

ROARSHOCK PAGE

www.roarshock.net

Volume 11, Number 5

San Francisco

April 22, 2018

Well remembered indeed April 22, 1998, a lovely warm spring day and balmy night along the beach in San Francisco. Inspired passions embraced and first gleam of what would become ROARSHOCK PAGE eight months later. Now please enjoy more from the late John O. Wilson's 2002 Europe travelogue.

TOURING VENICE

We toured the hotel gardens. Don't discount the unusual nature of Venice gardens. This place is special, and even if most Americans think it ordinary, the Italians know it. Me too. There is something about the garden and having plants around, even in this strange at sea level island, that helps maintain your connection with the land, sort of a dirt to human bond. The sky is threatening and means it. We catch the public boat (Vaporetto) down the Grand Canal to Piazza San Marco. Boat rides are fun, there is so much going on. Gondolas hauling tourists on the adventure of their lives, delivery boats which keep the city supplied, work boats everywhere, supplying the reconstruction and restoration going on, taxis hauling people about, public ferries. The waterways are full of traffic, and it's fun to join it here. Every canal has buildings right up to the water's edge, all old, some restored and maintained, more decayed and crumbling. In Venice everything settles, moves downward, not always at the same rate. So it's always being both pulled apart and sunk into the waters of the canals. This part of Italy has again become prosperous, and lots of money is being "sunk" into restoration of these Venetian landmarks. Construction work going on everywhere. The canal facing sides of buildings are hard to reach so have gotten less maintenance. They're starting to get it now, but only after the land side and interiors are finished. There are work boats everywhere and ceaseless sound of drills and grinders. Since Venice is made of bricks and stone and mortar, you don't hear many hammers and skill saws. We disembarked at the Piazza San Marco. The two predominate features of the piazza are the Basilica and the pigeons—nobody knows how many pigeons, but it's a lot. Venders sell bread crumbs and people in the large square feed them to the aggressive, focused on food, plump, sleek pigeons I've ever seen. They flock around the feeders. occasionally, when someone suddenly moves, they fly up in a cloud barely seen through, turn quickly and settle back for more food. They are focused. The Basilica should be approached slowly, from across the square. The City of Venice was once the most powerful engine in the world, and its leaders poured sizable wealth into the Basilica; expressing the arrogance of these masters of the Mediterranean. Each conquest reflected in a new addition to the building, piece of statuary, or alter furnished with the spoils of their pillage. The building has no single expression of form or style; each Doge won his battles and built his own addition. Thus a lumpy building with odd protrusions everywhere, and a most ornate exterior, covered with statues and carvings, turrets and spires and no overall architectural plan., As if whenever they won a war and brought home more loot they added a new chapel or vestry wherever it would fit. And they must have had a standard for so many statues per square foot. Each new lump sprouted the requisite number of statues. The inside much the same.

Stuff everywhere. The architectural statement "clutter." "Clutter and wealth." Also true for the finishes: "How much gold and mosaics can you fit in?" Everything glitters except the incredibly grand and important paintings. A place of great wealth, flaunting it without taste. No other unifying theme other than excess. Those Renaissance Venetians must have been rich, arrogant bastards. Off we go to take the public boat on a self-guided tour of the islands of Venice. We buy an all-day ticket and set out to ride the Grand Canal counter clockwise, going back by our hotel (on Dorsoduro). A side canal provides a quick way out to the open lagoon. It gets a lot of traffic. Once out on the lagoon the boat turns and follows the shore of the islands to about half way around, then turns away toward the island of Murano. It's a typical weekday on the Venice canals and the public boats carry more Venetians than tourists. The public boats (Vaporettos) are really the busses of Venice. Think Muni system in San Francisco and Vaporetto in Venice. The canals are crowded with work boats, delivery boats, not many gondolas, and the vaporettos. We share our ride with locals going from here to there, occasional tourists, and the working people of the city. It's a different feeling from the tourist crowd we've been encountering. Here a man and his dog coming home from a walk. We quickly leave the restored palazzos of the Grand Canal and start to see the neighborhoods where people live and work. Still some magnificent buildings, but less money being spent on restoration and more on infrastructure rather than cosmetics. We go by the railroad yards at the end of the causeway and see where the materials of demolition are loaded out and the materials of construction are loaded in. Also the supplies that Venice runs on, a considerable quantity. Warehouses with low docks full of boats loading cases of wine, produce, etc. A side canal to the open lagoon was most interesting, a glimpse at a residential neighborhood in Venice. Apartments with wash flying, shops for wine, deli, a cleaners, etc., a public market of produce and what all, people coming and going on domestic business. The vaporetto stops every several blocks or so and people, even on short errands ride it. Out on the main lagoon everything changes. The north side of the Venice islands are lined with larger buildings: factories, schools, I don't know what else. The stops are further apart and the most of the travelers are commuters. Not many on and offs this time of day. We hit three more stops on the north side, about 20 minutes total, and then head due north to St. Michele, the cemetery, and Murano, a mixed use island famous for its glass factories. We decide to continue on to Murano first and have then look in on St. Michele on the way back. Helga visited Murano in 1985 and bought quite a bit of glass: the grape goblets and the gray vase, plus the little green horse she shares with her mother. On that trip she took a taxi out, had an appointment for the tour, and the whole thing was a very formal educational and purchasing experience. This time we showed up on public transit, just in time for lunch, wandered around the residential portions of the island, and polled around several glass showrooms without buying anything. I like to think I had some influence on the agenda and expense of this second trip. We hop over to the cemetery of St. Michele for what I think is to be a short stop. The island is low, like all of Venice, about 5' above the tide, completely surrounded by a wall with gates to the boat landings, steps down into the water, this is where the deliveries are made. The inside of the wall is lined with Italian cypresses. There are two vertical elements on the island: Church on the east and west end of the island and the cypresses around the border. The center of the island is an orderly arrangement of crypts, one and two story, arranged as city blocks. Such crypts

occupy most of the island, the rest laid out in individual crypts and graves. The cemetery is too small for all the dead of Venice and the average stay of a burial here is ten years. Then the grave or crypt occupant must be relocated to some other resting place. The exceptions are a few special residents, amount them Ezra Pound and Igor Stravinsky. Signs with arrows direct you to these famous persons' graves. After about the third sign we start to be curious: these graves must be special. We're not the only ones curious about the Pound and Stravinsky graves. We keep meeting an older Italian lady, apparently a Venice resident, who was very keen on her quest for the Stravinsky grave. She was short (could have been Russian, but with a good Italian accent), wearing a plain dress, very mobile and energetic, and she spoke to us every time we met to ask if we had found him yet or to update us on the results of her search. Soon she had enlisted us in the search, and more or less together we followed the signs and read the headstones. Finally we find the graves of Stravinsky and his wife Vera, and she gives us the quote of the day (of the trip), "Well, that's life." It sure is, and so is she. I'll never forget her. The first two boats from Murano were so full we let them go, didn't even try to get on. Then, no boats for almost 20 minutes. We start to wonder, did we miss it? Is the service over at 5:30 p.m.? Couldn't be! But is it? Then another boat, pretty full, but we don't care. We'd have crowded on that boat no matter how full it was. Soon we're at the first stop on the north side, about ten people get off, at the next stop about ten more, soon the boat is more comfortable. We swing around the east end of the Venice islands and soon on to the public dock at Academia, and on to the hotel and ready for a special dinner tonight. The recommended restaurant, which we reach by vaporetto ride to within a block away, is on a side canal on the San Marco side. We're served by Alexandra. He seems to own the place, is short, attractive in the Italian style, and claims to be a local product. His family has land near Venice and makes olive oil, which we sample, very good olive oil. Alexandra has been to California, to the Napa Valley, where he made a BBC cooking show. He spots us as gastronomically worthy and begins to show off: special food, wine, his own olive oil, much attention. The meal was terrific: crab pasta, fried Scampi, a great bottle of Italian style Cabernet, and then to really show off, a mini portion of Risotto with Truffle oil, just to taste. Wow! We were too full for desert, and Alexandra seemed a little disappointed. I wonder what we may have missed. Alexandra wants to return to California to make another cooking show. This one showing the preparation and consumption of a great meal for about 20 guests/cooks. The whole thing to be shot in someone's home. I hope he makes his film, and I'd love to be at the table for it. We exchanged cards and promised to look for a suitable house for him. We parted full of good food, affection and good intentions, and headed back to the hotel and a comfortable night. Alexandra was anticipating a long night, because the high water was coming. A combination of factors were coming together: exceptional high tide, low pressure trough over northern Italy, and the Sirocco, the wind from northern Africa that blows north once in a while. This wind from the south is continuous, and has the effect of stuffing the water into the Adriatic, raising the water level as much as a foot. Venice is sinking a little each year, and when all these factors come together as they did this night and morning, everything low floods. This means most of the buildings close to the canals will have water over their floors. It's getting to be a fairly common occurrence that the walks flood, but it takes a night like this one to flood the buildings. People like Alexandra, whose buildings are in such an exposed location, have gotten quite sophisticated about the factors, how to read the tides, how high the water will get and how to protect or minimize losses. Alexandra was waiting for the last customer to leave and then he and his staff would pick up everything from the floor, sandbag the doors, then come in early tomorrow with mops and brooms. Like the old lady in the cemetery said, "That's life."

— John O. Wilson

MARTINEZ TO MUNICH, AUSTRIA, ITALY AND BACK AGAIN 2002
by John O. Wilson, complete, unabridged text can be read here:

<http://roarshock.net/TRAVEL%20LOG%20%20EUROPE%202002.pdf>

APRIL ALMANAC

- 04/01 2018 APRIL FOOLS DAY
EASTER SUNDAY
St. Stupid's Day Parade in San Francisco.
- 04/02 1800 Ludwig van Beethoven lead the premiere of his First Symphony in Vienna.
- 04/04 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee, aged 39.
- 04/13 2018 Art Bell died on Friday 13, the Kingdom of Nye, Pahrump, Nevada, aged 72.
- 04/14 2003 The Human Genome Project was completed with 99% of the human genome sequenced to an accuracy of 99.99%.
- 04/15 2018 NEW MOON
- 04/17 1397 Geoffrey Chaucer for the first time told *The Canterbury Tales* at the court of Richard II.
- 04/20 1657 Freedom of religion granted to the Jews of New Amsterdam (New York City).
- 04/21 1960 Brasilia, Brazil's capital, was officially inaugurated. At 09:30 hours.
- 04/22 2018 EARTH DAY
- 04/23 1516 The Bayerische Reinheitsgebot was signed in Ingolstadt.
- 04/24 1558 Mary, Queen of Scots was married to the Dauphin of France, François, at Notre Dame de Paris.
- 04/26 1958 Daniel C. Nettell was born.
- 04/28 1973 Pink Floyd's *The Dark Side of the Moon*, recorded in Abbey Road Studios, went to number 1 in the US charts, beginning a record breaking 741-week chart run.
- 04/29 2018 FULL PINK MOON
- 04/30 2018 WALPURGIS NIGHT

<http://roarshock.net/april.html>

Calling for Contributions! ROARSHOCK PAGE invites submissions of art, photographs, poetry, and micro-prose, to be considered for inclusion in future issues.

ROARSHOCK PAGE, Volume 11, Number 6 will become available May 22, 2018.

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www.roarshock.net

Published by:

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