

SHEHERAZADE'S TALE OF LAKE ANNE

By William Nicoson

A Samarkand Sultan has taken Lake Anne by storm. The battle still rages, but his commodious royal tent rises defiantly from the plaza through scimitar curves to 12 equally distributed pinnacles, each flying his pennant. As I approached this wonder for the first time, I thought I heard the beguiling ankle bells of the Sultan's dancing girls.

Not all who approached have been beguiled. Most of my friends with property on the plaza are gathering troops to repulse the Sultan's occupation. I understand their pain, as someone else once said, but I can't enlist in their cause. This column has to live up to its name.

Lake Anne residents above Ristorante il Cigno protest that their view of the plaza has been obstructed even if Lake Anne is still visible. But there's a positive side. The plastic-coated canopy will likely reduce decibel intrusion into residential space above the restaurant.

Lake Anne merchants protest that il Cigno's permanent canopy impairs their view of the plaza and therefore the reverse view which potential customers in the plaza have of their shops. Sagging sales have been alleged.

The immediate neighbors of il Cigno have a point, but only when the plastic sides of the tent are in place rather than drawn back as usual during daylight hours. Complaints of other merchants are difficult to justify except perhaps on aesthetic grounds. And those grounds may also motivate criticism from some visitors to the plaza.

It can't be maintained that the architectural personality of Lake Anne remains unchanged by the addition of il Cigno's mammoth canopy. Architectural purists are of course outraged. I find the stylistic contrast startling, energizing and amusing.

The study of aesthetics is a subjective discipline. My guess is that this striking canopy conjures ankle bells for me alone. Others may hear the shattering spears of medieval jousting. Still others find only desecration of seamless excellence in design. In any case, Reston's arbiter of structural style, its Design Review Board, approved the canopy, and Board members are unlikely to reverse themselves because the taste of some citizens differs from theirs.

The view from within the Sultan's tent is unobjectionable, even without dancing girls, and diners will be able to enjoy the tent at least a couple of months longer than they were able to enjoy the replaced umbrellas. That will mean greater vibrancy and animation for the plaza.

Lake Anne merchants should take heart from the likelihood that Restonians whose homes and workplaces are remote from Lake Anne may be encouraged to visit the plaza to view this new and controversial wonder. Some of these Restonians, not to speak of out-of-towners, may never

have visited the plaza before. Some may never have heard that Reston has its own “old town,” with charm comparable, at reduced scale, to Alexandria’s old town.

For some, the Sultan’s tent will encourage return trips. I doubt that new visitors will be put off as some old-timers have been. I predict that Sheherazade’s Tale of Lake Anne will be long, and that the ending will be happy even for those less happy as the Tale begins.

William Nicoson has lived within walking distance of Lake Anne for thirty years and has a financial interest in a unit of commercial property on Lake Anne Plaza.