

Summer 2018

# The Review

## SCHOOL NEWS

Sarah Fletcher, High Mistress, St Paul's Girls' School

## OPs IN SUSTAINABILITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Kulsum Ahmed, Rebecca Henderson, Emma Jones,  
Victoria Logue, Clementine Makower, Kate Raworth, Janet Stewart

## THE INTERVIEW

Jane da Mosto, co-founder We are here Venice





# The Interview

Jane da Mosto An insight into the world of the environmental scientist and activist for Venice's future

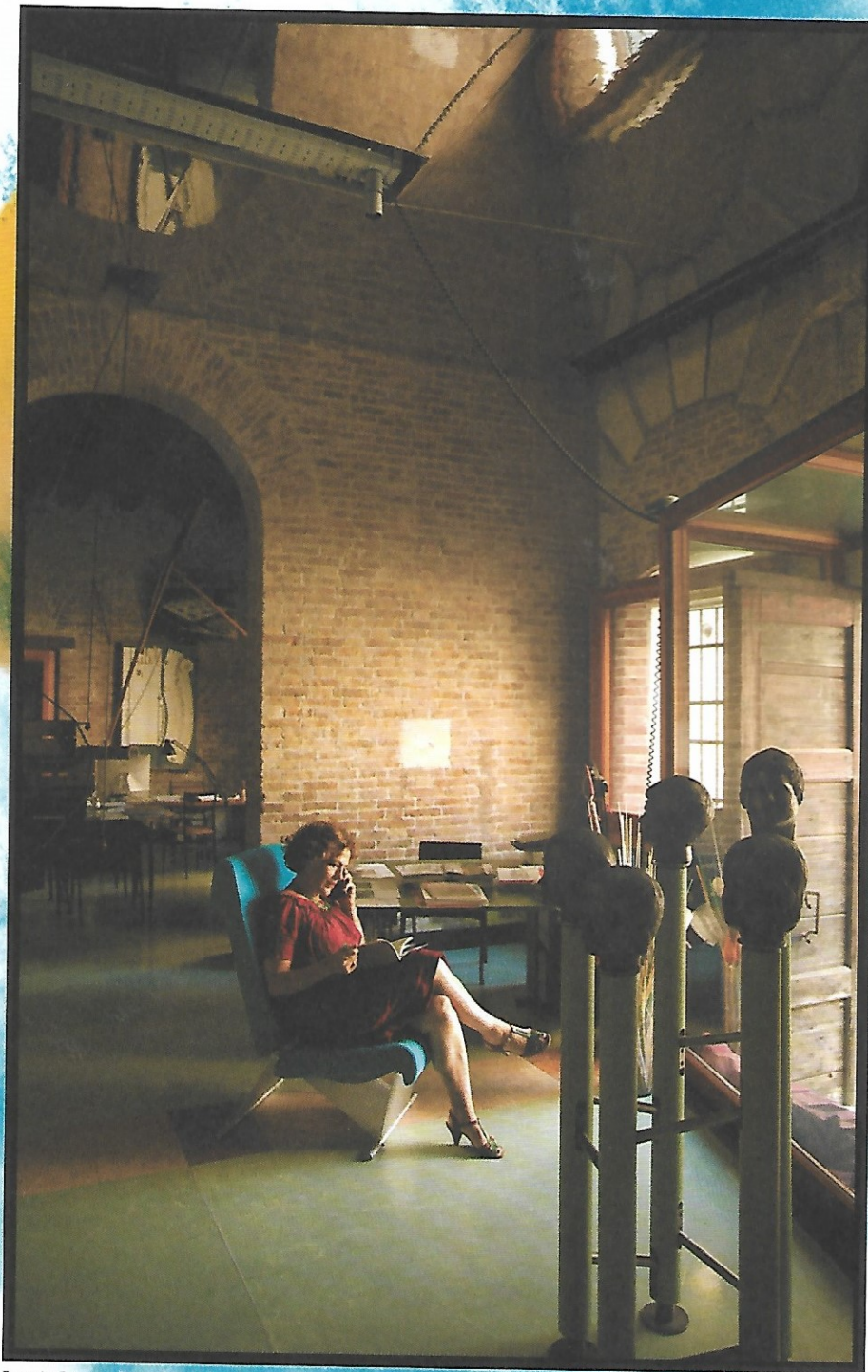
Jane da Mosto attended St Paul's Girls' School from 1982 to 1984. She then went on to study Zoology at Oxford, and continued with her education obtaining a masters in Environmental Science at Imperial College London. Since moving to Venice in 1995, Jane is a co-founder of We are here Venice, a research-based non-profit organisation with the central aim of protecting the future of Venice for all.

*Could you tell us more about the project you are involved with, We are here Venice?*

More than a project, it's a charity, to change Venice's future. It is clear for anyone that if Venice continues as it is, with collapsing numbers in the local population, growing tourism, and huge environmental problems, we're going to lose the city. On a personal level, my children are growing up happily in Venice and I can't bear the thought of them telling their children 'we spent our childhood in this place called Venice that isn't there anymore'. Practically, our charity makes sure issues are presented in an objective way, as we can't count on our politicians. Venice needs to have its own government, not be a municipality of Mestre on the mainland, with policies specific to Venice's needs. We started this because there were things that needed attention that nobody else was taking care of, but we soon found that we could not fix everything. We have, therefore organised five areas of action: stopping large cruise ships; finding a language of value; studying lagoon water levels; outreach; and most importantly the governance of Venice. We are a bridge between research, the public sphere and private sector initiatives. For the people on the mainland, Venice is like a lemon to be squeezed - you might have your job here but you do not care about litter or air pollution.

*Where do you think balance lies between the need for tourism and maintaining a balance with the environment?*

The large cruise ships are emblematic of what is happening now: they are ruining the skyline, polluting the air and increasing consumerist tourism. We need tourists that want to live a Venetian



Jane in her studio at home in Venice





lifestyle, not just to buy mass produced souvenirs or generic designer goods. They act as people do in theme parks, and why should Venice be treated as a theme park? Tourism can provide Venice with economic resilience but only if it is the right kind of tourism.

*How do you see people interact in the modern day with the ancient Venetian architecture?*

One of the great privileges of living in Venice is living amongst the so-called 'ancient architecture' on an everyday basis – some of the lecture rooms at the university are covered with beautiful frescos, my accountant's office has adorable plasterwork decoration, my son's school, albeit very run-down with peeling paintwork, has uplifting high ceilings in all the classrooms.

*What do you feel about the lack of new architecture in Venice?*

You don't need new spaces to work in new ways, one of our major projects is reinventing the now deindustrialised Arsenal, where ships used to be made. With the rise of the knowledge economy you don't need to pump in materials to create economic growth, you just need the spaces to be adapted for the mind, brain and creativity.

*Where did your passion for making Venice more sustainable come from?*

I live in Venice because my husband is Venetian and when we married, I knew I would live there with him. My passion for the city has come from the daily life and encounters of looking after our four children. Whilst I don't want them to feel obliged to stay here forever, I want them to have the option and I know at least one of them would like to spend the rest of his



*Jane receiving the Osella d'Oro prize in May 2017 for her work to protect the future of Venice*

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life here. He's really good at boats and fixing motors and from when he was little he'd walk along the canal noticing whether the tide was in or out. In addition, Venice has some resonance with where I originally came from: South Africa. I was 12 when we moved to London because of apartheid and there is something about the Venice lagoon landscape that I feel is in common with the savannah. When I'm out in the lagoon I feel it's a bit like going back to my roots.

*What do you think the future is like for Venice?*

I'm optimistic. Using rational, responsible thinking to find a way out of all these issues can make Venice better. The problem is short-term political interest is obscuring many obvious solutions. Implementing change depends very much on how Venice is governed. The historic city and the mainland areas of Mestre

and Marghera currently are administered as a single municipality, yet the Venice population accounts for less than a third of the total and therefore cannot be fully represented in the political decisions. I strongly believe there should be a dedicated local administration just for Venice; otherwise the city will increasingly be treated like a cow to be milked – until there's nothing left, or certainly no more residents.

*What impact will rising sea levels and climate change have on Venice?*

We need to start now putting together all our information that we have. For instance, one issue is that too much water comes in and out of the lagoon with each tide and maybe some of the protection against sea level rise is to restrict the amount of exchange between the lagoon and the sea. To do that you really need to clean up the lagoon, because with each tide it's like a flushing of the lagoon and if you're going to have to have less volume of water exchange you need to make sure that the water on the lagoon side is cleaner. It's difficult because for each action that needs to happen there are a lot of political creatures we have to interact with.

*What advice would you give us here in London to make our city more sustainable?*

Less of these crazy skyscraper buildings around Hammersmith. They're very alienating and there's so many buildings that are underused. They don't have to all look like historic buildings you can find new shapes, but I think the parks in London are wonderful.

**Jane da Mosto, OP 1982 to 1984  
Interview by Kristin and Natasha,  
VIII**