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Live *Artfully*



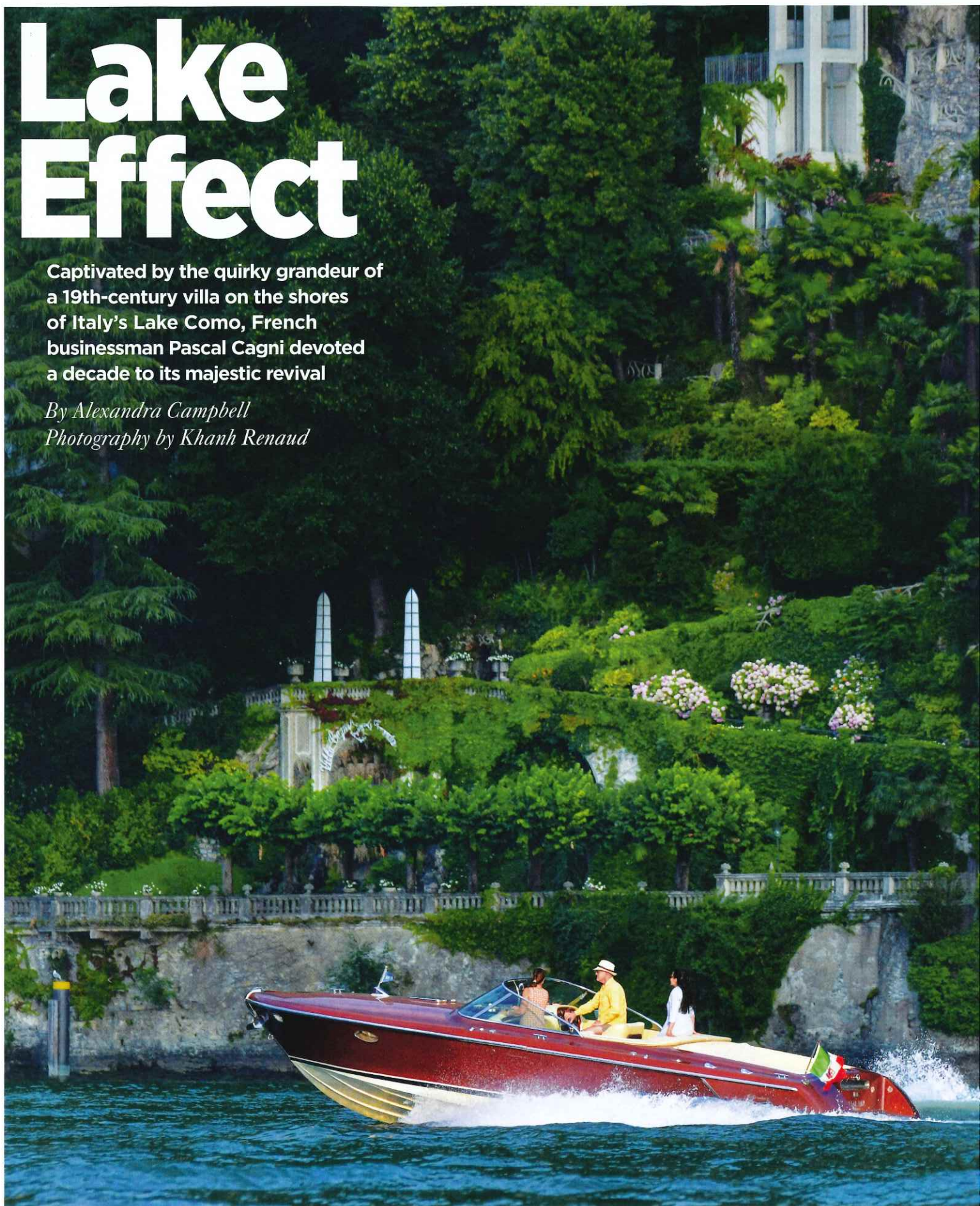
A secluded gathering spot at the lovingly restored Villa Cagni Troubetzkoy offers unparalleled views of Lake Como in Italy.

Lake Effect

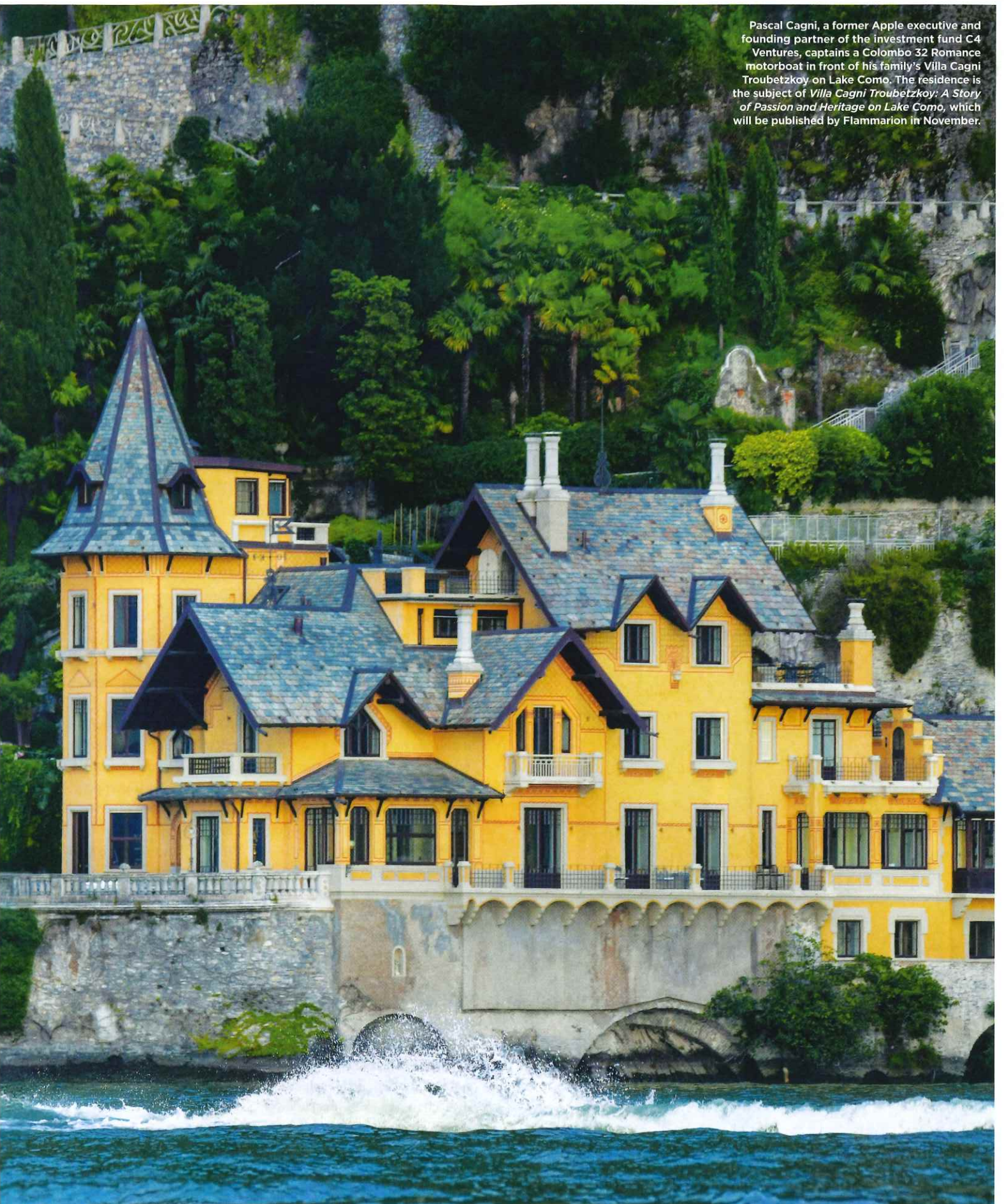
Captivated by the quirky grandeur of a 19th-century villa on the shores of Italy's Lake Como, French businessman Pascal Cagni devoted a decade to its majestic revival

By Alexandra Campbell

Photography by Khanh Renaud



Pascal Cagni, a former Apple executive and founding partner of the investment fund C4 Ventures, captains a Colombo 32 Romance motorboat in front of his family's Villa Cagni Troubetzkoy on Lake Como. The residence is the subject of *Villa Cagni Troubetzkoy: A Story of Passion and Heritage on Lake Como*, which will be published by Flammarion in November.





Catherine and Pascal Cagni stroll along a terrace at the villa. BELOW: The restored gardens feature a grotto fountain with ornate rocaille decoration.



He was hooked from the very beginning—the villa stood out against the lush green shores of Lake Como,

an atmospheric place in an unrivaled position. Pascal Cagni discovered it with his family in August 2009. It was an astonishing construction, like no other house on the lake. With its great hexagonal turret, gabled roofs, and slightly incongruous Brutalist elevator shaft, it quirkily drew attention among the traditional Palladian-style residences on the water. Yet it was spellbinding. Nothing could have prepared the visitors for the site they were about to explore.

Maneuvering through its unkempt gardens, the family stumbled across swaths of rusty chicken wire and brushed past broken balustrades and cracked walls—the weedy, overgrown paths leading through once-magnificent gardens were a hazardous circuit of uneven steps and terraces. The reinforced concrete elevator, dating from 1928, was covered in climbers and moss. Rather than being put off, however, Cagni was beguiled by the uniqueness of the place; he could see beyond the scars brought about by neglect and recognize its potential for renewal.

Long before any deliberation had gone into the design and materials that would be used for the extensive restoration by a talented team of master artisans, Cagni had already identified the estate's practical points: proximity to Milan and to airports. In addition, Lake Como offered the rare combination of heavenly tranquility and worldly excitement—here one could move seamlessly from privacy, a rare and valuable commodity, to the spotlight. Finally, it had what very few other houses have on Lake Como, a dual aspect at shore level, facing southwest and northeast with views on Villa Pizzo, Villa d'Este, Cernobbio, and Villa Erba. From the main entrance, there was a third aspect, a towering vista with a 230-foot drop to the lake, giving the visitor the sensation of being surrounded by all the elements.

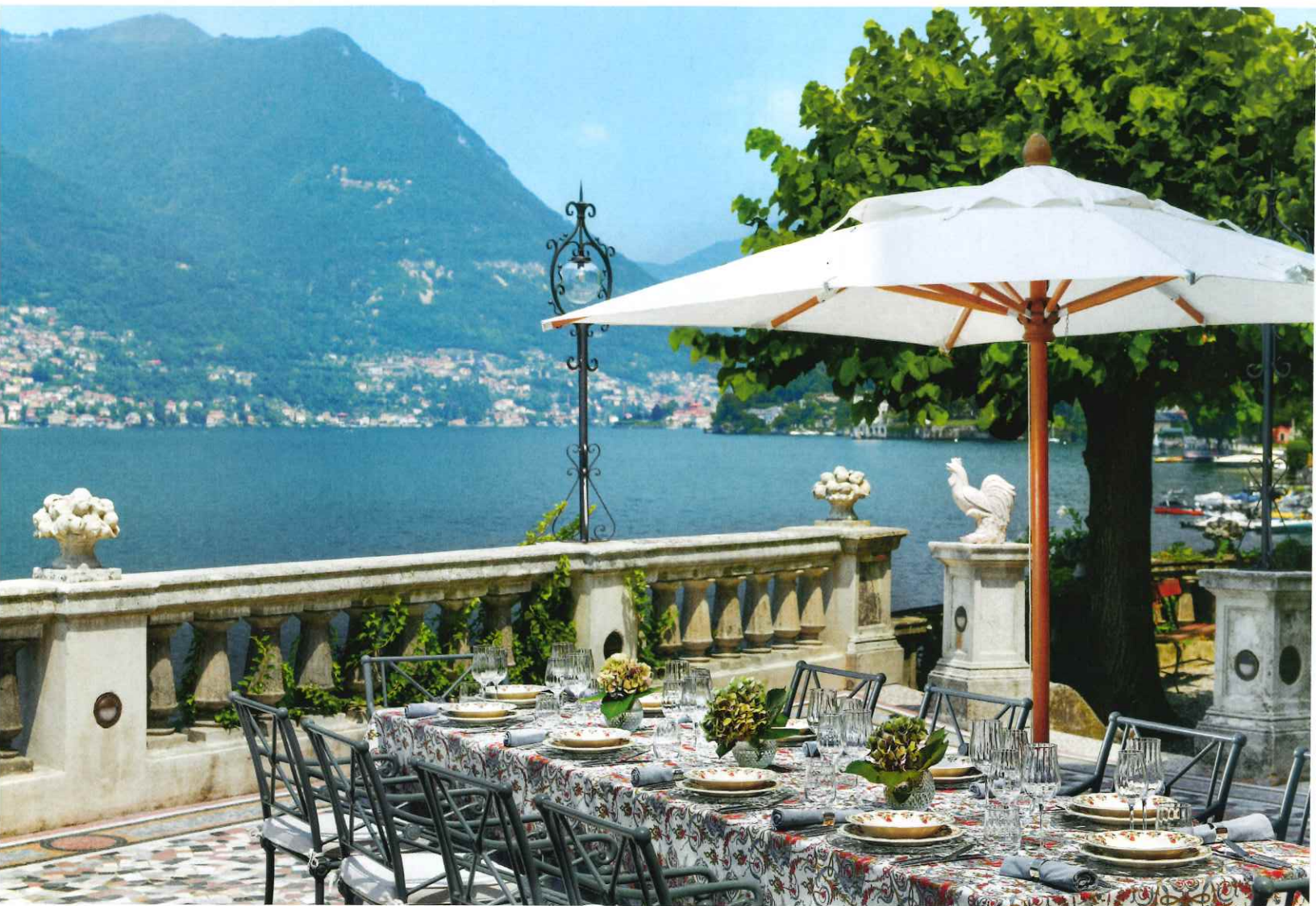
Cagni decided shortly afterward to purchase and rebuild the estate as it was in 1848, buying all six sections from different owners over a period of six years, to create Villa Cagni Troubetzkoy. He had always wanted to live on Lake Como, drawn to its dramatic natural beauty, with varied horizons and its breathtaking, ever-changing skies. Recruited by Steve Jobs to lead Apple's European operations in early 2000, he was a witness to the obsession and hard work required to build the best product on earth.

Over the course of a decade spent restoring the villa, he has been



On the main floor, light-filled salons with exuberant terrazzo flooring and elegant neoclassical plaster details offer spectacular views across the lake.

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helped and inspired by some extraordinarily gifted people, who have made him appreciate the remarkable reservoir of contemporary talent in this beautiful part of Italy, already blessed with a rich artistic heritage. He undertook his own research into the history and culture of the area and learned more about the period leading up to the Risorgimento, the movement for Italian unification, which is one of the most exciting and dynamic phases in Italian history and explains in part Italy's uniqueness as a country and its wide diversity.

He also uncovered some intriguing stories about famous artists and political figures who chose to make their home in and around Como at the same time as Alexander Troubetzkoy, the dashing Russian prince who had built the original villa. What he learned during his odyssey explains the pull exerted on so many by this enchanting part of the world and why Cagni continued to be drawn back to it. Never forgetting the magic conjured by simply uttering the words "Lake Como," such was his obsession that Cagni now has not one but three homes by the lake: the wonderful Villa Cagni Troubetzkoy in Blevio; a mountain retreat in the village of Gallio, commanding gorgeous panoramas of the lake and its surrounding snowcapped mountains; and a gem of a house called Villa Ossuccio, right on the water at Ossuccio, opposite Isola Comacina.



FROM LEFT: A table is set for an idyllic outdoor lunch. In the inviting paneled library, the floor features a scrolling motif that incorporates the initials of Cagni family members.

Having been born, brought up, and educated in France; having had the privilege to serve the French Republic, appointed by President Macron as Ambassador for International Investments, he considers France his *patrie* and loves it, first and foremost. That does not diminish in any way the immense attachment he feels for his Italian roots, which are planted deeply in the mountain soil near Como. This heavenly “borderland” of Lombardy has a “borderless” quality to it, appealing to a diverse international crowd. People settle in easily here, and they are made to feel welcome.

The villa is the realization of a long-held dream: to return to the Lario and call it home. Cagni feels the gaze of Lake Como penetrating through every window of the villa. He talks of his wish to “iconize” the lake, to enable us to look at it and contemplate its ravishing beauty, but the point of the icon is that it looks at us, with ever watchful eyes, silent and listening. It is an aid to communion with the Divine, and it is arguably what Cagni came close to achieving here. □

Text adapted from Villa Cagni Troubetzkoy: A Story of Passion and Heritage on Lake Como by Alexandra Campbell, Flammarion, Paris, 2024.



“This picturesque garden, combining theatricality and refuge, was certainly inspired by the famous gardens of the Villa d’Este, just across the lake,” says Pascal Cagni

