

La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind

Beppe Severgnini

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Beppe Severgnini : La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised La Bella Figura: A Field Guide to the Italian Mind:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A fun read! By Margaret M. This is an incredibly funny look into the Italian mindset. As I read this book, I find myself laughing out loud at some of the descriptions and situations. As an Italian-American, I also see the truth of what Mr. Severgnini has written and can definitely see the qualities and tendencies (not always positive) he describes in members of my family...and, yes, myself! It's a wonderful book that

shows some of the unique cultural attributes/differences of Italians. I'm not sure if being Italian makes this so amusing to me, or if non-Italians also would find this as funny. Either way, I'm enjoying this book immensely. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. It's a super funny and interesting take on Italian culture. By Michelle Bought this book as a requirement for an Italian culture class and was pleasantly surprised! It's a super funny and interesting take on Italian culture. I loved the voice of the narrator whose writing is extremely engaging. Will definitely reread when I finally get to take a trip to Italy! 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Two Stars By nutznboltz Would make a good essay, not a book

Join the bestselling author of *Ciao, America!* on a lively tour of modern Italy that takes you behind the seductive face it puts on for visitors—*la bella figura*—and highlights its maddening, paradoxical true self. You won't need luggage for this hypothetical and hilarious trip into the hearts and minds of Beppe Severgnini's fellow Italians. In fact, Beppe would prefer if you left behind the baggage his crafty and elegant countrymen have smuggled into your subconscious. To get to his Italia, you'll need to forget about your idealized notions of Italy. Although *La Bella Figura* will take you to legendary cities and scenic regions, your real destinations are the places where Italians are at their best, worst, and most authentic: The highway: in America, a red light has only one possible interpretation—Stop! An Italian red light doesn't warn or order you as much as provide an invitation for reflection. The airport: where Italians prove that one of their virtues (an appreciation for beauty) is really a vice. Who cares if the beautiful girls hawking cell phones in airport kiosks stick you with an outdated model? That's the price of gazing upon perfection. The small town: which demonstrates the Italian genius for pleasant living: "a congenial barber . . . a well-stocked newsstand . . . professionally made coffee and a proper pizza; bell towers we can recognize in the distance, and people with a kind word and a smile for everyone." The chaos of the roads, the anarchy of the office, the theatrical spirit of the hypermarkets, and garrulous train journeys; the sensory reassurance of a church and the importance of the beach; the solitude of the soccer stadium and the crowded Italian bedroom; the vertical fixations of the apartment building and the horizontal democracy of the eat-in kitchen. As you venture to these and many other locations rooted in the Italian psyche, you realize that Beppe has become your Dante and shown you a country that "has too much style to be hell" but is "too disorderly to be heaven." Ten days, thirty places. From north to south. From food to politics. From saintliness to sexuality. This ironic, methodical, and sentimental examination will help you understand why Italy—as Beppe says—"can have you fuming and then purring in the space of a hundred meters or ten minutes."

From Publishers Weekly: Severgnini—Italian newspaper columnist and author of the pesce-out-of-water memoir *Ciao, America!*—must have wanted to emulate Luigi Barzini, author of the 1960s classic *The Italians*, in this somewhat tepid sociological look at his countrymen. Severgnini writes pleasantly enough (and Giles Watson's translation is smooth, for the most part), but his observations are anything but sharp. He organizes this overview as a kind of geographical "tour," with a chapter about car sex in Naples and another on the Italian countryside in Tuscany. Sweeping statements, such as "Italians have the same relationship with food that some people have with the clouds in the sky—one glance and we know what to expect," abound, and they have the ring of truth, but they're rarely backed up by supporting anecdotes. In today's shrunken world, jokes about how Italians love to see half-naked women on television ("The new Italian icon is the Semi-Undressed Signorina") and abuse their cellphone privileges simply aren't new. The collection ends with the hoariest of devices: a letter from an imaginary American friend who has taken Severgnini's tour and reminisces about the beautiful "girls" in a Milan disco. Barzini, too, often wrote in generalities, but he had the advantage of coming first. (Aug.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. From Booklist: Severgnini attempts to plumb beneath the mask (the title's *bella figura*) that Italians present to the world, especially to tourists, to reveal the truth about modern Italian minds and hearts. He begins with the Italian "apartment," the place most Italians call home. For him, this is a cramped, well-guarded portion of real estate where one has little room for oneself and where one is constantly vigilant against neighbors' predations. He rails against Italian men's sexism and women's lack of serious opposition to discrimination in the workplace. Severgnini's Italians prefer bank tellers to impersonal ATMs. His Italians delight in talking about other people's money while maintaining secrecy about their own finances. He longs for equivalent reticence when Italians travel by trains, where, thanks to the cell phone, they share their most intimate secrets with their compartment mates. Severgnini holds - American-inspired Italian shopping malls in special contempt for his fellow countrymen's manic shouting at one another across their walkways, confusing modern mercantile halls with their ancient piazzas. Mark Knoblauch Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved. Praise for Beppe Severgnini *La Bella Figura* "Don't read this book—unless you have the courage to let Dottore Severgnini carve up your well-worn stereotypes about Italy. *La Bella Figura* proves that twenty-first-century Italians are more complicated than we thought. Sort of like Europeans. And Beppe loves them all." —Howard Tomb, author of *Wicked Italian* "The book on perplexing Italians . . . Severgnini's most systematic probe of the Italian psyche yet . . . A keen observer of human nature, [he watches] his compatriots with amused insight . . . Laugh-out-loud funny." —International Herald Tribune *Ciao, America!* "A *Bella* Laugh . . . This wonderfully funny and perceptive book . . . now finds its way to the country

that inspired it. What a pity it took so long to get here, but what a joy that it is here at last. *Ciao, America!* is fun from first page to last, pure and simple.” —The Washington Post “It’s not easy to walk the thin line between Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* and Dave Barry’s *Only Travel Guide You’ll Ever Need*, but this memoir manages to do so admirably.” —Booklist “Severgnini is a master . . . *Ciao, America!* is a sardonic tale of cultural bewilderment, an incisive peek into the mundane obsession of our American existence that makes the commonplace seem not only insane but extremely funny.” —Publishers Weekly “A delightful read, full of wonderful anecdotes that capture the eye-opening absurdity of life in these United States.” —Chicago Tribune “It would be difficult not to like this delightful book.” —Library Journal