The hot water that spouted from the cracks in the rocks, exhaling vapour, instilled a reverential fear in the ancient Greeks. Since from common experience we know that water follows a natural course, from its source on high, down to the rivers and seas below, thermal water, which unmistakably rises up to the surface from the bowels of the Earth, seems to obey different laws to those that govern the natural order of things. For the Greeks the subterranean world was characterised by constant contrast; a buried seed that resembles death and the spring time that always comes around. The thermal water that comes to us from that world where the obscure combines with the force of life, is connected with the mysterious and ambiguous origins of foretelling. The classical sources have long since attributed to the rooms of the oracles, the presence of springs that emit vapours capable of creating an altered state of consciousness in which they were able to find their answers.

The Romans inherited the myths of the Greeks, but their culture being of a more practical attitude and inclined towards a general state of wellbeing and good health, they gave thermal springs a much more positive importance. The name “thermae” was used by the Romans to indicate public baths, today’s Muslim hammams continue to carry on this tradition, where they could be found on a daily basis. In the absence of opposition between body and spirit, good health and a state of wellbeing was seen to be, by the Romans, a great value in itself.
“Bagni Vecchi” complex in Bormio is centred around a 19th century building, but encompasses much older facilities. They include the two pools of hot water described by Pliny the Elder in the first century AC and the “Bagni Medievali”, with their natural-steam rooms, the pool of salt water, the mud baths, and the dry saunas. Also, there are the “Bagni Imperiali”, containing adjustable jets of water, the open-air thermal swimming pool and San Martino’s “Grotta Sudatoria” (literally, “Sudatory Cave”), which stretches for over 30 metres inside the mountain. The more one advances through the “cave”, the more the steam becomes dense and hot, culminating in a temperature of more than 43°C close to the spring gushing from the rock.
A votive stela from the fourth century AC found at Bormio in Valtellina, is testimony to how the Celtic peoples were already aware of the virtues of its thermal waters. Also in Roman times its nine springs were well known for their medical properties. Both Pliny the Elder in the first century AC, along with Cassiodorus in the fourth century, refer to the existence of a “Hospitium balneorum”, literally a hotel of baths to welcome those who wished to cure themselves in its waters. The fame of the thermal baths of Bormio outlived the fall of Rome to such an extent that Charlemagne in ‘775 was known to have frequented them. Also the thermal baths of Salice, Voghera, were well known from the second century AC. The name of this place derives from the Latin “Locum Salis” which refers without doubt to the salt enriched waters of its springs. In fact their origins are deep in the salty water beds, residue of the deposits of sea water imprisoned in the ground during the course of Po-river plain’s geological formation; proof of this can be found in the consistent presence of shells and sandy sediment. It is thanks to this that the waters of Salice are so highly rich in precious minerals.
Thanks to its reception, sports and recreational facilities, Salice is very suitable to host exhibitions, conventions, assemblages, and sports meetings (among which the remarkable “Concorso Ippico Nazionale”, a national horse competition). The town sits in the midst of green hills with a number of old villages, castles and abbeys. With its historic park of twenty hectares, containing more than seven-hundred species of plants, Salice provides the visitor to the spa with the opportunity to enjoy a peaceful and serene atmosphere, but also fun and gala events.
The decline of the Roman empire marked a decline in the use of thermal waters. On one hand this was due partly to the precarious conditions of the roads, but mainly due to a change in lifestyle that tended to dissuade this type of “tourism” that was so common during Roman times. On the other hand the dominant upper middle age Christian mentality looked upon this practice with suspicion, and at times openly condemned cure and attention paid to one’s body, already relegated to the role of dualistic contrast with respect to the one’s soul. Add to this, if you like, the “magical” benefits it can have on one’s health, thermal water has all the elements to set off the alarm in all of those who believed Evil was a constant threat waiting to pounce. The hot springs force underground heat to the surface which, for the intellectuals of the period, was unmistakably connected to the fires of Hell. The smell of sulphur was considered to be a sign of the presence of the Devil and it is well known that the sulphurous thermal waters have an acute odour.
Bormio’s “Bagni Nuovi” provides a wide range of spa treatments. This facility is divided into four different sectors, each with a specific “path”. The “toning water-based” path involve Turkish bathing and hydromassaging, through high-pressure showers from the floor and the ceiling. The “detoxing” path, useful for skin renewing, is based on jets of water from the wall and the “steaming cave”. The Kneipp path, based on foot reflexology, requires walking ankle-deep in special thermal pools with a bottom composed of pebbles, while alternating hot and cold water. All the treatments are interrupted by relaxing session, where the guest – sitting on a comfortable chaise longue and wrapped in a hot blanket – can enjoy the mountain air, thus experiencing a total sense of restored balance.
In general, however, the underworld was the domain of hellish power and nothing that rose up from below could be considered to have a positive effect on us. The lower Middle Ages, characterised by the rich middle-class cities and intense mercantile traffic, saw a lessening and finally the disappearance of the nightmares and obsessions of the age prior to this and thermal springs began to beckon people back to their waters once more. In the 1200s the thermal spring of San Pellegrino near Bergamo had a high reputation particularly amongst the Venetians. At the end of the XV\textsuperscript{th} century Leonardo spoke of the thermal springs of Bormio, frequented in the same period also by Ludovico il Moro. From this moment onward the popularity of thermal cures never again fell into decline. In fact quite the opposite, they became subject of great interest amongst scholars during the great scientific bloom of the age of Enlightenment, which saw great progress made both in the medical and chemical field. The thermal springs of Miradolo, at that time known as “Saline di Miradolo”, half way through the 1700s were subject of study of Andrea Volta, brother of the more famous Alessandro, who was the first to analyse their waters. During the same period studies conducted by numerous scientists compared the phenomenon of thermal springs with that of volcanic nature.
Miradolo and its thermal spa are situated only 26 kilometres from the splendid city of Pavia, rich in historic, cultural and artistic heritage. The famous “Certosa di Pavia”, the magnificent Carthusian monastery, is very close and can represent a memorable trip. Miradolo’s mineral springs, characterised by the presence of salt, sulphur, bromine, and iodine are highly recommended for people who have breathing difficulties, as well as against against dermatological, gynaecologic, hepatic, and osteoarthritic disorders. The availability of many accommodations and recreational facilities contribute to genearte a pleasant and revitalizing stay.
Throughout the 19th century thermal therapy became increasingly more well known. The fame of the springs of Darfo Boario in Valcamonica was added to by the presence of Alessandro Manzoni, who spoke of their virtues. However the beginning of this period coincided with that of the Belle Époque. The technological revolution of means of transport, the growing state of economical wellbeing and a certain political stability, guaranteeing greater security and comfort in one’s movements, favoured the birth of a new type of travel. Differing from the adventurous protagonists of the Grand Tour, who were willing to support pain and discomfort for the scope of natural culture, these new traveller were in search of fun and good health.

These sites upon which are built thermal baths, hotels, old casinos without roulettes turned into cinemas and other forms of entertainment, like auctions where every night paintings, carpets and furniture are sold, can be found spread here and there all over Italy and the rest of Europe. Talking of Italy, who does not know Cianciano, Montecatini, Abano, Salsomaggiore, Sirmione, Ischia or other places similar to these, less famous but none the less visited? And who has not paid them a visit at least once to cure their intestine, liver, lungs, arthritis or other illnesses? There are those who deem these places to be miraculous, those who consider them a waste of time but nobody finds their stay in these places anything less than pleasant; you must visit them, they say, for the clean air, the tranquillity and the good food. They are for the body what sanctuaryes were for the soul: places of rest, relaxation, where one can reflect on one’s past life, which at a certain age can be providential.

Piero Chiara, *L’uomo di Petrovaradino*, 1986
These new visitors to the thermal spring “resorts” belonged to the aristocracy and to the rich middle-class, clients used to a high standard of living who demanded, alongside medical care and water therapy treatment, in keeping accommodation and mundane at-

Climatism was born, people began to stay in coastal or mountain areas which later became renowned for their healthy climate. And in this context Thermalism took great shape and in fact some of the most prestigious European facilities date back to these times.
The therapeutic use of Darfo Boario’s mineral waters started in 1737 in a facility built partly in bricks and partly in wood. In the last fifty years, the increasing fame of this locality has spread to the whole country. Now the resort, provided with a new convention centre, can meet the most different needs, both with respect to the medical level and to the kind of accommodation. The four mineral springs, “Silia”, “Igea”, “Antica Fonte”, and “Fausta”, are found in the heart of a large treed park. Their waters are especially recommended for bile and liver disorders.
This is typical of springs such as San Pellegrino, whose fame both national and international dates back to the beginning of 1900s, when its first buildings, which make up its world renowned centre, were built. The Art Nouveau style is visible all over this little town, in the Town Hall, in the Grand Hotel with its immense ballroom, in the building that houses the thermal baths but most of all in its splendid Casino which represents one of the finest examples in Europe of flower Art Nouveau, in its façade but above all in its internal décor, in particular the monumental staircase of honour decorated by some of the most important artists of the era.

“A dip in the waters” at San Pellegrino became a sort of a mundane rite attracting elegant crowds, renowned beauties and adventurers, intellectuals, actors and singers,
San Pellegrino Terme had been famous since the Middle Ages for its healing waters, especially effective against hyperuricemia and kidney calculus. However, its international fame dates back to 1899, when the “Società delle Terme” and the “Società dei Grandi Alberghi” were constituted. These organisations gave the town its typical and refined aspect, made of tree-lined alleys, art fountains, gardens and, above all, very fine buildings, notably the bath facility, the mineral water bottling plant, the porticoed refreshment area, the Grand Hotel, the Casino, the City Hall, and some private villas. By keeping faithful to its vocation to hospitality, San Pellegrino Terme offers a variety of accommodation facilities, restaurants, bistros, sports and recreational services.

princes, ministers, kings and queens, first among many Queen Margherita. At these thermal “resorts” the “season” was filled with parties and shows which became as important as the therapeutic properties of the waters themselves. In a similar context, these resorts became important meeting points for diplomatic talks. Official meetings, conferences and negotiations aside, the European diplomacy weaved its plans by means of reserved and sometimes secret encounters. The thermal baths were an ideal location as they offered a sumptuous environment, but above all, the waters were used as an excuse to explain the contemporary presence of eminent people from different chancelleries. San Pellegrino was theatre to many of these “reserved” meetings held during the somewhat turbid years that preceded the Great War.
A real symbol of luxury, San Pellegrino’s casino is an outstanding example of flower Art Nouveau, and testimonies to how much the Belle Époque promoted the pomp and the magnificence and the properties thermal waters were already well-known. Its internal décor is meant to represent a sumptuous scenography, starting from the foyer, where eight majestic columns made of red marble from Verona lead to the gorgeous staircase of honour, at the same time imposing and fantastic, where the balustrades, the stucco and the chandeliers produce a creative “motion”. Very remarkable are the twelve panels of the ceiling, symbolising the months of the year, created by the painter Malerba, and the stucco-decorated high reliefs by Bernasconi.
The aim of making San Pellegrino’s casino the symbol of an elegant and refined resort, based on the prestige of its natural preciousness, is visible all over in its rich internal décor. The most renowned artists of the time were instructed to design it. The architect Romolo Squadrelli, the blacksmith Mazzucotelli, the glass maker Beltrami, the wood carver Quarti and the sculptor Vedani, through their contributions, gave this building its typical forms, expression of an unconventional taste thanks to which every single piece and detail are a work of art.
Italy is the nation that has the highest consumption of mineral water in the world and boasts the greatest number of labels. These kind of statistics clearly indicate the importance that drinking water is given. After all the supply of drinking water, above all to the major cities, was a great problem until recent times.

With the end of Roman civilisation, in fact, the great network of aqueducts built by the Romans themselves fell into ruin and the water to the cities was distributed by men with horses and carts. In many urban areas and their surrounding hinterlands another great difficulty was encountered, that of the quality of the water which was often the source of infection and disease. This would explain the reason why certain populations tend not to drink just water and often add wine or vinegar to it in a crude attempt to kill off any germs and to disinfect it.

It was not until the beginning of 1900s that the necessary attention was paid to obtaining pure water; with progress made in bacteriology, transport and production on an industrial scale it became possible to diffuse mineral water on a vast scale from its source. At the beginning of the century the mineral water of San Pellegrino was distributed nationwide and was also exported to the US and Australia. Today all the most important thermal “sites” are equipped with a plant for bottling their water for a market increasingly more demanding due to the water’s healthy properties.
Whilst San Pellegrino began its era of great splendour, also at Sirmione the precious therapeutic waters began to spout. The hot source Boiola, which filtered into Lake Garda at a depth of 20 meters from the “Catul- lu’ Caves”, had been noted for centuries but it had never been possible to capture and channel it. Only in 1889 a diver, with special diving suit and pump commissioned from England, managed to create a dike and direct the source to the surface. In 1900 the first thermal spring was officially opened and in 1987 a second. The fact that the waters of Sirmione are rich in sulphur, salt, bromine, and iodine (highly recommended for people who have breathing difficulties) is a good enough reason alone to visit the area. However if you combine the therapeutic qualities of the waters with the possibility to reside in a place of such natural and artistic beauty, the end result cannot possibly be anything else than a general sense of all round good health and wellbeing.
For those who wish both to benefit from the water therapies at “Catullo” or “Virgilio” thermal baths and to admire a place rich with fascinating historic remains, the town of Sirmione possesses ideal characteristics. On the extreme end of Sirmione peninsula there are the remains of a Roman villa, known for centuries as “Catullus’ caves”, the most splendid Roman private building ever found in all the northern Italy. Also very important and charming is the Scaligero Castle, with its tower and merlons. Its darsena, perfectly conserved, is a rare case of a fortified port facility.
Most of the thermal spring resorts in Lombardy are located in such highly esteemed settings. Bormio is immersed in the splendid natural setting of the mountains of the Valtellina, Darfo Boario is close to an area of prehistoric carvings in Valcamonica, Salice is surrounded by green hills that are home to antique villages, castles and abbeys as well as to a famous horse racing course where they hold a famous competition and an international tournament of archery.

It seems that the thermal springs of Lombardy are able to offer the very best of conditions, combining the practical with pleasure.

The two world wars have changed society and with it the environment
Bormio combines the beneficial effects of its mineral spring and its Alpine environment, healthy and revitalizing. To fully appreciate this concurrence, “Venus’s bath” is an ideal location: the guest can relax in the 38°C of its hot water, while watching a beautiful mountain landscape. The open-air pool, entirely facing south, provides warm temperatures even during the coldest days. It is subdivided into two communicating sections, where high-pressure jets and still waters alternate. A few other experiences can produce that synthesis of physical and psychological wellbeing coming to us from ancients’ sages, at the heart of the thermal therapeutic philosophy.
“Pearl amidst peninsulas”: this was the definition given to Sirmione’s land by the Roman poet Catullus. Sirmione is immersed in an extraordinarily beautiful context, where the beneficial properties of its springs – especially useful against breathing difficulties, thanks to their high content in salt, bromine, and iodine – are to be added to the incomparable enchantment arising from this place. The mild climate, due to its fortunate position on the lake, favours the growth of a luxuriant vegetation, surrounding harmoniously the town and emphasizing its historic suitability for the human presence.
Today the thermal springs could be exploited for another kind of encounter. Nowadays the importance of congresses and a need to express innovative ideas and to exchange information, the fruit of research, is well known. The thermal “resorts” of Lombardy are structured in such a way as to be able to accommodate congresses and can offer the most modern of facilities including a high standard of accommodation and gastronomy.

However the most important characteristic that these places have to offer lies in the fact that they are still small towns far enough away from the chaos and congestion of the great metropolis therefore favouring relations, dialogue and communication. Finally these areas were designed and developed to reflect a state of good health and general well-being which can be perceived by all of those who come to visit them.

An unbalanced and calorie rich diet, long hours, environmental pollution, alcohol and smoke have unfortunately become part of our everyday lives. Only a virtuous or lucky few are able to escape what, apart from causing serious health problems, is inevitably reflected in the way we appear. Pale, saggy skin with saddle bags here and there; this is the image that our mirror presents us with which certainly does not do our humour, self-esteem and above all our health any good at all. For this reason nearly all the thermal resorts offer the “beauty farm” treatment which is not a trivial “vanity fair” and should not be undervalued. Beauty is something that should be taken seriously, as it contributes to a general state of wellbeing with ourselves and others and for this reason it should be taken care of.

Apart from the fact that water therapy, in terms of detoxification, works as an excellent cosmetic treatment, mineral waters are renowned for their ability to reactivate the body’s microcirculation and therefore favour the oxygenation of the skin and promote weight loss.

At the thermal resorts there are a wide range of treatments on offer, from thermal water massages to mud packs to programmed physical activity so that everyone has the chance to see the benefits gained from a stay at the resort on their own body which, undoubtedly, reflects a new found equilibrium of one’s organism.
This is why whoever decides to hold meetings and conventions here can be sure to count on a highly favourable climate.

Recently, for a period of time, the practice of visiting these thermal springs, by public opinion, was seen as something for the elderly suffering from a bad state of health. A false image of places filled with melancholy and a general state of decline was attributed to the springs which were seen as a “means to an end”.

Today, however, things are different. In fact a large percentage of the people who frequent the thermal springs are young people, athletes, managers and professionals. Natural medicine, which has gained a large number of followers, teaches us to maintain a state of good health through the integration of trace elements, a lack of which is responsible for a breakdown in our immune system and lowering of our energy level. Alongside this and increasingly more evident is the fact that, through purification, our body gains not only in terms of good health but also aesthetically.
So today thermal therapy is not only used as an accurate cure for the pathologically ill but it is also favoured by those who wish to achieve and maintain a certain healthy equilibrium that is under constant threat by a bad diet, stressful working hours and environmental pollution. The main purpose of those who frequent the thermal springs is to take advantage of the therapeutic physical and chemical properties of the spring’s waters. Also, there is, however, another positive side-ef-

Trescore Balneario’s, springs, already well-known among the Gauls, were restored in 1740 by the famous condottiere Bartolomeo Colleoni. In the same period, two medics from Bergamo, Ludovico Zimalia and Bartolomeo Albano started studying the beneficial properties of the local sulphur springs. The village, not more than 15 kilometres from Bergamo, is the main town of Valle Cavallina. It is surrounded by green hills, providing a serene atmosphere, enriched by the many castles, some of which converted into residences. The little church consecrated to Santa Barbara is an art treasure containing some exquisite frescoes by Lorenzo Lotto.
The peaceful town of Gaverina, in Valle Cavallina, provides the visitor with the opportunity of spending a “spa holiday” in a peaceful natural context, favoured by the hill climate, mild and revitalizing. The area is provided with beautiful trails leading to the castle of Brianzano, the sanctuaries of Colle Gallo and Madonna di Atina, and the close Endine lake. Gaverina spa’s treatments include inhalations against breathing disorders; special baths against rheumatic, vascular, and dermatological disorders; water therapies against diseases involving the urinary tract and the digestive system. Massages, hydromassages and beauty treatments complete the range of services provided by the spa.
New Age philosophy teaches us that physical health and psychological wellbeing are part of an undividable relationship and are the product of a re-discovery of a lost harmony. To say that one goes to the thermal springs to re-discover oneself is maybe a bit excessive. It is, however, true to say that the springs offer us a rare moment in which we can be company to ourselves and listen a little more to our inner-selves, a chance to assume an egoistical yet wise and healthy aspect, something which our hectic lifestyles, between work and social life, do not normally allow. The great gift that a stay at a thermal resort has to offer, in
one word, is harmony, to feel good once more in one’s own skin. Lombardy is home to a large number of thermal resorts whose waters are highly recommended in the treatment of many different pathological illnesses, as well as offering a number of other healthy activities such as massages, swimming pools, gyms, mud baths, hydromassages, natural beauty treatments and so on. The only decision you have to make is to “pull the plug out” and go to Gaverina, Trescore, Sant’Omobono, Angolo, Darfo Boario, Miradolo, Salice, San Pellegrino, Bormio or Sirmione to experience a rare and lasting state of wellbeing.