## EXPO

The City of Bridges is at a contemplative moment. It has come through two sleepy years, freed by the pandemic from the usual tourist crowds, and is now cautious about their return. Ahead of the city's forthcoming Art Biennale, we discover a city basking in soft spring sun and waiting to see what's around the corner for its flotilla of craftworkers, wine-makers, hoteliers and gondoliers.

# JUST ADD WATER

Venice marked its 1,600th birthday last year with quiet celebrations. Long a bastion of tourism and *mordi e fuggi* (eat and run) sightseers, Venice during the pandemic offered a glimpse of what life could be like without the crush of crowds. For some perspective on the turnaround, 2020 saw a little over 1.3 million people visit, compared to more than five million the year before.

Change usually comes rather slower to the ancient city. Venice remains entirely nautical, spread over 120 islands cobbled together from marshland and riven by canals rather than roads. There is a total absence of cars (even bicycles). While the manner of moving around has changed little – boats are ubiquitous and the best way to see the city – a ban on cruise ships entering the Giudecca Canal from 2021 and a clean-up of the lagoon signify a sea change in attitudes here as this beguiling metropolis battles both flooding and pollution.

There's also a new generation of entrepreneurs taking over the mantle of age-old restaurants and bars, building boats (the old-fashioned way), blowing glass and even installing electric charging stations for a new fleet of greener vessels. On the eve of the Venice Biennale, Monocle visits in the calm before the show, in the off-season when the silvery ripples of the lagoon reflect the low spring sun. What we find is a city in flux – familiar, somehow, but quieter, more contemplative than before. A city with all of its charm, ritual and tradition intact but a little less chatter, chunter and churn. Join us for a tour of Venice as you've never seen it.

#### Under the surface

Canals less travelled

Venice is at its best - most mysterious, most sublime deep at night and in the early morning when the crowds are absent. MONOCLE arrives by train, the tracks hovering just above the lagoon's calm surface. We disembark at the 1950s Santa Lucia station and reach our accommodation by boat long after nightfall. It's warm and we glimpse the deserted Rialto bridge and a shimmering bend of the traffic-free Grand Canal. Our hotel occupies one of the oldest stone palazzos in the city: once run-down, the building's 1,000-year history includes a lengthy renovation to become the new (and emphatically named) Venice Venice Hotel. The ambitious fit-out was masterminded by Alessandro Gallo and Francesca Rinaldo, the Venetian founders of fashion brand Golden Goose. The lounges and 20 guest rooms are decked out with the couple's customcrafted furnishings and avant garde artworks by the likes of Polish sculptor Igor Mitoraj, Italian Francesco Simeti and pieces from the Fluxus movement.

"Hotels here are baroque and old-fashioned," says Alessandro the following morning, sitting at the canal-side bar under arches of Constantine marble. "But we felt it



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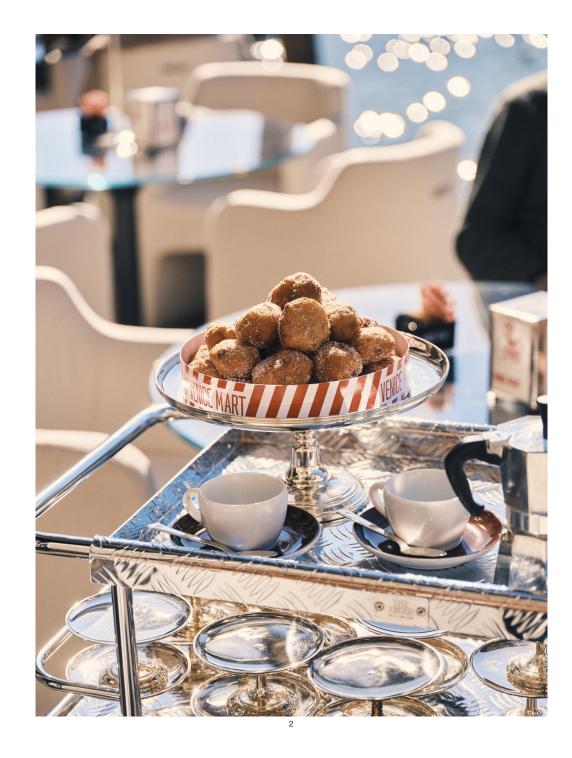
- Training in Venice
   Floating through Burano's calm waters
   Chefs in Trattoria da Romano in Burano
   Family-run trattoria





- Michieli Alessandro at the Trattoria da Romano
   Breakfast of frittelle at The Venice Venice Hotel

















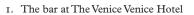












- The bar at The Venice Venice Hotel
   Canal views from the comfortable rooms
   Waiting for his gondola
   Drinks trolley at The Venice Venice Hotel
   Local pasta dish at the Locanda Cipriani in Torcello

- in Torcello
  6. Calm waters
  7. Building gondolas in Squero Tramontin
  8. Elena and Margherita Micheluzzi
  9. Alessandro Gallo at The Venice
  Venice Hotel
  10. Our guide, Francesco Palloni
  11. Palloni knows all the local spots
  12. Cooking risotto at the Trattoria
  da Romano
  13. Warmly hued Burano houses
  14. Cannaregio, the home of the
  16th-century Jewish ghetto
  15. Time for a spot of Venetian wine
  16. Soaking up the sun









was time to show the future of Venice, reflecting the spirit dynasty cooking and serving fresh seafood from the surof the Biennale and the cross-cultural influences that once rounding waters. "It is done in the Venetian tradition: made this city avant garde."

Before long, our captain and tour guide Francesco Palloni – trimmed beard, corduroy bomber, Persol sunglasses – steers up to the Venice Venice pier, his electric boat purring quietly. Palloni, who offers tours around the lagoon, also co-founded E-Concept, a company that installs charging stations for boats. With six moorings already in position, he hopes to expand as more of Venice's rubbish-collection vessels and there's a growing trend of retrofitting private boats with electric motors.

pass low footbridges and small boats berthed in tight, neat rows. "We've forgotten how to enjoy the journey," says Palloni, who left a job working for a wine critic and consultancy company in Bordeaux to return to his native city. says, ducking his head as we pass beneath a bridge.

Our first stop is Squero Tramontin, where a team is busy building and restoring three 10-metre-long gleaming, black gondolas. A squero is a Venetian workshop handcrafting boats in wood, a practice as old as the lagoon city itself. "We're still making wooden boats thanks to the strength of local heritage but also to tourist interest," says Silvia Scaramuzza, one of the boat builders, who is drilling a steel rail into a gondola. "They're part of the cultural remains high, and state-run courses teach residents such as Scaramuzza how to build them according to tradition. Most *squeri* are owned by foreign investors but Squero Tramontin remains in the hands of a pair of Venetian sisters, descendants of the original 19th-century founders.

We float down the Dorsoduro canal to another sisterrun workshop, where Elena and Margherita Micheluzzi are following in their father's footsteps as designers of blownglass objects but with their own youthful and international take on the artform. The pair moved back to their home town in 2019 after tenures in London's fashion and art worlds to create objects such as sinuous drinking glasses that fit perfectly into hands – modern styles that build on the techniques of Murano, where the sisters' designs are made and where Venice's glass-blowing furnaces have clustered for centuries. Their vases and glasses now huddle along atelier shelves, a rainbow of turquoise, amber, smoky purple and more. "We wanted to return to Venice but we creations. "Now we're applying what we learnt abroad to the experience of our father."

After crossing the choppier waters of the Grand Canal, MONOCLE arrives at Giudecca, a mostly residential island where we find the Trattoria Altanella, a beloved, nostalgiainducing fixture. Disembarking at the dockside stairs, the

troughs between the waves reveal the ovsters, mussels and seaweed that cloak the sides of all of Venice's waterways. Past the patio of canal-front tables, Altanella's wood-lined interiors are hung with old paintings by patrons, with the tinkle and buzz of vintage jazz and lapping water as its soundtrack. Open since 1865, the restaurant is a family affair, with the fourth and fifth generation of the same with a maximum of simplicity," says co-owner Roberto Stradella, whose musician father and grandfather welcomed artists such as Yoko Ono and Nino Rota to perform at the trattoria. "We try to maintain the family spirit of the place by keeping everything as it has been," he says, adjusting his necktie with one hand as he delivers a plate piled with squid-ink tagliatelle, tomato, courgette and prawns.

boats go electric. The first of the civic fleet to do so are the Heading to the north end of the lagoon, we glide past San Giorgio island and the Vatican's 2018 Architecture Biennale installation of contemporary chapels spread As we glide into the narrow canals of Dorsoduro, we out amid the greenery, then past the verdant pastures of the farming island of Sant'Erasmo. At Burano, an island known for its needle-lace tradition, Palloni pulls into a canal edged with low houses painted in deep pastels of violet, azure, persimmon and dahlia yellow, an old trick to "With these boats, the journey becomes the best part," he help fishermen distinguish their homes when they returned in the lagoon's thick winter fog.

The Remiera Vogaepara, on Burano's shoreline, is a soaring wooden boathouse stacked with longboats in all the colours of the island's homes, where rowers, including an increasing number of women, learn and practice their strokes. At a remiera, a Venetian rowing club, members practise the sport of *voga*, where boats once used to transport fruit, vegetables and other goods race across the water, powered by small rowing teams who stand foundation of the city." Fascination with gondola rides, as up as they paddle their single oars. "It's a unique sport well as the wooden boats long used to navigate the lagoon, born on the lagoon," says Franco dei Rossi, a sea-worn champion voghista at Vogaepara, which also offers lessons. With an instructor paddling behind us, we make progress in a longboat, despite our amateur arms aching from the thrusting effort. Our position on the water rewards us with views of the colourful modernist-inspired social housing by Giancarlo Decarlo, the leaning bell tower of Santa Caterina from 1318, one of Europe's oldest, and the snowcapped Alps in the hazy far-off distance.

In the late-day sun, the breadth of the lagoon is entirely illuminated, like a sheet of burnished gold, as our boat hums towards Venice's old Jewish ghetto, now a hive of activity. At Vino Vero, a natural-wine bar with a selection of 600 artisanal wines and a tiny art gallery in its window, aperitivo is served at tables by a slender canal. "Venice is a city with so much visibility but it had little going on so there's space for interesting projects here," says Mara Sartore, who opened the bar with her husband Matteo Bartoli, along with another in Lisbon. "Decades ago, no needed a project," says Margherita, backlit by her delicate one was practicing voga, and Venice's tourist offerings were all mordi e fuggi places," she says. "But now there's more interest in reclaiming the culture of the city. Just look at all the young restaurateurs creating high-quality places today."

One of the most compelling ventures lies a few short blocks away in the Jewish quarter. Anice Stellato, which

Elisa Pantano and her husband Estevan Bruno took over Crossing the lagoon gleaming under the high sun, Palloni in 2015, also offers natural wine as well as innovative reimoors the boat in front of Berengo Studio, a glass furmaginings of recipes from across the Mediterranean. nace and workshop renowned for its collaborations with "What sense is there in resurrecting old classics?" says artists. Inside, a chandelier-like glass sculpture by Ai Pantano, serving a bowl of pasta and beans with mussels and radicchio. "In a city of tourism, it's personality that's are working in the studio to fire, inflate and twist a piece needed." After concluding with a herby amaro at Anice of zebra-striped glass into a form for UK sculptor Tony Stellato, we head home to the hotel, sleepy from the wine, Cragg. The studio's gallery, with exhibitions of art in glass, seafood and salty air.

and we set off to explore the canal beside the Giardini Nero, a family-run trattoria, where plates of eel, baccalà della Biennale, where national pavilions cluster among the trees, from the austere archways of Poland and Russia to Australia's Denton Corker Marshall-designed black cube from 2015. Then we move on to the bay of the Arsenale, a military shipyard of old brick warehouses nestled around owners of the restaurant, "But only if the tourists are wella small bay, which serves as a sprawling gallery space for a informed and willing to learn about our culture." As a key exhibition at the Biennale. Looping around, we coast fisherman, Bovo spends much of his free time out on the into the canal along the Palazzo Ducale and St Mark's Church, where only gondolas and electric boats are that have retained the most character – the Venice that you allowed, past Byzantine-era palace walls and under the encounter by boat," he says wistfully, his own small vessel Bridge of Sighs in the peaceful waterway just behind bobbing in a nearby canal. "That is the way Venice was Venice's most tourist-jammed piazza.

Here we switch to a gleaming, oak-finished motorboat (Palloni restored it himself) and for the first time in our trip we stop for fuel. The fast boat will allow us to travel to the farthest reaches of the lagoon in less than an hour. We begin by docking at the island of San Michele, long Venice's cemetery, which is full of old tombs, quiet tracts and a secret: a plot of land where friars who lived in the island's now-abandoned monastery grew grapes for centuries. Today the vineyard has returned to life thanks to Laguna nel Bicchiere, an organisation reviving Venice's island vineyards with help from volunteers who harvest 2. and handpick the organic grapes and hand-paint the wine labels. Children enthusiastically provide some grapestomping assistance. "Restoring the vineyards means creating a different kind of tourism – a mindful tourism," says Renzo De Antonia, president of Laguna nel Bicchiere, as he tastes the group's Sant'E red under a pergola crowned with knotted grapevines.

After zipping to Torcello, we settle in at a garden table at Locanda Cipriani, a traditional restaurant with whitejacketed waiters and diners shaded by creepers. The profound silence in the garden is broken only by the squawk of flamingoes flying over the lagoon. On Torcello, one of Venice's earliest inhabited islands, archaeological remains and a stone throne date to the fifth and sixth centuries, when the first Venetians settled here. A neighbouring footpath leads visitors around the small, mostly green island where residents gather at a handful of quaint old restaurants.

Palloni drives on, dropping us at the cypress-lined island of San Francesco del Deserto. Here, a handful of Franciscan monks (and a parrot that says, "Ciao, bella") welcome guests of any faith for weekend retreats or to simply tour the medieval cloister, with its sprawling sanctuaries, a brutalist 1964 chapel in concrete by architect Camillo Bianchi and the tranquil gardens. "People who aren't believers come to us for an encounter with nature and silence," says Brother Agostino, who receives us in his long brown robes.

Weiwei hangs in a former oven room. Artisans of all ages is a few steps away.

When Palloni pilots across the northern lagoon to The next morning, Palloni picks us up at the hotel dock Burano again, he docks by the outdoor tables of Gatto (creamed salted codfish) and soft-shell crab from the lagoon arrive on fluffy white polenta – all Venetian staples. "We want tourists here," says Massimiliano Bovo, the Burano-born maître-d' whose parents are the chefs and water. "The real Venice is the lagoon and the outer islands meant to be seen." — 🕅

#### Address book

#### Stay

Venice Venice Hotel Sestiere Cannaregio 5631, Centro Storico venicevenice.com

#### Shop

Micheluzzi Glass Ponte de le Maravegie, Dorsoduro 1071 micheluzziglass.com

#### Fat

- Trattoria Altanella Calle de le Erbe 268, Giudecca
- 4. Anice Stellato Fondamenta de la Sensa, Cannaregio 3272 osterianicestellato.com
- Locandina Cipriani Piazza Santa Fosca 29, Torcello locandacipriani.com
- Trattoria Gatto Nero Via Giudecca 88, Burano gattonero.com
- Trattoria da Romano Via San Martino Destra 221, Burano daromano.it

- Associazione Remiera Vogaepara (Venetian rowing) Via San Mauro 58, Burano vogaepara.it
- Francesco Palloni (boat services and tours) francesco@lagunab.com

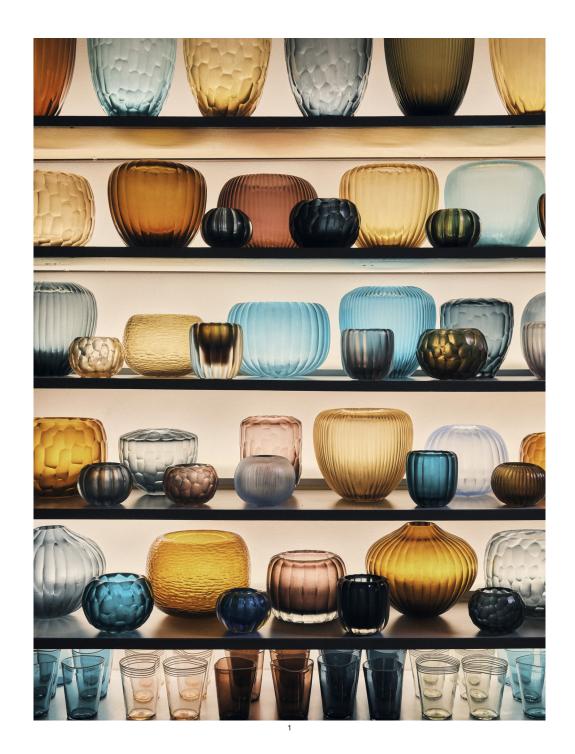
#### Drink

- 10. Vino Vero (natural wine bar) Fondamenta Misericordia 2497, Cannaregio vinovero.wine
- 11. Laguna nel Bicchiere (winemaking organisation) Calle Monte San Michele, San Michele lagunanelbicchiere.it

### See

- 12. Squero Tramontin (artisan longboat makers) Sestiere Dorsoduro 1542, Dorsoduro tramontingondole.it
- 13. San Francesco del Deserto (monastery) Isola di San Francesco del Deserto, Burano sanfrancescodeldeserto.it
- 14. Berengo (glass studio and gallery) Fondamenta dei Vetrai 109, Murano fondazioneberengo.org
- 15. Punta Conterie (glass gallery, restaurant, and rooftop terrace bar) Fondamenta Giustinian 130141, Murano puntaconterie.com

- Glass design by Elena and Margherita Micheluzzi
   Image of Marcello Bon, the King of the Oar





- San Francesco del Deserto island
   Brother Agostino welcomes guests to the island

