

Cognoscenti magazine

Because life is short

Grand Hotel Villa Balbi
Sestri Levante, Italy

Sumptuous décor, hand-painted ceilings, inlaid tile floors and spacious luxuriousness—that was the experience of **Cognoscenti Magazine** editors at the **Grand Hotel Villa Balbi**, located just opposite the beach in the pleasant town of Sestri Levante.



This room features period furniture and original ceiling paintings

The lobby is a very opulent affair, with its hand-painted ceilings, rows of stylish 1950s-style armchairs in brown leather, flowers, and an enormous fireplace guarded by two fantastic winged creatures in ornately carved wood.

The hotel's restaurant, *Il Parco*, is decorated in peach and yellow. An enormous and unusual tree trunk juts up through the middle of the restaurant to pierce the ceiling and reach the light above. *Il Parco* serves tasty if unexceptional meals, mainly for the hotel's half- and full-pension program guests.

In the *Bianchetti al vapore con limone e olio di frantoio*, a different oil might have been used to better effect. In the *gli spaghetti saltati alla brezza marina*, the noodles were undercooked—even for fans of *al dente*. *La piccata di vitello al vino pigato e basilico*, served with mashed potatoes and a mound of spinach with a heart-shaped carrot in its center, was rather more successful.

To accompany the meal, we enjoyed a very good 1997 *Barbaresco Montico* from the Bersano vineyard, exhibiting hints of pepper, tobacco, and orange.

For travelers wishing to experience the fabled era of the Grand Tour of Europe, there are few better places to experience it than the Grand Hotel Villa Balbi. Most of the hotel's 106 rooms are of more modern design, but in our spacious and luxurious duplex suite, part of the original 17th century building, the ambience and furnishings were among the finest to be encountered in all Italy.

This article was written by Jeffrey Riggs and other contributing editors to *Cognoscenti Magazine*.

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