



APRIL 22, 2025 · ALEC SCOTT

How Burrata Conquered America

Sometime in the 1920s, Lorenzo Bianchino Chieppa reportedly produced the first burrata while working on a dairy farm in the foothills of the southern end of the Apennines, in the shadow of a picturesque 13th -century



Burrata photo credit Klara Kulikova

castle. Legend has it that because he could not travel to market due to heavy snow, he used the byproducts from the making of mozzarella to create a new cheese. Workers would blow air into a left-over curd, stretch it out until it was nearly translucent, fill it with cream taken from the top of a morning's milking, throw some more curd into the cream, then tie its top, and place it in brine (for hygienic reasons, machines now mainly blow up and stretch out the curd, but the process otherwise remains similar).

The bit thrown in the middle is one of several edibles known to Italians as a “stracciatella” – in English, little rags or little shreds, prized by lovers of the cheese. “In my family,” Italian-American chef Matt Accarino says, “everyone would compete for the stracciatella.” Alluding to its history, he says, “Chop it up, stick it in cream, presto, next day, the magic of peasant food.”

Italian for “battered,” burrata cheese was first mentioned in print in the 1931 edition of the *Guida Gastronomica d’Italia*, an Italian auto-club-produced guidebook. In November 2016, “burrata di Andria” became a protected geographical indication (PGI) product, meaning all operations, from raw materials to the finished product, must take place in the defined geographical area of the region of Puglia.

HOW BURRATA CAME TO AMERICA



Spaghetti with burrata

Burrata is the epitome of fresh cheese. It only maintains the prized gooey oozing center for a very short time, which makes importing it from Italy difficult. It might have remained a regional specialty, and never

taken off in America, but for a series of small coincidences and for the coming together of three people with similar first names, Mimi De

Rosa, Mimmo and Mimma Bruno – or that’s how Southern California cheesemaker Stefano Bruno of [Di Stefano](#) tells it.

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Stefano Bruno’s father, Mimmo Bruno apprenticed under his mentor Mimi De Rosa, and became a strong cheesemaker, able to produce not just burrata, but mozzarella and mascarpone. Mimmo met a young American-Italian woman, with family roots in the area on a visit, and the pair struck up a friendship. Mimmo courted the young woman, named Mimma, by letters in the months after she returned to California. “My father didn’t spend long in school so he had a friend write these love notes for him. He used mozzarella to bribe the friend to write them.” They did the trick, Mimmo married Mimma and moved to be with her in Southern California.

Stefano now says, with a laugh, “My dad used to say, ‘I don’t know how I’m going to tell her that it wasn’t me who wrote those letters.’ She really took one of them to heart.”

At first, Mimmo Bruno worked in building and maintenance because, in Italy, he had to keep everything fixed and running in the cheese factory. When he tasted locally made mozzarella, he was unimpressed, to put it mildly. “‘What the hell is this?’ he thought. Everyone told him that the milk in California was no good, “But my dad said, ‘I can see the milk. I can taste the milk. The milk is great.’”

So Mimmo saved up enough money to start his own cheese firm, Tutto Latte. Sourcing some of that milk he liked from a farm in nearby Ontario, California, he soon found customers for his

mozzarella and mascarpone, but even Italian-American buyers disdained the burrata. “They said it was disgusting.”

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Around 1990, he brought some burrata to chef Nancy Silverton, who was running a new Los Angeles restaurant called Campanile at the time. “I had never heard of burrata,” she said in a recent telephone call. “He (Mimmo Bruno) brought it to all his Italian chef cronies, and nobody would go for it. It was not a new cheese, but not much accepted even in Italy, outside its region. I fell in love with it immediately.”

In a career-making rave about the restaurant in the *Los Angeles Times*, her dish using the cheese got a special mention – and from there, both Silverton and the cheese took off.

Stefano sums up the effect of Silverton’s backing of his father’s burrata: “Nancy is really a saint for us.” And more broadly, she might be considered the patron saint of burrata in the US.

BURRATA’S POPULARITY

Over the years, chef Nancy Silverton has used burrata with sundried tomatoes, with bacon and escarole, with radicchio, honey and fried rosemary. “Burrata being so milky in its flavor, it can be a canvas for so many other ingredients,” she says. As Mimmo Bruno’s cheesemaking business began to do well, he decided to hire his old

mentor Mimi De Rosa, who emigrated and moved to the LA area. Rosa helped lead an increasingly large team at the firm to make burrata and other cheeses – the current family-run company, [Di Stefano](#), has about 55 employees.

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Burrata has always needed to be made and sent to market quickly. Stefano says milk tends to come in at 11 p.m., gets transformed into burrata by 1 p.m. the next day, and is shipped out shortly afterward. Domestic burrata production has continued to take off, and today, several producers make it, in part because, like DiStefano, they can offer a very fresh, high-quality product and get it to market faster than Italian producers.

NOTABLE BURRATA DISHES TODAY

Recently, I looked around for restaurants doing different things with burrata. What fresh ideas are out there?

In New York, I tried a dish of burrata soft-serve ice cream at Dominique Ansel Bakery, praised by Tammie Teclemariam, the author of the popular Underground Gourmet column. A moan may have escaped me. A savory (and considerably more fancy and expensive) approach was on offer at a new swanky bar-restaurant, The Bronze Owl, on 33rd



Dominique Ansel burrata soft serve
photo credit [@Robbie_Sydney](#)
[Foodie](#)

Street, near what used to be called Herald Square: Here the glo' cheese had dollops of Black Diamond caviar with it. It was, as y expect, as you'd hope, good.

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Marea lobster burrata photo credit Alec Scott

The chefs at the midtown power-lunch spot, Marea also found some surf to complement the burrata's turfy origins, offering a starter of burrata surrounded with Nova Scotia lobster, micro-basil and chunks of eggplant.

(Note, mainly, to self: Though the lobster worked well with the cheese, the best bites were those with the eggplant on its own – it was prepared *al funghetto*, meaning, essentially, fried in garlic, as Italian cooks often do with mushrooms.) The Dubai branch of Marea has sometimes gone even more decadent, serving up a burrata coated in (edible) gold leaf. You imagine this peasant dish being embarrassed at its gilded coat.

In Istanbul, I had a Margherita pizza with a burrata so cold its contents almost stayed put when the waiter snipped it open – it left me as cold as the cheese. In Hanoi, I had that standard combination of burrata with roasted fruit, only the fruits served up (at excellent Pizza 4Ps) were local: jackfruit, mango and mangosteen. *Read more about the [cheese Pizza 4P is making in Vietnam](#).* In my native Canada, the

restaurant at the Megalomaniac winery in the Niagara region, r
mushroom *tartufata* on the burrata – an inspired pairing of a pa
that was nearly harsh in its salinity with the smooth and unctuous
cheese.

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In my adopted home region, the San Francisco Bay Area, most of the different burrata dishes I tried were more traditional. Terra, in the newish branch of Eataly in San Jose, served the cheese up with grilled peaches, pistachios, arugula and pesto on toasted sourdough. It also dolloped some smoked burrata into an agreeably gloopy *spaghetti al pomodoro*. Both were nice.



Burrata with stone fruit photo
credit Dale Gray



Butter chicken burrata
photo credit [Nidhi](#)

Slightly more adventurous was the Bay-facing San Francisco restaurant Alora's take: they served it with Jerusalem artichoke, roasted grapes, gremolata, on grilled focaccia – the crunch plus greenmarkety ingredients Teclemariam mentioned. (The roasted grapes were a particularly good call.)

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The menu of San Jose's clubby new Indian restaurant, Fitoor, uses the burrata in its butter chicken, it's a dish that other Indian restaurants around the world offer as well, and is popular on social media.

Since closing Campanile, Silverton has gone on to start (and run) the Michelin-starred Osteria Mozza in LA and speaks with some tongue in cheek when talking of the cheese she helped make into a global player. "Now it's become almost illegal not to have it, no matter what restaurant you have, Korean or Indian, if you don't have burrata on your menu, you're in trouble." Does she still serve it? Yes, she says, but it's dancing with a new partner, sautéed chicken livers.

All these innovative uses of burrata impress me, but I realize for my purposes the classic preparations remain my favorites. Mexican-American chef Chef Pablo Estrada earned a Michelin star when working at Luce in San Francisco's Intercontinental Hotel before opening his own restaurant, Fattoria e Mare, in Half Moon Bay, a few miles south of San Francisco.



Smoked burrata with
fava bean

It is his kitchen's smoked burrata dish on fava beans, that returns me to my first sighting, my first tasting of burrata. He smokes the cheese (sourced from Di Stefano) over burning cherry and applewood, but

the smoke doesn't overwhelm it. Nor do the dish's other ingredients with the favas are lemon zest, olive oil and arugula. The dish is elegant, straightforward, not trying to be anything it's not. In a phone interview, he says, simply, "I just wanted to have a few good ingredients, all speaking."

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Does burrata make every dish better, no, but in the right dish, it can be a showstopper. Soft, creamy, and luscious, it's no wonder why chefs are keeping it on the menu.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Alec Scott has contributed to the New York Times, Los Angeles Times, Guardian and Smithsonian Magazine. He is the author of *Until It Shimmers* and *Oldest San Francisco*, and has taught writing at Stanford.

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