

# Lord Rogers helps to rebuild a village buried by disaster

## Italy

James Bone Rome

Lord Rogers of Riverside, the architect responsible for London landmarks such as the Lloyd's building and the Millennium Dome, is volunteering his help to rebuild the disaster-stricken Italian village where his son lived before his death.

Vernazza, which hugs a cove on the Italian Riviera, is perhaps the most beautiful village in Italy. Acclaimed as the pearl of the five settlements known as the Cinque Terre on the Ligurian coast, it is listed as a Unesco World Heritage site for its "harmonious interaction between people and nature" and "landscape of exceptional scenic quality".

Yet the picturesque medieval village, with a year-round population of just 500, is marked by tragedy. A year ago, after being battered by torrential rain and a tornado, it was devastated by landslides. Three people lost their lives on October 25 as mud cascaded down the steep hillside, burying the streets to a depth of 4.3m (14ft).

Lord Rogers, born in Florence to an Italian mother, has visited Vernazza every summer for almost half a century. Bo Rogers, his son with his second wife, Ruth — who runs the River Café in West London — was staying in Vernazza at the time of the disaster.

Bo, 27, survived the mudslides, which blocked the rail line and destroyed the only road out, and managed to escape the next day by boat. But he died a day later, on October 27, after suffering an epileptic seizure in the bath in the nearby city of Viareggio on his way back to Britain.

"The love for Vernazza and the memory of their son is what is moving Richard and Ruthie to help," said Lord Rogers's Italian cousin and collaborator, Ernesto Bartolini. "He managed to sur-

vive. He managed to escape. The day after the escape, he died. It's a terrible story. Very tragic," he said.

Lord Rogers has made three visits to Vernazza since the deluge, including one with his friend Renzo Piano, with whom he designed the Pom-

pidou Centre in Paris. He is due to present the plan in public next week on the first anniversary of the disaster.

The plan aims to restore Vernazza to its original beauty with local materials and native trees. Sandstone from a local quarry will be used to pave the main street through the village and the piazza by the cove, now temporarily covered by tarmac after being destroyed.

Lord Rogers has also designed simple, elegant street furniture and sustainable public lighting. "Richard has focused on high quality, simplicity and a lot of respect for the tradition of the place," Ruth Manfredi, an American part-time resident, said. "We are interested in tourism, but we are interested in high-quality tourism."

With two other American residents, Ms Manfredi has formed a charity called Save Vernazza to raise funds for the rebuilding. It works with a second

charity, Vernazza Futura, which is more closely tied to local officials.

Lord Rogers's feasibility study estimates the cost at €2.5 million (£2 million). Work is due to start in January on rehabilitating the main piazza where tourists congregate, and reinstalling a drinking water fountain at the Fontana Vecchia that is favoured by local residents.

Gianni Viacava Lord

Rogers's close friend and host in Vernazza, said that the project was close to the architect's heart.

"It's a matter of emotion. It's not a question of business. It's a matter of helping. He is giving this to the town," he said. "It's all the small things that give the architectural touch. You see them and you don't see them."

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Source: The Times {Main}  
Edition:  
Country: UK  
Date: Friday 19, October 2012  
Page: 43  
Area: 473 sq. cm  
Circulation: ABC 406711 Daily  
BRAD info: page rate £16,645.00, scc rate £67.00  
Phone: 020 7782 5000  
Keyword: Lord Rogers of Riverside



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**A woman, left, dries her clothes after escaping from Vernazza, right, which was battered by a tornado and then engulfed by mudslides last October. Lord Rogers, whose son died a day after fleeing the disaster, has been visiting the village for 50 years**