

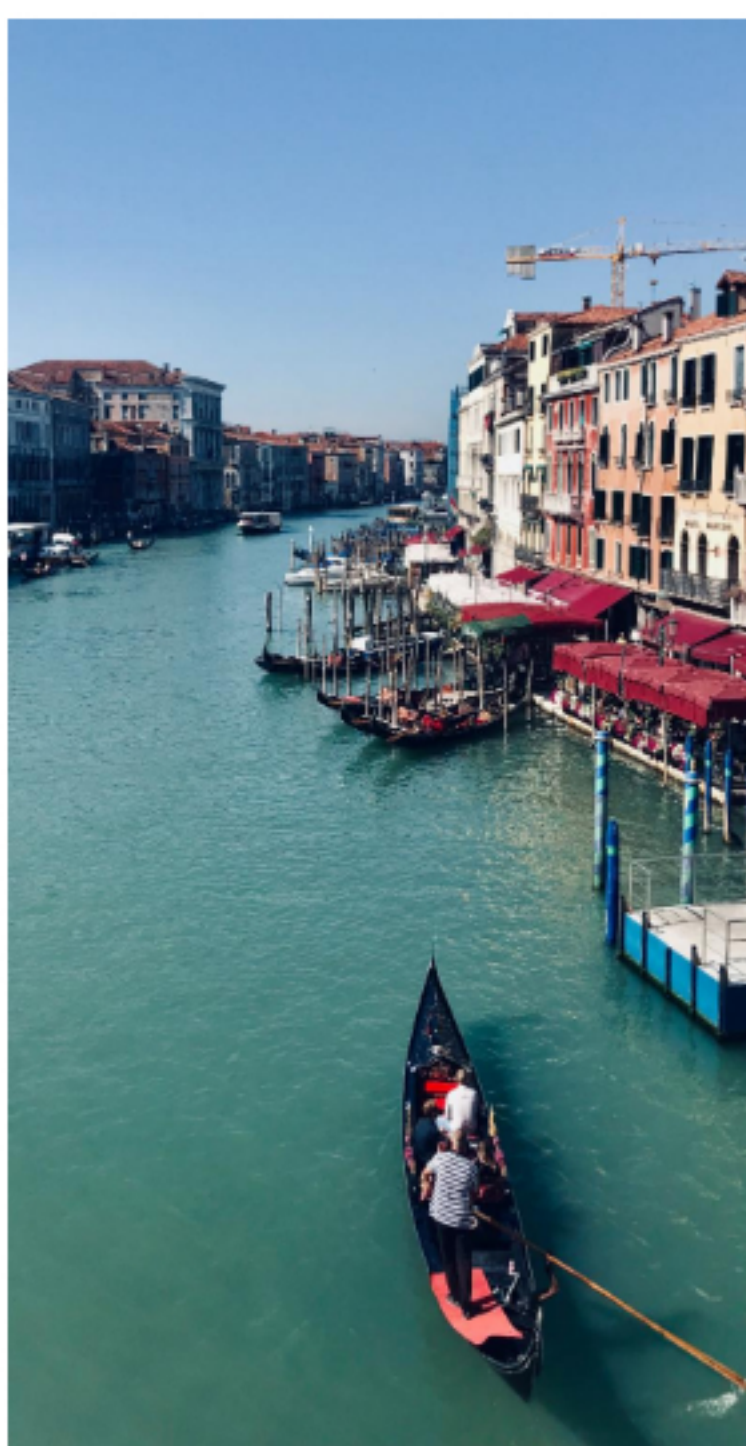


november inspiration... magnificent obsession

Truman Capote once said "Venice is like eating an entire box of chocolate liqueurs all in one go." I admit to having lusted after that box of chocolate for most of my adult life. Despite having spent my junior semester abroad in Rome and subsequent trips to Florence and Naples, for one reason or another, the universe had decided I wasn't ready for Venice until now.

To make my recent trip even more auspicious, on my *birthday* this past May, a friend texted me while I was at the gym slogging along on the elliptical machine. "**How would you like to go to Venice**" flashed across my iPhone screen with a ding. "**Call me**". It didn't take long for me to abandon my post and run to the window for a few extra "bars". A designer friend was putting together a group of interior designers for a small conference with Italian furniture manufacturers in the Veneto, about an hour north of Venice. *Really?* I hadn't had a birthday surprise like this since receiving a blue two-wheeler for my 8th birthday. I had forgotten how exciting birthdays could sometimes be. Without even mulling it over, checking dates, or giving it a second thought, I replied, "YES!"

I remember the exact moment my "girl crush" with the city began. The year was 1973 with the release of a movie called "Don't Look Now", starring Julie Christie and Donald Sutherland as a restorative architect and his wife. On the heels of a family tragedy, the couple moves to Venice. The husband begins restorations on an ancient church and the couple begins to heal their emotional pain. It was filmed in late fall when the atmosphere in Venice turns cool, and the chill in the air creates a steamy, ominous atmosphere. The crowds had left, the hotels were closing for the winter and a dwarf dressed in a red cape with a pointed hood was turning up here and there, predicting another tragedy yet to come. For me, that movie sealed the deal. The architecture, the romance, the intrigue... the city of Venice! I was smitten.



Grand Canal.



Debra Blair Design -Holiday House, VENETIAN CARNIVAL.

Like many other crushes, as time went by, my fascination with the city built on a lagoon, blossomed into full blown *unrequited love*. Despite being number one on my bucket list, other travel opportunities kept presenting themselves and it seemed as if I just might go to my grave without seeing the Doge Palace, Chiesa Di San Giorgio Maggiore by Palladio or follow John Singer Sargent's travels through the streets of the city, painting by painting.

This summer, I started preparing for my trip that was scheduled for early September. Out came all my files and the books I had collected. Based on the amount of material I had amassed, I realized that my love affair seemed to have morphed into somewhat of an obsession. Sorting through article after article and paging through books and photographs, in the back of my mind I feared when I finally did cross the lagoon, alas, I might experience profound disappointment. My expectations were so incredibly high, how could this ancient city ever measure up?

My reservations regarding my expectations didn't, however, stop me from rereading Henry James', The Aspern Papers, or skimming John Ruskin's The Stones of Venice. I looked up the paintings John Singer Sargent painted on the two visits he made in 1880 and 1884. At a friend's suggestion, I read John Berendt's, The City of Fallen Angels and from the local library I signed out a copy of Mary McCarthy's tome on the city, Venice Observed. Obsession aside, I was armed and ready to embrace my dream and face any disappointments that might arise along the way. I wanted to ask Truman, "What happens after you devour the entire box of chocolates? Do you want more? Did you have enough? Were they as good as you imagined and worst of all, what if they weren't?"



Mariano Fortuny Studio.

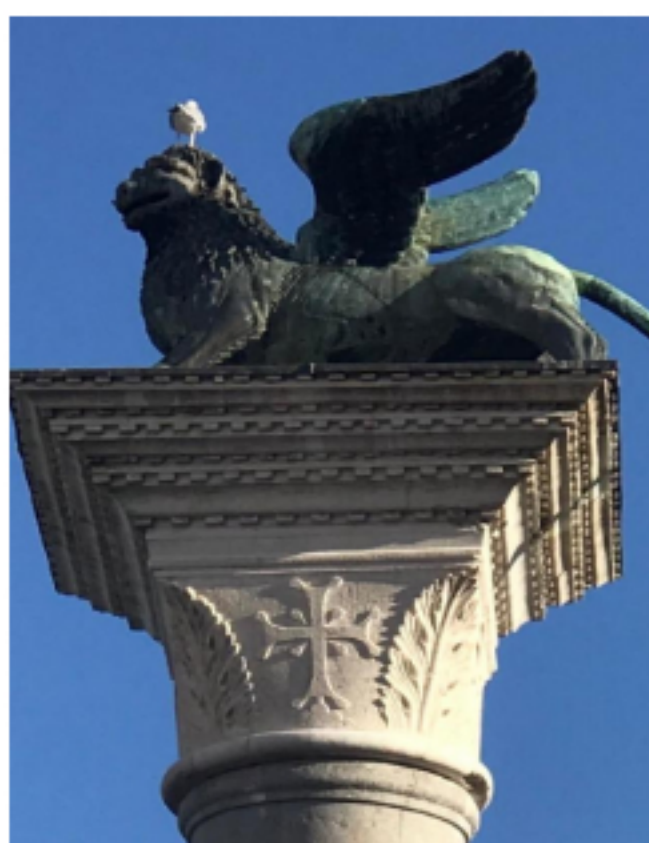
Soon after I arrived, I discovered that, amazingly, most everything I had read about, give or take a few floods, fires, or cruise ships, was the same as I had envisioned. Every view of the city looked for the most part, the same as it had in all of those famous paintings of the Renaissance and those of the 18th and 19th centuries. The magnificent descriptions of James and Ruskin didn't disappoint. The gold mosaics of St Mark's façade still caught the light the same as it did 500 years ago. The city remains a feast for lovers of Italian Gothic, Renaissance, and Palladian architecture. For each person who steps off a water taxi, walks along its brick and stone paths and crosses its bridges, they will find it more or less just as men and women have over the past hundreds of years. Living in our world today where major change happens daily, it is comforting to know there are places that will remain in our imagination and in our dreams more or less the same as they have been for hundreds and hundreds of years.

I did have just one disappointment. As much as I was able to cram into a few days, there was still so much I didn't see. Assuming the city can survive our climate changes and the onslaught of tourists that are dropped off at St. Mark's Square every day, I just might be lucky to have another go. If I do, I trust those chocolate liqueurs will taste the same and that is a comforting thing to know.

This Thanksgiving I am grateful for dreams that come true and for family and friends to come home to.

Alla prossima,

Debra



President

Debra Blair Design
dblair@blairdesignnyc.com
917-717-5020

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