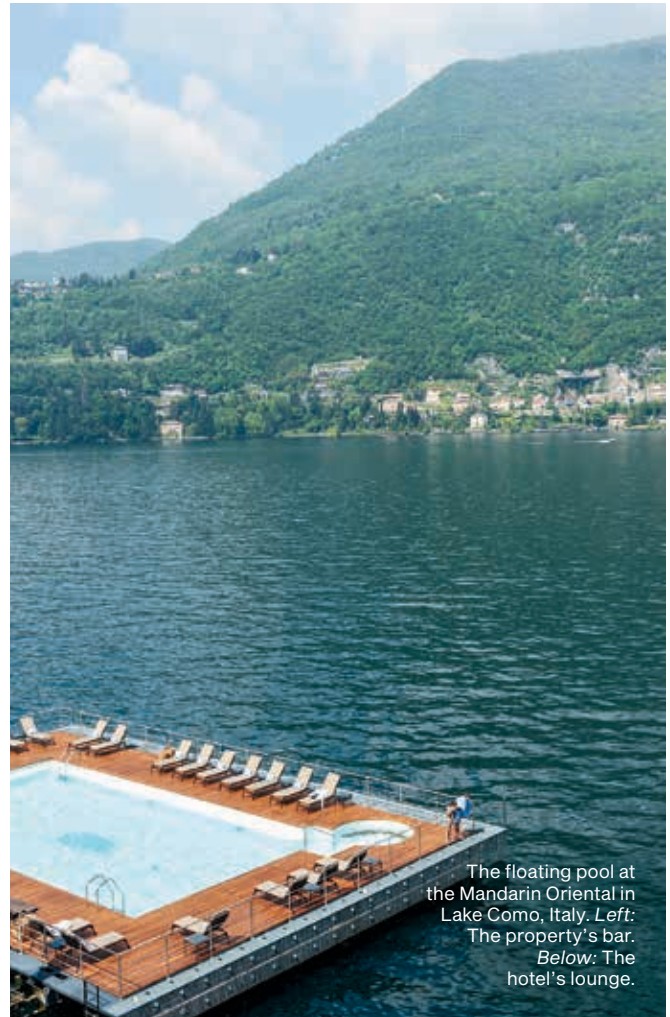




Fit for a Diva Mandarin Oriental's latest offering has become the new center of gravity of the Italian lake district. *by Joe Harper*

Photographs by Stefano Tripodi



The floating pool at the Mandarin Oriental in Lake Como, Italy. *Left:* The property's bar. *Below:* The hotel's lounge.

WHEN YOU ARRIVE at the new Mandarin Oriental on Lake Como, the first thing you should look for is the enormous 200-year-old Lebanese cedar tree towering above the water's edge. The acclaimed soprano Giuditta Pasta, who owned the property's Villa Roccabruna in the early 19th century, would sing underneath this sweeping evergreen. Legend has it that opera composer Vincenzo Bellini heard her voice from his home across the lake and began creating roles specifically for her, including the protagonist in his iconic 1831 opera *Norma*. The hotel's opening in April, in the village of Blevio, marked the first arrival of a major international hospitality brand directly on the lake.

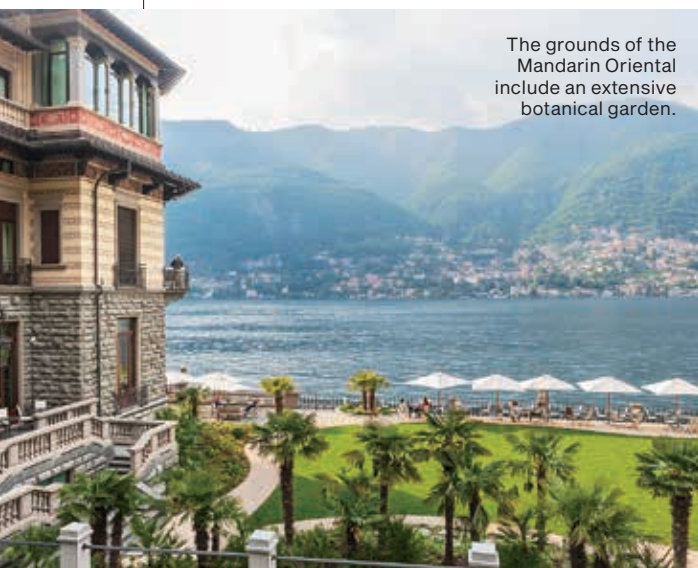
Mandarin Oriental, Lago di Como is made up of nine villas of different styles ranging from neoclassical to contemporary that are spread throughout the property's 6½ acres. The villas, which taken together contain 75 guest rooms and suites, are largely connected by a sprawling botanical garden meant for exploring—colorful oleanders and bulbous bay trees are among the 54 species of plants and flowers dotting the pristinely manicured landscape. Almost all the rooms have some sort of quiet

outdoor area providing sunset views of the lake. (A valley between the ridges in the opposing mountain range prolongs daylight—a unique perk, given the proximity to the Alps.)

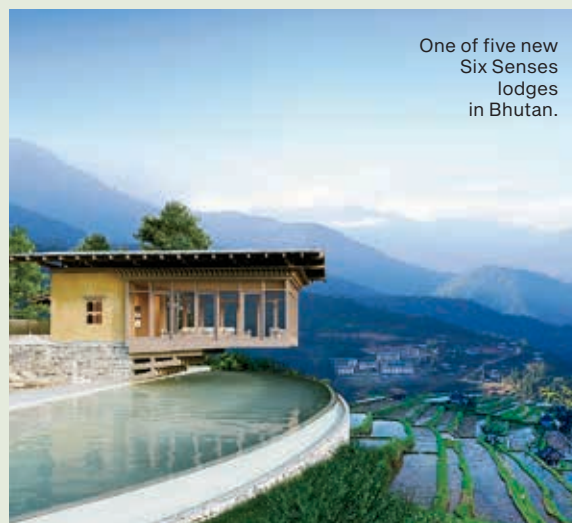
Most of the hotel's activity revolves around Villa Roccabruna, the opulent 1799 palazzo; after Pasta bought it in 1827, she added the buildings now used as guest villas. It's the home of CO.MO Bar & Bistrot, which serves traditional Italian fare (eggplant parmigiana, veal Milanese) and various *aperitivi*, which guests can enjoy in the sumptuous high-ceilinged salon and at one of the tables that spill out onto a series of lakeside terraces. Chef Vincenzo Guarino of the Michelin-starred Pievano restaurant in Tuscany shows off his chops at L'Aria, in the adjacent greenhouse. One standout creation is his "deconstructed tomato," which explodes in your mouth with the flavors of a caprese salad.

The Spa at Mandarin, Lago di Como measures 14,000 square feet and includes a cavernous wellness area with an indoor pool, a Finnish sauna, steam rooms, sensory showers, and a Himalayan salt room. Another pool, this one 52 feet long and heated, with an outdoor hot tub, sundeck, and small cocktail bar, floats outside on the lake but does not obstruct views or overpower the relaxed, dolce vita vibe. And if you can tear yourself away from all of this, there are Riva speedboats on call for excursions to such picturesque nearby towns as Bellagio and Varenna. *Rooms from \$610; mandarinoriental.com.*

TOP: COURTESY SIX SENSES BHUTAN



The grounds of the Mandarin Oriental include an extensive botanical garden.



One of five new Six Senses lodges in Bhutan.

Reservations Required

Noteworthy hotel openings to put on your travel list.

FOUR SEASONS ASTIR PALACE HOTEL, ATHENS

For its first property in Greece, Four Seasons revived the 52-year-old Astir Palace Hotel, located on a stunning peninsula on the Athenian Riviera, half an hour from the city center. The 300-room hotel includes a spa and six restaurants—the fare ranges from laid-back Italian at Mercato to just-caught seafood at Pelagos. *Rooms from \$450; fourseasons.com.*

JW MARRIOTT MIAMI TURNBERRY RESORT & SPA

This recently renovated golf resort in the Miami suburb of Aventura includes the 16-story Orchid Tower (which added 325 rooms to the 300-acre property), two courses reimaged by PGA champion Raymond Floyd, and Tidal Cove, a new luxury water park. *Rooms from \$229; marriott.com.*

MASSERIA TORRE MAIZZA, A ROCCO FORTE HOTEL

This 40-suite resort in Italy's Puglia region is set in a 16th-century estate that has been painstakingly restored by local artisans. Activities include golf,

horseback riding, and sailing. The restaurant, Carosello, serves guests in the garden, poolside, and on the rooftop. *Rooms from \$775; roccoforte hotels.com.*

SIX SENSES BHUTAN

In March, Six Senses opened the first three of five new lodges in the country, including one in Thimphu, the capital, which is in the style of a traditional fortress, and another in Punakha that's nicknamed the Flying Farmhouse and cantilevers over a hillside of rice terraces. Book the circuit to experience a variety of excursions, from hikes to temple visits. *Rooms from \$1,500; sixsenses.com.*

ITZ'ANA BELIZE RESORT & RESIDENCES

Each of the suites in this new retreat on the Placencia Peninsula is designed with old-world glamour in mind. After strolling white sand beaches and snorkeling in the pristine waters of the Great Blue Hole, spend the evening sampling the resort's extensive rum collection. *Rooms from \$325; itzanelize.com.*