



## **“IL CENACOLO: THE JEWEL OF SAN FRANCISCO”**

**CHUCK STAGLIANO’S  
PRAISE OF IL CENACOLO  
IN HIS  
MAN OF THE YEAR  
ACCEPTANCE SPEECH  
DECEMBER 15, 2019**

*“Van Gogh Never Saw the Golden Gate,” by Aja Trier, Sagittarius Gallery. Used with permission.*

**I’d like to tell you a story...**

**Some years ago, there was a movie with Michael Douglas and Kathleen Turner, called “The Jewel of the Nile.” Michael Douglas plays an Indiana Jones wannabe, searching throughout the Nile Valley looking for the Jewel of the Nile. After many adventures, it turns out, the Jewel of the Nile is not a precious stone, a diamond, emerald or ruby. No. The Jewel of the Nile is a person.**

**So, I started thinking. What is the Jewel of San Francisco? And I realized, like the Jewel of the Nile, The Jewel of San Francisco is not a thing. Not a precious stone. Is it one of the beautiful and iconic things that surround us? Is it the Golden Gate Bridge, Coit Tower, our beautiful bay, Golden Gate Park, the beautiful dome on City Hall?**

**No. It is none of those things.**

**The JEWEL OF SAN FRANCISCO is Il Cenacolo! If you’ll pardon the mixed metaphor, an oasis of civility in an increasingly uncivil and disconnected world.**

**While so many are frantically collecting “LIKES” on Facebook, we, on the other hand, like to be Face to Face, to talk to each other in person, not on a screen.**

**We meet for lunch. We enjoy the food and wine. We engage and we learn from each other and with each other as we contemplate the various subjects brought to us by our weekly speakers.**



*Armando Pedrini,  
a vice president of the  
Bank of Italy, and  
first president of  
Il Cenacolo, 1929-31.*

You know, the members of Il Cenacolo are an intriguing and sophisticated bunch. Our members have had, or are having, interesting careers, have broad travel experiences, varied educational backgrounds and many unique accomplishments.

When you sit down for lunch, you most likely, will meet a member you haven't known, learn something new about someone's recent travel, or about a book they have read, a performance they have seen or something unique about their life.

And every week we have a speaker. The subjects vary. It could be about the arts, music, history, the current world, food and wine, the many influences of Italy throughout the world or any one of a myriad of interesting subjects. Just as an example, here is a randomly selected list of subjects from the recent months.

- **Memoirs of a Field Biology Adventuress.**
- **The Frank Bellis Collection. A Cultural Bridge Between California and Italy.**
- **Ghiberti's "Gates of Paradise": The Famous Florentine Doors Gracing Our Own Grace Cathedral.**
- **How Italy Shaped the Views of a Young American.**
- **From North Beach to the Hindu Kush: A Correspondent's Story.**
- **Misfits, Merchants and Mayhem on the San Francisco Waterfront.**
- **The Roman City of Aphrodisias, the Marble Sculpture and the Council House.**
- **An Egyptian Tomb, an Etruscan Inscription and the Funerary Monument of a Civil War Officer.**

Don't they all sound intriguing?

Lively discussion always follows.



*Opera Outing 1958*

Ron mentioned the survey of members that we did a few years ago. The results were quite interesting. We learned that the glue that binds us is the combination of the weekly speaker programs and the camaraderie that is generated from friends sharing food, wine and conversation. It is the reason that we have survived when so many other clubs have disappeared from the San Francisco landscape. It is why we are unique.

I'm reminded of a story from the time when Jack Kennedy was President. He and Jackie would host special formal evenings where they entertained the cognoscenti of the day. The A-Listers, writers, artists, philosophers, sports figures, and more. It would be an evening with dinner and usually a performance by a major artist, such as Pablo Casals or Marianne Anderson.

In his welcoming, introductory remarks, President Kennedy once stated, “There hasn't been this much sophistication and intelligence in this room since Thomas Jefferson dined alone.”

Well, that's how I feel about Il Cenacolo. Intelligence, sophistication, uniqueness. And of course, love for all things Italian. That's what defines our membership.

So I say to you here tonight, come to lunch now and then. Tell us your stories. Listen to our stories. We will learn from each other and with each other as we keep our traditions and our stories alive.



Luciano Pavarotti as guest, 1979.

Keep the Jewel polished.

In conclusion, I'd like to read a brief excerpt from an article which appeared in “The San Francisco Chronicle” a few years ago. Written by Stephanie Salter who came to lunch as a guest. The full article is on our website. She described her experience in the article. Here it is.

*In Verdi's sweeping opera “Attila,” an impassioned Roman General named Ezio sings a duet with the invading Attila. “Avia tu l'universo. Resta Italia a me.” “You may have the universe. Let Italy remain mine!”*

*That sentiment pretty much sums up the attitude of the members of Il Cenacolo, even if they are Irish. Tastes, trends and affinity groups have come and gone in San Francisco, but for 90 years,*

*Il Cenacolo has stayed the course. The club exists today for precisely the reason it was founded in 1928, so that its members can learn about and support music, art, language and culture, particularly of the Italian persuasion.*

*Throw in the fact that this civilized pursuit has taken place all these years, primarily over weekly lunches, and the marvel that is Il Cenacolo is apparent.*

*The term Il Cenacolo was picked by the club’s founders to mean “a meal among friends in a private room.” This is how Leonardo da Vinci titled his famous painting of The Last Supper.*

*Then there is the organization’s official motto to ponder.*

*“Itala gente dalle molte vita.”*

*Ask six Cenacolisti what it means and you’ll get six different answers.*

*“It’s old Italian, I believe...and therefore very hard to translate literally,” said [then] President Bob Palazzi, who was born in Abruzzi.*

*“It’s essentially a statement about the Italian personality, getting at the notion that Italians are a people of many varieties, yet celebrating the fact that they are able to stay united and be together.”*

Ten or eleven years ago, Dave Giannini and Al Cavagnaro had a big argument about the motto. “You know, you have a few glasses of wine and start discussing these things....”

And the outcome was...?



90th Anniversary Gala 2018

“Well, I can tell you that nobody won the argument,” said Giannini. “That’s not the point.”

Of course it isn’t.

Il Cenacolo isn’t about winning arguments, It’s about civilized dialogue, expanding intellectual horizons and helping young singers and linguists make the world a better, more genteel, and *Italian*, place to inhabit. It’s something that Attila the Hun would never understand.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

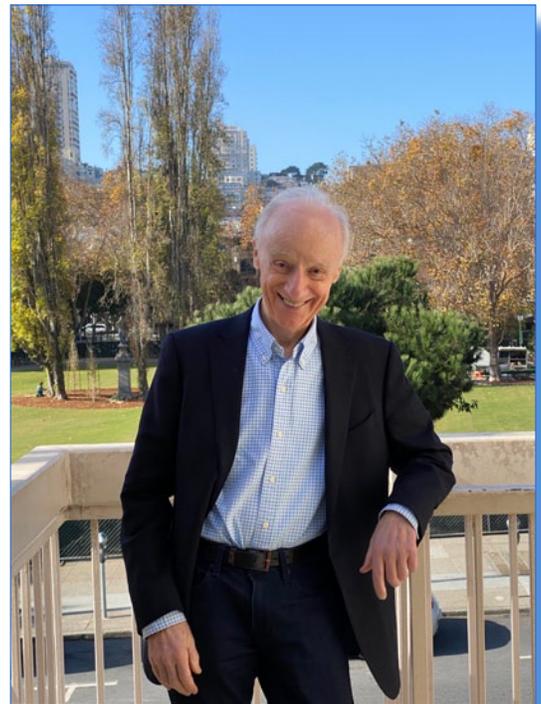
Con rispetto, grazie di cuore.

*Cenacolo, Cento Anni!*

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*From Chuck Stagliano*

*To my Cenacolisti friends. In my search for a way to express my heartfelt thanks for the Man of the Year honor, I recalled something I learned in the Navy. It is essentially, an expression of good wishes to a shipmate who is departing, but it somehow seems to fit here, especially at the beginning of a new decade.*



*“So, to my Cenacolisti friends, I say thank you, and in the decade ahead, may you have fair winds and following seas.”* 