

*Return to Simple Pleasures:  
Spring/Easter news from Lucca, 2012*



*Above: March view looking north from the studio window*



*Back of the duomo, as seen from the walls*



*Mid March view looking south from our bedroom*





*Beautiful views everywhere, from and around our flat here inside the walls of Lucca! Above: mid March when all of the Japanese magnolias that line Corso Garibaldi are in full bloom. Our flat is at the end of the street where you see the ramp up to the walls.*



*March was truly perfect here this year. We were expecting more typical cooler temps and wet weather ~ and instead we had beautiful warm sunshine almost every day! Much warmer than average all month. We had American friends visiting Lucca for a week mid March and could not believe what perfect weather they had for excursions everywhere in Tuscany and Liguria.*



*The season's newest portraits are all coming along ~ a few of you will recognize the works in progress in the photo below! March was the perfect month for John to be working on a portrait set in front of camellia bushes. The middle 3 weekends in March were Antiche Camelie della Lucchesia ~ the largest show in Italy for camellias, with many of our parks and gardens in high season for camellias.*





## *A Room (and Life) With A View: Levanto and the Cinque Terre*

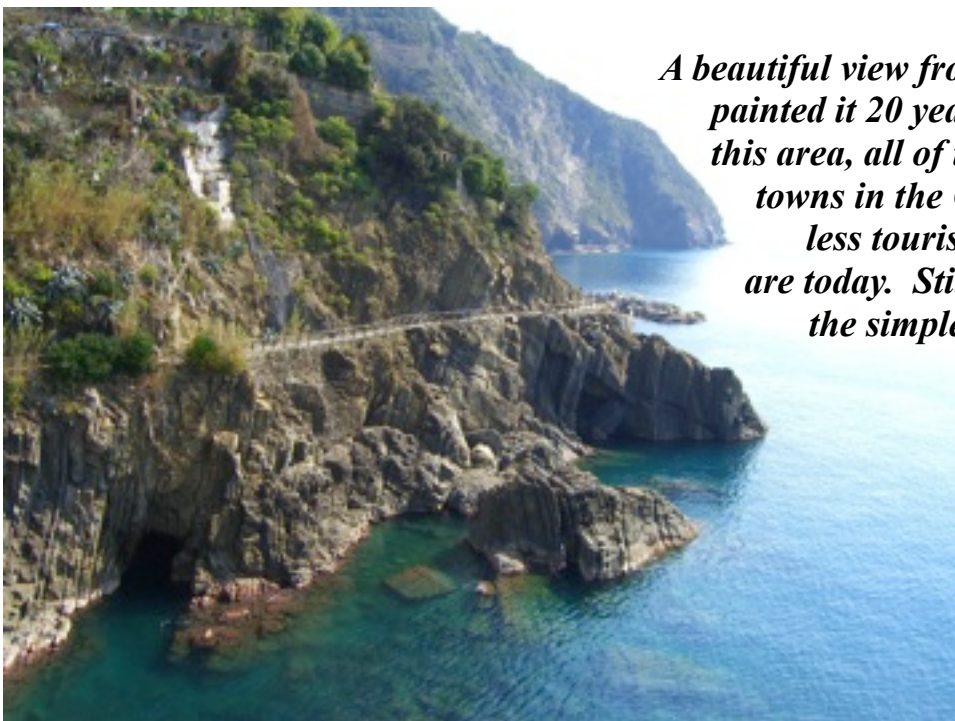
*On March 25th, we headed over to Levanto to enjoy the first few nights of the daylight savings time change here in Italy at a beautiful old villa with private balcony and gardens that we have long admired. One of our best minibreaks to date! Levanto is where we used to live before we bought our home in Lucca 12 years ago and we continue to have friends in that area of Liguria. Dramatic spring weather on the Sunday we arrived produced some beautiful lighting effects for our hike that afternoon up the coastal trail using the old seaside railway tunnels to Bonassola and Framura. Then we had all bright blue skies and sunshine for our next two days enjoying the quiet early spring season as we hiked south along the Med around the Cinque Terre ~bellissima!*







*Hiking north out of Levanto after Sunday afternoon showers had just blown through*



*A beautiful view from Riomaggiore, just as John first painted it 20 years ago! When we first lived in this area, all of the hiking trails were free and the towns in the Cinque Terre were all much less touristed and developed than they are today. Still, it is difficult not to miss the the simple way of Italian life and eternal rhythms of nature that this abundantly fertile area first introduced us to. Sitting on this coastline enjoying the fresh local wine and seafood remains one of our greatest pleasures.*

*See photos below!*







*We were so happy to have a visit with old friends in Vernazza (the central village of the Cinque Terre) and be brought up to date on the town's recovery from the devastating floods of last October. These are amazing people and so much progress has been made ~ for anyone coming to Italy this spring and summer, the Cinque Terre are as wonderful as ever and Vernazza will be ready and continuing on it's fast pace to the total rebuilding of the main street, where the damage occurred. Also, our friends took us over to what is soon to become an enormous new beach on the back side of town (previously the sea and seacaves that we used to only access via our sea kayaks)!!!*



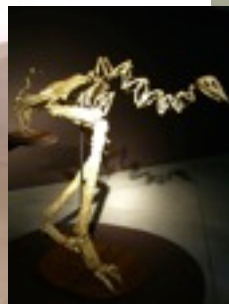
*Above and below: Vernazza's main seaside piazza last month. To the left: John with Giuseppe and Patricia on what will soon be "the new beach" on the back side of town! Their albergo is on the top floor of the biggest dark rose colored building in the photo below.*





*This past Thursday we finally got over to Florence to see the big spring shows there and we can highly recommend a day at the Palazzo Strozzi (where the big blockbuster shows in Florence are usually held) and also up at the Villa Bardini (just behind the Boboli Gardens). Cap the day off by toasting the late afternoon lighting or sunset over Florence from Piazza Michelangelo!*

*The Strozzi ([www.palazzostrozzi.org](http://www.palazzostrozzi.org)) currently has two really special exhibitions not to be missed: “Americans in Florence ~ Sargent and the American Impressionists” and “American Dreamers ~ Reality and Imagination in the Work of 11 Contemporary American Artists (see images below)”. The new exhibit up at the The Villa Bardini ([www.entecarifiirenze.it](http://www.entecarifiirenze.it)) until November 4th has more than 100 beautiful 19th C Italian paintings, including many works of the Macchiaioli.*

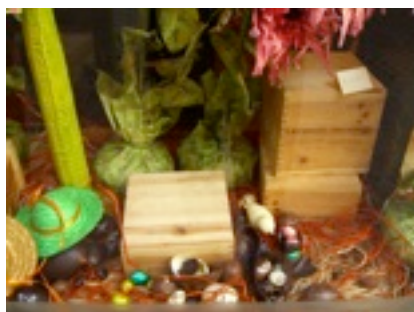




*And, for all you lovers of sweet things.....  
here are just a few of the Easter windows in Lucca this year:*









## *Food and Wine in Lucca ~ Adventures in Cooking*



*This is the optimal season for cycling, picnicing, and enjoying the sunsets from up on the walls of Lucca ~ the simple pleasures when we are not working on all of our indoor creative endeavors.*

*It has been almost impossible for me to stay out of the kitchen this season with all of the gorgeous fresh fruit and vegetables that have been so incredibly inexpensive while they are “il momento” in high season this spring. The blood oranges and pears have given way to kiwi and strawberries now at give away prices and the many types of radicchio, rapini, mushrooms and winter greens have been replaced by fennel, fave beans, spring peas, asparagus and all types of artichokes at their peak. See the two pdf recipes attached separately ~ each takes perfect advantage of what is best and in high season right now. All of our fresh local seafood has provided the perfect secondo most days to the cleansing early spring vegetables that we are enjoying.*

*All that said, I finally took the two days necessary to make my own veal demi-glace this past month! Have been meaning to get to that since my time at the Cordon Blue in Florence. A very special friend gave us a wonderful supply of Fouchon fois gras from her last trip to Paris this past fall ~ so I have been shamed into needing to have all else necessary for the right meal to accompany such a delicacy! Countless pounds of veal bones, along with hours of roasting and then reducing later, I now have a little more than a cup of very concentrated demi-glace to use like a true saucier for some filet mignon with a Bordelaise sauce and some veal paillards with a Chasseur sauce. So I now have some fois gras AND demi-glace all too precious to eat! Ha ~ soon!*

*Happy Spring and Happy Easter ~ k & j*