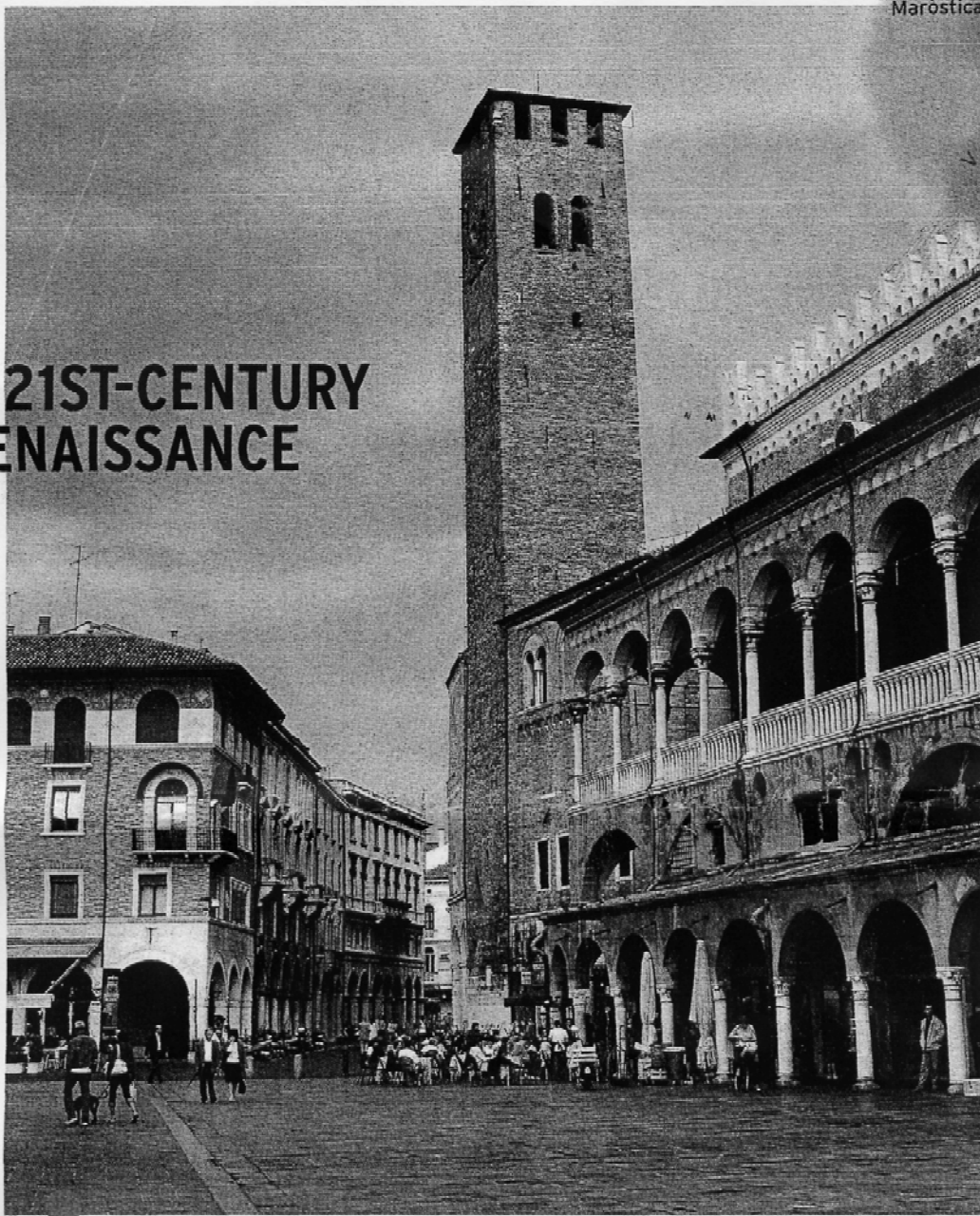




A 21ST-CENTURY RENAISSANCE



opened after being spruced up is the massive **Palazzo della Ragione** (Via VIII Febbraio; 39-049/820-5006), one of the most significant buildings in northern Italy. The Palace of Law, as it translates, has a roof shaped like the hull of a ship and houses a massive 15th-century wooden horse.

If the palazzo and Scrovegni Chapel are the heart and soul of the city, the **University of Padua** is its brain, a monument to its long history as a center of ideas. If you see nothing else there, tour the University's "Anatomical Theater," where surgery and medicine were taught in the Middle Ages. That's Galileo's old lectern on the side. Other great thinkers and statesmen are represented in the southern part of the city: Seventy-eight statues of important figures line the moats around the **Prato della Valle** (including Pope Paul II and Petrarch). On the Prato, the beautiful **Basilica di Sant'Antonio** (patron saint of Padua), attracts pilgrims by the millions—they leave notes, flowers, and photos around the saint's tomb.

In the shadows of Venice and Verona, quiet and historical **Padua**—Italy's second-oldest university town—too often goes overlooked. But the city has begun to buzz of late with some recent renovations and several new openings that plant it on modern terra firma. The most significant is the Scrovegni **Chapel**, Giotto's frescoed masterpiece depicting the life of Jesus and the Virgin Mary. It's one of the wonders of Western art, and, newly cleaned and restored, it has never looked better (the only thing in town that compares is Giusto de' Menabuoi's 14th-century fresco cycle in the baptistry of the Duomo). Reservations to see the Scrovegni Chapel are a must (39-049/201-0020; www.cappelladegliscrovegni.it). Also just re-

Every enlightened culture has a vibrant cafe society, and few are more legendary than **Caffe Pedrocchi's** (\$25 for drinks and casual dining fare; 15 Via VIII Febbraio; 39-049/820-5007; www.caffe-pedrocchi.it). But the place that Stendhal billed as "Italy's most beautiful cafe," did, for several years, lose its footing as the gathering spot for Padua's chattering class. Now, new owner Federico Menotti has turned the cafe, ■which opened in 1772, back into a bustling hub. Equal parts philosopher and entrepreneur, Menotti is as opinionated and knowledgeable about geopolitics as he is about food. His English is minimal, but ask for a tour anyway. The ground

The Palazzo della Ragione, the anchor of the Piazza della Erbe (above)



THE BEST OF THE COUNTRYSIDE

The Euganean hills southwest of the city provide a welcome break from the otherwise flat terrain of Padua. Arqua **Petrarca**, the most beautiful of the hill towns, is where the poet Petrarch lived. His 14th-century house is open to the public (39-0429/718-294). Nearby are the **Golf Club Montecchia** (39-049/805-5550; www.golfmontecchia.it) and the stunning formal gardens at Giardino Barbarigo **Valsanzibio** (39-049/805-9224; www.valsanzibiogiardino.it). The area's best restaurant is **I Ronchi** (dinner, \$50; 132 Via Costa, Arqua Petrarca; 39-0429/718-286; www.ironchi.it).



floor is divided into red, white, and green rooms (note the upside-down maps in the red room). The second floor is decorated in varying historic styles, like Egyptian, medieval, Corinthian, and Moorish.

For all its history, Padua also has a modern edge. The new **Methis Hotel** (rates, \$225-\$425; 70 Riviera Paleocapa; 39_049/872-5555; www.methishotel.it) is a swinging hot spot where the rooms are designed around the four elements. The "air" rooms are

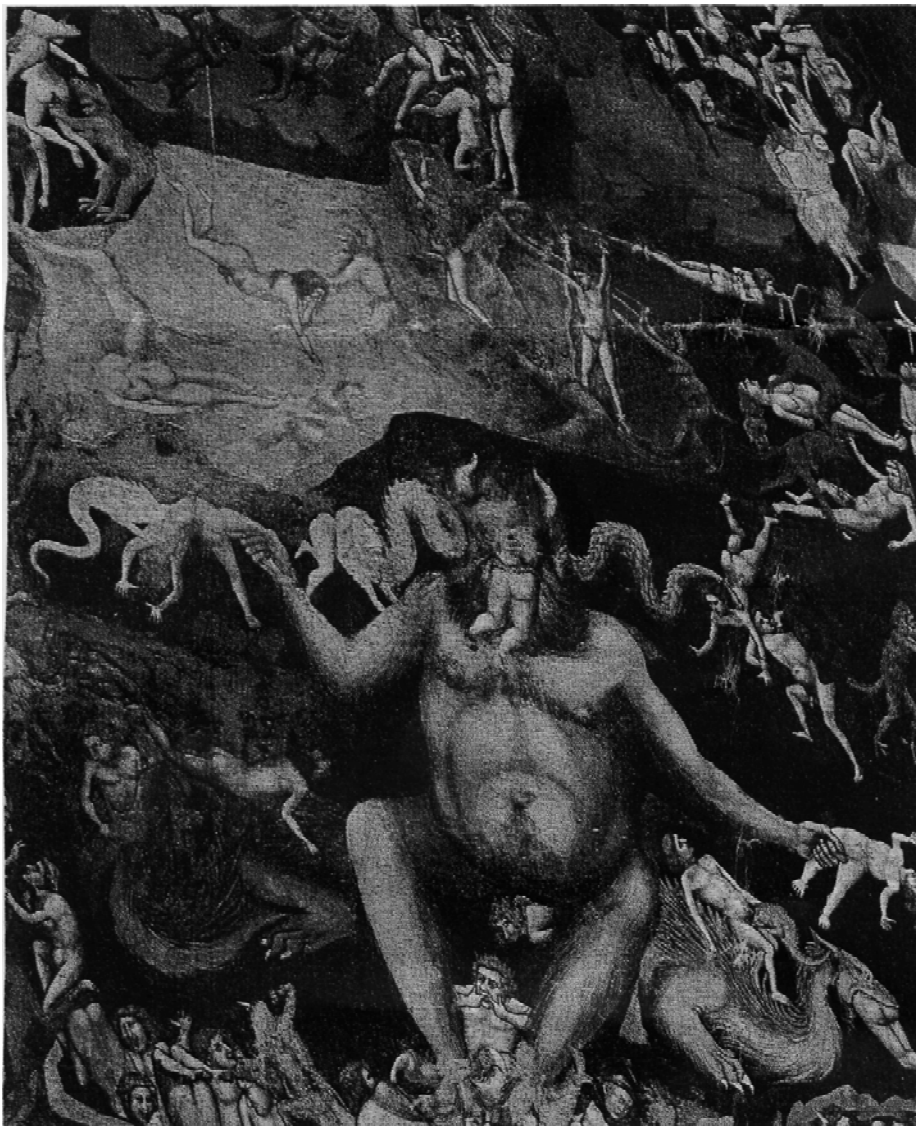
the best: all-white, with sheer white curtains around a canopied bed. The hotel's location—on the other side of the river that circles Padua—is its only flaw. Closer to Saint Anthony's, **La Casa di Cristallo** (rates, \$175-\$300; 82 Via Del Santo; 39-049/876-5523) is a modern B&B in a stylish loftlike house. The four rooms are each inspired by a different designer: Versace, Armani, Dolce & Gabbana, and, our favorite, Ralph Lauren. A little hokey, but endearingly earnest.

You'll find the same youthful buoyancy in Padua's nightlife. Everyone, it seems, lives for happy hour, when the hip set flocks to the **enoteca Godenda** (4-6 Via Squarcione; 39-049/877-4192), a chic little wine bar in the historic former Jewish ghetto. An even livelier mix of people heads to **Il Tira Bouchon** (23-24 Sotto il Salone; 39-049/875-2138), which just opened amid the food stalls in the Salone, a covered market under the Palazzo della Ragione that dates back to the 1200s. Students, merchants, and locals stand shoulder to shoulder, drinking wine (there are glasses on the menu for \$2) and nibbling panini and homemade *salumi*.

For dinner the smart choices are the new **Enoteca Santa Lucia** (dinner, \$35; 15 Piazza Cavour; 39-049/655-545), where the Pepen family serves traditional food under a stunning vaulted ceiling, and the rustic **Al Cicheto** (dinner, \$35; 59 Via Savonarola; 39-049/871-9794) for delicate pastas and massive Florentine steaks. P.R.

SPA OUTSIDE THE CITY

Abano Terme, along with Montegrotto Terme, has been Padua's spa town since the Romans discovered it. Now leading the charge into the future is **Hotel Magnolia**, offering yoga and Ayurvedic therapies in addition to the traditional thermal waters and mud treatments. \$35-\$75. At 6 Via Alessandro Volta; 39-049/860-0800; www.tivigest.com/abano_03.htm.



A detail of the restored Giotto masterpiece in the Scrovegni Chapel; an "air" room in the Methis Hotel (top), one of Padua's chic new openings.