



It's not every day you peek inside a restaurant and see Whoopi Goldberg smashing garlic cloves in the kitchen. No, she's not doing research for a movie; she's at the beloved New York City haunt Emilio's Ballato learning how to make her favorite dish: spaghetti with garlic and olive oil. "Let's see your chopping skills," says chef Emilio Vitolo Jr., handing her a sharp knife and a bunch of parsley.

"I don't *have* chopping skills," she says in that unmistakable voice we know from screens both big (*The Color Purple*, *Ghost*) and small (*The View*). Goldberg insists she doesn't have any cooking skills—period. "Nooo," she says, emphatically shaking her signature dreadlocks side to side. As it turns out, she'd much rather host. In fact, this month she's coming out with a how-to book on the subject, called *The Unqualified Hostess: I Do It My Way So You Can Too!* Goldberg's title is tongue-in-cheek, of course, as everyone knows she is a consummate entertainer who loves bringing interesting guests together around vibrant tablescapes. For her, it's tradition. "I grew up in an era when families ate together, so you had to know how to set the table," she says.

In her book Goldberg explains how to set a table with style. In the process this maximalist gets to show off the eclectic mix of items she's collected over the years: vintage china, antique silver, Meissen porcelain, troll dolls, and knife rests, of which she is a big proponent. ("Think of how many tablecloths would be saved if everyone used a knife rest.") Each piece sparks Marie Kondo–approved joy for Goldberg. "I have a lot of stuff, but I've had a lot of life," she says. "I like beauty and I like fun, and I think other people do too."

Back in the kitchen, now fragrant with sautéing garlic, Vitolo continues the lesson: "You want the garlic to be slightly brown. If you overcook it, you ruin the whole dish." With the grace of a dancer, Vitolo pops parsley, salt, and crushed

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—WHOOPI GOLDBERG

red-pepper flakes into a pan, adds some spaghetti, and emulsifies the ingredients with pasta water. "There's something about a simple dish," Goldberg says. "Done well, it tastes exquisite."

Vitolo's father, Emilio Vitolo Sr., bought the SoHo restaurant and made it his own in the early '90s. Since then, the entire Vitolo clan—dad, mom, and three sons—have worked there together. "It's a seven-day-a-week commitment," says the younger Emilio. When he was growing up, Sunday supper at home was the only time his father took a break. "If you're going to do a restaurant the right way, you always have to be there," he says. "But on Sundays my father was never the cook. My mother, who's from Peru, would make us dishes like chicken and rice instead."

That passion—plus some killer meatballs, chicken parm, linguine with clams, and so on—draws an impressive roster of fans, including Justin Bieber, Rihanna, Bradley Cooper, Lenny Kravitz, and the Obamas. Their photos, magazine articles, and album covers decorate the patinaed dining-room walls like family pictures. Goldberg, who's been a regular at Emilio's Ballato for 20 years, is up there too. "Coming here is like coming into someone's house," she says. "It always feels good because it's homey."

Once the spaghetti is plated, Vitolo grabs some Parmigiano-Reggiano for his superstar sous chef to taste. Then the pair sit down to eat. "I'm hungry," says Goldberg, digging into her pasta sprinkled with grated cheese. Frank Sinatra's 1966 hit "That's Life" plays in the background, adding to the old-school vibe. Will Goldberg ever make this dish at home? "Yeah," she says, "but why would I want to when I can come here?"



## THE VITOLOS' SPAGHETTI WITH GARLIC AND OLIVE OIL

MAKES 4 SERVINGS

1 tbsp plus 1 small  
pinch salt

1 lb. spaghetti

½ cup extra-virgin  
olive oil

4 cloves garlic, chopped,  
minced, or sliced

1 generous pinch parsley,  
chopped

1 small pinch crushed  
red-pepper flakes  
(optional)

Parmigiano-Reggiano,  
grated, to taste

1. Bring 4 quarts of water to boil in a medium pot and add 1 tablespoon of salt.
2. Pour in spaghetti and cook for half as long as directed.
3. Remove a ladle of pasta water and set aside. Drain the spaghetti and set aside.
4. Heat the olive oil over medium-high heat in a large pan that can accommodate all the spaghetti.
5. Add the garlic to the olive oil and sauté until slightly golden.
6. Add the parsley, crushed red pepper, pinch of salt, and ladle of pasta water to the garlic and olive oil.
7. Add the spaghetti and cook until the sauce reduces and the spaghetti is cooked through (approx. 2 min.).
8. Serve with grated Parmigiano-Reggiano.