

**MARTINEZ TO MUNICH, AUSTRIA, ITALY
AND BACK AGAIN**

TRAVEL LOG - EUROPE 2002

By

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Tuesday, 10/22/02 - Home to SFO to Munich

Left home at 5:30 p.m. via [BayPorter](#) van to [SFO](#). The plane was scheduled for departure at 9:30 p.m. We boarded on schedule, but got stuck in a 16 plane queue for the single operating runway. Finally in the air at 10:15 p.m. Flight was 12 hours, plus 9 hours difference in time, had us on the ground in [Munich](#) at 7:15 p.m. the next day their time. I never lost a day so fast in my life. Fortunately we make it back on the way home, although I doubt I'll give it that much credit.

I have never been able to sleep on planes, and especially on this plane. It was an [Airbus](#) with 2, 4, & 2 seating. We had the 2 seats on the right side: Helga at the window and me on the aisle. The seats were so close that if the seat in front of you was tilted back your tray table wouldn't fit down. So narrow that the common arms overlapped. I spent the entire trip leaning out into the aisle.

The plane was only half full and the experienced travelers quickly grabbed the vacant center seats so they could lie down to sleep. I watched them do it, figuring that since I couldn't sleep on planes, let someone else have the extra seat. After about the first six hours I began regretting that charity. Twelve hours of sitting at a 15* list can really sap your Christian charity.

We took a taxi to the Hilton Park Hotel. This hotel is in Munich, about a mile from the old city, but in a park and right next to a river. The river [Isar](#) runs through the city and mostly in a man-made, stone sided channel. They split the river into three channels at the upstream end of the park and the hotel actually sits between the main river and one of the side channels. The restaurant and our room look down on this side channel, bordered by trees and lawns, and full to the brim with water. My first look at German weather: threatening, misting skies, and a full river. Tells you something.

Helga and I unpack as far as the swim suits and go down to the pool. It's a posh space, constantly attended. Small weight room, sauna & steam, and a pool that's 12 feet

by 27 feet, 4.5 feet deep at the max. Full of gadgets: a pump that lets you swim upstream, a water fall, stepped ramp entry. Forget the gadgets, we just plunge and exercise.

One of the reasons we chose this hotel was the pool. After 12 - 14 hours in the plane we need something to get the blood moving, and nothing does it better than a pool. A few laps, some running in place, 4 minutes of side straddle hops, about the same of cross country ski silliness, why, we're right as rain! Or at least we're feeling the parts of our bodies again.

We dress and go down for dinner at the hotel. The menu says: "Tonight is Italian Night!" We should have been warned. Buffet (lousy), 3/4 empty restaurant, expensive! Still, it was easy and we were exhausted, so no hard feelings.

And so to bed in Europe, my first night on the continent.

Thursday, 10/24/02 - Shakedown in Munich

Phone rings at 9:00 a.m., and it's Ingrid. How did she know? We were so careful to be vague about our schedule, "We will call you when we arrive." and we need this first day to get our heads straight before we meet with Julius and Ingrid. We are firm that tomorrow is the day we meet and Ingrid is magnanimous. What the hell, she found us out, she can afford to be generous.

Breakfast was good, big improvement over last night, and we set out to pick up the car. Should be easy, right? Get in the taxi, show him the address, he takes us there. Sure. This was our first experience of what was to be a daily pattern, getting lost in Europe. He drives (we think) too far, and I'm having trouble following our route on the map I scored from the Concierge. Still, I figure out where we are and start checking the numbers. We're getting close..... There's a gap.....we've gone too far. We're in the 2000s! Cabdriver sighs (He's done this before) and turns off the meter. Two more around the blocks and we find it; a store front tucked into an odd, oblique corner.

Inside [Auto Europe](#) (the rental car agency) Helga undertakes to make them aware of what they agreed to in the reservation. This amounts to 30 minutes of negotiation, (to be followed identically when we return the car) and no chance for me to ask my questions. Questions about road signing, traffic laws, etc. Oh, well, I'll learn from experience. Finally we're on our way.

I'm driving in Europe for the first time. I don't know the rules, I can't read the signs, I can't pronounce the streets, I've only had a few minutes to memorize the map (inadequate) and my Navigator, (Helga) tends to communicate in broad gestures. Sheer terror.

Our first stop was to be the center of the old town. The concierge had given me a route and a parking garage, and miraculously it worked. I got to the main square, parked

in the underground garage, and walked around. Checked out [Dallmayr's](#), got the lay of the land. Came back to the car, thinking maybe this worked so well, let's go out to [Nymphenburg](#) as well. Now the roles start to be defined. "Helga, look at the map. What street are we supposed to be on? What street are we on? What was that cross street? Well, damn it, my job is to drive, yours is to navigate!" "Well, I can't read the map with my glasses on and I can't see the street signs with them off." "Well, where are we? Pull over, share the map, pick-up a location. Figure out a route to our desired destination." 3 minutes later, start over.

This was to be the scenario of most of our trip: start out with optimism, get lost, miraculously discover where we were, redirect and get lost again. An interesting way to see Europe.

We found Nymphenburg, a big, sprawling, one, two and three story Palace, unremarkable from the outside and inaccessible for non-walkers on the inside. Drove through the grounds and decided not to undertake the half mile walk to tour the inside. It was getting close to 5:00 p.m. and we had a clock to catch.

Back to the Altes Zentrum, the old town center. At least that was the goal. Should be easy. Just retrace our route back to the garage in the old city square. The problem was the street names. They don't sign the street you're on, just the intersecting streets. And streets bend 20* right or left and change their names, or at least appear to. And a lot of what we came out on became one way the other way on the trip back. Free fall again.

Best strategy, later to be perfected, seemed to be to follow the signs to the Zentrum, go around the old town to the south and intersect the street we knew, [Maximilianstraße](#), and follow it in. A long way about, but it should work.

And it did work. 15 minutes later we were back at the center garage. In the square in front of the [Rathaus-Glockenspiel](#), camera ready, with 10 minutes to spare. We had perfected our navigation system, at least for Munich.

Dinner at the [Rathaus Ratskeller](#) was excellent. Bought some flowers for Ingrid at a flower stall and headed back to the hotel. Drove (wandered) around for a while, knowing about where we wanted to go but unable to get there, finally stumbled on the right combination of one way streets and reached the hotel. Bed about 10:00 p.m.

Friday, 10/25/02 - Julius and Ingrid

Up at 7:30 a.m., swim and breakfast, back to room for finishing touches. Down to lobby to meet the Father/Father-in-law at the agreed on hour of 11:00 a.m. - Nobody's there. Got a paper, read the sports, then the international, still nobody. 11:30 a.m. and I'm starting to worry. I figured these people to be early, not way late. What's up?

Sort of half read the business news, half watched the front door. An old woman in a plain blue coat, looking sort of lost comes in and stands, trying to get her bearings. Playing a hunch I get up and approach her saying, "Ingrid?" It is, and she lights up, looking quite beautiful. I give her a hug (unexpected, but delighted) and a relationship is born. Ingrid and I are bonded.

Julius, it seems, is parking the car (or guarding the car, I didn't get which) and we should come out. Helga had been working out something with the desk, has finished and we three go out together to meet Julius. It's a strange, formal greeting. No hugs, like with Ingrid and I: more like handshakes and appraisals of both Helga and I. Greetings done we split up to go to [Türkenfeld](#), Helga with Julius in his car and Ingrid with me in the rental.

Some words on Julius and Ingrid

Ingrid first. She is an older woman, mid 70s and looks it, stands about 5' 3" with a straight figure wearing a plain, blue dress. Her hair is gray and always disheveled. She has a strong face which is quite handsome when she smiles, and she smiles often. Her manner is self-deprecating, but often her keen intelligence shows through. Her determination is often evident, and is inexorable, but when opposed and aware she is going to lose, she will back off with a laugh. She has a great deal of humor and applies much of it to herself. When she does back off from something, its only moments before she's back at it again.

Ingrid speaks English, but not fluently. She understands more and better than she speaks, but frequently will caution you to speak more slowly, to use more simple words. She carries an English/German dictionary and when stuck will call time and open it to settle the issue. She thinks like a good translator and keeps Julius in the conversation as much as she can. Likewise she translates his comments to us, often to Helga's protest, "I got that." Ingrid smiles and keeps on doing it. Thanks, Ingrid, because I didn't get it.

Julius is handsome and dignified, professorial in manner. He is quiet (speaks no English) much of the time, but always watching. Understands more than he lets on. No reaction, but recognition has occurred. Speaks in a reedy tenor typical of older German men, but with the authority of a professor. Pronounces rather than muses or questions. He is in good shape for 87, walks strongly and drives well, although erratic when preoccupied. Drives better than I when evaluated against a speed & coordination standard. Humor is dry, but it's there. He has style, and lives it.

The [Bavarian](#) countryside is beautiful. Low, rolling country, mostly cultivated, but some wood. Rivers and streams everywhere. Fields are bare, plowed or stubble in fall, trees are mostly hardwood: beech, birch, linden, oak etc. Everything is owned and managed - no wild open space. Still, pretty to drive through.

As we had left the hotel in Munich, Ingrid had told me quite firmly, "Don't worry about them, I know the way, I'll tell you where to go." As I don't care for last minute

way finding instructions, and in any case wasn't yet completely sure of Ingrid's communication skills, I was uneasy with this arrangement and tried hard to get Ingrid to tell me our route. She held out a while, then conceded to my concerns enough to tell me, "Lindau." The [Autobahn](#) we were taking was headed towards [Lindau](#). This gave me enough to start with and I followed the signs to Lindau, which allowed me to already be in the correct lane and starting my turn when Ingrid's instruction came, usually after I was already on the off ramp. Traffic moves fast on the Autobahn and I was suddenly aware that the car that had just passed me was Julius'. I speeded up and locked on, and the navigation issue was solved, only Ingrid didn't know it.

On we went, zooming toward Türkenfeld at 90 mph, and Ingrid began to notice that I was driving with confidence and wasn't waiting for her instructions. Still hadn't picked up on Julius up ahead. Her conclusion was that I was some sort of magic driver, could drive a stick shift, find my way without a map, and God knows what else. Our relationship was growing.

Unable to stand such prosperity, I pointed out to her that it was Julius in front of us, and a new Ingrid emerged. She said "Let's dust him!" or words to that effect.

Now Julius drives fast, and I had my hands full just tailing him. I wasn't at all sure that our rental could even pass him, much less stay ahead of him if he was even half trying. Still, I had something going with Ingrid, and if she wanted to win this race I could at least try. I floored it and pulled into the center to pass. As we went by Ingrid waved both hands and made a series of rude faces. I glanced over briefly and saw Julius looking at Helga, gesturing with his right hand. Helga was gesturing with both hands. We flew by and I pulled in front of them, held that position to the Türkenfeld off ramp, pulled off, let them pass and resumed our following position. Three minutes later we came to a grove of trees and Julius pulled off. Ingrid grunted with satisfaction: the poor man has an 87 year old prostate and had to pee. We won anyway. Not only that, Helga and Julius were working so hard to communicate that they hadn't even seen us.

So, Ingrid and I were solid. First the hug, then my driving prowess, and last but not least, the race. Best of all, we won but no one lost (read Julius). The drive had been good for Helga and Julius, too. In spite of the language difference they had established that they could communicate. We had reached our [Gasthaus](#) just in time for lunch which we ate there. Julius and Ingrid are obviously friends of the establishment, and they gave us a very good lunch. Then we separated, Julius and Ingrid to go home and make some phone calls and plans, and Helga and I to take a nap, still trying to shake off the effects of the trip over. We'll meet again for dinner and a tour of their house, and we'll find out what tomorrow has in store.

The Gasthaus has been extremely successful since Helga stayed here 17 years ago. They have added a wing with a big party room downstairs and about 6 luxury rooms upstairs. We were staying in one of the new rooms in the new wing, and were impressed with the activity in the place. That day they had a wedding dinner, a birthday bash, and

us. Probably the other rooms were full too, but we didn't know it. We rested until the appointed hour of 6:00 p.m. and then Julius and Ingrid picked us up for dinner.

Dinner was at the local monastery, good, but not spectacular. Afterwards we retired to the [Stürmer](#) home to view the artist in his workplace and to get a much better understanding of Julius and Ingrid. And of the family. Ingrid, as usual, was the interpreter. However, this time the visual spoke louder than the words.

The apartment was filled with Julius' work. I think most of it was arranged for our benefit. Julius' work is strong, his statements quite vivid. It's on the walls, propped against the cabinets, on the drawing board, on the coffee table. What's out or being worked on appears at first to be haphazard, but on study two themes emerge: this is what he is currently working on, and "this is a good one, I want them to see it."

The flat files and drawers are in perfect order. He can put his hands on anything he has in a moment. A picture of Linda, back in '67, when she came to live with them. He opens a drawer and takes it out (My God, I remember that girl, she was working with me at the County just a few weeks before and all the guys were hitting on her. Boy, was she mad at everybody!). He and Ingrid reminisce about how angry and difficult she was, and I see a fondness of parents for their daughter. They didn't have her long, but she's all the daughter they had.

They love her. Admire her beauty, cluck their tongues, forgive all faults and admire all virtues. Parents displaying Princess Linda, and Kate is little Linda. Another side of Julius and Ingrid emerges, and I like it.

No Burt.

Saturday, 10/26/02 - Off to Bamberg

After Julius and Ingrid's phone calls and planning of last night, it was decided that if we were going to see cousin Gerda, (Victor's daughter), it had to be tomorrow. Gerda lives outside of [Bamberg](#), 300km away, and we must go there as she works in Bamberg and must be back at work Monday. The meeting is a necessity because Gerda and Helga are about the same age and raised a lot of hell as kids in [Romania](#) (There was this risqué story of the two girls trying to write their names in the snow, or on a wall, or some such - Neither would admit to it.), they had not met since Helga left, and so we had to go.

This Saturday morning, a lot of discussion took place on how to travel to Bamberg. It's far enough that we need to spend the night there, so luggage is required. Further, since Helga and I won't be in Türkenfeld for Saturday evening, we should check out and check in again when we got back. That meant we took all our luggage, which filled the trunk of our car. The idea of two cars, similar to our trip out the day before

wasn't too good because the distance and travel time was too great. Helga and Julius would wear out due to language difficulties.

Julius solved it by dictate, and I sealed it by agreement. Julius would drive alone and lead, I would follow with Helga and Ingrid. If Julius lost us, no problem, Ingrid knew the way. If Julius needed a rest stop, no problem, we could stop or go on. Ingrid could give us the tour guide tour as we went, not having to translate the other way, and Julius was clear of all that stuff and could just drive. Suited me fine, no one's uncomfortable. I endorsed.

Julius started off. I followed. We reached my threshold of speed comfort at about 110km (70+ mph). Julius continued to accelerate. Leveled off at 140 km (95 mph, +/-). I hung on. Helga and Ingrid were talking, no need to worry about speed, Julius and John were in charge of that. Ingrid did say that she insisted that Julius observe the 120 km posted limit rule. We were doing about 145km at the time. Weather turned nasty and we slowed to 120km, about 50km over my comfort zone. Rain got heavy, wipers on full, Julius drops to 110km, but then speeds up to pass. And so on for 250km.

The country, or what I could see of it, was lovely. Farmland and woods, mostly farm. Hay, corn (they call it maize), millet (all harvested) and hops. Trees were in fall colors: green, yellow, red and brown. The plane of Munich gives way to low hills with limestone outcrops, managed woods of pine and fir. Road is some Autobahn (very fast) and some rural arterial (Improved rural highway, very fast, but with surprises). I'm following Julius who drives very well: fast, but conscious of the follower's needs. When he thought he was losing me he pulled over into the right lane and waited until I caught up. My mind did a reassessment: the man is 87 and he's a better driver than I am.

During the drive up Ingrid is filling us in on Gerda and who she is now. Helga knew her as a playmate in Romania, but hasn't heard much of her since. She's a teacher of art at the university, she has a house, she has dogs, she has a husband (or significant other) that, apparently, Ingrid doesn't approve of. His name is Plato, he drinks too much, smokes too much, is lazy, no help to Gerda, has money inherited from his mother, generally not a good sort.

We arrive in Gerda's village near Bamberg in the rain, caravan to Gerda's house, no Gerda! Note on the door: Her husband, Plato, has had a stroke and she took him to the hospital. She'll be back soon.

What do you do? We stood and stared at the note. Ingrid and Julius gave us a quick tour of the grounds (house was locked). Magnificent place! 200 years old and immaculate. Big garden with all the stuff I would have, barn/shed/wine cellar dug into the hill. All this in the rain, the dogs locked in the house and barking, and Gerda missing with a tragedy on her hands.

Tour over, we assemble in the carport (Or whatever you call a 200 year old shelter for vehicles. Gerda parks her car there.) What now?

Suddenly Gerda returns. She says, “Oh good, you made it. Come in and eat.” But what about Plato? How is he? “It’s bad. Can’t move left side. Really don’t know anything yet. Please sit down and eat.” “But...” Not even Ingrid can stand up to her.

Gerda introduces us to her dogs, Wolfe and Ivol. Wolfe is a white German Shephard and a sucker for a petting, and Ivol is a mix and more suspicious. After about two hours in the house they both knew Helga and I for family. Interesting to watch Julius with the dogs. He loves them and they him. No posing or preservation of image here, he’s an animal lover.

We sit. Gerda serves, first ouzo, olives, bread, feta and aubergine. It’s all great, quality products and a flair for both preparation and composition. I think that’s lunch and grab seconds (there’s plenty). Turns out it’s only the appetizer. Two courses follow: Cretan chicken (really, it was great!) and a desert of local bakery pastry. Best food so far on the trip. 2 hours conversation about the past, the house and finally Plato’s condition. We start to understand Gerda a little.

Then a tour of the house. It’s a 200 year old shrine, fully restored and decorated to perfection. Theme is Romanian and Bavarian, with art by Julius and Victor, some ethnic art, and Photos by Gerda. Very good taste and composition in everything. Very little family art out, (family photos, etc.). Still, this is a house to live in and it feels of a home, not a display.

Gerda is as much an artist as her father (Victor) or Julius. Her compositions are studied, but natural, and they show everywhere: in the way the rooms are arranged, her photographs, even in the arrangement of the food she served at lunch. She teaches art at the local university, and disclaims the idea that she is an artist, she’s only a teacher.

Gerda is average height (about 5’ 6”, but she appears larger), solid build, strong and fit, same age as Helga. While her house, her photos and her food show her artistic skill, her personal appearance shows an almost complete disinterest. She has a good, interesting face and shows an awesome intelligence. She’s no beauty, but she grows on you. Overall impression is an attractive woman who doesn’t fit the stereotype.

After lunch, Gerda shows us to the local Gasthaus, where we check in and rest up from our drive. Gerda takes the dogs for a walk. If I’d known that was what she was going to do, I would have gone with her. I needed a walk much more than I needed a nap. Got to learn a little German.

Just a few words on the communication situation. I knew from the beginning that communication in [German](#) and [Italian](#) was going to be a problem for me. Especially German, which had always sounded alien to me. The surprise was that I understood quite a bit of German. A large number of English words are common or similar to the German word, they’re just pronounced differently. When a German speaker speaks slowly, separates the words clearly and uses an “English accent,” I pick up most of what’s being said, assuming it’s not too complicated. When Julius and Ingrid are talking to one

another, it's a garble of sound and I'm lucky to pick out a word here and there. When they speak to me, slowly and clearly, simple ideas, I get it most of the time. Ingrid is very good at this and uses the English pronunciation on common words. Julius can't or won't do an English accent and I find him more difficult, but when he remembers to go slow and simple I can get most of it. He also tends to follow the theory of "if he didn't get it, I'll say it louder." and then understanding departs completely.

The plan is to see the sights of Medieval Bamberg on a whirlwind tour of those places most spectacular at night, then go to dinner, and do the whole thing again tomorrow in daylight. It's been drizzling or raining all day, and tonight is at least as wet. Julius will ride with Gerda in her car and I will follow with Helga and Ingrid. Here we go again, me trying to follow in the rain and the dark, this time on medieval streets.

I should have realized that anyone who could cook like Gerda and who could run that big house and garden so well would be a cinch to follow. She drove with assurance, not slow, but always with me in mind. She signaled every turn well in advance, gave me plenty of time to get in the proper lane and waited when someone got in between us. Even with the rain and the narrow cobblestone streets, Gerda made it easy.

We went first to the cathedral at the top of the hill (berg), a walled complex with a large square ringed by buildings, built in the 12th and 13th century. A huge, gothic structure, made even more huge and gothic by the dark and the rain. The main cathedral, seeming to grow out of the rock of the berg, was lit by spotlights, from below, making it seem even larger and more impressive.

According to Gerda there are 7 major cathedrals which remain in Bamberg, built in the 12th to the 15th century. Gerda not only knew how to find them, but how to approach them for the maximum impact: where to go for the perfect views, how to use the night or the light, even the rain. We visited 4 of the 7, selected because they would benefit from the conditions, and ended with a view from across the river of the cathedral on the berg. Went inside of only one: a huge gothic structure about 150' high to the main roof, all stone, roof supported by crossed gothic arches, no beams, only mortar. Been there for 800 years. Unbelievable.

A service was underway, and both my training and the sign in the foyer said, "Don't take pictures." I respected the request. To my surprise, Julius didn't. Even when he is playing with his video camera, Julius has the attitude that he is an artist, a higher calling, and the rules don't apply to him. I guess this attitude is necessary when you make your living by creating and selling art, but his disregard of the common courtesy surprised me.

Rainy night tour completed we returned to the restaurant across from Gerda's house for dinner. The place was packed. Germans must eat out a lot, because there are lots of restaurants and they are nearly all full. Food was quite good, but most patrons smoked, which interfered with the food. Gerda was distracted by Plato's illness, but couldn't visit until tomorrow morning. Ingrid continues to function gamely, but she's

about worn out and it shows. She's tired, not feeling well, but not willing to quit. Helga and I are plotting to slip off alone tomorrow. Maybe that will give her a break.

Sunday, 10/27/02 - Return from Bamberg

It's Sunday and it's raining. We all meet for breakfast at 9:00 a.m. at the Gasthaus. Gerda arrives an hour early, as she forgot it was the morning of the change back to standard time, and she hadn't reset her clock. Helga and I made the same mistake: we didn't forget, we never knew that [Germany](#) was on daylight savings time. You might say it was ignorance that got us there on time (first time ever). Julius was wearing a fancy new watch that was programmed to change automatically, so he knew the correct time, but his and Ingrid's bodies were still on daylight savings time and they got up anyway. They were sitting in their room waiting for 9:00 a.m. to come down for breakfast. Gerda, Helga and I were sitting at the breakfast table drinking coffee and wondering where they were.

Finally Gerda (and us) got worried and she went to check on them. Soon all three came into the breakfast room: Gerda relieved, Ingrid embarrassed, and Julius just tickled pink over his new watch and that he was right. We all considered it cheating, but he wasn't buying it.

Gerda is increasingly distracted by Plato and the uncertainty of his condition. She really wants to get to the hospital to see if she can find something out. Ingrid still looks beat and is starting to admit it. Julius' main interest in the whole trip, whether he acknowledged it or not, was his chance to talk to Gerda. With her off to the hospital, there went that. So when Helga and I announced we would like to wander back on our own there was some skepticism that we could find Türkenfeld, but not much opposition.

Helga and I wanted to make our way slowly back to Türkenfeld site seeing along the way. In particular, I had seen very little on the way north to Bamberg other than the highway and the back end of Julius' car, but the little I had seen made me want to take my time and see more. The countryside was both interesting and lovely, and off to the sides we had seen fascinating, tantalizing little [dorfs](#) with their church spires and medieval architecture. Just the views when the clouds break and the sun streams through. And Bamberg. The appetizer we had experienced the night before had been too brief to satisfy, just enough to entice our appetite.

We started with Bamberg. It was Sunday morning and all the cathedrals were having services, so parking and touring were between difficult and out of the question. Still, revisiting the sites we had seen the night before, but in daylight, was worthwhile. Last night we had seen the parts that were lit, symbolic images (20th century images) of the actual structure. In daylight we saw the whole place including the unlit portions. While the compositions weren't as good, the real place emerged, including some charming features that hadn't been apparent the night before. For example, the medieval street leading up to the cathedral on the berg was right out of the [Renaissance Pleasure Faire](#). The best we saw in Germany.

Left Bamberg at 12:30 p.m. and headed south. The rain had let up, except for occasional showers, but the wind was awful and got worse as we moved south. Seemed like it would blow you right off the road. We stopped just north of [Nuremberg](#) for lunch and to get money at an ATM. Found a bank right off, and that worked fine. The restaurant was an out of the way neighborhood place serving German-Greek food, acceptable but well short of good. Chalk up one big advantage to traveling with Julius and Ingrid: they knew the good places to eat.

Stopped again at a little church in [Donauwörth](#). One of those lovely little dorfs we could see from the highway. The church was built about 1700 at a guess, in perfect repair and still working. Not very remarkable, but warm and comfortable. Well, the building made you feel comfortable (at home) not like a tourist or an intruder. The wind was ferocious. And the graves were nearly all post war. It was as if they had started over in 1945, rebuilt the whole thing using original architecture and construction. Could be. There wasn't a label anywhere, not even a church name.

We had left the highway to visit Donauwörth and now we continued on the blue highway, the scenic route, south. Well, we thought it would be scenic. Turned out this was the old highway that connected all the little and mid-sized towns between Nuremberg and Lindau. The Autobahn had been built after the war, a freeway through the countryside with no side access allowed. This local road had caught all the industrialization and urban sprawl of the post war era. Much of the country flavor had been pre-empted by the unattractive growth since the war, and little of the "country road" remained. It was slow, but that was because of all the traffic lights, local traffic, and the fact that every little town had at least three narrow street, 90* turns with full stops. Still, there were some open spaces and the views were spectacular.

We had planned to take the #2 from Donauwörth to [Augsburg](#), pick up the #17 Autobahn there and follow it to [Landsberg am Lech](#), and take the E57 Autobahn back towards Munich to the Türkenfeld turnoff which we knew to be signed. To our surprise we spotted an off ramp to [Geltendorf](#) while still on the #17, 20km north of Landsberg. This put us immediately on a tiny farm road, almost without signs, that we followed faithfully because we had no other choice. Suddenly our faith was rewarded when without warning we were in downtown Geltendorf facing a sign to Türkenfeld. 5km later we roll into the Gasthof parking place just as the last light was fading. It was 5:20 p.m. We had turned a 3 hour drive into a 7 hour journey and enjoyed it thoroughly.

Dinner was downstairs with Julius and Ingrid. Ingrid looked much more rested and was amused at our tale of the journey. After dinner, good nights and Helga and I upstairs for showers and a romantic cognac. I lay down for a moment, next thing I knew it was morning.

Monday, 10/28/02 - Wolfegg & Ottobeuren

Julius and Ingrid met us for breakfast downstairs for breakfast, no confusion about time this time, and then we departed in Julius' car for their house to review pictures, select copies for Helga and me to take, and to see photos of Julius' recent shows. Then on to [Wolfegg](#) to tour the auto museum and Julius' work in particular. Wolfegg is about 150 km southwest of Geltendorf, almost to Lindau, and the museum is in the stable and barn buildings of a prince's castle, about 500 year old buildings. On exhibit are cars, motor cycles, travel trailers and an accompaniment of ads, posters, cartoons and other graphics (mostly by Julius) which advertised the vehicles, races, auto shows, etc. for about 100 years of vehicles. It is a good show, particularly to someone my age who grew up with so many of the exhibits.

Also nice for me was the ride to Wolfegg and back. I got to sit in the back seat and look out the window, Ingrid beside me giving a running commentary on the countryside, history, Linda stories and translations of Julius' comments. It was the first time in Germany that I didn't have to drive.

We went through the museum exhibits slowly, concentrating on Julius' work. I've got most of it on video, so I won't try to describe it here, other than to say he started out with illustrations of sports cars and motor cycles in the '30s, split into cartoons, more serious commentary and race posters as the war approached, and back to commercial ad art in the '50s and '60s. If he had anything newer than 1970 in the exhibit, I didn't notice it.

After the tour of Julius' work, which took about an hour, he offered us the opportunity to go on through and look at the cars. Helga had gamely limped around way past her limit, and she begged out, and Ingrid had seen it all before, so she stayed with Helga. Julius and I wandered through the two buildings, looking at about 100 autos and other vehicles (Including 3 tractors) with manufacture dates from about 1900 forward. So many of them I had driven or had belonged to friends of mine. Early Jags, MGs, an old Healy, a '50 Ford! This was the private collection of a man who loved cars, any and all cars. A man rich enough to be able to acquire 100 or so cars and stuff, keep it until the collection became too big, and then convince the owners of the castle to make available about 100,000 square feet of the castle to house it. Nothing in the collection was of great value by itself, but taken as a whole the tour was a blast for me, and I think Julius knew it. We bonded a little bit.

I need to go back a bit and tell you about the cat. We had gotten to Wolfegg about 1:00 p.m. and stopped in the village for lunch before going to the museum. Excellent lunch, best Bavarian food we had eaten. Before leaving the restaurant, Julius and I had gone to the lavatory; Helga and Ingrid had already gone, so they went ahead to the car. When Julius and I came up to the car 5 minutes later, there was this very social cat who had climbed into the backseat with Ingrid. It took about 5 more minutes to persuade the cat that we had to leave and he/she had to get out of the car. As we drove out of the restaurant parking lot, there was the cat, being social and climbing into another family's car.

So, when Julius and I had finished our tour, another 2 1/2 hours had elapsed and we both being over 60, had to go again. There was a W/C on the lower floor of the stable wing of the exhibit and we headed there. I noticed a blur of motion as we went in, turned, and there was the same cat, accompanying us to the W/C. Having completed our use, Julius and I turned to leave. Here comes the cat. It didn't seem too good an idea to leave it locked in the W/C, so I caught the cat (not so social when you want to catch it) and gave it its liberty at the outside door to the building.

So, how did the cat (die Katze) get from the restaurant to the castle? Hitched a ride of course. As we were leaving the castle grounds, there was the cat sucking up to another family, no doubt trying to cage a ride back to the restaurant, or to where ever the cat wanted to go. As a non-German speaking person I couldn't figure that out. However, I do speak cat well enough to know that cat knew exactly what it was doing.

From the auto museum we went to a baroque church at [Ottobeuren](#). This church, according to J&I was the living end of schlock (My word, not theirs). Ottobeuren is a tiny dorf of about 50 - 100 buildings (20th century total) and this church complex. I think it was both an abbey and a Bishop's cathedral when built, back in the 15th century, probably remodeled to fit the Bishop during the Baroque period, and now maintained at enormous expense just because it is, and nothing else is so much. Certainly, the dorf isn't big enough to support such an edifice.

The cathedral itself is huge, about 250' x 100' wide x 100' high, with a huge nave. Every surface is painted or carved, or both. Gold and marble everywhere. Remains of saints or parts of saints in about 6 locations throughout. Ceilings painted to rival the Sistine Chapel. Even the ceilings in the hallways were painted with biblical scenes. It was an unbelievable display of wealth, both to build and maintain.

On to Geltendorf - pick up dinner by Ingrid: bologna salad and [Mosel](#) wine. Back to Türkenfeld for Helga and me, to sleep and recuperate for tomorrow's adventure: [Austria](#) and [Italy](#).

Salzburg and South to Italy

Tuesday, 10/29/02 - To Salzburg

We departed Türkenfeld for [Salzburg](#) after a leisurely breakfast and pack. This is the first morning since we arrived that we haven't been either awakened or had to get up for Ingrid and Julius. It seems delicious to just dawdle along at our own pace.

Salzburg is a short drive, about 2-1/2 hours, all Autobahn. The road zips through the Bavarian hills with views of the [Alps](#) to the south. There are lots of interesting looking dorfs, some narrowly missed by the Autobahn, but nothing to interrupt the

German motorist speeding to his or her destination. Us too. There will be plenty to see in Salzburg and only two days to see it, so we can't afford to wander off in search of forgotten dorfs no matter how tempting. We push straight through.

Salzburg is in Austria, right on the Germany/Austria line and we depart the Autobahn at the west edge of town. Conveniently located about a block off the freeway is a one story building with a sign "Visitor's Center" in English (Maybe they had another visitor's center for Germans or others, or maybe only English speaking people need help, I don't know, but the only sign was in English). There we got directions to the hotel and a recommendation for lunch. The lunch was excellent, and the directions took us straight in without a hitch.

Our hotel was the [Goldener Hirsch](#) (Golden Deer or Stag) and it is located in the old city, just opposite the gateway tunnel. We would never have found it without the great directions from the girl at the visitor's center. Old Salzburg sits on a narrow flat between berg (hill or mountain) and river. The sides of the berg (solid rock) have been excavated to vertical to about 50 to 100 feet and the city built into them. In medieval times it appears the only road in was through the Gateway tunnel. It was that or swim the river. The gateway tunnel is still the only way in from the west or north, and the chance that we would find that tunnel without directions was remote.

Old Salzburg is about 2 - 5 blocks wide from berg to river and about 3 times longer along the river. The current buildings date from about 1200AD. Newer old town has spilled across the river since about 1500AD and its here that you find the larger halls and palaces where Mozart played. On top of the berg sits the castle ([Schloss](#)), appearing impregnable with its steep slopes and high walls. A tramway is now available to take you to the Schloss.

Traffic is kept off the interior streets, but they are so full of pedestrians that they are still hard to navigate. Cars and busses travel avenues that loop around the old town, and taxis are allowed into major squares. The old town is filled with upscale shops, museums, chapels, hotels, restaurants, etc., mostly on the lower level. Upper stories lean over the street, and these appear as original, but the lower commercial level has been modernized, with plate glass and lighted shop windows. Still, when you stand back and look at these old streets it's not hard to imagine how they looked in 1400. Prohibiting cars does a lot to preserve the medieval look.

Wandered around for a while, window shopping and getting a feel for the place, about as much as Helga's foot would allow, and wandered back to the hotel to freshen up for dinner. The concierge recommended several places for dinner, but modestly stated that nothing was as good as the Goldener Hirsch. Neither of us was in the mood for a five star dinner that night, but we figured we might challenge him tomorrow. Had a very acceptable two course supper in the Rathskeller next door (also owned by the Goldener Hirsch) and went up to bed.

Wednesday, 10/30/02 - Salzburg

We wake up in the Goldener Hirsch Hotel in old Salzburg to the sounds of people moving and talking, traffic in and out of the tunnel, the sounds of a city going to work. Salzburg is already full and busy at 8:00 am. Our window looks out on the tunnel, 100 meters away to the northeast, [St. Peter's Cathedral](#) down the street about three blocks to the northwest, and due north the [Hohensalzburg Fortress](#), the Schloss, so high up on top of the berg that you have to bend your knees and crane your neck to see it out the window.

Breakfast is a combination of American style (eggs, bacon, hot sausage, hash browns, etc.) and continental (cold cuts, fruit, breakfast pastry). We found that this was typical of most, larger, hotels we stayed in throughout the trip, the smaller hotels just offered the continental. The Goldener Hirsch's breakfast was excellent, as was all their food.

After breakfast we go out to walk around, get the real feel of Salzburg. Yesterday's gray weather has advanced to steady drizzle which somehow finds its way between the buildings and down to the medieval street. People, with or without umbrellas, walk on about their business as if it were dry, ignoring the weather which is such a familiar part of their lives, but I notice that it's wet.

We stroll down [Getreidegasse](#), past [Mozart's](#) house, to the old apothecary shop (Still doing business as a Pharmacy, and still arranged as it was in 1600.), wander through several platz which were just breaking down from the morning's market activities. We come to the entrance to the square in front of St. Peter's Cathedral, it's raining a little harder now, and stop at the stand of a watercolorist selling his pictures of the City. He has his work arranged under an umbrella, tucked as far as possible back under portal to the square. His pictures stay dry, but if he has two customers, one has to stay out in the rain. I noticed this because I was the second customer. Helga will probably argue to the end that I'm crazy, there was no rain, see, there is the sun.

He gives us his assurance that he will still be there when we return later and we go on into the square. The cathedral is dark and gothic, we go in but don't stay long, and we move on to the old original [Kapelle](#), graveyard and garden. The Kapelle was built in the 10th - 11th century and is now seldom used, but the graveyard is getting lots of attention. Tomorrow is [Halloween](#), Friday is [All Saints' Day](#) and Saturday is [All Souls' Day](#). A bevy of older women in gardening clothes are spiffing up the grave yard, making everything look nice for the services. They ignore both the few tourists and the rain, as if both are merely minor trials sent to test their faith.

Above the old Kapelle is the wall of the berg, almost straight up for 200 feet. Old buildings and crypts have been built into the bottom of the cliff, and catacombs hollowed out for additional crypt space. The stairs are steep, I go up but Helga rests her foot at the bottom. Just as well, the "catacombs" are pretty disappointing: just dirty caves with no evidence of the centuries of history they must have housed.

Also in this area is the foot of the cogway to the Schloss. We don't go up because with the low clouds and the rain we wouldn't be able to see anything, and Helga's foot has about had it. We start back, stop at a [Benedictine](#) run shop for some liqueurs and at the stand of our water color friend to buy some of his city sketches. He turns out to be a [Montenegro](#) born, [Dubrovnik](#) resident, recently arrived in Salzburg and already turning a profit. He and Helga talk about the weird ways of fate and the world, and we walk on (I walk, Helga hobbles). This guy isn't doing too bad for a refugee, a minority refugee, from a civil war torn country. We limp back to the hotel, and search for lunch.

The rain continues to worsen as the afternoon goes on, as does Helga's foot, so we return to the room and look out the window. It's a pretty good compromise, as all of Salzburg is before our window and the sounds of the rain and the people below are quite soothing. We lie on the bed and listen to the soft rain, the traffic's roar a block away, conversations of the people in the street below our window and the bark of a little dog in a rain coat, telling the world he doesn't mind the rain. He barks again, the conversation below moves on and Helga and I nap.

At 6:00 p.m. we pop up and go out to shop for a few things and find the street almost deserted and everything closed. What is it with Wednesday nights? We give up on the shopping and go back to the Goldener Hirsch to take them up on the dinner challenge. Boy, are they good! Much too much food for me. Five courses and all of it rich. I couldn't pace myself all the way to desert - had to quit. Best lamb chops I've ever eaten.

Back to the room for a fitful, groaning, very careful lie down to digest. Tomorrow we need to do our shopping and get off to Italy, but tonight there's nothing but bed.

Thursday, 10/31/02 - On To Italy

We left Salzburg at 11:30 a.m. It was raining hard. Visibility was about 300 feet. Navigation in cities is always a problem on arrival, but on leaving all we needed was to find the Autobahn and head south. How hard could that be?

Using logic to make up for the absence of a city map we crossed the river and turned left, certain to strike the Autobahn. Big mistake. The road kept getting smaller and rural, and about 15 miles out of town we picked up a sign that indicated we were headed for a town that the Austrian map said was north of Salzburg. How could this be? I'll never figure out how we got across both the river and the Autobahn without realizing it, but we did. We were 180* off course.

We turned around and tried again. This time we got lost in a suburb alongside the Jaguar plant. With a sigh I pulled over and put the old town map together with the Austria map, plus the information gained from getting lost twice, and figured it out. At 1:00 p.m. we reached the Autobahn, recognized it this time, and headed south. It was still raining hard.

The Alps are spectacular, even in the rain. Very rugged peaks and deep, deep canyons. Some of the peaks are cut off by clouds, others cut the clouds off and stand in silhouette: black bottom, white top and gray background. The rivers are all full and swift. Even the smaller “creeks” have more water in them than we see in our mountain rivers in summer time. You get the feeling that these streams run full all the time.

The road follows the Salzburg River canyon to about 3500 feet elevation, then cuts (literally) through the ridge in a 6 mile tunnel to the Italian watershed. It then follows another river down to [Villach](#) on the Austrian border with Italy. The weather started to clear as soon as we emerged from the tunnel on the Italian side, and the views on the south side of the divide were even more spectacular than before. However the road requires full attention and there are few places to pull out. Even these are hard to use unless you know them in advance, as the curves are continuous and traffic speed fast. By the time you spot a turnout you’re past it.

We left the Autobahn to visit a village by the name of [Gmünd](#) in an attempt to stop and enjoy the view and incidentally some lunch. It was too late for lunch so we stopped at an Austrian supermarket and bought sausage, cheese, bread, pastry and fruit. Also some surprisingly cheap liquor for evening cocktails. One advantage of the Euro (Probably the only advantage) is that it has removed the tariffs from a lot of items that were formerly protected, and scotch, cognac, cosmetics etc. are suddenly very reasonable.

Gmünd is an old town on the trade route to Austria which lies in the canyon bottom and clings to its sides. It has been protected by its situation from ever outgrowing village status: it can’t get much bigger because the canyon walls are too steep and the central flat only so long. So it got bypassed, the Autobahn is 400 feet up on the east side of the canyon, and today it looks about as it did in the 16th century. Old buildings, charming countryside (steep countryside), and a feeling that the pace of life here is not quite up to the 21st century. Of course, they do have a supermarket and the sound of the Autobahn.

We drove up the hill to the west of the village and soon were up into the vineyards, looking down on the old village. This is a village like so many that I would like to hang around for a while. Get to know the locals, follow up on the history, it must have a fascinating story (stories) to study on this route. I’ll bet the Romans, the Barbarians, the Austrians, the Germans, probably a dozen or more others, all have been through and have dominated this place for a time. What are their stories? Give me good food and good stories and I’m having a great time. I’m starting to figure out why I’m here.

Back to the Autobahn and continuing on down the hill to Italy. Stopped at a roadside rest for a late lunch about 3:30 p.m. We decided to drive to Villach for the night. This was our 2nd mistake: picking Villach as a day’s end destination. Villach spreads out for about 15 miles along the Autobahn. The canyon widens out, a “See” on each side and a very scattered collection of towns, all loosely labeled “Villach” this and that. The area

is a summer resort, loaded with Gasthaus, all of which are closed for the season and for the year today.

Tried one, met by an old lady with no English, no rooms. Closed today. Another (hotel on the See), 3 flights up, tiny room, shabby, the place is a bath house, all male patrons, forget it. Back to the Autobahn.

Back to the Autobahn, for 10 miles, off at "Villach Süd." Long, dark road leading back towards the way we had come. Scattered buildings, slowly becoming dense. Finally a sign, "Gasthaus." We'd have taken anything. It was 2 hours past dark and I was exhausted.

It was not that bad. Only one floor up, lively bar-restaurant (everyone smokes). Room was a cube: 12' X 12' x 12'. Bed was only 18" high, with gold satin sheets & pillow cases. Mattresses and pillows were stuffed with something with the texture of wet wood. Weighed about 50 pounds and stayed where ever you placed it, regardless of the angle or the load. Like I said, the place was not that bad.

Dinner was ok - off from the smokers. We shared a soup (beef and veg) and Helga had a fruit and nut filled dumpling for desert. To bed and to sleep, on lumpy mattress and pillows. Like I said, not that bad.

Breakfast was at 8:00 a.m., no negotiation available, and that got us on the road by 9:30 a.m. If Madam hadn't been so emphatic about the early start the beds would have driven us out early anyway, so we accepted our fate and made the best of it. The day was gray, but dry, cold in Villach which is still in the mountains, but warmed up as we drove south down the hill. First stop was to be [Udine](#), about 10 miles north of the road to [Trieste](#). Udine sits right at the edge of the coastal plain, and its history goes back to [Rome](#) and before. We intended to visit it through lunch and then continue on to Trieste, which was our target for the night.

Let me say a few words about the Italian freeways, which operate differently from those in Germany and Austria. They look about the same, appear to be built to the same standards of widths, grades, materials, etc., and the differences aren't apparent immediately, but the Italian freeways are toll roads. When you cross the border into Italy you come to a plaza with security guards asking you the purpose of your trip, etc. Having satisfied them you proceed to structure similar to a bridge toll booth where you are issued a ticket. We assumed it was a ticket to enter Italy, sort of a pass or something. On you go, everything looking about the same as it did in Austria.

Until you want to get off. We see an exit marked "Udine North." From the size of the city it appears that Udine should have at least three exits, so we continue. And continue. And continue. 16 km further south we at last come to another exit and take it. We've now made the turn to Trieste and gone about 4 km down that road.

As we exit we come to a toll plaza. 3 options: Fast pass, trucks and other, all in Italian. What did we do with the ticket? Are any of these booths manned? I guess we go to “other,” but that is 7 lanes over, how do we get across? It could have been worse; it could have been raining! (Before attempting to cross the 7 lanes I look superstitiously up at the sky.)

We find the ticket, pay the toll and exit into our first experience of Italian signing. In Italy they have a rigid yet flexible protocol for highway signing: they sign everything if they feel like it, all on the same post. A typical sign post will have 14 to 22 signs with arrows, and be placed in an intersection you are approaching at 60kmh, with a 700 series BMW with his lights on about 5 feet from your bumper. It will identify towns and villages you've never heard of, but will omit any mention of the place you want to go. That's if you brave the wrath of the BMW and slow down enough to read it. If you don't slow down, it will bury your destination in the middle of the sign, will require an immediate right turn, and will be the last mention of that place you will see until you come back to that intersection.

We leave the toll plaza, completely turned around by the combination of spirals we went through to get to the Plaza, and in about a block, come to an intersection with a traffic light which to our good fortune is red. Helga reads as many of the signs as the red light permits, (I have given up and don't even try.), and when it changes we get goosed into motion by the impatient traffic. I go straight ahead.

About a km further the road is getting smaller, starting to look like a driveway to a factory just ahead, and even I have to admit that we need a better plan than “straight ahead.” Helga says, “I think I saw Udine on that sign back there at the toll plaza.” Back we go, no sign. Frustrated, I try to go the wrong way into the Plaza, make a U-turn to avoid disaster and there we are, facing the same sign again on another red light. Talk about luck! The local road to Udine is to the left, around another spiral, over the freeway, around yet another spiral, and finally off to the north as straight as an arrow.

We traveled about two km and came to a walled city. A by God walled city. Not surrounded by a stone or brick wall, but by a very practical earth dike with a moat on the outside. This was your economy style walled city, built on the cheap, but effective, principal being that the objective was to enable defense, and if your city was more defensible than the next one, you were ok. So, they dug a wide ditch, built the dirt from the ditch up into a steep sided dike, put in stone portal gates, one on each of four sides, (north, south, east and west) and built the city inside. The reason it's still here is that land is cheap here. The city hasn't grown, and the surrounding land is still pasture. So no pressure to convert the dike and moat real estate to houses or commercial. End result: a once common but now unique style of walled city survives, right here, 2 km off the main freeway. Named [Palmanova](#).

A man is fishing in the moat, about 100m east of the bridge to the south gate. Several others are hiking on top of the dike, now a popular walking trail. We pass through the portal and drive down a street lined with farm and small community oriented

businesses. Five blocks and we enter a large square, about 300m on a side, church at opposite end and shops around the other three sides and alongside the church. The center of the square is empty, graveled but unpaved.

Around the square and on to the north 5 more blocks and we exit at the north portal gate. The local road to Udine continues straight north, same as before. Thinking back to Palmanova, we vow to return there someday. It's a town that still belongs to the locals, the farmers and the local townsmen and women. Not all dressed up for tourists.

Continued north toward Udine on the local road. It's narrow, no shoulders, farms on both sides, about every 3km a store, bar, maybe a grocery. As we get closer to Udine, the houses start, and then get closer together, until we are in town. Head for the Centrum (All larger Italian towns sign the Centrum, usually where you find the main square, church or cathedral, and the old center of the town). Udine looks interesting, but impossible to visit today. It's All Saints' Day and a Friday afternoon, and everyone and their offspring are heading for the cathedral square. The closest parking place is at least a mile out, and Helga can't spend her entire foot on Udine. We drive around, see what we can from the car, and head for Trieste.

Still haven't eaten lunch, so fix on an off-beat town called [Cividale](#), about 15km east of Udine. To my surprise we find it without problems, park close to the centrum and eat at a little trattoria about a block from the church. Nice town, good food, everything simple, a town for the region, not for the tourists. Now on to Trieste.

Local roads most of the way (I like local roads: reasonable pace, you can see the countryside, signs are for people, not for freeway fanatics, but they are slow). We make what should be a short detour to see Maximilian's Castle at [Miramare](#). Miramare is the premier local beach and [Maximilian](#) was the one of [Mexico](#) fame. The weather is nice, it's been improving ever since we left Austria and is now about 65* and sunny. Maybe the last decent beach day of the season. Guess where everyone in northeastern Italy is?

In addition to the entire population of Italy headed to or coming from the beach that day (A holiday, All Saints' Day, remember?), they are installing a huge pipeline in the only beach side road, the road that leads to Maximilian's Castle, and there are only 20 feet, caution tape to concrete wall. This 20 feet is parked solid on one side, and carries cars both ways to boot. What complicates things is the cars that lose patience and decide to turn around rather than go all the way in. Did I tell you that it's a dead end road?

We decided we didn't care to see the castle long before we managed to turn around, and the trip back was just as slow and just as tedious as the trip in. By the time we got into Trieste I was tired and cross. Headed along the waterfront, following the signs for the Centrum (We are starting to figure out how to navigate here in Italy, but the worst will come later). We found the [Hotel Grand](#) and double parked. They said, "Go around the block and find a parking place." Ha! I drove around 20 blocks, got lost, finally arrived back at the hotel and double parked again. Gave the car to a young guy (Assistant Manager, I think.), he parks it about 2 blocks away and is back in 5 minutes. OK by me.

Nice room, friendly staff, right on the main square. Helga and I go out into the square and wander around. It's about 4 city blocks of empty pavement, one fountain, and it's full of people. Why do they come here? The city streets, or the waterfront mall are prettier. Still they flock to the square. Kids run around, families stroll, mostly folks just stand and talk. It's the evening entertainment.

We had dinner at Harry's Bar in the hotel (Superb!), strolled around some more, went up and had a high-tech shower and then to bed.

Trieste to Asolo

Saturday, 11/2/02 - Trieste

We wake up in Trieste to a gray morning. Last night's rain has given way to mist and fog. Everything is wet, but not enough precipitation to warrant an umbrella. Helga wants to wash her hair, so I take an hour to walk around with the video camera.

A quick tour of the square and the seawall, almost empty now on a wet, Saturday morning, then up the hill toward the [Castello](#). We had seen the remains of an old Roman amphitheater last night while looking for a parking place and I thought I would return to it and get it on tape. No such luck. I went a block too far, turned to the right up the hill, and encountered a fascinating pedestrian stairway up the hill. The autos went into a tunnel through the hill. At the top of each flight was a terrace for a total of three terraces, each containing a marvelous old decayed fountain, the fountains hadn't been maintained for years, but you could still see what a lovely walk this must have been. On top of the hill, according to the map, was the Castello.

It was there, I could see it looming over the city. It was surrounded by what I initially took to be a park, clinging to three sides of the hill. As I walked through the "park" I realized it was a cemetery with graves plugged in where ever they would fit. Nothing fancy, very few crypts or large headstones, mostly just modest stone, mostly flat, in some cases just an inscription carved into the native rock outcropping. And everywhere, cats.

Plump, sleek cats. Obviously well fed and cared for. They were quite social with each other, hanging out in groups without much territorial behavior. A little leery of me, they tended to drift away at my approach, but not far enough to go into hiding or leave the area. They seemed to be waiting for something, and I wasn't it.

I was about out of time, and so cut my walk short at this point and headed back to the hotel. Navigation was intact and I bee lined it down the hill and straight to the square. While in Italy we didn't always enjoy such navigational success, but once out of the car and away from traffic I generally did pretty well.

Back at the hotel. Helga has washed and dried her hair, and the world is much better. Of course, my walk helped a little. We breakfasted at the hotel, loaded the car. It was parked on the street about two blocks from the hotel. They gave me a map, unreadable, at the desk. As I was collecting the car I noticed a ticket on the windshield, and a meter maid was nearby. I took the ticket in disgust, and she came over to me with her hand out. I handed her the ticket and she punched some numbers into a handheld she was carrying, it printed and she then hands me a receipt for \$2.70. I give her \$2.70, she says "Thank you" in English, and walks off. Back in front of the hotel I double park again, we load the bags, I thank the young assistant manager for his incredibly reasonable parking place, he shrugs modestly and we drive off.

On the way out from the Hotel, about three blocks away, we drive by the amphitheater that I had missed on my walk. Again we double park (It's like [San Francisco](#), the only way you can stop is to double park. I don't know who gets those curb spaces) and I get out with the video camera to record what is a truly magnificent structure. All of the in-ground seating remains, as well as the foundations and supports for the stage. The floor of the stage is gone, and the back stage also: it would have been out into the street, so maybe it was removed by some insensitive civil engineer who wanted to widen the road in the dark ages. Five minutes of wet, raindrops on the lens recording and I return to the car. Nobody paid the slightest attention to our double parking.

Three blocks later and we are lost again. Typical! It's something about gray days, street names you cannot pronounce or remember, and a peculiar Italian urban layout logic that seems reasonable but is maliciously different from what you think it should be. We go through the tunnel, duck around a maze of one way or no way streets, and get more confused by the minute - out come the maps - no help. Where we are isn't even on our abbreviated city map. We ask a passerby, he speaks no English, but gives us detailed directions that lead us back exactly to where he spoke to us. He sees us, shrugs and turns the other way. He's done his part, and if we can't use it to get where we want to go, that's our problem.

It's an absolute rule in Italy that there are two kinds of people from whom you ask directions: the ones who really want to help you and speak no English and the ones who speak English but have no clue how to get you to where you want to go. We keep asking and it's always either misdirection or total incomprehension.

Asked directions again, this time from an older man out walking with his wife. He came pretty close to helping, at least got us pointed in the right direction. We finally find an avenue whose name is on the map, then a sign to the Castello, then to parking. It's raining hard again, and the new umbrella breaks. More typical.

The Castello is interesting. The visible parts are Venetian with a [Hapsburg](#) overlay, and some remnants of the original Roman structures are still visible. It's a great

view spot, right on top of the hill above the square and harbor, but this is not the day for viewing, so we don't hang around.

Helga wants to see the church, which is an 11th century building on top of a Roman structure. It's raining hard now, and I'm burnt out on churches, so I sit in the car in the rain while she, shielded by our disabled umbrella, looks in on the church. About 20 minutes later she appears through the rain. "Oh, you got to see it! They've got a Roman foundation you can see!"

So I haul myself out of the car, put up the hood of my parka which now leaks, and go to see the Roman ruins. You know, it was worth it. A Roman church, I presume Christian, was the foundation. They had excavated around enough of it to expose the structure of the foundation without endangering the integrity of the next building, an 11th century church built on top of the old, utilizing the original foundations, then expanded in subsequent centuries, now about twice the size of the original. The current church, as evolved over 10 centuries and still active, was a good building, well-proportioned and serving its purpose well, but not one of the great monuments of Europe. Even so, it was well worth the drenching I received as the rain worsened.

Done with the antiquities of Trieste we headed for the freeway out of town. Trieste is at the north east corner of Italy, and one of the two western entry points to the former [Yugoslavia](#). Yugoslavia has recently been adopted by the world as needing resuscitation, and is getting resources pumped into it at an unimaginable rate. Most of it is coming from Italy or Austria. The Italian source comes around or through Trieste. The highway traffic between Italy and Yugoslavia is incredible.

We are seeking to exit Trieste, a town built to serve a seaport. After the seaport had faded in importance, the freeway was built around it, trying not to damage expensive properties. This results in a big loop, around the city to the east, up the hill to the relatively uninhabited hills to the north of town, finally settling down to the coastal plain about 10 km west of town. Lots of road but cheap real estate.

The traffic to Yugoslavia generally bypasses Trieste and exits into Yugoslavia about where the freeway makes the big turn from eastbound to southward. From beyond that point to Trieste, the road and its access becomes pretty much local, and I think they assume most people using it either know the road or are fluent in Italian.

This would have been easy to anticipate, had we had a full map of the city. What we had was the tourist map that the hotels give out. It shows the central area, with points of interest noted, and no correlation with the general area map or the Italy Highway Map. You're ok as long as you stay downtown, and this gives you a false sense of security. On arrival or departure, you're screwed.

Logic said: "Follow this street and it should intersect where the freeway should be." It didn't. OK, let's go back to the pier and go out that way. Kept running into industrial dead ends at factory entrances. Factories must access freeways. Bingo! Headed

away from the factories, soon saw a sign for the freeway, soon entered, heading the wrong way, according to my intuition. We're going east, Venice is west, this is wrong! Helga, a now very emphatic Helga, said, "Shut up! Just follow the signs!" Gradually, as we completed the loop, easterly to north to west, the logic of the freeway geography dawned on me, and I accepted her imperative. And a lesson learned: In Italy, in the absence of a complete and current map, just follow the signs!

We were headed back toward the intersection of the major highways to [Venice](#), Austria and Trieste, the place we had exited and learned of the Italian toll road system. When we got there we got off again and headed for Palmanova, to explore this town and eat lunch. It's still raining, getting late, and it seems, everyone is closed. Four trips around the square and two up and down the main street confirm this. Italy in the off season is unforgiving.

We settle for a sandwich at a bar on the square, I have a glass of wine, and then we move on. Palmanova in the rain and after hours wasn't what we had anticipated, but we should have. It's a sleepy little town that operates on its own rhythm; that's its charm and that's its inconvenience. If you want an unspoiled Italian town this close to major tourist areas, you need to accept the downside of a place that doesn't cater to folks like us. Bummer.

Back on the road, we head for [Pordenone](#), a smaller city in the lower hill country. We are late again; we spent the majority of the day being lost or eating, we expect to enter the city after dark and fumble for a hotel. We are still operating on [Rick Steves'](#) advice: "After November 1 it's easy to find lodging anywhere in Italy." Bullshit! Most of the hotels are closed, the ones that are open are hard to find, and because you have little choice you have no negotiating power.

Into Pordenone at 5:00 p.m., a bad time to be looking for a hotel. The town is small, but traffic is awful. We go twice around the "Old Town," which includes the new downtown, finally find a sign for a hotel down this street, then another saying several hotels are this way, and pull into the unloading space at the [Hotel Minerva](#) because it's the only place to park we've seen in the city. Turns out to be a pretty good hotel, with its own free parking lot. I'd have taken anything with its own free parking lot. We settle in.

At the recommendation of the desk clerk (appeared to be the sole employee of the hotel) we went to dinner at a trattoria, [Osteria La Vecia Osteria Del Moro](#), in the oldest part of town. The place sounded hard to find and I had already become discouraged with the likelihood of parking, so we took a cab. This was the first of several experiences of being the rich tourist riding in a cab through crowded medieval streets. Pordenone is a university town, and the Saturday night crowds of students were everywhere. The cab rolled slowly forward and the kids sort of melted out of the way, to close again behind the cab after our passing. It was eerie, both to see their flow which belied our passage and the separation of class between pedestrian crowd and passengers in the cab. There was an acknowledgement of privilege by both pedestrians and taxi passengers. I've never felt that before.

Entering the [osteria](#) we walked through the bar, were greeted by the host, and seated in the dining room. There were a number of middle aged Italian men drinking wine and the host, who, after seating us, returned to his conversation with the men in the bar. They seemed a regular group.

The building the osteria was in was a former convent, and the spaces were not grand but very interesting. Architecture was Romanesque, rooms were of modest size with crossed arches, mostly plastered and painted white. One room had been left unplastered and you could see the basic structure of 15th century brick. The whole place was well kept and you could see they were very proud of it.

Returning to us, our host turned out to be more than just a pretty face, which he wasn't. He skillfully led Helga to choose the radicchio fagioli (a hearty concoction of beans, served over radicchio - not a likely choice), told me in no uncertain terms that what I wanted was the roast beef with mashed potatoes, pushed Helga into the roasted chestnuts with pieces of roasted sweet potato for desert, and assumed we would like it. We did. One of the best meals in all of Italy.

Sunday, 11/3/02 - Pordenone to Conegliano

Leaving Pordenone, we got lost again, as usual. Our plan was to visit the old center, see the [Duomo](#), leave town for [Conegliano](#). We had been to the old center in the cab last night and it was only a few minutes away from the hotel, how hard could it be? Remember, this is a medieval town whose original streets have been adapted to auto traffic, and while we thought many of last night's detours had been to avoid the Saturday night traffic, some were not. They were to accommodate the medieval streets, and when you didn't know how to work around the "one ways" and "do not enters" you got lost. You soon found yourself out on the ring road, circling the town. Three times around the town on the ring road (the town isn't that big, so it only took three times) and we had it figured out. Found a way in and a parking place not far from the Duomo and began our stroll.

It was Sunday morning, and the Duomo was crowded, too crowded for a long tour. It's a wonderful old church, not real big, with a nice balance of design. It's also a hard working church, very much an important structure serving the needs of the people of Pordenone. The old town is like a stage set, and not much bigger. The church, some great old buildings, including last night's osteria, mostly given to religious use, shops, bars and restaurants. A few residence apartments on the upper levels, but most buildings were one, two, or three stories.

This is a town where people stroll about, or just hang out and have conversations. You see people greeting each other as long lost friends, genuinely glad to see each other, and you sense that they really are, even though they saw each other yesterday. The bars spill out onto the sidewalks, and are filled with people enjoying their conversations, along with their wine. It's a small town whose main occupation seems to be social. In fact,

drinking wine and being social appears to be a full time occupation for some. Isn't that the group from last night's bar standing there at the bar by the church? What on earth can they still find to talk about?

I'm not good at hanging out, and as the town is small, the architectural appreciation doesn't take long. Before long I'm getting pretty bored. Helga is still charmed. The place is so ITALIAN. Then she has pity on me and we go.

Conegliano is pretty close to Pordenone, but if you stick to the little red roads you can stretch the trip out quite a bit. The country is pretty, vineyards and old towns, but suburban housing and industrial plants are steadily creeping into it. There appears to be no restriction on where they can locate and there is no effort made to screen them or otherwise mitigate their negative impacts. They sprawl along the roads and spoil them with their modern boxy crassness, so much in contrast with the beauty they displace. Italy has got to deal with this sprawl.

Speaking of sprawl, Conegliano is 90% ugly. How can a town that is famous for its history and its beauty be so awful ugly when approached from the east? The sprawling industries, subdivisions and strip malls get closer together until at last they touch each other and become a suburb of Conegliano, then become Conegliano itself. Out comes the guidebook, reread the blurb, "yep," it says "it's pretty."

We were getting pretty worried by the time we crossed the river and following the sign for Centrum, turned towards the spire of the old church. Suddenly the place changed. Beautiful old buildings, streets turn to cobble stones, get very narrow and the upper stories overhang the sidewalks. The old town is about 15 blocks by 5 blocks. River and railroad on one side and steep hills, crowned by a great old castle on the west. The recommended hotel is on the street we drive through on, and they do indeed have rooms available. We settle down for an excellent lunch at the hotel, check in and then back to the car for a drive around the town.

First a word about the hotel. The [Canon d'Oro](#) is described by the guide book as the premier hotel and restaurant in Conegliano, and it well may be. Certainly the first floor is. The restaurant showed by our lunch that it could be great, the lobby and downstairs rooms were lovely, loving restorations of what had always been a beautiful building. The staff was competent and friendly, with one exception. The lady on the desk was about 60, trying to look 40, and a real dragon. What she seemed to want from life was compliments from any man she met and the head of any woman. I got along with her fine, but Helga found her difficult. The room was nice, adequate size and nice view to the front. The whole town was under restorative construction, and I found the view from the front window, which showed reconstruction work on three separate projects, absolutely fascinating. Watching the painters across the street was great fun. So Italian! The lead painter had a great bandage on his thumb, and a few moments of study made you aware of the probable cause. His junior partner was brash, deft, and adjusted his preparation so that he always finished first. I kept coming back to them: surely these two represented meaning of much of the life I had experienced.

In the car we go up to explore the castle. It's a classic Italian (Venetian) castle built around the 15th century. It took about 2 centuries to complete (must have had one of our contractors). It houses a small museum with some surprisingly good art works. Most of the grounds have been landscaped as a park, and one corner with a small building is now a restaurant and bar. The lower quad is used as a parking lot, and several of the lower out buildings are now private residences. The Castello history is strangely silent from its completion in the 17th century to the end of World War 2, then it was converted into a park, and it now shows much love from its City.

This is a great place. The entire experience is wrapped up with a sense of history and the peace of the Italian countryside. The views from the parapets are magnificent. You can walk around the walls and see in all directions. To the northwest is the wine road, winding through the hills and vineyards. This is what we were looking for when we approached Conegliano, it still exists, but only to the north and west. The Venetian side has already been lost.

We hang out here until about 6:00 p.m., hoping for a great sunset. The day has been gray with some drizzle, the kind that sometimes lifts as the sun gets below the clouds, but no such luck tonight. Darkness comes, and with it its own serenity, and we linger on the walls, watching the mist in the lights below and relishing the peace. We're not the only ones; a number of what appear to be local couples are also enjoying this special place. The rain picks up and one by one we all give up and go down the hill.

We have dinner at the Canon de Oro, and it is a disappointment. Must be Chef's night out or something. The whole thing was a poor imitation of lunch. All of the side dishes were the same as at lunch, only poorly executed. The entries just were not done well. Only thing about it to praise was the wine: a Prosecco di Conegliano. This is a nice, very young white wine, stilled with about half the carbonation of a champagne. It's served in a pitcher from a cask, similar to a beer on tap, and while it's not like your Great Grand Cru, at \$10 a liter you can't beat it.

Monday, 11/4/02 - Conegliano to Asolo

It's Monday, 2 weeks into the trip, and we've got to do some wash. This is getting to be a desperate situation. Panic is setting in, at least I'm starting to panic. Helga, who becomes more Italian by the moment, says, "Eh, Que sera sera." I'm not convinced.

The plan for the day is to do the wine road loop. From Conegliano southeast on a red road to [Orderzo](#), then west to [Treviso](#), finally northwest from Treviso ending up in [Asolo](#). Leaving Conegliano, we need to find a minor road, not named on the map, just a line. It seemed easy when we were looking at the map, where all the towns are dots and the roads lines. In reality, Conegliano is surrounded by these industrial suburbs which were signed for local business, not for travelers looking for a distant minor town. The search begins.

We head southeast from the old town, full of confidence. After all, the map only shows one line connecting Conegliano and Orderzo. Welcome to the Italian suburbs. At least it's not raining, only gray with some drizzle. We can't be precise about the direction, the sun is somewhere up there in the lighter part. Say about 30% of confidence, this way is the sun.

You know, this navigation system works. We fumbled around for about half an hour, trying to find the right road, started picking up signpost references to Orderzo, and found ourselves on the right road, even though it didn't look like the right road. The industrial sprawl gets less dense as we get further from Conegliano, then intensifies as we approach Orderzo. None of this is the idyllic wine road described in the guide book.

Orderzo is a nothing town. We drive through without stopping. Nothing to stop for. A tall church with nothing around it, endless suburbs, a nothing town. The road to Treviso is clearly marked and we continue in that direction. Along this road too is the sprawl and creeping industrialization that displaces the farms and vineyards and destroys the appearance of the countryside. It spreads out a little as we leave Orderzo and thickens as we approach Treviso.

I've got to tell you a little about Treviso. This is a somewhat larger city, like a county seat, and a university town. Historically it's been the head of a district, whether as a servant of Venezia, or before that as the main bunny of its own region. It became important because of its location, where plains and hills meet, and a days' ride from Venice. The old town, it appears, was protected by water rather than walls, built for commerce rather than defense.

Today it remains a fascinating city, with lots of medieval building and the charm of a good city plan that is still respected today. This city continues to make you feel that just around this next corner you will see the ultimate medieval square, or building, or thing. With all that said, this was the most frustrating city we visited from a way finding perspective. Let me tell you the story.

We're not rookies anymore. We've been lost in enough European cities now that we are starting to get the system. You do your homework, get the map and follow the signs... Now let me introduce you to Treviso.

We drive into town, following the signs for the Centrum. Pretty soon this takes us to an old church. I say, "Cool. This must be it." Helga reads the name of the church and announces, "No, this is not the Duomo. Let's ask these gentlemen how to get to the Duomo." Two men are in intense conversation nearby, and I hate to break in, but Helga is adamant and so I bother the fellows and ask them the way to the Duomo. They explain that we go on down this road, turn left, left again, and straight in to the church. They then resume their intense conversation as if we had never been there.

Off we go, down the road, left, left again, and then we come to an intersection with only one option. We take it and soon come to another intersection with only one

option. These single options are slowly bending us to the left, in what we soon perceive to be a circle or ring around the old city. We turn a corner, and there in the familiar square in front of the old church, are the same two men, still in deep conversation. I wish I could say they looked up in astonishment to see us back, but they appeared not even to notice. They just went on with their conversation, one pounding his fist into his palm to illustrate his point.

Their directions had been so clear, and it had seemed that we were so close, that we elected to try again. Down the street, left at the "T," left again at the next intersection, no choice, no choice, no choice, and there they were again, still in conversation, still not aware of us.

Now I'm getting mad. This town isn't going to beat me! Down the street, left, left, intersection with no choice, no choice, no choice, same guys, still conversing.

We tried about eight combinations of turns that took us as much as a mile away from the original loop. Always we came back to the same loop, passed the same two guys in conversation, we finally gave up. Who wants to visit the Duomo, anyway? Let's head for Asolo. We'll leave the mystery of Treviso unsolved for this trip, but it looks like a fun town if you can ever get into it. Next time we will plan ahead, park the car and walk it. For now, on to Asolo!

What we want is a red road. The map has double orange roads (autostrada), single orange roads (local autostrada), yellow roads (smaller local highways), and red roads, (indicates a way from place to place, paved but not labeled on the map). We head out of Treviso in roughly the right direction on the theory that when we come to a small place it will list the more important places on a sign and we will pick up the road we want. The day has partially cleared and we now have filtered sun, much better for determining north - south direction, and with new confidence I press on. 15 km, no signs.

We stop at a bar to ask directions (In spite of the unattractive stereotype we men enjoy for our failure to be willing to ask directions, I'm a fan of inquiry under the right circumstances. However, insistence by your wife seldom qualifies as the right circumstances). Helga won't get out of the car. She says the bar appears to be all men, having a good time, and that makes her uncomfortable. The time is about noon, and the lunch crowd is heavy. I walk into the place, and it smells wonderful. I'm reminded how hungry I am. I approach a distinguished looking gentleman leaning against the bar and reading a paper. I ask him politely if he can help me, and without even waiting for the question he smiles, turns around, motions to a young guy to come over, and returns to his paper.

The young guy speaks some English, hears my question, corrects my pronunciation and takes me outside to show me the way. His first take on the problem is that it's impossible. Then he takes my map, turns it to orient it with the proper direction, and takes me foot by foot, turn by turn, to Asolo. His English isn't that good, so words like left, right, etc., get him stuck until I guess his meaning and give him the word. After

he has gotten me to Asolo, he does it again. Same detail, every foot, every turn, all the way to Asolo. As he starts again on a third instruction I thank him, bless him, tell him my debt is unpayable, and duck back in the car.

We hit the road again, the same road we were on before. It was the proper road all the time. We continue to follow it, and drive straight to Asolo without a hitch.

Asolo is 3 km north of the “yellow” road from [Montebelluna](#) to [Bassano del Grappa](#). As we leave the yellow road, the industrial sprawl drops away and old farms and villas take over. The road climbs into the hills, takes a turn around a taller hill and we roll through a massive stone portal gate into a [Renaissance](#) village. Helga’s sister Linda described this town and countryside as “Seriously pretty,” and she may have understated it a bit. It’s flat out perfect!

Before we go to check into our hotel we stop for lunch at a trattoria on the square. The host is a distinguished looking man of about 60 who soon reveals he knows food and what’s good. If this is a sample of the food in Asolo, this is going to be a happy stop.

On the further edge of the village is the Villa Soprano, a gorgeous hotel. As perfect as the village is perfect. Our room is a large suite immediately above the restaurant. It has a large bath and, as the restaurant below is larger than the upper stories, a large terrace that overlooks the gardens and the valley spread out below. The view is to the west - actually 270* centered on the west - from the castello on the hill above the village to the road north with its villas and farms. Across the valley is an olive grove, a vineyard and a roving flock of sheep grazing in the rich, green meadows below the vineyard.

The room is furnished with high quality antiques. A comfortable bed (very firm), chairs you can sit on and enough space that you can use the stuff and move between it without feeling crowded. A big, well equipped bathroom that even has good lighting. Everything done with good taste.

From the view from the spacious terrace, the ample rooms and top quality furniture, the double windows and heavy drapes, down to the plentiful fruit bowl and the products in the bathroom, this place is pure luxury. Helga and I both sigh and settle in. This is what we came for.

We get a recommendation from the desk/concierge for dinner at an osteria just off the square. It proves to be a short but steep walk to the restaurant, then a flight of very steep stairs to the dining room. The food was worth it though. Our waitress was French, quite charming, and spoke fair English. She was the only one working in the place who did, but at the table next to us was a party of four young Americans. The girls were students at the satellite business school of the University of Kansas, which was located right here in Asolo, and the guys were G.I.s, at last stationed at a desirable billet in Italy. Big improvement after Kuwait. They were fun to talk to and reminded us of Young

Richard and the kids back home. A nice break from tourists struggling with a foreign language.

Tuesday, 11/5/02 - Enjoying Asolo

At last the laundry problem is solved! A little old lady in the village will wash and dry all our dirty stuff for \$12! My dirty linen terrors melt away.

This laundry solution comes by way of a friendly desk clerk, who sympathizes with our horror at the thought of getting wash done at the hotel prices. His name is Camille, and he quietly gives us directions to the laundress'. This is between us, a conspiracy that the hotel must not know about. We have not only gotten our laundry done, but we made a friendship founded on shared danger. Not only comrades, but comrades in clean clothes.

Our comrade is helpful in other ways. He helps us to select hotels in [Siena](#) and [Verona](#), with the aid of his handy [Michelin Guide](#). Then he makes the reservations for us at these hotels, and gets them to fax back confirmations. It's so easy when you speak Italian!

The downside of this service is that you are dependent on your comrade to have an accurate read on your tastes and resources, and since we were staying in the most luxurious room ever, at the most beautiful hotel this side of Venice, taste and luxury tended to be the decision makers. We had given up our ability to negotiate, and the hotels and reserved rooms tended to be expensive. Still, he did pretty well by us, given how short our acquaintance had been.

With these reservations made, the itinerary for the rest of the trip is set. It's Asolo to Sienna to Venice to Verona, and the over the Alps back to Munich, where we already had reservations for the last two nights. This done, it's time to see the country around Asolo.

We drive north, further into the hills. First target is the [Villa Barboro](#), a most famous villa designed by [Palladio](#), the premier architect to those Venetians rich enough to afford villas in the vineyards on the hills around Venice. His style was distinctive, his exteriors impressive, his interiors (I'm told) magnificent. We didn't get to see the interiors, as the tours of Villa Barboro were limited to Saturday and Sunday after November 1. We were too late. So do your homework. Most of this information is available on line.

However, since we were limited to exteriors, the star of the Villa Barbary show was not the villa but the chapel down by the road. This exquisite little chapel had apparently been constructed as part of the Villa grounds, and given to the church. The owners of the villa had some time ago decided that to retain the villa they must open it up and conduct tours. Thus the villa had some income, but the chapel was an orphan.

And no matter how neglected, a gorgeous orphan it was. Physiques almost faded, shape perfect for the 15th century in which it was born, a lovely, tidy, perfect little chapel. Neglected for at least a century, inaccessible to the interior, of all the structures we saw in Italy, this is the one we want to revisit, inside and out, to hang out in and feel the past. Perfect little chapel.

On into the hills. These hills are beautiful. Rolling like California, vineyards, olive groves, pasture, some small wooded acres. Dolomite looming to the north, the plains to Venice to the south. Much water, summer and winter rains (not like California), now a high strata of broken, stretched clouds and a veil of mist which decreases during the day and returns as it cools. Midday temperature in the mid 60*s. The whole effect is a lovely landscape dotted with farms, villas and villages (with their tall campaniles), distance softened by mist. Softened but not obscured. Colors are green, yellow, red and brown, and it's definitely fall.

We go on into the hills, all the way to the beginning of the mountains, then turn around and return on the other side of the river. It's more of the same. Enchanting country and villages strung out between vineyards and olive groves. The river is swift and full, with few bridges. The villages are all about the same size: church, store, a few shops houses giving away to more vineyards and groves. Eventually we loop back to Asolo.

At the hotel we walk out onto the terrace. It's late afternoon, and as the sun sets the mist thickens. Our view is 270* on a hilltop. General view is west, more hills, to the north a plain that runs to the base of the mountains, to the south another broader plain that runs on out of sight, dotted with villages. Everywhere villages. The plains are dotted with churches and campaniles, surrounded by 2-3 story houses, gradually separated by fields and vineyards for a while then thickening into the next village. Picturesque, but almost as dense as our own suburbs. Still, they're working the ground, which we aren't.

Dinner tonight was a treat, postponed until we were ready for it. We ate in the hotel dining room, a lovely dining experience. Helga and I both had the featured entry, calves liver, and it and all the courses were perfect. What a way to end a great day!

Wednesday, 11/6/02 - More Asolo

We can sure waste time! Slept late and breakfasted long. Back to the room for final preparations, then off to Helga's manicure appointment at 11:30 am. She wasn't comfortable about driving the car or finding the manicure place so I drive her down and wait in the reception area for the hour appointment. Didn't bring a book.

They have a big pile of magazines. About 50/50 motor mags and fashion mags, all in Italian. Fascinated, I start leafing through a magazine on motorcycles. You don't need to understand the language to enjoy those things. Hell, I don't understand it when it's in English. You just look at the pictures and the tables of specifications. Those even I can read.

Finished with the one on motorcycles, I pick up a Motor Trend look-a-like and find an article on SUVs. We've seen a lot of SUVs in Europe, particularly in Italy, and I'm curious about how the article treats them. Just like in the US, a reverential sales pitch. Turn the page and it's an article on the Rubicon Jeep Jamboree, reprinted and translated into Italian from the original in last quarter's Jeep magazine. I recognized it because I had read the original before leaving home. It raised some interesting questions in my mind (the presence of this article in an Italian magazine), namely, where in Italy could you have an off road Jeep rally? Where in Europe? Therefore, why would anyone in Europe want to own that kind of SUV? Then I considered the Hummer, the jacked up trucks, the low-riders, all the silly things people do to cars, and I realized that one of my favorite stereotypes, that Europeans were all driving small, practical cars, was just silly. Their economy is improving, their disposable income growing, and they are starting to waste it in the same silly ways that we do in the US. In fact, they not only copy our wastes, they copy our articles about them.

Helga emerged from the manicure room with her nails wet and her cuticles bruised. She expressed that they had had a nice talk, even though she couldn't talk with her hands. We stop at the square to pick up the laundry. The lady had said it would be ready tomorrow at the same time. This is tomorrow, same time as drop off, shop is closed. Our guess is come back after 3:00 p.m. ultimately proves right, only partially successful. We eat lunch at a trattoria just off the square. Excellent!

After lunch we take a brief drive to get Helga at ease with the car. Shouldn't be hard. It's a VW product and everything is similar to our BMW. Helga's at the wheel for about 4 km, everything is coming at her too fast, and I take over. It's then I realize how much different it is to drive in Europe. It really helps to break in gradually, as I did in Germany (*if that's what I did*).

Back to laundry – she's been here, lights are on, but not here now. She drives up while we're debating our next move, double parks, opens the shop, and tells us the laundry's not dry yet. It's been cold, gray, some drizzle and totally unsuitable for drying laundry. Come back at 6:00 p.m.

Stunned, we wander off. We had been so happy that our laundry was being taken care of. We walk around, visit the church, take a longer drive, but always aware of the impending 6:00 p.m., take no chances that we will get lost and miss our pick up. Give up and return to the hotel at about 5:00 p.m. Just sort of lie about for a while, then at 5:45 p.m. I go back to the laundry and pick up the clothes. I'd have taken anything she handed me. Back to our room, spread out the clothes and smell.

The laundry lady has a clothes line for cotton wash and a dryer for dry cleaning. When the weather gets wet, she combines to maintain schedule. The clothes reek. Oh, well, it only cost \$12:00.

We are tired and decide to have dinner in our room tonight. We've collected quite a bit of appetizer food: salami, proscuitto, cheese, olives, fruit, small bottle of wine. Long

leisurely dinner with TV accompaniment. When the wine runs out we switch to cognac. Transition to bed, sleep like a log, we are exhausted.

Thursday, 11/7/02 - Bassano del Grappa

Today is the day we must see it all. Our last day in Asolo. Tomorrow we dash for Siena. One thing is abundantly clear. We both really like Asolo and the hill country of the [Veneto](#). We like the countryside, the villages, the food and the people. This is a place we want to come back to.

Today we explore Bassano del Grappa and the hills to the west of Asolo. We make our usual start: up around 8:00 a.m., toilet until 9:00 a.m., breakfast, bathroom again, on the road to Bassano del Grappa at 10:30 a.m. The road is not super scenic. It's a tree lined two lane road with intermittent businesses and groups of houses and some strip mall type commercial. Traffic is fairly heavy in both directions. It's about 15km to Bassano, and after about 10 km the industrial development begins to thicken and spread out from the highway. What had been occasional industry along the highway becomes industrial subdivisions spreading evenly in all directions. The weather is colder than yesterday, and grayer, more inhospitable. No rain, but threatening without being dramatic.

Now to find the Centro, which is not as easy as some, because we keep running out of signs. "There's one!" "I see it." We turn right onto a busy road, drive 2 km without seeing another, sigh and turn back, trying to circle the quarry. We are starting to understand another of the navigational truths in Italy, that they usually only sign in the direction you are not going. Corollary: Sign one direction only, but lots of signs in that direction. Thus, once you find the way to go, you get a sign every block, but if you're crossing, only one hint.

After circling for about 10 km we finally had it surrounded, and we drive through the old town. This town is very old. It sits astraddle the [Brenta River](#), a wide and swift river plunging down from the [Dolomites](#). In the 15th century, our friend the architect Palladio designed and built a bridge across the river that still stands and functions, sort of a central landmark for the old town. Known as the [Ponte Vecchio](#) (what else?), it's a not very spectacular but very functional bridge made of stone abutments and wooden superstructure. Palladio's theory was that the superstructure would wash away periodically, but the wood superstructure was designed to be easy to build back. I guess it has, and it is, and they still have the plans, because the wood's not that old, and it still looks like the Palladio original.

Bassano del Grappa is a neat old city. It's in the center of the Veneto wine growing country, on a river at the foot of the mountains, and it's here not because of it being a good defensive position, like Salzburg, but for commerce. Add to an ideal location to serve commerce the fact that this is where someone back in the 12th or so century discovered what do with all those seeds and pulp left over from the wine making

process, make it into brandy (or “[grappa](#)”), and you have the function for the town. A different town from the walled cities and castles in other parts of Europe.

The streets are narrow and cobbled, the upper stories overhang, just like the others, but the buildings are different. Partly this appears to be because they’re still doing it. Commerce and brandy making I mean. In the blocks around the bridge you find distilleries and warehouses mixed in with the shops and tasting rooms. This is a town where people live and work.

The gray weather has given way to rain, not heavy but steady, and the town is having a street fair. About half the streets are shut down for the fair, and already scarce parking is nonexistent. The street along the river is open and we drive it past the 10 blocks of old town, getting a feel for the town and the impossibility of parking, then turn east, away from the river and up the hill, hoping that the crowd will lessen and we will find somewhere to park. No such luck. Soon we are much too far from the center for Helga’s foot to make it, and we turn back toward the river to see if things might be less crowded on the other side.

They are. We find a parking place about two blocks from the bridge and, equipped with parkas and umbrella, set out walking. The street leading to the bridge is being restored. The old cobble stones and square granite pavers had been paved over with asphalt and they are now digging up half the street at a time, bringing it to grade with aggregate base, and cleaning and replacing the original cobble stones and granite sidewalks. All by hand, with loving care and an eye to making it look like it was original. The kind of thing I do with my brick walks. I stop and study their technique for a while. Yep, that’s the way I do it.

On to the bridge, stop at mid span, looking upstream and downstream at the buildings that line the stream on both sides. Their lower stories extend down into the flood. The stream is defined by these buildings, and they by the stream. Several months out of the year the people in those buildings look out of their windows often and I expect that high water means anxiety runs high. The water is swift, brown and appears to be unstoppable. But the channel has the history on its side and the river stays controlled.

Helga and I wander into the old town, looking to see the town and to find the grappa shops. We wander along the river road, looking at shops and heading for the square. The rain keeps falling and my parka leaks. Helga’s umbrella has broken one stay, and sags on one side. Good enough for one but inadequate for two. The street fair is still going and we walk by, mostly clothing, shoes and leather goods. Mostly cheap and tacky goods and we aren’t tempted. We head back to the bridge and double back to buy some grappa, brandy, and whatever. Go into a shop next to one of the distilleries, they have tasting, and we taste and buy a bottle of grappa and an Italian brandy. On to a bookstore, where Helga locks into a bunch of Italian language books for Betsy. Squeals of delight, “This is so cute!” and her hands fill with neat treasures, the culture of Italian Christmas for Betsy. Maybe it will work, maybe not, but you can’t fault the joyous feeling.

Back to the car, out of town, heading for [Nove](#), the ceramics capital of Italy (We think).

Soon lost again, this time into the hills, some serious hills up here. These are the foothills of the Dolomites, very steep and irregular, lots of canyons cutting deep into the mountain mass. Glaciated valleys with villages tucked away in their depths. Narrow, curving road climbing up the side of the hills, into the canyons, over the ridges, down to the next village.

We have lots more fun when we're lost. Somehow the real discovery of this countryside requires that you get lost, put aside the destinations and the deadlines you have set, and just take what comes. Don't get uptight about where you're going to eat, where you're supposed to be, just enjoy where you are. This works real well for a while.

Until you get hungry, and it's approaching 2:00 p.m., and you can't find an open oesteria. Now things start getting tense. We try three locals, all closed for the season (we presume) and decide, "This is getting desperate. Let's go down to the highway before everything closes." So much for the adventure of discovery while being lost.

Down to a local road along the base of the hills, along it to a trattoria which is open and not bad, crisis averted. After lunch we continue along the local road and spot a spectacular castle and walled village. We investigate.

This is the former City-State of [Marostica](#). Fabulous old wall, battlements and towers, all about 1 km square, from highway to hilltop. The wall runs along the highway (castle in the middle of this run), up to the hilltop where there is another castle, around the top of the hill and down to the highway again. The castle at the bottom has central gates on each side that open onto a lovely village built around a large square. The village is about 10 blocks in east-west direction and 6 blocks south to north, ending at the foot of the hill. The hill goes up another 400 meters to the upper wall and the upper castle, and has a few rich houses on it. The castles and walls date from 15th century and the village from 15th to modern. All are in current use and fully occupied. The things we find when we are lost. Much better than the things we think we want to visit.

We poked around the village of Marostica for about an hour and a half, visited the church and both castles, and drove around the walls (No mean feat. It took about 30 minutes, but well worth it. See the video), then headed on our way to Nove, the ceramics capital. We spot a sign immediately on leaving Marostica (I think someone's guiding us. We think we're lost, but really, we're just being directed to better things than the guide book has to offer. I offer this theory to Helga and she says, quite sensibly, "Bullshit. You were lost."), and it directs us quite clearly to Nove. 5 km later we're there.

Ceramics often tend to be like a baroque church: pure schlock. This is certainly the case of everything we saw in Nove. Incredible gaudy, super intricate, not in good taste statues, bowls, plates, God knows what. Nothing we would ever buy (or even want to walk by), all in the name of Italian Art. We stopped at two places, asked if there was a

“rustic” school available, and finally gave up. I’ve seen some of this stuff in Italian homes in the US and I think it’s a cultural thing. The current Italian ceramists don’t do “simple, but elegant,” they do fancy baroque. Frankly, I was relieved. The last thing we need is more ceramics to lug home.

It’s late and we head back to Asolo for our last night here. We’ve learned a lot about ourselves and what we like in Europe.

We love the hill country. We love to wander around and have adventures in unsuspected places. To discover the cool stuff that seems to be everywhere in these hills. To sit on a hill and look out at the vineyards and sheep and steeples and villages with tall campaniles. It’s November; the weather is gray and cold, the colors fall into winter, but it’s beautiful and exciting. Suddenly, it is okay we came to Europe.

On to Siena

Friday, 11/8/02 - On to Siena

Time to leave. We get out of Asolo slowly (Big surprise). Up a little earlier, much bathroom and packing. Breakfast went a little faster, until Helga discovered the new desk clerk and they traded insights for about 30 minutes. Then back to the room for final bathroom and pack, then check out which took another 30 minutes of conversation.

Finally on the road to Bassano del Grappa at 10:30 a.m., and soon lost again. Missed the A-47 and headed south looking for the signs to [Padua](#). The day is lovely, cold, bright sun, light filtered and soft. Looks like it should be a warm day. Until you open a window or go outside and realize it’s a nice fresh 40* out there. Our spirits are good and we are confident that we can navigate back to the proper highway.

We have learned to adjust our navigation here in Italy. The streets, though named on the map, are seldom marked on highway signs. When they are named and marked, it’s usually from the other approach direction only, and that’s the opposite direction from yours. So it doesn’t do you much good. Therefore, you navigate as follows:

Use the sun or moon as your compass and head as closely as possible toward your chosen destination or turn point. Don’t expect to be able to hit a linear landmark such as an [Autostrada](#) or river and be able to recognize it with any certainty. Instead, pick a few cities on the route you want to take and watch for them on the signposts at each intersection you come to. The Italians post up to 10 - 12 possible destinations at each intersection of through roads. Little towns are mixed with major cities, usually the distant city first. It’s nearly impossible to read them all if you’re driving, so a navigator is imperative. The navigator needs to pay fairly close attention to this responsibility, and conversation becomes pretty disjointed, but the system can work pretty well if the navigator does his/her job.

We are looking for the A47, Bassano to Padua. Should be a lead pipe cinch, which is always a dangerous way to start. Soon we are entering Bassano di Grappa suburbs and on the lookout for a north-south Autostrada, or any sign indicating Padua. Nothing. We get to the middle of town, still nothing. The map is very plain: A47 is encountered by our Asolo to Bassano road on the east side of Bassano, but today it wasn't. Almost across the river we come to a large arterial street and I turn south. Finally a casual arrow, buried in the middle of a sign post, left for Padua.

We almost missed it, didn't trust our fleeting impression and had to double back to confirm. Yes, it said Padua, left, and so we followed. Small road, looked like one of the industrial subdivision streets, just kept going for about a mile, headed east. Then another sign, Padua, right. Soon picking up the Padua sign at every sign post, slowly climbing toward the top of the post. This road gets busier and busier, grows larger, side access starts to be limited. At least halfway to Padua we finally see a highway designation sign and realize that we were right all the time. This is the A47. Italian navigation theory proven.

The country is flat plain, mostly industrial along the highway, fields and towns in the distance. You can identify the towns by their [campanile](#). Larger towns have two or three. Every other vehicle on the highway is a truck, all in a hurry, and the speeds are up to 80kmh. Until someone wants to make a left turn. Then sudden stop, every vehicle skids a little, blue smoke from tires and brakes fills the air. Miraculously all vehicles make it, the smoke starts to dissipate and the line begins to move again, soon back to 80kmh until the next left turn.

As we approach Padua the rural highway becomes a freeway in stretches, with lapses back to rural 2 lane highway from time to time. The speed of traffic picks up to 120kmh, with people passing at 150-180kmh, and the sudden stops become even more terrifying. On the freeway there are signs, which flash by between trucks, only one or two words read, survival, not navigation becomes our only priority.

We're almost by Padua and we are presented with a choice: Venezia or [Bologna](#) or [Milano](#). Which is which? At 120kmh it's hard to tell, and since Italian freeways exit on the left or right at whim, that's no help. We grit our teeth and hold our lane, soon we are headed west and it's obvious, it was the other one. Because this is now a toll road and interchanges are scarce, we continue 14 km west before we can get off. Then we pay for the exit and get a new ticket to get back on in the other direction, drive 14km back and take the Bologna direction. Now the direction city is [Florence](#) - we know that's right - and southward we fly.

It's now 1:30 p.m. and restaurants in Italy mostly close at 2:00 p.m. Do we leave the Autostrada to eat (and probably get lost) or do we eat at an [Autogrill](#), the franchised rest stop restaurant? We try several small towns alongside the Autostrada - no acceptable restaurant - and the hour passes. We settle for an Autogrill (The guidebook said they were not that bad. We could never find that reference again).

It's not that bad. Not good, but not quite terrible. And quick. We're soon back on the Autostrada headed towards Florence. We've crossed the [Po River](#) and valley and soon are in the hills south of the Po. These are some of the high hills that comprise the spine of the Italian boot. The country is pretty and the road is fast, my reflexes are still up to it and we fly. But I'm tiring.

We approach Florence and I'm sensing the barn. Another interchange, with multiple choices, and I choose "Rome" (all roads lead to Rome, right?). It was a bad choice. 30 miles later my navigator, who's also my critic, reviews the map in reference to the freeway signs, and announces in solemn tones that I've fucked up again! I respond that I'm not the navigator, I just drive where I'm told, when I'm told, which is only when we're fucked up, which is too late, and a good navigator would point out the right direction while there is still time to go there, and she says....

This discovery came about 45km south of Florence, which is north of Siena. (In case you've forgotten, we are heading for Siena). We've taken the wrong road and have missed Siena by about 40km to the east. We exit.

At the toll booth Helga cues me and I plead, "Dove Siena?" A bored toll taker stares at me in disbelief that anyone could be so stupid, and responds, "Go back to Florence and try again." He then looks at Helga, and I believe in sympathy for my predicament, adds "Go right, then left, then right again, you'll see a sign..." I grab it, with a quick "Grazie," and take off to the right.

Right, left, right heads us due west, which is where I think we want to go. We come to a "T," go left and follow it a long way (I'm getting nervous), then right and back to the west on a country road, I wouldn't call it a highway, up into the hills. Pretty country, late afternoon fading into evening, very rural road.

Suddenly an intersection, signpost, tiny arrow, "Siena" and off we go. Nobody ever felt so relieved. To miss by so much, and to save it on such a beautiful road, such a relief! If only I could claim to have done it on purpose! But wait, it's not over yet.

We travel about 40km of rural road which slowly becomes crowded, overcrowded suburban feeder, then half of a freeway. They're building the other now, open next year. The half that's built is vastly inferior to the rural we've been on. We approach Siena on an under construction, half built, half signed freeway, looking for a sign. So far, our whole career in Europe we've been looking for a sign.

Let me take you back to Camilo, at the Asolo Cipriani, booking us a hotel in Siena. He said, "Fax a confirmation, and a map to the hotel." They did: confirmed the reservation and included a map and directions from Florence to the hotel. Neither would have worked, even if we had been coming from Florence, and we weren't, we were coming from due east. The map was unreadable and had no useful information on it except the name of the hotel and the phrase "outside the city wall."

I knew the map was useless, but reasoned that if we headed for the Centro we would reach the city wall, turn and follow it until we reached the hotel. I was real tired by this time, but I figured this can't take long, it'll soon be over. Ha!

We reach the city wall and turn right, follow as close as possible the wall. Not that easy, as the streets tend to run at diagonals to the wall, so you were constantly losing it. We've made about a 270* circuit when we realize we have somehow miraculously gotten inside the walls. Things get hairy in a hurry. One way medieval streets, rules about where you can drive and where you can't, warning signs in Italian that I can't read, taxis honking, people waving and shouting (the instructions were to passionate to understand in detail, however the gestures were clear enough).

It seems there are rules about who can drive cars on what streets in the old city and who can't, and we don't know them. The walls, which appeared to be solid, aren't. It's now dark. The map, which at first appeared unreadable, is worse than that: it doesn't even have a north arrow (As it turned out, north was to the bottom of the map. I'd never have figured that out). We're in the right city, we think, but absolutely lost.

Stop for directions three times. Broken English, eager to help, all refer to [Porta Camollia](#), one of the [7 gates to the city](#) (Not to be confused with the broken walls). We've worked ourselves outside the walls again and drive around locating the gates, all of which are named. [Porta Romana](#) and a bunch more. Several more times around the walls and I have learned the circuit now, still no clue to the Hotel Park, our hotel. We need a new strategy.

Finally I find I've wandered within the walls again, without knowing how. A large square, a hotel alongside (not ours), and an idea strikes. I figure that at a hotel they should speak English and have maps to direct guests. They can help. Everything was right except the last. They could, but would they, to a rival hotel? The issue is decided by a miraculous parking place that opens up across from the hotel.

A large, surly (very large and very surly) clerk awaits me at the desk. With reluctance he produces a map of Siena (very readable), and with broad wave of his ham like fist he rapidly explains how to get to the [Hotel Park](#). All in his mix of 50% English/50% Italian, a rapid patois that would have confused [Chico Marx](#). I'm tired, and I don't much care anymore, and so I make no pretense of understanding, but ask him to draw it on the map. I even hand him his own pen.

The man glares at me, his contempt complete. He draws himself up, takes the pen and very slowly draws the route from his hotel to my hotel, all the time repeating in very slow and emphatic patois the steps which must be followed. I thank him gravely, but sincerely, and we depart.

It still takes us two false turns and a 1/2 mile reconnaissance to find the hotel. That anyone ever arrives there except by cab is a miracle. It's now 7:30 p.m. and we've been in Siena since 5:00 p.m.

We check in, and they placidly inquire, "How was your trip?" I debate with myself, if physical restraint is needed to keep Helga from their throats, should I intervene? Helga responds to the polite question as if there had been no problem at all in finding this hotel. Instead she begins at the beginning, and recites all the events from Florence to Siena to the Hotel Park. Their eyes begin to glaze at the second circuit of the wall, and I was never so proud of my wife. By the time she gets us to the hotel, they have been punished aplenty for the lousy map, directions, and their insensitivity to the difficulty they caused would be hotel guests. My passionate denouncement wouldn't have been a tenth as effective.

The room is a converted balcony/terrace. About 10 feet wide by 30 feet long, solid windows on the one side, hung with heavy burgundy drapes. Kind of like a narrow bordello, without hostesses. It's actually quite comfortable, the view is great, but you feel you are on a train, a bordello train. I have a feeling of being overcharged, and as some of you know, such a feeling cuts me deep.

We have dinner in the hotel, being too tired to go out, and it is okay. Not OK, but okay. We've arrived in [Tuscany](#), survived the worst lost in/around the city experience yet, and okay is good enough. Let's go to sleep and we will deal with the details tomorrow.

Saturday, 11/9/02 - Seeing Siena

We're up and down to breakfast at about the usual time, and a special breakfast it is. First, the dining/breakfast area is sort of unique. The hotel is a large, fancy, three story villa, built about 400 years ago, used to billet troops during the war and renovated as a hotel after the end of the war. The original villa had much of the ground floor as colonnade, and above the colonnades, open balconies with sweeping views to the south, west and north. It must have been a spectacular piece of architecture. In order to get the room count up to something that would work as a hotel, they enclosed all the colonnades and balconies, probably increasing the interior space to about 150% of the original. It also made a box out of the building, and created some odd shaped rooms, such as the one we were sleeping in.

The dining and breakfast areas were on the ground floor in the former colonnade space. They were long and narrow, and you accessed them by passing from one room to the other. We hadn't noticed it last night at dinner, because the dining rooms were the first of the colonnade from the lobby and only one was being used. Breakfast was in the room made from the end of the colonnade, a room two tables wide by ten tables long, with the colonnade arches filled in with glass doors looking out on a paved courtyard garden. Probably a very pleasant space in summer, with the doors open and tables spilling out on the courtyard, but a little funny in late fall.

There don't appear to be many other guests, only four tables including ours are at breakfast. At one of the tables a nice young couple with a darling little boy (what a

hellion!) seem to be only mildly interested in the kid and where he is running to. It sounds funny to hear them talk to the child in Italian, they look so much like any weary American family with an uncontrollable two year old. Another couple, our age, she like a page out of an Italian fashion magazine, he like an irascible college professor. He had the loudest, raspiest voice, it made me wince whenever he spoke, but she didn't seem to react at all. The third, an older couple, he like [Robert Morley](#) in search of "porridge." It felt like a scene from a British murder mystery.

The food was good, all except the eggs. All through Italy the eggs tasted like they were reconstituted from powder, and these were no exception. A real contrast to the excellent sausages, cheeses and pastries. Breakfast entertainment comes via the almost two year old in jeans, out of control to the barely concealed horror of the staff, and the braying conversation of the professor - Not to mention his fashion plate wife, who must have made 20 trips back and forth past our table to the buffet.

Breakfast over, we elect to take a taxi into Siena. Last night's adventure was enough driving for me. It was a really good choice, as no directions would have been sufficient to guide me anywhere near where we wanted to go, and parking inside the walls was nonexistent. The weather is again hazy-clear and quite cold - about 40*. No wind to speak of, but enough high mare's tails to suggest the possibility of showers later. It's cold enough for sweaters and jackets, but not for long underwear.

The taxi drops us near the center ([Piazza del Campo](#)) and we begin the walk up the hill to the Duomo. Medieval streets about 15 feet wide, wall to wall, paved with smooth cobble stone sized pavers, packed with people moving up and down the street, or just standing around in groups of two to four, talking. Occasional cars or taxis push their way through, hardly slowing for even the most stubborn people. Pedestrians, without looking at the cars or interrupting their conversation, drift to the side as the car nears and fill the street again as it passes. No eye contact. No acknowledgement at all of cars by people or people by cars. Except when someone fails to move out of the way. Then, as if by a miracle, the car stops inches away from the pedestrian, the driver mutters his disapproval of the idiot(s), maybe even honks (but this very seldom), and waits impatiently for them to clear and moves on, rapidly, still no eye contact. It's like they feel each other by radar or something.

The narrow streets are all shops on the lower levels, who knows what above. Three and four story buildings, some obviously dwellings, some offices, most anonymous without even an obvious way up. Shops are mostly high end, leather, paper, ceramics, wine and spirits, clothes, bars and restaurants. All seem to be doing well. People in the streets are well to do and are buying.

We reach the cathedral and go inside. Amazing. Better see the video, because I can't do it justice in words. We spent about an hour in the cathedral, another 30 minutes in the Baptismal below, and we begin our wander back to the Piazza del Campo. We stop for lunch on the way. The first stop smells of chlorine and we reject it, the second smells of good food and we stay to eat. Excellent! Helga had [Truffles](#) and is hooked. It's a

family run restaurant and we can see the kitchen, the family comings and goings. Little baby shows up in a stroller pushed by mom and dad, everybody goes gaga. Papa is maître d'. He gives us a hearty send off and we promise to come back. We may, someday.

After our long, leisurely lunch we continue our equally leisurely stroll back to Il Campo. We check out the shops along the way, halfheartedly looking for a purse for Ingrid. Ingrid and the purse are important, but our shopping is definitely halfhearted. I never could get into shopping on a full stomach, and it's gotten much more so lately. We wander into the square without having bought anything, but with a pretty good idea of what's available in this high end shopping ghetto. Stopping at the fountain, a magnificent collection of sculptures, we soon get lost in the people. The sculptures take about 15 minutes to review, the people are worth hours. Families with kids, families with dogs, young lovers, old people with opinions: best people watching of the whole trip.

Light rain is now falling as we take a brief tour of the rest of the square. It's a great event place, with a great history and some wonderful architecture, great place to people watch, all of which we did, but how long can you hang out in a place like that? Done with Piazza del Campo, we set out on a fruitless search for [St. Catherine's](#) shrine and relics. I believe the relics are a finger and some other body parts. The shrine is noted on signs all over Siena, and we had thought it to be part of the Duomo complex, but no, it is separate. Like pirates in search of treasure, we set out to find it.

After about four blocks the quest gives way to a greater urge to have a pee. We are wandering northwest from il Campo, and at each corner we expect that this is it, only to see another arrow pointing down another street. Most of these streets we had traveled last night when lost in the city, and I was convinced from that experience that they led nowhere. I was almost right.

We come to another corner, arrow now points left. It's a very steep downhill street, so steep that the sidewalk has steps. Helga says, "I'm not going down that thing!" I say, "Stay here, I'll check it out. If it's not here, we go on to the taxi." I go down the hill about a block, to a modern plaza and building (the only modern thing in the walled city) and enter the building. It's empty, except for a lighted glass case in the center of a large room, the case full of St. Catherine relics. Probably. I wasn't even tempted to go and inventory the relics, but I was tempted to go get Helga to see this bizarre building. Once outside I took another look at the steps and decided against it. St. Catherine and her relics weren't worth what those steps would do to Helga's foot.

We went on from the intersection at the top of the steps, to the square before the shrine of the [Golden Arches \(McDonald's\)](#), where we could get our pee and grab a taxi back to the hotel. Both were available, and also visible across the square was the hotel where I had sought directions the previous night. The one with the big, surly desk clerk. That's when I realized that we had entered the city within the walls. I had thought that it was outside the walls.

Back at the hotel we caught a couple hours of rest and refreshment needed for our return to the city for dinner, again by taxi. On the way we stop at an ATM for cash, where I'm told by the machine that my card is "not authorized for international transactions." The nerve of that machine! It doesn't know who it's messing with! In spite of my righteous indignation, no money.

Dinner is superb. The restaurant is [Le Logge](#), and it is worth the trip to Italy. Helga has more truffles and I "[Ossobuco](#) /lamb stew" (They were uncertain what to call it, it had both lamb and veal, call it good!). The [Chianti](#) was the best so far. Feeling very pampered we catch a taxi back to the hotel, talk over what was a fine day, and fall into bed.

A word about travel by car to the old city of Siena. Not advised. If you can walk great distances, you can park outside and walk around the city, but you need to be ready to go three or four miles at least. Helga isn't. I thought that a couple of taxi rides and I would learn the secret ways and where to park, and we would be able to drive ourselves. No way.

Travel in the old city is very indirect. No streets are straight, many are one way and they twist and turn on themselves, uphill and down, sometimes turning back on themselves. The taxi seems to reverse its travel at least four times to go halfway across the old city, a distance of less than a half mile. This requisite back and forth doesn't help you to know the city, it just gets you turned around and lost. Walking is better because there are no one way streets and you can stop, study the map and pick a route. But be prepared to walk a long way.

Sunday, 11/10/02 - Hill Towns and Chianti Country Roads

Today is our main shot at roaming free over the Chianti countryside. We have an ambitious itinerary of Siena south to [Montalcino](#), on south to [Sant'Antimo](#), then looping eastward on the flanks of [Monte Amiata](#) to [Castiglione d'Orcia](#), turning northeast to [Pienza](#), on to [Montepulciano](#), (You have got to go to Montepulciano!), and then either on in the same direction or home to Siena somehow, not yet determined. Very ambitious. Experience so far say we can do half, maybe. We did it all, and enjoyed every minute.

We drive south into the Chianti hills. The so-called capitol of Chianti country is [Radda](#), about 30km north of Siena, but we were focused south and east, towards Rome and the Montepulciano area. We were drawn by a guide book description and the wine of last night, a Montepulciano Chianti that was outstanding. Not a bad reason to base an expedition.

It's a lovely day - sunny, warm, perfect fall weather. Yesterday's light rain has polished the sky and provided a growing, faint at first, mist on the horizon. As we drive south the country population thins from suburb as we leave Siena to open fields and vineyards in about 10km. The road parallels the Autostrada for a while, then bears off right towards the west to the walled city of Montalcino. There's a subtle change as we

leave the proximity of the Autostrada: the countryside becomes almost pure country with occasional villages. No random houses or buildings as are found along the highway. It's like dropping back 50 years.

Montalcino is on a hill, with scattered houses and farms climbing the flanks, and is a perfect example of the medieval village of this section of Italy. That's "village," smaller than a city, but at least one of everything. It has a fortress, or Castello, moderately intact, but not improved and pretty much neglected. There are two churches, both working, a warren of medieval streets, about half open to cars, and a magnificent view of the countryside. Visible on the surrounding hilltops are similar villages, and in the valleys and rolling hills in between are vineyards and pasture, some olive groves, and scattered farm houses, usually tucked in alongside creeks or streams. The chief occupation is tourist related, 2nd is serving the farm and village community. It's a place which you walk if you want to join in, and if you're on the move, you observe and move on. We move on.

As we drive on south, working our way down the mountain, we see a great old villa, perched on its own hill surrounded by vineyards. Almost a castle, pristine setting away from roads and other habitations, it sits alone on its hill and says, "This is the life!" A sign marks the villa's driveway, advising that it is available for guests. A little sad that someplace like that should have to accept guests to survive, but also a welcome indication that such accommodations are available. Helga makes a note of the name and address.

On down the hill and into a lovely valley with a river meandering through it, across a bridge and start up the north slope, when looking back down to the right, we see a solitary church with some abbey grounds around it, looking old and aloof and very interesting. A road turning off to the right looks like it hooks back to the abbey and we take it. It switches back down to the river, across an old bridge, and swings back west to end at the abbey. We've arrived at the Abbey of Sant'Antimo.

Sant'Antimo started as a chapel in the 9th century, expanded to an abbey over the next 300 years, got very prosperous and was taken over by the City state of Siena, and gradually as that city's power waned, it wasted away to neglect, finally diminished to a local church for the last two centuries. It was recently taken over by a Jesuit order and reestablished as an abbey, with the brothers maintaining the fields and conducting the regular ritual services daily. It resounds to Gregorian chants at intervals through the day and at other times is open to visitors. The brothers are slowly restoring the beautiful old church, and it still serves as the local church to the farms and village that are nearby. The peacefulness of the place is amazing.

We hang out at Sant'Antimo for about an hour, listen to the brothers' service and view the church and antiquities (You can't tell them apart. Very little is labeled, and it's all old. Is this wall 9th century or 15th century?). What makes this place special is not record antiquity, but the present. It's a working church and abbey, a living thing, not a dead relic with printed history.

We move on, starting to get hungry. It's Sunday and many of the local restaurants, even those which haven't closed for the season, are closed today. Finding a restaurant lunch might be a problem. We climb the mountainside on the north side of Monte Amiata to a village, a very cool village clinging to the side of the mountain, the village of Castiglione d'Orcia. I'm sorry, it was so steep and such a driving challenge, I took no video of this picturesque little village, so words will have to suffice. Better yet, go there and see for yourself. But be prepared to walk, no, climb a lot. No establishments were open that we could see, and there was no place to stop anyway, so we drove through, looped back where we could, wound up going down a goat path that magically ended up at the rural road we were following, said "screw it , we're hungry," and went on.

We're heading generally towards Pienza, a sizable medieval city of some reputation. The hills are gorgeous: plowed fields, vineyards and woods, all in fall colors, mist collecting to haze the hills about two ridges over from us, but warm sun overhead. We drive with windows open and the country smells wonderful. Almost no one else on the road but us (The only other car we saw between Castiglione d'Orcia and the Autostrada crossing was the one when we stopped to pee in the bushes (They were perfect hosts and pretended they didn't see us). Many of the olive groves are harvesting and we did see cars and folks, mostly families, off to the side in the olive groves, harvesting olives. Whether for their own use or for the landowner, or both, they were focused on the work and paid no attention to passersby.

Next destination was the walled city of Pienza, then Montepulciano. We had the feeling we found both at least three times before we actually got to them. As you get east of the road from Siena to Rome the hills get higher and more defined, and each has a walled city on top. Three to six campaniles, tight medieval streets with three story buildings and laundry hanging out of the upper windows, nowhere to park. From a distance they all look alike. Up close they all look fascinating, inviting you to stop and find a cafe, walk the streets, get to know the people. I know I'm sounding like a romantic, but that's what these hill country villages are and the root of the word "Romantic" is Rome, and that's where we are.

We didn't stop in Pienza or Montepulciano, access was too difficult for Helga's foot and we had seen enough medieval towns and cathedrals. We had also missed lunch, it being Sunday and after 2:00 p.m., and most things closed. Still, even if it was Sunday, we were hungry and sought refuge in a hilltop inn parking lot. The inn was closed for the season, but the drive was open and the parking lot accessible and deserted. It was fringed with pines and looked out over the valley and the distant hilltop cities and villas across the way. We ate some emergency fruit and cheese, pastry, stale bread and a mix of olives, and drank some of the execrable orange drink (my mistake from back in Gmünd. I thought it was orange juice (Helga refused to forgive me, even though the label was in German). If we had had a bottle of wine the picnic would have been perfect. I'll never again get caught in Italy without a bottle of wine. We had another pee under the pines, enjoying the fresh air and the privacy, and began our return to Siena.

This area is our (my) favorite so far. The hills with their crowns of towns and villas and abbeys, grapes and olives all around, little roads that are fun to drive, this is what I like. The bigger cities are too complicated. Their history and architecture get lost in my being lost, in the difficulty in getting around, in too many people, too many rules all in a foreign tongue which I only partially understand. Give me the hills. Here I am at home.

Tomorrow we depart for Bologna and Venice.

On to Bologna - Venice

Monday, 11/11/02: Siena to Bologna

We wanted to get away early, but the funny shape of the bed room and the dining room entertainment defeated us. Packing should be easy for us by now, but the linear shape of the room somehow made it harder. Add to that our companions at breakfast, same as before, and we were detained. The hyperactive child with indulgent parents (he's still wearing expando-top western jeans over his diapers, and still on the run), the professor and his fashion plate wife (22 trips to and from), Robert Morley and his porridge (his wife turned out to be quite nice. Long suffering, but nice), you can't cut short entertainment like this.

Finally away from the hotel about 10:30 a.m., headed toward Florence. Turned off on a side road to [San Gimignano](#) after about 10km. Our intent is to just drive by San Gimignano, the town of many towers, just see what it looks like but don't stop. We do that, it looks great, but man, there is more here than the guidebook suggests. In the first place, there are more hilltop towns than just San Gimignano. They all look like they would be fun places to hang out or wander about, and they are very picturesque to look across at. This area was scene of a competition between cities to see who could build the most towers. San Gimignano won (by one or two towers) but the result remains that every hilltop has its multi towered city, and it will take more time than we've got to analyze the personality of each and determine which is best. No matter, they all look interesting and we're just passing through.

Lunch begins to assume increasing importance. As usual, nothing we pass is open and our concern mounts. We're headed for [Empoli](#), a town back out of the hills and on the Autostrada, not pretty, but should have an open place to eat. It's raining, really a fine mist, and driving in a strange town is difficult. Helga is ignoring me except to shout orders and complain about our progress, and after several loops around the square, fighting the one way streets, we park on a rainy side street and walk to a local cafeteria. They primarily serve the local population, primarily the staff at the hospital across the street. This place is in lieu of the hospital cafeteria, and other hospitals should do so well.

It took a while to figure out how the place worked, as most of the patrons were here on chits from the hospital. You took a number, placed an order, presented your chit (or in our case, paid), and when your food was called, picked it up and found a table and ate. Our problem was that we saw everyone ahead of us with chits and thought we had missed a step. Since the conversation was all in Italian and the patrons all were regulars, no clue was offered that we had misunderstood until we got to the counter. It took a while to straighten out, but the food was good and reasonable, and we left with new friends.

Headed back to the Autostrada, toward Firenze (Florence), looking for the A11 to Bologna @ [Prato](#). We must have missed a sign, because we dumped back on city streets on the outskirts of Florence, headed for downtown. It took 15 minutes to figure out for sure that we were wrong, 30 minutes more to find our way back to the Autostrada. Finally we're back on the Autostrada and headed in the right direction to Bologna. Why can't they just provide an intersection? With an off ramp to the A11 and a sign to Bologna?

Anyway, after a 45 minute scramble around Prato, almost into Florence, we are finally on the A11 to Bologna. Helga points out that this is the same place we got screwed up on the way down to Siena. I get a little huffy and defend that we're fine, heading in the right direction, it only took 45 minutes, she can drive any time she wants, anyway, she's the navigator... Perhaps I over reacted a little.

The run to Bologna was short, about an hour on the Autostrada, and we get off at the Bologna exit at 4:00 p.m. to seek our hotel. At last, looking for the hotel in daylight! We have the address (nobody in Bologna ever heard of that street) and a hotel name. Also, we know it is near the center. Simple. Head for the center, stop at the first hotel we come to and ask them for a map and directions. Hotels speak English, have maps, and know where things are.

We drive on toward the center, past the center, back around, no hotels. Nothing from the freeway into town, nothing around the center, what is this? I'm starting to panic. It's typical: I think I've got a foolproof, logical plan that can't go wrong, and the first time I try it out, disaster. Turn into the center, usual crowded street, double-park behind a delivery truck. It's a guy vending bottled water. Ask him if he can help. No English. Suggests a tobacco shop, no English either, but a customer partially translates, "About 2 minutes, that way." What speed, 2 minutes? We came that way. What happens in 2 minutes? I give up. That's all I'm going to get.

We drive back the way we came, totally frustrated. About 2 minutes after I turned the car around and headed back, I look left and see a very tall campanile. On a hunch we turn left and head for it. About half way there I spy a hotel on our side. I pull up beside a fire plug and tell Helga to go and ask directions, and get a map with the route drawn on it! She grumbles, gets out of the car and is gone long enough that I expect to be arrested for parking in front of a fire plug, the guy in front of me pulls out and I pull up, now I'm starting to worry about Helga being gone so long, and she finally shows up and gets into the car.

I say, “Where's the map?” She says, “He said it's so simple we don't need a map.” I'm suspicious of that answer, but I wait for the finish. “Just go straight on to the square, take the street on the right side of the square to the church, and you're there.” Helga beams at me, it's so simple who needs a map?

We go straight on toward the square. One building short of the square, our street ends in a building with a pedestrian mall on each side. We can go left or right, but not past the square. I opt for right. As we go past the pedestrian mall we can see across the square to the church on the other side. There's a space on the right side of the church that might be a street, but there is no way to get to it except to drive down the pedestrian mall.

We go around, with considerable difficulty, and try again. No other way in. So I turn into the mall, pretending I'm back in Siena and practicing my “I didn't understand” speech, and drive across the square and into the ally alongside. It's half blocked by a large fenced construction excavation that blocks the view in, but as I drive by that I find other cars parked in the road and our hotel, big as life.

The hotel, the [Hotel Commercianti](#), is a remodeled 11th century building across the ally alongside the cathedral. It's four stories with 30 rooms, rated three stars, looks like the latest remodel is very recent. A very nice job architecturally, but not quite clean enough, and all the doors and windows stick, nothing quite fits right. Our room is a petite suite: about standard sized hotel room with left over spaces added (entry, walk in closet, odd shaped bath). The price of \$230 a night is maybe justified by the location, but not by the room itself. If you want to be a tourist in Bologna, next door to the cathedral it's worth something, but to us, not that much.

Dinner observations: we have experienced good food everywhere in Italy, since our arrival nine days ago, and so far three meals are especially memorable:

1. The Vecia Osteria del Moro in Pardonone near the cathedral. The host seated us and told us what to order. You couldn't argue with him (not and win). The exotic dishes, (pasta fagioli with radicchio, polenta and sausage, and fermented red cabbage) were wonderful and not something we would ever choose without his twisting the arm. Also, the chestnuts and sweet potatoes for desert. How many Americans order that? My roast beef and mashed potatoes was actually Italian in flavor, although I don't know how they accomplished that, and would have been considered excellent in any country in the world.
2. The Cipriani dining room: radicchio salad, linguine with duck ragù, calves liver in onions and sauce, and apple pie, Italian style. Everything was superb, and the liver was the best I've ever had.
3. In Siena, at the old style fish [trattoria](#): good, old fashioned neighborhood trattoria, featuring fish dishes, noisy people and fun. We had fish [carpaccio](#) to start, baked sea bass, local white wine and [pane cotto](#) for desert. Fish was impeccably fresh, waiter

steered to the best on the menu, and the preparation, again, perfect. Simple, but wonderful.

I had looked forward to adding our dinner in Bologna to this list, because Bologna has the reputation as the food capital of Italy, but not tonight. We ate at a recommended osteria about three blocks from the hotel, with a happy crowd among which I recognized several other faces from the hotel. The place was full, warm and noisy. We shared a vegetable appetizer and Helga had a [Porcini Lasagna](#), both quite good. I had the pasta with [Bolognese sauce](#), good, but not as good as ours. Probably not fair to test them on a dish that we have perfected so well, but they missed the classic recipe by quite a bit, and this is Bologna, after all. Still, for the price, not a bad meal.

Tuesday, 11/12/02 - The Trip to Venice

We spent an hour this morning, trying to resolve our banking problem: the difficulty in utilizing ATMs that first surfaced in Siena. Our cash was low and traveler's checks were hard or impossible to cash, so we visited a bank about two blocks away from the hotel to get the whole thing straightened out. We had made free use of ATMs in Germany, Austria and Northern Italy without problem. They were convenient, offered the best exchange rate, and no transaction fees. When we hit Siena the ATM no longer worked, and when I had tried last night to make an ATM withdrawal, same result as Siena: "Card not authorized for International Withdrawals." So we went to the bank to ask them what was going on.

Ever been in an Italian bank? Two doors, one in and one out, both guarded. Temperature about 108* inside (It was raining outside, about 33* drizzle, and you better dress for it). No real English spoken, maybe 50% by two employees, not the same 50%, so they had to confer often. "We're sorry, the cards not linked, you can't withdraw." Slowly comes the understanding of what's been happening. Our bank is linked to about six other systems that allow us to withdraw because they have an agreement. But in central Italy, no agreement has been reached, no linkage, no withdrawal. Sorry.

After further discussion they sighed and agreed to cash our traveler's checks, (American Express) for a whopping transaction fee. We needed cash. For the parking at Venice, for the water taxi, for lunch, probably. We grumbled, but we paid and walked out with \$170 of our \$200 bucks, enough cash to see us to the hotel in Venice.

Leaving the bank, drenched with sweat inside our clothes, sweaters and parkas, we wandered around the square for a while. So far Bologna wasn't so hot (except for inside the bank), but checkout wasn't until 12:00 p.m. and we didn't want it to be a total loss, so we figured to see the sights around the square and cool off while doing it.

Our first stop was at [Neptune's Fountain](#). It's in all the guide books and worth the press. Big, intricate, sensual marble statues of Neptune, nymphs, horses, fish, all piled up in a well-designed fountain about 20 feet tall that dominates the entrance to the square. See the video for details.

Across the square from the fountain is the [Cathedral of Bologna](#). Our view of it last night had been recognition of a landmark we needed to find the hotel, and we hadn't really registered its awesome details. Suddenly, from that perspective across the square, the incredible nature of the building leaped out at you. The sheer size is enough to freeze you. It's a very large building, barn shaped from the outside, with a semi-detached bell tower at the back. It's so big that until you get across the square you don't really realize how big it is. Even then, it's not until you go inside that you really see it. The outside is so plain and so barn like and so tall that you feel it's an industrial building, until you step inside. The outside of the structure is not at all like the Renaissance churches we've been seeing.

When you step inside you get the full scale of it. It would hold a full soccer field (with two rows of 8' diameter columns at the hash marks). The roof soars up at least 200', and is supported by gothic arches spanning at least 100'. Upper walls and arches are plain – it's the architecture that speaks to you here, not the decoration. A truly breathtaking building, so different from the others of its time that you wonder, "What did its builders say about it?" See the video and see for yourself.

We have seen some amazing and diverse churches on our travels so far, and will see some more before we're through. The churches of Bamberg were wonderful, dark gothic buildings that expressed the German Catholicism very well. Great brooding buildings that stood on high promontories and served as monuments to the city. The baroque cathedral at Ottobeuren, a magnificent structure from the outside, but the real stuff was inside, with all that baroque schlock and incredible wealth, paintings, statues, gold leaf, on and on and on. The simple little chapel/parish church we found on the way back from Bamberg. Not grand, but perfect proportions. The magnificent, abandoned chapel at the Villa Barboro. We didn't (couldn't) go inside, but the exterior was as perfect a piece of architecture as I've ever seen. Most recently, the cathedral of Siena. Huge, all marble in black and white, incredible mosaics on the walls and floors, over 400 busts carved in marble and set around the edge of the ceiling, even more marble gargoyles, saints, local princes, etc. covering the outside.

All of these said volumes about the people who built them, supported them and worshipped in them. The Cathedral of Bologna spoke for its town. A huge, somewhat spare, functional building whose extraordinary feature was the engineering accomplishment of constructing something so immense at the time it was built. It reflects the prosperity of the town in its size, the academic nature of the town in the engineering accomplishment, and the merchant and commercial roots of Bologna in its undecorated vastness. It stands out in an age of decorative excess not the least because of its austere appearance.

We hit the road for Venice about 12:00 p.m. It's a short road, about 100 miles. Helga is navigator: "We want to take the A4 straight in to the [Piazzale Roma](#)." Should only take about an hour and a half, two at the most. After about an hour and a half we reach a toll plaza where we are charged for the 150kms from Bologna. Resuming the

freeway, we pass off ramps to Zona Industrial, “Nope.” to Aeroporto, “Not yet.” etc. Soon all signs indicating Venice cease and we are still heading north on the A4. Our two hours has stretched out to three, and every indication is that next stop is Austria.

We come to another toll plaza and they give us a ticket (by machine) to travel the next 100kms. It seems that the toll road takes a vacation past Venice. We figure this means we have passed Venice. We pull over and review the maps.

It seems we have overshot Venice by quite a bit. We have also committed to the Autostrada for another 20km until the next off ramp and toll plaza, where we can turn around. It's now about 3:00 p.m. and traffic is building up.

The total of the overshoot detour is almost 100km, about one and a half hours. It turns out that what we wanted as an exit was not signed to “Piazza Roma.” It is simply designated “S11.” We finally got that from the map, but it sure didn't jump out at you. Once the “S11” designation was clear the way finding became easy. Except for the trucks.

Truck traffic is murder on the Italian freeways. The trucks are huge, some truck trains of tractor and three trailers, they clot up the right lane and you can't read the signs if you are behind or alongside a truck. The signs are all cunningly hidden so that they are completely hidden from any angle due to truck obstructions, until you have just passed them. Trucks seem to know this, and they vary their speed to obstruct for the longest possible time. Also, talking navigators are to be avoided. Helga talks a lot, and has a genius of having something to say whenever there is a break in the line of trucks coinciding with a sign. The dangers of this are obvious. So, stay away from Italian freeways during the p.m. commute and avoid talking navigators.

The S11, once found, took us straight into the Piazza Roma, and to the recommended garage where we left the car. Leaving the car was not without its controversy. Let me explain.

The plan for Venice was to consolidate our luggage into two bags: the small suitcase and Helga's cosmetic/carryon bag. The large suitcase with the dirty laundry, not needed clothes and various accumulated items was to stay in the car. My position. Helga's position was that it would be checked. I said, “No, we'll lock it in the trunk. Who wants some old dirty laundry, anyway?” Helga then counters, “They don't know it's just dirty laundry.” I say, “They don't know it's there at all.” Helga points to the attendant, who is trying not to get involved in our escalating discussion. “He knows.” Here I cheated. “You interested in dirty laundry?” Apparently not, so we leave it in the trunk, me praying that nothing is going to happen to it.

Leaving the garage we fumble our way to the water taxi. A light rain is falling and the private boats, the water taxis, are not signed. We inquire at the public boat dock and are told “over there” (broad gesture, indicating about 180* of adjacent dock. Italians love broad, nonspecific gestures. That's why Italians and Helga love each other so much), but

sure enough, there is a kiosk, with a couple of Italian boat people, and one of them agrees to haul us to the [Hotel Academia](#).

The boat is a 25' Mahogany runabout, capacity about 6 people. Well kept, he knows how to handle it and he knows the traffic in the canals. The ride is brief, and soon we're alongside the dock at the patio of the Hotel. It's a private dock and a private patio, more suited to a home than a hotel. We soon see that the hotel is small and intimate, a former home and Russian Consulate, and the garden, patio and hotel go together very well.

Venice, the hotel, the old streets and the canals are all cool. We've had a light rain all day and there are puddles among the flagstones. Everybody walks. There are no cars, just pedestrian streets and canals. The boat traffic on the [Grand Canal](#) is very busy, but the hotel is on a side canal with very little. I'll give you more on Venice tomorrow.

Dinner was very good, and inexpensive. We ate at a trattoria about a block away from the hotel, crowded, noisy and good food. We ate fish and [Chardonnay](#), Italian style, limped around the neighborhood for a brief while, and went back to the hotel and to bed.

Venice and Verona

Wednesday, 11/13/02 - Venice

We're up, breakfasted and out walking at 11:00 a.m. We've toured the hotel gardens, which didn't take long, but don't discount the unusual nature of a hotel in Venice that has gardens at all. 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. I don't want to get too maudlin about this, but maybe you get my drift.

The sky is threatening and means it. Rain is forecast. 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 which is going on everywhere, public boats and taxis hauling people about, the 70 foot public ferries. The waterways are full of traffic, and unlike the freeways it's fun to join it here.

The views are great also. Every canal has buildings right up to the water's edge, all old, some restored and maintained, more decayed and crumbling. Venice is a mud island and 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. Recently, this part of Italy has become prosperous, and an incredible amount of money is being "sunk" into restoration of these Venetian landmarks. The construction work is going on everywhere.

The canal facing sides of buildings are hard to reach and so have gotten less maintenance. They're starting to get it now, but only after the land side and interiors are finished. Still, there's a lot of work going on - 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, starting at the center and planning to work outward. The two predominate features of the piazza are the [Basilica](#) and the pigeons. There must be at least a million pigeons, maybe two million, maybe more. Nobody knows how many, but it's a lot. Venders sell bread crumbs and people all over the large square (400' x 600') feed them to the pigeons. The pigeons are aggressive and focused on food, the plumpest and sleekest pigeons I've ever seen, and they flock around the feeders like a school of anchovies. Occasionally, when someone makes a sudden move they fly up in a tight cloud you can barely see through, turn quickly and settle back for more food. Like I said, they are focused.

The Basilica should be approached slowly, from across the square. For over 500 years the City of Venice was the most powerful engine in the civilized world, and during that time its leaders poured a sizable portion of their wealth into the Basilica. This was to be the expression of all the arrogance of these masters of the [Mediterranean](#), showing that they were the masters of it all. Each conquest of that period was reflected in a new addition to the building, piece of statuary, or altar furnished with the spoils of their pillage. As you walk up to the building you are aware that it has no single expression of form or style; each [Doge](#) won his battles and built his own addition to house his loot. The building is thus lumpy, with odd protrusions everywhere.

It is the most ornate exterior we've seen anywhere, covered with statues and carvings, turrets and spires. Like I said, sort of a lumpy building with no overall architectural plan. It's like 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 is much the same. Stuff everywhere. The architectural statement is "clutter." "Clutter and wealth." The same is true for the finishes: "How much gold and mosaics can you fit in?" Everything glitters except the paintings, and they are incredibly grand and important. This is 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.

We walked back to the hotel via the streets on the south side of the central island of Venice, staying one block in from the Grand Canal. Helga is experiencing increasing pain in her foot, and I'm trying to avoid too much sympathy until I get her home. She moves more slowly each block and it's all I can stand to pretend that I don't notice. The rain is increasing and Helga thinks that's what has me upset.

About halfway back to the hotel we find the [Bel Sito](#), the hotel Helga stayed at in 1984. It still looks nice, but probably is much more expensive than in those days. Helga gets a brochure and promises the clerk we will come back one day. Across the tiny square from the Bel Sito is Helga's favorite church, the church [Santa Maria del Giglio](#). It's seeing much better days from her experience in 1984, with much of the interior restored and a charge to tourists who enter to tour. We pay gladly, happy to see this lovely church prosper. It has magnificent art throughout the church, and shows great design, although small. The basic building goes back to the 12th century, neo-baroque remodel in the 16th century, very much cleaned up and lit since 1984. Charges \$2 a head to tour and worth it. You pay for the history, the worship is free.

We continued on back to the hotel in the rain, now raining hard. Helga now silent, just trying to do it. Valiant effort, literally hurts me as much as it hurts her, but in a different place. She, at least, has the satisfaction of knowing the pain can't beat her, but watching her, each step stabs me right through the heart. Finally we reach the hotel.

Let me say a few words about the Hotel Academia. It was built in the 15th and 16th centuries by a rich merchant for his primary house. It's just off the Grand Canal, about 100 feet, and backs up (or fronts) on a side canal about 30' wide that cuts through the island. The island is one of the four major islands of Venice and is across the Grand Canal from the touristy, Piazza San Marco part of Venice. It's in a quiet, residential part of Venice that has a large student population and some commercial catering to the locals rather than the tourists. You have to experience the area around the Piazza San Marco to appreciate the difference. Anyway, this building served as the Russian Consulate for most of the first half of the 20th century and then was converted to a hotel in the 1950s.

They tore down a bit of it, built the lovely courtyard garden off the canal and the large garden on the other side, and fixed up the interior as a high quality hotel. The quality of the conversion is excellent. Lovely, ample sized rooms and warm lobby and public spaces. Rooms are tastefully furnished and the place is overall comfortable. The p.m. desk clerk appeared at first to be something of a prick, but he's loosening up, and the rest of the staff are great.

We ate again at the [Taverna San Trovaso](#). Again the place was full, the food good and reasonable, and the crowd fun to watch. Tomorrow we will try to dine more elegantly, but for tonight, this is perfect. And only one tortured block from the hotel.

Thursday, 11/14/02 - Boat Tour of Greater Venice

Off we go after breakfast to take the public boat on a self-guided tour of the islands of Venice. We buy an all-day ticket (cheap) and set out to ride the Grand Canal counter clockwise to and around the end of the island our hotel is on, west on the [Canale della Giudecca](#) (almost a km wide and deep enough for cruise ships) to the west end terminal, where the highway and railroad causeway comes in, and where we left our car,

then back on the Grand Canal for a short stretch, west on a side canal about half the size of the Grand Canal, but twice the size of the one by our hotel ([Dorsoduro](#)). This side canal cuts the west island in half and provides a quick way out to the open lagoon. It gets a lot of traffic. Once out on the lagoon the boat turns east and follows the north shore of the islands to about half way around, then turns away from the Venice shore to go north to the island of [Murano](#).

Let's go back to the Grand Canal. 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 is a man and his dog coming home from a walk.

As we round the tip of our hotel island, 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.

Leaving the terminal area, a short stretch on the Grand Canal, the shorter dash northwest on the side canal, and out to the open lagoon. The side canal 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 like a bus (which it is).

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 feeling is that 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 lunch, 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 get off the vaporetto needing a W.C. the worst way. There is a public W.C. off to the left of the dock and to it we sprint (I sprint, Helga limps). Having now committed 300 feet in this direction, our natural requirements satisfied for the moment, we continued in that direction (Helga questioned the wisdom of going this way. I explained that it looked like there was a commercial area down the way and there we could get lunch. I can be so wrong sometimes...)

We walk along the path between several glass factories and the lagoon, heading northwest away from the public dock. The factories appear closed, and probably are, it being after 12:00 p.m. Murano is a big island. We thought it only glass factories, but as we proceed we discover that it is much more. People live here, in houses or apartments, and there are all the things that go with residential neighborhoods: schools, stores, church, parks, and playgrounds, and a thriving commercial area. Tourist retail is clustered around the central canal. Had we turned right at the public dock instead of left, we would have immediately entered the retail area. Going left we left it behind for the factories and lagoon side path, and had to wind our way back through the residential section.

Walking along the path along the lagoon, heading for a brighter area that we thought was the commercial area, we soon find it's not; it's only a collection of factory ads. OK, let's head inland and work our way back that way. Circle and sooner or later you will find it. It's worked that way so far in Italy. Why not now?

Soon our inland street becomes a lane, then an alley, then something less than an alley. Backyards with low fences, neglected vegetable gardens a guy making wine, some kids heading home from school. We're getting pretty hungry and Helga's foot won't take much more of this walking. We meet a guy walking the other way and ask him where is the restaurants? Giving no assurance that he understood us at all he waves his hand in the direction we have come.

We head back. Helga is dragging and won't be able to go much further. An old woman, local, smiles at us and without us asking, gives us a clear, nonverbal direction to the tourist retail area. We trust her and follow her waved directions, and sure enough, three blocks later we're there. On the Murano central canal, which has paths on each side lined with restaurants, bars, glass shops and a host of other establishments too numerous to list. We are focused: we want lunch.

We smell test two places, the second passes. Larger than it looks, three dining rooms behind a 20' storefront. Tables on the canal bank as well, for a warmer day. We settle in for lunch: pasta, shrimp and prosaic wine - not at all bad.

Wandering back to the public dock we check out the glass shops, looking primarily for a comparable to the gray vase of 1984. None found. Neither a lookalike nor comparable quality and size. Helga's expensive purchase appears to one of a kind. Along the way we buy three mini vases. I mean really mini. Like 1" tall and about 16 gauge opening, like one tiny flower each. Helga loves them, so did I (when we got them home with flowers in them).

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. It's completely surrounded by a wall with gates to the boat landings, steps down into the water, this is where the deliveries are made. You've really got to see the video for this stop. 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. A total of about 20 city block of such crypts occupy 2/3 of the island and the other third is laid out in individual crypts and graves. The 20 blocks of crypts are mostly six high vaults by a block long. It reminds you of an open air file room warehouse with six high file cabinets that goes on forever.

We're told that the cemetery is too small for all the dead of Venice and that 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](#). As you wander around the place several 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 ride back to the hotel is more of the back streets (canals) of Venice. It's closing on 5:00 p.m. and most of the other riders are commuters. As a matter of fact, the first two boats from Murano were so full we let them go, didn't even try to get on. Then, all of a sudden, 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, into the super wide canal between Venice and the [Lido](#) where we get in line with a cruise ship. It's about 10 stories high, lit like a sports arena, and moving slowly to an anchorage opposite the Piazza San Marco. We slide by it and soon on to the public dock at Academia, and on to the hotel.

Back at the hotel, not so tired, not wet at all, 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, not far from the Bel Sito. We're served by

Alexandra. He seems to own the place, is short (about 5' 5"), 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](#) (shrimp sized), a great bottle of [Cabernet](#) (made in a light Italian style), 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. Perhaps Bebe and Russ might be interested. Bebe would know some cooks who might participate, and they have enough room. We parted from Alexandra full of good food, affection and good intentions, and headed back to the hotel and a comfortable night.

Oh, another thing. 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."

Friday, 11/15/02 - On to Verona

We left Venice on the high water ([Acqua alta](#)). The tide is about a foot above the canalized walkways in some places, and up to 4" deep in some canalized shops and restaurants. High tide was at 8:30 a.m. and had dropped about a foot by the time we were ready to leave, so we were able to stay in the dry for our trip to the vaporetto. We had used a water taxi on arrival, and that was a good buy since we didn't know the location of the hotel and the system of public boats, but now that we did we took the vaporetto for our return. It cost \$3.50 a piece instead of \$50 for the taxi, and if we had left an hour sooner we could have used yesterday's all day pass; it would have been free. Of course, we probably would have gotten our feet wet.

The trip to the Piazzale Roma was about 40 minutes, all along the Grand Canal in the opposite direction from yesterday's trip, so the views were new to us. The vaporetto is fun, if you like people watching and don't mind engine noise. This is the Venice bus system and everyone uses it, there's no other way to get around. No taxis, no private cars, not even the ever present motor bikes. Young, old, workmen, tourists, dogs and dog walkers, everyone uses the vaporettos.

We landed at Piazzale Roma and picked up the car (Yes, the luggage in the trunk was fine. The suitcase, the dirty laundry, even the package of liquor and stale pastry, all were undisturbed). We headed out to the A and [Verona](#). This time we had done our homework. We had the hotel in Verona fax us a clear map of the city showing the route to the hotel. They embellished it with a verbal description as well, which helped, as the map was okay as a picture, but still hard to read regarding street names. Following these directions, we drove straight to the hotel. That means no double backs, no getting lost, no circling the city. There is no such thing as truly "straight" in medieval cities.

The [Hotel Due Torri](#) is on the northernmost edge of the old city of Verona, which lies in a 270* crook in the [River Adige](#). They took a 270* bend and walled off the fourth side, to provide a city that was surrounded by water on three sides and by a moat and wall on the fourth. The defensive advantage of this site was obvious from the beginning. The Romans saw it and constructed the start of the wall and various works behind it, including a fine amphitheater that survives and is used today.

The Due Torri (Two Towers) Hotel is just a perimeter road away from the river. It's a Thirteenth century building, built as a palace and converted to an inn in the mid Thirteenth century. Like most of these former Roman towns, there was probably something here before that, but not recorded that we could find. In its life as an inn it hosted many notables, including Mozart and Maximilian. The building is about 4 stories and 100 rooms, with a very imposing lobby.

Our sty room was overlooking the perimeter road, and was incredibly noisy. The hotel is overheated, even the staff complain, and the only way to cool it is to open a window. You never heard such a din in your life as that sty room with the window open. We called, they sighed, soon we were moved to an interior room, view of the interior court well and lobby ceiling, skylight really, but quiet. Lousy view, but quiet. Now to try to cool off the room. When we entered it was about 90*. We got it down to about 80* and left for dinner.

The hotel knows that we will be comfortable or will leave. They explain that it's difficult to provide controlled heating and air conditioning to an 800 year old building. We agree. Different subject. If we can't be comfortable, we will leave. We represent two nights rent for an otherwise empty room. They listen.

The Desk recommends we dine at a local restaurant about 3 blocks from the hotel. The myth in Verona is that no cars are allowed in the old city. The truth is that only the

out of town and timid cars are prohibited. No local observes the ban and the streets are lined solid with autos after 6 p.m. When you mix in all those cars on the tiny streets with the [Vespas](#) and the cars in transit, a steady stream, being a pedestrian is a hazardous business. Being a pedestrian with a crippled foot was downright suicidal.

We made it with no more than several bad scares, and found a friendly, good smelling restaurant. We weren't about to try to go back immediately, so even if it had been awful we would have stayed. No worry there. We had [Rhodesia](#) crepes with crab for starters. Not that bad. Helga had the sole and I the lamb chops. Even better. Helga had pane cotto for desert, but I was too full. Good enough to warrant our return tomorrow.

Saturday, 11/16/02 - Seeing Verona

We set out after breakfast with three sites to view: the [Roman Arena](#), [Basilica of San Zeno](#), and the [Castelvecchio](#). Verona is a neat town. About half the size of Siena and more "now," not so much preserved for the tourists. There are a lot of compromises between history and current use (witness the cars after 6:00 p.m.), but the town is a vibrant, current place for the people of Verona to use.

It has its museums, but they are distinct and labeled as such. The town as a whole has the feel of a place where people live, work, shop and while tourists are part of that, they don't seem to dominate the place.

We figured we would walk to the arena and check that out. It was about 6 - 8 blocks from the hotel, through the high end shops area. We wandered along through the shops, Helga stopping abruptly (frequently) to peer in windows or enter and browse around. All sorts of shops, no particular product being sought, but frequent and unexpected stops. And questions like "What do you think?" Pointing at some object about which I have no opinion, no interest. It took hours.

There was a market in a square at about the halfway point of the walk to the arena. Goods being offered were tacky, food was not the best, we stopped anyway as Helga was tired and needed a chance to sit a while. We spent 15 minutes resting, then underway again. Helga spots a perfumery. She's gone about 20 minutes, finally comes back with a bag with about two pounds of cosmetics costing several hundred dollars. All she can talk about is "What a deal!" Thank God it was a deal.

At last we reach the arena. The arena is on the northern perimeter of the main square. It is the only intact (almost intact) arena of Roman construction in Italy. The walls, the seats, the gladiator and lion cages, the sand floor of the arena are all still there. It's a cool place. They now use it for opera, music and other events. The seats look pretty uncomfortable, but the acoustics are fine and it will seat quite a crowd. Just bring your pillow (Better see the video of this one. I can't really paint the true picture in words).

We had lunch in the square. Nothing fancy, just a sandwich and tea then caught a taxi to the oldest church in Verona. It's a large complex: church, chapels, convent, graves

and crypts. Total about 6 city blocks. The highlight was a center courtyard in grass, surrounded by colonnades. The colonnades on the north and south sides were Roman, with rounded tops of the arches, and on the east and west side were gothic, with rounded to a point arches. The same architect and same builder. Explain that one to me.

We toured the church, which was interesting because of its architecture and its antiquity. Not as fancy as the majors we'd seen in other cities, but an interesting building. The entry is at street level (plus a couple of steps) and occupies about half the church. At midpoint the sides step up about six feet to the main floor before the altar. Enough room to seat about 300 people in front of the service. The lower level is the catacombs, totally open to the entry, you can see the central crypts from the church front door. Again, see the video for more details. It's an interesting church.

As we are leaving the church it starts to rain heavily. We sit on benches under the colonnades until it lets up, peacefully smelling the wet grass. There is something very nice about this place in the rain. We're in no hurry to leave it.

The rain lets up for a while and we begin a walk back towards the Castelvecchio. It's a great walk along the river with views across to the old town and the castle in the distance. The river is extremely high and muddy, up almost to the bottoms of the bridges. The flow rate is about 300' per minute. It's a torrent, carrying whole trees along with lesser debris. Must be all this rain plus the Sirocco melting the snows that have swollen the river more than usual, because the banks could never survive this kind of torrent all the time.

The Castelvecchio is an interesting structure. Built in the 15th century, it's a castle and bridge, one structure, made of brick and stone, built into and over the river, with a moat around the land side. The moat is dry now, full of grass and weeds, and the castle seems small and insignificant compared to some of the fortresses we have seen. Still, the proportions are perfect, and all the classic castle features are there: drawbridge across the moat, drawbridge at the end of the bridge over the river, battlements on the walls in all the right places. The castle is a museum now, and the exhibits are mostly historical pieces from the country's churches, mostly interiors but some exteriors. You can see that the church isn't sharing any of its good sculpture; this stuff is both sparse and of poorer quality than we have seen in the standing churches.

The bridge is a working and necessary part of the city. It's the only way across the river for a half mile each way and gets a lot of pedestrian traffic. It's closed to cars now, but you can see that they have used it in the past, you can see the ruts in the cobbles. It is supported by three big brick arches and the river is almost up to the crests of the arches now. How did this bridge stand for 600 years?

We take another tea break and stroll back to the arena square to hail a taxi. Helga spots a cool jolt shop on the way and we try them out. Damn good. Taxi takes us back to the hotel, rain starting to fall again. It's good to get indoors.

Sunday, 11/17/02 - On to Bressanone (Brixen)

We are tired. It's been 27 straight days without a break, no weekends, foreign language, each day's trip a challenge, and we are pooped. We could feel it when we were getting up this morning. We both were loath to get out of bed, even after we were fully awake. No question, this trip is wearing us out.

Breakfast and checkout completed, we set out for Bressanone, known on the Austrian side as [Brixen](#). This is the [Brenner Pass](#) route and has always been a popular route through the Alps. Control of Bressanone has been back and forth between the Italian and Austro-German sides at least six times since Roman control ended, and while it's currently Italian, the population is mostly German speaking. This is no doubt because it only came back to Italy after World War II and it takes longer than 50 years to shift the population and culture in this part of the world. Besides, no one has any faith that the control won't shift back soon.

We head for the A22 (Autostrada), but sign confusion lands us on the local instead. That's okay, it's slower and more scenic, a lot more to our liking. We are climbing up the valley of the Adige River, a spectacular glaciated "U" that cuts through the Dolomites. A wide, flat bottomed valley with straight, vertical sides. Occasional out thrust ridges with castles on them, great marble and granite quarries, one village after another, and grapes. Vineyards everywhere, across the valley bottom and up the sides until the slopes get too steep. I swear, they plant vineyards on 45* slopes. When they get to the cliff, look up where it flattens out again above the cliff, more vineyards. The whole effect is just beautiful.

Just past [Bolzano](#), about half way to Bressanone, we enter the A22 Autostrada. 10km later we come to a full stop, no cars coming the other way. A cloud of black smoke is rising about a kilometer ahead, from around a curve, so we can't see what's going on. A siren sounds in the distance behind us. Another, more distant, comes from behind the smoke.

What happened? Why has all traffic stopped? No one knows. Truckers don't know. Everyone asking everyone else in four different languages. Smoke gets darker.

A police car goes by, slowly forcing a path along the right shoulder, our direction. A fire truck with a big fan goes by the wrong way up the deserted opposite lanes. Then an ambulance, same path, toward the scene. Long pause, then an ambulance in a hurry, from the scene. Two more to the scene and another away. Slowly the black smoke dissipates.

An hour later the line of cars starts to move. First we inch forward, gradually gain speed, reach a tunnel mouth with fire equipment at this end. We continue to accelerate through the tunnel, exit at 80km, lots of fire equipment at the other end. Still nothing moves going south. The backup is 6km, I'm doing 120km and being passed by the end of it. We continue north and soon forget the delay.

It's an hour later that we reach the Bressanone exit, about 5:00 p.m. In this deep and now narrow canyon, that means almost dark. The delay back at the tunnel has pushed us into nightfall, into dark. Bressanone is a short way off the Autostrada, but the exit is 10km up the canyon from the town. Remember, these are toll roads, exit toll plazas are expensive and they don't come very often. It brings us back to a familiar old problem: how to find a particular hotel in the dark without directions?

Like we learned on the way to Siena, ask the toll taker. This one throws us a curve, however. We ask our question in English and He immediately responds - in German. He rattles on for some time in German, Helga listens, I accept the fact that there is no way I'm going to get anything out of this, Helga says, "Danka" and we move on.

I ask, "What did you get from that?" Helga says, "On to Brixen. 5 something, turn left I think. I don't know." I've gotten so used to Helga's quick ear for languages that I'm surprised at the uncertainty, but I guess the unexpected change from Italian to German threw even her. Anyway, we're sure of the "On to Brixen" and so we continue toward the town.

Lacking any better guess, we count traffic lights to 5 and turn left. A block later a sign magically appears, halfway down a signpost, "[Hotel Dominik](#)." Son-of-a-gun! Helga got it right again!

We follow a well signed route for about eight blocks, ending up at a building that's fairly new, a well-designed four stories, almost suburban/residential style. Clearly it was designed to be a hotel, but intended to fit the neighborhood rather than to stand out. Inside it was more hotel like, with a large lobby and desk in front and bar and dining rooms off to the right. Off to the left was the unexpected: a swimming pool and workout room.

We checked in, swam in the pool, dressed and inquired about a dinner recommendation. The desk was very clear on that. We must eat at [Fink](#). The Fink. Unfortunate name, but very good food. The only way to get there was to walk. In Brixen there are no exceptions. No autos, not even taxis, in the old town. It's only a few blocks, and look, the rain is letting up!

The rain did let up a little, and we eventually found the Fink, although it was about twice as far as we had been led to believe. And the food was worth it: three courses of game, which is what they mostly favor in the Tyrol. Wine was excellent. Helga isn't found of game, but I am and I liked it. I ate too much, drank too much, staggered back to the hotel in the rain (Yep, it's raining again, as I knew it would) and fell into bed, immediately asleep.

Monday, 11/18/02 - Seeing the Südtirol

Raining hard and snow on the peaks. We breakfast and take a drive up the mountain side. The country is very steep, still some grapes on the lower slopes, soon

becomes pasture and fir trees. About a 50 - 50 mix. Rock, where exposed, is a contorted metamorphic sandstone, although there is evidence of some granite here and there. The granite looks like it's imported. The sandstone, which is definitely local, is a lousy building material and they probably brought down granite from the higher slopes for structures and walls.

As we climb higher and the road narrows we see farms clinging to the sides of the mountain, barns on the lower story and residence above. This is pasture and dairy country and the meadows, which slope up to 45*, are all close cropped. But no cattle out today. In all the days travel through dairy country we saw only one cow. They are probably all in the barns, warm and cozy. We know they are around, because we see the milk cans in front of every farm house, waiting for pick up. No need to worry about refrigeration today, with this cold, rainy weather.

As we climb higher the pasture gets scarce and the forest thickens. Evidence of wood cutting everywhere. Every house we have passed has at least several cords of wood laid by. Some as much as 10, and that's what we can see. Goodness knows what's in the basements.

Occasionally we come to villages, a church and however many houses can fit on that particular hump or flatter bit of mountain. They all look prosperous, and as it moves into afternoon, we see the kids coming home from school in slickers and umbrellas. They are cute, shy, and seem not at all curious, which I find very, very curious.

Still higher it's all forest. The rain begins to turn to snow and its starting to stick on the ground. We meet a snow plow and have to back up to let him pass. A little higher and snowing harder, time to turn around. Coming down we notice that the elevation where the rain becomes snow is very discrete - about 200 foot elevation from all rain to all snow, snow on the ground.

Going down the hill is like traveling a familiar, but different road. Same country, steep hillsides, villages, but things look different from the back. When we get breaks in the clouds we see the peaks are fully clad in snow, and way, way up there. Seems like straight up. Rugged, high mountains, incredibly steep, but the snow sticks to all surfaces. Looking down through occasional breaks in the clouds we see villages clinging to the sides of the mountain and at the bottom, Brixen looking small and compact from this great height.

We get back to the hotel in the early afternoon, have a swim and eat a late lunch of leftovers in our room. The rain has abated a little, and we go out to the old town to shop for a purse for Ingrid. "Abated" means it was raining much harder that it is now. It soon perceives that we are out walking with our broken umbrella and it picks up again.

The old town looks like a Disney set for a renaissance village - all new and sparkling. This even though the brass plaques say 13th, 14th, 15th century. It occurs to us that this is the way the buildings were intended to look when they were built. Most of the

cities we have visited have been “preserved,” left alone, marble stained and eroded, stucco pealed or peeling, paint old and faded. Brixen (Bressanone) is all sparkling well maintained. Cleaned up, painted, stucco repaired, new frescoes, everything the way a Brixen housewife would insist it be. It’s a different look.

We had dinner that night at the Hotel Dominik. Full staff, full service, total of 9 people including us eating. This is between seasons here, but they don’t cut back. Winter they get the skiers and summer it’s the tourist travelers. I think they are marketing for the convention and retreat trade to fill in between, but they were unsuccessful that night. Rainy November nights it was just us. The food was excellent, a very enjoyable meal. The turbot was inspired, and every course was excellent. The wine was a little sharp and thin, sort of a French style, went well with the food but didn’t satisfy on its own. Never let the chef recommend the wine unless you want it to compliment but stay behind the food. We linger a full three hours and drift back up to our room at about 11:00 p.m.

This has been one of the big surprises of the trip, this glorious Austro-Italian village and mountain sides. We had planned to stay one night and were only able to grab one extra day, but every aspect of the place has captivated us. The pool helped a lot. But the real draw is the countryside and the sense that these people are here, not for us, but to milk their cows and keep their town in good repair, to send their kids to school, all the things we think are important. People are friendly, “[Grüß Gott](#)” opens every meeting, and their town is all spit and polished.

It’s not Italian, not German. It’s a mix of the best of both. Whether it would wear well, better than the laidback Italians, I don’t know. I do know that I want to come back.

Tuesday, 11/19/02 - Back to Munich

We planned to hit the road to Munich at about 11:00 a.m., to get over the pass in the warmest part of the day. Last thing we do before we leave the Hotel Dominik is to see their ancient wall buried in the basement of the hotel. This is a 5th century BC dwelling fragment they uncovered when they were expanding the basement of the hotel to add some conference rooms. The girl from the desk showed us to the basement, to a modern business center lobby with two medium sized meeting rooms, built two years ago. The lobby was fairly large for the two meeting rooms, and it had a marble floor and no furniture. As you crossed the lobby toward the meeting rooms, you came to a place against the wall where the marble stopped, and the floor became glass. Looking down through the glass floor we see a hole about 6’ deep, three sides of which are hand laid, mortar-less river stone, a small fireplace, a matte type grinding stone and a handful of bones in a basket, probably from a child. The girl from the desk says it has been dated back to 500 BC, which makes it pre-Roman in this area. They found it when excavating for the expansion, explored it as far as it went, preserved it as well as they could, covered it with a window and went on with their project. Seems like as sensible a solution as I can imagine.

We made our way out of town the way we had come, paralleling the Autostrada for about 5 miles to an onramp, then on to the Autostrada and up to the pass at about 120kmh. It was raining lightly as we started, rain got heavier as we went up, and turned to snow near the top. The snow line was abrupt just like yesterday, and we reached it only a few hundred feet below the tunnel through the summit. They were working on the road in the other direction from ours, a big deicing operation, but the northbound lanes were fine. A few miles past the summit and the snow turned back to rain. Looking around the valley you could see the sharp line where the frosted trees stopped and the no-snow zone below. It was lovely.

We continued our descent from the pass, down the Autobahn, past [Innsbruck](#). We were beginning to feel the pangs of lunch hunger and started looking for a suitable town with a restaurant. This one looks okay, we drive through town, all inns closed, even the bars are closed. Drive on, try another town with the same result. We end up in a MacDonald's - awful as ever. Both of us were burping the rest of the way to Munich, about 100km.

Finding the hotel was easy this time. We know the general layout and the streets local to the hotel and we drive right to it. By 3:30 p.m. we are settled in our room at the Hilton, soon have our swim, and time to relax and get ready for dinner. We're halfway back to the States.

We eat at the hotel, ordering from the menu. This is what we should have done the first time. Forget the buffet. Helga has [Tagliatelle](#) with Truffles, and I have Prime Rib. Her meal is better, but I enjoy mine more. Helga says that her meal is better, and she enjoys it more, maybe she has a point. Anyway, dinner is not that bad, we both enjoy, and so to bed.

Wednesday, 11/20/02 - Last Day with Julius and Ingrid

We have two goals today. 1. Spend lunch and afternoon with Julius and Ingrid, and 2. Shop for chocolates at Dallmayr's. We left the hotel at 10:20 a.m. after an argument with the garage manager. Translation problem. Hotel bellman put the car away and gave me the ticket. I thought it was a two-day ticket. It wasn't. It took 20 minutes to straighten out the misunderstanding, apologize to the garage manager, finally pay for the parking and get on the road \$14 poorer. Driving to the Stürmer house in Geltendorf, where I've not been before without a navigator. Turned out to be a piece of cake. We headed to Türkenfeld, followed the familiar path to Geltendorf, and drove right to it.

We arrived at the Stürmer's, late but unexpected. They thought we couldn't find it. Once praise for our way finding abilities were out of the way, we presented the purse to Ingrid, and she was truly overwhelmed. Never have I seen anyone so surprised and pleased with a gift.

The four of us had lunch at a near-by local. Good value and I got to pay for it. You don't even begin to realize how special it is that I got to pay. No one in my

experience is harder to grab a check from than Julius. Usually this is not a thing I contest, but I can appreciate the accomplishment. Lunch done we returned to the J & I home to look at videos. Not mine, but Julius'!

Linda and Kate last August, the May show of his paintings, Julius and Ingrid in New York in 1997 (with a constant sound track of Helga and Linda talking), J & I in Romania, Oct 2001, the trip we missed because of 9/11.

Actually it was kind of interesting. Julius is an excellent technician with a camera. He composes his shots, holds the pose, has a steady hand and most of all, holds his shots steady, horizon level and the whole sequence looking very professional. I learned a lot from his videos: "how to" as well as "what to" shoot. He also took about 5 minutes of the ground, just like me, and I liked Julius a lot better for this lapse than I would have without it.

We stayed with them about 2 hours longer than we should, left at last at 5:30 p.m., heading for Munich to shop at Dallmayr's which closes at 7:00 p.m. It's dark, foggy and 40km to Munich, where we expect to get lost. We've been lost in so many cities, we are getting good at it. We found the Centrum, the garage and Dallmayr's with about 15 minutes to spare and concluded our purchases as they were closing the store. Then back to the hotel, a swim, a short evening of TV (German language version of an old [Brook Shields](#) movie.), dinner on some of Ingrid's excellent onion cake, and then to bed.

Thursday, 11/21/02 - Going Home

Our plans were to get up around 8:00 a.m., go down and swim, have breakfast and pack up for a 12:00 p.m. checkout. The alarm worked perfectly, but neither Helga nor I responded to the summons. I didn't even bother to turn it off. Just laid there until "Dixie" was done. We had desultory conversation, both of us defending our sloth for about 45 minutes, finally admitting that neither of us had the energy for a swim. We dragged out of bed at about 8:45 a.m., had our toilet and half packed, and went down for breakfast, resigned to go to the plane without exercise. Finished packing and reached the desk for checkout at the prescribed 12:00 p.m., thus proving that we didn't have time for the swim in the first place.

In checking out we discovered that breakfasts were covered as part of the deal in our room rate. No extra charge for all those sausages and eggs, pastries, juice, etc. We should have caught it the first time we were there but were so focused on Julius and Ingrid that it slipped by. Still, it was a nice surprise to end the trip on.

We drove to the airport and dropped off the car. There was an interesting combat between Helga and the German Auto Europe rep. Interesting because he had all the cards, but she hung right in there, almost prevailing. It was gloves off, no holds barred, consumer vs. big business negotiation.

Helga says, “No, you’re wrong.” she then tells him what’s right. Then he tells her again, “This is what you pay.” No more words, no explanation why this is what you pay, it just is. Helga says, voice even, without passion, equally unequivocal, “This is what I’ll pay.” he, with equal evenness and lack of emotion repeats. “This is what you pay.” Neither acknowledges the other’s words or even reacts to them.

I’m starting to get pretty tense. This discussion could go on for a long time. He doesn’t care, but we have a plane to catch. He knows that and so do we. The amount of difference they are debating is small, like I said, he has all the cards. After about three iterations of this non-connecting dialog, Helga surprises both of us by saying “OK” and signing the bill. No grudge, no agreement on principals, just “OK” and signs. I think I see a glint of admiration in the rental car rep’s eye. If Helga ever wants a job in the rental car industry, I can think of one Puerto Rican and one German who would give her a pretty good recommendation.

The rental car return garage is in the lower level of the Munich terminal building. The terminal is about five levels. lowest level one floor below street level. The five levels are not stacked straight up, but each are offset a little towards the aircraft apron. They are also not uniform in width but tend to taper toward the top floor. Stairs, elevators and escalators are scattered throughout, some serving all floors and some only connecting selected levels, some skipping some floors altogether.

The functional layout of the floors, particularly those floors with retail, is not all that way finding friendly. It’s as if the building architect had control and used intuitive way finding as his criteria for the operational areas of the terminal, but the the retailer came along later and forced him to surrender control and logic on any level that has retail. There the traveler passes the maximum number of shops, arranged in a herring bone pattern, the theory being that if you pass more shops you will buy more stuff.

The passenger starts out moving through a very rational building. You enter, either from curb or gate, in an area controlled by the functionally oriented architect. You see a familiar layout, signs where you expect them, level changes where expected and clearly signed, you’re moving through a rational building in an efficient manner, clearly directed to your destination. Until you stray into the retail-controlled area.

Suddenly the direct corridors become a herring bone pattern of shops, no view longer than 4 - 5 shops, stairs and escalators which connect retail floors but omit access to rest of the complex. The shops repeat. I counted three news and gift with identical name and logo. Signs seem to be designed to lead you deeper into the labyrinth rather than out of it. Stairs and escalators skip functional floors and connect retail to retail. People from whom you seek direction say “Go straight down there...” vague wave of the hand indicating a general direction of shops and herring bone corridors.

In short, I got lost. Went to mail a letter requesting a refund of about \$30 for Euro taxes and got hopelessly lost. Knew where I wanted to get back to but couldn’t for the life of me find the correct floor. Asked directions about six times, always told, “Go

straight...” You know the rest. Last try for directions added a key bit of wisdom: “Just follow the signs to departure. It takes you through the whole thing.” sure enough it does. After 45 minutes since I left to mail the letter, I’m back to where Helga was waiting, near where we had checked the bags.

Helga greets me. “Where have you been? You’ve been gone for hours!” “How can you have been lost? You know, you do always have trouble getting lost indoors.” Her irritation over being left for so long is almost counterbalanced by her obvious enjoyment of my screw up.

Well, she’s right. This incident has taught me something. I tend to assume that my logic is right, that things must be arranged as I’ve assumed they are. This works well in the woods, where nature tends to follow her own rules and once you learn them you know what to expect. Not so well when you don’t understand the pattern. Then I lose my way, and because the logic is wrong, can’t find my way back. Put this together with signs in a foreign language which I don’t speak, landmarks which I can’t recognize, an arrangement to serve some other purpose than mine, mounting frustration at being so confused, and it’s a miracle I ever found my way back. When I understand the layout, can see a landmark I recognize, I’m great. The danger is when I’m wrong about the logic.

Once back with Helga, I’m not about to take any more chances before plane time. I insist we go straight through security, no detours, and on to the gate. Helga says, “wait, we should change our money, we should buy some stuff...” No way. I’m not getting lost down there again. She doesn’t really understand this, but there’s no mistaking my determination, so we go to the gate.

On the plane, which is about half full, I take a seat across the aisle. I learned something from the trip over. Helga and I both have two seats. The flight home is much more comfortable than the one over.

Disseminating at SFO we must clear Customs. Ours is the only flight arriving, and the Customs, Immigrations, Agriculture, and whatever want to get paid for a full shift. They look at every line on the forms, open every bag, really string it out. It takes an hour to clear customs. Even after a 7:00 p.m. arrival at SFO and a van to ourselves for the shuttle ride home, we don’t get there until 11:30 p.m. It was a 27-hour day, and the adventure is over.

The End.

