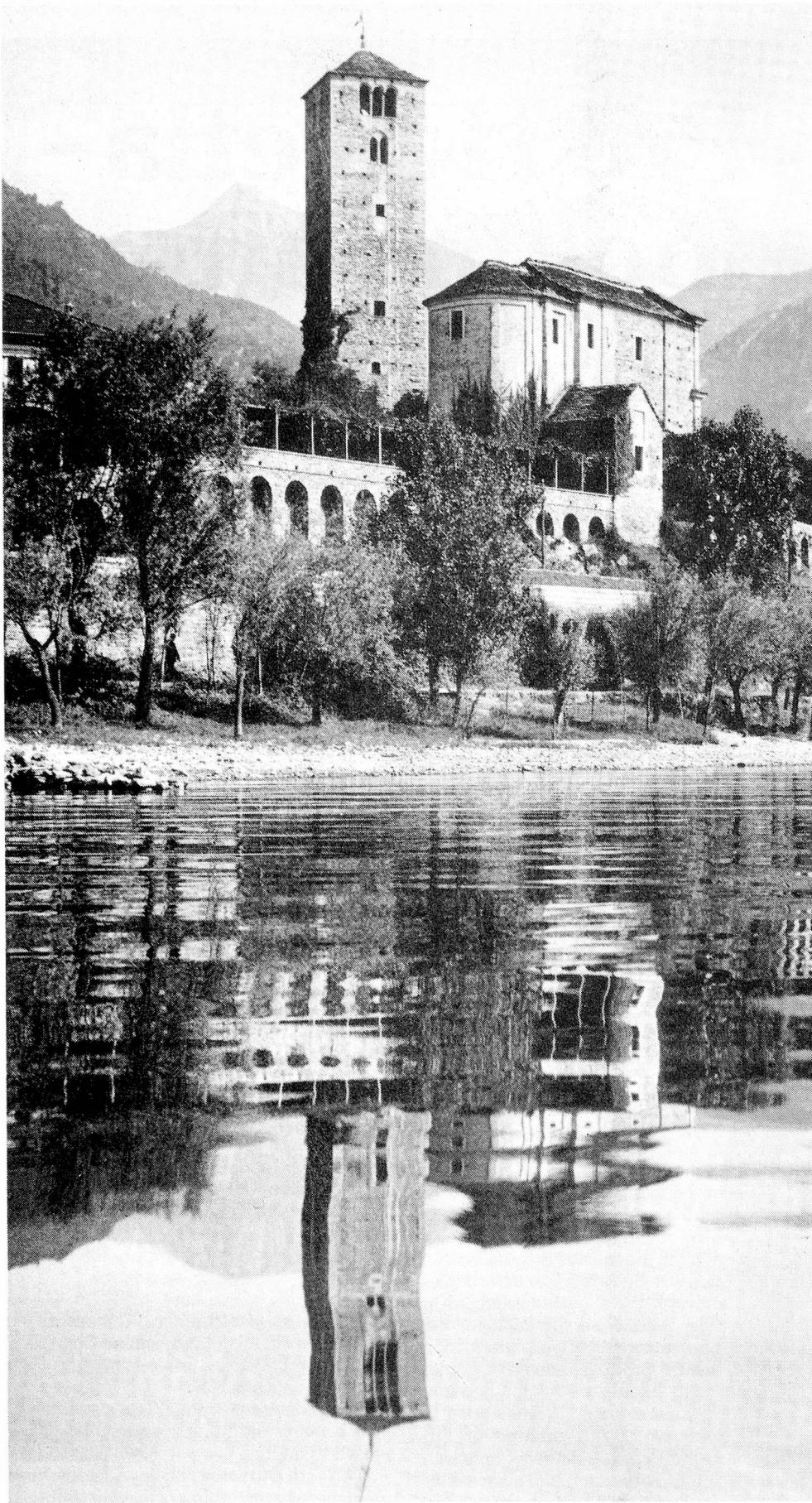
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The famous village church at Ascona on Lake Maggiore

# The ch magic Ticino

By NINA MANSELL

"IS it lovely, and gentle, and beautiful, and pleasant, and serene and joyful?" wrote Charles Dickens. He could easily have been asking about the lakeland of Southern Switzerland!

Certainly this must be one of the most glorious areas of Europe. Add to the picture, sunshine enriching the bright colour of flowers and trees, sprinkle the lake edge with white-plumed swans gliding effortlessly on the water and small steamers crossing and re-crossing from one resort to another and you can see the Ticino lakeland.

The Dan-Air flight from Gatwick to Berne around mid-day gives an opportunity to spend a few hours in that fascinating mediaeval city with its fountains, ancient arcades and sandstone buildings, before departure to Locarno by train through the awe-inspiring scenery of the Bernese Oberland. It is changing magic all the time - a vista of magnificent snow peaks, tumbling cascades and quiet hillside villages. What amazing engineering skill has triumphed over the mountains to claw tunnels through basic rock for a mere railway!

It was a late evening arrival in Locarno, that small town nestling comfortably on the north shore of Lake Maggiore, famous in recent times for the signing in 1925 of the Treaty of Locarno in the old Visconti castle, now a museum and art gallery.

But the town's history goes back far beyond this as visits to Renaissance frescoed churches, as the Chiesa Nuova (New Church) built in the 16th century, soon reveal.

High above the town is the Sanctuary of the Madonna del Sasso, housing among its other treasures Bramantino's "Flight into

# hanging of the lakeland



*The beautiful view of Lugano with the Monte S. Salvatore from the Monte Brè*

"Egypt" painted about 1536. From the panoramic walk, there below lies the green and pleasant town, cradled by mountains, with vast areas of gardens and houses circling around the still water of a gemlike lake. A cable railway takes you even higher to Canada, then a chairlift, if you will, to Cimetta (5,500ft), a busy winter sports centre.

Locarno is picturesque and charming and much favoured by retired people coming south from the more northerly industrial centres to enjoy the mild climate, high sunshine levels and low rainfall: but sports enthusiasts, walkers and golfers are not overlooked. Locarno seeks to please everyone all the time!

Ancient narrow streets converge on the Piazza Grande and lakeshore promenade. On Saturday mornings these tiny cobbled thoroughfares, almost impassable for traffic, thronged and bustling with the activity of the weekly market.

In earlier centuries the Piazza was itself the scene of great markets where merchants came by water from as far away as Venice to buy and sell. Today residents and visitors meet in the cafes in the square. The shopping arcades offer both local specialised products and elegant fashion goods and a vast tourist traffic moves around this town centre.

But the town still remains inviting, interesting and unspoilt. Social and artistic life reaches its climax with the International Film Festival in July but throughout the year there is music and entertainment of high standard. Julian Bream and his group of musicians were giving a recital of 16th and 17th century music in the Chiesa del Collegio Papio in nearby Ascona.

Locarno is only 205 metres above sea level – the lowest town in Switzerland – thus it is possible to enjoy the high mountain "scene" yet take pleasant easy walks along the lakeside. Flowers are in profusion from mid-March onward with an early riot of azalea, camelia, mimosa and magnolia: yet above on the high slopes winter sports conditions are often excellent to the end of April. It is little wonder that in the Ticino region 2,000 millionaires have homes – and 2,000 millionaires can't be wrong when the world is their oyster!

Property is scarce. There were magnificent villas around, particularly in situations above the town such as Orselina near the Sanctuary of Madonna del Sasso. In general it is expensive and most people tend to live in apartments. Muralto also is a very popular area for residence. There are numerous estate agents in the town and the Tourist Office can give you a list of these if you wish to consider buying or renting while you look around at possibilities. There are of course certain restrictions regarding purchase by foreign nationals but the Tourist Office and the Estate Agent will help you with the general procedure to be followed and a Swiss notary will guide you through legal intricacies.

If you wish to consult someone who has excellent experience in the property market and can also help you with your travel arrangements, Hilary Scott can give you a great deal of information about this both in Locarno and Lugano. She is the London agent for several property companies in the Ticino.

One of her clients is the Panorama condominium, situated on the outskirts of the

business area of Locarno yet within easy reach of the centre. It has a total of 75 apartments, the lower floors being exclusively for Swiss nationals but from the 5th to 13th floors they are on offer for foreign nationals. The apartments vary in size from  $1\frac{1}{2}$  rooms (studio, built-in kitchen and bath) to  $3\frac{1}{2}$  rooms. The price range is from Sfr. 218,217 to the top level of Sfr. 642,478.

All apartments are large, airy, have fine views over lakes and mountains and are built to a high specification with first class materials. Hilary Scott has a comprehensive brochure about Panorama with diagrams and full description of the facilities offered. The proposition unquestionably offers luxury lifestyle.

Uto-King of Zurich are in the early stages of erecting an apartment-hotel in Ascona but this at present is only at "ground level".

Arlette Adler of Villas Abroad Ltd also has a fund of knowledge about houses in Switzerland after 13 years experience in this market. Her firm is able to provide information on residential property in over 60 locations in six countries.

Hotel Arcadia au Lac opened in March this year with 91 apartments which were all sold before construction. Each apartment is individually owned but can be sublet by the owner when he does not wish to occupy it. This is not on a "time-sharing" basis but for individual letting for varying periods. The apartments are extremely comfortable with individual kitchen facilities but there is a restaurant offering an excellent cuisine and a swimming pool for the general use of

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The attractive springtime scene of the lakeside by Lugano, backdropped by the Monte Brè

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residents.

Locarno has a population of only around 12,000 but this increases considerably during the tourist season. It is a very wealthy town favoured by doctors and professional men for residence. It would be possible to pay as much as Sfr. 4,000,000 for a large luxury villa in a prime position with every amenity but Sfr. 650,000 would buy you a modest home.

Local restaurants are generally very good. Osteria Antica in Vico de Vecia is particularly attractive with its pleasant vine-covered terrace and its veal fricassé and zabaglione are not quickly forgotten.

Ancient and modern live easily side by side in Locarno but the granite slabb'd roofs of old dwellings will soon have disappeared for there are few who now know the craft of laying stone on stone without fixative who can repair them as they fall into decay.

A short drive of about half an hour or even shorter by train and one is in Lugano, a much larger town than Locarno and standing on its own named lake. Here the Italian influence is even more pronounced. Almost everything

except politics and money is in Italian. Yet the Swiss have a tremendous sense of nationality although they have managed to rub off something of the basic gold of their neighbours in culture and speech!

Lugano with its population of about 30,000 excluding the surrounding villages has been a major tourist centre for many decades. At present the English are not strongly in evidence mainly due to currency depreciation but such a setting of incredible beauty, with warm sunshine, almost invariably good hotels and pensions, numerous excursions and sporting facilities of all kinds must make spending that little more no bad bargain.

Everywhere views are spectacular and surely that of Monte San Salvatore from the lakeside at Castagnola must be one of the finest in Europe and is strangely reminiscent of Rio de Janeiro.

The season is from Easter till mid-October though the best months are May, June and September, culminating in the Wine Festival with a spectacular street procession at the beginning of October. There is plenty of varied accommodation available as well as camping facilities at Agno and Castelana.

Here the Tourist Office have details: in fact they have leaflets and comprehensive lists of most aspects of life in the Lugano region.

Apart from a great variety of excursions by boat, train and coach there are all types of sport available as well as concerts with international artists and conductors throughout the year. Exhibitions of painting are often given at the Thyssen-Bornemiszo Exhibition at lakeside Villa Favorita. Major works of Impressionists and Post-Impressionists from the Soviet Museums were on show for a short season.

An excellent way to gain a general impression of the whole lake is a "grand tour" by boat, passing such places as Bissoni, an ancient fishing village with its pillared arcades, the homeland of many eminent artists: Gandria, which boasts a fascinating "Smugglers' Museum" housed in the former Custom's post: the cemetery 'on the steps' at Morcote and to glimpse the hillside terraced homes so much in demand by film stars and well known society figures.

Living is not cheap. According to an English housewife who had been living in Lugano for 14 years there was good variety in shops and supermarkets where prices were

approximately the same as in England, for general purchases. However many people find it useful to make a periodic excursion into Italy to buy in bulk, particularly for meat, as prices were lower. In the field of elegant shopping, boutiques offering luxury goods such as jewellery, model clothes, leather goods and shoes are magnificent in their quality and range but prices are far beyond the average purchaser who can only gaze with envy at the exquisite products and admire the skilled workmanship.

Most people tend to live in rented flats. An average moderate family apartment of three rooms, kitchen and bath would cost at least £50 per week with probably a two-year agreement generally renewable. Houses were regarded as too costly to purchase unless there was more than one wage earner in the family but salaries tended to be very much higher for the average worker.

Living in the Castelagno area of Lugano would be very acceptable. It is slightly away from the main tourist stream, has fine views and lakeside gardens with a sense of space and peace. The exclusive development of Residenz Cassarate-Lago, now almost completed, is in a superb location. On the lower floors is a bank, shopping precinct, hotel and restaurant with private swimming pool and terrace overlooking the lake. From the

second to sixth floors there are 2-7 room apartments with penthouses on the sixth floor, each of which has a private roof terrace and its own swimming pool.

Construction materials are of the highest quality and of the 78 apartments in the complex, 50 are permitted to be sold to foreign nationals subject to the usual Swiss legal formalities. Again Hilary Scott is the British agent and can give you complete details and a well illustrated brochure. There are seven lifts, several garage areas in the basement and even an air raid shelter!

For lesser mortals, the Tourist Office have a list of local Estate Agents and can help with details of selected areas. It is often a good plan to spend time in an area in which you are thinking of permanent residence before you actually decide. To visit the Ticino means that in any case you will enjoy a wonderful stay while you are considering possibilities. Then it will be more than difficult to tear yourself away from the Sun Trap of Switzerland!

Returning from Zurich to London meant a lunchtime flight with an easy train journey from Lugano and a chance to travel by another scenic route of mountains, waterfalls and rock-perched chalets. Swiftly through an easy-to-follow airport and in less than two hours by plane I was in Gatwick. Home by late afternoon!



*The Church of San Quirico, Locarno*

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