

# CLASSIC DRIVER

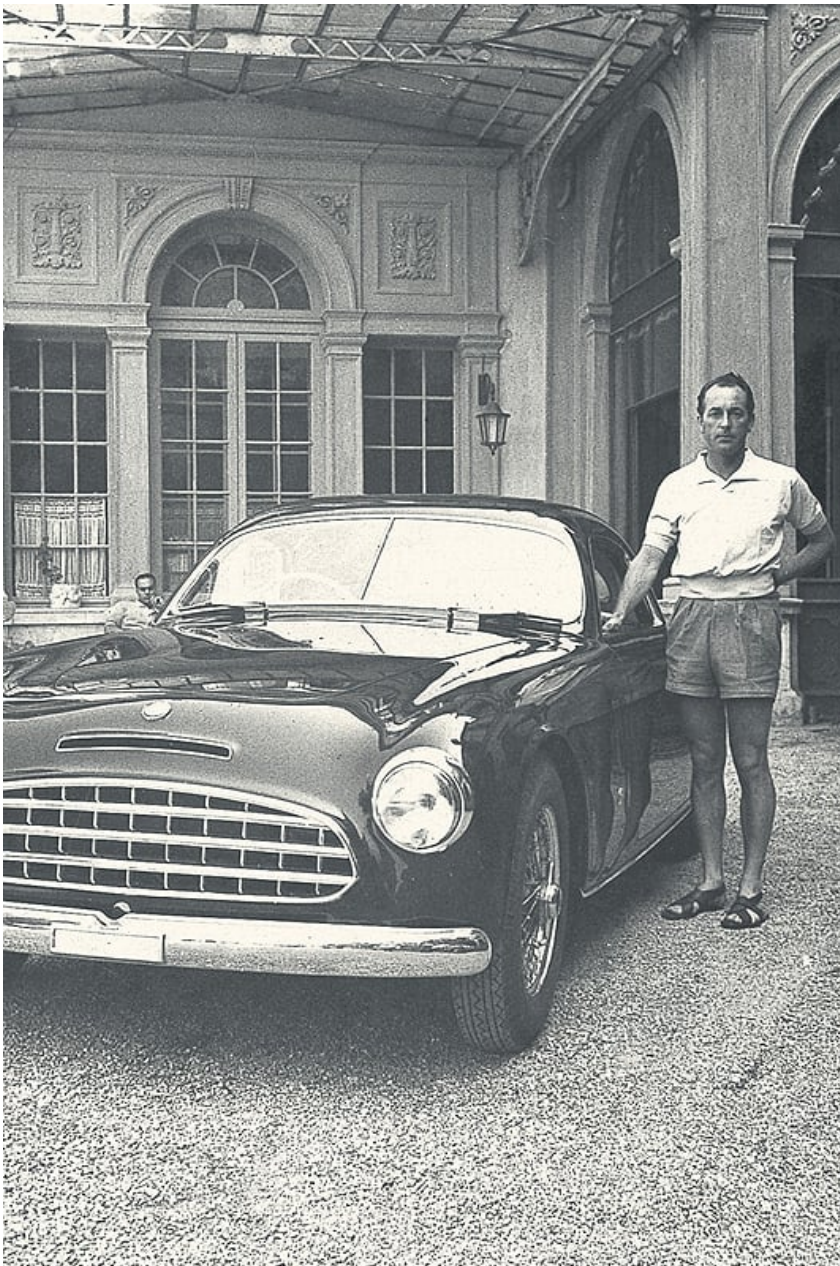
## Villa Serbelloni: The last of the classic 'Grand Hotels'?

### **Lead**

What would a traveller have experienced, spending a summer on Lake Como in the Roaring Twenties? We can't turn back time, but a stay at Villa Serbelloni will bring you as close as you can get.

Sometime in May 1925, a blue Bugatti Type 30 burbles through the narrow streets of Bellagio. With a mixture of suspicion and curiosity, the townspeople flock towards the shapely new convertible. A Russian prince emerges; his destination is the Grand Hotel Bellagio.

For those arriving at Villa Serbelloni by car, the experience has changed little in the past 80 years. The ferry from Cadenabbia delivers you to the historic centre of Bellagio; from there you can navigate the narrow, largely pedestrianised streets (though hotel guests are allowed to drive), before reaching the famed Villa Serbelloni. Previously known as the Grand Hotel Bellagio, it's been welcoming guests since 1870.





The spacious, park-like garden – smelling of lemon, cypress trees and wild roses – is one of a dying breed, typical of a classic Grand Hotel. With a mix of traditional Italian hospitality and slightly melancholic, yet opulent charm, the 95 rooms and suites invite you on a personal journey. Meanwhile, the more time you spend in the outdoor saloon, nourished by a gorgeous view of the lake, the more vividly you can picture the aforementioned Russian prince dancing with a beautiful young lady at dusk. Time seems to pass more slowly within the massive walls of this extraordinary hotel and its surroundings.

One gets the impression that every corner of this Grand Hotel could tell a story. Since 1918, it's been run and owned by the Swiss Bucher family, head of which – Gianfranco – lives in the hotel with his family. Only very rarely does one find such a close bond of family owners, so close to the 'pulse of the hotel events'.





The Bucher family has endured many turbulent times at Villa Serbelloni. At the end of the First World War, it served as a barracks and refuge for needy families. Later, under Mussolini's rule, there were plans to appropriate the property, but by decree it was placed under the protection of the Swiss consulate in Milan, allowing it to remain in the hands of the rightful owners.

The New York Times once wrote of the Villa Serbelloni: "One of the best hotels to visit, if you can afford it." Those tired of the hard futon beds in 'fancy' designer hotels will no doubt welcome the luxury. And who knows, maybe during a walk along the shores of Lake Como, one might encounter a Bugatti-driving Russian prince.

#### Related Links

The Villa Serbelloni website: [www.villaserbelloni.com](http://www.villaserbelloni.com).

*Photos: Villa Serbelloni*

## Gallery





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