

A Taste of Italy

100 Favourites



Randolph Riecker

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I would like to thank my dear family and friends for the constant encouragement they have given me when I have tried out some of the recipes that I like. They have endured my efforts throughout and have given me nothing but support and the desire to see me succeed. Without their support this book would never have become a reality. I am grateful every day for all that they bring into my life, whether it be emotionally, physically or spiritually, even if they sometimes don't like my food or cooking !

First Edition

CAMPUS ELYSIUM – COOKBOOK SERIES

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DEDICATION

This book is dedicated to my dear friend, Filippo, who, at the time of writing, is the proprietor of my favourite Italian restaurant in my home town. I have eaten there many times and Italian food has become a firm favourite with me and my family. Filippo is gregarious and welcoming, and along with his wife, Tina, are charming hosts who have instilled within me a desire to dig deeper and discover the intricacies of Italian cuisine. I also dedicate this book to another friend, Gionata, who has cooked a few great pasta meals at my home, but not enough ! More please !



CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	7
STARTERS	9
SALADS	23
SIDE ORDERS	35
PIZZAS	49
PASTA	65
MEAT AND FISH	83
DESSERTS	97
WINES	113
LIQUEURS	130
COFFEES	142
BONUS	153
GLOSSARY	163

INTRODUCTION

Let us start with a brief introduction about Italian food. Yummmmm ! What can I say ? I've been a major fan of Italian food all my life. I grew up in a village that was full of Italian families, and sampled Italian food at the homes of my friends many times. During the last 10 years I have decided to explore the cuisine much further. Whether it be pizza, pasta or meat dishes, I love them all. Just about every place in the world has an Italian restaurant somewhere. In London alone, there are over a thousand Italian restaurants - doesn't that tell you something ? This is a revelation of the different Italian foods that I have enjoyed over the years. I really have to thank the following families for my gastronomic Italian experiences – the Catenas, Cescuttis, Ciceros, Elleros, Fontanas, Govettos, Ioppos, Marzianos, Mazzaros, Moros, Pizzos, Passeros, Resentes, Rosettos, Scarpas, Zans. Thank you – I salute you all ! I'm sorry if I have left anyone out.

It doesn't matter whether the dishes originated in Bologna, Calabria, Florence, Genoa, Liguria, Lombardy, Marche, Milan, Naples, Palermo, Parma, Perugia, Rome, Treviso, Turin, Tuscany, Venice, or Verona, they all taste great as long as they are made according to the original recipes which have been passed down from generation to generation.

A typical gastronomic Italian meal can consist of a number of stages, and below I have outlined the ones that you may encounter :

Aperitivo – This is usually a drink that can be enjoyed before a large meal. Typical examples are Campari, Aperol, Prosecco, etc.

Antipasto – Literally, this means “before the meal” and consists of a small portion of an appetiser, either hot or cold.

Primo – This is the “first course” of the meal – it may be a pasta dish, a risotto dish, soup or gnocchi.

Secondo - This is the “second course” of the meal. It is usually the main dish, and is either fish or meat.

Contorno – This is a side dish that can be served as an accompaniment to the first or second course. It can be a salad or a portion of vegetables.

Formaggio e frutta – Literally known as “cheese and fruits”. Not every Italian meal includes this section.

Dolce – These are the sweets that may be served after the main courses of the meal and can consist of cookies, cakes, ice cream or tarts.

Caffe – The different types of coffees such as espressos, lattes, cappuchinos, macchiattos, etc.

Digestivos – These are liqueurs or aperitifs, and may very well be the last item of consumption in your gastronomic meal. Some examples are grappa, amaretto, limoncello, etc.

All the weighted measures used in these recipes are according to the metric scale, and all the heating measures are in degrees Celsius (centigrade). If you prefer to use other measures, you may either need a conversion chart, or you can use one of the convenient converter programmes on the internet. Enjoy !

My Italian menu

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| 1. STARTERS | - my choice of the 10 best appetisers |
| 2. SALADS | - the 10 best salads that I fancy |
| 3. SIDE ORDERS | - my choice of the top 10 side orders |
| 4. PIZZAS | - the 10 best pizzas that I've eaten |
| 5. PASTA | - my top 10 favourite pasta dishes |
| 6. MEAT & FISH | - my top 10 best meat and fish dishes |
| 7. DESSERTS | - the 10 best desserts I have ever enjoyed |
| 8. WINES | - my top 10 best Italian wines |
| 9. DRINKS | - the 10 best Italian digestivos I like |
| 10. COFFEES | - my favourite top 10 Italian coffees |
| 11. BONUS | - a few items I would like to add |

..... and a GLOSSARY

1 STARTERS

You cannot fully enjoy an Italian meal without at least having a great starter. It's an item of food served before the main course, and is sometimes known as an “antipasti”. It is typically much smaller than the main course. Before enjoying a starter, it's a good idea to sip some sort of drink in order to whet your appetite. A glass of authentic Italian Prosecco would be a good bet. When selecting a starter, it's better to select one that's going to complement your main course, and shouldn't be an extension of the main course. Obviously this is common sense. Finally, it shouldn't numb your taste buds so that you can't enjoy the flavours of the main course. Here's a list of my all-time top 10 favourite Italian starters. What follows on the next pages are the recipes for them.

- 1.1 BRUSCHETTA AL POMODORO
- 1.2 CALAMARI FRITTI
- 1.3 SARDINE PAESANE
- 1.4 FEGATINI DI POLLO ALLA VENEZIANA
- 1.5 MELANZANE ALLA PARMIGIANA
- 1.6 GAMBERONI ALL' AGLIO
- 1.7 BIANCHETTI DIAVOLA
- 1.8 SALSICCIA TOSCANA CON POMODORO
- 1.9 PORTOBELLO AL FORNO
- 1.10 ARANCINI SICILIANO



1.1 BRUSCHETTA AL POMODORO

This starter is made of grill-toasted home-made ciabatta bread that's topped up with a mixture of chopped cherry tomatoes, onions, garlic, basil and extra virgin olive oil. I've had this many times and sometimes even make it with a bit of cheese on top, for breakfast ! Now and again my dear wife treats me to this starter at Filippo's restaurant !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

ciabatta bread (sliced)
250g x cherry tomatoes
2 x garlic cloves
6 x basil leaves
extra virgin olive oil
black pepper
sea salt

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat a grill pan. Drizzle both sides of the bread slices with a little olive oil. Then grill the bread on both sides. Chop the tomatoes and then season them with salt and pepper. Add this to a mixing bowl. Finely chop the onions and add them to the mixing bowl. Chop the garlic cloves and add to the mixing bowl. Chop the basil leaves and add to the mixing bowl. Stir up the mixture and then drizzle it with olive oil. Then stir up the mixture again. Top the grilled ciabatta slices with the mixture from the bowl and serve.

1.2 CALAMARI FRITTI

This is battered fried calamari, served on a bed of salad with tartare sauce. This dish is an excellent antipasto or seafood course. Don't overcook the calamari because it will get to be tough and tasteless. The calamari should be tender and have its own flavour. Don't allow it to have too much of a crust because this will make it hold too much oil and make it taste greasy. Fry the calamari at a steady temperature of about 190°C. The cornmeal produces a little crispiness.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1 x lb of cleaned squid
5 x tablespoons of general purpose flour
5 x tablespoons of stone-ground yellow cornmeal
4 x cups of extra virgin olive oil or walnut oil
4 x lemon wedges (for serving)
½ x teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper
2 x teaspoons of salt

THE RECIPE

Cut the squid horizontally into 2cm-thick rings. Cut the tentacles in half lengthwise. Pat the squid dry with some paper towels. Mix the flour, cornmeal, salt, and pepper in a shallow bowl. Add the pieces of squid and cover them with the flour mixture. Then remove the squid and shake the excess flour off the pieces. Place them on a wire rack. Set them aside for about 10 minutes to allow the coating to stick well.

Pour the oil into a large saucepan that is at least 2½cm deep. Heat until it reaches 190°C. You can use a deep-frying thermometer to check.

A Taste of Italy

Carefully add $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ of the squid pieces to the oil, without crowding them. Then fry for about $1\frac{1}{2}$ minutes.

Remove immediately with a slotted spoon and then drain off the oil onto paper towels. Let the oil temperature rise back up to 190°C , and repeat with the rest of the squid.

Finally, serve immediately along with the lemon wedges on a bed of salad and a small bowl of tartare sauce.



1.3 SARDINE PAESANE

These are fillets of sardines that have been deep fried in breadcrumbs, served with lemon wedges and garnished with green salad. The very first time I had these, it was at my friend Marco's house – I didn't want to leave – the food was so good !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

12 x filleted sardines
50g x plain flour
2 x eggs (beaten)
100g x dried breadcrumbs
vegetable oil (for deep-frying)
1 x lemon (cut into wedges)
coarsely ground black pepper
sea salt

THE RECIPE

Heat the vegetable oil to 170°C in a deep, heavy-based frying pan. Pat the sardines dry and roll them in the plain flour. Then pat them again to shake off any excess flour. Then dip them in the beaten egg. Finally, roll them in the dried breadcrumbs and deep fry them in batches until they are golden and crispy. This should take from about 3 to 5 minutes. Lastly, serve them on a bed of green salad with the lemon wedges on the side.



1.4 FEGATINI DI POLLO ALLA VENEZIANA

This dish is made of chicken livers fried in peri-peri, lemon and garlic sauce, and is served with hot garlic bread. Mmmm ! I tasted the best offering of this lovely starter at a restaurant called “la Dolce Vita”, and went back time and again over the years.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

400g x free-range organic chicken livers
500g x onions (thinly sliced)
50g x butter
a few sprigs of thyme
1 x tablespoon of flour
185g x polenta (cooking according to packet instructions)
100g x watercress
cracked seasalt
coarsely ground black pepper

THE RECIPE

Cut out any green spots found on the chicken livers. Heat the butter in a frying pan and add the onions, thyme, 2 tablespoons of water and a small pinch of cracked seasalt. Cook very slowly on low heat for half an hour until soft and melting. Scoop the onions out into a sieve placed over a bowl. Return any butter that drips out to the pan. Lightly dust the chicken livers in the flour, seasoning it with salt and pepper. Then increase the heat and cook in the pan until the livers have browned and cooked through, although still pink in the middle. Finally, serve with the polenta and onions, plus a few leaves of watercress. Add some hot garlic bread to complement this lovely dish.

1.5 MELANZANE ALLA PARMIGIANA

This recipe is all about oven-baked aubergines with added cheese and tomatoes. I sometimes make these at home – they are so easy to make and simply taste delicious !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

2 x medium aubergines (sliced about 1cm thick)
2 x fresh garden tomatoes (sliced about ½cm thick)
2 x red peppers (halved longways and seeds removed)
125g x mozzarella cheese (torn into bite-size chunks)
50g x parmesan cheese (finely grated)
3 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
15g x fresh basil (roughly chopped)
2 x garlic cloves (peeled and finely chopped)
1 x jar of Arrabiata sauce

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat the grill to medium high. Grill the red peppers slowly with the cut-side facing down for about 20 minutes, until the skins have been fully blackened. Carefully transfer them to a bowl and cover the bowl tightly with plastic clingfilm. Put this aside for about 10 minutes to allow the steam to loosen the skins.

In the meantime, heat a griddle pan until it is hot and brush the aubergine slices with 2 tablespoons of the extra virgin olive oil. Cook them in batches on low heat for about 5 minutes per side, or until just chargrilled and a little tender. Then set aside.

Pre-heat your oven to 180°C. Remove the red peppers from the bowl, carefully avoiding the hot steam. Peel the skins from the red peppers and discard.

A Taste of Italy

Then, in a separate pan, heat the remaining olive oil and gently fry the garlic for about 3 minutes. Stir in the Arrabbiata sauce with about 150ml of water and add the basil. Bring to the boil. Season well with the salt and pepper and remove from the heat.

Arrange a layer of red peppers, tomatoes and aubergines in a shallow 1½ litre ovenproof dish. Pour some of the sauce over this and sprinkle with a little parmesan cheese. Then repeat the process with the remaining ingredients. Top it up with the mozzarella and a final sprinkling of parmesan cheese.

Bake for half an hour, until bubbling. Serve scattered with fresh basil.



1.6 GAMBERONI ALL' AGLIO

These are prawns fried in garlic, olive oil and chilli sauce. They are delicious when the body is peeled, leaving the flesh exposed to absorb the other flavours. Juices from the head also add to the final taste of the sauce. My best experience of these was at Piccolo's restaurant, which is sadly no longer in existence as the owner has retired.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

2 x dozen large red, fleshy prawns
12 x tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
1 x tablespoon of parsley (coarsely chopped)
4 x garlic cloves (finely chopped)
2 x dried chillies (crumbled)
1 x teaspoon of ginger

THE RECIPE

When peeling the prawns, leave the heads and tails attached. Gently heat the olive oil in a frying pan. First add the chillies. Then immediately after, add the prawns and fry them by turning them over frequently. Do this for about 2 minutes. Then add the garlic, parsley and ginger. Allow the flavours to soak into the prawns. This should only take only a few seconds. Don't let the garlic turn brown. Serve the prawns on warm pre-heated crockery.

1.7 BIANCHETTI DIAVOLA

This recipe is all about a deep fried whitebait that has been dusted with paprika and a garlic mayonnaise. I have had these in London on occasions, and have enjoyed them immensely.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

500g x whitebait
75g x plain flour
1 x teaspoon of paprika
vegetable oil (to deep-fry)
lemon wedges (for serving)
coarsely ground black pepper
finely ground seasalt

THE RECIPE

Pat the whitebait dry with a paper towel. Then place the flour, paprika and a teaspoon of salt in a shallow bowl and set aside. Fill a deep-fryer $\frac{1}{4}$ full with vegetable oil and heat on medium heat to 180°C. Working in 4 batches, toss the whitebait in a mixture of the flour, then drop into the oil and fry for about 5 minutes until golden. Then remove the whitebait with a slotted spoon and drain on a paper towel. Re-heat the oil to 180°C and fry the whitebait in a single batch for a further minute until crisp. Remove with a slotted spoon and drain onto a paper towel. Finally, season with salt and pepper and serve with lemon wedges.

1.8 SALSICCIA TOSCANA CON POMODORO

This is a spicy Tuscan sausage tossed with rocket and red onions in olive oil, garlic and mixed herbs, and is served with toasted focaccia bread.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

4 x spicy Italian sausages
1 x can of plum tomatoes
1 x clove of garlic (finely chopped)
2 x small red onions (sliced into small pieces)
extra virgin olive oil
coarsely ground black pepper
mixed herbs
basil
seasalt

THE RECIPE

Remove the sausages from their casings. Heat the olive oil in a large pan over medium heat. Add in the sausages, breaking each one down into about 4 or 5 pieces, the chopped red onions and the garlic, and cook until they are brown. Then add in the can of plum tomatoes, breaking them up as you stir. Add some mixed herbs and basil. Cover the frying pan and turn down the heat. Let it simmer for between 5 and 10 minutes. Allow to cool down a bit, and then serve with focaccia bread to help soak up all the juice at the bottom of the bowl.

1.9 PORTOBELLO AL FORNO

This has portobello mushrooms topped with spinach and ricotta cheese, sprinkled with chunky ciabatta croutons and seasoned with thyme and oregano and baked until golden. Any good Italian restaurant should be able to prepare these for you.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

75g x good crumbly ricotta cheese
1 x fresh red chilli (de-seeded and finely chopped)
2 x tablespoons fresh oregano (finely chopped)
1 x small handful freshly grated parmesan cheese
4 x hand-sized portobello mushrooms (brushed clean)
extra virgin olive oil
a handful of rocket
a zest of lemon
freshly ground black pepper
some sea salt

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 220°C. Put the ricotta cheese into a bowl with the lemon zest, chopped red chilli and a little salt and pepper. Beat all together with a wooden spoon, then add in the chopped oregano and the parmesan. Carefully remove the stalks from the mushrooms and discard them. Then toss the remaining mushroom caps into a little olive oil, adding salt and pepper. Lay them upside down on a baking tray so that they can be filled with small doses of the ricotta mixture. Carefully spoon in the filling, sprinkling a little parmesan cheese, a sprinkling of thyme and chopped spinach over the top and bake in the pre-heated oven until golden. This should take about 15 minutes. Serve on a big plate, sprinkled with some dressed rocket leaves and ciabatta croutons.

1.10 ARANCINI SICILIANO

This starter is a delicious Sicilian speciality made with spinach, goat's cheese and mushrooms. The risotto balls have a golden crust and are served with a spicy tomato dip.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1 x cup arborio rice
3 x large eggs
¼ x cup grated pecorino cheese
¼ x cup diced mozzarella cheese
½ x cup diced Prosciutto
3 x tablespoons fresh parsley (finely minced)
2 x cups fresh bread crumbs (toasted)
¼ x cup of home-made tomato sauce
peanut oil (for deep-frying)
salt and black pepper

THE RECIPE

Bring 2½ cups of water to the boil in a saucepan. Add the rice and cook for 15 minutes, after which it should still be quite firm. Drain and transfer to a bowl.

Slightly beat one of the eggs and add to the rice. Then add the grated cheese, parsley, 2 tablespoons of the tomato sauce, and finally add the salt and pepper. Mix all of this very well. Chill the mixture in the refrigerator for about 15 minutes.

Mix the mozzarella cheese, Prosciutto, and the remaining 2 tablespoons of tomato sauce in another mixing bowl. With floured hands, divide the rice mixture into about 8 portions and roll each portion into a ball the size of a plum.

A Taste of Italy

Using a finger, poke a hole into the center of each ball and insert about 1½ tablespoons of the mozzarella mixture. Reshape the balls and smooth them by closing up the filling.

Beat the remaining 2 eggs in a shallow dish. Spread the bread crumbs on a plate. Dip the balls into the eggs, turning them to coat them well. Then roll the balls in the bread crumbs to coat them evenly. Let them dry on a plate for about 45 minutes.

Using a deep fryer or deep heavy pan, heat the peanut oil to 190°C. Fry the balls until they are golden brown on all sides. Drain them on brown paper and serve immediately, with lemon wedges and a spicy tomato dip.



2 SALADS

If you're having guests around and you're cooking an Italian meal, then you've got to have a great Italian salad to complement the meal. Here is a list of my top 10 favourites.

- 2.1 INSALATE DI MARE
- 2.2 INSALATA CAPRESE
- 2.3 INSALATA RUSTICA
- 2.4 INSALATA VERDE
- 2.5 INSALATA MISTA
- 2.6 INSALATA DI RINFORZO
- 2.7 INSALATA DI RISO
- 2.8 INSALATA DI POLPO
- 2.9 INSALATA DI PATATE
- 2.10 INSALATA PANZANELLA



2.1 INSALATA DI MARE

This is a delicious seafood salad, best enjoyed in the summer.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1 x octopus (fresh and cleaned, with tentacles)
330g x squid (cleaned, with tentacles)
450g x medium prawns
80 x ml white wine
2 x chopped celery stalks
50ml x lemon oil
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
1 x tablespoon of parsley and garlic flakes

THE RECIPE

Tenderise the octopus by beating it with a mallet, and rinse it very well under cold running water. Using a clean sponge, remove any excess saltiness. Bring a large pan of water to the boil and add the octopus, but don't season it, or it will toughen up. Cover with a lid, turn down the heat and let it simmer gently for about 20 to 30 minutes, or until tender. While the octopus is cooking, bring another pan of water to the boil. Drop in the squid bodies and tentacles. Simmer for about 10 minutes. Remove with a slotted spoon and drop the prawns into the same water for about 2 minutes until they have changed colour and are just about cooked. Peel all of the prawns. Finally, add the chopped celery to the other ingredients in a pre-heated wok and drizzle with the lemon oil, white wine and tablespoon of parsley and garlic flakes. Allow to simmer for about 5 minutes and then sprinkle with salt and pepper and serve on a bed of lettuce leaves.

2.2 INSALATA CAPRESE

The Caprese salad is a simple salad, made of sliced fresh mozzarella, tomatoes and basil, seasoned with salt, and olive oil. This salad was designed to echo the colours of the Italian flag, namely red, white, and green. It is a gloriously simple salad invented in Campania. You've got to ensure, though, that the ingredients are perfectly fresh.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

15g x pitted black olives
1 x tablespoon of salted capers
1kg of ripe tomatoes (sliced, seeded, and well drained)
½kg of fresh, diced mozzarella cheese
10 x fresh hand-shredded basil leaves
¼ x cup of extra virgin olive oil
salt and pepper
a slight pinch of oregano

THE RECIPE

Slice the tomatoes into circles and lay them out on about 6 plates. Slice the mozzarella into circles as well, and lay them out over the tomatoes. Then season them with the olive oil, basil, oregano, and then add a little salt and pepper. The traditional recipe does not call for olives and capers, but they are a welcome addition to round off the salad. Finally, slice the olives and add them on top. Voila ! Done !

2.3 INSALATA RUSTICA

This is a wonderful salad for cool weather. It's got an interesting assortment of ingredients and flavours that blend perfectly together. What is really intriguing is the roasting of the grapes, and will surely get you excited about trying out this recipe.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1 x bunch of red grapes
1 x cup of extra virgin olive oil
30g x Prosciutto (sliced ¼cm thick and diced)
30g x pecorino cheese (sliced ¼cm thick, cut into wedges)
30g x gorgonzola cheese
2 x thinly sliced pears
10 x cups of loosely packed salad greens
½ x cup of dried cherries (re-hydrated in warm water)
3 x teaspoons of balsamic vinegar
2 x tablespoons of acacia flower honey
¼ x cup toasted pine nuts
1 x juiced lemon
salt and pepper

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 180°C. Remove the grapes from the stems and toss them with a little extra virgin olive oil. Then roast them until they are softened. This normally takes about 10 to 15 minutes. Using a medium pan over a medium heat, saute the Prosciutto until it is crisp. Then move it to a paper-towel-lined plate so that you can drain off the fat.

Around the rim of each of 6 plates, make three equally distant stacks of pecorino cheese on the bottom, sliced pears in the

A Taste of Italy

middle and pine nuts and honey on the top. In between the cheese and pear stacks, place three small pieces of the gorgonzola cheese. Using a large mixing bowl, combine the greens, roasted grapes, cherries, olive oil, balsamic vinegar and lemon juice. Add salt and pepper to improve the taste. Mix this until it is evenly balanced. Then evenly distribute the dressed greens and place them in a mound in the center of each plate. Finally garnish this with some crispy Prosciutto and you are ready to serve.



2.4 INSALATA VERDE

This is a most traditional Italian salad, bringing together all the greens of winter. Vary the lettuces according to what is available. This salad can go with just about anything !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

175g x baby spinach
1 x small white onion (thinly sliced)
1 x pear (julienned)
100g x gorgonzola cheese (crumbled)
1 x small handful of walnuts
¼ x cup of extra virgin olive oil
1 x tablespoon of red wine vinegar
2 x teaspoons of honey
cracked seasalt
freshly ground black pepper

THE RECIPE

Wash the spinach, dry it quickly, and place in a large bowl. For the vinaigrette, whisk together the olive oil, the vinegar and the honey in a small bowl. Do this until the vinaigrette starts to thicken. This normally takes about 2 minutes. Add the onion and the pear to the spinach and gently toss it. Add the vinaigrette and toss it to combine. Divide the final solution among 4 plates and finish off by adding walnuts and the gorgonzola cheese. Last of all, season with seasalt and freshly ground black pepper. Ready to serve !

2.5 INSALATA MISTA

This is what is commonly known as a mixed salad of different kinds of greens with the addition of carrots. This gives it a different flavour and colour.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1/3 x cup of lightly packed fresh basil leaves
1/3 x cup of white wine vinegar or fresh lemon juice
1/2 x cup of seasoning
1/2 x cup of extra virgin olive oil
4 x cups of arugula
4 x cups of bite-size pieces of radicchio
1 x carrot (peeled)
1 x hothouse cucumber (peeled)
1/2 x teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 x teaspoon of salt

THE RECIPE

Blend the basil, the vinegar, 1 teaspoon of salt, and 1/2 a teaspoon of pepper in a blender. Gradually blend in the oil with the machine running. Place the arugula and the radicchio into a wide shallow bowl. Using a vegetable peeler, shave the carrot over the salad. Then shave the cucumber into a medium bowl. Pat the cucumber shavings with paper towels to absorb the moisture. Then add the cucumbers to the salad. Please note that the vinaigrette and salad can be prepared a day ahead. Cover separately and refrigerate. Whisk the dressing to blend before using. Toss the salad with enough dressing to coat. Season the salad with salt and pepper, and finally serve.

2.6 INSALATA DI RINFORZO

This salad originates from Naples and can best be described as “reinvigorating”. There are numerous versions of this salad available, but this is the one I like best. This salad is known as a ‘reinforcing salad’, and if you enjoy the taste of pickled vegetables, then this salad will definitely be up your street !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1 x head of cauliflower (cut into florets)
2 x large carrots (peeled and cut into large slices)
1 x jar of peperoncini
2 x stalks of celery
1 x jar of roasted bell peppers
½ x cup of pitted black olives
½ x cup of pitted green olives
¼ x cup of fresh parsley
1 x bulb of fennel (chopped)
2 x tablespoons of capers
½ x cup of red wine vinegar
½ x cup of extra virgin olive oil
salt and pepper (to add taste)

THE RECIPE

Fill a large pot with water and sprinkle in a good pinch of salt, bringing it to the boil. Add the cauliflower florets, carrots, celery, fennel and cook them until they are tender (but still crisp). This should take about 8 minutes. Then remove them from the boiling water and plunge them into ice water. After a short while, remove them from the ice water and place them in a large bowl. Add the remaining ingredients and toss them well together. Then cover them and place it in the fridge for a couple of hours. However, remove it one hour before serving.

2.7 INSALATA DI RISO

This is a classic, rich Italian rice salad. It is a summer dish, and depending on whom you speak to, can vary much from person to person. Please feel free to change it if you wish.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1½ x cups of parboiled rice
200g of canned tuna (drained and shredded)
4 x canned sardines (de-boned and shredded)
100g of fontina or Swiss cheese (diced)
¼ x cup of pitted, sliced black olives
1 x pickled bell pepper (diced)
2 x ripe, peeled, seeded tomatoes (diced)
¼ x cup of mushrooms in oil (diced)
2 x tablespoons of cooked peas
¼ x cup of pickled button onions
2 x hard-boiled eggs (quartered)
1 x tablespoon of rinsed pickled capers
2 x pickled artichoke hearts (sliced)
1 x tablespoon of shredded parsley
¼ x cup of extra virgin olive oil
1 x tablespoon of lemon juice
salt and pepper (to add some flavour)

THE RECIPE

Cook the rice in lots of slightly salted boiling water and add a little extra virgin olive oil. Then rinse it with cold water and let it drain for a while. In the meantime, assemble the remaining ingredients. Once the rice has cooled down, combine everything in a bowl and place the salad in the refrigerator so that it can chill for a while. After about half an hour it is ready to serve.

2.8 INSALATA DI POLPO

This is a classic, refreshing and healthy Venetian octopus salad.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

3 x sliced celery stalks
1 x small onion
3 x peppercorns
2 x medium-sized fresh octopuses
1 x bunch finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
2 x cloves of garlic (minced)
some lemon juice
extra virgin olive oil
some balsamic vinegar
fine sea salt and coarsely ground black pepper

THE RECIPE

Using a large pot, bring about 2½ litres of water to the boil. While it is boiling, add a small onion, a faint drizzle of balsamic vinegar, some salt and a few whole peppercorns. Depending on the portion sizes, you may need 2 octopuses. First dip the head of the octopus in the water, so that the tentacles become crispy. Then plunge it into the boiling water for about 40 minutes. Then turn off the flame and leave it in the pot so that it soaks in its water for a couple of hours. Then add some cold water to the pot. Remove the octopus(es), and let them cool down and dry for about 5 minutes. Cut them into small pieces and mix into a bowl with quite a lot of celery that has been cut into thin slices. Add plenty of finely chopped parsley and garlic, extra-virgin olive oil, salt and pepper, and a plenty of lemon juice. It is now ready for serving.

2.9 INSALATA DI PATATE

This is a tasty Sicilian potato salad, an ideal accompaniment to any meat or fish dish.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1kg x potatoes
2 x cucumbers (chopped)
¼ x cup of capers (drained)
½ x cup of pitted black olives (halved)
1 x teaspoon of thyme leaves
1 x teaspoon of oregano
½ x cup of extra virgin olive oil
1 x pickled onion
1 x large red onion (chopped)
½ x cup of white wine vinegar
1 x teaspoon of castor sugar

THE RECIPE

Place the potatoes into a large saucepan. Add 2 teaspoons of salt. Then cover them with cold water and bring to the boil. Reduce the heat to low and cook for about 30 minutes. Then drain off the water. When it is cool enough to handle, peel the potatoes and chop them into small pieces. Then set them aside. In the meantime, combine all the other ingredients with 2 teaspoons of salt and add about 125ml water in a bowl. This is to make the pickled onion. Cover this and set aside for 30 minutes until the onion is slightly softened. Then drain and discard the water. Combine the cooked potatoes, cucumbers, capers, olives, herbs and pickled onion into a large bowl. Whisk some vinegar and olive oil in a small bowl. Add this to the potato mixture and toss to combine. Season gradually with salt and pepper. You are now ready to serve.

2.10 INSALATA PANZANELLA

This is a simple, delicious salad that's bursting with flavours from the Mediterranean. It has tomatoes tossed with olives, fresh mozzarella, basil and croutons in an olive oil and balsamic vinegar dressing. It's the perfect summer salad that can be enjoyed any time of the week.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

275g x day old ciabatta bread (torn into bite-size pieces)
75ml x olive oil
3 x cloves of garlic (finely chopped)
4 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
2 x tablespoons of balsamic vinegar
4 x medium ripe tomatoes (cut into wedges)
125g x sliced red onion
10 x basil leaves (finely sliced)
85g x pitted and halved green olives
110g x fresh mozzarella cheese (cut into bite-size pieces)
salt and pepper (to add taste)

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 200°C. Using a large bowl, toss the bread with 75ml of olive oil, salt, pepper and garlic. Lay the bread down on a baking tray and toast in the pre-heated oven until it is golden in colour. This should take about between 5 and 10 minutes. Then allow this to cool slightly. While the bread is in the oven, whisk together 4 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar. Gently toss the bread, tomatoes, onion, basil, olives and mozzarella cheese together. Then toss with the vinaigrette and let it stand for 20 minutes before serving.

3 SIDE ORDERS

A great Italian meal cannot do without a healthy dose of side orders, or contorni, as it is known in Italian. Whether you're eating in a restaurant or cooking up a storm yourself, a good side order or two is necessary to complement your pleasure and enjoyment of the main course(s).

- 3.1 PANE ALL'AGLIO (GARLIC BREAD)
- 3.2 FOCACCIA AL POMODORO (TOMATO FOCACCIA BREAD)
- 3.3 FUNGHI RIPIENI (STUFFED MUSHROOMS)
- 3.4 MINI POLPETTE (MINI MEATBALLS)
- 3.5 ZUCCHINI FRITTERS
- 3.6 ASPARAGI FRITTI (FRIED ASPARAGUS)
- 3.7 PISELLI ITALIANI (ITALIAN PEAS)
- 3.8 PATATINE FRITTE (FRENCH FRIES)
- 3.9 CAVATELLI AND BROCCOLI
- 3.10 PURÈ DI PATATE AGLIO ARROSTO (ROASTED GARLIC MASH POTATOES)



3.1 PANE ALL 'AGLIO

The basic concept here is that of an open loaf of Italian bread, fresh or old, brushed with olive oil and lots of chopped garlic, sprinkled with dry oregano, and grilled or baked. I would go so far as to suggest that this should accompany every Italian meal.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

30cm x loaf of Italian bread (without seeds)
3 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
3 x garlic cloves (crushed and peeled)
1 x teaspoon of dry oregano
cracked seasalt (for seasoning)

THE RECIPE

Using a small bowl, combine the olive oil and the garlic and let the flavors mingle for about half an hour. Pre-heat your oven to 200°C. Split the bread in half lengthwise. Cut each half in half again, so that you have 4 pieces. Set these pieces with the cut-side facing up, onto a sheet pan. Now brush the bread with the flavoured olive oil, rub with the garlic cloves, and leave the garlic pieces on the bread after rubbing. Sprinkle this with the dried oregano. Finally, bake until the bread is golden and crispy, which should take about 5 minutes. Last of all, remove any large garlic pieces and lightly season the bread with the seasalt before serving.

3.2 FOCACCIA AL POMODORO

When I was just a kid, I remember going to play at the home of one of my Italian buddies, Marco. His mother had made us some focaccia with cherry tomatoes to snack on. What a treat ! This recipe is a basic one with cherry tomatoes and a hint of oregano. It is an original recipe from Liguria, the region where the best focaccia was made !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

320g x plain flour
½ x teaspoon of honey
200g x lukewarm water
20g x extra virgin olive oil (for the dough)
20g x extra virgin olive oil (for the cookie sheets and focaccia)
6g x dry yeast (dissolved in a tablespoon of warm water)
cherry tomatoes (halved and dressed with a pinch of salt, a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil and ½ a tablespoon of oregano)
7g x salt

THE RECIPE

Put the water, oil, salt, honey in a mixer with a dough hook. Add half the flour. Knead the dough until all the ingredients are well mixed. Dissolve the yeast in the water. Add it to the mixture. Add the remaining flour, little by little, and knead for 15 minutes. When ready, transfer the dough onto a work surface that has been sprinkled with flour. Cover it with a tea towel. The dough has to be soft and sticky. Let it rest for about 15 minutes. Then fold it over onto itself and slightly flatten it. Do this twice. Cover again and let it rest for 15 more minutes. Put about 4 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil onto the cookie sheets. Divide the dough into two and place it on the cookie sheets. Turn the dough over so that it gets coated in olive oil on all sides. This is to prevent a crust from forming

A Taste of Italy

on the surface, and this will make it easier to flatten later. Let it rise for an hour. After it has risen, take the focaccia out and flatten with your hands. Push the dough down and don't stretch it. Add 3 pinches of salt onto the surface of each focaccia. Put them back in the oven to rise for 30 minutes more. Then take them out and pour 3 tablespoons of lukewarm water and 3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil over the top. Spread the mixture by massaging it with your hands. Make the characteristic holes by pressing down hard with your fingertips. Quickly add the dressed halved cherry tomatoes and press them gently onto the dough. Then put the focaccia back into the oven and let it rise for an hour more. Bake in a pre-heated oven at about 210°C for about 15 minutes. When ready, place on a wire rack to cool down and then brush immediately with some extra virgin olive oil. Cut into pieces and enjoy !



3.3 FUNGHI RIPIENI

Gathering mushrooms in Italy is, in some cases, a covert and secret operation ! Those who know the best spots generally keep the details secretly to themselves. The most common type of mushroom is the porcini mushroom which can, with just a slight touch of seasoning, highlight their woody flavour. When porcini mushrooms are dried, their flavour intensifies and they can be kept stored for long periods. Another alternative to porcini mushrooms is portobello or cremini mushrooms. However, using dried porcini mushrooms as part of the stuffing helps authenticate the real recipe !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

2 x very large mushrooms or 4 slightly smaller ones
3 x tablespoons of ricotta cheese
1 x tablespoon of gorgonzola cheese (softened)
2 x tablespoons of finely grated parmesan cheese
2 x tablespoons of soft white breadcrumbs
1 x tablespoon of flat leaf parsley (chopped)
3 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
fine sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 180°C. Wipe the mushrooms clean. Cut off the stalks. Chop the stalks into very small pieces and place into a bowl. Add the ricotta, gorgonzola, and half the parmesan cheese, breadcrumbs and parsley. Place the mushrooms skin side down. Fill the mushroom caps with the ricotta mixture. Grease a shallow ovenproof dish with a tablespoon of olive oil. Place the mushrooms in this dish and drizzle with the rest of the olive oil. Bake the stuffed mushrooms for 25 minutes until golden-brown. Serve warm !

3.4 MINI POLPETTE

These mini meatballs are originally from Venice. It is best to make up the meat mixture about an hour before you need it. Keep it covered in the refrigerator until you need it. These homemade meatballs are generally made from any combination of ground meat including chicken, beef, turkey, pork, veal or lamb and really depends on the flavour you want. Chicken and turkey are lower fat choices but should always be used in conjunction with ground beef.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

½kg x ground meat
3 x eggs
½ x cup of grated parmesan cheese
2 x tablespoons of flour
1 x portion of breadcrumbs
1 x sprig of chopped parsley
extra virgin olive oil
salt and pepper (to add taste)

THE RECIPE

Put the ground meat in a bowl with the whole eggs, grated cheese, flour, chopped parsley, a pinch of salt and freshly ground pepper, and a handful of breadcrumbs. Mix thoroughly until all the ingredients are well blended. The mixture should be smooth and firm enough to shape small meatballs. Add some breadcrumbs if the mixture is too moist. Cover the bowl and leave in the refrigerator for at least one hour to blend the flavours. Pour some breadcrumbs on a plate. Make bite-sized meatballs from this mixture. Roll them in the breadcrumbs and then fry in the hot oil. Turn them and fry for 5 minutes until the outside is golden and crispy. Serve piping hot.

3.5 ZUCCHINI FRITTERS

These fritters are similar to potato latkes, and are such a delicious meal.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

Soy Dipping Sauce

3 x tablespoons of unseasoned rice vinegar
1 x tablespoon of reduced-sodium soy sauce
1½ x teaspoons of sugar
1 x teaspoon of crushed red pepper flakes

Fritters

3 x medium-sized zucchini (grated)
1 x large egg
¼ x cup of all-purpose flour
3 x tablespoons of finely chopped fresh chives
1 x tablespoon of cornstarch
⅓ x cup of vegetable oil
freshly ground black pepper
½ x teaspoon of salt (plus a bit extra for seasoning)

THE RECIPE

Soy Dipping Sauce - Mix vinegar, soy sauce, sugar, and a pinch of red pepper flakes in a small bowl until the sugar is dissolved. Then set this aside.

Fritters - Place the zucchini in a colander set in the sink and toss with ½ teaspoon of salt. Let it stand for 10 minutes. Then wring the zucchini dry in a clean kitchen towel. Place the zucchini in a large bowl and gently mix in egg, flour, chives, and cornstarch. Season with salt and pepper.

A Taste of Italy

Heat the oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Working in 2 batches, drop $\frac{1}{4}$ cups of zucchini mixture into the skillet, flattening slightly. Then cook until golden and crisp, which normally takes about 3 minutes per side. Transfer the fritters to a plate that is lined with a paper towel. Finally add salt for seasoning and serve with the soy dipping sauce.



3.6 ASPARAGI FRITTI

These asparagus fritters are really filling, and, if there are any leftovers, they are perfect for lunch or breakfast the next day. They are also great if you're watching your carbohydrate intake, and are cheap to make.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

12 x large eggs (shelled and whisked)
½ x cup of milk
¼ x cup of parmesan cheese (grated)
2 x tablespoons of butter
2 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
1 x medium onion (diced)
250g x thin pencil asparagus (blanched, chilled and diced)
¼ x cup of assorted fresh chopped herbs (thyme, chives, etc.)
salt and pepper

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 160°C. Using a large bowl, combine the beaten eggs with the milk and parmesan cheese. Heat the butter and oil in a large saute pan. Do this until the butter is frothy. Add the onion and cook until it is translucent and golden. Be careful not to burn this. Using a large wooden spatula, stir in the eggs and turn the heat down very low. Stir the eggs so that a large flat omelette shape is formed, fully covering the bottom of the pan. When the eggs begin to cook and are taking shape, stir in the diced asparagus and the herbs. Place the whole saute pan into the oven and continue to cook for about 2 minutes more, until the fritters are cooked around the edges and the center has puffed up. Remove immediately from the oven. Invert the fritters onto a large platter and serve immediately.

3.7 PISELLI ITALIANI

This is a simple recipe and can be added as a side order to just about any Italian primo or secondi dish ! You'll never look at peas in the same way again !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

450g of frozen green peas
2 x cloves of garlic (minced)
1 x onion (chopped)
2 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
1 x tablespoon of chicken stock
salt and pepper (to add some taste)

THE RECIPE

Heat the olive oil in a skillet over a medium heat. Stir in the onion and garlic. Cook this for about 5 minutes. Then add the frozen peas, and stir in the chicken stock. Season with salt and pepper. Finally, cover and cook until the peas are tender. This should take about 10 minutes, and are then ready for serving !



3.8 PATATINE FRITTE

Despite the name, this is the Italian version of French Fries, and once again, despite the name French Fries, the recipe actually originated in Belgium. However, semantics aside, these are a very popular accompaniment to any Italian meal, especially meat and fish dishes !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

Salt (optional)

4 x potatoes
½ x teaspoon of paprika
1 x teaspoon of chilli powder
¼ x teaspoon of garlic powder
¼ x teaspoon of cumin powder
¼ x teaspoon of turmeric powder
1 x tablespoon of tomato paste
vegetable cooking oil (for frying)
salt and pepper (for adding taste)

THE RECIPE

Wash, dry, and peel the potatoes to remove any dirt or grime. Then fill a dry pan to about ⅓ full with some vegetable oil. Set the stove on medium to high heat. If your stove has gas mark number settings, then set it to 8. Using a sharp, clean knife, chop the potatoes carefully. You can slice the potatoes to be as thin as you want. Please ensure that they are all about the same size. Also, make sure that the vegetable oil is hot before you put the potatoes in. You can do a pre-test of how hot the oil is by putting a single potato fry in there. If it starts cooking immediately, and quickly, the oil is ready. Cook the potato slices in the oil until they are absolutely golden brown. Don't burn them because they won't taste very nice. Cool the cooked

A Taste of Italy

fries when they are ready. Add a little salt while still hot, so that the flavour is kept in. Then set them on your work surface, or an area with room temperature to cool them down. Don't eat the fries when they're still hot because you'll burn your tongue. You can add ketchup, mayonnaise, BBQ sauce, or any other appropriate sauce, but best to hold off the sauces if the fries are a side order to your main meal. Then serve.



3.9 CAVATELLI AND BROCCOLI

This is quick and easy to make. The recipe seems to have come from either Naples or Bari.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

3 x heads of fresh broccoli (cut into florets)
700g x cavatelli pasta
½ x cup of extra virgin olive oil
3 x garlic cloves (minced)
1 x teaspoon of crushed red pepper flakes
2 x tablespoons of grated parmesan cheese
1 x teaspoon of salt

THE RECIPE

Blanch the broccoli for about 5 minutes in a large pot of boiling water. Then drain and set aside. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Saute the garlic until it is lightly golden. Be careful not to burn it. Add the broccoli. Saute, stirring occasionally, for 10 minutes. The broccoli should be tender yet crisp. In the meanwhile, cook the cavatelli in a large pot of boiling salted water for about 8 to 10 minutes. Then drain and place in a large serving bowl. Toss this with the broccoli, and season with salt and hot pepper flakes. Serve with parmesan cheese.

3.10 PURE DI PATATE AGLIO ARROSTO

This is roasted garlic mash potatoes and is absolutely delicious as a side order ! I would seriously recommend them as an addition to any meat dish.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1kg x of baby white potatoes
1 x tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil
1 x head of garlic
2 x tablespoons of milk
2 x tablespoons of butter
salt and freshly ground black pepper

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 200°C. Slice ½cm off the top of the head of garlic. Place it with the cut-side up onto a square of tinfoil. Drizzle this with 1 tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil and wrap the foil around the garlic to enclose it. Transfer this bundle to the oven and roast it until it is golden brown and tender. This should take about 45 minutes. When the garlic is ready, place the potatoes into a medium size pot and cover them with some cold water. Bring this up to a bubble and gently boil the potatoes until they are tender, which should take about 15 minutes. When the potatoes have been cooked, drain them very well and return them to the pot they were cooked in. Then squeeze the roasted cloves of garlic into the pot and add the milk, butter and some salt and pepper. Mash the potatoes up as you like them and serve.

4 PIZZAS

You cannot eat Italian food for any length of time without coming across their world famous pizzas. The modern pizza was invented in Naples. Italian pizza is generally lean, but when you add the cheese, its fat level rises proportionally. There are so many different kinds of pizza made around the world, but I have stuck to proper Italian pizzas, that are traditionally made in Italy. Authentic Italian pizza is baked in a wood-fired or coal-fired stone oven. Just about every country has a pizza shop in some shape or form. That just goes to show you how popular this form of food is ! There are so many different variations, but here is a list of my top 10 favourite authentic Italian pizzas – not in any particular order. All the recipes assume that you already have the pizza dough previously prepared and made.

- 4.1 NAPOLETANA
- 4.2 FIORENTINA
- 4.3 RUSTICA
- 4.4 TOSCANA
- 4.5 VENEZIANA
- 4.6 SICILIANA
- 4.7 MARINARA
- 4.8 VESUVIO
- 4.9 TREVISO
- 4.10 CALABRESE



THE BASIC PIZZA DOUGH RECIPE

INGREDIENTS

1 x pack of active dry yeast
1 x cup of warm water (43°C)
a pinch of sugar
1½ x teaspoons of salt
2 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
3 x cups of all-purpose flour (plus more, if required)
corn meal, as necessary (for dusting the pizza peel)

RECIPE

Using a large bowl combine yeast with water and sugar and stir well to combine. Set this aside until it is foamy, which should take about 5 minutes. Add the salt, olive oil, and half of the flour and mix well to properly combine. Add all the remaining flour except ½ cup and mix well using your hands, to incrementally add the flour little by little. The dough should now be slightly sticky to the touch. Transfer the dough to a lightly-floured work surface and knead the dough for between 5 and 7 minutes, adding enough additional flour as necessary to form a smooth and elastic texture that is not sticky. Transfer the dough to a lightly-oiled quart bowl and turn to coat with olive oil. Cover with a damp towel and let it rise in a warm place until it has doubled in size. This should usually take about an hour.

Pre-heat your oven to 260°C, and if you do have a pizza stone, place it on the bottom rack of the oven.

Divide the dough into 2 portions for 2 x 12 to 14-inch pizzas and form into balls. Place the dough on a lightly-oiled baking sheet and cover with a damp towel. Let this rest for 15 minutes, and then transfer to a lightly-floured surface. Shape as desired and roll out to a thickness of ⅛ inch. Transfer the

A Taste of Italy

dough to a pizza peel. Sprinkle with cornmeal to help facilitate moving the dough and top up with the toppings of your choice. Transfer to the preheated pizza stone and bake until crispy and golden brown, which should usually take from about 12 to 18 minutes, depending on the toppings and the thickness of the crust. Remove from the oven with a metal peel or spatula and serve immediately.



4.1 PIZZA NAPOLETANA

Authentic Neapolitan pizzas are made with tomatoes and mozzarella cheese. A genuine Neapolitan pizza dough consists of wheat flour, natural Neapolitan yeast, salt and water. When cooked, a Neapolitan pizza should be crispy, tender and fragrant – what a treat !

SERVES 1

INGREDIENTS

2 x cups of chopped fresh tomatoes
1 x basic pizza dough (rolled out for 2 x 14-inch pizzas)
cornmeal (for dusting the pizza peels)
450g of mozzarella cheese (diced)
3 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
3 x tablespoons of fresh oregano leaves
3 x tablespoons of fresh basil leaves
salt and freshly ground black pepper

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 260°C. Place a pizza stone on the bottom rack of the oven. Season the tomatoes with salt and pepper and place them in a strainer or colander set over a bowl to allow them to drain. Leave until the tomatoes have released some of their liquid (about 15 minutes). Place the rolled out pizza dough onto 2 pizza peels, using cornmeal, as necessary, to help facilitate moving the dough. Sprinkle the tomatoes evenly over both rounds of dough. Scatter the diced cheese. Drizzle each pizza with 1½ tablespoons of olive oil. Bake the pizza for 12 minutes until the dough is golden brown around the edges and the tomatoes are lightly caramelized. Remove from the oven and sprinkle with oregano and basil. Bake for an additional 3 minutes until the pizza is crisp and golden brown. Sprinkle with salt before serving immediately.

4.2 PIZZA FIORENTINA

I've made this pizza a few times, and it is one of my favourites. As the name implies, it originates from Florence. The major highlights of it are the spinach and the egg.

SERVES 1

INGREDIENTS

100g x chopped spinach
100g x mozzarella cheese
200g x tinned and chopped tomatoes
herbs - chives and basil
1 x garlic clove
2 x eggs
½ x teaspoon of black pepper
red peppers, mushrooms, onions, black olives (all chopped)

THE RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 250°C. Have a pizza base ready. Chop up the herbs and garlic. Heat them with tomatoes in a saucepan for a few minutes. Then take it off the heat and mix in the spinach. Put the tomato, spinach, garlic and herb mixture on top, so that it covers the dough except the very edges. Add the chopped red peppers, mushrooms, onions and olives. Tear up the mozzarella and spread the pieces over this. Put the pizza in the oven for 4 minutes. Then take the pizza out, crack two eggs on top of the pizza and sprinkle it with black pepper. Turn them around so that the opposite sides are at the front of the oven. Cook for about another 4 minutes until the base is crisp and the eggs are ready. Ready to eat !

4.3 PIZZA RUSTICA

This is another one of those famous pizzas that originated from Naples. It is also known as a savoury pie, and is delicious when served warm or at room temperature !

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

900g x Swiss chard
2 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
4 x large eggs (lightly beaten)
500g x ricotta cheese
4 x large red bell peppers (roasted and chopped)
2 x garlic cloves (minced and mashed to a paste)
2 x pizza bases
110g x parmesan cheese (finely grated)
220g x thinly sliced prosciutto (chopped)
180g x Provolone cheese (cut into ¼ inches and diced)
egg wash (1 large egg beaten with 2 tablespoons of milk)

THE RECIPE

To roast the peppers :

Using a long-handled fork, chargrill the peppers over an open flame, or on a rack set over an electric burner, turning them, until their skins are blackened. This process normally takes about 4 to 6 minutes. Alternatively, you can broil the peppers on the rack of a broiler pan under a pre-heated broiler that is about 2 inches away from the heat, turning them every 5 minutes. Do this for about 15 to 20 minutes, or until the skins are blistered and charred. Then transfer the peppers to a bowl and let them stand, covered, until cool enough to handle. Keeping the peppers whole, peel them, starting at the blossom end. Cut off the pepper tops and discard the seeds and the ribs. This whole process should not take more than 45 minutes.

To Make the pizza :

Wash the Swiss chard well, remove the stems and slice thin. Chop the leaves separately. Using a large heavy saucepan, cook the chard stems in olive oil over a moderate low heat, stirring occasionally, until crisp and tender. This should only take about 3 minutes. Add the chard leaves with water clinging to them and cook, covered, over a moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until the stems are tender. Again, this process should take about 8 minutes. Drain the chard well, using a colander, and squeeze out as much moisture as possible. Using a large bowl, combine the eggs and ricotta cheese very well. Combine the well roasted peppers and garlic paste in a bowl.

Pre-heat your oven to 190°C. On a lightly floured surface, roll out two thirds pastry dough $\frac{1}{4}$ cm thick into a round shape about 45cm in diameter. Fit the dough into a 23cm springform pan and trim the edge, leaving a 5cm overhang. Layer evenly half of the chard and half of the ricotta mixture into the shell, adding the roasted pepper mixture, half parmesan, all the prosciutto, the remaining ricotta mixture, remaining chard, and remaining parmesan.

On a lightly floured surface roll out the remaining dough $\frac{1}{4}$ cm thick into a round shape about 28cm in diameter. Brush the edge of the shell in the pan with some egg wash and fit the dough on top of the filling. Trim the top crust evenly with the bottom crust and crimp out the edges together decoratively. Cut four 7.5cm long vents in the top crust and brush the top crust with some remaining egg wash. Bake this *pizza rustica* in the middle of your oven for about 1½ hours, or until the top crust is deep golden, and cool completely in a pan on a rack.

*If you wish, your **pizza rustica** can be made 2 days ahead and chilled in a covered pan. Cut your pizza rustica into wedges and serve at room temperature.*

4.4 PIZZA TOSCANA

This is a famous pizza that originated in Tuscany, and, when made properly, can change the way you think about pizza. This wonderful creation is an exercise in careful restraint to achieve a balance between the ingredients, flavours, and textures. Ensure that your pizza has a thin base. Pre-baking the base makes it easier to handle, if you prefer. A proper pizza stone also helps moderate the heat of the oven, allowing the cooking appliance to perform even better.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

350g x crushed tomatoes
110g x fresh mozzarella cheese
55g x pecorino cheese
3 cloves garlic
3 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
450g x of fresh dough
1 x handful of flour
4 x thin slices of salami
¼ x cup of white button mushrooms
½ x cup of fresh spinach
½ x small white onion
6 x fresh basil leaves
a pinch of salt and pepper

RECIPE

To make the sauce, add extra virgin olive oil to a pan that is at medium heat, for 2 minutes. Add the garlic, chopped onions and cook for 3 minutes before adding the crushed tomatoes, salt and pepper, and chopped basil leaves. Let this cook for 30 minutes at a low heat. Pre-heat your oven to 220°C. While the sauce is cooking slowly, prepare your pizza base(s). Lightly brush the pizza stone with olive oil and place the base(s) on

A Taste of Italy

the pizza stone. Then add the tomato sauce to the base(s) and place in the oven. Chop the fresh mozzarella and spread across the pizza with 2 finely chopped fresh basil leaves. Chop the mushrooms and the fresh spinach and spread across the pizza. Keep a little spinach aside. Then place the salami slices over one another and cut across them in 5 lines to create 20 strips, and spread across the pizza. Sprinkle grated pecorino cheese over the pizza and top it with the left-over spinach. Cook for 20 minutes, until the cheese is slightly browned and the crust is crunchy. Remove the pizza from the oven let it cool for 5 minutes before slicing. You are now ready to serve !



4.5 PIZZA VENEZIANA

This is a very basic pizza that was first made in Venice. There are some restaurants that make a gluten-free version of this famous pizza.

SERVES 8

INGREDIENTS

- 1 x 12-inch pizza crust
- 1 x tablespoon extra virgin olive oil
- 1 x cup of pizza sauce
- 1½ x cups of shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 x can of pineapple chunks (drained)
- ¼ x cup of sliced pepperoni
- 2 x tablespoons of red or green bell pepper slices
- 2 x tablespoons of chopped green onions

RECIPE

Brush the pizza crust with olive oil. Spoon the sauce over the crust and then sprinkle with cheese. Top the pizza with pineapple, pepperoni, the bell peppers and the green onions. Finally, bake at 220°C until the crust is golden brown. This should take from between 18 and 20 minutes. Ready to serve.

4.6 PIZZA SICILIANA

The genuine Pizza Siciliana originated in Palermo, Sicily in the mid 19th century. There are other regional varieties in Sicily, such as the scacciata and sfincione.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

2 x 310g cooked pizza bases
200g x carton passata
2 x garlic cloves (chopped)
250g x mini mozzarella (drained and halved)
285g x artichoke antipasto (drained)
90g x Parma ham
12 x sunblush tomatoes (drained)
16 x basil leaves
2 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil

RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 230°C. Spread half the passata over each pizza base and then sprinkle the garlic bits over this. Next, come the mozzarella and the artichokes. Then top this with the parma ham, the tomatoes and the basil leaves. Finally, season with black pepper and drizzle over with extra virgin olive oil. Bake in the oven for 10 minutes until pale golden. Serve piping hot !

4.7 PIZZA MARINARA

This is another one of those famous pizzas that originated in Naples. It is only one of two types of “pure” pizzas favoured by many Italians today, the other being the “margherita”. This pizza was so named because it was traditionally prepared by "la marinara", the seaman's wife. She used to prepare this pizza for her seafaring husband when he returned from fishing in the Bay of Naples.

SERVES 2

INGREDIENTS

1 x pizza base (thin crust)
400g x cherry tomatoes
250g x marinara seafood mix
125g x grated cheese
1 x tablespoon of extra virgin olive oil
1 x tablespoon of dried sweet basil
1 x tablespoon of sweet chilli sauce
1 x teaspoon of crushed garlic
2 x tablespoons of fresh oregano
3 x anchovies

RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 220°C. Line a pizza pan with baking paper and spray with canola oil. Place the pizza base on the tray and set aside. Then heat the olive oil in a frying pan and add the garlic, anchovies, sweet chili sauce, basil and cherry tomatoes. Bring to the boil and simmer for 12 minutes until the sauce thickens. Remove and allow to cool slightly. Then spread the sauce over the pizza base. Sprinkle with grated cheese. Scatter the marinara mix on top of the cheese. Sprinkle with fresh oregano. Bake in a hot oven for 10 to 12 minutes, until the cheese has melted and the cherry tomatoes have a burnished look on top. Ready to serve ! Buon appetito !

4.8 PIZZA VESUVIO

This is another one of those famous pizzas that originated in from Naples. It is a tribute to Mount Vesuvius, the still-active volcano that dominates the Naples horizon but has never actually harmed the city because of the favourable Mediterranean winds.

SERVES 3 to 4

INGREDIENTS

½ x cup of frozen artichoke hearts (thawed and sliced)
230g x pizza dough (thawed out if frozen)
all-purpose flour (for dusting)
½ x cup of fresh ricotta cheese
225g x fresh mozzarella cheese (cut into 2.5cm cubes)
55g x of thinly sliced baked ham (cut into 2.5cm strips)
55g x salami (cut into 2.5cm strips)
½ x teaspoon of dried oregano
½ x cup of marinara sauce
2 x large mushrooms (porcini or cremini - sliced ½cm thick)
4 x pitted olives (sliced ½cm thick)
extra virgin olive oil
salt and freshly ground pepper

RECIPE

Place a pizza stone in your oven and pre-heat the oven to 260°C. Let the pizza stone heat for 30 minutes. Using a bowl, lightly drizzle the artichoke hearts with olive oil. Season with salt and pepper. Using a floured work surface, roll or stretch the pizza dough out to a 12-inch circular shape, about 0.3cm thick. Roll the edge over half of the pizza ½cm thick. Generously flour a pizza peel. Transfer the dough to the peel and lightly brush with olive oil. Top up the thinner side of the dough with half of the artichokes, mozzarella, ricotta cheese, ham and salami, 7.5cm from the edge. Sprinkle this with half

A Taste of Italy

of the oregano and drizzle with 2 tablespoons of the marinara sauce. Lift the 7.5cm edge of the dough over the filling and press to seal in the centre of the round shape. Spread the remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of marinara sauce over the dough, leaving a 1cm border. Arrange the remaining artichoke hearts, mozzarella cheese, ham and salami over the marinara sauce. Then spoon small dollops of ricotta cheese over the toppings and scatter the mushrooms and olives on top. Sprinkle this with the remaining oregano. Slide the pizza onto the hot stone base and bake for about 8 to 10 minutes, until the pizza is crisp and bubbling. Cut into wedges and serve !



4.9 PIZZA TREVISO

This is a pizza that originated in Treviso in the region of the Veneto.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

440g x pizza base with tomato sauce
2 x teaspoons of extra virgin olive oil
1 x large zucchini (trimmed and thinly sliced)
1 x treviso (trimmed and the leaves shredded)
1 x tablespoon of fresh rosemary leaves
120g x blue cheese (crumbled)
2 x tablespoons of pine nuts

RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 250°C. Place the pizza base on a baking tray. Bake the pizza on the lowest shelf of your oven for 8 minutes or until the base is crisp. During this time, heat the olive oil in a frying pan over high heat. Cook the zucchini, turning it halfway through the cooking, which should be about 2 minutes or until golden. Add the treviso and cook for 1 minute or until wilted. Stir in the rosemary. Spoon the zucchini mixture over the pizza base. Top up with the blue cheese and pine nuts. Then cook on the middle shelf of your oven for a further 7 minutes or until the cheese melts. Ready to serve !

4.10 PIZZA CALABRESE

This pizza originates from Calabria, a region in the south of Italy. This type of pizza normally has a minimal amount of cheese.

SERVES 2

INGREDIENTS

1 pizza crust
½ x cup of pizza sauce
¼ x cup of red onions (thinly sliced)
¾ x cup of salami (julienned)
½ x cup of mozzarella cheese
175g x of arugula leaves
1 x can of whole peeled tomatoes
2 x teaspoons of salt
2 tablespoons of pizza seasoning
salt and pepper

RECIPE

To make your sauce, crush the tomatoes, add salt and pizza seasoning and cook for 5 minutes. Heat your oven grill and pizza stone to 280°C. Place your crust on a pizza peel, and top with cheese, onion and salami. Transfer the pizza to the pizza stone, close the grill, and cook for about 4 to 8 minutes, or until the crust is browned and the cheese bubbles up and is beginning to brown. Remove the pizza from the grill and sprinkle with the arugula leaves. Season sparingly with salt and pepper to add taste. Allow the pizza to stand for 5 minutes before cutting and serving.

5 PASTA

The first reference to pasta dates back to 1154 in Sicily. Pasta is well known as a staple food of Italy. It is typically made from a form of unleavened dough of a durum wheat and flour mixed with water and formed into sheets or various shapes. It is then cooked and served in any variety of dishes. Other types of pasta can be made with flour from cereals or grains, and eggs can be used instead of water. Pastas can generally be categorised into dried pasta (*pasta secca*) and fresh pasta (*pasta fresca*). Most dried pasta is produced by an extrusion process. Fresh pasta was traditionally produced by hand, sometimes with the help of simple machines. Today many varieties of fresh pasta are produced by large industrial machines. There are over 300 different forms of pasta and can be known by over 1300 different names. In Italy the names of the specific types of pasta can often vary by region. Common shapes of pasta are long, short, tubes, flat, sheets, filled or stuffed, and there are also specialty or decorative shapes.

There are generally 3 different categories of pasta dishes in Italian cuisine. **Pasta asciutta** is cooked pasta and is plated and served with a complementary sauce or condiment. **Pasta in brodo** is a pasta in which the pasta is part of a soup dish. **Pasta al forno** is a pasta in which the pasta is incorporated into a dish that is baked.

Some pasta dishes are served as a first course because the portion sizes are small and simple. Pasta can also be prepared in light lunches such as salads. It can also be prepared in large portion sizes for dinner. It is best prepared by hand and served hot or cold.

Pasta sauces vary immensely in taste, colour and texture. There are some rules to observe when choosing which type of pasta and sauce to serve. Simple sauces like pesto are better for long and thin strands of pasta. Tomato sauce combines

A Taste of Italy

well with thicker types of pastas. Thicker sauces are better suited to cling onto the holes and cuts of short, tubular, twisted pastas. The ratio of sauce to pasta varies according to taste and texture. Traditionally the pasta sauce should not be excessive as the pasta itself must still be tasted. Any extra sauce left on the plate afterwards is often mopped up and eaten with a piece of bread.

Here are my ten favourite pasta dishes of all time.

- 5.1 SPAGHETTI CARBONARA
- 5.2 SPAGHETTI ALLA PESCATORA
- 5.3 FETTUCCINE ALFREDO
- 5.4 TAGLIATELLE ALLE SARDE
- 5.5 LINGUINE CON GAMBERONI
- 5.6 LASAGNA AL RAGU
- 5.7 PENNE ALL' AMATRICIANA
- 5.8 PENNE ALLA TORRESE
- 5.9 MACCHERONI AL FORMAGGIO
- 5.10 CANNELLONI DI MANZO



5.1 SPAGHETTI CARBONARA

This is probably my favourite pasta dish of all, and the one that I choose to eat more than any other. My dear friend Filippo makes the best of the best, and I don't try this at any other restaurant as I have eaten the best and am not prepared to try the rest ! Spaghetti Carbonara is first known to have originated in Rome in the middle of the 20th century. The name is derived from *carbonaro*, the Italian word for charcoal burner, and some people believe that the dish was first made as a hearty meal for Italian charcoal workers. It has even been suggested that it was created as a tribute to the Carbonari, the “charcoalmen”, a secret society prominent in the early, repressed stages of the unification of Italy.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

100g x pancetta
50g x pecorino cheese
50g x parmesan cheese
3 x large eggs
350g x spaghetti
2 x large garlic cloves (peeled and kept whole)
50g x unsalted butter
salt and freshly ground black pepper

RECIPE

Boil up a large saucepan of water. Finely chop the pancetta, after having first removed any rind. Finely grate both the pecorino and parmesan cheeses and mix them together. Beat the eggs in a medium bowl. Season them with a little freshly ground black pepper and set everything aside. Add 1 teaspoon of salt to the boiling water. Add the spaghetti and when the water comes back to the boil, cook at a constant simmering temperature, covering the saucepan with a lid. Do this for

A Taste of Italy

about 10 minutes or until it is *al dente* (just cooked). Squash the garlic with a knife blade to bruise it. While the spaghetti is cooking, fry the pancetta along with the garlic. Drop some of the butter into a large wide frying pan and, as soon as the butter has melted, put in the pancetta and the garlic. Leave these to cook on a medium heat for about 5 minutes. Stir often, until the pancetta is golden and crisp. The garlic has now released its flavour. Take it out with a slotted spoon and dispose of. Keep the heat on low under the pancetta. When the pasta is ready, lift it out of the water with tongs and put it in the frying pan with the pancetta. Don't throw away the rest of the pasta water yet. Mix most of the cheese in with the eggs and keep a small handful back for sprinkling over later. Remove the pan of spaghetti and pancetta from the heat. Quickly pour in the eggs and cheese and lift up the spaghetti (using the tongs) so that it combines easily with the egg mixture. Allow this to thicken but not to scramble the eggs. Add several tablespoons of pasta cooking water to keep it saucy. Keep it just moist, not wet. Then season with a little salt, if necessary. Use a pronged fork to twist the pasta onto the serving plate or bowl. Serve immediately with a little sprinkle of the remaining cheese and a grating of the black pepper. If the dish gets a little dry before serving, splash in some more hot pasta water and the sauciness will be restored.



5.2 SPAGHETTI ALLA PESCATORA

This is a traditional peasant dish, especially in fishermen's homes. The translation of the name of the dish is "a fisherman's wife's spaghetti". It is possible to use any combination of seafood that you like. The best spaghetti alla pescatore that I have ever tasted used to be made by Enrico at Villa d' Este.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

225g x spaghetti
½ x cup of extra virgin olive oil
2 x garlic cloves (thinly sliced)
225g x calamari (cut into rings)
8 x small neck clams (cleaned and minced)
8 x mussels (cleaned and minced)
8 x sea scallops
8 x medium shrimps (peeled and de-veined)
1 x cup of crushed palm tomatoes
½ x cup of dry white wine
½ x teaspoon of chopped fresh oregano
a pinch of hot pepper flakes
¼ x cup of chopped flat leaf parsley
sea salt and coarse black pepper (to add taste)

RECIPE

Cook the spaghetti according to directions on the pack and then drain off the excess water. Using a large skillet, heat the olive oil over a medium high heat. Add the garlic and cook until golden, taking about 3 minutes. Add the calamari rings and cook for another 3 minutes or until the calamari rings turn opaque. Add the clams and mussels. Then cook for another minute. Add the tomatoes, the wine, the oregano, and the

A Taste of Italy

pepper flakes. Add some salt and pepper to taste. Cook stirring occasionally until the sauce thickens slightly. Allow the food to simmer and then cook for a further 4 minutes until the clams and the mussels start opening. Then add the shrimps and the scallops. Cook for 2 more minutes. If the sauce is apparently too thick, then add a few tablespoons of the water from the cooked pasta.

Finally, add the drained pasta to the sauce, coating evenly. Arrange the pasta on a platter and spoon the cooked seafood around the rim. Sprinkle with parsley and serve immediately !
Buon appetito !



5.3 FETTUCCHINE ALFREDO

Fettuccine Alfredo is a dish made from fettuccine pasta that has been tossed with parmesan cheese and butter. The cheese emulsifies the liquids as it melts to form a smooth and rich coating on the pasta. Fettuccine with butter and parmesan cheese originated from a 15th century cookbook, written by a northern Italian cook who worked in Rome.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

700g x dry fettuccini pasta
1 x cup of butter
425ml x heavy cream
 $\frac{3}{4}$ x cup of grated Romano cheese
 $\frac{1}{2}$ x cup of grated parmesan cheese
1 x dash of garlic salt
salt and pepper (to add taste)

RECIPE

Bring a large pot of lightly salted water to the boil. Add the fettuccini pasta and cook for about 8 to 10 minutes or until al dente, and then drain. Using a large saucepan, melt the butter into the cream over a low heat. Add some salt, pepper and garlic salt. Stir in the cheese over a medium heat until it has melted. This will thicken the sauce. Add the pasta to the sauce. Use enough of the pasta so that all of the sauce is used and ensure that the pasta is thoroughly coated. Serve immediately !

5.4 TAGLIATELLE ALLE SARDE

Tagliatelle alle sarde is such a simple mid-week meal to prepare. Sardines are full of omega-3 fish oil and calcium, so this is a healthy supper for all of the family. Sardines have quite a strong flavour so you don't need a lot of seasoning. Try stirring the sardines into a jar of pasta sauce to make this even quicker !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

300g x tagliatelle
1 x onion (finely chopped)
2 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
1 x clove of garlic (crushed)
400g x can of chopped tomatoes
a small pinch of dried chilli flakes
75g x black olives
100g x cherry tomatoes (halved)
6 x basil leaves
120g x can sardines in tomato sauce (broken into small pieces)
8 x caper berries (to garnish)
a little grated parmesan cheese

RECIPE

Cook the tagliatelle in a large pan of salted, boiling water for about 10 minutes. During this time, fry the onion in the olive oil for 5 minutes until it is soft. Add the garlic and fry for half a minute. Add the tomatoes and the chilli flakes. Bring to the boil and reduce the heat. Simmer for about 5 minutes. Then add the olives and the cherry tomatoes. Shred half the basil leaves and stir them through with the sardines. Season with salt and fresh ground pepper. Drain the tagliatelle and mix with the sauce and top with the remaining basil leaves and the caper berries. Finally, serve with the grated parmesan cheese.

5.5 LINGUINE CON GAMBERONI

This is a superb linguine dish that consists of prawns. My friend Gionata made this a few times at my home, and every time he visits, I always ask him to do the same again, please !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

10 x large peeled raw black tiger prawns
100g x dried linguine pasta
60g x finely chopped white onion
4 x cloves of crushed fresh garlic
1 x fresh red chilli pepper (de-seeded and chopped)
1 x fresh green chilli pepper (de-seeded and chopped)
80ml x dry white wine
80g x chopped ripe cherry tomatoes
60ml x extra virgin olive oil
2 x sheets of greaseproof paper (cut into 40cm x 40cm pieces)
fresh chopped parsley
salt and fresh ground black pepper

RECIPE

Put the pasta into a pan of salted boiling water and cook until "al dente". Drain the pasta and stir in 20ml of olive oil to prevent it from binding together and then put aside. Pour 40ml of olive oil into a frying pan and add the onions, along with some salt and pepper. Slowly simmer the onions until they start to turn brown. Add the chilli, garlic and tomatoes and simmer for another 2 minutes, and then put the pan aside. Place each square of greaseproof paper separately onto a shallow oven proof bowl. Divide the pasta equally and place onto each piece of greaseproof paper. Season the pasta with a little pinch of salt and ground black pepper.

Spread the mix of onion, chilli, garlic, olive oil and tomato onto the pasta, leaving a little behind in the pan. Then work the mix into the pasta with a fork. Place 5 prawns per portion on top of the pasta. Don't allow the prawns to overlap each other. Add some more seasoning onto the prawns. Spoon the last of the mix from the frying pan onto the prawns. Pour about 40ml of the wine per portion over the prawns. Complete this by adding the chopped parsley. Heat your oven to approximately 230°C. Gather each of the four corners of the greaseproof paper and twist the paper closed, ensuring that you do not squash the contents of the paper. Make sure that the top is twisted tightly closed and that there are no gaps. Put the two bowls into the oven and cook for a minimum of 10 to 12 minutes. Remove from the oven and serve hot !



5.6 LASAGNE AL RAGU

This is the recipe of the best lasagne that I have ever tasted. Obviously I like meat dishes and the ragu sauce is simply delicious ! My best experience of this lasagne was at Fabrizio Ravanelli's restaurant, Numero 11, in Cagli (Marche), and was made by my dear friend Gionata.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

3 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
750g x lean beef mince
90g x pack of prosciutto
½ x quantity of tomato sauce
200ml x hot beef stock
300g x fresh lasagne sheets
½ x quantity of white sauce
125g x mozzarella
a little grated nutmeg

RECIPE

First prepare the ragu or meat sauce. Heat the oil in a frying pan and then cook the beef in two batches for about 10 minutes until browned all over. Finely chop 4 slices of the prosciutto, then stir it through the meat mixture. Pour it over the tomato sauce and the stock, add the nutmeg, and then season.

Bring up to the boil and allow it to simmer for 30 minutes until the ragu appears rich and well coated with the sauce. This can be left for 3 days in the fridge or frozen for 3 months if necessary. Heat your oven to 180°C. To assemble the lasagne, lightly oil an ovenproof serving dish. Spoon in ⅓ of the ragu sauce and then cover it with the lasagne sheets. Drizzle over about ¼ of the white sauce. Repeat until you have

A Taste of Italy

3 layers of pasta. Cover this with the remaining half quantity of the white sauce, ensuring that you can't see any pasta poking through.

Tear the mozzarella into thin strips and then scatter over the top. Arrange the rest of the prosciutto on top of this. Bake for about 45 minutes until the top is bubbling and lightly browned. The uncooked lasagne can be frozen. If baking from frozen, add another 45 minutes to the cooking time. This should now be ready to serve piping hot !



5.7 PENNE ALL' AMATRICIANA

This is a very popular pasta dish. It is best prepared using bucatini (spaghetti-style tubes), but penne works great as well. It is best served with a strong red Italian wine, preferably one this around 14%abv.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

250g x pancetta (cut into matchsticks shapes)
2 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
2 x dried chillies (crumbled)
2 x red onions (peeled and finely chopped)
150ml x red wine
2 x 400g tins peeled plum tomatoes (drained)
250g x penne pasta
100g x parmesan cheese (grated)
A handful of fresh oregano
2 x tablespoons of rosemary

RECIPE

Put the pancetta, olive oil and chillies into a large saucepan. Heat and fry them until the pancetta gets crispy. Then add the onions and rosemary. Keep frying until they have also turned light brown and crispy. Add the red wine and let it reduce before adding the tomatoes. Then season with the oregano and some black pepper. Bring to the boil, lower the heat and allow to simmer for about 45 minutes, until thick and almost dry. Check for seasoning. Cook the penne in a generous amount of boiling salted water and then drain. Add to the sauce, mix and finally serve with the parmesan cheese.

5.8 PENNE ALLA TORRESE

This dish originated from a little village in the region of Naples. Other than that, there is not much other history about it. However, I have enjoyed this dish immensely every time that I have eaten it.

SERVES 2

INGREDIENTS

250g x penne pasta (already cooked al dente)
150g x pancetta (cubed)
1 x medium red onion (sliced)
70g x defrosted peas
3 x tablespoons of sun-dried tomato flavoured olive oil
1x tablespoon of chilli flavoured olive oil
salt (to add a bit of taste)

RECIPE

Fry the onions, pancetta and peas in the sun-dried tomato flavoured olive oil in a large frying pan. Allow this to cook for approximately 2 minutes until crispy. Blanche the pasta in the boiling water for about half a minute. Drain and immediately put in the sauce and mix well. Drizzle chilli flavoured olive oil over the pasta and serve hot ! I sincerely hope you enjoy this one I did !

5.9 MACCHERONI AL FORMAGGIO

Macaroni and cheese has to be one of the more popular pasta dishes that my mother used to make for me when I was a child. Although she was not Italian, she had a few Italian friends who left her with this recipe. It is quite basic and rich, and if you are very hungry, then this is one of the better pasta dishes to satisfy your hunger pangs. The pipe-shaped pasta originated in either Campania or Liguria.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

3 x cups of grated fontina cheese
5 x cups of grated cheddar cheese
2 x cups of grated parmesan cheese
1 x 4-inch piece of a day-old Italian bread
2 x tablespoons of unsalted butter (plus extra for baking)
450g x pipe-shaped pasta (maccheroni)
4 x large fresh sage leaves
4 cups of milk

RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 200°C. Bring a large pot of salted water to the boil for the pasta. Using a large bowl, combine the fontina cheese and cheddar cheese. Pour the milk over this. Let the cheese stay in the milk for ½ an hour to an hour, until the cheese has dissolved in the milk.

Grate the bread on the coarse holes of a box grater to get about 1½ cups of coarse breadcrumbs. Melt the butter in a small skillet over medium heat. When the butter has melted, add the breadcrumbs. Stir and toss the breadcrumbs until they are crispy and toasted, which should take about 3 minutes. Scrape the breadcrumbs into a bowl and let them cool. Butter a large baking dish and coat the bottom and sides with a thin layer of

A Taste of Italy

some of the breadcrumbs. Stir a cup of the grated parmesan cheese into the remaining breadcrumbs.

Pour the cheese and milk into a pot and add the sage leaves. Whisk over medium-low heat until cheese melts, about 7 to 8 minutes. Stir in the remaining cup of grated parmesan cheese. In the meantime, add the pipe-shaped maccheroni pasta to the boiling water. Cook until very al dente, which is about 3 to 4 minutes short of the package cooking time, and drain. Return the pasta to the pot. Add the cheese sauce and stir until all of the pasta is coated with the sauce. Scrape the pasta into a baking dish and sprinkle with the breadcrumbs. Bake until this has browned and is bubbly. This should be about about 20 minutes. Once ready, remove from the oven and serve.



5.10 CANNELLONI DI MANZO

This is probably one of the best beef cannelloni recipes that I have tried. It originated in Piedmont. However, the best gastronomic experience that I can remember is the time that I had it at a restaurant called Spiga d'Oro !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1 x package of dry cannelloni
1kg x ground beef
1 x cup of grated parmesan cheese
6 x cups of homemade tomato sauce
3 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
1 x white onion (finely chopped)
1 x egg
½ x cup of parsley (finely chopped)
2 x cloves of garlic (sliced)
⅓ x cup of fresh breadcrumbs
¼ x cup of dry white wine
1 x teaspoon of dried oregano
salt and freshly ground black pepper (to add taste)

RECIPE

Add the garlic and onion to a large pan. Cook over a medium heat until it is soft. Add the ground beef. Cook it to about ¾ of the way through. Remove the mixture and let it cool.

Using a large bowl, mix the ground beef mixture, breadcrumbs, parsley, oregano and salt and pepper. Add the grated cheese, white wine and egg. Mix well by hand and let stand for 10 to 15 minutes. Heat your oven to 175°C. Fill the dry cannelloni shells with the ground beef mixture. Use a wooden spoon to push the mixture through.

A Taste of Italy

Create a base layer of tomato sauce in your oven proof dish and create a single layer of cannelloni. Pour more tomato sauce over the cannelloni, ensuring it is well covered, and then sprinkle the grated parmesan cheese over this.

Cover with foil and bake in a preheated oven at 175°C for about 30 minutes. Remove and let stand for another 10 minutes before serving.



6 MEAT AND FISH

Apart from pizzas and pastas, the Italians also have a wonderful variety of meat and fish dishes. Here is a list of my all-time top 10 favourites. I have chosen 5 meat dishes and 5 fish dishes. The recipes for them follow on the next pages.

- 6.1 POLLO ARROSTO
- 6.2 COTOLETTA ALLA MILANESE
- 6.3 ABBACCHIO ALLA ROMANA
- 6.4 POLLO SICILIANO
- 6.5 BISTECCA ALLA FIORENTINA
- 6.6 PESCE ALLA GRIGLIA
- 6.7 ORATA AL CARTOCCIO
- 6.8 BACCALA IN SALSA PICCANTE
- 6.9 PESCE SPADA
- 6.10 SPEZZATINO DI MARE



6.1 POLLO ARROSTO

This roast chicken dish is one of the best that I have tasted. A family member took my wife and I to a wonderful Italian restaurant called Mama Luciana, which had a fantastic view of the sea. We dined al fresco on the sun deck and had a really delicious lunch. The recipe was influenced by the owner's hometown of Modena. The chicken is cooked in a pizza oven in either a peri-peri or lemon and herb sauce.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

8 x chicken breasts

½ x cup of extra virgin olive oil

½ x cup of fresh rosemary leaves

¼ x cup of fresh lemon juice

10 x cloves of garlic (thinly sliced)

1 x lemon (peel removed, pith and pulp chopped)

salt and freshly ground black pepper (to add taste)

RECIPE

Toss the chicken with some olive oil, rosemary, lemon juice, garlic, lemon, and salt and pepper in bowl. Marinade for about an hour. Then heat your oven to 240°C. Put the chicken in a baking dish, and add the remaining marinade. Then roast for about 40 minutes, flipping once halfway through. Ready to serve with sides of vegetables such as roast potatoes, carrots and spinach.

6.2 COTOLETTA ALLA MILANESE

This is a really delicious dish of veal cutlets that originates in Milan. It is made using breadcrumbs and the veal is fried in butter. The first time that I enjoyed this dish was in the dining room of a wonderful hotel called the Lido, which overlooked the sea. It was prepared by an Austrian-Italian chef call Bruno, who was a really gregarious character and very popular.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

4 x veal cutlets (with bone)

½ x cup of finely ground breadcrumbs (toasted in the oven)

¾ x cup of butter (half if you are using a non-stick frying pan)

lemon wedges (not in the original Milanese recipe)

sprigs of parsley (for garnish)

2 x eggs (beaten)

RECIPE

Use good, high quality veal cutlets. Trim away any fat from the cutlets. Remove any membranes to prevent the cutlets from curling while cooking. Flatten them out between the palms of your hands. Pat them dry and then salt them lightly. Dip them in the egg and dredge them in the breadcrumbs, pressing down to make sure the breadcrumbs stick. Shake them gently to remove any excess. During this time, melt the butter in a skillet large enough to accommodate all 4 cutlets at the same time. When the butter begins to crackle, add the cutlets to the frying pan. Cook them quickly, turning once so that both sides get brown. When done, serve hot and garnished with the parsley and the lemon wedges on the side. Buon appetito ! Hope you love this one !

6.3 ABBACCHIO ALLA ROMANA

As its name implies, this lamb dish comes from the capital city of Italy, Rome. It is well worth getting excited about, because, if you enjoy lamb, then this one is going to tickle your taste buds !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1¼kg of young lamb (from the leg, cut into bite-sized chunks)
2 x salt-packed anchovies (rinsed and drained)
2 x tablespoons of butter
2 x whole cloves of garlic
1 x finely chopped clove of garlic
2 x sprigs of rosemary
1 x cup of white wine
1 x tablespoon of white wine vinegar
3 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
1 x tablespoon of salt

RECIPE

Using a large, heavy-based skillet, heat the olive oil over a high heat and add the butter. When the butter melts, add the 2 whole garlic cloves and saute until it turns brown. Remove the garlic and add the lamb. Brown the meat on all sides. Using a small bowl, combine the rosemary, anchovies, vinegar, salt and the remaining chopped garlic and mix well. Add this mixture to the meat and cook over a medium to low heat until the vinegar evaporates and the meat is tender. Moisten this occasionally with some of the wine. The meat will take about an hour to cook. When ready, serve with an accompaniment of vegetables.

6.4 POLLO SICILIANO

This dish is a pan-fried chicken breast that has been cooked with crushed black olives, basil, garlic and olive oil pesto in a wonderful creamy sauce. My dear friend Filippo makes the best Pollo Siciliano, as Sicily is where he is originally from. This is the favourite chicken dish of my sons !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

4 x skinless, boneless chicken breasts
3 x tablespoons of all-purpose flour
½ x cup of dry white wine
½ x cup of crushed black olives
1 x can of diced tomatoes (undrained)
1 x tablespoon of olive oil
1 x tablespoon of balsamic vinegar
1 x teaspoon of dried oregano
¼ x cup of chopped fresh basil
½ x teaspoon of black pepper
½ x teaspoon of salt

RECIPE

Place each chicken breast half between 2 sheets of heavy duty plastic wrap. Pound each chicken breast to about 2cm thickness with a meat mallet. Sprinkle both sides of the chicken with salt and pepper. Heat the olive oil in a large nonstick skillet over a medium to high heat. Place the flour in a shallow dish and dredge the chicken in the flour. Add the chicken to a frying pan and cook for about 3 minutes on each side. Add in the wine and cook for a minute. Add the crushed olives and the other ingredients. Bring to the boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for 8 minutes or until the chicken is done. Sprinkle with basil and ready to serve with grilled aubergines and roast potatoes.

6.5 BISTECCA ALLA FIORENTINA

As the name implies, this original steak dish comes from Florence.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

2 x 800g Porterhouse steaks (about 5cm thick)
balsamic vinegar
extra virgin olive oil
sea salt
coarsely ground black pepper

RECIPE

Ensure that your steaks are fully defrosted before cooking. Use a hot, clean, oiled grill. If you are pan-roasting, pre-heat your oven to 230°C. Season the steaks very liberally with the salt and pepper. Then coat them with the olive oil and press the seasoning into the meat. Grill the steaks for about 5 minutes on each side to get them to be medium rare. Fillets will cook a little faster than strip loins. Move the steaks around every 2 minutes or so to even out the cooking and to give them a crispy exterior. For pan-roasting, heat a cast iron skillet with a little olive oil until it is smoking hot. Turn on the fan, open the window and stand back to avoid getting blasted ! Using some tongs, put the steaks in the middle of the pan. Cook until the first side is seared brown. This should take about 4 minutes. Turn the steaks and place the pan in the oven until the steaks are done, taking about 6 minutes to get medium rare. Move the steaks to a carving board and let them rest for at least 5 minutes before carving. Cut the steaks away from the bone and carve into 2cm slices. Arrange the meat on warm plates and drizzle a bit of balsamic vinegar over the slices. Serve with some seasalt on the side.

6.6 PESCE ALLA GRIGLIA

This is grilled fish, or “Pesce alla Griglia”, as it is known in Italy. The recipe probably originated from the fishermen's wife in Naples.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1kg x Mediterranean fish (cleaned, scaled, and lightly scored)
½ x cup of marinade (olive oil, salt, pepper, lemon juice, a few leaves of minced rosemary, and a bay leaf)

a folding grate to put the fish in

RECIPE

Any medium-sized Mediterranean fish will do. Cut an incision into the bottom of the fish. Then marinade the fish by putting some of the herbs and lemon slices into the cavity as well. Preheat your grill or start the fire long enough ahead to let the coals burn down. Place the fish over the coals, basting it with the marinade while it cooks. Use a folding grate with a hinge opposite the handle to make the fish easier to flip. This allows you to prepare several small fish at once. Continue cooking till the flesh parts easily and the skin is crispy. In terms of cooking time, plan for about 10 minutes per 2.5cm of thickness of the fish, measured at its thickest point.

Grilled fish can also be done in the oven. Marinade it as above, and place it in a pan with just a drop of olive oil. Roast using a very hot oven (about 220°C), flipping carefully when it is half-cooked. Serve with fries or jacket potato.

6.7 ORATA AL CARTOCCIO

Orata al Cartoccio is sea bass roasted in paper ! Being served fish “al cartoccio” is a delightful experience. You get to carefully pull back the paper and discover what has been included. There are always surprises. Italians will bake just about any kind of fish this way, including fish steaks. It is wonderful in the way that they use their imagination to include the accompanying shellfish.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1½kg x sea bass
100g x fresh shrimp
200g x fresh clams (scrubbed and purged)
200g x fresh mussels (scrubbed and purged)
8 x plum tomatoes
¼ x cup of unsalted butter
extra virgin olive oil
some minced parsley
5 x cloves of garlic
a little brandy
salt and pepper (to add taste)

RECIPE

Use canned shellfish if fresh shellfish are unavailable. Make the sauce with the juices, and place the shellfish on the fish before you put it in the oven. Clean and scale the fish. Also wash it and pat it dry. Season the cavity with salt, pepper, and a few drops of olive oil. Mince the two cloves of garlic and mix with 2 tablespoons of the minced parsley. Fill the cavity in the fish with this mixture, and skewer it shut with toothpicks. Sprinkle the fish with some of the brandy and let it stand for about 15 minutes.

A Taste of Italy

Meanwhile, blanch and peel the tomatoes, then seed them, and cut them into thin strips. Heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of olive oil and flavour it by browning the remaining cloves of garlic, peeled and crushed, in it for a few minutes. Remove the garlic, add the tomatoes, salt and pepper, and a heaped tablespoon of parsley. Simmer the sauce for about 10 minutes, then stir in the clams, mussels, and shrimps, and cover it.

Pre-heat your oven to 200°C. Grease a large sheet of oven-proof paper with half the butter, lay the fish on it, and pour the shellfish sauce over it. Dot the fish with the rest of the butter. Fold the paper over the fish, crimping the edges to make a packet. Bake the fish for about 15 minutes.

When ready, open it at the table. If you choose to have smaller fish or fish steaks “al cartoccio”, please prepare them in individual portions. Enjoy !



6.8 BACCALA IN SALSA PICCANTE

Baccala is salted cod, sold by the slab. In the past baccala played an extremely significant role in rural diets. This is because it was one of the few types of fish that was available for Friday and other days on which the Church declared that people were not allowed to eat meat. In addition to traveling and keeping well, it is tasty, although a little firmer and saltier than fresh cod. It is also a perfect accompaniment for all sorts of sauces. This recipe originated in the le Marche region.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

600g x soaked baccala
1 x carrot (minced)
2 x ribs of celery (minced)
1 x medium-sized onion (minced)
2 x tablespoons of flour
½ x tablespoon of tomato paste
200g x bell peppers packed in oil (finely sliced)
100g x mild black olives
a handful of salted capers (rinsed well)
1 x hot pepper (shredded)
3 x tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil
1 x small bunch of parsley (minced)
½ x cup of dry white wine
salt and pepper

RECIPE

Begin by boiling the soaked baccala for 15 minutes. Drain it, pat it dry, cut it into moderately small pieces, and flour it lightly. Put the pieces in a broad skillet with the olive oil and brown them on both sides, then sprinkle them with the wine.

A Taste of Italy

In the meantime, saute the minced onion, carrot, celery, and hot pepper in some olive oil in a large pot. When the onions have browned lightly, add in and stir the tomato paste, the thinly sliced peppers, olives, capers, and about a ½ a cup of hot water. Bring to the boil and cook for about 3 minutes. Then season to taste with salt and pepper, bearing in mind that the baccalà will be saltier than fresh fish.

Pour the sauce over the baccalà. Dust everything with the minced parsley, gently add two ladles of hot water, cover, and simmer for 2 hours. Check every now and again to see if you need to add water. The sauce should be thick and definitely not dry. Serve when ready.



6.9 PESCE SPADA

These are swordfish steaks, done in a Sicilian style.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

4 x pieces of swordfish (200g each)
2 x medium onions (chopped into small cubes)
2 x cups of plain bread crumbs
½ x cup of extra virgin olive oil
2 x cloves of minced garlic
1 x bunch of parsley (chopped)
5 x spears of rosemary (chopped)
5 x spears of thyme (chopped)
1 x zest of whole lemon (plus 2 wedges for garnish)
½ x cup of olives
salt and pepper (to add taste)

RECIPE

Heat ½ a cup of extra virgin olive oil and saute the garlic on a medium heat. Take off the stove and add parsley, rosemary, and thyme. Mix the herbs and add the breadcrumbs, lemon zest, salt, and pepper. Let this cool down. Season the fish fillets with salt and pepper, dust with the breadcrumbs mixture, and grill evenly for about 4 minutes on each side until firm. Saute the onions in olive oil on a medium heat until clear. Pit the olives and cut them in half. Toss the olives in right before finishing the onions. Put the swordfish steaks on a platter and cover with the onion and olive mixture. Serve with the lemon wedges.

6.10

SPEZZATINO DI MARE

This is a luscious, tomato-rich seafood stew in which the calamari is slowly cooked until it becomes very tender. Calamari is vital to the success of this dish because it releases its liquid as it simmers, and this adds a huge amount of flavour to the sauce.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

650g x cleaned squid (cut into 1cm rings, tentacles halved)
350g x mussels (scrubbed)
350g x clams (scrubbed)
350g x large shrimps (shelled and de-veined)
350g x of skinless bass fillet (cut into small square pieces)
1 x white onion (finely chopped)
½ x cup of extra-virgin olive oil (plus extra for drizzling)
1 x fennel bulb (cored and finely chopped)
2 x celery ribs (finely chopped)
1 x tablespoon of dried oregano
a pinch of crushed red pepper
2 x cups of dry white wine
1 x can of tomato puree
2 x lemons (one peeled in strips and the other finely grated)
2 x cups of water
1 x cup of bottled clam broth
2 x tablespoons of finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
salt and freshly ground black pepper

RECIPE

Using a Dutch oven, heat the ½ cup of olive oil. Add the fennel, celery, onion, oregano and crushed red pepper and cook over a moderate heat, stirring frequently. Do this until the vegetables are soft. This takes about 15 minutes. Add the

A Taste of Italy

squid and cook over a moderately low heat for 15 minutes, stirring occasionally.

Stir in the wine and bring to the boil over a moderately high heat. Cook until evaporated, which takes about 20 minutes. Stir in the tomato puree and the strips of lemon zest. Season with salt and pepper and cook over a very low heat, stirring occasionally, until very thick. Normally this takes about 40 minutes.

Add the water and the clam broth and bring to the boil. Remove and discard the lemon zest. Season the broth with some salt and pepper. Add the mussels, clams and shrimps. Cover and cook until most of the shells have opened. This takes about 5 minutes. Add the striped bass and cook until it is opaque – taking about 2 minutes longer.

Using a small bowl, combine the parsley with the grated lemon zest. Spoon the stew into deep bowls and sprinkle with the gremolata. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and serve with garlic-rubbed pieces of toast.



7 DESSERTS

One of the best parts of an Italian meal is finishing it off with a great dessert. Here I select my top 10. The recipes for them follow on the next few pages.

- 7.1 LIMONCELLO PANNA COTTA
- 7.2 TIRAMISU
- 7.3 AFFOGATO
- 7.4 ZEPPOLE
- 7.5 D' AMARETTI BISCOTTI
- 7.6 RAVIOLI DOLCI
- 7.7 ZABAGLIONE
- 7.8 SFINGE DI RICOTTA
- 7.9 CAPEZZOLI DI VENERE
- 7.10 CASSATA SICILIANA



7.1 LIMONCELLO PANNA COTTA

I really love cooking for guests whenever I can, but there are certain times after a huge dinner that you just cannot enjoy a heavy dessert. At those times a panna cotta is just perfect for the occasion. As it is light and creamy, you can flavour a basic panna cotta recipe with just about anything. Here we have a simple lemon-flavoured panna cotta using Limoncello, a lovely liqueur made from rinds of lemons that originated along the Amalfi coast near Naples. The flavour of the lemon is subtle, yet just refreshing enough after a heavy meal. We have used blueberries as a topping, but you could use just about any fruit.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

For the panna cotta :

500ml x of heavy whipping cream

$\frac{3}{4}$ x cup of sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ x cup of Limoncello

1 packet of gelatin

3 x tablespoons of cold water

For the glaze :

3 x tablespoons of powdered sugar

1 x tablespoon of Limoncello

500ml x tub of fresh blueberries

RECIPE

Using a medium sized bowl, add the cold water and sprinkle the gelatin on top. Set aside without stirring. Using a small saucepan, place the whipping cream and the sugar over a medium heat. Stirring frequently with a spoon or whisk until well combined, cook it until it nears boiling point. Remove it from the heat, add the Limoncello and stir well to combine. If you are using custard cups, spray lightly with cooking spray as

A Taste of Italy

you will be inverting the panna cotta onto plates to serve. Slowly pour the cream mixture over the gelatin mixture and stir well until combined. Divide among your custard cups and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or until firm. Serve with blueberries, limoncello glaze or blueberry sauce, or a combination of your favourite fresh fruits !



7.2 TIRAMISU

Tiramisu, in terms of Italian cuisine, is a fairly recent dessert that originated in the northern Italian city of Treviso around about the 1960's. If made well it can be one of the best desserts that you will ever taste !

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

568ml x double thick cream
250g x mascarpone cheese
75ml x marsala wine
5 x tablespoons of golden castor sugar
300ml x strong coffee
175g x sponge fingers
25g x chunk of dark chocolate
2 x teaspoons of cocoa powder

RECIPE

Place the cream, mascarpone, marsala and sugar in a large mixing bowl. Whisk the mixture until the cream and mascarpone are totally combined and have the consistency of thickly whipped cream. Prepare your serving dish. Place the coffee into a shallow dish. Dip a few of the sponge fingers into this at a time, turning occasionally for a few seconds until they are nicely soaked, but definitely not soggy. Layer these into your dish until you have used half the biscuits. Then spread this over half of the creamy mixture. Using the coarse side of a grater, grate most of the chocolate over this. Repeat the layers and finish with the creamy layer. Use all of the coffee. Cover this and chill in the refrigerator for a few hours or overnight. This can be kept refrigerated for up to 2 days. When serving, dust with cocoa powder and grate over the remainder of the chocolate. Wow !

7.3 AFFOGATO

Affogato is thought to have originated in Florence and to normally have been consumed early in the morning, or at about 5pm each day, to cope with the unbearable heat of summer. It's a wonderful alternative to iced coffee. Affogato means “drowned” and this is reserved for the ice cream that is drowned in the coffee !

SERVES 1

INGREDIENTS

2 x small scoops of ice cream (coffee, chocolate or vanilla)
1 x shot of espresso
1 x shaved dark chocolate
1 x portion of chopped hazelnuts

RECIPE

Place 2 small scoops of the ice cream into a coffee cup. Next, pour in a shot of espresso. Top the mixture up with the shaved dark chocolate and chopped hazelnuts. Serve and enjoy !



7.4 ZEPPOLE

Zeppole were known as Zeppole di San Giuseppe, and were traditionally eaten during St. Joseph's Day on 19th March each year. The tradition dates back to about 500BC when celebrations took place on 17th March in honour of Bacchus and Silinus, the gods of wine and wheat. The ancient Romans consumed large quantities to celebrate these gods. It's no surprise, then, that St. Joseph's day, which is 2 days later, often includes similar customs. Today's recipe is believed to have been created by monks at the start of the 19th century.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

2 x litres of vegetable oil (for frying)
1 x cup of general purpose flour
2 x teaspoons of baking powder
1½ x teaspoons of white sugar
2 x eggs (beaten)
1 x cup of ricotta cheese
¼ x teaspoon of vanilla extract
½ x cup of confectioners' sugar (for dusting)
1 x pinch of salt

RECIPE

Heat some oil in a deep-fryer to 190°C. Using a medium-sized saucepan, combine the flour, baking powder, salt and sugar. Next, stir in the eggs, ricotta cheese and vanilla. Mix this gently over a low heat until fully combined. Please note that the batter will be sticky. Drop by tablespoons into the hot oil a few at a time. The zeppole will turn over by themselves. Fry them until they are golden brown, which takes about 3 to 4 minutes. Then drain them using a paper sack and finally dust them with the confectioners' sugar. Serve warm.

7.5 D'AMARETTI BISCOTTI

Amaretti comes from the word *amaro*, which means bitter. These biscotti are not bitter, although some recipes do add a small amount of bitter almonds or lemon zest or cinnamon or even a tablespoon of brandy. The best type of *amaretti* are crunchy on the outside, soft and nutty in the middle, and taste simply of almonds. You can have them at any time of the day. They are a good match for a cup of coffee in the morning, or with a glass of sherry in the afternoon, or with an Amaretto liqueur after dinner. If stored in a metal tin, they can last fresh for a few weeks. They are so simple to make, just 4 ingredients. It's a good idea to have some on hand for when guests drop around.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

250g x almond meal
2 x tablespoons of plain flour
3 x egg whites (beaten until soft)
250g x sugar

RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 180°C. Line a baking tray. Mix the sugar and almond meal and then fold in the egg white. Add a tablespoon of flour. This should give you a soft but pliable mix that you can shape into balls. If it is too soft, add a bit more flour. Add a bit of lemon zest, liqueur, bitter almond essence or cinnamon, when you add the flour at the end. Shape the mixture into balls. Place on a baking tray and keep slightly apart because they will spread as they bake. Flatten the top of them with the back of a spoon. Cook for about 30 minutes until they start to colour. Then cool them on a wire rack. They taste even better after a week or two !

7.6 RAVIOLI DOLCI

This sweet treat is generally enjoyed in Italy at Carnevale time, which is about the 4th March each year. Carnevale is quite a big occasion in Italy. All the children dress up for almost a week and take part in parades with all kinds of floats. The most famous carnevali in Italy are in Venice, Ivrea, Viareggio, Putignano and Cento. They attract hundreds of thousands of tourists each year. During this time of the year the Italians tend to eat lots of sweets and fried food because Carnevale comes right before Lent, when Catholics usually fast. Ravioli dolci, or sweet ravioli, are delicious rectangles of sweet dough filled with jam, and fried and dusted with icing sugar.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

1 x egg
1 x ravioli dough
300g x general purpose flour
1 x teaspoon of vanilla extract
50g x butter
60g x sugar
60ml x milk
40ml x rum
1 x zest of lemon
some jam
some icing sugar
vegetable oil (for deep frying)
1 x pinch of salt

RECIPE

Put all the dough ingredients in a bowl belonging to an electric mixer, fitted with a paddle attachment. Knead well until you

have a smooth and elastic type of dough. Make it into a ball and wrap it with clingwrap, and then refrigerate it for about half an hour. Then divide the dough into smaller pieces and start working with one. Keep the remaining dough covered with clingwrap so that it doesn't dry out. Flatten the piece of dough into a rectangular shape, using your hands. Put a little of the flour on it and begin passing it through the pasta machine. Turn the dial to the widest setting and, starting with one of the shorter sides of the rectangle, feed it through the rollers. Then fold one side of the piece of dough into the middle. Fold the other side over that to form 3 layers. Starting with one of the narrower sides, feed the dough through the machine again, at the widest setting. Repeat this folding and rolling technique on the widest setting for at least a few times. Now you can start rolling it thinner, by turning the dial to the next narrowest setting. Roll the dough through the machine without folding the dough between settings. Keep reducing the settings until you get to the end. If the sheet of dough gets too long, you can cut it in half using a knife. Put the filling, using a teaspoon, on one half of the sheet of dough. Ensure that you leave some space in between. Fold the other half of the sheet onto the filling and then press well all around. Ensure that there are no air bubbles inside, otherwise the ravioli will open while cooking and the filling will come out. In order to seal the dough, use a little bit of water or egg white. Cut around the filling in a square shape and remove the excess dough. Keep the ravioli on a tray dusted with flour. Get ready to fry them in batches of warm vegetable oil. When golden on both sides, remove them with a slotted spoon and drain them on a plate that is covered with kitchen paper. When they are dry, dust them with icing sugar. Serve the sweet ravioli at room temperature.

7.7 ZABAGLIONE

I absolutely love this dessert !!! Zabaglione is a simple dessert made of egg yolks, sugar, and marsala wine. It's usually served warm, although it can be served cold, as a sauce, or even served frozen. Zabaglione is said to have been invented in the 16th century in Florence, in the court of the Medici. It is classified as a “caudle” rather than as a custard. A “caudle” is a sauce that is used as a custard to fill pies or tarts. The original pre-16th century version was a drink made of wine or ale and thickened with egg yolks.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

6 x egg yolks
1/3 x cup of sugar
3/4 x cup of marsala wine
1 x teaspoon of grated lemon peel
freshly grated cinnamon or nutmeg
1 x vanilla extract
1 1/2 x cups of heavy cream (whipped)
strawberries
raspberries
biscotti

RECIPE

Place the egg yolks and the sugar in a large, round-bottomed stainless steel bowl. Add the grated lemon peel, a pinch of cinnamon, and a drop of vanilla extract to the yolk mixture. Pour in the marsala wine. Fill a pot with half water and bring to a simmer, reducing the heat to low. Set the bowl containing the custard mixture over the water, without allowing the bottom of the bowl to touch the water. Whisk the custard mixture, ensuring that the water does not boil. This causes the

A Taste of Italy

gentle, even heat to thicken the mixture without curdling it. Whisking traps the air in the yolks for a light, fluffy mixture. Continue whisking for about 10 minutes, until the mixture triples in volume, froths up and goes pale. When it reaches the desired level of consistency, remove the container of custard from the pot. The custard can be used as a slightly thickened sauce. Longer cooking will thicken the custard further, giving it a mousse-like texture. Continue to whisk for 2 minutes to prevent the custard from sticking to its container. Serve the custard while still warm. If you want to serve it cool, then set it aside for about 15 minutes. Whisk the heavy cream until it forms soft peaks. Add the whipped cream to the cooled custard and use a whisk to gently fold them together. Keep some of the whipped cream to serve on top. Ladle the zabaglione into individual dishes and serve with whipped cream, strawberries, raspberries and biscotti.



7.8 SFINGE DI RICOTTA

This is a Sicilian treat made with ricotta cheese, flour, and sugar that has been fried to an elegant golden brown and lightly dusted with confectioner's sugar.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

4 x eggs

½ x cup of milk

700g x ricotta cheese

¾ x cup of granulated sugar

1 x teaspoon of baking powder

2 x tablespoons of vanilla extract

1 x cup of vegetable oil (for frying)

⅓ x cup of confectioners' sugar (for decoration)

4 x cups of cake flour

1 x pinch salt

RECIPE

Using a large bowl, mix the eggs, white sugar, and ricotta cheese until smooth and creamy. Stir in the vanilla and the flour. If the batter is dry, mix in a little bit of the milk. Using a frying pan over a medium to high heat, heat the vegetable oil until it is hot. Drop teaspoonfuls of batter into the hot oil and fry until it is golden. Turn to cook the cookies evenly. Then remove with a slotted spoon and drain the cookies on some paper towels. Sprinkle with some confectioner's sugar before serving.

7.9 CAPEZZOLI DI VENERE

These delightful little confections are called Capezzoli di Venere, or Nipples of Venus ! This recipe comes from one of my Italian friends' nonna's recipes. This is such a delightful little treat that it is well worth taking the time and making the effort. It is very suitable for serving on St. Valentine's Day, and could quite easily make it a day to remember. This recipe produces about 60 of the little truffles.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

450g x canned whole chestnuts (drained)
350g x high quality dark chocolate (chopped)
350g x high quality white chocolate (chopped)
1 x dash of powdered food coloring (preferably red)
6 x tablespoons of softened butter
1 x teaspoon of vanilla extract
½ x cup of white sugar
¼ x cup of brandy

RECIPE

Place the dark chocolate into the top part of a double boiler over simmering water, and let it melt. Turn off the heat and let it cool. Place the chestnuts into the working bowl of a food processor. Process until the chestnuts are quite smoothly pureed, taking about a minute. Beat the butter and sugar together with an electric mixer until the mixture is light and fluffy. This should take about 3 minutes. Stir in the chestnuts, the brandy, and the vanilla extract until the mixture is smooth. Stir in the chocolate, and pinch off about a tablespoon of filling per truffle. Roll the mixture into balls about an inch in diameter. If the mixture is too soft to hold its shape, chill it for several minutes in refrigerator. Reserve about 30g of white

chocolate for tempering, and about 30g for colouring. Melt the remaining white chocolate over simmering water in a double boiler until it has melted and is warm but not hot. About 40°C should do the trick. Remove the pan containing the melted chocolate from the double boiler and add about 30g of chopped, unmelted white chocolate. Stir the chocolate until all the pieces have melted, and the temperature drops to about 28°C. Carefully dip each centre in the melted white chocolate, and gently place the truffle onto a piece of waxed paper to cool and harden, taking about 15 minutes. Melt the remaining 30g of chopped white chocolate over simmering water in a double boiler until it has melted and is warm but not hot. Stir in a very small amount of powdered red food colouring until you get a very desired shade of pink. Dip a little coloured chocolate out with a spoon, dot each truffle with a pink dot, and allow the pink chocolate dots to set, all in all, taking about 15 minutes. Ready !



7.10 CASSATA SICILIANA

This is a typical, classical dessert from the isle of Sicily and is best consumed in the winter months, because it is particularly energy-giving.

SERVES 6

INGREDIENTS

For an 8-inch baking pan

150g x marzipan
450g x ricotta cheese
200g x confectioners' sugar
100g x candied fruit
85g x chocolate drops
1 x teaspoon of vanilla
100g x dark chocolate (melted)
150g x sponge cake
3½ x tablespoons of rum

For the icing

150g x sugar
1 x egg white

For the garnish

100g x candied fruit

RECIPE

Use powdered sugar to roll out the marzipan to a thickness of 4mm, to avoid it sticking to the work surface and rolling pin. Dust the cake pan with powdered sugar and line it with the marzipan, taking care that it sticks perfectly. Trim the edges with a knife. Using a brush, spread the melted and tempered plain chocolate over the marzipan. Line the cake pan with the sponge cake. Brush with half of the rum. Put the ricotta cheese, sugar, chocolate drops, candied fruit, and vanilla into a bowl and mix it together. Lay the filling into the mould and

A Taste of Italy

spread it out. Finish this off by covering it with the remaining sponge cake and brush it with the rest of the rum. To prepare the glaze whisk, the sugar and the egg white, glaze everything, after placing the dessert on a grating, pouring the glaze uniformly over the entire surface. Let the cake rest in the refrigerator for an hour. Add the candied fruit on top as decoration. Voila ! Ready to serve !



8 WINES

You cannot enjoy a great Italian meal without complementing it with a great Italian wine. Here is a list of my favourite categories, with a brief description of each.

- 8.1 SOAVE
- 8.2 TRENTINO
- 8.3 GAVI
- 8.4 PINOT GRIGIO
- 8.5 PROSECCO
- 8.6 MONTEPULCIANO D' ABRUZZO
- 8.7 BAROLO
- 8.8 SANGIOVESE
- 8.9 CHIANTI
- 8.10 VALPOLICELLA



8.1 SOAVE

Soave, the Italian word for “Suave“, is a dry white wine from the Veneto region in the northeast of Italy, mainly focused around the city of Verona. The principal grape variety here is the Garganega. However, limited percentages of Chardonnay, Pinot Bianco and Trebbiano di Soave (Verdicchio) are allowed. Although most Soave wines are dry, the region does also produce a small quantity of a sparkling spumante and late harvest. The region has a reputation for producing rather bland, boring white wines. However, there are many producers who are doing some good work here. With a little bit of help from some Chardonnay or new French oak, the Garganega grape can make profound white wines packed full of flavour. The Soave region has both DOC and DOCG designations of wine. Some producers are instead producing IGT wines under the Veneto designation as a protest against the revision of the regions in the early 21st century.

My 10 choices in this category are :

Recioto di Soave, Rocca Sveva, Midas (2006)
Soave Superiore, Villa Erbice, Panvinio (2010)
Soave Superiore, Vicentini, Il Casale (2011)
Soave Classico, Filippi, Castelcerino (2011)
Soave Classico, Marcato, Monte Tenda (2011)
Soave, Fattori, Motto Piane (2011)
Soave Classico, Coffele, Cà Visco (2011)
Soave, Tenuta Sant’Antonio, Monte Ceriani (2011)
Pieropan La Rocca Soave Classico (2011)
Borg San Lorenzo (2012)



8.2 TRENTINO

The Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol area is an autonomous region located in the north-east of Italy and produces wine in the two provinces of Trentino and South Tyrol. The region is known for the distinct Austrian and German influence on the wine industry because of the region's long history under the rule of the Holy Roman Empire and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Due to its unique history and location within the southern Alps and Dolomites mountain regions, the Trentino-Alto Adige/South Tyrol area grows a wide variety of grapes not usually found in other parts of Italy. These include Pinot Gris, Riesling Renano, Traminer Aromatico, Schiava, Blatterle, Lagrein and Sylvaner. The dual influence of German and Italian cultures are found in the region's wines. In Alto-Adige, the wines are typically German, made in an Italian style. Some of the grapes are also of German origin, possibly from the Rhine and the Mosel valleys. The wines of Trentino show the Italian influence because the wines are very drinkable. Trentino Pinot Grigio and Lagrein are two of the easiest wines to drink. While the Trentino-Alto Adige region does not boast of any DOCG wines, it does produce the largest percentage of quality wine found in Italy. Nearly 80% of the wine produced in the region falls under a DOC classification.

My top 10 choices in this category are :

Cavit Arele Vino Santo Trentino (1998)
Cesarini Sforza Tridentum Metodo Classico Brut Trento (2006)
Cavit Bottega Vinai Lagrein (2011)
Franz Haas Manna Alto-Adige (2011)
Cesconi Olivar Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGT (2011)
Peter Pliger Kuenhof Sylvaner Sudtirol Eisacktaler (2011)
Tiefenbrunner Feldmarschall von Fenner zu Fennberg (2011)
Cavit Bottega Vinai Gewurz (2012)
Mezzacorona Castel Firmian Pinot Grigio (2012)
Sudtiroler Weinbauernverband 'San Pietro' Lagrein (2012)

8.3 GAVI

Gavi di Gavi, also known as Cortese di Gavi, is a famous dry white wine produced in a restricted zone of the province of Alessandria and the Monferrato hills in Piedmont, close to the border with Liguria. It has DOCG status. The vineyard area surrounds the city of Gavi. Cortese is the grape behind the wines of Gavi di Gavi, notable for its crisp, floral, peachy, aromatic qualities. It is sometimes referred to as the Chablis of Italy ! The wines are best enjoyed young. Piedmont's most famous, and finest, white grape, Cortese, has produced wines here since the 17th century. The current style of production dates back to 1876. The wine was awarded DOC status in 1974 and DOCG status in 1998.

My 10 choices from Gavi are :

Pio Cesare Gavi di Gavi (2008)
Tenimenti Ca' Bianca Gavi (2011)
Roberto Sarotto Gavi di Gavi (2011)
Morgassi Superiore Gavi di Gavi (2011)
Villa Sparina Gavi del Comune di Gavi (2011)
La Zerba Terrarossa del Comune di Tassarolo (2011)
Beni di Batasiolo Gavi 92012)
Bruno Broglia Gavi di Gavi (2012)
Gavi La Toledana (2013)
Michele Chiarlo Gavi (2013)



8.4 PINOT GRIGIO

Pinot gris is a white wine grape and is thought to be a mutant clone of the pinot noir variety. It normally has a grayish-blue fruit. The grapes can also have a brownish pink to black and sometimes even a white appearance. The word *pinot* means “pine cone” in French, and could have been so named because the grapes grow in small pine cone-shaped clusters. The wines produced from this grape also vary in colour from a deep golden yellow to copper and even a light shade of pink. The clone of pinot gris grown in Italy is known as pinot grigio. The flavours can range from ripe tropical fruit notes of melon and mango to botrytis-influenced flavours. In Italy, pinot grigio grapes are harvested early to retain the refreshing acidity and minimize the overly fruitiness of the variety, creating a more neutral flavour profile. Plantings of pinot grigio can be found in the Oltrepo Pavese region in Lombardy, the Alto-Adige region, and the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region.

My selection of 10 pinot grigios from Italy are :

Vie di Romans Dessimis Pinot Grigio Friuli Isonzo (2001)
Dario Princic Bianco Pinot Grigio (2007)
La Bellanotte Conte Lucio Pinot Grigio (2009)
Cesconi Pinot Grigio Vigneti delle Dolomiti IGT (2010)
Livio Felluga Pinot Grigio Colli Orientali del Friuli (2010)
Venica & Venica Jesera Pinot Grigio Collio (2011)
Toros Pinot Grigio Collio, Friuli-Venezia Giulia (2011)
Lis Neris 'Gris' Pinot Grigio Venezia-Giulia IGT (2011)
Branko Pinot Grigio Collio, Friuli-Venezia Giulia (2011)
Santa Margherita Pinot Grigio Alto-Adige (2013)



8.5 PROSECCO

Prosecco is a sparkling white wine, notably dry or extra dry. It is normally made from the glera grape, which was mostly known as the prosecco grape until 2009. There are other varieties as well, such as Bianchetta Trevigiana. The name “Prosecco” is derived from the Italian village of the same name near Trieste. This is possibly where the grape may have originated from. Prosecco is produced in the Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia regions, traditionally around Conegliano and Valdobbiadene in the hills north of Treviso. Prosecco is a cheaper alternative to champagne. Prosecco sparkling wine was generally rather sweet until the 1960's. Since then, production techniques have improved, leading to the higher quality dry wines produced today. Until the 2008 vintage Prosecco was protected as a DOC within Italy, as *Prosecco di Conegliano-Valdobbiadene*, *Prosecco di Conegliano* and *Prosecco di Valdobbiadene*. After 2008 it has been promoted to DOCG status. In order to further to protect the name and brand, an association of traditional Prosecco growers is moving for a protected designation of origin status. In Italy, Prosecco is enjoyed as a wine for every occasion. Outside of Italy, it is most often drunk as an aperitif, pretty much the same as champagne is. Prosecco should be always served chilled. Prosecco does not ferment in the bottle, and it grows stale over time. It should be drunk as young as possible, preferably within 2 to 3 years of its vintage. However, top quality Prosecco may be aged for up to 7 years. When compared with other sparkling wines, Prosecco is low in alcohol content, generally about 11% to 12% by volume. The flavour of Prosecco has been described as intensely aromatic and crisp, bringing to mind yellow apple, pear, white peach, and apricot. Most commonly Prosecco is served unmixed.

My top 10 selection of Proseccos are :

Nino Franco Rustico, Prosecco di Conegliano-Valdobbiadene Superiore D.O.C.G. (2005)

Montesil 'Vigna del Paradiso' Extra Dry, Prosecco Superiore di Conegliano-Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G. (2010)

Carpene Malvolti Prosecco di Conegliano-Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G. Extra Dry (2011)

Ruggeri Giustino B. Extra Dry Superiore, Prosecco di Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G. (2011)

Canella Prosecco Superiore di Conegliano Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G. (2012)

Silvano Follador Brut Prosecco di Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G., Veneto (2012)

Bisoli Desideri Jeio Prosecco di Valdobbiadene Superiore D.O.C.G. Brut (2012)

Adriano Adami Dry Vigneto Giardino, Prosecco di Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G. (2012)

Sorelle Bronca Spumante Brut Prosecco di Conegliano Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G. (2012)

Le Vigne di Alice Prosecco Superiore Extra-Dry Conegliano-Valdobbiadene D.O.C.G. (2012)



8.6 MONTEPULCIANO D'ABRUZZO

Montepulciano d'Abruzzo is one of Italy's most famous wines. This classic, well-rounded, plum-scented Italian red is made from Montepulciano grapes grown in the region of Abruzzo, which is on Italy's Adriatic coast. It is very different from *Vino Nobile di Montepulciano*, which is a wine from Tuscany that is based on the Sangiovese grape. The Montepulciano d'Abruzzo DOC title was created in 1968, and covers a vast area of eastern Abruzzo. It spans all of Abruzzo's coastline up to the border with Molise in the south and Marche in the north, and spreads inland for approximately 33km. Most Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wines come from the low hills, plains and coastal areas. The best examples come from the hills of the Teramo province, and have their own DOCG title *Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Colline Teramane*. The Montepulciano red wine grapes have thrived in Abruzzo since the middle of the 18th century. It is a plump grape that produces an easy-drinking wine, and is popular with both producers and consumers. The variety typically provides deeply coloured juice, varying from ruby red to purple, depending on the vintage and the particular winemaking techniques used. It has low acidity and soft, unobtrusive tannins. The Montepulciano grape variety is nearly completely disconnected with the Tuscan town of Montepulciano with which it shares its name. The grape was named after the town, and was once widely used there. To earn the right to be called *Riserva* a Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wine must spend at least 3 years ageing, of which at least 6 months must be in oak. These wines age exceptionally well if the proper winemaking techniques are used. There are 5 viticultural sub-zones which have been identified as producing Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wines of particular quality, and their names may well be found on labels, written as part of the appellation title. They are *Alto Tirino*, *Casauria*, *Teate*, *Terre dei Peligni* and *Terre dei Vestini*. Montepulciano d'Abruzzo wines are my favourite Italian wines and I probably consume more of them than any other !

My favourite top 10 Montepulciano are :

Azienda Agricola Valentini Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (2002)
Marramiero 'Dante Marramiero' Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (2003)
La Valentina Bellovedere Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (2007)
Emidio Pepe Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (2008)
Agriverde Plateo Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (2008)
Fratelli Barba Vigna Franca Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (2008)
Farnese Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (2009)
Terra d'Aligi Tolos Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (2009)
Cantina Zaccagnini San Clemente Montepulciano d'Abruzzo (2009)
Marramiero Inferi Montepulciano d'Abruzzo Riserva (2010)



8.7 BAROLO

Wow ! What can I say about this wine ? It is one of Italy's best, and in my honest opinion, should be reserved for special occasions. Barolo has been called the “king of wines”, and also the “wine of kings”. It is one of the world's best wines and is made from only the very best Nebbiolo grapes, grown near the town of Alba in the region of Piedmont. The Barolo grape is a robust red grape, full bodied and very dry. It's high in acidity, alcohol and tannins. The aroma reminds one of ripe strawberries, tar, roses, violets and truffles. Barolo is a traditional hillside village in the rolling hills of Piedmont in north-western Italy. The vineyards and wineries there have long been famous for producing some of Italy's very finest red wines, mainly from the Nebbiolo grape. Fragrant, tannic Barolo wine is so revered that it was one of only 3 wines awarded DOCG status on the day that the classification was introduced in July, 1980. The other two were Brunello di Montalcino and Vino Nobile di Montepulciano. The Barolo vineyard zone covers the districts of Castiglione Falletto, Serralunga d'Alba and Barolo itself, and also spreads over into sections of Monforte d'Alba, Diano d'Alba, Novello, La Morra, Verduno, Grinzane Cavour, Roddi and Cherasco. The soils and micro-climates vary ever so slightly between these communes, thus creating subtle differences between the wines produced from their vineyards. In spite of the differences between the wines from these various terroirs, they all retain the key qualities that define the classic Barolo style - the famous “tar and roses” aroma, a bright ruby red colour, firm tannins, heightened acidity, and relatively high alcohol. To earn the title “Barolo”, the wines must undergo a minimum of 38 months' aging prior to commercial release. At least 18 must be spent in the barrel, and the remainder in bottle. For an added designation of *riserva*, the total ageing time increases to 62 months. As the tannins soften over time, the complexity shows through with subtle hints of earth, truffles and dark chocolate. Classic Barolos have traditionally required at least 10 years cellaring to tame their tannins.

A Taste of Italy

My selected top 10 Barolos are :

Brovia Monprivato, Barolo DOCG (1990)
Poderi Aldo Conterno Granbussia, Barolo Riserva DOCG (2005)
Giacomo Conterno Monfortino, Barolo Riserva DOCG (2006)
Vietti Villero, Barolo Riserva DOCG (2007)
Paolo Scavino Rocche dell'Annunziata Riserva, Barolo DOCG (2008)
Ceretto Bricco Rocche, Barolo DOCG (2009)
Falletto di Bruno Giacosa 'Le Rocche del Falletto', Barolo DOCG (2009)
Vietti Brunate, Barolo DOCG (2010)
Roberto Voerzio Brunate, Barolo DOCG (2010)
Renato Ratti Rocche dell'Annunziata, Barolo DOCG (2010)



8.8 SANGIOVESE

The Sangiovese grape, or *Nielluccio* in Corsica, is a dark-berried vine and the most widely planted grape variety in Italy. It is synonymous with the red wines of Tuscany. At the start of the 21st century, the Sangiovese vines made up about 10% of the vines on the Italian peninsula. The quality of the Sangiovese wine can be notoriously variable, though in the 1980s, drastically improved winemaking techniques saw a significant shift toward more quality-oriented releases. Sangiovese has a number of clones and is consequently known by many synonyms in its native Italy. Top quality Sangiovese is prized for its high acidity, firm tannins and balanced nature. Savoury flavours of dark cherries and black stone fruit are characteristic, and may be underpinned by secondary notes of tomato leaf and dried herbs. The use of oak barrels has become very popular and this coaxes richer flavours from the grapes, tending toward plum and wild raspberry. In Tuscany, Sangiovese is the sole grape variety permitted in the prestigious Brunello di Montalcino DOCG wine and provides the backbone to Vino Nobile di Montepulciano and the popular wines of Chianti. One of the Sangiovese's more-modern incarnations is in the so-called "Super Tuscans". These wines allow winemakers further freedom to blend indigenous Italian grapes, mainly Sangiovese, with Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot and Syrah. Outside of Tuscany, Sangiovese is widely planted in Lazio, Umbria, Marche and of course Corsica where the variety is known as *Nielluccio* and has a distinctive *maquis* characteristic, that separates it from other Sangiovese. Maquis is the shrubland that covers the island and includes sage, juniper, heath trees, oak and myrtle. Clones of Sangiovese ripen slowly and result in an extended growing season and produce richer, stronger and longer living wines than those made from early-ripening varieties. When the vines are encouraged to produce higher yields, the wine's naturally high acidity is accentuated and its characteristic colour is noticeably diluted. The grape's thin skin causes it to rot in damp conditions.

My chosen top 10 Sangioveses are :

Biondi Santi Tenuta Greppo Annata, Brunello di Montalcino DOCG (2005)
Fontodi Flaccianello della Pieve Colli della Toscana Centrale IGT (2006)
Fuligni Brunello di Montalcino Riserva DOCG (2007)
Tenimenti Angelini Val di Suga Brunello di Montalcino DOCG (2008)
Poliziano Asinone, Vino Nobile di Montepulciano DOCG (2009)
Casanova di Neri Tenuta Nuova, Brunello di Montalcino DOCG(2009)
Felsina Berardenga Fontalloro Toscana IGT (2010)
Il Poggione Brunello di Montalcino DOCG (2011)
Castello Banfi Brunello di Montalcino DOCG (2012)
Poderi dal Nespole Celita Sangiovese di Romagna Superiore (2012)



8.9 CHIANTI

Chianti is situated in Tuscany in central Italy and is home to probably the best known of all Italian wines. Although a wine of ancient origin, Chianti has only been recognized by its geographical area since the Middle Ages. The official *Chianti* wine zone was officially demarcated by Cosimo Medici III in the early 18th century, and the wine's defining character came about under the craftsmanship of Barone Ricasoli in the late 19th century. Back then, it was made using a wide range of local varieties, including white-wine grapes. The Chianti DOC title was created in 1967, and in 1984 was promoted to the highest level of Italian wine classification – DOCG. Its success as a DOC wine fell in the 1970s. Many producers reacted against its mass production and created their wines outside this classification's broad rules. Wines were then produced under the looser terms of the *Vino da Tavola* (VdT) classification, allowing the winemaker to use pure Sangiovese, or add a touch of Cabernet Sauvignon. This affected the whole classification system. A new designation was introduced under the guise of IGT to correct this and to make way for a new “trend” of wine which allowed the different blends or varieties not within the rules of the DOC. Even the DOC regulations were eventually adapted, and Chianti was promoted to the higher classification in 1984. Today, Chianti is a source of world-class wine production. It has started to move away from its long-associated image of *fiaschi*, the squat, straw-covered bottles. Most producers now use the traditional Bordeaux-style bottles that indicate higher-quality wines. Local laws also state that the wines must have a minimum of 70% Sangiovese, and 80% for the more prestigious Chianti Classico DOCG. The native varieties Canaiolo and Colorino are also allowed, as are the classics Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot to a limited degree. In 2006, the use of the white Trebbiano and Malvasia grapes was prohibited, except in Chianti Colli Senesi until the 2015 vintage. Chianti's winemaking zone stretches into the provincial regions of Prato, Florence, Arezzo, Pistoia, Pisa and Siena. Its vineyards produce more than any other Italian DOC,

nearly 750,000hl per year. The area's most highly regarded wines come from the Chianti Rufina zone and the Chianti Classico zone, which was awarded DOCG status in 1996. Rufina and the other six Chianti sub-zones, namely Chianti Colli Aretini, Chianti Colli Fiorentini, Chianti Colli Senesi, Chianti Colline Pisane, Chianti Montalbano and Chianti Montespertoli, fall under the Chianti DOCG, and wines made in these zones are allowed to use either the name of the sub-zone or simply Chianti. Chianti is distinguishable by its red and black cherry character, intermingled with notes of wild herbs, mint and spice, and supported by a racy acidity and mellow tannins. It must be aged for at least 4 months, and for the added designation of *superiore*, it has to age for an additional 3 months before being released. The label *riserva* indicates that the wine has been aged for at least 38 months. Chianti Putto, from growers in the Chianti DOCG, is another wine label from the area. Its distinctive label features a pink cherub, known as *Putto*. For many years, Chianti was bottled in *fiaschi*, the round straw-wrapped bottles that became synonymous with the Italian wine industry and bistros around the world. Winemakers in the 21st century have sought to shed the association of Italian wine with the cheap-and-cheerful *fiaschi* image of days gone by. It is now more common to find Chianti wines in tall Bordeaux-style bottles.

My chosen top 10 Chianti wines are :

Dievole La Vendemmia, Chianti Classico DOCG (2005)
Tiziano Chianti DOCG (2006)
Castello di Querceto Chianti Classico Riserva DOCG (2007)
Sensi Chianti DOCG (2008)
Santa Margherita Chianti Classico DOCG (2010)
Marchesi Mazzei Fonterutoli, Chianti Classico DOCG (2010)
Fattoria Selvapiana Chianti Rufina DOCG (2011)
Rocca delle Macie Chianti Classico DOCG (2011)
Melini Chianti DOCG (2012)
Barone Ricasoli 'Brollo', Chianti Classico DOCG (2012)

8.10 VALPOLICELLA

Valpolicella is probably the most famous red wine from the Veneto wine region in north-eastern Italy. The notable characteristics of a quality Valpolicella are its fragrant, tangy cherry aroma. In the past few decades Valpolicella has suffered the same fate as its French equivalent, Beaujolais, because of the ever-increasing yields and the resulting fluctuations in quality. The Valpolicella production area was granted DOC status in 1960, and this resulted in a dramatic fluctuation of quality and quantity for nearly 40 years. In the 1970s and 1980s Valpolicella wines were highly priced. This was because the low price paid per kg of grapes led more quality-focused producers, mainly in the finer Valpolicella Classico and Valpantena zones, to abandon their vines altogether. This increased the percentage of Valpolicella that came from the poorer sites, and the downward spiral continued, only to be halted by a sudden spike of interest in Amarone della Valpolicella during the 1990s. The grapes used to make Valpolicella are Corvina, Rondinella and Molinara. Corvina is generally regarded as the best of the three, and is the most traditional. Rondinella was popular in the 1960s and 1970s because of its generous yields, while the pale, over-acidic, oxidation-prone Molinara declined dramatically since its early surge. Corvina still remains first choice for higher-quality Valpolicella, and particularly Amarone della Valpolicella, Recioto della Valpolicella and Valpolicella Ripasso. On the warmer, well-drained slopes, Corvina produces wines with greater body than traditionally expected of Valpolicella. This explains the large difference in quality between regular Valpolicella from the plains and Amarone from the hills of the traditional *classico* zone. The Valpolicella viticultural area covers a sizeable area of the western Veneto, stretching north into the hills above Verona for almost 10 miles, and east to west for more than twice that distance, linking Soave with Bardolino. The best terroir can be found in the north of the *classico* zone, around the villages of Fumane, Marano and Negrar. The little hamlet of Gargagnago is also

home to some of the region's finest vines, although it is better known as the spiritual home of Garganega, the white grape used in Soave and Gamberella. The hills here rise into the fresh sub-alpine air, creating a beautiful patchwork of aspects in every direction and taking advantage of the northern Italian sunshine. Because standard Valpolicella wines have traditionally been at the lighter end of the spectrum, local winemakers have used various techniques to achieve greater depth and complexity. The *passito* and *ripasso* methods have been so successful that both techniques now have dedicated DOC titles. In the case of the *passito* Amarone and Recioto wines, they have DOCG status. Where the *passito* wines are concerned, the grapes are dried out for weeks or even months before fermentation, and during this time their natural sugars and flavours get to be sufficiently concentrated to produce deeper, more alcoholic wines. The *ripasso* method is to "re-pass" or re-ferment, the *passito* grapes with standard Valpolicella wine. This creates a deeper, more character-filled wine. The style gained DOC status for its Valpolicella Ripasso in 2007.

My selection of the Valpolicellas are :

Giuseppe Quintarelli Recioto della Valpolicella Classico DOCG (2001)
Viviani Recioto della Valpolicella Classico DOCG (2005)
Giuseppe Quintarelli Valpolicella Classico Superiore (2006)
Santa Sofia Recioto della Valpolicella Classico DOCG (2007)
Romano Dal Forno Vigneto Monte Lodoletta Valpolicella Superiore (2008)
Zenato Recioto della Valpolicella Classico DOCG (2009)
Tommaso Bussola Recioto della Valpolicella Classico DOCG (2009)
Zenato Ripassa Valpolicella Superiore (2010)
Gerardo Cesari Bosan Valpolicella Superiore Ripasso (2011)
Marion Valpolicella Superiore (2012)

9 LIQUEURS

In this chapter we sample some “digestivos” - after dinner liqueurs. Any one of these is an ideal after-dinner drink, or as a nightcap !

- 9.1 LIMONCELLO
- 9.2 AMARETTO
- 9.3 FRANGELICO
- 9.4 GALLIANO
- 9.5 SAMBUCA
- 9.6 CAMPARI
- 9.7 RAMAZZOTTI
- 9.8 STREGA
- 9.9 NOCINO
- 9.10 APEROL



9.1 LIMONCELLO

Limoncello is an Italian lemon liqueur produced mainly in southern Italy, especially in the region around the Gulf of Naples, the Sorrentino peninsula, the Amalfi coast, the islands of Procida, Ischia and Capri. It is also produced in Puglia, Sicily and Sardinia, as far as the Italian locations are concerned. The origins of limoncello are at least 100 years old. Traditionally, it is made from the zest of Sorrento lemons. Lemon zest (peels without the pith) is steeped in rectified spirit until the oil is released. The resulting yellow liquid is then mixed with a simple syrup concoction. Varying the sugar to water ratio and temperature will affect the clarity, viscosity, and flavour. Opaque limoncellos are the result of spontaneous emulsification of the sugar syrup and extracted lemon oils. Limoncello is also a popular ingredient in cocktails. It imparts a strong lemon flavour without the bitterness of pure lemon juice. It is traditionally served chilled as an after-dinner digestivo. Along the Amalfi Coast, it is usually served in small ceramic glasses that are also chilled and this tradition has been carried into other parts of Italy. It generally has an ethanol content of between 28% and 32% and this is considered optimal for Limoncello. There are also many variations of Limoncello available, such as Pistachiocello (flavoured with pistachio nuts), Meloncello (flavoured with cantaloupes), and Fragoncello (flavoured with strawberries). There is also a less alcoholic, creamier version, known as Crema di Limoncello, and the alcohol content is generally around 16%.



9.2 AMARETTO

Amaretto is a sweet, almond-flavoured, liqueur. It is made from a base of apricot pits or almonds, sometimes both. Amaretto should not be confused with *amaro*, a different family of Italian liqueurs. The two major brands of amaretto are Disaronno and Lazzaroni. The legend of amaretto is that it was first created back in the Renaissance by a beautiful young innkeeper in Saronno, Italy. In 1525, the citizens of Saronno were finishing the reconstruction of their city which had been ravaged by war. Bernardino Luini, a member of the Leonardo da Vinci School of Art, was commissioned by the Basilica of Santa Maria delle Grazie in Saronno to paint a fresco of the “Adoration of the Magii”, which included the Madonna. Luini was passionate about his work and art and went on a lengthy search for the perfect model to represent his Madonna. He found that looking for someone who was patient, poised and beautiful was an arduous task until he first laid his eyes on the fair-haired innkeeper. It was only a matter of time before the young innkeeper fell deeply and passionately in love with Luini. Her love was so deep that she created a special potion for her lover – hence amaretto. Unfortunately, the young innkeeper's name has been lost, but her likeness and amaretto recipe lives on. Since its first inception in 1525, the recipe for amaretto has reportedly remained unchanged. Today, Amaretto is carefully crafted with high-quality natural ingredients like absolute alcohol, burnt sugar and the pure essence of 17 different selected herbs and fruits soaked in an apricot kernel oil.



9.3 FRANGELICO

Frangelico is a brand of noisette (hazelnut) and herb-flavoured liqueur that is produced in Canale in Italy. It was released in the 1980s and gained attention because its unusual bottle was designed to look like a friar, complete with a knotted white cord around the waist. It is sold in two sizes - 750ml and 375ml. Frangelico can be used to make many cocktails, such as the Hazelnut Martini, the Frangelico Colada, and Frangelico with Cranberry Juice. It can be added to vodka to make the shot called the "Chocolate Cake". It can also simply be served on ice, with soda water, or with coffee. Frangelico is my most favourite of all Italian liqueurs and was introduced to me on Mallorca by Carsten of the famous German/Italian restaurant in Santa Ponsa called "XII Apostel". We were celebrating our 21st wedding anniversary and Carsten produced a bottle and 3 shot glasses. We imbibed a shot each to celebrate ! According to legend, a hermit named Fra Angelico "created unique recipes for liqueurs". It is funny, though, that the bottle itself most closely resembles the habit of a Franciscan friar, while the liqueur's likely namesake, the famous painter Fra Angelico, circa d.1400s, was a Dominican , whose robe would have been white and without the cincture. Frangelico is made in a similar manner to some other nut liqueurs. The nuts are crumbled up and combined with cocoa, vanilla berries, and other natural flavours, and then left to soak in the spirit base. After the flavour of the ingredients has been absorbed by the spirit, the liqueur is filtered, sweetened, and bottled.



9.4 GALLIANO

The Galliano liqueur was originally created in Livorno by Arturo Vaccari in 1896, naming the spirit after Giuseppe Galliano, a 19th century hero from the Italo-Ethiopian war. Galliano has numerous natural ingredients, including vanilla, star anise, Mediterranean anise, ginger, citrus, juniper, musk yarrow, and lavender. Neutral alcohol is infused with the pressings from the herbs except the vanilla. The liquid is then distilled and infused with pressed vanilla. In the final stage, distilled water, refined sugar and pure neutral alcohol are blended with the base concoction. Galliano is different from other aniseed-flavoured liqueurs such as Sambuca, Pernod, or Anisette. It is used both as a digestivo, for drinking after heavy meals, and as an ingredient for cocktails. Galliano is now produced and sold by a company based in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. Galliano comes in a distinctive, tall, slender bottle with an almost triangular shape that bears the logo for the liqueur, a large “G” flanked by two herb plants. The liqueur itself has a distinctive bright, yellow color. The taste of Galliano combines the flavours of vanilla, orange and anise. A popular cocktail made with Galliano is the “Golden Dream”. It combines the liqueur with triple sec, orange juice and light cream. The cocktail is shaken with ice then strained and served in a martini glass.



9.5 SAMBUCA

Sambuca is an anise-flavoured, usually colourless, liqueur. Its most common variety is often referred to as *white sambuca* to differentiate it from other varieties that are deep blue or bright red. Like other anise-flavoured liqueurs, it sometimes has an ouzo effect when combined with water. Sambuca is flavoured with essential oils obtained from anise, star anise, liquorice and other spices. It also contains elderflower. The oils are added to vodka, a concentrated solution of sugar, and other flavouring. Apparently the name *Sambuca* comes from the Arabic word *Zammut*, which was the name of an anise-flavoured drink that arrived by ship from the East at the port of Civitavecchia. Another explanation is that sambuca was the early original word for elderflower. The Greek word *Sambuca* was first used as the name of another elderberry liqueur that was created in Civitavecchia over 135 years ago. The first commercial version of such a drink started at the end of 1800 in Civitavecchia, where Luigi Manzi sold *Sambuca Manzi*. In 1945, soon after the end of the 2nd World War, commendatore Angelo Molinari started producing *Sambuca Extra Molinari*, which helped popularise it throughout Italy. Sambuca can be served neat, or on the rocks with water, and this gives it the resulting ouzo effect. Sambuca is suggested to be a wonderful complement to coffee. As with other anise liqueurs, it can be drunk after coffee or added to coffee as a substitute for sugar. The most iconic serving of sambuca is a shot with 3 coffee beans, called *con la mosca*, which means “with the fly”. The 3 coffee beans are said to represent health, happiness and prosperity, known as the Holy Trinity. The sambuca shot may be ignited to toast the coffee beans with the flame extinguished immediately before drinking.



9.6 CAMPARI

Campari is a liqueur made by the infusion of herbs and fruit, including chinotto and cascarilla, in alcohol and water. It is classified as a “bitter” because of its dark red colour. It is often used in cocktails and is more commonly served with soda water, wine, or citrus juice. It was invented in 1860 by Gaspare Campari in Novara. And was originally coloured with carmine dye, derived from crushed cochineal insects ! This gave the drink its distinctive red colour, but in 2006, Gruppo Campari stopped using carmine in its production. In 1904, Campari's first production plant was opened in Sesto San Giovanni near Milan. Any bars that bought Campari had to display the *Campari Bitters* sign. Under the direction of Gaspare's son, Davide Campari, the company began to export the beverage, initially to Nice in the heart of the French Riviera, and then overseas. The Campari brand is now distributed worldwide. In Italy, Campari mixed with soda water is sold in individual bottles as Campari Soda, and is packaged in a distinctive bottle that was designed in 1932 by Fortunato Depero. Campari is an essential ingredient in the classic Negroni cocktail, the Garibaldi cocktail, and in the Americano, which was named at a time when a few Americans were aware of Campari.



9.7 RAMAZZOTTI

The formula for Ramazzotti was created in 1815 by Ausano Ramazzotti in his small laboratory in Milan. His creation was a sweet, plant-based liqueur, and it proved to be an immediate success. The recipe does not contain any colouring or artificial additives and is still very much a secret formula today. Its most distinctive flavours are the Sicilian sweet oranges, bitter Curaçao oranges, star anise and cardamom. The liqueur is known today as Amaro Ramazzotti and is traditionally enjoyed as a digestivo, either taken straight or on ice to retain all its flavours. There is also a Ramazzotti Menta, which is an aperitif served straight with a mint leaf or as a long drink, and a Ramazzotti Aperitivo, a sweet aperitif slightly spiced. Amaro Ramazzotti is classified in the “bitters” category. In its production, it consists of 33 different aromatic plants and fruits, including sweet oranges, whose taste is the most prominent. It is made at Canelli in Piedmont.



9.8 STREGA

There are a number of legends surrounding the origins of Strega, and we will explain some of them here. Strega was created in 1860 by Guiseppe Alberti in Benevento in Italy. A wine merchant by trade, Guiseppe moved to Benevento after his father, a spice merchant, was imprisoned in the area by a ruling family that disliked him. Benevento was a major railway at the time and Alberti began exporting local wines to France. Having made quite a bit of money through this venture, he bought a few bars in the area, one of which was in the train station. The more common story of Strega's creation is that, after his father was released from prison, they joined forces to create the herbal liqueur. Alberti's father's knowledge of spices helped shape the herbal ingredients that eventually became Strega. Alberti began offering their creation in a lunch basket he served at the train station for travels. They called the liqueur Strega, because Benevento was known as the city of witches. Eventually word spread about the liqueur and the rest is history. Perhaps the most interesting story starts out with Alberti and father searching the area for herbs to make elixirs. Benevento had long been known as the "city of witches" ever since it was invaded by barbarians. The locals thought the barbarians had magical powers and believed them to be witches. While on their search they stumbled upon a witch who had been trapped under a fallen tree branch. They saved the witch and as a reward were presented with the "secret" recipe for Strega. They had to promise not to tell anyone else the recipe and could only pass it on to another family member shortly before death, so that the recipe would live on from generation to generation. Only two people know the recipe and they are the only ones allowed to prepare the herbs for Strega. They supposedly have a secret "herb room", where all the herbs are stored in a coded set of drawers. Only these two know how to decipher the code to collect the correct herbs. A rather less exciting legend is that Alberti simply received the recipe from a monastery in the area. It seemed as if the monks designed some of the best

A Taste of Italy

alcoholic beverages and drinks in the area and then gave it to some people to make in secret. Like most herbal liqueurs, Strega is made from a secret combination of about 70 herbs from all corners of the globe, and are infused into a base distillate. While some of the herbs come from Italy, such as Ceylon cinnamon, Florentine iris, Italian Apennine juniper, Samnite mint, perhaps the highlight is its yellow colour, which comes from the addition of Saffron to the infusion. Like many great liqueurs, Strega is a completely natural product with no artificial colours or flavours. The final distillate is also aged in ash barrels before bottling.



9.9 NOCINO

Nocino is a sticky dark brown liqueur from the Emilia-Romagna region in northern Italy. It is made from unripe green walnuts. Italians recommend that the walnuts are harvested on San Giovanni, June 24th. After steeping them in spirit, the walnuts are removed and the now-black alcohol is mixed with simple syrup. Nocino has an aromatic but bittersweet flavour. In many early cases, it was homemade and villages and even individual families often had their own recipes, including different additions such as cinnamon or cloves. During the middle ages, Italian monasteries used nocino for its medicinal properties and as an alcoholic treat. In Modena The Typical Walnut of Modena Roll of Tasters “Il Matracci” has been operating as a non-profit company for many years and it's aim is to spread this product through the world's first travelling school for Walnut of Modena tasters. In collaboration with the municipality of Castelfranco Emilia, the association organizes “Nocinopoli” - The Nocino Town: a night in which everything is related to Nocino, the undisputed star of the event. This celebration takes place in the heart of Castelfranco Emilia every 3rd Wednesday of July in the main street Via Emilia. The other streets and squares of the city centre are closed to traffic to permit the stalls of the exhibitors to expose the high quality products of the territory of Modena. Besides the inevitable Nocino, with all its derivatives, there are other products such as Parmigiano Reggiano, Aceto Balsamico Tradizional di Modena, Prosciutto di Modena, Lambrusco, musk melon, Borlenghi, Ciacci, Crescentine and much more from other Italian provinces and regions that have been invited for the occasion. As a drink, Nocino must be served cold.



9.10 APEROL

Aperol is an aperitif originally produced by the Barbieri company, based in Padua. It is now produced by the Campari company. Aperol was originally created in 1919, but only became successful after the 2nd World War. Some of its ingredients are, bitter orange, gentian, rhubarb and cinchona. Although it tastes and smells much like Campari, Aperol has an alcohol content of less than half of that of Campari. Aperol and Campari have the same sugar content. However, Aperol is milder and less bitter, while Campari is also much darker in colour. Spritz, an aperitif cocktail, is often made using Aperol. There's no doubt about it, Aperol is hugely popular in Italy, with style bars, restaurants and hotels serving Aperol Spritz to young and old, male and female alike, enjoying the cooling, sparkling drink, garnished with a slice of orange and served in a healthy sized wine glass over ice.



10 COFFEES

This final chapter is all about Italian coffees. Coffee is such an essential part of Italian culture. Italian coffee is generally made from a blend of Arabica coffee beans, known for its full flavour and low caffeine content, and is often perfect, the cups just the right shape and size, and the machines are also made in Italy. As far as we know, the first Italian cafe opened in Venice in the middle of the 17th century. Cafés soon spread quickly throughout the country to cities such as Florence, Milan, Rome, and Naples. Within a short while there were over 200 cafés in Italy. Italian Coffee was often referred to as an “intellectual beverage”, because coffee soon became synonymous with stimulating conversation in a relaxed, stylish atmosphere. Coffee was credited by some Italian doctors for its restorative properties and was even considered as a cure-all by some. There are just so many to choose from that I had a hard time whittling it down to my final 10.

- 10.1 CAPPUCCINO
- 10.2 MACCHIATO
- 10.3 ESPRESSO
- 10.4 FREDDO
- 10.5 LATTE
- 10.6 AMERICANO
- 10.7 MAROCCHINO
- 10.8 CORRETTO
- 10.9 LUNGO
- 10.10 RISTRETTO



10.1 CAPPUCINO

A cappuccino is a coffee-based drink that has been prepared with espresso, hot milk, and steamed milk foam. It is different to a caffè latte because it is prepared with rather less steamed milk than a caffè latte. As a guide, an espresso is normally $\frac{1}{3}$ espresso, $\frac{1}{3}$ milk and $\frac{1}{3}$ foam. A cappuccino usually exceeds the height of the cup by virtue of the fact that the foam is visible above the side of the cup. Cappuccinos are traditionally served in porcelain cups. This is because they retain heat far better than glass or paper cups. The foam on top of cappuccinos form an insulation to the coffee down below and helps to retain the heat of the liquid. This allows them to stay hotter for longer. To test a good cappuccino, pour a teaspoon of sugar onto the foam. If the sugar doesn't sink, then it's a good, well made cappuccino !



10.2 MACCHIATO

Traditionally, a macchiato was made with one shot of espresso, and the small amount of milk added to it was the “stain”. However, the “stain” later came to refer to the foamed milk that was put on top of it to show that the drink had milk in it. In the past, the baristas needed to show the serving waiters the difference between an espresso and an espresso with a tiny bit of milk in it. In this case, a macchiato was 'marked'. As the term “macchiato” to describe this type of coffee predates the common use of foam in coffee by centuries, the 'stain', in other words, the additive that lightens the dark espresso, is traditionally the milk and not the foam.



10.3 ESPRESSO

Espresso is the most widespread type of coffee in Italy, so when you ask for a coffee at the bar, you are very likely going to be given an espresso. It is also very important to serve an espresso in a hot cup and not in a cold one. This drink is brewed much quicker than a regular Italian coffee. It was so named, because espresso means “fast” in Italian. An espresso coffee machine forces water through packed ground coffee, thus creating a drink that is stronger in taste, and it usually has a rich bronze froth on top, called a “crema”. There is also another version of an espresso called a “doppio” and in relatively simple terms it is just a double espresso.



10.4 FREDDO

A caffè Freddo is an espresso that is served cool or cold. Sometimes it is placed within a refrigerator for about half an hour before it is served. Many Italian coffee bars serve “caffè freddo”, which is straight espresso kept in a freezer and served as an icy slush. In the Salento region of Puglia, this process was perfected by freshly brewing the espresso, adding the desired amount of sugar and finally pouring it into a whiskey glass filled with ice cubes just before being served, and came to be known as “Caffè in ghiaccio”, or “coffee in ice”.



10.5 LATTE

A latte has become the coffee drink of choice outside of Italy, especially in English-speaking countries. However, in Italy latte just literally means “milk.” That’s it. If you order a *latte* in a cafe in Italy, you’ll get a glass of cold milk and not a coffee ! There is a coffee drink in Italy that uses the word “latte”, but it’s not kind to call it a coffee drink in Italy. If you ask for a *caffè latte*, what you will get is basically a tall glass of steamed milk with a small shot of espresso. Italians have been known to order this, but it's generally not widely done. When in Italy, just be careful to ask for a “*caffè latte*” if you want the same as you get in western Europe, or north America, or else you will just get a tall glass of milk !



10.6 AMERICANO

A caffè Americano is about half way between the American-style coffee you're probably used to and a more traditional style Italian coffee. An Americano is an espresso that's been watered down a bit and served in a bigger cup than the little espresso cups.



10.7 MAROCCHINO

The original caffè Marocchino was created in Alessandria in Italy. It is served in a small glass and is made up of a shot of espresso cocoa powder and milk froth. In some of the northern regions of Italy, they add thick hot cocoa. The name Marocchino is Italian for Moroccan, and is derived from its colour, as marocchino was a type of light brown Moroccan leather used in the 1930s.



10.8 CORRETTO

Caffè corretto is an Italian coffee drink that consists of a shot of espresso with a shot of liqueur, more often than not using grappa, and sometimes sambuca or brandy. It is also known outside of Italy as an “espresso corretto”. Correctly, it should be ordered as “un caffè corretto alla grappa” or “un caffè corretto alla sambuca”, “un caffè corretto al cognac”, etc, etc depending on the desired liqueur that you have chosen. Most Italian baristas prepare a caffè corretto by simply adding a few drops of the desired liqueur into an espresso shot. However, in some cases, the liqueur is served in a shot alongside the coffee allowing the customer to pour the quantity of the liqueur that he/she desires. A few baristas also let their regular customers make their drink themselves providing the espresso shot and the bottle of the liqueur. The Italian word “corretto” means “correct” in the sense of the coffee having been corrected ! This drink can serve as a great after-dinner treat.



10.9 LUNGO

The Italian word “lungo” is literally translated as “long,” and this coffee drink is somewhere between a *caffè Americano* and a regular Italian *caffè*. It’s got more water in it than a *caffè*, but it’s water that’s been run through the same coffee grounds rather than just hot water added afterwards. It results in a slightly weaker flavour than a regular shot of espresso.



10.10

RISTRETTO

A caffè ristretto is basically a single shot of espresso with less water than a traditional shot. It's the same amount of coffee, but with less water passing through it, making the flavour much more concentrated. It can also be called a "caffè stretto".



11 **BONUS**

This final chapter is a little bonus and covers a few items that we feel are also worthy of mentioning, but do not have a home elsewhere in the book.



RESTAURANT – XXII APOSTEL

11.1 BIRRA MORETTI

Luigi Moretti's brewery was started over 100 years ago in Udine, in the Friuli region. At that time, Udine was a sleepy little provincial town surrounded by stone walls that had been built as early as 1350. Within those old town walls, the people of Udine worked hard for generations. It was at an important time during the unification of Italy that the whole of the Friuli region was still annexed to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and there were frequent patriotic uprisings in the city. An Austrian garrison was stationed in the castle that dominates Udine, and cannons were placed in the main square. It was during this very climate of unrest that the 37-year-old Luigi Moretti – in the same year as the famous battles of San Martino and Solferino – decided to build his brewery. Born into a wealthy family of merchants, Luigi Moretti was at that time already familiar with wholesale trading. At the time his small factory was started, its founder certainly could not have imagined how it would grow in the future. The first bottle of Birra Moretti was sold in the summer of 1860. Even though it looked a little different to today's bottles, the quality of the product has certainly remained the same. The machinery used then was extremely advanced for its time, just as that used today is also at the cutting edge. From the 1990s on, Birra Moretti went from being a regionally-based beer to a nationally distributed beer. Today Birra Moretti is exported to over 45 countries around the world, and it has won numerous international awards.



The legend of the label One day in 1942, the nephew of Luigi Moretti, the brewery's founder, saw a pleasant-looking man sitting at a table in the Trattoria Boschetti in Udine. There was something unique about him. He somehow embodied the real values of his beer - authenticity, tradition, genuineness. Eventually Mr Moretti went up to him and asked if he could take a picture of him. When the man was asked what he wanted in return, the only thing he asked for was another Moretti beer. Since that day the image of that man is on every single Moretti label.

Birra Moretti ranks as my favourite beer of all time and I can highly recommend it to connoisseur beer drinkers anywhere !

11.2 NASTRA AZZURO PERRONI

The Peroni Brewery was founded in 1846 in Vivegano in Lombardy. The company was moved to Rome by Giovanni Peroni in 1864, six years prior to Rome becoming the Italian capital in 1870. The company's main brand in Italy is *Peroni*, a pale lager sometimes known as *Peroni Red* in export markets. However, it is probably best known worldwide for its premium lager, *Nastro Azzurro*. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the company became one of the most prominent brewing companies in the newly unified Italian nation. The company's brand strategy continued to refine itself to match industry trends of the 1980s. By the 1990s, both the Peroni brand name and product line were distributed and known worldwide. *Nastro Azzurro* is a 5.1% alcohol pale lager. It is the Peroni Brewery's premium lager brand which was launched in 1963. The name means "Blue Ribbon" in Italian, in honour of the Blue Riband won by the Italian ocean liner SS Rex in 1933.



11.3 POLLO CACCIATORE

Pollo Cacciatore, or “Hunters Chicken”, is one of my all time favourite classic Italian recipes. It is very rich and creamy, best enjoyed on a cold winters day with a bottle of strong red wine and some good company !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1 x whole chicken (cut into 12 pieces)
100g x plain white flour
3 x carrots (peeled and finely chopped)
3 x celery sticks (finely chopped)
1 x large red onion (peeled and finely sliced)
2 x tablespoons of rosemary leaves (finely chopped)
100ml x white wine
2 x 400g tins of chopped tomatoes
150g x pitted black olives (drained and cut in half)
5 x tablespoons of chopped flat leaves parsley
salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
olive oil

RECIPE

Pre-heat your oven to 160°C. Place the chicken pieces in a large bowl with the flour and add plenty of salt and pepper. Give it a good shake and transfer the chicken pieces onto a plate. Heat 150ml of the olive oil in a large frying pan and fry the chicken pieces until they are browned on all sides. Then remove them with a slotted spoon and set aside. Add the carrots, celery, rosemary and onions into the frying pan. Season with salt and pepper and cook on medium heat for 8 minutes. Stir occasionally with a wooden spoon. Pour in the wine and continue to cook for another 2 minutes, allowing the alcohol to evaporate a little. Using the wooden spoon, scrape

A Taste of Italy

all the good bits off the bottom of the frying pan. Pour the chopped tomatoes into the pan and add a glass of water and the olives, bringing to the boil. Transfer the sauce into an ovenproof dish and place the chicken pieces therein. Cover with a lid and cook in the oven for 1½ hours. Before serving, season with salt and pepper, and sprinkle the parsley over it. Serve in a large warm serving dish with plenty of crusty bread around it. Buon Appetito !



11.4 RISOTTO PRIMAVERA

The birthplace of risotto is definitely the Veneto. There are hundreds of risottos in Venice and Veneto, many more so than in Lombardy. This risotto features the radicchio of Treviso and is a firm favourite. I normally have a risotto about once a year !

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

200g x shelled broad beans
4 x medium shallots
3 x spring onions (trimmed)
1 x small garlic clove
250g x bunch of asparagus
1.3l x good quality chicken or vegetable stock
1 x tablespoon of olive oil
85g x butter
350g x risotto rice
100ml x dry white wine
140g x shelled peas
100g x parmesan cheese (finely grated)

RECIPE

Drop the fresh broad beans into boiling water and leave for a minute. Then drain and cool under cold water. Peel off the skins. Chop the shallots, spring onions and garlic as finely as possible. Snap the woody bases from the asparagus spears and discard them. Slice each spear into 4 diagonal pieces. Pour the stock into a separate pan and bring to a simmer. Heat the oil and half the butter in a wide, heavy pan. Tip in the shallots, spring onions and garlic and cook for 4 minutes until they are soft and see-through, but not brown, stirring them often. With the heat on medium, add the rice and keep it moving all the

A Taste of Italy

time with a wooden spoon for a few minutes so that it gets toasted and very hot, but not coloured. Once it starts to hiss and sizzle, pour in the wine. Keep stirring for about a minute until the wine has evaporated. Put the timer on for 20 minutes, add 1½ ladles of stock, allowing it to simmer but not to boil. Keep stirring until all the liquid is absorbed, scraping the sides of the pan to catch any stray bits of rice. Continue to stir and add another ladleful of stock when the previous amount has been absorbed. If you add too much stock at a time the risotto won't be as creamy. The rice tells you when it needs more stock by sighing ! When you pull a spoon across the bottom of the pan it should leave a clear line. After 15 minutes add the beans and peas to the rice with a little bit of seasoning. At the same time, drop the asparagus into the stock and let it simmer for 4 minutes, then lift it out with a slotted spoon and add to the rice. Start tasting the rice now. When done, it should be softened, but with a bit of bite in the centre, almost chewy, and the risotto creamy. Overcooking just makes it mushy. Continue adding stock and stirring until done. Take the pan off the heat, add half the parmesan and the rest of the butter plus a splash of stock to keep everything moist. Put the lid on the pan and leave for 3 minutes to rest. Serve with the remaining parmesan.



11.5 AGNELLO SCOTTADITO

There are very few things that are as tasty as a grilled lamb chop. This grilled lamb chop dish from the Marche is called agnello scottadito (finger burning) because you won't wait for them to cool before you devour them ! When preparing Italian lamb dishes, you should bear in mind that Italian lambs are slaughtered young. By the time an animal reaches the weight of about 40 pounds it's an agnellone - not quite a sheep, but no longer a lamb either, much like a teenager ! Ask your local butcher for meat from a small, locally grown animal.

SERVES 4

INGREDIENTS

1kg x thickly cut lamb chops
20cm x sprig of fresh rosemary leaves
3 x cloves of garlic
100g x cured lard (or use prosciutto fat)
salt and pepper to taste

RECIPE

Grind the lard, rosemary leaves, and garlic into a smooth paste. Spread it on both sides of the chops and set them aside in a cool place for at least 12 hours. The next day fire up your grill. The ideal combustible is chestnut wood though other coals will work as well. When the fire is ready set the grill over it to heat it for a few minutes, then carefully lay down the lamb chops. Cook them briefly, flip them, and grill the other sides as well. The overall cooking time should only be a few minutes. Remove them and serve them with a tossed salad made with an abundance of greens (arugula, radicchio, dandelion greens, lettuce and whatever else suits your fancy) while they're hot enough to burn the fingers !



AGNELLO SCOTTADITO

12 GLOSSARY

abbachio – This is the Italian word for lamb, especially those that are larger and have darker meat.

aglio – This is garlic, a relative of the onion family, and is a staple cooking ingredient of the Mediterranean region.

al cartoccio – A cooking method of being wrapped in paper and baked.

al dente – In Italian cooking, “al dente” describes cooking that is firm to the bite – almost ready to eat. Literally, it means “to the tooth”.

arancini - Stuffed rice balls that have been coated with breadcrumbs and fried.

arborio rice – This is an Italian short-grain rice used to make risottos. When cooked, the grains are firm, creamy, and chewy, due to its higher starch content.

arrabiata sauce - A spicy sauce made for pasta from garlic, tomatoes and red chilli peppers cooked in olive oil. “Arrabiata” literally means “angry” in Italian, and the name of the sauce is meant to mimic the heat of the chilli peppers.

artichoke – The artichoke is native to the Mediterranean and is a variety of thistle that is cultivated as a food.

arugula – Arugula is an edible plant or herb that has a peppery or mustard flavour, and is more commonly known as salad rocket.

asparagi – Asparagus is a spring vegetable that is native to most of Europe, north Africa and western Asia, and is widely cultivated as a vegetable crop.

baccala – This is dried and salted cod, similar to the Portuguese “bacalhau”.

balsamic vinegar - Balsamic vinegar is made from cooked white Trebbiano grape juice, and used as a condiment.

basil - Basil, or sweet basil, is a common name for the culinary herb sometimes known as Saint Joseph's Wort in

some English-speaking countries.

bianchetti – Whitebait (fish).

biscotti – Biscotti, also known as cantuccini, are twice-baked cookies originating from the city of Prato.

bistecca - The Italian word for steak. It normally refers to T-bone steaks and Porterhouse steaks.

broccoli - Broccoli is an edible green plant from the cabbage family. Its large flowering head is used as a vegetable.

bucatini - Bucatini, which is also known as perciatelli, is a thick type of spaghetti-looking pasta with a hole running through the center. The name comes from the Italian word “buco” which means “hole”. Bucatini is common throughout the Lazio and Rome regions.

cannelloni - Cannelloni are cylindrically-shaped pasta that is generally served baked with a filling and covered by a sauce.

cantaloupe - Cantaloupes are the non-netted, orange-fleshed melons of Europe.

carnevale – Carnevale is the traditional Christian celebration and feast right before the start of the Lent, which is the 6 weeks period before Easter in which one goes on a frugal diet, thus giving up eating meat.

castor sugar - This is the term for sugar with small grains that are between granulated sugar and icing sugar in terms of fineness. It is also sometimes spelt as “caster sugar”.

cavatelli - Cavatelli are small pasta shells that look like small hot dog buns. The name is less frequently used for a type of dumpling made with ricotta cheese.

ciabatta - Ciabatta is an elongated, broad and flat white bread made from wheat flour and yeast, created in the Veneto, as a response to the popularity of French baguettes.

cinnamon - Cinnamon is a spice obtained from the inner bark of several trees from the genus *Cinnamomum* that is used in both sweet and savoury foods.

cotoletta - Cotoletta is the Italian word that means veal breaded cutlet. When cooked, it is fried in clarified butter only and traditionally uses exclusively milk-fed veal.

cremini – These are mushrooms that are a moderately mature version of the white button mushroom, and also have a similar flavour. They are younger than portobello mushrooms, but still related. Their slightly more mature state means that they have a browner colour, firmer texture, and better flavour than the younger white button mushrooms.

cumin - Cumin is a flowering plant that is native from the east Mediterranean to India. Its seeds are used in the cuisines of many different cultures, in both whole and ground form.

diavola – Devilled with a spicy sauce.

DOC – This is a quality assurance status afforded to Italian wine and is fully known as Denominazione di Origine Controllata, or “controlled designation of origin”. It was started in 1963 and overhauled in 1992 for compliance with the equivalent EU law.

DOCG – If you see this on the label of your wine bottle it means that the wine producers followed the strictest regulations possible to make that wine. It is a higher form of DOC and is appended by “Garantita”, or “guaranteed”. The wine was tested by a committee that then guarantees the geographic authenticity of the wine and its quality. There are currently only a handful of Italian wines that qualify for DOCG status.

extra virgin olive oil – Extra virgin olive oil comes from virgin oil production only, and is of a higher quality. It is judged to have a superior taste, having some fruitiness and no defined sensory defects. Extra-virgin olive oil accounts for the following percentages in the Mediterranean countries - Greece: 80% ; Italy: 65% ; Spain 30%.

focaccia – This is a flat oven-baked Italian bread that is similar in style and texture to pizza doughs and is generally topped up with herbs or other ingredients.

fegatini – This can be calf livers or chicken livers.

fontina – fontina cheese is made from unpasteurized milk and has an earthy, mushroomy, and woody taste. It is fairly pungent and has quite an intense flavour.

formaggio - The Italian word for cheese.

funghi – The Italian word for mushrooms.

gamberoni – The Italian word for prawns.

gelatin – This is a colourless, brittle, flavourless foodstuff derived from collagen of various animal by-products.

gorgonzola – This is an Italian blue cheese, made from unskimmed cow's milk, and generally has blue veins.

IGT – This is another of the Italian wine classifications, and means “Indicazione Geografica Tipica”. This designation was created a little after the DOC and DOCG designations in order to accommodate growers who couldn't meet all the DOC or DOCG regulations for one reason or another, but were still producing great wines.

julienne – This is a culinary process of cutting, using a culinary knife to cut the food into long thin strips, similar to matchsticks. Common food items that are “julienned” are carrots, celery, or potatoes. This is done by trimming the ends of the vegetable and the edges to make four straight sides. This makes it easier to produce a uniform cut. Trimmings can be used for stocks, soups, purees, etc. The measurement for *julienne* is **3mm x 3mm x 3 to 5 cm**. The process can also be applied to the preparation of meat or fish, especially where stir-fried foods are made.

lasagne - Lasagne are a wide, flat pasta shape. It is possibly one of the oldest types of pasta. The word also refers to a dish made with several layers of lasagne sheets alternated with

sauces and various other ingredients.

latkes – These are shallow-fried pancakes of grated or ground potato, flour and egg, often flavoured with grated onion or garlic and seasoning.

linguine - Linguine is a form of pasta similar to fettuccine, but elliptical in sections rather than flat. It is wider than spaghetti, but not as wide as fettuccine.

maccheroni - Macaroni is a variety of dry pasta made with durum wheat. Macaroni noodles usually do not contain eggs and are normally cut in short, hollow shapes. However, the term refers not to the shape of the pasta, but to the kind of dough from which the noodle is made. It may be straight or curved. Macaroni is usually made commercially by large-scale extrusion. The curved shape is caused by different speeds on each side of the pasta tube as it comes out of the machine. The Italian word *maccheroni* is a generic term for hollow or tubular pasta.

manzo – The Italian word for beef.

marinara sauce - Marinara sauce is an Italian tomato sauce originating from Naples. It is usually made with tomatoes, garlic, herbs, and onions. Its many variations can include the addition of capers, olives and spices.

marsala - Marsala is a wine produced in the region around the city of Marsala in Sicily. It first received DOC status in 1969.

marzipan - Marzipan is a made primarily of sugar or honey and almond meal, and is sometimes augmented with almond oil or extract.

mascarpone - Mascarpone is an Italian cheese made from cream, with the whey removed, and without any pressing or ageing.

melanzane – Aubergine, eggplant, or brinjal (depending on where you come from)

mozzarella – A cheese originating from southern Italy, traditionally made from Italian buffalo, using the pasta filata method.

nutmeg – is one of the two spices, the other being mace, that is derived from several species of tree in the genus *Myristica*, which is indigenous to the Banda islands of Indonesia. Nutmeg is the seed of the tree and is roughly egg-shaped. Nutmeg is usually used in powdered form.

oregano - Oregano is an important culinary herb, used for the flavour of its leaves, better when dried rather than fresh. It has an aromatic, warm and slightly bitter taste, which can vary in intensity. In southern Italy it is most frequently used with roasted, fried or grilled vegetables, meat and fish. Unlike most Italian herbs, oregano combines well with spicy foods, which are popular in southern Italy. It is less commonly used in the north of the country, as marjoram is generally preferred.

paesane – A small village.

pancetta - Pancetta is Italian bacon made of pork belly meat that is salt cured and spiced with black pepper and various other spices.

panzanella - Panzanella is a Tuscan salad of bread and tomatoes that is popular in the summer. It includes chunks of soaked stale bread and tomatoes, sometimes also onions and basil, dressed with olive oil and vinegar.

paprika - Paprika is a spice made from ground, dried fruits of the chili pepper family. Although Paprika is often associated with Hungarian cuisine the chillies it is made from are native to the New World.

parmesan – A hard granular cheese that is cooked but not pressed. Also known by its proper name of Parmigiano-Reggiano.

parsley - Parsley is native to the central Mediterranean region, naturalized elsewhere in Europe, and widely cultivated as a herb, a spice, and a vegetable.

passata – Passata is a thick liquid made by cooking and straining tomatoes, in the form of a tomato puree. The thicker the consistency, the deeper the flavour.

pecorino – This is the name of a family of hard Italian cheeses made from ewe's milk.

penne - Penne is a type of cylindrical-shaped pasta. The word is the plural form of the Italian word “penna”, similar to the English word pen.

peperoncini – This is a spicy Italian chilli pepper.

peri-peri – Peri-peri, also known as African bird's eye chilli, is one of the sources of chili pepper that grows both wild and domesticated.

pesce – The Italian word for fish.

piselli – The Italian word for peas - botanically a fruit, since they contain seeds developed from the ovary of a flower.

polenta - is cornmeal that has been boiled into a porridge, and eaten directly or baked, fried or grilled. The term is of Italian origin.

polpette – These are Italian meatballs made from an amount of ground or minced meat rolled into a small ball, with other ingredients such as breadcrumbs, minced onion, spices, eggs and herbs.

polpo – The Italian word for octopus.

pomodoro – This is the Italian word for tomatoes.

porcini – These are the “king” of mushrooms. What Italians affectionately call the Porcini (the piglet) is a ruling class of the delicious funghi. It has a meat-like texture, along with an earthy and somewhat nutty flavour. They are characterised by a soft, meaty white body that does not change colour after it is cut. They can be found under pine trees, poking up through the dead needles, and are sometimes also found in chestnut woods.

portobello mushrooms – These are extremely large, dark brown mushrooms that are simply the fully mature form of the crimini mushrooms. The name “portobello” started being used in the 1980s as a simple marketing ploy to popularise an unglamorous mushroom that, more often than not, had to be disposed of because growers couldn't sell them. The

portobello mushroom has an open, flat cap. Because it's the elder of the species, the portobello's gills are fully exposed, which means that some of the mushroom's moisture has evaporated. The reduced moisture concentrates and enriches the flavour and creates a dense, meaty texture. Their stems are very woody and should be removed. The caps can be used chopped, as with most mushrooms.

prosciutto - Prosciutto is a dry-cured ham that is usually thinly sliced and served uncooked.

provolone – This is an Italian cheese made from cow's milk that originated from Casilli near Vesuvius. Some versions of provolone are smoked. These days the major production of Provolone takes place in the Po valley region, particularly Lombardy and Veneto.

radicchio – This is a chicory leaf vegetable that usually has white-veined red leaves. It has a spicy, bitter taste that mellows when it is grilled or roasted.

ragu sauce – This is a meat-based sauce, which is commonly served with pasta. In the northern Italian regions, a ragù is typically a sauce of meat, often minced, chopped or ground, and cooked with sauteed vegetables in a liquid. In southern Italy, especially Campania, ragùs are often prepared from substantial quantities of large, whole cuts of beef and pork, and possibly regional sausages, cooked with vegetables and tomatoes. After a long braise, the meats are then removed and may be served as a separate course without pasta.

ricotta – This is an Italian whey cheese made from sheep cow, goat, or Italian water buffalo milk.

ripieni – The Italian word for “stuffed”, as in the case of stuffed mushrooms, or “funghi ripieni”.

risotto -

Romano - Romano cheese is an American or Canadian term for a class of cheeses. It should not be confused with the genuine pecorino Romano which is a typical Italian product recognized and protected by the laws of the European

Community, a hard, salty cheese, suitable primarily for grating over pasta, as a sometimes substitute for parmesan cheese. Romano cheese can be made from cow, goat, and/or sheep's milk and must be aged at least five months. Dry milk and water can be added.

rosemary – Rosemary is a woody, perennial herb with fragrant, evergreen, needle-like leaves and white, pink, purple, or blue flowers, commonly found in the Mediterranean region.

salami - Salami is a cured sausage, fermented and air-dried meat, mainly made from pork, salt, garlic, white pepper, miced fat, wine, vinegar and various other selected herbs. It generally has a marbled appearance. Historically, salami was popular among Southern European peasants because it can be stored at room temperature for periods of up to 30–40 days once cut, supplementing a possibly meager or inconsistent supply of fresh meat.

salsiccia – A raw sausage with a thin casing.

sauté - Sautéing is a method of cooking food by using a small amount of oil or fat in a shallow pan over relatively high heat. Ingredients are usually cut into pieces or thinly sliced to facilitate fast cooking.

scacciata - Scacciata can be any of several types of Sicilian dishes. One version is a provolone cheese-filled pastry in a bread dough pie crust.

sfincione – This is a pizza prepared in a manner that originated in Sicily. The Sicilian version is a deep dish pizza with a thick crust, derived from the Sicilian sfincione.

spaghetti - Spaghetti is a long, thin, cylindrical pasta of Italian origin. It is made of durum wheat semolina or flour and water.

spezzatino – This is the Italian word for stew.

spinach - Spinach is an enormously popular green vegetable plant that is native to central and southwestern Asia. The leaves can be either flat or slightly ruffled, and are a bright green when young, deepening to a more intense colour when older. The bitter flavour is distinctive. The milder, young

leaves can be eaten raw in a salad, while the older ones are usually cooked.

Swiss chard – Swiss chard is a leafy green vegetable often used in Mediterranean cooking. The leaves can be green or reddish in colour.

tagliatelle - Tagliatelle is a traditional type of pasta from the Emilia-Romagna and le Marche regions of Italy. Individual pieces of tagliatelle are long, flat ribbons that are similar in shape to fettuccine and are typically about 6.5 mm to 10 mm wide.

thyme – Thyme is a herb use for cooking and is composed of a woody stem with paired leaf or flower clusters spaced $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 inch apart. A recipe may measure thyme by the bunch or by the sprig, or by the tablespoon or teaspoon. Depending on how it is used in a dish, the whole sprig may be used, or the leaves removed and the stems discarded. Usually when a recipe specifies “bunch” or “sprig”, it means the whole form. When it specifies spoons, it means the leaves. It is perfectly acceptable to substitute dried for whole thyme. Leaves may be removed from stems either by scraping with the back of a knife, or by pulling through the fingers of a fork. Thyme retains its flavour on drying better than many other herbs.

treviso - Treviso radicchio is a milder variety of radicchio, an Italian red lettuce. It has long, delicate magenta leaves, creamy white veins and a delicate crinkled texture. It has a slightly bitter, yet nutty flavour which mellows when grilled, roasted or slow cooked. Similar to other leafy salad vegetables and greens, Treviso radicchio is a good source of vitamin C and vitamin A, potassium and calcium.

turmeric - Turmeric is a perennial plant of the ginger family that is native to southeast India, and needs temperatures between 20°C and 30°C and a considerable amount of annual rainfall to thrive.

watercress – Watercress is a leaf vegetable that is known for its peppery, tangy, zesty, piquant flavor.

zucchini - The zucchini or courgette is a summer squash that belongs to the family of other squashes and pumpkins. Zucchini can be dark or light green. A related hybrid, the golden zucchini, is a deep yellow or orange colour. For cooking purposes, the zucchini is treated as a vegetable, which means that it is usually cooked and presented as a savoury dish or accompaniment. Botanically, however, the zucchini is a fruit, being the swollen ovary of the zucchini flower. It originates from Italy.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randolph grew up in a small village on the east coast of South Africa. This village was largely populated by immigrant families who had been brought from Italy to work in the pulp and paper factory in the Umkomaas Valley. Along with them, they brought their classical and traditional regional Italian recipes and cuisines. Randolph had a number of Italian school buddies and often ate the local Italian food along with them. They would sometimes bring their lunch packs to school, which often consisted of various types of home-made pizza, pasta, bruschetta, and antipasti. Sometimes there were even leftovers from the previous night's food fest ! He also often ate at the homes of his Italian friends. Italians love to cook and show off their culinary skills. The town nearby had a local Italian Club and an Italian restaurant in totally separate locations, of which both were always very busy. There was little getting away from Italian food at the time, and, if you couldn't beat them, you had to join them ! So that's how Randolph came to develop an appetite and an appreciation for Italian food.

A Taste of Italy

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