Also by Lidia Matticchio Bastianich

LIDIA'S ITALY
LIDIA'S FAMILY TABLE
LIDIA'S ITALIAN-AMERICAN KITCHEN
LIDIA'S ITALIAN TABLE
LA CUCINA DI LIDIA
LIDIA COOKS
FROM THE
HEART OF ITALY

Lidia Matticchio Bastianich
and Tanya Bastianich Manuali
with David Nussbaum

PHOTOGRAPHS BY
HIRSHEIMER & HAMILTON
and
LIDIA MATTICCHIO BASTIANICH

ALFRED A. KNOF. NEW YORK 2009
I dedicate this book to my father, Vittorio, who died twenty-eight years ago.

Papà, Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy is in your honor. Many of the dishes bear the flavors of your heritage and some of these recipes, as I remember, were your favorites.

Thank you for having the courage to go forth with Mamma Erminia and immigrate to America in 1958. It was not easy for you and Mamma with two children to be immigrants in a new country. But you made it possible for me, my brother, Franco, and our families to build wonderful new lives full of opportunities, values, and freedom. I would never have written this book if it were not for your courage.

Grazie, your daughter,

Lidia
MOLISE
Fish Soup with Vegetables  Fried Ricotta  Fresh Cavatelli  Fresh Cavatelli with Fava  Fresh Cavatelli with Cauliflower  Fresh Cavatelli with Cauliflower, Almonds & Toasted Bread Crumbs  Fresh Cavatelli with Eggs & Bacon  Fresh Pasta for Malefante & Taccozze  Fresh Taccozze Pasta with Sea Bass  Fresh Pasta Strips (Malefante) with Beans & Bacon  Spaghetti with Calamarini, Scallions & Shrimp  Braised Octopus with Spaghetti  Three Meat Brined in Tomatoes with Rigatoni

BASILICATA
Wedding Soup  Potatoes with Peperoncino  Artichokes, Fresh Fava & Potatoes  Bucatini with Sausage  Pasta with Baked Cherry Tomatoes  Ditalini with Broccoli di Raga  Rigatoni with Lentils  Fiery Maccheroni  Fish Soup  Bucati Lucana-Style  Farro with Pork, Roast Potenza-Style  Tarte with Fruits

CALABRIA
Calabrese Salad  Onion Soup  Eggplant, Onions & Potatoes  Orecchiette with Fava & Cherry Tomatoes  Shepherd’s Rigatoni  Baked Cavatelli in Tomato Sauce  Stuffed Baked Pasta  Spicy Calamarini  Steamed Swordfish Bagnara-Style  Chicken Catanzaro-Style  Pork Chops Shepherd-Style  Stuffed Figs Sibari-Style  Almond Biscottini  Sesame Candy

SARDINIA
Provolone Turnovers  Flatbread Lasagna  Cauliflower with Olives & Cherry Tomatoes  Gallurese Bread & Cabbage Soup  Baked Eggplant with Onions & Fresh Tomatoes  Baked Eggplant in Tomato Sauce  Homemade Malloreddus  Malloreddus with Sausage-Tomato Sauce  Handmade Pasta Pears  Baked Fregola Casserole  Spaghetti with Cold Tomato-Mint Sauce  Lobster Salad with Fresh Tomatoes  Roast Lobster with Bread Crumb Topping  Semolina Pudding with Blueberry Sauce

General Reference Recipes
Bolognese Sauce  Marinara Sauce  Vegetable & Herb Sauce  Tomato Sauce  Chicken Stock

Sources
The Public Television Series of Lidia’s Italy: Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy

Recipe Finder by Course
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My heartfelt thanks to all who helped make this book: to Judith Jones for her wisdom and guidance in shaping my books into a personal expression of my passion for cooking; to Ken Schneider for connecting all the dots; to David Nussbaum for his tireless research and help in writing; to the ever-dependable Amy Stevenson for testing all the recipes and serving as culinary producer for the TV series; to Christopher Hirshheimer for capturing with her camera my love of food and, with the collaboration of Melissa Hamilton, for the design of the book; and to Paul Bogaards and Sheila O’Shea for their tireless marketing.

Thanks to Jane Dystel for her invaluable advice, as well as to Miriam Goderich and the staff at Dystel and Goderich Literary Management.

Mille grazie to those in Italy who helped make our research and filming so productive—and fun:

In Lombardy: the people at Peck Milan, conte Paolo Salvatore and contessa Rosetta Clara Cavalli at Principato di Lucedio; my wonderful and inspirational friends Mario and Costanza Donizetti; the staff at Ristorante il Pianone of Bergamo; Emanuele Rabotti from Monte Rossa winery and his friend Bruno Zamboni; olive oil producer Alex Nember and his wife, Francesca Donati, at Bellavista winery; Rinaldo Rondolino and his family at Acquarello, where some of Italy’s best organic rice is produced; Luigi Guffanti, maker of excellent gorgonzola and fontina; and dott. Marco Arrigoni of Caseificio Arrigoni Battista.

In Trentino: Deborah Dorigoni and dott.ssa Paola Pancher from the region of Trentino, the organizers at Consorzio Melinda and signor Endrizzi; Mayor Schwartz, D’Antona and Partners; to the folks at Trentingrana; signora Rossi of El Banchet dei Rossi in the mushroom market; Enoteca Grado 12; Ristorante Antico Pozzo; the folks at Birreria Pedavena and Pfefferlechner for enlightening us about good Italian beer-making; and the Sandri family of Az. Agricola Pojer e Sandri for a fun-filled day of drinking and dancing.

In Valle d’Aosta: Pietro Vallet and his son Roberto of Caseificio Pietro Vallet and Sons for their extraordinary fontina, and Matilda Squinobal and Stefano Peretto, whose cows produce such rich milk; signor Charrere of Les Cretese di Charrere; to the Bertolin family of Dinus Donavita Azienda Agricola di Marilena Peaquin; and to Loretta Maschio and Roberto Domaine from the Associazione Turistica Culturale pro Loco di Issogne.

In Emilia-Romagna: Mirella and Carlo Galloni; signora Monica Maggio and her very knowledgeable husband, Maurizio, from Il Feudo Azienda Agricola; Carmen Maletti and family from Agricola Due Vittorie di Maletti balsamic vinegar; the Venturi family from Le Sfogline in Bologna and Giorgio Salvatori; the Tamburini family; the Antica Riseria Ferron Gabriele e Maurizio; the lovely owners of La Buca in Zibello; and Andrea Babbi, Barbara Candolfini, and Raffaella Rondolini from the region of Emilia-Romagna for facilitating our trip there and for their hospitality.

In Umbria: my in-law Gianfranco Manuali, Tanya’s father-in-law, for introducing us to his native region; Marco Caprai and his family for sharing his wonderful wines in Montefalco; Carmela Cocolico of the Park Hotel ai Cappuccini in Gubbio; Hotel Palazzo Seneca in Norcia; the people at Brancaleone in Norcia and La Tagliavento Macelleria in Bevagna; signora Dagnelli of Sberna and Katia Baldelli of Ceramiche Duca di Montefeltro in Gubbio—both makers of beautiful ceramics; and the Trattoria Il Panaro for their crescia.

In Le Marche: Attilio Scortichini from Nenetta in Porto Recanati and his friend Miranda Galassi for their generosity and for introducing me to delicious seafood; the Petrini family from Fattoria Petrini; the wonderful and inspirational Vittorio Beltrami and his wife; and, near Le Marche, Bianca Maria Canepa for the gorgeous pottery of Faenza that she creates.

In Liguria: everyone at the Antica Osteria di Vico Palla; Paolo Fellegara for introducing me to the topography of Riomaggiore; Walter de Batte for sharing his delicious Sciaccetrà; and my cousins Lidia and Giovanni Bosazzi.

In Sardegna: the Corrias family and the ladies that make the delicious pane carasau at their Pintapane bakery; Anna Farnello, who makes it by hand; Franco Azzara and his wife, Lina, for showing me their island; the Isoni di Monti brothers and their families for a special day at the Pedra Majore winery.

In Calabria: Enzo Monaco, the president of Accademia del Peperoncino, and his staff; Raffaele La Gamba, who introduced me to mayor dott. Franco Barbalace of Spilinga; sausage-maker Caccamo Luigi of Spilinga; Pina Amarelli for her wonderful licorice; friend and attorney avv. Tommaso Manferoghi, who fed us a delicious
Calabrese lunch.

In Abruzzo: Gregorio Rotola and his family for their superb pecorino; Cesidia Silla for his gorgeous photos of Scanno; Gina Sarra, manager of the small local agriturismo in Civitaretenga, Casa Verde, where with her brother Silvio she showed me the harvesting of saffron; and Leonardo Pizzolo from Valle Reale in Popoli for sharing his wonderful wines.

In Basilicata: Franco Luisi and his sister Angela, for those ferricelli we ate one Sunday afternoon; the father and son team that run the Azienda Cracco; Paternoster, which produces some of the best wines from the region; and Pina Cerimieli, maker of copper pots in neighboring Molise.

Special thanks to Augusto Marchini from the Ufficio ICE (Italian Trade Commission) in New York and the Fondo Ambiente Italiano for giving us entrée to castles and villas, and to the helpful legal counsel of Kranjac, Manuali & Viskovic.

Particular thanks to all of my chefs and staff: at Felidia, Fortunato Nicotra; at Becco, Billy Gallagher; at Del Posto, Mark Ladner; at Lidia’s Kansas City, Dan Swinney and Cody Hogan; and at Lidia’s Pittsburgh, Eric Wallace. Thanks also to Shelly Burgess Nicotra, my right hand and the one who manages public relations and marketing, plus the production of the companion Public Television series, and to my personal assistant, Lauren Kehnast, for keeping my life running as efficiently as possible.

The companion television show is the partner of this book, and I am grateful to our sponsors, Cuisinart, Colavita, Buonitalia Spa, and the Consorzio Grana Padano, for their continued support of the series, and to the following companies for contributing products during our filming and recipe testing: Oxo, Le Creuset, Microplane, Wusthof, Bonjour, Stew Leonard’s, Jars, Hunt’s Tomatoes, D’Artagnan, Segafredo Coffee, Keil Brothers, San Pellegrino and Panna Waters, and Bastianich wines. And thank you to American Public Television for distributing the companion series and to our new presenting station, WGBH in Boston.

None of this could have happened without the support and love of my family. Thanks to Grandma Erminia, who is the foundation and the rock of stability on which all is built; to my son, Joseph Bastianich, for his collaboration and for his splendid cameo appearances on the show sharing his expertise on wine; and to his understanding and supportive wife, Deanna, always on call when needed. A big kiss goes to my superstars, Olivia, Miles, and Ethan Bastianich, and to Lorenzo and Julia Manuali, my jewels, the grandchildren who light up my life and occasionally the screen of my TV show.

A special thanks to my daughter, Tanya Bastianich Manuali, a coauthor of this book and the TV series who worked with me into the morning hours many a night to pull this book together. And of course her husband, too, Corrado Manuali, who took care of the legal matters, watched the children, and gave his support whenever needed.

A special thank-you goes out to my dear friend Mario Piccozzi, my tireless companion, guide, and chauffeur on those long research trips up and down the Italian peninsula. Together we gathered much information, had many good meals, and toasted with great wines, always having fun discovering more and more of Italy.

Lidia Matticchio Bastianich
Tanya Bastianich Manuali

www.lidiasitaly.com
**INTRODUCTION**

There is no more appropriate time than now to think about how and why we cook. Why does cooking give us so much satisfaction? Yes, it nourishes us, we enjoy savoring it and feel physically good when we have eaten and are satiated. But the cooking and sharing of food has much more to say to us than “You are full and feel good.” Food is a way of connecting with the people who surround us. Through food we communicate love, compassion, and understanding. The sharing of dishes together at the table opens doors for us to penetrate the thoughts of those around us. There is no better opportunity to communicate with our children than at the table, to discuss values of life that are important to us as individuals, as a family, and as a part of the world we live in. Our approach to food, our respect for and understanding of the ingredients we work with, will dictate our future survival. Will there be enough available for the generations to come? Will the world survive?

As overconsumption and greed have come to haunt us, it is now a time for reflection, for looking back at the generations before us, to understand their approach to the table. In my research into the twelve regions of Italy that I explore here, some answers came to light. The recipes I share with you reflect a respect for food—growing it, shepherding the animals, foraging for the gifts of nature in the wild, and hunting respectfully to put nourishing meat on the table, not just for sport. Nothing is wasted. Bread is recycled and used in soups, casseroles, lasagnas, and desserts. Water is carefully conserved; for instance, the same water in which vegetables are cooked is used to cook the pasta that follows, and then that is saved for soups or for making risotto. The fat that is rendered is used as a base for a soup or a pasta or a braised dish. The outer leaves of cauliflower and broccoli and the stalks of Swiss chard are all included in a meal. When an animal is sacrificed for our food, all of the animal parts are used, not just the breast of the chicken wrapped tightly in plastic wrap. The legs, neck, and wings make a great soup. The liver, heart, and gizzards make a great frittata or pasta sauce. And there is nothing better than a whole chicken, perfectly roasted, or a chicken cut in pieces and turned into a chicken cacciatore with drumsticks, wings, neck, and thighs all there to nibble on.

This kind of respect for the foods we prepare also leads to a much more sensible and balanced intake of proteins, legumes, vegetables, and so on. In most of the recipes in this book, it is evident that the dish is rooted in the reality of the times, when frugality went along with hard work, and home cooks made do with what was on hand. And, of course, they wanted dishes that would taste good. So you’ll find these recipes tasty, satisfying, relatively easy to prepare. But, most of all, they are a testimony to the harmony of elements that result in a harmony of taste.

“Waste not, want not,” and make it delicious.

Lidia Matticchio Bastianich
Overleaf: A valley in Trentino-Alto Adige
The first time I came to this magnificent region was in 1969. My son, Joseph, was just nine months old, and we were determined to get him—and later his sister, born in 1972—to the old country during the first years of their lives and every year thereafter, so that they could connect with their roots. We wanted them to absorb the tastes of the indigenous foods, the language and the music, and the ways of the Italian people.

Trentino–Alto Adige is a region that is split into two provinces. Around the city of Trento, to the south, the language and the culture have long been Italian, whereas in Alto Adige, around the city of Bolzano, to the north, the region has absorbed the German culture.

That year we had bought a Mercedes 220 diesel, and to save money we went to the factory in Stuttgart, Germany, to pick it up. It was a long drive back to Italy, up and down the Alps, and we crossed the border at the Brenner Pass. Today there is a tunnel, and easier routes, but for us then it was a real high-altitude experience, with snow in July. We headed toward Trento and then turned into the Val Sugana, one of the most beautiful valleys, surrounded by peaks. There are little towns scattered around the mountainsides, each with a steeple, around which are huddled beautiful wooden chalets with vibrant flowers cascading from their balconies.

During that first trip, we stayed for a few days in the Val Sugana, at a small family-run inn where we had some of the most gratifying meals. The first night included Beef Rolls with Mustard and Vegetables, and Whole-Grain Spaetzle to mop up the sauce. To go along with this hearty fare, we had a pitcher of beer and some simple Baked Apples for dessert. By this time Joe had fallen asleep, and we carried him to our room, where the windows looked out onto the main street. Suddenly the sound of an oompah band exploded into the night. I felt transported to my childhood, and from our window we joined in the singing as Joe slept on.

Throughout this mountainous region, the food is rustic and the people, weathered by the climate, are disciplined and efficient. Every bit of land is used, and when it yields its harvest, the abundance of flavors is doubly appreciated and the whole community gets together to celebrate. Nothing is wasted, and during the months of plenty the women are busy putting up horseradish and other condiments and curing meats to be consumed by the hearthside during the cold months ahead.

The lush pastures in the Asiago High Plateau, where cattle have been grazing since the Middle Ages, are responsible for the delicious cheese Asiago, which is also produced in the Veneto. Two kinds are made here in Trentino–Alto Adige: fresh Asiago, also known as pressato, made from whole milk that has been aged, and the mature Asiago d’Allevo, which is made from partially skimmed milk and then aged anywhere from three months to a year. The younger cheese is popular as a table cheese with fruit, especially apples, and slices of dark Bauernbrot and crispy rye flatbread. Young Asiago is also delicious tossed in a salad, including the Country Salad, whereas the Asiago d’Allevo, depending on how long it has aged, is used primarily for appetizers, grating on soups and pastas, and in stuffings.

I and my children, now with their children, have returned to this region periodically over the years. In 2005, my friend Mario Piccozzi, with whom I often travel through Italy, invited me to visit his summer home in Merano to experience his favorite spots in Trentino–Alto Adige. Merano is a beautiful citadel situated on the Adige River, and we took long walks and admired the beautiful buildings adorned with decorative paintings. We also enjoyed some great hiking to the north of Merano and assuaged our appetites in Tirolo, the Tirol, where we had many a platter of sliced speck (smoked air-cured pork), deliciously sweet and smoky. We also had an unusual but delightful Cabbage Salad with Speck and oversized Dumplings with Speck—Canederli di Speck. In the north of Italy it is common to make gnocchi from stale bread, but the canederli are a much-magnified version, and particularly delicious when they are made with speck. Speck, used extensively in this cuisine, is boned pork ham, smoked and aged by artisans in the Venosta Valley. It looks like bacon and tastes like prosciutto, but has the added element of smoke.

Heading south from Merano, bypassing Bolzano, we ended in the Val di Non, the apple epicenter of Italy. Apples have been a major product here since the Middle Ages. An 1856 nursery list, compiled by the guild of Bolzano farmers, listed 193 apple varieties that could be successfully grown here. Today there are more than eight thousand...
apple farmers in the region, and apple growing is one of the principal industries. Val di Non apples owe their superior qualities to the rich soil, to the magnesium-rich dolomite rock formations that are characteristic of the territory, as well as to the Val di Non’s temperate continental-Alpine climate. So it is natural that apples play an important part in the culinary tradition. From Celery Root and Apple Salad—*Insalata di Mele* to Spaghetti in Tomato-Apple Sauce—*Spaghetti alle Mele* to Horseradish and Apple Salsa—*Salsa di Cren e Mele* and Chunky Apple-Apricot Bread Pudding—*Sformato di Mele*, it is not unusual to find apples in every course, as you will see in the recipes that follow.

As we headed up the Val di Non valley, we encountered this husband and wife resting during a passeggiata in July 2007.

The southwest part of Trentino–Alto Adige borders on Lake Garda. I particularly like the olive oil from this area. It is said that olives have been cultivated in the Garda since prehistoric times. The varietals planted today are Casaliva, Frantoio, Leccino, and Pendolino, which yield fruity and mellow buttery oils with scents of almonds. They are light green in color, with low acidity levels—sometimes half of other extra-virgin olive oils. It is the microclimate created by the lake and Alps behind that allows olives to grow at such high latitude. Although the traditional cuisine of Trentino–Alto Adige is based on animal fat, ever more olive oil is being used in cooking today.

Because of the region’s hilly topography only 15 percent of its land is cultivable, and the difficulty of growing vines on steep terraced hillsides compels growers to emphasize quality. One would think that at such high altitude white would be the wine of choice, but over the years the emphasis has been on reds, such as Lagrein and Teroldego. Nevertheless, I particularly love the large perfumed and crisp whites of this terrain—Sylvaner, Veltliner, Gewüztraminer, and Müller Thurgau.

**Apple & Bean Soup**
Zuppa di Mele e Fagioli Serves 6

Every region of Italy has a fagioli (bean) soup, often quite filling, with potatoes and pork and either pasta or rice. Interestingly, it was in Trentino–Alto Adige, renowned for the heartiness of its soups, that I had this unexpectedly light bean soup, cooked with fresh apples and delicately spiced. It is vegetarian (also unusual), nourishing, and quite scrumptious. The combination of apples and beans is marvelous, and one of the pleasing features of this recipe is that simply by using less water you can make a great bean-and-apple side dish, a perfect accompaniment to roast pork, duck, or ham.

- ½ pound dried cannellini beans, rinsed and soaked overnight
- 1 bay leaf, preferably fresh
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2 pounds firm cooking apples, such as Golden Delicious
- 6 tablespoons butter
- 4 whole cloves
- 8 cups hot water (or 6 cups for a thicker side dish)
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon (about 2 teaspoons)
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A 3-quart pot for cooking the beans; a heavy-bottomed saucepan, 4 quarts or larger, 10 inches wide, with a cover

Drain the soaked beans, and put them in the pot with the bay leaf and fresh cold water to cover by an inch or so. Bring to a boil, lower the heat to keep the liquid simmering steadily, and cook, partially covered, about 40 minutes, or until the beans are cooked through but not mushy. Turn off the heat, stir in ½ teaspoon salt, and let the beans cool for a while in the pot, absorbing some of the cooking liquid.

To make the soup: Peel and core the apples, and cut them in ¼-inch-thick slices. Put 4 tablespoons of the butter in the heavy saucepan, and set it over medium heat. As soon as the butter melts, scatter the apple slices in the bottom and drop in the cloves.

Cook the apples for 3 minutes, or until they begin to soften, turning and stirring them gently. Drain the cooked beans, and add them to the pan, then pour in the hot water—all 8 cups if you’re making soup; 6 cups to make a side dish with thicker consistency. Turn up the heat, and stir in the lemon zest, cinnamon, and remaining 1½ teaspoons salt.

Cover the pan, bring the liquid to a boil, then set the cover ajar and lower the heat to keep the soup bubbling gently. Simmer 10 to 15 minutes, until the apples are completely soft and the liquid has the consistency you like for soup (or cook longer for a side dish). Turn off the heat, stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons butter, and serve.

---

Canederli

You might be lost in the mountainous northern regions of Italy, but there would be one sure sign of your whereabouts: if you are served canederli, you are in Trentino–Alto Adige. These traditional bread dumplings appear somewhere in almost every lunch or supper: they might be floating in a bowl of broth, or dressed like pasta and served as a first course, or as a starch alongside a braise or stew, or even as a dessert.

Like many of the most enduring dishes in Italian cooking, canederli were born out of frugality, when the poor but clever women of generations past fashioned a tasty new dish from the chunks of old bread that they always saved. In Trentino–Alto Adige, the bread was soaked until soft, bound with flour, formed into balls, and cooked—but of course they would give it great flavor by adding something from the pantry: herbs or spices, cheese, or cured meat.
And here canederli have become the essential starch dish used to mop up sauces, as pasta, polenta, and rice are in other locales.

These two savory versions of canederli—and the sweet Canederli di Ricotta show the variety of ways they are prepared and enjoyed. The canederli di speck are most typical, made from a dough of reconstituted country bread, loaded with tidbits of speck, the lightly smoked ham so prized in Trentino–Alto Adige. The canederli al cumino are quite different, made from a base of cooked potatoes and celery root, flavored with herbs and ground cumin, then fried to develop a crusty exterior, and finally baked. I know you will love both types of canederli, as I do.

**Dumplings with Speck**

Canederli di Speck  Makes about 14 canederli, serving 6 to 8

Genuine imported speck is the meat of choice for these canederli, but you can substitute either thick-cut bacon or prosciutto—in particular, the fatty prosciutto from the end of the leg—and get excellent results. Or you may omit the meat entirely and still have quite satisfying canederli. Poached canederli are best served as soon as they are cooked, but you can cook them in advance, and reheat them in hot stock.

- 2 ounces thick-sliced speck (or bacon or prosciutto)
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
- 3 cups 1-inch cubes of hearty white bread, day-old but not stale, crusts removed
- 2 cups milk
- 1 cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for topping
- ¼ cup chopped fresh chives
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- ½ teaspoon plus 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 2 eggs, beaten with a pinch of salt
- 1 cup all-purpose flour, plus more as needed
- 4 tablespoons butter

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A 9- or 10-inch skillet; a wide pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the canederli; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a rimmed tray or baking sheet

Cut the sliced speck (or bacon or prosciutto) into strips about ½ inch wide; chop the strips crosswise to form little square bits of meat.

Pour the olive oil into the smaller skillet, and set it over medium heat. Stir in the onion, and cook until it starts sizzling. Spoon a tablespoon or two of water into the pan (so the onions soften without coloring), and cook for 3 or 4 minutes more. Scatter in the chopped speck and cook for 2 or 3 minutes, until it has rendered its fat. Scrape the onion and speck into a large bowl and let cool.

Put the bread cubes in another bowl, and pour in the milk. Toss the cubes so they’re all drenched, then let them soak up the milk for about 10 minutes, until completely saturated. By handfuls, squeeze the bread, discarding the excess milk (or saving it for your cat!).

Loosen the compressed bread, tearing it into shreds, and toss them into the bowl with the speck. Add the grated cheese, chives, parsley, and ½ teaspoon salt, and toss everything together. Pour the beaten eggs over the bread mixture, and stir to blend. Finally, sprinkle on ½ cup flour and stir it in to form a moist, sticky dough. Pick up a bit
and form it into a ball: if it is too soft to keep a shape, stir in more flour, a tablespoon at a time.

Fill the wide pot with about 6 quarts water, and add 1 tablespoon salt; heat it to a boil. Melt the butter in the big skillet over very low heat; turn off the flame, but leave the skillet on the burner.

Spread ½ cup flour on the tray or baking sheet. With floured hands, scoop up a small portion of dough (a scant ¼ cup or so). Shape the dough into a 2-inch ball, tossing it from hand to hand and patting it lightly into a round—don’t press or squeeze it too much. Lay it in the flour, and roll the ball to coat it all over. Set it on one side of the tray, and form round dumplings from the rest of the dough the same way.

With the poaching water at a steady boil, drop in the dumplings, one at a time but quickly. Handle them gently and don’t stir them. Bring the water back to a boil, then adjust it so it simmers steadily. Don’t let it boil vigorously, which can break apart the canederli.

Let the dumplings cook, without stirring, until all have risen to the surface of the water. Simmer them for a couple of minutes, then scoop one out and cut into it to check that the center is not wet and the dough looks uniformly cooked through.

Meanwhile, have the big skillet with melted butter warming over very low heat. Lift the cooked dumplings with a spider, let drain over the pot for a few seconds, then gently drop them in the butter. Spoon butter over the canederli and serve them right away—on individual plates or a platter, family-style—topped with grated cheese.

If you are serving them as an accompaniment to braised or roasted meat, drizzle the pan juices over the canederli. You can also arrange the buttered canederli around the meat on a platter, letting them slowly absorb the juices or sauce.

**Potato–Celery Root Dumplings**

Canederli al Cumino  Makes about 12 canederli, serving 6

These tasty canederli are fried and baked rather than poached, with a potato-cake crustiness that is delicious any time of day. Serve them with eggs for a special breakfast or brunch, with a salad for lunch, or with juicy meats, like the Roasted Chicken with Beer, or Beef Braised in Beer. And they are also good (though not crusty) if you poach them—follow the procedures for the preceding canederli di speck.

- A 1-pound whole celery root, rinsed well but not peeled
- 1 pound russet potatoes
- 5 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup very finely chopped onion
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh marjoram
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds, toasted and ground
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 5 large egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 1 cup all-purpose flour
Put the celery root in a large saucepan with cold water to cover, and heat to a boil. Lower the heat a bit, and simmer the celery root for about 20 minutes; then drop in the potatoes (and raise the heat to bring the water back to the simmer). Cook the vegetables together just until they are cooked through and can be pierced easily with a skewer or sharp knife. Depending on size, the celery root needs 40 minutes to an hour, and the potatoes will take 20 to 30 minutes.

When done, remove the vegetables to a colander to drain and cool until you can handle and peel them. To peel celery root, scrape the skin off with the dull side of a paring knife, then cut out any bits of skin in the folds or any tough, knobby parts. Press the cooked, peeled vegetables through a ricer or food mill into a large mixing bowl, and blend them together.

If the celery root is too fibrous to pass through a food ricer, cut it into chunks and drop them into a food processor fitted with the metal blade. Process until smooth, then blend with the potatoes. Don’t put the potatoes into the food processor, because it will make them gummy.

While the root vegetables are simmering, melt 1 tablespoon of the butter in a small skillet over medium heat, stir in the onion, and cook until slightly softened, about 3 to 4 minutes. Turn off the heat and let cool.

Before mixing the dough, arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 400°.

When the celery root and potatoes are mashed and mixed, stir in the onion, chives, marjoram, cumin, salt, and pepper. Pour in the egg yolks, and blend in well. Sprinkle ½ cup of flour on top, and work it in, forming a stiff, sticky dough.

Spread the remaining ½ cup flour on the baking sheet. With floured hands, form the dough into twelve patties, about 1½ inches wide and ¾ inch thick. Dredge them in the flour, coating both sides, and set them on one side of the tray.

To fry the canederli: Melt the remaining 4 tablespoons butter in the big skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. When the butter starts to bubble, shake excess flour off the patties of dough and lay them in the pan. Fry until golden brown on both sides, about 2 to 3 minutes per side. Remove them to paper towels to drain.

Clean the dredging flour from the baking sheet, arrange the fried canederli on it, and set in the oven. Bake for about 10 minutes, until the canederli are crisp and cooked through. Serve hot.

**Cabbage Salad with Speck**

*Insalata di Speck* **Serves 6**

Savoy cabbage is typically served as a cooked vegetable, but here the raw cabbage, shaved into thin shreds, makes a wonderful salad with great, resilient texture. Crisp rendered strips of speck (or bacon or prosciutto as alternatives) are a great complement, and the hot vinegar dressing is delicious.

For shredding the cabbage, I like to use a mandoline slicer. These versatile cutting implements were once quite costly and usually found only in professional kitchens. Today, though, you can buy a decent simple mandoline for under $20, and I recommend that every home cook have one.
Core the cabbage, and cut it into two or three wedges. With the mandoline or knife, slice the wedges into fine shreds, and heap them in a large bowl.

Cut the speck (or bacon or prosciutto) into ½-inch strips or ribbons. Set the skillet over medium heat, pour in 2 tablespoons of the olive oil, and scatter the strips in the pan. Cook the speck, stirring and spreading the ribbons, until they’ve rendered their fat and are crisp on the edges, about 5 minutes. Blot them on paper towels, then toss in with the cabbage. Drizzle the remaining 2 tablespoons oil over the cabbage, season with salt and freshly ground pepper, and toss again.

Set the empty skillet over high heat, pour in the red-wine vinegar, swirling the pan to deglaze it, and bring the vinegar to a boil. Cook rapidly to reduce the vinegar by half. Immediately pour it over the salad and toss well. Serve warm or at room temperature.

**Cauliflower & Potato Salad**

Insalata di Cavolfiori e Patate Serves 6

This is a terrific salad for your repertoire, especially in winter, when vegetable choices are limited (though I like it any time of year). It is tasty and versatile, good as a side dish for grilled chicken, lamb chops, or pork chops, and substantial enough to be a meal in itself. It doesn’t wilt and is excellent for a buffet table or picnic. Best of all, you can make and dress it ahead of time—in fact, it gets better if you do.

- 1 pound **cauliflower**
- 1 pound small **russet potatoes**, scrubbed but not peeled
- 1½ bunches **scallions**, white and some of the green parts, chopped in ½-inch pieces (about 1½ cups)
- 2 teaspoons **kosher salt**
- Freshly ground **black pepper** to taste
- ¼ cup **cider vinegar**
- 5 tablespoons **extra-virgin olive oil**
- 3 hard-cooked large **eggs**, peeled, sliced in thin wedges

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A large bowl for dressing, tossing, and serving

Tear off any tough leaves at the base of the cauliflower (reserve any small, tender leaves) and cut out the core. Break or cut the large branches into 1-inch florets, drop them (and any tender leaves) into the boiling water, and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Lift from the water, and drain well in a colander. When cool, put the florets in the large bowl.
As soon as the cauliflower is out of the pot, return the water to a boil and drop in the potatoes. Cook them at a gentle boil just until a knife blade pierces the center easily—don’t let them get mushy. Drain and briefly cool the potatoes; peel them while still warm, and cut into 1-inch cubes.

Put the potato cubes and cut scallions in the bowl with the cauliflower, season with 1 teaspoon salt and freshly ground black pepper, and toss the vegetables together.

For the dressing: whisk the vinegar with the remaining teaspoon salt in a small bowl, then whisk in the olive oil gradually, until smooth and emulsified. Pour the dressing over the salad; toss and tumble to coat all the pieces. Scatter the wedges of cooked egg over the top, and gently fold in with the vegetables.

Serve warm or at room temperature. Store in the refrigerator for 2 or 3 days.

**Country Salad**

Insalata Paesana  Serves 6

Crunchy, flavorful, refreshing, nourishing, and colorful, this salad makes a fine meal by itself. Its assortment of vegetables, apples, nuts, and cheese should be fresh and well prepared. It is especially important to use a top-quality table cheese, because it is a major contributor of taste and texture. In Trentino–Alto Adige, this salad would always have a fresh local cheese, most likely an Asiago pressato, made with milk from farms in the province of Trento (and the neighboring Veneto region). Aged only 20 days, this young cheese has a sweetness and soft, chewy consistency that’s perfect in salad.

If you can’t find genuine Italian Asiago, don’t buy the inferior cheeses called Asiago produced in other countries (including the United States). Choose instead Montasio—a favorite of mine from my home region, Friuli—similarly soft and sweet, though richer and more complex than Asiago. Cubes of fresh Grana Padano (which also is made in Trento) or even good American cheddar, younger and on the mild side, would be great here as well.

You can dress this salad in advance and set it out on a buffet. In that case, though, I suggest you add the walnuts just before serving, so they remain crunchy.

- 1 pound cauliflower
- ¼ pound small red potatoes (3 or 4 potatoes)
- 1 large or 2 smaller firm, crisp apples (½ pound or so)
- 8 small radishes (about 6 ounces)
- 1 cup ¼-inch-diced red onion
- 8 ounces imported Italian Asiago, rind removed, cut in ¼-inch cubes (see headnote for other good cheeses)
- ½ cup toasted coarsely chopped walnuts
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh Italian parsley

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A large bowl for dressing, tossing, and serving

Fill a pot or saucepan with 3 quarts water, and heat it to a boil.

Tear off any tough leaves at the base of the cauliflower (reserve any small, tender leaves) and cut out the core.
Break or cut the large branches into small florets, drop them (and any tender leaves) into the boiling water, and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Lift from the water, and drain well in a colander. When cool, put the florets in the large bowl.

As soon as the cauliflower is out of the pot, return the water to a boil and drop in the potatoes. Cook them at a gentle boil just until a knife blade pierces the center easily—don’t let them get mushy. Drain and briefly cool the potatoes; peel them while still warm, cut into ¼-inch dice, and put them in the serving bowl with the cauliflower.

Peel and core the apples, cut into ¼-inch dice, and add to the salad bowl. Trim radishes, quarter them in wedges, and drop into the bowl along with the diced red onion, cubes of Asiago, and toasted walnuts.

Sprinkle the salt over the salad pieces and toss. Drizzle the olive oil and vinegar over the salad and toss; sprinkle on the parsley, toss once more, and serve.

**Celery Root & Apple Salad**

*Insalata di Mele* Serves 6

Here’s another fine winter salad, pairing one of my favorite, underappreciated vegetables—celery root—with fresh apples. The mellow, tender cubes of cooked celery root and the crisp apple slices provide a delightful, unexpected combination of flavor and texture. To turn the salad into a light lunch, add a few slices of prosciutto and serve it with some crusty bread.

A firm, crisp apple is what you want for salad, and fortunately there are many varieties in the market that have that essential crunch, with flavors ranging from sweet to tangy to tart. I like to use a few different apples, rather than just one type, for greater complexity of flavor and vivid color in the salad. In addition to the reliably crisp Granny
Smith apple, I look for some of the old-time firm and tart apples, such as Gravenstein, Jonathan, and Rome, and a few newer strains, like Cameo, Gala, and Fuji.

- A 2-pound whole celery root, rinsed well but not peeled
- 1 pound firm, crisp apples (see above for varieties)
- 3 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1 tablespoon German-style mustard
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large bowl for dressing, tossing, and serving

Put the celery root in a large saucepan with cold water to cover, and heat to a boil. Lower the heat a bit, and simmer the celery root for about an hour or so, until cooked through and tender. As it cooks, keep the root submerged by weighting it with a plate or pot lid. When you can easily pierce the celery root with a skewer, drain it in a colander and cool.

To peel the celery root: scrape off the skin with the dull side of a paring knife, and cut out the bits of skin in the folds and any tough, knobby parts. Cut the celery root in half, and slice each half into thin half-moons; put these in the large bowl. (If the celery root is a bit fibrous, cut the slices into thin matchsticks.)

Rinse the apples well, but don’t peel them. Slice them in half, through the stem and bottom ends, and cut out the seeds and cores. Slice the halves crosswise into half-moons, about ⅛ inch thick, add to the bowl, and gently toss the celery root and apple slices together.

For the dressing: whisk together the vinegar, mustard, salt, and pepper in a small bowl, then whisk in the olive oil gradually, until smooth and emulsified. Pour the dressing over the celery root and apple, sprinkle the chives on top, and tumble to coat all the slices with dressing.

Serve at room temperature.

**Spaghetti in Tomato-Apple Sauce**

Spaghetti con Salsa di Pomodori e Mele Serves 6

I know you might do a double take at the name of this recipe. But I assure you it is a simple, delightful rendition of spaghetti in quickly cooked tomato sauce. The unique touch comes from shreds of fresh apple, which lend the sauce a lovely aroma and flavor and feel good in the mouth. When I tasted this for the first time in the Val di Non of Trentino, I wondered, Why didn’t I think of this long ago?

Spaghetti is my choice of pasta here, but linguine, ziti, or rigatoni would be just as good.

- 3 cups (one 28-ounce can) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 large stalks celery, cut in ¼-inch dice (about 1 cup)
- 1 medium onion, chopped (about 1 cup)
Pour the canned tomatoes into the food processor or blender, and purée until smooth.

Pour 4 tablespoons of the olive oil into the skillet, set it over medium heat, and strew the chopped celery and onion in the pan. Cook and stir the vegetables for about 5 minutes, until they wilt and start to caramelize.

Stir in the puréed tomatoes, season with the salt, and heat to a bubbling simmer. Cook, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes or so. As the tomatoes perk, peel and core the apples, and remove the seeds. Shred them, using the coarse holes of a shredder or grater.

When the tomatoes have cooked about 5 minutes, stir the apples into the sauce. Heat again to a simmer, and cook the sauce, uncovered, for about 15 minutes, stirring now and then, until it has reduced and thickened and the apple shreds are cooked and tender.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil, drop in the spaghetti, and cook it until barely al dente. Lift the spaghetti from the water, let drain for a moment, and drop it into the warm sauce. (Reheat, if necessary.)

Toss pasta with sauce for a minute or two, until all the strands are coated and perfectly al dente. Turn off the heat, sprinkle the grated cheese over the pasta, and toss well. Drizzle over it the remaining olive oil, toss once again, and heap the pasta in warm bowls. Serve immediately, passing more cheese at the table.

Whole-Grain Spaetzle

Spätzle di Farina Integrale  Serves 6

Spaetzle are little noodles or dumplings made by pressing a sticky dough through a perforated tool right into boiling water—one of the simplest of all the techniques by which pasta is made. These whole-wheat spaetzle are especially delicious, dressed simply with butter and grated cheese, and make a good alternative to potatoes as a contorno accompanying roasts or braised meats.

The key to making spaetzle is having the right tool or utensil, with holes large enough to let the sticky dough pass through easily and quickly. You might have a colander that works, but I recommend that you buy a spaetzle-maker designed for the job. There are different kinds—some slide like a mandoline; others extrude the dough, like potato ricers—and both types are inexpensive and easy to use. And you’ll use your spaetzle-maker often, I am sure, after you make and taste a batch of spätzle di farina integrale.

- 2 large eggs
- ¼ cup milk, plus more as needed
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1¼ cups whole-wheat flour
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
2 tablespoons butter
½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A ricer-style or sliding spaetzle-maker, or a colander with large holes (¼ inch or larger); a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Whisk the eggs, milk, and salt together in a large bowl until thoroughly blended. With a wooden spoon, stir in the flour, parsley, and nutmeg, forming a thick, sticky, batterlike dough. If the dough is stiff, and doesn’t drip like a batter, work in more milk. Let the dough-batter rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt). Fill the hopper of the spaetzle-maker with the batter, hold it over the pot, and press or slide it (depending on the type of tool), forcing the dough through the holes so it drops into the water in small blobs. If you don’t have a spaetzle-maker, scoop or pour the batter into the colander or perforated utensil and press it through the holes with a spatula.

Press all the batter into spaetzle, stirring occasionally so they don’t stick together or to the bottom. Return the water to a steady, gentle boil, and cook for 4 or 5 minutes, until the spaetzle are all floating and cooked through; slice and taste one to check for doneness.

As the dumplings cook, melt the butter in the skillet over low heat. Scoop the cooked spaetzle out of the pot with a spider or large strainer, let drain for a moment, and spill them into the skillet. Still over low heat, toss the spaetzle to coat them all with butter and evaporate excess water. Turn off the heat, sprinkle the grated cheese on top, and toss again. Serve immediately.

Recipes with Beer

In Trentino–Alto Adige they brew good beer, which they enjoy by the steinful and use in cooking, too. Like wine, beer can be an important element in a dish, as I have found in the two dishes that follow. In the first, beer in the roasting pan contributes to a very tender roast chicken with a great crust. In the second, beer in the braising liquid deepens the flavor of a beef shoulder roast and its wonderful pan sauce.

You will see that I leave open the choice of beer in both recipes. In testing for this book, I made the roast chicken several times with different beers and ales, including a golden lager, a mildly hopped pale ale, and a sweeter brown ale. My favorite so far is the pale ale. We braised the beef twice, with a golden lager and then an amber lager (both brewed in Brooklyn!), and each was delicious.

Of course, you want to use a premium-quality, flavorful beer in these dishes. Fortunately, great beer is easy to find these days, with all the new artisanal microbreweries around the country. And keep in mind that the cooking process accentuates the flavor of the brew: the caramel maltiness of a dark lager will lend sweetness to the roast chicken; the bitterness of India pale ale will be imparted to the beef and braising sauce. I hope you’ll try these many times with different beers and let me know what you’ve discovered.

Roasted Chicken with Beer
Pollo alla Birra Serves 6

A 3½-to-4-pound roasting chicken
2 teaspoons kosher salt
2 medium onions, peeled, quartered through the root
1 large carrot, peeled, halved crosswise, and quartered lengthwise (about 4 ounces)
2 medium parsnips, peeled, halved crosswise, and quartered lengthwise (about 4 ounces)
Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 400°.

Trim excess fat from the chicken, and season it inside and out with 1 teaspoon of the salt. Scatter the onions, carrot, parsnips, sage, cloves, and cinnamon stick in the pot, sprinkle over this the rest of the salt, and set the chicken on top of the vegetables.

Put the pot on the stove, pour in the stock, beer, and apple cider, and bring to a simmer over medium heat. Cook, uncovered, for about 15 minutes on top of the stove.

Put the pot in the oven, and roast the chicken for about 30 minutes, basting with the pan juices two or three times. Cover the chicken with a sheet of aluminum foil to prevent overbrowning, and roast another 30 minutes. Remove the foil, and roast another 20 to 30 minutes, basting frequently, until the chicken and vegetables are cooked through and tender.

Remove the chicken to a warm platter, and surround with the vegetables (or with the Potato–Celery Root
Dumplings. Bring the pan juices to a boil on top of the stove, and cook until reduced by half. Carve the chicken at the table, and spoon some of the pan juices on top.

**Beef Braised in Beer**

*Brasato alla Birra* Serves 6 or more

Beef chuck, or shoulder, offers excellent cuts for stews and braises, because the meat is extremely tasty and, over long cooking, all the connective tissue adds flavor and body to the dish. For this braise (and the *Sugo alla Genovese*), I especially like the compact chunk of meat cut off the top of the shoulder blade, which is known by many names, including “top blade” or “top chuck shoulder” or “flatiron.” This piece is usually sliced and packaged as steaks, but ask your butcher to give you a whole top blade, as a roast. The more common beef chuck or shoulder roast, which comes from the underside of the shoulder, would be fine in this recipe, too. (It might be called “chuck pot roast” or “underblade chuck.”)

- 4 ounces thick-sliced *slab bacon*, cut in chunks
- 3 medium *onions*, cut into chunks (about 3 cups)
- 1 tablespoon *kosher salt*
- A 4-to-5-pound boneless *beef shoulder roast* (preferably a “top blade” or “top chuck shoulder” roast)
- ¼ cup *all-purpose flour*
- 4 tablespoons *extra-virgin olive oil*
- 5 sprigs *fresh thyme*, tied in a bundle with kitchen twine
- 3 cups (two 12-ounce bottles) flavorful *beer* or *ale*
- About 6 cups *light stock* (chicken, turkey, or vegetable broth), or as needed
- 3 tablespoons *Dijon mustard*

**Recommended Equipment:** A food processor; a heavy 6-quart ovenproof pot, such as enameled cast iron, with a cover

Arrange a rack in the center of the oven with room for the covered braising pan, and heat to 375°. Put the chunks of bacon and onion and a teaspoon of the salt in the food processor, and mince together into a fine-textured *pestata*.

Trim the beef of fat, and sprinkle all over with salt, using another teaspoon in all. Spread the flour on a plate and dredge the roast thoroughly, coating all surfaces, then shake off any excess.

Pour the olive oil into the big pan, and set it over medium-high heat for a couple of minutes, then lay the roast in the hot oil. Brown the beef well, turning it every few minutes to sear another surface, until nicely colored all over, about 10 minutes.

Push the meat to one side of the pan, drop the *pestata* into the pan, and stir and cook it on the pan bottom until it has dried out and just begins to stick, about 5 minutes. Move the meat back to the center of the pan, drop in the bundle of thyme sprigs, and pour the beer in around the roast.

Bring the beer to a boil, stirring and scraping up any brown bits from the pan bottom. Pour in enough stock so the braising liquid comes halfway up the sides of the roast, and sprinkle the remaining teaspoon salt all over.

Cover the pan, and bring the liquid quickly to a boil, then set it into the heated oven. After 2 hours, lift the cover, drop the 3 tablespoons mustard into the braising liquid, stir carefully, cover again, and braise another hour.
Remove the cover, and continue the oven-braising, stirring the bottom of the pan occasionally, as the sauce reduces and concentrates. When it has thickened to a good consistency—it should take another 30 minutes or so—carefully take the pan out of the oven.

Lift the meat onto a cutting board and cut it crosswise into ½-inch-thick slices. Fan the slices on a warm platter, skim off any fat from the surface of the pan sauce, and ladle some of it over the meat. Serve right away, passing more sauce at the table.

**Horseradish & Apple Salsa**

Salsa di Cren e Mele. Serves 6

Makes about 3 cups

In Trentino, this lively condiment of cooked apples and fresh horseradish is served with boiled beef, poached chicken, and all kinds of roasts. It’s great with many of the dishes in this chapter, especially the beer-braised chicken and beef and the fried and baked potato–celery root canederli. Since it is so easy to make in large volume, I serve it with roast turkey or ham at the holidays, and I hope you will, too. Cream is customary in the salsa (it counters the sharpness of the horseradish), but the flavor is good without it. And you can use more or less horseradish to suit your taste for its pungency.

- 3 pounds good sauce apples, such as McIntosh, Macoun, or Golden Delicious, peeled, cored, and cut into 1-inch chunks
- 3 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 4- to 5-ounce chunk fresh horseradish root (or larger if you love it)
- ½ cup heavy cream

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy 3- or 4-quart saucepan, with a cover; a potato masher

Put the apple chunks in the saucepan, and toss with the lemon juice and salt. Cover the pan, and set it over medium-low heat. Cook the apples slowly for 15 minutes or so, stirring now and then, as they soften and release their juices. Remove the cover, raise the heat to bring the juices to a boil, and cook for 10 minutes or more, until the juices are syrupy and the apples very soft. Turn off the heat.

Meanwhile, peel the horseradish and grate it into fine shreds, until you have at least ½ cup for a milder salsa, or a cup (or more) for greater pungency.

With the potato masher, mash the apples in the saucepan to make a uniform, chunky sauce. Stir in the grated horseradish and cream, and turn into a serving bowl. Serve warm or cold.

**Beef Rolls with Mustard & Vegetables**

Involtini di Manzo alla Senape. Serves 6

These rolled-up scallops of beef (involtini di manzo) are fun to make, lovely to serve, and pleasing to eat, with the tangy surprise of a whole pickle (and other vegetable morsels) inside. They’re a practical choice for a special meal, too, since you can assemble and cook the involtini in advance, leave them in the pan, where they’ll stay moist, and reheat them when your guests are seated. And if you need more than six servings, the recipe can be multiplied easily. I like to serve these with Whole-Grain Spaetzle to mop up the sauce.

- A 2½-pound boneless bottom-round rump roast
To slice the beef into scallops: Lay one hand open on the top of the roast to hold it in place. With a sharp chef’s knife, begin slicing the meat on a slant, cutting across the grain, and continue with parallel angled cuts every ½ inch or so, slicing the meat chunk into a dozen thin scallops. As you slice, press down lightly with your top hand, creating resistance, so you can feel the blade moving and keep the slices evenly thick.

Flatten the slices into scallops one at a time. Place each one between sheets of wax paper or plastic wrap and pound it with the toothed face of a meat mallet, tenderizing and spreading it into a narrow oval, about 6 by 3 inches. When all are pounded, season the scallops with salt, about ½ teaspoon in all, and spread a thin layer of mustard on the top surfaces.

Starting at the short end of each scallop, pile three celery sticks, three carrot sticks, and a pickle in a bundle. Roll up the meat, enclosing the vegetables, and secure it with toothpicks. When all the rolls are formed, season with the remaining salt. Spread the flour on a plate, and dredge the involtini, lightly coating them.

Pour the olive oil in the pan, and set it over medium-high heat. Shake excess flour from the rolls, lay them in the pan in one layer, and cook, rotating and moving them around, until browned all over. Push the rolls to the side of the pan, and scatter the onion slices and any remaining carrot and celery sticks on the pan bottom. Drop in the bay leaves, and cook the vegetables, stirring occasionally, until they’re beginning to brown and soften, about 5 minutes.

Turn the heat to high, pour in the white wine, and let it heat and bubble until almost completely evaporated. Pour in just enough broth to cover the involtini, and bring it to a boil. Set the cover ajar, and adjust the heat to keep the liquid simmering. Cook for an hour and 15 minutes, or until the beef is tender and the sauce has reduced to a consistency you like.

Turn off the heat, take out the toothpicks, and remove the involtini to a warm platter. Ladle some of the pan sauce over the involtini, pour the rest into a bowl for passing at the table, and serve while hot.

Baked Apples
Mele al Forno alla Meranese Serves 6
Baked apples are a favorite treat and comfort food in Trentino–Alto Adige as they are here. This recipe emphasizes the treat aspect, since the apples are draped with melted chocolate, chopped walnuts, and Amarena cherries. Many apple varieties are good bakers, including Cameo, Cortland, Empire, Jonagold, Northern Spy, and Rome. Granny Smith and Golden Delicious are always reliable, too.

- 6 large, firm baking apples (about 7 ounces each), any of the varieties mentioned in the headnote above
- 2 tablespoons butter, at room temperature
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 6 cinnamon sticks
- 6 ounces semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- ⅓ cup coarsely chopped toasted walnuts
- ¾ cup Amarena cherries in syrup, drained

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 3-quart baking dish or shallow casserole

Heat the oven to 375°.

Core the apples, and put them in the baking dish. Drop ½ teaspoon butter, ½ teaspoon sugar, and a cinnamon stick in the center hollow of each apple.

Pour ½ cup hot water in the bottom of the dish, and cover the dish with a sheet of aluminum foil. Put the dish in the oven and bake for 35 minutes, until the apples have softened and released their juices. Remove the foil, and bake the apples another 10 minutes or so, to brown their tops. Remove from the oven, and let cool briefly. Pour the juices from the baking dish into a small saucepan, heat to a boil, and cook until syrupy.

Meanwhile, put the chocolate and cream in a heatproof bowl set over simmering water. Stir occasionally as the chocolate begins to melt, and continue to stir until completely smooth. Turn off the heat, stir in the salt, and keep the sauce warm.

To serve: Arrange each apple on a dessert plate and drizzle over it some of the thickened apple juice. Spoon chocolate sauce on top, letting it drip down the sides. Sprinkle walnuts on each apple, surround it with a few cherries, and serve immediately.

**CHUNKY APPLE-APRICOT BREAD PUDDING**

Sformato di Mele Serves 6 to 8

My friend Mario Piccozzi and I discovered this deluxe version of bread pudding on a winter visit to Merano, the historic resort town in the middle of the Alps, in Alto Adige. It was the perfect dessert on a cold day, served in its baking dish, still warm from the oven. Spooning the pudding onto plates, I was thrilled to find it loaded with apple chunks and walnuts, oozing rich custard and bubbling apricot jam. I make this at home now (it’s very easy) and serve it just as they do in Merano, family-style, setting the steaming, gold-topped pudding in the middle of the table, with a serving spoon and lots of plates. It disappears fast.

- 1 tablespoon soft butter
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

6 large eggs

1 cup heavy cream

1 cup milk

¼ teaspoon kosher salt

½ teaspoon vanilla extract

Finely grated zest of 1 lemon (about 2 teaspoons)

3 cups day-old hearty white bread, crusts removed, cut in ½-inch cubes

1½ pounds firm baking apples, peeled, cored, and cut into ½-inch chunks (see headnote to preceding Baked Apples recipe for good apples to use)

6 tablespoons apricot preserves

½ cup coarsely chopped toasted walnuts

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 2-quart (11-by-7-inch) rectangular baking dish, or an oval gratin dish of similar size; a flexible, sturdy wire whisk; a roasting pan large enough to hold the baking dish

Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 350°. Coat the bottom and sides of the baking dish with the softened butter. Sprinkle 3 tablespoons of the sugar on the buttered surfaces; tilt and shake the pan so it’s sugared.

Stir together ¼ cup of the sugar with the cinnamon.

For the custard: Whisk the eggs in a large bowl until thoroughly blended. Gradually pour in the cream, milk, and all the remaining sugar, whisking steadily to incorporate them, then whisk in the salt, vanilla, and lemon zest. Fold the bread cubes into the custard, pushing them down so they’re all submerged, and stir in the apple chunks.

Spoon the pudding into the baking dish, spread everything out to fill the dish in an even layer, and smooth the top. Drop teaspoonfuls of the apricot preserves on the pudding, distributing it all evenly, then scatter the chopped walnuts on top. Finally, sprinkle the cinnamon sugar over the pudding.

Put the pudding dish inside the roasting pan, and set the big pan in the oven. Carefully pour hot (not boiling) water into the roasting pan, enough to come halfway up the sides of the baking dish—don’t splash the pudding!

Bake the pudding for an hour and 20 minutes, or until the top is golden brown and crusty and the custard is set: a knife blade inserted into the custard should come out clean. Carefully lift the roasting pan from the oven to a solid surface. Leave the pudding dish in the water bath to cool very gradually, but not too much—take it out of the water and serve the pudding family-style while it is still warm.

SWEET RICOTTA DUMPLINGS WITH STRAWBERRY SAUCE

Canederli di Ricotta Makes about 18 canederli, serving 6

Here’s a beautiful and special dessert: ivory canederli, sitting in a crimson pool of fresh strawberry sauce. Whereas the savory Canederli al Cumino are fried, these delicate morsels are poached and have a very light texture. They are formed from a dough of ricotta, eggs, and flour instead of reconstituted bread.

These are best when cooked just before you serve them (although the sauce can be made ahead), and in the recipe I give you a sequence of steps to streamline the procedure. Cook the strawberry sauce first, if you haven’t already, then proceed to make the canederli. Follow my instructions for poaching them—it’s important to cook them all the way through—and you’ll have perfect canederli in minutes. Once your guests taste them, I know they will tell you
that this dessert was worth waiting for.

- **FOR THE STRAWBERRY SAUCE**
  - 3 pints fresh strawberries, hulled and quartered (about 6 cups)
  - ½ cup sugar
  - ¼ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice

- **FOR THE CANEDERLI**
  - 1 tablespoon plus ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
  - 6 tablespoons butter
  - 1 pound fresh ricotta, drained
  - 2 large eggs
  - 1 cup all-purpose flour

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 3-quart saucepan; a wide pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the canederli; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a 2-ounce spring-loaded ice-cream scoop

Put the cut strawberries in the saucepan (or cut them right into it), pour the sugar and lemon juice over, and toss together. Set the pan over medium-low heat; stir occasionally as the berries release juice and it gradually starts to bubble. Adjust the heat to keep the juice simmering, and cook for about 8 minutes, until the berries are soft and the juice is slightly syrupy. Turn off the heat, and cover the pot to keep the sauce warm.

Meanwhile, fill the big pot with about 6 quarts water, add 1 tablespoon salt, and heat it to a boil. Put the butter in the big skillet and melt it over very low heat; turn off the flame, but leave the skillet on the warm burner.

For the dough: Dump the ricotta into a large bowl, and stir to loosen it and break up lumps, then blend in the eggs
and ¼ teaspoon salt. Sprinkle all the flour on top, and fold it in gently, just until it is all incorporated, with no small clumps of dry flour. The dough will be stiff and somewhat sticky.

Adjust the heat so the cooking water is bubbling gently. Fill a glass or jar with cold water to moisten the scoop, so the dough doesn’t stick. Dip the ice-cream scoop into the water glass, scoop up a round of dough, level it off (scrapping excess back in the bowl), and dispense the dumpling into the cooking pot. Scoop up all the dough in the same way, and get the dumplings cooked as quickly as possible. If you don’t have an ice-cream scoop, use a ¼-cup measure. Empty each portion into your hand (both hands must be lightly floured!), and quickly roll it into a ball, then drop the dumpling into the pot.

As you form the canederli, keep the scoop moistened (or your hands floured) and the water at a gentle simmer: don’t let it boil vigorously, which can break apart the canederli.

After all are in the pot, let the dumplings cook, without stirring, until all have risen to the surface of the water. Simmer them another 5 minutes, and then scoop one out and test it for doneness. First, press gently: it should feel solid and spring back to the touch. If it feels soft at the center, return it to the pot and cook the batch a minute or two longer. Scoop out another dumpling, and cut into it to check that the center is not wet and oozing and that the dough looks uniformly cooked through.

Meanwhile, have the big skillet with melted butter warming over very low heat. Lift out the cooked dumplings with a spider, let them drain over the pot for a few seconds, then gently drop them in the skillet. Roll the dumplings gently so they’re coated all over with butter, then turn off the heat and leave them in the warm pan for a few minutes to firm up.

Serve the canederli on warm dessert plates, spooning a pool of strawberry sauce in the center of each plate and setting two or three canederli on top. For family-style serving, arrange the canederli in a large rimmed platter and drizzle some of the strawberry sauce around them in a colorful border. Pass the remaining sauce at the table.
The altopiano, an enormous plateau in the Alpe di Susi, is a wonderland of grazing cows, green pastures, and wildflowers during the early spring. The charming town of Ortisei is well known as a skier's paradise in the winter. I bring my kids to hike when everything is a lush green and the rich spring milk is being used to make creamy cheese.

Merano is the most picturesque town in Trentino–Alto Adige, where many of the building façades are decorated with elaborate frescoes. When you stroll down Via Portici, the pastel-colored façades, fountains, and lovely courtyards make the experience even more enjoyable, because you are walking under nine-hundred-year-old porticoes. Make sure to see the surrounding areas, where many fortified castles have remained in exquisite condition, including the Castel Fontana, Castel Torre, and Castel Tirolo.

Bressanone is Alto Adige’s oldest town. There you’ll find intricate fresco paintings covering many of the arches and vaults of the Cathedral, or the Palace of the Prince-Bishops. A visit to the old pharmacy in the center of town is a must. Owned by the Peer family for the past seven generations, this Pharmacy Museum shows how pharmaceuticals have developed over the years, from the use of pieces of ancient mummies and beaver testicles to modern pills and powders. If Christmas is your favorite holiday, or you just appreciate fine artisan craftsmanship, then stop to see the most amazing nativity scenes, with more than five thousand figures created in wax, wood, ceramic, and papier-mâché.

Trento is famous as the setting for the Council of Trent (1545–1563), which gave rise to the Counter-Reformation. There are many places to visit, but my favorite is the Castello di Buonconsiglio, which overlooks the city. Inside, the frescoes of the Labors of the Month give an accurate portrayal of medieval life, highlighting everyday activities.

Lake Toblino is dramatically placed between snow-covered mountains and is on a small piece of land that juts out into Lake Garda. The site of a tragic romance between Prince-Bishop Carlo Emanuele Madruzzo and the young Claudia Particella, the castle today is a restaurant and a romantic place to enjoy magnificent scenery. In the early morning, when the fog rises off the lake, you can sit and ponder the poisoning of Claudia by the bishop to cover up their love affair.

Bolzano’s most picturesque spot is Piazza delle Erbe, with its many painted façades and daily produce market. In the former Dominican monastery nearby, the Chapel of St. John has Giottesque frescoes which are quite surprising. The Triumph of Death is one of the best. Action-packed, with arms flailing and horses writhing, the scene depicted reveals expressions on the characters’ faces that are incredibly individualistic and intense.

Castel Roncolo, a short drive or a pleasant bicycle ride from the town of Bolzano, northward along the Talvera River, will take you to some of the most important examples of chivalrous medieval frescoes, which tell the stories of King Arthur and Tristan and Isolde. Although well preserved, the frescoes are ghosts of the originals, and yet the hunting scenes are alive with movement, and the jousting scenes portray vividly the excitement of courtly games.— Tanya
Case Cofuzzi-Rella in Piazza Duomo, Trento
Overleaf: Lago d’Iseo
EARLY IN 2008, I ENJOYED AN EXTENDED STAY IN MILANO, THE capital of Lombardia, which renewed my love of its food and culture. As we do every year, Joe and I had brought the chefs from our American restaurants—Becco, Felidia, and Del Posto in New York City, Lidia’s Kansas City, and Lidia’s Pittsburgh—to savor and assimilate Italian cuisine in situ, so the “boys” could bring back to their respective kitchens what they had absorbed and incorporate it in their menus. We focused on the classic dishes of Milano and Lombardia: their risottos, side dishes, soups, stuffings, main courses, and desserts. We were particularly interested in the succulent ossobuco, which we sampled in several places and in different variations, but usually set in a risotto with the golden hues of saffron. What truly distinguished the dish, we decided, was the mellow flavor of the marrow seeping from the veal shank bone (the ossobuco) into the risotto, so tender and delicious when properly cooked. Bone marrow is also essential, we noted, to traditional Risotto alla Milanese.

Some playful dishes surprised us. A costoletta alla Milanese, one would say, is just a plain breaded veal cutlet. Oh, but not in Milano! There we had it all’orecchie d’elefante (elephant ears): the thick veal cutlet cut in half, and the two halves, still attached to the long bone, pounded thin to look like flapping elephant ears. We also had a one-sided, thick, breaded costoletta con il manico (cutlet with a handle)—the handle being the bone. But I brought back a simpler veal-chop recipe for you, using that meltingly delicious Lombardian cheese, Taleggio (more about those local cheeses later).

We all agreed that the food was delicious and the preparations were simple, with a no-fuss attitude. Indeed, it is said that the people of Lombardia are so industrious that to save time they put the primo (a starch course) and the secondo (a meat course) on the same plate—a practice that would be unacceptable anywhere else in Italy.

Outside of Milano, Lombardia is a large, productive, and geographically diverse region that I never tire of exploring. Though I love the sea and Lombardy is landlocked (of Italy’s twenty regions, only four are without a coastline), I never sense this deficiency, since there is water all around.

To the north, like fingers pointing toward the Swiss border, are the beautiful Lago d’Orta, Lago Maggiore, Lago di Como, and the much-less-visited Lago d’Iseo. With dramatically varied topography and microclimates—and studded with lovely villas and castles—the shores and islands of the lakes are among the most picturesque settings in Italy. The landscape is also shaped by its many rivers, flowing down from the Alps and snaking like capillaries through hills and valleys, ultimately to join the mighty Po. Together these waters nourish the nation’s most fertile agricultural plain, the Pianura Padana, Italy’s rice basket.

From Vercelli in Piemonte, across Lombardy to the Veneto, and down into Emilia-Romagna, this territory is the biggest producer of rice in Europe. Most important, the fields here are our major sources of Italian short-grain rices, on which our treasured heritage of risottos and other rice preparations depend.

There are literally dozens of different varieties of Italian rice grown in the Pianura Padana, but only a few are well known and marketed around the world. Arborio, Carnaroli, and Vialone Nano—all of which have been developed within the past half-century from older strains—are now the leading varietals, most esteemed for their distinctive cooking characteristics. Though they vary in size and composition, all have the tight concentration of starches that are slowly released during cooking, imparting the essential creaminess to risotto while keeping the rice kernel intact.

Short-grain rice is not the only quintessential Italian food produced in the Val Padana, which stretches through Lombardy and neighboring regions. Some of the most popular and delicious cheeses are produced from the rich milk of cows that graze on the lush pastures, including Grana Padano, which takes its name from these plains. Grana, meaning “grain,” refers generally to the crumbly texture of the hard-aged cow’s-milk cheeses that have been a staple food in this part of the continent for thousands of years, since pre-Roman times. The first documentation of the production of grana has been traced to around the year 1000 in Lodi, south of Milano. Today, Grana Padano is said to be the best-selling cheese in the world!

The Pianura Padana is the area where most of Lombardy’s enormous cheese production takes place, but its boutique cheeses—Gorgonzola and Taleggio—originated and are still produced in the highlands leading into the
Alps, where lush pastures nourish cows that in turn yield extraordinarily flavorful milk. (Both cheeses are now also processed in lowland areas of Lombardy, so great is worldwide demand.)

Gorgonzola (my favorite blue cheese) evolved in medieval times from a related Lombard cheese, the rich stracchino, which ripened quickly. To age and preserve the cheese, it was stored in underground caves, where it naturally developed the blue mold, *Penicillium glaucum*, and thus were born the first samples of the Gorgonzola we enjoy today.

In fact, driving from Milano to Bergamo, on my way to Lago d’Iseo, I often pass right by the town for which Gorgonzola was named—and am reminded of the long tradition of cheesemaking in Lombardy. I always make a stop in Bergamo, a jewel of a city. There I head down a cobbledstone street and enter a sixteenth-century palazzo—the home and studio of my dear friend Mario Donizetti, one of the best contemporary realist painters in Italy. It is always a thrill to see the latest work of this great artist. (Mario’s earlier creations can be seen by all. His *Crucifixion* hangs in the Museum of the Treasury in St. Peter’s Basilica in Vaticano; his frescoes and altarpiece are in the historic Monastery of Pontida.)

Yet Mario is no less of an artist in the kitchen. When we cook together, I marvel at the way he handles the gifts of nature. One day, he prepares a simple plate of ripe, beautifully veined Gorgonzola (from a local artisan cheesemaker) paired with some fig marmalade and a torn end of crusty bread. Set on an aged, long wooden table, it makes a delicious still life. When he assembles a salad of perfectly ripe tomatoes, he captures and presents the flavors and beauty of food for his guest, in the same distinct style in which he creates these essences on canvas. Then, with his ever-present wife and muse, Costanza, we eat the still life and talk about life. Our brief visits always teach me something. When I am back in New York, I understand that for me there is no better way to finish a meal than a perfectly ripe slice of room-temperature Gorgonzola with a spoonful of fig marmalade and some crusty bread.

Leaving Bergamo, I often go to my favorite lake, Lago d’Iseo, set between the larger Lago di Como and Lago di Garda. Lago d’Iseo is in the middle of the area known as Franciacorta, where Italy’s best sparkling wines, Metodo Champenoise, are being produced.

When, at last, I arrive at Lago d’Iseo, there is yet one more leg of the journey: Montisola, a big island smack in the middle of the lake. It is a beautiful and a natural culinary nexus, filled with olive and lemon orchards, and a great lake for fishing products that complement each other perfectly. On one particularly memorable visit, in early summer, my friend Mario and I took the ferry there from Sale Marasino. No cars are allowed, and one can either rent a bike or walk the island, which we did for the entire day. We visited the monastery and peeked into the workshop of the local fishing-net makers. There were fine nets, large nets, blue, green, red nets, hanging from the ceiling, draped on the window, and festooned from wall to wall. I wanted so to bring one back with me, but, alas, the fishing net was too large to lug, so I settled for a netted shopping bag just like the one my mother used to carry to market when we lived in Trieste, a half-century ago.

For lunch we had lake fish of all kinds—*alborelle, agone, cavedano*, and *tinca* at Ristorante da Vittorio. Having grown up on the sea, I do not ordinarily like lake fish, but this day was different; maybe it was the moment, the olive oil, the fragrant whole lemons we squeezed over the fish. No matter: life was beautiful, and the fish was delicious.
Baked Rice Frittata

Frittata di Riso Infornata Serves 6 or more

This tasty frittata has a particularly pleasing texture, light and luscious like a soufflé on the inside, with lots of crust outside, especially when baked in a heavy cast-iron skillet. It’s an excellent brunch or lunch dish, served either warm or, if you want to make it ahead, at room temperature. And this lends itself to many tasty variations: simply fold into the rice mixture a cup or more of sautéed onions and peppers, cooked crumbled sausage, or cubes of Taleggio, before incorporating the whipped egg whites.

- 3 tablespoons soft butter
- ¼ cup or so fine dry bread crumbs
- 5 cups milk
- 1½ cups Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano
- 2 teaspoons (plus a pinch) kosher salt
- 8 large eggs, separated
- 1 cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 2 cups finely chopped scallions

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 12-inch-diameter heavy skillet, preferably well-seasoned cast iron; a large heavy-bottomed saucepan, about 3-quart capacity; a sturdy wire whisk; an electric mixer, handheld or freestanding, with whisk attachment

Heat the oven to 325°. Grease the inside of the skillet with 1 tablespoon of the soft butter, and coat the bottom and sides thoroughly with bread crumbs. Pour out any loose crumbs.

Pour 4 cups of the milk into the large saucepan, and heat rapidly, stirring in the rice, 2 teaspoons salt, and remaining 2 tablespoons butter, until the milk starts to boil. Lower the heat, and simmer, partially covered, about 8 minutes, until the rice has a loose custard consistency. Remove the pan from the heat, and stir in the remaining cup of milk, cooling the rice slightly.
Whisk the egg yolks in a large bowl, just to break them up. Pour or ladle in the hot rice gradually, whisking well between additions, to avoid scrambling the yolks. Whisk in the grated cheese and chopped scallions.

In another bowl, whisk the egg whites and a pinch of salt with the electric mixer on medium-low speed until the whites become foamy, then raise the speed and whip just until they form soft peaks. Fold the whites into the rice batter with the wire whisk, gently turning them over and breaking up any large clumps, until incorporated.

Pour the frittata batter into the skillet, and smooth the top. Set into the oven and bake for about an hour, until the frittata is nicely browned and a paring knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Place the skillet on a cooling rack, and run the knife blade around the sides to loosen the frittata. Let it set for about 10 minutes before unmolding.

When the frittata has cooled slightly, lay a wooden cutting board over the top of the skillet, hold the two together, and flip them over. Rap on the upturned bottom of the pan and give it a good shake to release the frittata. Present it on the board as is, or invert again onto a serving platter, browned side on top. Serve warm or at room temperature, sliced in wedges.
Varieties of Rice

Nuances of flavor and suitability of each rice for different dishes can be a matter of great debate. But here are some guidelines:

- The Lomellina area of Lombardy is particularly renowned for its superfino (large) varietals, especially Carnaroli, perhaps the favorite of chefs these days.
- The Vialone Nano, a shorter semifino rice that grows around Mantova in Lombardy, and farther east in the Veneto, is excellent for soups and desserts, and, despite its smaller size, makes fine risotto.
- Arborio is the best known of the Italian rices (and most readily available in the United States). Perhaps not as fashionable with cognoscenti as Carnaroli, it is an excellent rice, I believe, for most cooking procedures.

Five Rice Dishes

As many of you know, I have for years been encouraging my readers and viewers to prepare risotto the traditional way, patiently stirring hot stock into Italian short-grain rice, a bit at a time. This slow incorporation of liquid coaxes out the starches packed into each grain and creates the incomparable creaminess and al dente bite that are the hallmarks of a real risotto.

Well, now I am relaxing a bit, and I want you to do the same!

After some marvelous meals and candid conversations with cooks and chefs during my recent trips to Lombardy and Piemonte, instead of preparing the traditional risotto I’ve been enjoying a different approach to cooking the regions’ superfino rices like Arborio, Carnaroli, and Vialone Nano, where instead of the incremental addition of stock, all of the liquid (stock or water) goes into the pot at once, along with the rice, to cook, covered, without stirring. In fact, this is the method of cooking rice that I recall from my childhood. It is usually quicker than a stirred risotto and certainly more convenient, for you can do all the other things you need to get dinner on the table while the rice cooks. And when you uncover the pot after 15 minutes or so, you’ll find the rice is creamy and al dente—almost as luscious as a traditionally prepared risotto.

The following five riso recipes from Lombardy all employ this no-stir technique and show the great range of delicious dishes that can be prepared in this manner. Indeed, the possibilities are nearly endless. Here are some suggestions for creative variations in your own riso dishes.
Cook with stock or water: I prefer stock in traditional risottos, but for no-stir rice dishes I use either a light stock (chicken, turkey, or vegetable) or plain water. Stock always gives you a somewhat richer dish, but water will serve quite nicely, especially in riso dishes that build a flavor base with a pestata (as I do in several of these recipes).

Cook different vegetables or meats with the rice: The procedures here for preparing rice with chicken, lentils, or squash will work with many seasonal vegetables, meats, or seafood. Green beans, fresh peas, favas, diced carrots, or cherry tomatoes would be delicious in the riso. Adjust the timing of the basic recipe so the vegetable is cooked when the rice is al dente. Similarly, you might add shrimp, diced cooked meats, salami, or prosciutto.

Finish the rice with different cheeses (or with extra-virgin olive oil): I often give my no-stir rice dishes a finishing touch of butter to amalgamate the texture, and a final addition of grana—grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano. For richness and complexity, you might add to rice dishes ½ cup or so of either Taleggio or Gorgonzola cut in small pieces, along with the grana, since both of these great cheeses from Lombardy have a natural affinity with rice, in my opinion. For a seafood rice dish, however, I would use extra-virgin olive oil as my finish.

**Rice & Lentils**

Riso e Lenticchie Serves 8 or more as a first course or soup

Lentils and rice are one of my favorite combinations. I fondly recall savoring a dish just like this often as a child; it was comforting and nurturing. It can be enjoyed in many ways: make it dense like risotto or add more liquid to make it soupy. Just rice and lentils are delicious and simple, but you could easily add a few sausages or pork ribs to the pot to make quite a festive main dish.

- 2 ounces pancetta or bacon, cut in pieces
- 1 cup onion cut in 1-inch chunks
- 1 cup carrot cut in 1-inch chunks
- 1 cup celery cut in 1-inch chunks
- 6 fresh sage leaves
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 8 to 10 cups hot water
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1½ cups lentils, rinsed and picked over
- 1½ cups Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano
- 1 cup chopped scallions
- ½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A food processor; a heavy-bottomed saucepan or soup pot, 5-to-6-quart capacity, with a cover

Drop the pancetta or bacon pieces into the food-processor bowl, and pulse several times, to chop the meat into small bits. Scrape all the chopped pancetta right into the heavy saucepan. Put the onion, carrot, and celery chunks and the sage leaves into the empty food-processor bowl, and mince together into a fine-textured pestata.
Put the butter and olive oil into the saucepan with the minced pancetta, and set over medium-high heat. Cook, stirring, as the butter melts and the fat starts to render. When the pancetta is sizzling, scrape in the vegetable pestata, and stir it around the pan until it has dried and begins to stick, 4 minutes or so. Clear a space on the pan bottom, and drop in the tomato paste, toast it in the hot spot for a minute, then stir together with the pestata.

Raise the heat, pour in the white wine, and cook, stirring, until the wine has almost completely evaporated. Pour in 8 cups of hot water and the tablespoon salt, stir well, and heat to the boil. (Add all 10 cups of hot water if you want to serve the rice and lentils as a thick soup rather than a denser riso.) Cover the pan, and reduce the heat slightly, to keep the water at a moderate boil, and let it bubble for 20 minutes or so, to develop the flavors.

Stir in the lentils, return to a gentle boil, and cook, partially covered, stirring occasionally, until the lentils just start to soften, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in the rice, return to a bubbling simmer, and cook, cover ajar, until the rice is al dente, 13 minutes or so. If the dish is thickening more than you like, lower the heat and cover the pan completely. If it seems too thin and wet, remove the cover and cook at a faster boil.

When the rice and lentils are fully cooked, turn off the heat. Stir in the scallions and grated cheese. Serve in warm bowls, passing more cheese at the table.

A Perfect Pot of Rice

When you are cooking rice, whether by the traditional risotto or the no-stir method, I trust that you will use your senses, taste, and judgment even as you follow instructions. Particularly when your rice is cooking in a covered pot, you should regard the cooking time in the recipe as a guideline: the actual time it takes your rice to achieve optimal creaminess and al dente texture will vary greatly, depending on how much liquid was added at the start, the size and kind of saucepan and the lid you use, what the other ingredients may be (such as meats or vegetables), the level of heat, and even the variety of rice.

So, when your rice has cooked the suggested amount of time, remove the lid, give the rice a stir, and take a bite. If the rice is perfectly chewy and creamy, turn off the heat, and incorporate the finishing ingredients. If it is almost al dente or just a bit loose, cook a couple more minutes, covered.

But if the rice seems dry—especially if the grains are also undercooked—stir in ½ cup hot water or stock, or more if necessary to loosen the rice, and cook, covered, over low heat for several more minutes, then taste again.

On the other hand, if the riso seems soupy—and the rice grains are almost fully cooked—you want to evaporate excess liquid quickly by keeping the lid off, raising the heat, and cooking the rice, stirring constantly, until it thickens.

Rice with Fresh Sage

Riso e Salvia Serves 6 or more as a first course or side dish

When you want to enjoy a risotto-style rice but don’t have the time for lots of prep and stirring, try this simple recipe. You’ll get the creaminess and toothsome bite of the rice grains and the wonderful flavor of fresh sage, one of my favorite herbs—or use rosemary, thyme, basil, or any other fresh herb you like. This makes a great primo all by itself and can be a delicious accompaniment to grilled or braised meat or fish dishes.

I finish the rice with just a bit of butter and grated cheese, but you can add complexity by stirring in cubes of Taleggio or Gorgonzola, or any of your favorite cheeses. (And though I am happy to serve the rice with the sage leaves buried inside, you may pick them out, if you prefer, when the pot comes off the heat.)

- 4 tablespoons butter
- 12 large fresh sage leaves
Melt the 4 tablespoons butter in the saucepan over medium heat. When the butter is foaming, scatter the sage leaves in the pan and heat for a minute or so, just until they are sizzling. Pour in 5 cups of hot water or stock, and stir in the salt. Raise the heat, and bring the liquid to the boil, then stir in the rice and bring back to the boil.

Cover the pan, and lower the heat so the water is bubbling gently. Cook for 13 or 14 minutes, then check the rice and adjust the consistency if needed. At this point, too, stir in the scallions, to cook for the last minute or two, until the rice is creamy and *al dente*.

When the rice is fully cooked, turn off the heat, drop in the butter pieces, and stir vigorously until thoroughly amalgamated. Stir in the ½ cup of grated cheese, spoon the *riso* into warm pasta bowls, and serve immediately, passing additional grated cheese at the table.
Cover the pan, and lower the heat so the water is bubbling gently. Cook for about 14 minutes, until rice is *al dente* with a creamy consistency like risotto, so you can easily stir in the egg yolks. Adjust the consistency if needed.

While the *riso* cooks, beat together the yolks and olive oil in a small bowl with a fork, then mix in ½ cup of the grated cheese, to form a paste.

When the rice is fully cooked, remove from the heat. Scrape in the egg-and-cheese paste, and stir vigorously until thoroughly amalgamated. Stir in the remaining grated cheese and the crumbled Gorgonzola, if you like, reserving some of the crumbles for a garnish.

Spoon the *riso* into warm pasta bowls, and serve immediately.

**Rice & Butternut Squash**

*Riso e Zucca* serves 6 or more as a first course or side dish

In autumn, Lombardy abounds in *zucca*—what we call “winter squash”—and the seasonal cuisine makes full use of the vegetable. Squashes of all sizes and shapes are in the market—favorite varieties like *marina di chioggia*, *berrettina piacentina*, *zucca tonda padana*, *zucca blu*, and *zucca delica*—to be cooked in stuffings, soups, pasta sauces, and risotto. And, like many fruits and vegetables, *zucca* is pickled with mustard seed to make the delicious condiment called mostarda, for which Lombardy—especially Cremona—is famous.

This *riso* will be delicious made with any of our squashes—try acorn, buttercup, delicata, hubbard, or kabocha as well as butternut. The fresh vegetables of other seasons can be used, too, following the basic technique of the recipe. Asparagus in springtime or broccoli in summer will be delicious cooked with rice.

- 2 pounds butternut squash
- 1 cup onion cut in 1-inch chunks
- 1 cup carrot cut in 1-inch chunks
- 1 cup celery cut in 1-inch chunks
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 5 cups hot water or light stock, plus more if needed
- 2 cups Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano

**FOR FINISHING**

- 2 tablespoons butter, cut in pieces
- ½ cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy saucepan, such as enameled cast iron, 10 inches wide, 3-to-4-quart capacity, with a cover

Trim, peel, and remove seeds from the squash. Cut it into ½-inch cubes.

Using a food processor, mince the onion, carrot, and celery chunks to a fine-textured paste (*pestata*).

Put the olive oil and butter in the saucepan and set over medium heat. When the butter is melted, scrape in the
*pestata* and season with ½ teaspoon of the salt. Cook the *pestata* for about 5 minutes, stirring it around the bottom of the pan, until it has dried out and just begins to stick.

Pour in the hot water or stock, and bring to a boil. Drop in the squash, then all the rice, stirring, and remaining salt. Return the liquid to the boil, cover the pan, and reduce the heat to keep the *riso* bubbling gently. Cook for about 14 minutes, until the rice and the squash are cooked and creamy.

Turn off the heat, drop in the butter pieces, and stir vigorously until thoroughly amalgamated. Stir in the ½ cup of grated cheese, spoon the *riso* into warm pasta bowls, and serve immediately, passing additional grated cheese at the table.

**Traditional Rice & Chicken**

*Riso alla Pitocca* Serves 4 to 6

This venerable Lombard specialty belies its literal name. *Pitocchi* (taken from the Greek word for “poor”) were beggars who roamed the Padana lowlands during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries seeking sustenance; presumably a plain rice dish was what they got. Though simple to prepare, today’s *riso alla pitocca* is far from meager. Quite the contrary, it is rich in flavor from the *pestata* base and loaded with succulent chicken chunks.

- 1½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs
- 1 cup onion cut in 1-inch chunks
- 1 cup carrot cut in 1-inch chunks
- 1 cup celery cut in 1-inch chunks
- 2 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 fresh bay leaf
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 5 cups hot chicken or turkey stock, plus more if needed
- 2 cups Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano

**FOR FINISHING**

- 2 tablespoons butter cut in pieces
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- ½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy saucepan, such as enameled cast iron, 10 inches wide, 3-to-4-quart capacity, with a cover

Trim any excess fat from the chicken thighs, and cut them into 1-inch chunks.

Using a food processor, mince the onion, carrot, celery, and garlic into a fine-textured *pestata*. Pour the olive oil in the saucepan, and set over medium-high heat. Stir in the *pestata*, and season with 1 teaspoon of the salt. Cook for about 5 minutes, stirring frequently, until the *pestata* has dried and begins to stick to the bottom of the pan.

Toss in the chicken, bay leaf, and the remaining salt. Tumble and stir the chicken in the pan until browned and
caramelized all over, about 4 minutes. Raise the heat, pour in the white wine, and cook, stirring and scraping up the browned bits in the pan, until the wine has almost evaporated.

Pour in the hot stock, stirring, then all the rice. Bring to the boil over high heat, cover the pan, and reduce the heat to keep the riso bubbling gently. Cook for about 14 minutes, or until both the rice and the chicken chunks are fully cooked and the consistency is creamy.

Turn off the heat, drop in the butter pieces, and stir vigorously until thoroughly amalgamated, then stir in the parsley and ½ cup of grated cheese. Spoon the riso into warm pasta bowls and serve immediately, passing additional grated cheese at the table.

**RISOTTO WITH GORGONZOLA**

Risotto alla Gorgonzola Serves 6

This traditional risotto is a showcase for two of the great foods of Lombardy: the rice itself and Gorgonzola, the region’s superb blue cheese. Here the cheese is more than a garnish (which I recommend in other riso recipes); it is the very essence of the dish. You blend in a generous half-pound of Gorgonzola just before serving, when the al dente risotto comes off the heat, to bring out the full flavor of the cheese, unaltered by cooking. This deserves a top-quality, genuine imported Gorgonzola, preferably not too piquant. I like sweet and creamy Gorgonzola Dolce, aged no more than 3 months.

In Lombardy, chunks of fresh ripe pear are sometimes incorporated into risotto alla Gorgonzola. When pears are in season, it is easy to give the basic risotto this wonderful embellishment. Peel and cut ripe pears into about 2 cups of small cubes. When the rice is almost done, gently stir in the pears, and cook for just a minute. Turn off the heat, and finish the risotto with Gorgonzola and grana, as detailed below.

- 6 to 8 cups hot chicken, turkey, or vegetable broth
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1½ cups finely chopped onions
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2 cups Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 8 ounces imported Italian Gorgonzola Dolce (aged no more than 3 months), cut into small pieces
- ½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy saucepan, such as enameled cast iron, 10 inches wide, 3-to-4-quart capacity, with a cover

Heat the stock in a separate pot almost to the boil. Keep it very hot, near the risotto pan.

Put the olive oil in the risotto pan, and set over medium heat. Add the onions and 1 teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are wilted and just starting to color, about 6 minutes. Add the rice all at once, raise the heat, and stir for a couple of minutes, until the grains are toasted (but not browned). Pour in the wine, and cook, stirring continuously, until nearly all of the liquid has been absorbed.

Ladle in 2 cups of the hot stock, and stir steadily as the rice absorbs the liquid and begins to release its starch. When you can see the bottom of the pan as you stir, after 5 minutes or so, quickly ladle in another couple of cups of stock and the remaining teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring, until the stock again is almost completely absorbed, and then ladle in another cup or so of stock. Continue this process, and check the risotto for doneness after about 6 cups of stock have been added, at about the 15-to-20-minute mark. Add more stock if needed, and cook until the risotto is
creamy but still *al dente.*

Turn off the heat. Scatter the pieces of Gorgonzola over the risotto, saving a few spoonfuls for a garnish. Sprinkle over it $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of grated *grana,* and stir both cheeses into the risotto until incorporated. Spoon into warm pasta bowls, scatter the reserved bits of Gorgonzola over the top, and serve immediately, passing more grated cheese at the table.

---

**Risotto Milan-style with Marrow & Saffron**

Risotto alla Milanese  6 to 8 cups hot **beef stock** (chicken or turkey broth could be substituted)
½ teaspoon loosely packed saffron threads
1½ pounds beef marrow bones, preferably center-cut from the leg bone
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 cups finely chopped onions
1½ teaspoons kosher salt
2 cups Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano
1 cup dry white wine

FOR FINISHING
2 tablespoons butter, cut in pieces
½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed saucepan, such as enameled cast iron, 10 inches wide, 3-to-4-quart capacity

Heat the stock in a separate pot almost to the boil, and keep it very hot, near the risotto pan.

Pour about ½ cup of the stock into a heatproof cup. To toast the saffron (for more flavor): Drop the strands into the bowl of a metal spoon, separating them a bit. Hold the spoon over a low open flame for just a few seconds, until the aroma is released, then spill the threads into the ½ cup stock. Let them steep in a warm place.

Scrape the marrow out of the bones with a sturdy paring knife—don’t scrape off any bits of bone (if you do, pick them out). Chop the marrow into little pieces: you should have about ⅓ cup total.

Put the olive oil and marrow bits in the heavy saucepan, and set it over medium heat. As the marrow melts, stir in the chopped onions and 1 teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, for several minutes, until the onions are wilted and just starting to color, then—to soften the onions further—ladle in ½ cup hot stock from the pot and let it simmer until completely evaporated. Add the rice all at once, raise the heat, and stir for a couple of minutes, until the grains are toasted (but not browned). Pour in the wine, and cook, stirring continuously, until nearly all of the liquid has been absorbed.

Ladle in 2 cups of the hot stock, and stir steadily as the rice absorbs the liquid and begins to release its starch. When you can see the bottom of the pan as you stir, after 5 minutes or so, quickly ladle in another couple of cups of stock and the remaining ½ teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring, until the stock is again almost completely absorbed.

Now pour in the saffron-infused stock along with a cup or so of hot stock from the pot. Cook, stirring, until the liquid is absorbed and the saffron color has spread. Check the risotto for doneness: it should be creamy but still al dente. Incorporate more stock if necessary.

When the risotto is fully cooked, turn off the heat, drop in the butter pieces, and stir vigorously until thoroughly amalgamated. Stir in the ½ cup of grated cheese, and spoon into warm pasta bowls. Serve immediately, passing additional grated cheese at the table.

**Braised Stuffed Cabbage Rolls**
Polpette di Verza Serves 6
In Lombardy, where it’s often cold and foggy, cabbage grows well in the fertile soil and is used in many dishes. The common type here, as all across northern Italy, is the Savoy cabbage—the name suggests its probable origins in neighboring Piemonte, which was once ruled by the Casa Savoia (“House of Savoy”). The loose, wrinkled leaves of the Savoy are great for stuffing, because they’re easy to separate and roll. And they’re delicious in this wonderful dish, mellow and tender but still sturdy enough to hold the sausage-and-vegetable filling.

Cabbage rolls are very much part of my culinary heritage. My family grew Savoy cabbage, and I grew up on sarmes, the Istrian interpretation of stuffed cabbage. Sar(me) are a more sour preparation, since the cooking on the eastern edge of Italy had many Slavic and Eastern European influences. The polpette di verza of Lombardy are sweeter (though the wine in this recipe provides a nice balance).

Whatever the differences, I love all kinds of stuffed cabbage, and love to serve them at special family occasions. These polpette make a fine appetizer as well as a main course. I serve the rolls in a warm bowl, so the sauce can be scooped up with each bite. For a main dish, accompany them with Riso alla Lombarda, polenta, or mashed potatoes.

FOR THE PESTATA AND STUFFING

- 2 cups milk
- 4 ounces dry country bread cubes (about 4 cups)
- 2 ounces pancetta, cut in pieces
- 1 large onion, cut in chunks
- 1 large carrot, cut in chunks
- 1 large stalk celery, cut in chunks
- 3 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 pounds sweet Italian sausage (without fennel seeds), loose or removed from casings and crumbled
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 1 large egg, lightly beaten
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh Italian parsley
- ½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano

FOR THE CABBAGE ROLLS AND SAUCE

- 1 medium head Savoy cabbage (about 2 pounds)
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2½ teaspoons kosher salt
- 3 cups dry white wine
- 4 cups or so hot chicken, turkey, or vegetable broth

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy-bottomed sauté pan or deep skillet with 4-inch sides, 13-inch diameter or wider, with a cover; a big pot for blanching the cabbage leaves

To make the stuffing: Pour the milk over the bread chunks in a bowl, and let them soak for a few minutes, until completely saturated.

Using a food processor, mince the pancetta, onion, carrot, celery, and garlic into a fine-textured pestata. You should have about 2 cups total.

Pour the 3 tablespoons of olive oil into the heavy pan, and set over medium-high heat. Scrape in ½ cup of pestata, and cook for a few minutes, stirring frequently, until it starts to dry and stick on the pan bottom. Crumble
the sausage into the skillet, and cook, stirring, until all the meat is sizzling and no longer pink, about 5 minutes. Season with 1 teaspoon salt, and pour in the white wine. Bring to a boil, and cook until the wine has evaporated completely. Remove from the heat, and immediately scrape the sausage into a large bowl to cool.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 375°. Fill the big pot with water, and bring to a boil.

When the meat has cooled, squeeze the milk from the soaked bread (catch it in the bowl, and use it for another purpose). Crumble the softened bread over the sausage, and combine them with your hands, then work in the beaten egg, chopped parsley, and grated cheese, tossing all together into a loose stuffing.

To prepare the cabbage: Pull off and discard any bruised or torn outer leaves. Cut out the core of the cabbage, and separate the largest leaves from the head, keeping them intact. Lay each leaf flat, outside up, and with a sharp paring knife shave off the raised ridge of the rib at the leaf base. When you’ve trimmed twelve good-sized leaves (and a few extra) for the rolls, slice the remaining cluster of small inner leaves into shreds about ¼ inch wide.

Drop the big, trimmed leaves into the boiling water, and blanch them until soft and quite floppy, about 7 minutes. Cool them in a bowl of icy water; drain well, lay them on paper towels, and pat dry.

Return the big sauté pan to the stove (wipe out any browned bits), pour in the ¼ cup olive oil, and turn on medium-high heat. Stir in the remaining pestata, and cook until dried and sticking, about 4 minutes. Toss in all the shredded cabbage and 2½ teaspoons salt, and cook, stirring, until the cabbage starts to wilt. Pour in the white wine, raise the heat to bring it to a boil, then lower the heat and simmer the sauce for 10 minutes or so, to blend the flavors.

As the sauce simmers, make the cabbage rolls. Lay out each softened leaf with its shaved rib side down. Take about ⅓ cup of stuffing in your fingers, form it into a plump log, and lay it on the leaf. Roll the bottom of the leaf over the filling, tuck the sides in, and roll up tightly the rest of the way.

When all the polpette are formed, lower the heat under the sauce and place each roll in the sauté pan, seam side down. Pour in the stock, submerging the rolls, heat to a bubbling boil, and put on the pan lid. Set the pan in the oven to braise the rolls for an hour. Remove the lid, and push the rolls down in the sauce, which will have reduced. Bake, uncovered, for another 30 minutes or so, until the sauce has reduced and thickened and the tops of the rolls are nicely caramelized.

Serve in a warm bowl with some of the sauce, accompanied by rice, potatoes, or polenta.

**Everyday Roasted Duck**

Anatra Povera Serves 4 to 6

This crispy-skinned duck is delicious but definitely not fancy. Povera means “poor,” and this is a rustic family-style dish, with relatively few ingredients and simple preparation. The duck is roasted whole and basted with a whisked-together dressing of lemon juice, wine, and olive oil. It crisps up beautifully, and the pan juices make a great sauce.

You don’t have to fuss much with the serving, either. For a family meal, I chop the bird into small pieces, pile them up on a platter—neck and giblets, too—and let people pick the pieces they like. (Fingers are fine for this, so plenty of moist towels on the table are handy.)

For a more orderly dinner, the duck can be quartered to serve four nicely. Riso e Lenticchie—Rice and Lentils, braised greens, or just a tossed salad would be good with it.
1 whole duck, about 5 pounds, with giblets and neck

1 tablespoon kosher salt

4 sprigs fresh rosemary

1 cup dry white wine

½ cup freshly squeezed lemon juice (from 3 or 4 large lemons)

¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 to 2 cups light poultry (or vegetable) stock

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: Kitchen twine; heavy-duty flameproof roasting pan with a flat wire roasting rack, preferably just big enough to hold the duck with an inch or so empty space around it; a fat-separating measuring cup (2 cups or larger); poultry shears or heavy knife for splitting the duck

Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven, and heat to 400°.

Remove all clods of fat from the duck cavities, and trim any loose flaps of skin. Rinse the bird, including the giblets and neck, and pat dry with paper towels.

Sprinkle a teaspoon of the salt inside the belly cavity, and push in the rosemary sprigs. With the breast side up, twist and fold the wing tips so they stay in place under the bird. Cross the legs over the cavity opening and tie the ends together tightly with kitchen twine. Chop the duck neck into two or three pieces, and scatter in the bottom of the pan, along with the giblets, under or around the wire rack. Set the duck, breast side up, on the roasting rack in the pan.

Whisk the wine, lemon juice, and olive oil vigorously together until emulsified, and pour this all over the duck skin. Sprinkle the remaining 2 teaspoons salt over the bird, making sure that the sides are moistened and salted as well as the breast.

Roast the duck for an hour, breast up, then baste it all over with the pan juices, using a bulb baster or large spoon—tilt the roasting pan carefully to scoop up the liquid. Continue to roast for another 1 to 1½ hours, basting the bird every 30 minutes or so, until it is dark gold and very crisp all over.

Remove the duck to a platter, take out the rack, and gather the giblets and neck pieces onto the platter, too. Carefully pour the hot juices from the pan into a fat separator (or other heatproof container), and let the fat gather on top. Pour the good juices out of the separator into the roasting pan—if you don’t have a separator, spoon off all the fat first—then pour in a cup or more of stock, so you have at least 1½ cups of liquid to deglaze the pan and cook into a sauce.

Set the roasting pan over medium-high heat on top of the stove, and bring the liquids to a boil, vigorously scraping up all the caramelized bits on the bottom of the pan. Let the juices reduce until slightly thickened and flavorful, then turn off the heat.

In the meantime cut up the duck into small pieces to serve family-style: First split open the breast, cutting through the center of the breast bone with poultry shears or a chef’s knife. Cut along the backbone to divide the bird in half, then slice each half into a wing, leg, thigh, and two or three breast pieces. Pile the cut pieces on a serving platter, along with the roasted neck and giblet morsels. Keep warm, and when the sauce is ready pour the pan sauce all over. Let people take the pieces they like the most.

To quarter the duck to serve four: Split it in two as above, cutting along both sides of the backbone so it can be removed. Divide each duck half into a breast piece and a joined leg and thigh, set each quarter on a warm dinner
plate, and nap with the pan sauce.

SKILLET-BRAISED CHICKEN BUNDLES

Fagottini di Pollo  Serves 6

_Fagottini di pollo_ means “little chicken bundles”—and that’s what these are. Boneless chicken thighs are slightly flattened, wrapped around a savory vegetable _pestata_, and kept in shape with a strip of bacon and a toothpick. They’re braised in a big skillet, and finally topped with cheese and baked briefly, to get a crisp _gratinato_ topping. You will love _fagottini di pollo_, I am sure!

You will also see why these make a great party dish, since they’re convenient for a buffet. You can braise them largely in advance—in fact, the flavor improves with resting. Then set them on baking pans, sauced and topped with grated cheese; refrigerate if necessary. When you are ready to serve, simply put the pan in the hot oven to heat them and create the crunchy _gratinato_ effect.

Be flexible forming your bundles, since chickens vary in size greatly. If the thighs are small, make more bundles per serving and adjust the stuffing amount and the cooking time accordingly.

What to serve with _fagottini di pollo_? Since they have such a nice sauce, I recommend polenta, _Riso alla Lombarda, Riso e Salvia_, or just plain mashed potatoes.

- 1 medium onion, cut in chunks
- 1 large carrot, cut in chunks
- 1 large stalk celery, cut in chunks
- 10 fresh sage leaves
- 2 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 2½ pounds boneless, skinless chicken thighs, preferably 6 to 8 large thighs
- 6 or more thin-sliced strips bacon, preferably 2 inches wide
- 2 cups dry white wine
- 3 cups (one 28-ounce can) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 2 to 3 tablespoons grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy-bottomed, ovenproof skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a cover; toothpicks

Using a food processor, mince the onion, carrot, celery, 4 sage leaves, and the garlic into a fine-textured _pestata_. Pour 2 tablespoons of the olive oil into the big skillet, and set over medium heat. Stir the _pestata_ into the oil, season with ½ teaspoon salt, and cook, stirring frequently, until it has wilted and just starts to stick to the pan bottom. Scrape all of the _pestata_ into a bowl to cool.

Trim the chicken thighs of fat and any loose bits of flesh, and lay them open, boned side up, on a cutting board. One at a time, cover each thigh with a piece of plastic wrap, and pound it with a meat mallet (or other heavy implement) to an even thickness of about ½ inch. Sprinkle salt lightly on the flattened sides, using another ½ teaspoon in all.

Spread a tablespoon or so of the cooled _pestata_ in a thin layer on each thigh, almost to the edges—use more or less depending on size. Fold the thighs over into thirds, as if folding a letter, and compress gently. Wrap a strip of
bacon the long way around each bundle, so the open sides are partly sealed. Overlap the ends of the bacon and thread a toothpick through them to hold the strip in place.

Pour the remaining 3 tablespoons of olive oil into the big skillet—cleaned of pestata—and set over medium-high heat. Lay all the chicken bundles in the pan, turning them when the bacon starts sizzling and rendering fat. Sauté the fagottini for 5 minutes or longer, turning several times, so the bacon and chicken are lightly caramelized all over. As they brown, drop the remaining pestata by spoonfuls in between the bundles, along with the rest of the sage leaves, to cook on the pan bottom.

When everything is sizzling, pour in the wine and bring to a bubbling simmer. Cook until the wine has reduced by half, turning the fagottini occasionally. Pour the crushed tomatoes (and juices) all over the bundles, and shake the pan to mix them with the wine. Season with the remaining teaspoon of salt, and bring the braising liquid to a boil over high heat. Cover the pan, adjust the heat to keep things bubbling steadily, and braise until the thighs are cooked through and tender, 25 to 30 minutes, depending on size. (If you’re not sure, slice discreetly into one of the bundles to check for doneness.)

If you want to finish the fagottini with a crisp gratinato topping, arrange a rack in the top part of your oven and preheat to 425° while the chicken braises. When the meat is done, uncover the skillet, raise the heat, and reduce the braising liquid a bit, exposing the tops of the thighs. Turn off the heat, and carefully pull the toothpicks out of the bundles. Sprinkle a teaspoon or so of grated cheese over each, and set the skillet in the oven. Bake about 10 minutes, until the gratinato is golden, the bacon very crisp, and the sauce quite thick. Remove from the oven carefully.

To finish the fagottini on the stovetop: Reduce the braising juices in the uncovered pan a bit longer, until thickened to a sauce. Turn off the heat, pull out the toothpicks, sprinkle a teaspoon cheese over each, and set the cover back on for a minute, to melt the cheese.

To serve the fagottini: set one (or more if they’re small) on a serving plate with sauce spooned around the hot bundle.

BRAISED VEAL SHANKS

Ossobuco alla Milanese Serves 6

I can understand why my chefs were focused on ossobuco alla Milanese when we visited Milano in 2008, and why so many readers, viewers, and customers at my restaurants tell me it is one of their favorite dishes—in any cuisine. It is, to me, a perfect symphony of flavors and textures and colors: the luscious veal shank meat falling off the marrow bones, the marrow seeping into saffron-infused risotto, the dense sauce moistening meat and grain. And all the richness is enhanced by the counterpoint of a vibrant gremolata topping of fresh garlic, lemon, and parsley.

Fortunately, a trip to Milan is not necessary to enjoy this grand meal. With this recipe (and the one for the risotto), the multitude of pleasures in preparing, serving, and eating an authentic ossobuco alla Milanese will be yours at home. The most work may be finding a butcher who can supply the “tall” ossobuco I recommend: ask to have the shanks cut so each ossobuco is nearly 3 inches high (when standing on end). If necessary, you can use the flatter-and-wider-cut ossobuco you usually see in the market. Be aware, though, that the meat will cook more quickly and you will need to reduce the sauce ingredients so the ossobuco does not drown in the braising liquid.

♦ 6 veal shanks (ossobuco), cut 3 inches thick, about 1 pound each
♦ 2 bay leaves
♦ 4 whole cloves
1 sprig fresh rosemary
10 juniper berries
1 orange
1 lemon
1 tablespoon coarse sea salt, or to taste
1 cup or so all-purpose flour for dredging the meat
1/2 cup vegetable oil
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 cups finely chopped onions
1/2 cup peeled and shredded carrot
1/2 cup finely chopped trimmed celery
2 teaspoons tomato paste
1 cup crushed canned Italian San Marzano plum tomatoes
2 cups white wine
About 8 cups hot poultry, meat, or vegetable stock
Freshly ground black pepper
FOR THE GREMOLATA
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh Italian parsley
2 plump garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped
Zest of 1 lemon, in fine shreds or chopped

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: Cotton kitchen twine; a small piece of cheesecloth; a heavy 7-quart saucepan, such as an enameled cast-iron French oven, preferably about 12-inch diameter (just wide enough to hold all the shank pieces without excess space around them)
Stand the shank pieces up on a flat end. Cut six lengths of twine, each about 2 feet long, and wrap one around the outside of each ossobuco, in the middle (the meat will look as though it’s wearing a very tight belt). Tie the twine securely and trim the ends.

Cut a small square of cheesecloth and wrap up the bay leaves, cloves, rosemary sprig, and juniper berries. Tie the packet with twine. Shave off the peel of the orange and lemon in broad strips with a paring knife or vegetable peeler —remove only the colorful zest, not the bitter white pith. Squeeze and strain the juice from the orange.

Just before browning the meat, salt the ossobuco lightly, using ½ teaspoon in all. Dredge the shanks in the flour to coat all surfaces.

Pour the vegetable oil into the pan, and set over medium-high heat. Shake off excess flour, and set all the ossobuco in the oil, standing on a cut end. Let them sizzle for 4 to 5 minutes, until the bottoms are well browned; turn to caramelize the other cut side. Flip the pieces onto their round edges, and rotate so the fat crisps all around the shanks. Remove them to a platter when nicely colored—this will take 10 minutes or more.

When all the ossobuco are browned, carefully pour the hot vegetable oil out of the empty pan, leaving the crusted bits of meat on the bottom. Pour in the olive oil, set over medium-high heat, and dump in the onions. Stir them around for a minute or two, scraping the pan to release the caramelized bits, then stir in the carrot and celery. Drop in the cheesecloth herb sachet, sprinkle on a teaspoon of salt, and cook, stirring, until the vegetables are sizzling and wilting.

Clear a space in the pan bottom, and drop in the tomato paste; cook the paste in the hot spot for a minute, then stir it into the vegetables. Add the crushed tomatoes, stir well, and bring to a boil. Raise the heat to high, pour in the wine, and cook for a couple of minutes at a boil to evaporate the alcohol. Pour in the orange juice and about 6 cups of the hot stock; drop in all the strips of citrus zest and the remaining salt, and bring the liquids to a boil.

Return the ossobuco to the saucepan, standing them on end so they’re evenly immersed in the sauce. Add more hot stock, if necessary, just to cover the tops of the ossobuco with liquid. Cover the pan, and lower the heat so the sauce is perking steadily but not too fast. Cook for an hour or so, covered, checking that the sauce has not reduced and is still covering the meat (add stock if needed). Turn the ossobuco over in the pan so the meat cooks evenly.

Uncover the pan, and cook for another hour or more at a bubbling simmer, adjusting the heat as necessary to maintain slow but steady concentration of the sauce. As the braising-liquid level gradually drops, carefully turn the shanks again, so no parts dry out.

Cook for 2 to 3 hours in all, until the meat at its thickest part is tender enough to pierce with a fork with only slight resistance, and the sauce is thick, reduced well below the tops of the shank pieces. Season with fresh pepper to taste and stir. Turn off the heat. Lift each ossobuco from the cooking pot with sturdy tongs, letting the sauce drain off, and place it on a large platter. Snip the knotted twine pieces with a scissors; pull off and discard. Lift out the cheesecloth sachet, press to release all the juices back into the pot, and discard.

Set a wire-mesh sieve in a bowl or saucepan. Strain all the sauce through the sieve, pressing the liquid from the strips of peel and vegetable bits. The sauce should be thick and velvety, with the consistency of molasses (if it is too thin, quickly reduce it over high heat). Taste the sauce, and adjust the seasoning for the last time.

Chop and stir together the chopped parsley, garlic, and lemon zest for the gremolata just before serving, for freshness. Spoon the Risotto alla Milanese into the center of six wide plates, and nestle the ossobuco in the center of
the risotto. Spoon over it some of the sauce, and sprinkle lightly with gremolata (about ½ teaspoon per serving). Serve with small spoons for scooping the delicious marrow from the bones, and pass the remaining gremolata at the table.

**Veal Chop Gratinato**

Costolette al Formaggio Serves 6

Gorgonzola and Taleggio are my favorites of Lombardy’s many fine cheeses. Both are made from rich cow’s milk, exclusively from animals that have grazed in the pastures of particular locales. The finest Taleggio, in my opinion, comes from small producers in the highlands north of Bergamo, where the cheese originated centuries ago. Creamy and soft when ripe, Taleggio is a superb table cheese, all by itself or with a piece of good bread or fruit (and at room temperature, of course). On my recent trips to Lombardy, though, I’ve appreciated it as a component of cooked dishes. As I’ve suggested in the recipes, fold it into any of the riso dishes in this chapter—after the heat is off—and you will love how it melts and lends its luxurious texture and complex flavors to the rice.

Because it browns beautifully in a hot oven, Taleggio is a great cheese for a gratinato, as you will find when you try this very special recipe. Thick veal chops are browned, then braised in a sage-infused tomato sauce and finished in the oven under thin slivers of Taleggio and a sprinkle of grana. The golden crown of cheese over the tender meat is a perfect final touch.

To be sure, this is an extravagant dish and demands the best ingredients. Meaty veal chops are always expensive, and these should be cut extra thick (either rib or, my preference, loin chops are suitable). And your Taleggio must come from a reliable cheesemonger who has allowed the cheese to ripen properly before it’s cut and sold—too young and you won’t get the full flavor. The cheese should be soft under the rind but not runny all the way through. In fact, you’ll need to chill ripe Taleggio in order to slice it thinly for the recipe. But the effort and expense are well worth it, as you’ll find when you taste your costolette al formaggio.

- 6 veal loin chops, cut 1½ inches thick, about 12 ounces each
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 cup all-purpose flour for dredging
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 12 fresh sage leaves
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 3 cups (one 28-ounce can) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 5 ounces Taleggio, cut in 6 or more thin slices
- 2 tablespoons grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed, ovenproof skillet or sauté pan, preferably 13-inch diameter or larger, with a cover

Season the veal chops with salt on both sides, using about a teaspoon in all. Spread the flour on a plate, and lay in the chops to coat on both sides. Leave them in the flour briefly while heating the olive oil and butter in the big skillet over medium-high heat.

As soon as the butter is foaming, quickly shake excess flour off the chops and lay them in the pan, nestling them all in one layer. Brown them well on the first side, about 3 minutes, then flip them over. Drop the sage leaves between and around the chops. When they are nicely caramelized on the second side, move the chops to a large platter (but leave the sage in the pan).
Pour in the wine, and bring to a boil, scraping up the browned bits in the skillet bottom. Boil for a minute or so, to cook off some of the alcohol, then stir in the crushed tomatoes and the remaining teaspoon salt. Slosh the tomato containers with 1 cup water, and stir that in, too. Bring the sauce to a bubbling simmer and cook, uncovered, for 10 minutes, to reduce a bit and develop flavor.

Return the veal chops to the skillet, and pour in any meat juices that accumulated on the platter—the meat should be nearly submerged in braising liquid. Cover the pan, and adjust the heat to maintain the active simmer. Let the veal braise about 20 minutes, until cooked all the way through. Meanwhile, arrange a rack in the top third of the oven, and heat to 425°.

Uncover the pan, and if the braising liquid is still near the top of the chops, let it boil down to thicken over high heat for a few minutes. Distribute the Taleggio slices equally over the meaty parts of the chops, and sprinkle a teaspoon grana over each cheese-topped chop.

Set the skillet in the oven, and bake until the cheese is tinged with gold and the sauce has thickened. Carefully remove the hot pan from the oven. Lift the chops from the pan to a serving plate, and spoon sauce all around.

This dish is so full of flavor that a vegetable with a gentle flavor will do best. I love boiled asparagus spears with just a drop of butter, allowing the veal sauce to flavor them. Braised spinach or Jerusalem artichokes would be very good as well.

The wrapper on a Taleggio form with the assurance of DOP—"Di Origine Proteta," a traditional and government-controlled product

ALMOND CAKE ALLA MANTOVANA

Torta Mantovana Makes a 9-inch cake, serving 8 or more

This traditional almond cake is named for the historic city of Mantova (perhaps better known to most English speakers as Mantua, the city to which Romeo is exiled in Romeo and Juliet).

The torta is equally delightful for dessert and for breakfast. In the evening, I like to serve it with poached fruit—prunes poached in rum are perfect—and a dollop of whipped cream. Of course, I make sure there’s some left over, so I can enjoy it again in the morning, with my caffè And since it’s quite moist and keeps well, it will be good the following morning, too (excellent incentive to cut small slices and make it last!).

On a more serious culinary note, I want to emphasize the importance of using a fine almond extract in this cake. Indeed, all desserts and dishes that call for fruit, nut, or spice extracts are immeasurably better when you use a top-quality extract rather than a supermarket brand (and never use an imitation flavor). The slightly greater expense of a premium extract is always worthwhile and will pay you back in the flavor of your creations.

- 5⅛ ounces (1½ sticks) soft butter, plus more for the cake pan
2 tablespoons fine dry bread crumbs
2 cups all-purpose flour
1½ teaspoons baking powder
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
3½ ounces whole blanched almonds, toasted (about ⅔ cup)
1¼ cups sugar
1 large egg
4 large egg yolks
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon (about 2 teaspoons)
1 teaspoon almond extract
2 tablespoons milk

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 9-inch springform pan; a food processor; an electric mixer with paddle attachment

Arrange a rack in the center of the oven, and preheat to 350°. Butter the bottom and sides of the assembled springform pan, add the bread crumbs, and swirl them around to coat the insides well, tapping out the excess.

Sift together the flour, baking powder, and salt. Pulse the almonds in the food-processor bowl until finely ground but not pasty, about twelve quick pulses.

In the mixer, cream the butter and sugar on high speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. Drop in the egg and yolks, one at a time, mixing well on medium speed, then scraping down the bowl. Once all the eggs are in, add the lemon zest and almond extract, and beat on high speed for a minute or so, until very light.

On low speed, spoon in half the flour mix, and beat just to incorporate. Beat in the milk, then the remaining flour mix. Scrape the bowl, and beat briefly until smooth. Finally, mix in the ground almonds for a few seconds to distribute them evenly through the batter. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan, and spread it in an even layer.

Bake the torta for about 1 hour, rotating the pan after 30 minutes, until the cake is golden brown on top and a knife inserted in the center comes out clean and dry (it’s okay if a few moist crumbs stick to it).

Let the cake cool for 10 minutes on a wire rack. Run a paring knife around the edge of the cake to loosen it from the pan, then open the spring and remove the side ring.

Cool the cake thoroughly before serving. Wrap well to keep fresh for 2 to 3 days. (In the morning, I like to warm a slice of torta to enjoy with my cappuccino.)
One of the high points in Milan is the Brera Gallery, where I always make a point of seeking out Bramante’s *Men at Arms*. The frescoed figures are so real, each expression different, with light bouncing off wavy hair, lips curled in haughty smirks, and a faint glimmer in the eyes.

The Navigli quarter is the bohemian side of Milan. Home to photographers, artists, antique shops, and outdoor markets, Navigli is surprising because of the waterways that weave around the old buildings.

In Bergamo, in the upper city, walk under the Palazzo della Ragione to the Colleoni Chapel, burial place of the famous mercenary soldier Bartolomeo Colleoni. Decorated with intricate carving and colored marble, every nook and cranny is filled with detail to keep your eyes occupied for hours.

Many people come to Mantova to view, in the Gonzaga Ducal Palace, the Camera degli Sposi, a gorgeous bedroom of newlyweds painted by Andrea Mantegna. The frescoes are breathtaking, rich in color, and filled with the details of Renaissance life. The highlight of Mantova for me is Palazzo Tè, which was the summer residence of the Gonzaga family, known as a pleasure palace for activities such as horseback riding, and also the place for lascivious behavior. The palazzo is the Mannerist masterpiece of Giulio Romano, well known also for his book on sexual positions, *I Modi*. The frescoes inside the palazzo cover a similar topic.

Castiglione Olona is a sleepy town on the Olona River. The Palazzo Branda is filled with wonderful frescoes by the early-Renaissance painter Masolino, who was called there to decorate the palace. You will probably be the only people visiting, and much attention will be shed on you by the caretaker. There is an outdoor market here the first Sunday of each month, where you can find old books, antique glass, silver, and other precious objects.

Sirmione is one of the most romantic spots in Italy, best experienced when there is a low fog on Lake Garda that slowly consumes the peninsula. Originally a Roman settlement (visit the Grotto of Catullus—a great example of a private Roman edifice), the Castle of Sirmione is perfectly adorned with crenellation worthy of a movie set.

The fabulous Certosa di Pavia, a monastery begun in the fourteenth century, has in its library an enormous number of ancient texts. The façade is so rich in marble sculpture and so blindingly white, it always reminds me of an overdone wedding cake. About five miles outside of town is one of the most charming bridges in Italy, the covered bridge over the Ticino River in Pavia. It connects the historical center of Pavia to the other riverbank, Borgo Ticino. Around the first Sunday in September, Pavia is home to a frog festival, held in outdoor gardens, during which frogs (from the rice fields) are served in every way imaginable.—TANYA
Mario Donizetti in his home in Bergamo
Overleaf: Castello di Saint-Pierre
Ironically, it was an American who first took me into the heart of the small mountainous region of Valle d’Aosta, in the northwest corner of Italy, back in 1985. And for that pleasure I am always grateful to my dear friend Dr. Paul Mandala. Paul was a great pediatrician (now retired) who adored Italian wines and food. He comes from a Sicilian background, but his love affair with Italian gastronomy blossomed during his years of medical study in Bologna.

In the 1980s, long before culinary tours of Italy were a big business, Dr. Paul organized Italian wine-and-food dinners for a group of fellow food-loving physicians in New York (which is how I met him), and every year he would take them to a different area of Italy to eat and explore. One year, Valle d’Aosta was the destination, and he invited me to come with them. I had never been, and I accepted.

Paul loved Valle d’Aosta and was intimately familiar with its spectacular terrain, set in the western Alpine range, surrounded by four of the highest mountains in Europe, Monte Bianco (Mont Blanc), Monte Rosa, Cervino (the Matterhorn), and Monte Gran Paradiso.

Though Valle d’Aosta is best known as a winter tourist attraction, it was spring when we drove north from Torino, climbing steadily toward Courmayeur, underneath Monte Bianco. The rolling hills were emerald green, and the mountains ash gray, topped with glaring snowcaps under the spring sun. It was clear why one could fall in love with this beautiful, almost humbling setting. Paul had found us the perfect inn, a small chalet that looked up at the southern face of Monte Bianco. I will never forget the rumbling of an avalanche from that majestic peak, right across from my chalet window—the distant rocks rolling down the mountainside like jelly beans from a pile.

We had a great time traveling around Valle d’Aosta that spring. We visited Alpine vineyards; we made friends with the local bovines and drank their freshly yielded milk, alive with the flavors of the Alpine spring pastures. We ate the complex fontina cheese, and dunked our grilled polenta tarragna into the creamy fonduta at the dinner table. And, most memorably, we sang local folk songs in front of the fireplace, while passing around the grolla. The perfect symbol of our group’s journey, the grolla is a deep, lidded bowl, carved from local walnut wood, with a ring of small drinking spouts sculpted all around the bowl.
The many spouts of a grolla are the reason it is also known as a coppa dell’amicizia, the cup of friendship. As is the custom in Valle d’Aosta, our grolla was filled with a nearly boiling mixture of freshly brewed coffee, red wine, grappa, sugar, and lemon peels, and capped tightly with the beautifully engraved lid. As we passed it around, every one of us took a sip from one of the spouts. We learned quickly that the grolla should be held like a precious commodity, in both hands, and passed carefully—and passed again, and again, until there is no more. Friendship is sealed!

I have made several visits to Valle d’Aosta in the years since Dr. Paul took us into the Alps. And I’ve come to understand that the cuisine of Valle d’Aosta, though it obviously reflects the influence of the bordering cuisines of France to the north and Piemonte to the south, definitely has a quality all its own.

Soups are a main staple, dense and nourishing, such as the Soup with Bread and Fontina Pasticciata. Polenta accompanies many dishes, from fonduta to meat and vegetables (see Polenta with White Beans and Black Kale). Risottos are made with the seasonal flavors of the mountains; for instance, in the fall, Rice and Chestnuts—Riso e Castagne could be a main course, or a dessert if sweetened. Game and meats, such as beef prepared as Filetto alla Carbonade and Socca, you’ll find are unique.

But the flag dish of this region is fonduta, a melted fontina-cheese sauce that goes well with everything from polenta to vegetables and meats. And when you combine and stuff veal chops with fontina, you have the delicious Costolette alla Fontina.

Cheese is used a lot in Valle d’Aosta cooking, especially fontina. The fontina cheese is produced only in Valle d’Aosta. Somewhat different from other cheeses, fontina is a semi-cooked, semi-hard cheese made from the whole milk of the first milking of the cows. The rind is thin, and the paste is creamy, soft, and elastic. Its color is light straw to yellow, its taste is sweet, and to be a DOP it must contain 45 percent fat. It must be produced exclusively from the Valdostana breed, which feed on the local herbs and forage.

The most prominent species of cows, which yield the rich milk for the production of fontina, are the dappled red, which from a distance seem like moving freckles on the mountainsides. The milk of all-black and dappled white-and-black cows is also used in making fontina.

My close encounter with these wonderful animals was when I asked Pietro Vallet, from Caseificio Pietro Vallet e Figli in Donnas, a small producer of fontina, to take me to the source, the fountain of goodness from which he made his delicious fontina. Up the hills we went to visit the pastures of Matilde, who runs a mother-and-son milk operation. I felt as if I were Heidi in my favorite book when I was a child. The pasture was sprinkled with these
beautiful animals, peacefully grazing. Now and then the sound of the big Alpine cowbell chimed in the silence. When I asked Matilde why only a few of the cows had the bells—we could have had a symphony if they’d all had bells—she said, “Ah, only the leaders have bells, so the rest can follow.” They were so peaceful and secure that my coming barely evoked curiosity. I was more curious than they. Matilde noticed that I wanted to get closer to them, so she signaled with her hand for me to go among them, and slowly I did. They acknowledged me—some with just a look, but others came close enough to lick my hands and arms. Their raspy warm tongues were like a caress, and they seemed to know how I appreciate their hard work.

On those initial trips, I was dubious about the quality of the wines at this high altitude, but, with each subsequent visit and tasting, it became clear that this challenging terrain, where the vines grow low, clinging to the rocks, produces some very interesting and delicious wines.

The DOC reds are the Dommas, Chabave Rosso, and Nuss Rosso, and the whites are Blanc de Morgex, Bianco, and the sweet Nus Malvisie Fletri. A wonderful local producer, whom I discovered in my early visits, is Constantino Charrere from the winery Les Crâtes in Aymavilles. I have been there many times now, and carry his wines in our restaurants in the States. His passion is evident in his wines and in his words: “Il nostro vino à la montagna che si fa bere. La Valle d’Aosta, i nostri vigneti e i nostri uomini contribuiscono alla realizzazione di questa stupefacente magia” (“The mountain is the wine we drink. The Valle d’Aosta, our vineyards, and our people make the realization of this stupefying magic a reality”).

**POLENTA WITH WHITE BEANS & BLACK KALE**

Polenta con Cavolo Nero Serves 6

This terrific dish brings into one bowl three essential Italian foods: polenta, cannellini, and the unique variety of kale called cavolo nero—one of my favorite vegetables. The customary green in Tuscan ribollita, cavolo nero has an earthy mouth-filling flavor, as if cabbage, broccoli, chickory, and spinach were all packed into one leaf. Fortunately, this delicious and healthful vegetable is now being grown and sold in this country under a variety of names, including lacinata, or dinosaur kale (for the texture of the leaves), and black kale (for their dark hue). In this recipe,
cavolo nero is braised with bacon and cannellini and served atop hot polenta. But you can just braise it with bacon, following the same basic procedure, and serve it as a delicious side dish, or enjoy it in crusty bread as a great sandwich filling.

- **FOR THE BEANS**
  - ½ pound *dried cannellini beans*, rinsed and soaked overnight
  - 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
  - 2 tablespoons *extra-virgin olive oil*
  - ½ teaspoon kosher salt

- **FOR THE POLENTA**
  - 5 cups cold *water*
  - 2 tablespoons *extra-virgin olive oil*
  - 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
  - 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
  - 1 cup yellow *polenta*, medium grind

- **FOR THE GREENS**
  - 5 tablespoons *extra-virgin olive oil*
  - 8 ounces *slab bacon*, cut into ½-inch lardoons
  - 1½ pounds *cavolo nero* (black kale), tough stems removed, leaves cut in 2-inch shreds
  - 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
  - 8 ounces finely shredded *fontina* from Valle d’Aosta (or Italian Fontal;)

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A 3-quart pot for cooking the beans; a heavy-bottomed 3- or 4-quart saucepan with a cover for cooking the polenta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a cover

To cook the beans: Drain the soaked beans and put them in the pot with fresh cold water covering them by an inch or so; add the bay leaves and olive oil. Bring to a boil, lower the heat to keep the liquid simmering steadily, and cook, partially covered, about 40 minutes or until the beans are just cooked through, but not mushy. Turn off the heat, stir in ½ teaspoon salt, and let the beans cool for a while in the pot, absorbing some of the cooking liquid.

To cook the polenta: Pour the water and olive oil into the heavy pot, drop in the salt and bay leaves, and bring to a boil. Pick up the polenta by handfuls and let it rain into the water through your fingers, whisking steadily with a sturdy wire whisk, until it is all incorporated. Return the polenta to a boil over medium heat, still whisking. When big bubbles start bursting, lower the heat to keep the polenta perking, and set the cover ajar on the pot. Stir frequently with the whisk or wooden spoon, scraping the bottom and sides of the pot as the cereal thickens. Cook for about 25 minutes or until the polenta is glossy and pulls away from the sides as you stir; for this dish it should be soft, not too firm. Turn off the heat and cover the pot to keep the polenta hot.

To cook the kale: Pour 2 tablespoons of olive oil into the skillet, set it over medium heat, and scatter in the bacon. Cook, stirring occasionally, as the bacon sizzles and renders most of its fat, 4 or 5 minutes. Pile the shredded kale in the pan, sprinkle the salt over it, put on the cover, and cook, tossing the kale a couple of times, until the shreds have wilted, about 5 minutes.

Uncover the skillet, and stir in the cooked cannellini, along with about a cup (not all) of the bean cooking liquid and the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring often, for 5 minutes or more, until the kale is tender. Stir in more bean liquid as needed to keep the greens and beans from drying.
When the kale and beans are ready, stir half of the shredded fontina into the hot polenta. Spoon portions of polenta into warm shallow bowls, then top each with kale and beans and a sprinkling of fontina. Serve right away, while very hot.

**Real Fontina**

For this *fonduta* and many other recipes in this chapter, I always recommend using genuine fontina from Valle d’Aosta. With superb flavor, texture, and melting ability, this cow’s-milk cheese is unsurpassed in these dishes, far superior to the inexpensive cheeses called fontina produced outside of Italy, including American and Scandinavian versions.

Fortunately, imported authentic fontina is widely available in markets with good cheese departments and from gourmet Internet vendors. Be sure that you are buying DOP (name-protected) fontina, with the distinctive imprint of an Alpine peak on the wheel. Though more expensive than other semi-soft cheeses, it is well worth the cost.

If DOP fontina isn’t available, a less distinctive but similar cheese called Fontal, imported from Italy, is a good substitute.

**Fondue Valle d’Aosta—Style**

Fonduta alla Valdostana Serves 6

If you liked the fondues so popular in the 1960s—those pots or chafing dishes of melted cheese in which everyone dunked crudités, crackers, and bread—you will be thrilled to taste an authentic *fonduta* as it is prepared in Valle d’Aosta. Though the technique of melting cheese over a low flame is much the same, the main ingredient makes all the difference: nothing compares to a fondue of authentic fontina, the sweet, nutty, semi-soft cheese made only in the Aosta Valley—and only from the milk of those gentle dappled red, brown, and black Valdostana cows.

Customarily served as a dip for chunks of toasted bread, *fonduta* is a great sauce for all kinds of foods. I like it on poultry and meats, such as poached chicken or turkey breast, or lightly seared veal medallions; or on vegetables—steamed asparagus, broccoli, cardoons, celery, and many more. And it’s delicious spooned over a bowl of hot polenta or boiled gnocchi.

There’s one more thing I must tell you. *La sua morte*, as it is said in Italian, the ultimate pleasurable enjoyment of *fonduta alla Valdostana*; is to top it with shavings of fresh white Alba truffle from neighboring Piemonte. Two Italian treasures in one dish.

- 1 pound fontina from Valle d’Aosta (or Italian Fontal; see box), shredded
- 1½ cups milk
- ½-pound (or larger) chunk or whole loaf of Italian or other light-textured tasty bread
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 egg yolks
- Pinch of kosher salt

**Recommended Equipment:** A box grater/shredder or other hand shredder; a 2-quart heavy-bottomed saucepan; a wire whisk; 6 small glazed terra-cotta pots or other bowls or ramekins (8 to 12 ounces each in volume) for individual servings, or one large ceramic vessel for a communal fonduta

Heap the shredded fontina in a glass or glazed ceramic bowl, and pour the milk over it. Stir to make sure the cheese is submerged, seal the bowl with plastic wrap, and refrigerate overnight.

To make toasts for dipping: Heat the oven to 350°. Slice the bread chunk or loaf lengthwise into big oval slabs about an inch thick. Cut these into small blocks, 3 to 4 inches long and 2 or 3 inches wide (the size of a BlackBerry or iPod!), that will afford a few good bites when dipped in the fondue. Lay the bread blocks flat on a baking sheet,
and toast in the oven for 10 to 15 minutes, turning now and then, until golden brown and crisp all the way through.

To make the fonduta: Stir the milk and cheese shreds (now softened and crumbling) and scrape them into the saucepan. Heat slowly over a low flame, stirring often, as the cheese melts and blends with the milk, until smooth and steaming hot. Whisk in the butter, and keep the fonduta over low heat—but don’t let it boil.

Beat the egg yolks and pinch of salt in a heatproof bowl with the whisk. Ladle out ¼ cup of the hot fondue and drizzle it very gradually into the egg yolks while whisking steadily (this tempers the yolks so they cook without coagulating), until thoroughly blended, then whisk in another ½ cup hot fondue, until smooth. Now slowly drip the tempered yolk mixture back into the saucepan of fonduta, whisking rapidly, until fully incorporated.

Still over low heat, cook the fonduta slowly, without boiling, stirring often, for about 10 minutes, until smooth and thickened, easily coating the back of a spoon (or a bread toast).

For serving, warm the small serving bowls (or the large one if serving communally), and pour in fonduta in equal portions. Give everyone a spoon and a fork to dunk in those last pieces of bread, and wipe up the fonduta from the bottom of the bowl.

Roasted-Pepper & Olive Salad with Fontina

Insalata di Fontina Serves 6

What I love about this recipe is its simplicity. With a chunk of fontina or other fine cheese and some tasty vegetables—here I use slices of roasted peppers and green olives—you have the basis for a zesty Alpine salad any time of the year. Freshly roasted peppers are best, but you can use jarred peppers if you like. The creamy mustard dressing can be whipped up in seconds, but leave some time for the dressed salad to sit and the flavors to blend. (The cream gives the dressing a velvety texture, but you can replace it with a tablespoon of olive oil and a tablespoon or two of skimmed milk.)
6 yellow bell peppers to roast (or 3 cups jarred roasted peppers)
5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon kosher salt
½-pound chunk fontina from Valle d’Aosta (or Italian Fontal;)
1 cup pitted large green olives
½ cup heavy cream
3 tablespoons Dijon mustard
1 tablespoon cider vinegar
2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

To roast the peppers: Preheat the oven to 350°. Rub the peppers all over with 3 tablespoons olive oil, season with 
½ teaspoon salt, and place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Roast for 30 minutes or so, turning the peppers 
ocasionally, until their skins are wrinkled and slightly charred. Let the peppers cool completely. Slice them in half 
through the stem end, discard the stem, peel off the skin, and scrape out the seeds. Slice the peppers into ½-inch 
strips, and place them in a sieve to drain and dry. (If using jarred peppers, slice and drain the same way.)

Slice the fontina into ¼-inch-thick slabs, then into ¼-inch matchsticks. Slice the olives lengthwise into ¼-inch 
slivers. Toss the sliced peppers, cheese, and olives together in a large bowl.

For the dressing: Whisk together the cream, mustard, cider vinegar, and remaining salt in a small bowl. Whisk in 
the remaining olive oil gradually, until the dressing is smooth and emulsified. Pour the dressing over the salad; toss 
and tumble to coat all the pieces. Let the salad sit at room temperature, so the flavors blend, for at least 15 minutes, 
then sprinkle over it the chopped parsley, toss again, and serve. (You can assemble and dress the salad an hour in 
advance and keep it refrigerated. Let it sit at room temperature for a few minutes before adding the parsley and 
serving.)

Soup with Bread & Fontina Pasticciata

Seuppa ou Piat Serves 6

This might seem like an unusual dish, a pasticcata (a layered casserole) of bread and cheese that’s baked, cut into 
portions, and served in a bowl of hot broth. Yet the tastes and eating pleasure of seuppa ou piat will be completely 
familiar and welcome to anyone who loves the gratinéed crouton of French onion soup or enjoys a crispy grilled-
cheese sandwich with a bowl of rich chicken broth alongside. This is a good dish for company, because you can 
have both the broth and the pasticcata hot and ready to be put together when your guests come. (Chicken stock is 
my preference, but a savory vegetable stock or a meaty beef broth is just as good.)

8 cups tasty chicken broth (or clear beef or vegetable stock)
Kosher salt to taste
1 tablespoon soft butter for the baking dish
½ pound fontina from Valle d’Aosta (or Italian Fontal;)
1 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing
18 slices Italian bread, cut ½ inch thick from a long oval loaf, left out to dry overnight

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A baking dish or oval gratin dish, 3 quarts or larger; heavy aluminum foil

Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven, and heat to 400°. Heat the broth almost to a simmer—season with salt 
to taste—and keep it hot. Butter the sides and bottom of the baking dish. Shred the fontina through the larger holes
of a hand grater and toss the shreds with the *grana* (grated hard cheese).

Arrange half of the bread slices in one layer in the baking dish. Ladle out 1 cup of broth, and drizzle it on the bread slices, slightly moistening them all. Sprinkle half of the cheese on top of the bread in an even layer. Cover the cheese with the remaining bread slices, filling the entire surface of the dish. Moisten these slices with another cup or so of stock; top the bread with all the remaining cheese, scattered evenly.

Tent the *pasticciata* with a sheet of heavy aluminum foil, arching it so it doesn’t touch the cheese topping, and pressing it against the sides of the baking dish. Set the dish in the oven, and bake until heated through, about 25 minutes. Remove the foil, and continue baking for 10 minutes or more, until the top is golden brown and bubbly. Take the dish from the oven, and let it cool and set for 5 minutes or so.

To serve: Cut out large squares of *pasticciata* and, with a spatula, transfer them to warm shallow soup or pasta bowls. Ladle a cup of hot broth over each portion and serve immediately, passing more grated cheese at the table.

**Baked Penne & Mushrooms**

*Pasticcio di Penne alla Valdostana*  Serves 6

The marvelous melting qualities of authentic fontina are particularly evident in baked pasta dishes such as this delicious *pasticcio*. When it is in the oven with penne (or other tubular or concave pastas, like ziti, rigatoni, or shells), the molten cheese oozes around each piece of pasta and is caught in all of its nooks and crannies. The cheese on top of the *pasticcio* melts and then becomes crusty and caramelized.

- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon *kosher salt*
- 8 ounces *fontina* from Valle d’Aosta (or Italian Fontal)
1 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

4 tablespoons soft butter

1 pound mixed fresh mushrooms (such as porcini, shiitake, cremini, and common white mushrooms), cleaned and sliced

1 cup half and half

1 pound penne

2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot for cooking the penne; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a 3-quart baking dish, 9 by 13 inches, or shallow casserole of similar size

Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 400°. Fill the pasta pot with 6 quarts water, add 1 tablespoon salt, and heat to the boil. Shred the fontina through the larger holes of a hand grater, and toss the shreds with ½ cup of the grana (grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano).

Put 3 tablespoons of the butter in the big skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. When the butter begins to bubble, drop in the mushroom slices, stir with the butter, season with 1 teaspoon salt, and spread the mushrooms out to cover the pan bottom. Let the mushrooms heat, without stirring, until they release their liquid and it comes to a boil. Cook the mushrooms, stirring occasionally, as they shrivel and the liquid rapidly evaporates. When the skillet bottom is completely dry, stir the half and half into the mushrooms, and continue stirring as the sauce comes to a boil. Cook it rapidly for a minute or two to thicken slightly, then keep it warm over very low heat.

Meanwhile, stir the penne into the boiling pasta water and cook until barely al dente (still somewhat undercooked to the bite). Ladle a cup of the pasta cooking water into the mushroom sauce and stir. Drain the pasta briefly, and drop into the cream-and-mushroom sauce. Toss the penne until all are nicely coated, then sprinkle over them the remaining ½ cup of grana (not mixed with fontina) and the chopped parsley. Toss to blend.

Coat the bottom and sides of the baking dish with the last tablespoon of butter. Empty the skillet into the dish, spreading the penne and sauce to fill the dish completely in a uniform layer. Smooth the top, and sprinkle the mixed fontina-grana evenly all over.

Set the dish in the oven, and bake 20 to 25 minutes, until the cheese topping is crusty and deep golden brown and the sauce is bubbling up at the edges. Set the hot baking dish on a trivet at the table, and serve family-style.

Rice & Chestnuts

Riso e Castagne Serves 6 to 8

In many mountain regions of Italy, chestnuts have been cultivated and gathered as staple foods for generations. In Valle d’Aosta (with thousands of cows), it is customary to cook chestnuts and rice together in milk, a simple, nourishing dish that lends itself to many variations. Traditionally, riso e castagne was made as a light supper in the evening, especially for children before bedtime. The dish has a natural sweetness that kids love, and if you emphasize that quality with sugar, honey, or a swirl of jam, you have a lovely dessert or sweet brunch dish.

It is just as easy, though, to take riso e castagne in a savory direction, as I do in this recipe. With a finish of fontina and grana, it becomes a rich-tasting chestnut-flavored riso or risotto, wonderful as a primo or as a main course. And if the same dish is cooked with more milk—or less rice—it becomes a comforting, creamy, and warming zuppa, which I am sure is much appreciated in the Alpine winter.

2 quarts milk

2 tablespoons butter
1¼ teaspoons kosher salt

1 pound frozen cooked chestnuts, defrosted and thinly sliced, or canned whole chestnuts, drained and sliced

2 cups Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano

1 cup finely shredded fontina from Valle d’Aosta (or Italian Fontal)

½ cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for the table

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed saucepan, 6-quart capacity, with a cover

Put the milk, 2 cups water, butter, and salt in the saucepan, set it over medium-high heat, and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally. Stir in the sliced chestnuts, and lower the heat to maintain a gentle simmer. Cover the pot, and cook about 25 minutes, until the chestnuts are very tender and fall apart when pressed against the side of the pan.

Stir in the rice, return to a gentle simmer, cover the pot, and cook, stirring often, until most of the liquid is absorbed and the rice is al dente, another 15 to 20 minutes. Be prepared to serve immediately.

Turn off the heat, and stir in the cheeses until thoroughly amalgamated. Spoon the riso into warm pasta bowls, and serve immediately, passing additional grated cheese at the table.

**Veal Chops with Fontina**

Costolette alla Fontina Serves 6

Veal chops are always something of an extravagance, though worth it when well prepared. In this exciting recipe from Valle d’Aosta, thick rib chops are stuffed with the region’s prized fontina, browned, and braised on the stovetop, then baked. The result is quite grand, because the succulent meat and pan sauce are enriched with driblets and hidden pockets of sweet melted fontina. And if you want to go superluxe for a special occasion, shave fresh truffle on top of each chop just before serving.

To return to earth, however, let me point out that you can make costolette alla fontina in more modest versions that are absolutely delicious and much easier on the pocketbook. For instance, you can form veal scallopine into envelopes to enclose the fontina, or stuff a veal loin chop, a thick pork chop, or a plump chicken breast in place of the veal rib chop. You may have to adjust the amount of cheese you put inside, and adjust the cooking time at each step to avoid overcooking. But if your meat, wine, olive oil, tomato paste, and broth are of fine quality, and—most important—if you use real fontina (and Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano), you will produce a splendid dish.

6 bone-in veal rib chops, about 1½ inches thick, 8 to 10 ounces each

2 teaspoons kosher salt

8 ounces shredded fontina from Valle d’Aosta (or Italian Fontal)

1 cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano

4 tablespoons butter

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

½ cup all-purpose flour for dredging, plus more as needed

12 fresh sage leaves

1 tablespoon tomato paste

2 cups white wine

½ cup hot chicken broth

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A meat mallet; a heavy-bottomed ovenproof saucepan or enameled cast-iron French oven, 6-quart capacity, with a cover
Arrange an oven rack to accommodate the covered saucepan, and heat the oven to 400°.

Trim the chops, leaving only a thin layer of fat. With a sharp, thin knife, slice horizontally into the outer edge of each chop, splitting the meaty portion in two almost all the way to the bone, forming a pocket for stuffing. With the mallet, pound and spread the meaty part, flattening it to ½-inch thickness. Lift the top flap of the meat you just sliced apart, hold it up, and pound the bottom flap of meat a few more times, spreading it thinner and wider than the upper flap. When all the chops are sliced and pounded, salt them on both sides, using a teaspoon in all.

Toss together the shredded fontina and the grana (grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano), and divide the cheeses into six equal portions. One at a time, lightly compress the cheese portions into oval patties, and slip them into the sliced chop pockets. Fold the larger bottom meat flap over the top flap—enclosing the cheese—and thread a toothpick through both flaps to keep them together. (The chops can be prepared up to this point a day in advance, sealed in plastic wrap, and refrigerated.)

Put 2 tablespoons of the butter and the olive oil in the big pan, and set over medium-high heat. Spread the flour on a plate, dredge each chop on both sides, shake off excess flour, and lay it in the pan. When all the chops are in the pan, drop the sage leaves in between them. Cook the chops for 5 minutes or more, turning them once or twice, until well browned on both sides.

Clear a space in the pan bottom, drop in the tomato paste, and toast it in the hot spot for a minute. Pour the wine over the tomato paste, stir them together, and shake the pan to distribute the liquid. Bring it to a boil, and cook for 3 minutes or so, to reduce.

Add the remaining 2 tablespoons butter and whisk it into the pan liquid. Turn the chops over, pour in the chicken stock, sprinkle on the remaining salt, and bring to a boil.

Cover the pan, and place in the oven. Roast for about 15 minutes, then remove the cover and roast another 10 minutes or so, until the chops are done and the sauce has thickened.

Remove from the oven, and place the chops on a warm platter. (Drape a towel over the handle of the pan when it comes out of the oven to remind you it is very hot.) If the sauce is thin, put the pan over high heat and reduce until the sauce has the consistency you like.

Serve right away—while the cheese is still oozing—arranging all the chops on a warm platter and spooning the sauce over, family-style, or on warm dinner plates with mashed potatoes alongside and sauce drizzled over. (If you do have fresh white truffle, shave it on the top of each chop at this moment.)

BEEF FILET WITH WINE SAUCE

Filetto alla Carbonade Serves 6

In this version of carbonade, the beef-and-wine dish that is a hallmark of Valdostana cuisine, the principal elements are cooked independently. First, you prepare the sauce, cooking red wine with aromatic vegetables and herbs until complex in flavor and highly concentrated. Later, the beef tenderloin, the filetto, is skillet-roasted (on the stovetop) until crusted and caramelized outside and juicy inside—a simple cooking method that takes barely 15 minutes. Before serving, you deglaze the empty skillet with the wine sauce and blend in the butter. It is only on the serving
platter that the beef and wine come together, yet the pairing is perfect.

I particularly like this separately cooked wine sauce because it is as good with other meats as it is with the filetto. Try it with roasts, such as loin of pork or rabbit, or with game, such as tenderloin of venison or elk, seared like the beef tenderloin here.

- 3¼ cups dry red wine (a 750 ml bottle)
- 4 cups water
- 4 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- 1 cup onion chopped into ¼-inch pieces
- 1 cup carrot chopped into ¼-inch pieces
- 1 cup celery chopped into ¼-inch pieces
- ½ cup loosely packed dried porcini (about ½ ounce)
- 2 sprigs fresh rosemary
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 3-pound piece beef tenderloin, at room temperature
- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 tablespoons cold butter, cut into chunks
- 1 teaspoon honey

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 4-quart saucepan with a cover; a sieve; kitchen twine; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Pour the wine and water into the saucepan, and drop in the garlic, onion, carrot, celery, porcini, rosemary, and ½ teaspoon of the salt. Bring to a boil, set the cover ajar, adjust the heat to maintain a steady simmer, and cook for an hour or more, until the vegetables have exhausted all their flavors and the liquid level has reduced by half.

Set the sieve over a bowl, and pour the entire contents of the saucepan into it, straining out the solids and collecting the sauce in the bowl. Press the vegetables with a big spoon to release more sauce (then discard them). Rinse the saucepan, pour the strained sauce back into it, and bring to a boil. Cook, uncovered, adjusting the heat so the sauce reduces steadily without scorching, until thickened and flavorful, about 1½ cups in volume. Season with ½ teaspoon salt, and keep the sauce warm.

Meanwhile, tie loops of kitchen twine tightly around the filet to keep it compact, even in shape, and easier to handle. Tie the first loops an inch in from either end of the filet, and more loops at 2-inch intervals along its length.

When you are ready to cook the filet, sprinkle the remaining teaspoon salt all over its surface. Pour the olive oil in the skillet, set it over medium-high heat, and put in the beef. Pan-sear the filet for 15 minutes—more or less, depending on how well done or rare you like it. Frequently roll and shift the tied meat in the pan, so it cooks and colors evenly on all sides, until crusty on the outside and medium-rare inside. Turn off heat, and put the filet on a warm plate.

To finish the sauce: Pour it all into the searing skillet, turn on the heat, and bring the liquid to a boil while scraping up all the browned bits from the skillet bottom. Stir to incorporate this flavorful glaze into the sauce as it heats.

While the sauce is boiling, drop in the cold butter, one piece at a time, vigorously whisking each one to amalgamate it fully with the sauce before adding the next piece. When the last bit of butter has disappeared in the sauce, turn off the heat and stir in the honey until it disappears, too.
To serve: Slice the meat crosswise into ½-inch-thick slices, snipping and removing the twine loops as you cut. Drizzle some of the wine sauce on a warm rimmed serving platter, and arrange the beef slices on top of the sauce (or drizzle a couple spoonfuls of sauce on rimmed dinner plates and top with individual portions of sliced beef). Serve immediately, with remaining sauce in a bowl to be passed at the table.

**Layered Casserole with Beef, Cabbage & Potato**

**Socca** Serves 8 or more

Make this dish once and you will make it over and over. Everything about it is good. It requires only one big pan, and that one will contain a complete supper of meat, potatoes, and vegetable for at least eight and likely a dozen people. Best of all, everybody loves every bit that comes out of the pan.

Socca, as this is called in Valle d’Aosta, is exactly what the English recipe name says: a big casserole with layers of sliced beef, sliced potatoes, and shredded cabbage (all nicely seasoned). It bakes for several hours, until all the layers are fork-tender, then it’s covered with a final layer of fontina, which bakes into an irresistibly crusty cheese topping. (Though it is unlikely you will have much left over, the dish will keep well for several days in the refrigerator; reheat it either on top of the stove or in the oven.)

In Valle d’Aosta, the meat of choice in socca is beef or game; in my recipe, it’s a top-blade roast from the beef chuck (or shoulder). Since I am sure you will make this again, I suggest you try it with slices of pork shoulder (the butt roast) or lamb shoulder or lamb leg. These meats will be delicious in the casserole, too.

- About a dozen large fresh sage leaves
- ¼ cup fresh rosemary leaves, stripped from the branch
- 8 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1½ tablespoons kosher salt
- 2 pounds red potatoes, sliced ½ inch thick
**Biancomangiare**

**Serves 6**

*Biancomangiare* (known as “blancmange” in French and English) is a very old milk-pudding dessert that food historians say has been made since the Middle Ages, in countries from the Middle East to Scandinavia. I am delighted with this modern *biancomangiare*, which I had recently in Valle d’Aosta. Rich with cream, flavored with both vanilla bean and almond extract, and molded in individual ramekins, it is quite similar to panna cotta. So, if you and your family like panna cotta, you will love this, too.
The puddings are lovely as is, unmolded onto plates, with their caramel syrup. They’re even better served with poached fruit in season, such as poached pears or cherries. For a special touch, have the poached fruit ready when you make the biancomangiare. Place a pear half or a few big cherries in the bottom of each ramekin or cup just before filling with the sweet pudding mixture. When you unmold it, the biancomangiare will be crowned with the fruit and glistening with caramel.

- ¾ cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 cups milk
- 2 cups heavy cream
- 1 vanilla bean
- 2 envelopes unflavored gelatin (about 5 teaspoons)
- ½ teaspoon almond extract
- 6 poached half pears or 24 poached, pitted Bing cherries (optional)

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A small, heavy skillet for making the caramel; six 8-ounce ramekins or other individual dessert molds; a heavy-bottomed saucepan, 3-quart capacity; fine strainer

To make caramel: Put 6 tablespoons of the sugar and ½ cup water in the small skillet, and set it over medium heat. Bring to a boil without stirring—the sugar will dissolve into a syrup. Let it bubble away without stirring or shaking the pan for 10 minutes or more as the syrup and the bubbles thicken, until the syrup starts to take on color, usually near the edge of the skillet. Lower the heat, and swirl the syrup so it caramelizes evenly. When it is a uniform copper color, carefully pour the hot caramel in equal amounts into the ramekins. Tilt and swirl each ramekin so the caramel coats the whole bottom evenly.

Pour the milk and cream into the saucepan. Split the vanilla bean lengthwise, and scrape the sticky seeds into the milk. Stir in the remaining sugar; drop the split, scraped bean pod in, too. Set the pan over medium heat, and heat slowly to a simmer. Sprinkle in the gelatin, whisking constantly until completely dissolved, then turn off the heat.

Let the mixture cool to room temperature, stir in the almond extract, and pour through the strainer into a large, spouted measuring cup. Fill the ramekins with biancomangiare in equal amounts. Set them in the refrigerator overnight, or until set.

To unmold: run the tip of a paring knife around the edge of the ramekins, set a dessert plate on top, and invert—tap the ramekin if necessary to release the pudding. Serve topped with poached fruit and syrup.

**Chocolate-Biscotti Pudding**

Budino di Gianduia Serves 6 to 8

This delightful pudding is a fine example of the art of using leftovers to make something fresh and new (without evidence of recycling). Here, crumbled biscotti, chopped chocolate, and chopped hazelnuts are mixed into the warm custard. As it cools and sets, the dry cookies absorb and meld with the custard, but also contribute their flavor and texture. This recipe is one upon which you can improvise, using whatever sweet remnants you have on hand, whether ginger snaps or shortbread cookies, or bits of dry sponge cake or pound cake.

- 2 large eggs
- ¾ cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 1¼ cups heavy cream, plus more for whipped topping
1 cup milk

1½ cups coarsely hand-crumbled plain biscotti

3½ ounces finely chopped bittersweet chocolate

½ cup toasted, skinned, finely chopped hazelnuts

⅓ cup cocoa powder, sifted

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 9-inch pie plate; a heavy-bottomed saucepan, 3-quart capacity

Line the pie plate with plastic wrap, leaving a few inches overhang on all edges.

Whisk the eggs with the sugar in a large bowl. Whisk in the cornstarch until no lumps remain.

Pour the cream and milk into the saucepan, set it over low heat, and bring to a simmer. Turn off the heat, and slowly pour about 1 cup of the hot milk-cream into the egg bowl, whisking steadily, to temper the eggs. When blended, slowly pour the tempered eggs back into the saucepan of milk and cream, again whisking constantly.

Put the pan back over medium-low heat, and whisk steadily until the custard heats and thickens. Don’t let it boil, though it should bubble occasionally. Cook for 7 to 8 minutes, until it is quite thick.

Remove from the heat, and stir in the crumbled biscotti, chopped chocolate, nuts, and cocoa powder. Stir continuously until the chocolate has melted and all the ingredients are evenly blended. Pour the custard into the pie plate, and cover with plastic wrap, laying it directly on the top of the pudding. Refrigerate until set, at least 4 hours or overnight.

To serve: Remove the top sheet of plastic, invert the budino onto a serving plate, and cut into wedges. Top with unsweetened whipped cream and coarsely crumbled biscotti (if you have any left) or crushed hazelnuts; in season, strawberries or raspberries would be wonderful.

*Country Italian bread is best for this pasticcata. The width of the bread can vary since it is layered snugly in the baking dish, then cut in squares when served.
Valle d’Aosta is so rich in castles that as you are driving through the countryside it is hard to know how to choose which to stop at. I am particularly drawn to the castles of **Fenis** and **Issogne**. Set against the backdrop of the Alps, Fenis’s silhouette looks as if someone had taken a large lace ribbon and casually placed it standing on its side on a soft hill in front of the mountains. In the early fifteenth century, Jacquerio painted for the Castello di Fenis one of the most elegant *uomini illustri* fresco cycles on the Italian peninsula, consisting of twenty-four figures each holding a scroll with a moral proverb or a saying in archaic French.

The courtyard area of **Castello d’Issogne** is decorated with representations of everyday shops and happenings depicted under the portico from the end of the fifteenth century. Almost like a voyeur, the visitor walks under the courtyard portico and looks at the arches on the walls, peering into the butcher shop, the bakery, the shoemaker’s shop, and the tavern. The detail is extraordinary, as if a page of fifteenth-century life has been opened for us to enjoy. I love the two figures playing backgammon in the tavern, or the people busy at work in the fabric shop with reams of cloth piled on tables and clothes hanging from the rafters. The whole castle is worth exploring, particularly the wonderful chapel.

The **Castello di Verràs** is built on a craggy rock. Massive, towerless, and constructed in a cube shape, this is a castle that children enjoy, because the huge stone halls are almost empty. From one room inside, you can peer down into the vast hall below, which seems to go on forever.

**Aosta**, a Roman city founded in 25 B.C., is one of the finest examples of Roman city planning, a perfect rectangle divided into a grid carved out by the roads. Twenty centuries later, the current city of Aosta follows pretty much the same city plan. There are many Roman artifacts, such as the triumphal Arch of August and the grand urban Roman villa that was excavated on the outskirts of town and is the only remaining Roman villa in the Valle d’Aosta.

The Abbey of **Ranverso** is one of the most important examples of Lombard Gothic architecture. Its location in the Val di Susa, not far outside of Torino, has helped protect most of the structure, which consisted of a church, hospital, monastery, and farm. It was built on the busy pilgrimage route from Torino to Lyon. The overall effect is one of absolute elegance, particularly evident in its pointy arches and elongated spires. Mostly, I enjoy the rich pinkish brick color of the buildings. The intricate terra-cotta decorations weave around the outline of the architectural elements like frilly lace.

With all the medieval castles in Valle d’Aosta, **Castel Savoia** in Gressoney is a relatively modern masterpiece. It was begun in 1899 by the Savoy family, kings of Italy, in particular for Margaret of Savoy. The castle is richly decorated with wood carvings and affords a wonderful panoramic view. There is also a lovely botanical garden.— **Tanya**
Les Crates winery in Aymavilles
Overleaf: Riomaggiore in Liguria
It was in the home of my cousins Lidia and Giovanni Bosazzi that I tasted Ligurian food for the first time. They had left Istria soon after it became a part of Yugoslavia, and by the time my parents decided to escape Istria ten years later, Lidia and Giovanni were already well established in Genova, the historic capital city of Liguria. I will never forget our first trip to visit them, approaching the coast by train from Trieste, passing in and out of tunnels, the train whistling as we entered and the sound dissipating as we came out; the shimmering sea playing hide-and-seek as we zoomed past clusters of houses—bright pinks, mustardy yellows, blues of all shades—that converged into a village at the sea’s edge.

Although my parents were apprehensive on that trip, having so recently escaped the communist bloc, for us children the trip was filled with discovery. New cousins, new places. But most of all I remember the first meal that my cousin Lidia cooked for us. She was a schoolteacher, yet she had time to make a lovely meal for us—a crostata stuffed with shredded zucchini, rice, and cheese. My first bite into that warm crust, redolent of sweet, buttery Ligurian olive oil, still lingers in my taste memory.

After that came a steaming vegetable soup. Surely, it is not often that a child has an epiphany when eating vegetable soup. So why do I recall Cousin Lidia’s zuppa di verdure so vividly, many years later? It was the garlic: Liguria is known for its aromatic garlic, and that soup was full of it. So was the aggiadda, a sauce Lidia served that day, a pungent, creamy emulsion of olive oil, vinegar-soaked bread, and lots of Ligurian garlic. I indulged that day in a garlicky feast that has guided my palate for more than half a century.

As you can see in the map, Liguria is a thin strip of land where northwestern Italy hugs the Mediterranean Sea—or Mar Ligure, as it is called locally. Sheltered from the cold north by the mountains, and basking in the sun’s warm rays reflected by the shimmering Mar Ligure, the whole of Liguria enjoys an ideal microclimate; it is a true paradise. Indeed, my dear friend Fred Plotkin, an extraordinary musical historian and cookbook writer, named his Ligurian cookbook Recipes from Paradise.

Giovanni and Lidia are well into their eighties now, and I go to Genova to see them as often as I can. And on every trip, it seems, I discover another corner of this paradise called Liguria. Recently, in late summer, my friend Mario joined me in Genova for a culinary adventure. Before we even left the city, we stopped for lunch in the zona del Porto, the old port section, at a little trattoria, Antica Osteria di Vico Palla, a family-run establishment where I knew we would find superb local fare.

As soon as we sat down, a basket of deliciously resilient focaccia was put on the table along with a bowl of oil-cured taggiasca olives. These small oval olives, fruity and delicate in flavor, are the preeminent variety pressed for delicious Ligurian olive oil. And when cured—whether in brine or oil—the taggiasca is one of my favorite olives for cooking or simply in an antipasto. Then we had farinata, a flavorful treat made from a batter of ceci (chickpea) flour, water, olive oil, and salt that’s baked in the oven. With its delicious nutty taste and velvety mouth-feel, it’s a favorite snack of Genovese, sold at bakeries and by street vendors all over the city.

Mario had sbirra—a traditional dish of tripe with potatoes and tomatoes—and though I forked some tripe from his bowl now and then, for me Liguria is the place to indulge my love for vegetables. So I ordered Zuppa di Verdure all’Agliata, the delicious vegetable soup redolent of garlic. And of course we had to sample the Osteria’s rendition of Trenette con Pesto alla Genovese, the region’s signature pasta dish. This one had all the classic elements—diced potato and green beans cooked with the long trenette, all dressed with a brilliant green basil pesto and final flourishes of superb Ligurian olive oil and grated cheeses.

Two more vegetables alla Genovese followed: one, a plate of braised spinach with pignoli nuts and raisins and delightful anchovies, and the other, sautéed green beans with anchovies and glints of lemon as well. The highlight of that meal, though, was the stuffed baked vegetables—peppers, mushrooms, zucchini, eggplant, and ripe tomato—with the lightest of fillings, intense with the aroma of the vegetables, all baked to a crispy top.

As we headed out of town, winding up and down and around the coast road, I observed (not for the first time) that there is something very green about Ligurian cuisine, which reflects the landscape. All the houses have terraces full
of blossoming flowers and gardens bursting with vegetables and herbs—especially basil, a Ligurian variety with small leaves no bigger than the end of a Q-tip. It has an intense flavor and a pleasant scent without a trace of the mint found in the large-leaf basil Americans are familiar with.

Since it is blessed with such marvelous fresh herbs and greens, it’s no wonder that Ligurian cooking is filled with many fresh, uncooked pestos—not just the basil-and-pignoli variety. Fred Plotkin explains that Genova’s historical role as a seafaring city led directly to the creation of pesto. For centuries, Genovese mariners and traders were regarded (along with the Venetians) as the best. After all, Cristoforo Colombo was born in Genova. At sea for weeks and months, these sailors surely yearned for the fresh flavors and herbs of their verdant Liguria. According to Fred, they returned home determined not only to feast but to find a way to bring the fresh foods with them on their next voyage. What better way than pounding and grinding them into a convenient, portable condiment? And so pesto alla Genovese was born.

With Genova behind us, our late-summer journey took Mario and me southeast, toward the breathtaking stretch of Ligurian coast known as Cinque Terre—the Five Lands. Here, steep-sloped promontories stick out into the sea like extended fingers. And in between (where the fingers meet the hand), a town nestles in each fjordlike cove, its narrow streets and steep stairways winding from the rocky seaside upward to rows of houses, stacked against the cliffs and clinging to the hillsides. Visitors from around the world hike the footpaths of the Cinque Terre, from one end to another, marveling at the natural beauty and stopping in each of the picturesque towns—Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola, and Riomaggiore—to rest, take pictures, and, of course, eat.

In Riomaggiore we had a most memorable meal with the winemaker Paolo Fellegara, discussing the topography of this marvelous terrain. I discovered a new love—a pesto called preboggion that includes borage, chervil, chicory, and other wild herbs all ground with olive oil and garlic with pestle and mortar. The sauce dressed trofie, a twisted dry pasta typical of Liguria, topped with grated Pecorino Sardo. We sipped a 2005 Cinque Terre white Bonnani Fellegara—Paolo’s pride—and admired the shimmering sea, the source of our next course, fried sardines. The Mar Ligure is known for its small bluefish—a modest catch but great eating.

As always, I yearned for fresh vegetables, and accompanying my crispy sardines came a bowl of Condiggion, a Ligurian bread salad. It was made of crunchy cucumbers, thinly sliced peppers, basil, garlic, ripe tomatoes, chicory,
and chunks of day-old bread steeped in a dressing of red-wine vinegar and Ligurian olive oil, which squirted goodness with every bite I took. As I dug in deeper, I discovered slivers of bottarga, the salted, pressed, and dried roe of tuna. Known as “poor man’s caviar” and widely used in the coastal regions and in Sicily and Sardinia, where it is produced, bottarga turned that seemingly simple salad into a powerhouse of flavor and textures.

Walter de Batté, the renowned Ligurian winemaker, joined us for coffee, and we finished with a glass of his Sciacchetrà, a late-harvest wine, with aromas of almonds and apricots. Available in very limited quantities, it is a wine that was much prized through the ages, then fell out of fashion; Walter is credited with its revival. Thank you, Walter, and thank you, Liguria.

RICE & ZUCCHINI CROSTATA
Torta di Riso e Zucchine

Makes 15 or more appetizer slices or several dozen hors d’oeuvres

This is a generously proportioned version of the delicious rice-and-zucchini crostata, or tart, that my cousin Lidia prepared when our family first visited Genova, nearly fifty years ago. She made hers in a small baking pan, and mine is the same, only bigger! I use a half-sheet baking pan (a jelly-roll pan will work, too) lined with the olive-oil-based dough that has no leavening, is easy to make, and fantastic to roll.

The large size of this crostata is necessary, I find, because the crostata disappears right away. Whether I put it on a buffet in bite-sized party pieces, bring it to a picnic, or serve it as a plated appetizer or main course with salad, everyone loves it—and has to have another piece. And in the unlikely event you do have leftovers, they can be frozen and reheated—just as good as when freshly baked.

The procedure is straightforward and quick, though there’s one important (and interesting) step you must leave time for: steeping the uncooked rice with the shredded zucchini. Since squash is a watery vegetable and rice is dry and starchy, this steeping allows the rice to extract most of the vegetal water from the zucchini. In this way, the grain is softened enough to cook during the baking time, and without absorbing all the liquid from the ricotta and milk. The result is a moist, creamy, and flavorful filling.

**FOR THE DOUGH**
- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for working
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup cold water, plus more as needed

**FOR THE FILLING**
- 1 pound small zucchini
- ½ cup Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano
- 2 cups ricotta, preferably fresh, drained
- 1 cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 2 bunches scallions, finely chopped (about 2 cups)
- 3 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 2 cups milk
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- Butter for the baking pan

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a baking stone, if you have one; a 12-by-18-inch rimmed baking sheet (a half-sheet pan)

To make the dough: Put the 2 cups flour and the salt in the food processor fitted with the metal blade. Pulse a few seconds to aerate. Mix the oil and water together in a spouted measuring cup. With the processor running, pour the
liquid through the feed tube and process about 30 seconds, until a soft dough forms and gathers on the blade. If it
doesn’t, it is probably too dry. Add more water, in small amounts, until you have a smooth, very soft dough.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and knead by hand for a minute, until it’s smooth and soft. Pat
into a rectangle and wrap in plastic wrap. Let rest at room temperature for ½ hour. (The dough can be refrigerated
for up to a day, or frozen for a month or more. Defrost in the refrigerator, and return to room temperature before
rolling.)

To make the filling: Shred the zucchini on the coarse holes of a box grater into a large bowl. Toss the rice and
shredded zucchini together, and let sit for 30 minutes to an hour, so the grains absorb the vegetable liquid. Fold in
the ricotta (breaking up any lumps), then the grated cheese, scallions, beaten eggs, milk, and salt, stirring until
thoroughly mixed.

When you’re ready to bake the torta, set a rack in the bottom half of the oven—with a baking stone on it, if you
have one—and heat the oven to 375°. Spread the butter on the bottom and sides of the pan.

On a lightly floured surface, roll the dough to a rectangle that’s at least 4 inches longer and wider than the baking
sheet. Transfer the dough to the pan, either by folding it in quarters and lifting it onto the sheet, or by rolling it up
around the floured rolling pin and then unfurling it over the baking sheet. When the dough is centered over the pan,
then gently press it flat against the bottom and rim of the pan, leaving even flaps of overhanging dough on all sides.
(If the dough tears as you are moving it, patch it with a bit of dough from the edges.)

Pour and scrape the rice-zucchini filling into the dough-lined pan, and spread it to fill the crust in an even layer.
Fold the dough flaps over the top of the filling, pleating the corners, to form a top crust border that looks like a
picture frame, with the filling exposed in the middle.

Set the pan in the oven (on the heated stone), and bake until the crust is deep golden brown and the filling is set,
45 minutes to an hour. About halfway through the baking time, turn the pan in the oven, back to front, for even color
and cooking.

Cool the torta on a wire rack for at least 30 minutes to set the filling before slicing. The torta can be served warm
or at room temperature, cut into appetizer or bite-sized pieces in any shape you like—squares, rectangles, triangles,
or diamonds.

Stuffed Vegetables
Ripieni all’Antica  
Makes about 3 dozen vegetable morsels

A platter of baked stuffed vegetables is one of the everyday delights of the Genovese table, and I always sample a
seasonal assortment when I visit the city. The array is never exactly the same, and this recipe is a guideline that you
can (and should) vary according to your tastes and what’s available.

I give you one delicious and easy bread stuffing, along with procedures for preparing and baking a few of the
most typical vegetables used in Genova—bell peppers, mushrooms, sweet onions, tomatoes, and zucchini. Many
others can be substituted and will be delicious with this stuffing, including beets, fennel, squash, and even carrots.
Of course, you don’t have to have every one of the vegetables I recommend. Stuff just a couple of different veggies,
or just pick one, such as stuffed and baked big mushrooms, if that’s what you like.

Like other Ligurian vegetable dishes, ripieni all’Antica can be served piping hot, warm, or at room temperature;
presented on individual plates, or family-style on large platters. They make a great appetizer, a side dish for grilled steak, lamb, or chicken, or a vegetarian main course. And when I have a few leftover vegetables, I heat them up in the morning and top them with a fried or poached egg, for a special breakfast.

FOR THE STUFFING

- 4 cups 1-inch cubes of day-old or dry country bread, crusts removed (about 4 thick slices)
- 1 cup milk
- ¼ ounce dried porcini (about ¼ cup loosely packed pieces), soaked in 2 cups warm water
- 1 cup finely chopped scallions
- 10 large fresh basil leaves, finely chopped
- ½ cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano Reggiano
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten

FOR THE VEGETABLE ASSORTMENT

- 2 or more medium zucchini (6 inches long)
- 2 or more red or other colorful bell peppers
- 12 or more large white stuffing mushrooms
- 3 or more ripe small tomatoes
- 2 or more large Vidalia or other sweet, flat onions
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, or as needed
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- Butter for the baking dishes
- ½ cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano Reggiano

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: 2 or more large shallow baking dishes or casseroles, such as 4-quart, 15-by-10-inch Pyrex pans

To make the stuffing: Put the bread cubes in a mixing bowl, and pour the milk over them; toss the cubes, and let them sit for a couple of minutes to absorb the liquid. When softened, gather and press the cubes together, squeezing out any excess milk (discard, or save it for your cat!), and return the moistened bread to the bowl, tearing it into shreds.

Lift the rehydrated porcini pieces from the soaking liquid, squeeze firmly (saving all the liquid), and chop them into fine bits. Scatter the chopped porcini, scallions, basil, grated cheese, and salt on top of the torn bread; toss and mix together with your hands. Pour in the beaten eggs, and stir with a wooden spoon or mix with your hands to form a well-blended, fairly dense stuffing.

To prepare zucchini for stuffing: Trim off the ends, and slice the squashes in half lengthwise. Scoop out the central pulp and any seeds with a teaspoon or melon baller, so each half resembles a hollowed boat. Cut the long halves crosswise into serving-sized pieces, about 3 inches long (or shorter if you like).

To prepare bell peppers for stuffing: slice them lengthwise in half, starting at the stem, or in thirds if very large; trim away the stem and all seeds and fibers, forming cuplike pieces.

Pull out the stems of white mushrooms, leaving the hollow caps for stuffing.
Cut tomatoes in half crosswise, and squeeze out the seeds to make concavities for stuffing.

Peel the onions, and cut them crosswise into ¾-inch-thick slices.

When all the vegetables are prepped and all but the onions are hollowed, put the pieces (except the onion slices) in a large bowl. Toss with the olive oil and ½ teaspoon of the salt. Brush some of the oil on the onion slices, keeping them whole.

To stuff and bake the vegetables: Butter the baking dishes, arrange a rack (or two, if necessary) in the oven, and heat to 425°. Fill each vegetable piece with a tablespoon of stuffing, more or less. For zucchini, peppers, tomatoes, and mushrooms, fill the cavities with stuffing and arrange all the pieces in a baking dish, with a bit of space between the pieces. Lay flat onion slices right in the dish, and mound a spoonful of stuffing on top of each slice.

When the dishes are filled (but not crowded), sprinkle all the vegetable pieces evenly with the grated cheese and remaining teaspoon salt. Scrape any olive oil left in the vegetable bowl over the stuffed pieces, and pour half of the reserved porcini-soaking liquid (leaving behind any gritty residue) into the bottom of each baking dish. Cover each dish with a tent of foil, pressing it against the dish sides and making sure it doesn’t touch the stuffing or tops of the vegetables.

Bake 30 minutes, until the vegetables have started to soften and release juices, then remove the foil tents and bake until stuffing is crisped and brown, another 30 minutes or so. Switch the position of the dishes in the oven once or twice so all the pieces cook and color evenly. Serve hot from the oven, or let the vegetables cool and serve warm or at room temperature.

**Bread Salad with Summer Vegetables**

**Condiggion** Serves 6

The traditional Ligurian bread salad *condiggion* was the highlight of the meal we had in the Cinque Terre a few years ago (as I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter). With many textures from crunchy vegetables, vinegar-soaked bread, and tangy greens, and layers of flavor in the basil and olive-oil dressing—and a shower of dried tuna roe, *bottarga*, providing a touch of salt and sea—this has become one of my favorite summer salads. It is exceptionally flavorful and refreshing, and a great accompaniment to the grilled meat and fish that I prepare in summer.

This salad is also open to variation, so use your favorite greens, vegetables, and even bread. I find that curly chicory, green and bitter, makes the best salad, but you can play with other seasonal greens you find in the market. And if you have some day-old whole-wheat or multigrain bread, that could be delicious here, too. Just make sure it is dry enough to be revitalized by the vinegar and dressing (if too fresh, it will crumble into mush at the bottom of the bowl).

In Liguria, where *bottarga* is a common flavoring element, it is essential to the salad. If you have some, by all means use it (and keep it wrapped well and frozen for long storage). Otherwise, chopped anchovies are a good final addition to the salad, if you yearn for that salty fish flavor, as I do.

- 4 or more thick slices *country bread*, preferably a few days old and fairly dry
- ¼ cup plus 1 tablespoon *red-wine vinegar*
- ½ cup *extra-virgin olive oil*
- 1 large *red bell pepper*, seeded and cut in thin strips
- 1 small or ½ of a large *English cucumber* (about 8 ounces), peeled and sliced into ¼-inch-thick rounds
- 2 ripe *tomatoes* (about 10 ounces), cored and cut into 1-inch wedges
Cut the bread slices, with crust on, into 1-inch pieces or cubes—you should have about 5 cups total—and put them in a large bowl. (If the pieces are not dry and almost crunchy, spread them on a baking sheet and heat it in a moderately low oven until the bread chunks are hard and crisp but not colored; let cool.)

Whisk together the ¼ cup vinegar and 1 cup cold water, sprinkle it all over the bread, and keep tossing the pieces till they’re evenly moistened. Drizzle 2 tablespoons of the olive oil over the cubes, and toss again. Put the sliced peppers, cucumber, and tomato in the bowl, and toss together with the bread.

To make the dressing: Put the garlic cloves and ½ teaspoon of the salt in the food processor or blender, and pulse to chop the garlic, scraping down the bowl as needed. Pack in the basil leaves, and pulse until they are coarsely chopped. With the motor running, pour in 5 tablespoons of the olive oil in a slow, steady stream to make an emulsified dressing. Drizzle the dressing over the bread and vegetables, and toss well.

In a small bowl, whisk together the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, 1 tablespoon vinegar, and 1 tablespoon olive oil. Tear the chicory leaves into bite-sized pieces, and scatter them over the bread in the bowl. Drizzle the vinegar-oil dressing over the greens, and toss everything together well.

As a final (optional) touch, if you have bottarga, shave or grate about a teaspoon of the dried roe over the top of the salad. Or chop anchovy fillets into small bits and scatter them all over. Serve on a platter or on separate plates.

**Fresh Basil: All Kinds, All the Time**

In Liguria, basil grows luxuriously in every garden and naturally plays an enormous role in the region’s cuisine, as I discussed in the introduction. For this bread salad, where basil dressing is a major element, and for many other dishes in this chapter, I encourage you to find and use the freshest, most flavorful basil that you can. Though we don’t have the good fortune of Ligurian cooks, most of whom can pluck sprigs of intensely flavored, small-leaved basil right from a window box or patio planter, we Americans now have more fresh basil available to us than ever before. Fine food and farmers’ markets (in season) may have “sweet” basil for cooking in different varieties, colors, and even nuances of flavor. For these Ligurian dishes, look for a classic pesto variety like small-to-medium-leaf Genovese basil. But other types will be fine, too. Try giant-leaved basil (it’s great for wrapping around fish fillets and stuffing), or purple basil. Basils with distinctive aromas like lemon, mint, and anise are great to cook with; so is spicy Thai or Vietnamese basil.

Even better, grow your own fresh basil, perhaps just a small pot on the windowsill. It will provide you with great flavor for many dishes, especially if you snap back the new shoots when they have four or five bright leaves. Just keep the plant from flowering and it will last for months. Garden centers and specialty seed companies sell more varieties of Italian basil than even I knew existed. But an ordinary sweet-basil plant like the ones I see in the supermarket will grow well with a bit of attention.

And whether you grow your own or buy it, I recommend highly that in late summer and fall, or whenever fine fresh basil is abundant in your area, you should make a big batch of basil pesto in the food processor—just fresh herb leaves and extra-virgin olive oil, nothing else—and freeze it in ice-cube trays. Once it is frozen, pop the cubes out and wrap them in a bit of plastic, then seal the batch in giant ziplock bags. Protected from freezer burn, your basil-pesto cubes will provide bursts of fresh flavor in soups, tomato sauces, and vegetable pasta sauces all year long!
VEGETABLE SOUP

Zuppa di Verdure all’Agliata • Makes 4 quarts, serving 12 or more

This soup exemplifies the Ligurian love of vegetables, which is one of the things I love most about that cuisine. It demonstrates that with vegetables alone—there’s no meat or meat stock in it—you can cook immensely flavorful and satisfying dishes. This is my re-creation of the heavenly vegetable soup served by my cousin Lidia Bosazzi when my parents took my brother Franco and me to Genova before we immigrated to America. With more kinds of vegetables than I could count—and that aroma of pungent garlic, which I have never forgotten—this is one of the most satisfying soups I know.

More than most dishes, soups accommodate variation and improvisation, and, as usual, I encourage you to experiment with this recipe. You don’t need every vegetable in the exact amount listed for the zuppa—use what you have or like. And even the all-important garlic can be reduced (or increased) according to your family’s taste. A substitution or addition that I recommend, in fact, is to use all the aromatic onion-family members that come in springtime—fresh spring onions and spring garlic with green shoots, scallions, baby leeks. They make every soup better.

At home I make this in large quantities, and that is how I share it with you. With all the work of washing and chopping vegetables, I like to have plenty of soup to enjoy right away and a couple of quarts in the freezer for a future meal. You can cut the recipe in half if you like, but I believe you go through your days feeling better when there’s a delicious soup stored at home, ready to be enjoyed and to sustain you.

1 medium onion, cut in chunks
8 plump garlic cloves, peeled
½ cup or so fresh basil leaves (packed to measure), preferably small-leaf Genovese basil
¼ cup fresh Italian parsley leaves
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
¼ ounce dried porcini (about ¼ cup loosely packed pieces), soaked in ½ cup warm water
1½ cups finely chopped celery
2 cups finely chopped carrots
2 cups chopped fresh ripe tomato
3 cups peeled and diced red potatoes (about 1½ pounds)
6 cups cold water
2 tablespoons kosher salt
1 or 2 pieces (card-sized) outer rind of pecorino, Grana Padano, or Parmigiano-Reggiano (optional)
1 small head curly chicory (frisée), leaves washed and cut into bite-sized pieces (about 4 cups)
5 ounces spinach, leaves trimmed and rimed (about 4 cups, loosely packed)
2 cups green peas, preferably fresh (from 2 pounds peas in the pod) or frozen peas
Freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano for serving
Extra-virgin olive oil, best-quality, for serving

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy-bottomed soup- or stockpot, 8-quart capacity or larger, with a cover

Put the onion chunks, garlic cloves, basil, parsley, and ¼ cup of olive oil in the food-processor bowl, and chop to a chunky-textured pestata.

Pour the remaining ¼ cup olive oil into the soup pot, and set over medium-high heat. Scrape in the pestata, and cook, stirring often, as it sizzles and dries, about 5 minutes.
Meanwhile, lift the rehydrated porcini from the soaking liquid (reserve the liquid) and chop into fine bits. When the *pestata* just begins to stick to the bottom of the pan, drop the porcini, the chopped celery, carrots, tomato, and diced potatoes into the pot, and stir well. Cook over high heat, stirring, until the potatoes become crusty and start to stick to the bottom.

Pour in the cold water and the porcini soaking liquid (except for the sediment in the container). Stir in the salt, and heat the water to a vigorous bubble. Drop in the cheese rind (if you have a piece or two), partially cover the pot, and adjust the heat to maintain a steady bubbling.

Cook 45 minutes to an hour—until the vegetables begin to break down—and add the chicory, spinach, and peas. Return to a bubbling boil, and cook 30 minutes or longer, until the broth is concentrated and flavorful and the total volume has reduced by about a quarter. (You can serve all or some of the soup now. Let the remainder cool, then refrigerate or freeze.)

To serve: Ladle the simmering soup into warm bowls. Sprinkle a couple of tablespoons of freshly grated cheese over each portion, and finish with a swirl of excellent olive oil. Pass more grated cheese at the table.

**Mak** **ing** **Your** **O** **wn** **Pes** **tos**

The name “pesto” comes from the verb *pestare*, which means “to pound” or “to crush.” As Italian cooks have long known, there are infinite possibilities when fresh herbs, spices, vegetables, nuts, fruits, and cheeses are pounded in a mortar—or, with today’s kitchen technology, processed at high speed—into a smooth, savory sauce. So, as you read the recipe for classic *pesto alla Genovese*, let your imagination go; think of all of your favorite flavors and how you can make your own pesto.

The cardinal rule for all pestos is to use the freshest herbs, the best extra-virgin olive oil, the perfect cheese. And, to experience the freshness and intensity of the herbs, don’t alter their qualities by cooking them. So, when dressing pasta with an aromatic pesto, follow the basic procedures in the recipe for *Trenette* with Pesto Genova-Style. Quickly drain the pasta and toss it in a warm bowl or pan with the pesto (thinned with a bit of hot water from the pasta cooking pot if necessary) until all of the pasta is coated. Finish with a drizzle of oil and a sprinkle of grated cheese.

**German Potato Salad**

*Insalata di Patate alla Tedesca* **Serves 6**

This tangy, textured potato salad is much appreciated in Liguria, and it has become a favorite of mine. I like it best served warm—when the freshly cooked potatoes have just been tossed in the hot bacon-and-mustard dressing—though it is also delicious at room temperature, on a buffet or picnic table.

As the name implies (and the slightly Nordic ingredients also suggest), this salad came to Liguria from somewhere else. Though I don’t know the precise origins, the Riviera Ligure has for centuries lured writers, composers, poets, and artists from other parts of Europe. Perhaps one of these creative types made this salad during a Ligurian sojourn. Certainly I have no objection that such a tasty dish, even if introduced by an outsider, took root in Liguria and became part of the regional cuisine.

- 2½ pounds red potatoes
- 1 cup finely chopped scallions
- ¾ cup sweet pickles (about 4 ounces), coarsely chopped
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 ounces slab bacon, cut in ½-inch pieces
Put the whole, unpeeled potatoes into a pot with 2 to 3 quarts cold water, enough to cover them by a couple of inches. Bring the water to a gentle boil, and cook the potatoes until a knife blade pierces them easily to the center, but don’t let them overcook, split, or get mushy.

When done, drain the potatoes in a colander, peel them as soon as they’re cool enough to handle, and slice into 1-inch cubes. Immediately toss the warm cubes in a bowl with the chopped scallions and pickles and 1 teaspoon salt.

Meanwhile, put the olive oil and bacon pieces in the skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Cook, stirring, until the bacon has rendered its fat and starts to crisp, 4 minutes or so. Whisk in the mustard and vinegar, and heat to a boil. Continue whisking until the dressing is smooth and emulsified, then pour it over the warm potatoes and toss. Sprinkle over it the chopped parsley, grinds of black pepper, and remaining teaspoon of salt. Toss well, and serve right away.

**Spinach Genova-Style**

Spinaci alla Genovese Serves 6

Vegetables prepared *alla Genovese* are among my favorite Ligurian dishes, made with the freshest produce and brilliantly flavored. I particularly love this sauté of spinach with anchovies, raisins, and pine nuts (and I’ve read that spinach prepared in this manner was one of Michelangelo’s favorite dishes, too).

Each of the components makes a distinct contribution: The anchovies lend complexity and saltiness. The raisins bring sweetness and counterbalance the anchovies. (I give you the amounts of each that I like, but find your own balance of flavors by increasing or decreasing either.) Finally, pine nuts add a mellow, pleasing textural contrast.

You can apply this trio of tastes to other vegetables; escarole, broccoli, cauliflower, and Swiss chard will all be delicious in such a preparation.

*Spinaci alla Genovese* is wonderful served family-style as a dinner vegetable, or as a colorful bed for grilled chicken breast or fish. Should you have any leftovers, layer the spinach between slices of crusty bread for an unusual but absolutely delicious sandwich.

- ½ cup golden raisins (preferably plump and moist)
- 2½ pounds tender spinach (or about 4 pounds untrimmed bunch spinach), stems removed and washed well
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- 2 anchovy fillets, finely chopped (about 1 teaspoon)
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ¼ cup pine nuts, toasted

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed sauté pan or high-sided skillet, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a cover

If the raisins are dry, soak them in a small bowl in hot water to cover until plump and softened, about 10 minutes.
Wash and drain the spinach just before you cook it, so there’s still some water on the leaves.

Pour the olive oil into the pan, set it over medium-high heat, and toss in the crushed garlic cloves. Cook and stir the garlic until it begins to sizzle, then drop in the chopped anchovies and cook, stirring them in the oil for a minute or two, until they melt.

Fill the pan with spinach, heaping it in by handfuls and letting it wilt down a bit before adding more. Once all the spinach is in the pan, scatter the raisins on top (and pour in any remaining soaking water, if you plumped them); sprinkle over them the salt and grated nutmeg. Toss the spinach leaves over and over with tongs, distributing the raisins and seasonings, then cover the pan and cook for a couple of minutes, until all the spinach has wilted and released its liquid.

Remove the cover, and cook over high heat, stirring, tossing the spinach, and evaporating the water. When the bottom of the pan is dry, toss in the pine nuts and cook for a few moments, then remove the skillet from the heat and serve the spinach right away.

**GREEN BEANS GENOVA-STYLE**

Fagiolini alla Genovese  Serves 6

Here’s another example of a simple vegetable sauté with brilliant Genovese touches. As in the preceding spinach recipe, anchovies provide salty savor to the green beans, and slivers of garlic and lemon bring additional flavor notes. Great as a vegetable side dish anytime, these beautiful beans make a particularly delicious accompaniment to grilled steak or lamb chops.

- 1½ pounds fresh green beans
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 plump garlic cloves, sliced
- ¼ lemon, sliced in thin ¼-moon slices
- 6 small anchovy fillets, finely chopped (about 1 tablespoon)
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a cover

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil, and prepare a large bowl with ice and water to chill the beans after you cook them. Trim both ends of the beans and remove the strings, if they have them. Toss all the beans into the boiling water, and cook until tender but not mushy, about 7 minutes. Lift the beans from the cooking water, and drop them into the ice bath to set their color.

When cool, drain the beans, and dry them on towels. One by one, split the beans open along the seam with your fingernail or a paring knife, and separate each into two long halves, with the small seeds exposed. Open all the beans this way.

Pour the olive oil into the pan, drop in the butter, and set over medium-high heat. When the butter is melted, scatter in the garlic slices and get them sizzling, scatter in the lemon slices, and drop in the chopped anchovies. Cook and stir for a couple of minutes, until the anchovies melt into the oil, then toss all the split beans into the pan. Season with the salt, and cook for 2 or 3 minutes, tossing the beans continuously in the flavorful oil, until they’re thoroughly coated and hot. Serve immediately.
Trenette con Pesto alla Genovese

Serves 6

When I say the word “pesto” to people in America (or anywhere outside Italy), I know they are thinking of pesto alla Genovese, with its lush green color and intense perfume of fresh basil leaves. Indeed, though there are countless fresh sauces that are also termed “pesto” in Italian cuisine, it seems that pasta with basil-and-pine-nut pesto is so well known that it might as well be the national Italian dish!

Traditionally, long, flat trenette or shorter twisted trofie is the pasta used here, though even spaghetti is great with the pesto. For the most authentic flavor, use a sweet, small-leaved Genovese basil for the pesto—perhaps you can find it at a farmers’ market in summer, or grow it yourself. Large basil will be delicious, too. Of course, use the best extra-virgin olive oil available, in the pesto and on the pasta, preferably pressed from the marvelous taggiasca olives of Liguria.

FOR THE PESTO

- 3 cups fresh basil leaves (firmly packed to measure), preferably small-leaf Genovese basil
- 3 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil (preferably Ligurian), plus more for covering
- ¼ cup pine nuts, toasted
- 2 tablespoons grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 2 tablespoons grated pecorino

FOR THE PASTA

- Kosher salt for the pasta pot
- ½ pound or so red potatoes, peeled, cut in ½-inch chunks
- ½ pound or so fresh green beans, ends trimmed, cut in ⅔- to 2-inch pieces
- 1 pound trenette or trofie or spaghetti
- ¼ cup grated pecorino
- ¼ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a large pot for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, or a large serving bowl, for tossing pasta, vegetables, and pesto together

To make the pesto: Put all of the basil, the garlic cloves, salt, and olive oil in the food-processor bowl. Process 10 to 15 seconds—stopping once to scrape down the sides of the bowl—to form a coarse paste.

Dump in the pine nuts, and process another 10 seconds or more (scraping down the bowl once or twice), creating a uniformly smooth bright-green paste. Add the grated cheeses to the bowl, and pulse a few times just to blend in. The pesto should be thick yet flowing; if it’s too firm, blend in olive oil, a spoonful at a time, to loosen it.

Scrape the pesto into a small bowl or container, and pour a thin film of olive oil over the top surface to prevent it from discoloring. It can stay at room temperature for a couple of hours before being used. For longer keeping, lay plastic wrap on the surface of the pesto, seal the container, and refrigerate or freeze. Let the pesto return to room temperature before using.

To make the pasta: Bring salted water to a boil in the large pot (at least 6 quarts, with 1 tablespoon kosher salt). Drop in the potato chunks, stir, and cook them for 10 minutes, then add the green beans. Cook the beans and
potatoes for another 10 minutes and then add the pasta to the pot and cook 5 minutes, until the trenette is al dente.

Set the large skillet over very low heat, just to warm it, or warm the serving bowl, whichever you’ll use for dressing the pasta. Scrape the pesto into the pan or bowl, and loosen it with a bit of the pasta boiling water (don’t cook the pesto, just warm it).

When the vegetables are tender and the pasta is al dente, lift everything from the pot with a spider and tongs, drain briefly, and drop into the skillet or bowl. (If you prefer, drain the pasta and vegetables into a colander, being sure to reserve a cup or so of pasta cooking water before you pour it out.) Toss pasta, vegetables, and pesto together well—moisten with more pasta water if needed—then sprinkle the grated cheeses over, and toss again. Serve immediately in warm bowls.

**Tuna Genova-Style**

**Tonno alla Genovese Serves 6**

Thick tuna steaks are not just for grilling. The stovetop technique here is quick and convenient. You use one big skillet for browning the fish steaks, make a simple (yet complex-tasting) sauce, and put the two together for a final brief braise that marries the flavors perfectly. This is the true alla Genovese method.

If you prefer grilling to pan-cooking, however, you can certainly omit the first step of flouring and frying the steaks, and make the sauce separately. Use a smaller saucepan in this case, preparing the sauce as in the recipe, starting with the sauté of garlic, anchovies, and porcini in 2 tablespoons olive oil. (Use the other 3 tablespoons olive oil, and ½ teaspoon salt, to season the fish before grilling.)

One advantage of a separate sauce is that it can be finished ahead of time, so when your guests arrive you only have to fire up the stove and cook the fish. And you’ll find it delicious with bass, codfish, or salmon as well as tuna. In fact, this sauce is so good, I suggest you have a good slab of focaccia to mop up the pan.

- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 6 tuna steaks, about 6 to 8 ounces each, cut 1 inch or thicker
- ⅛ cup or so all-purpose flour, spread in a plate for dredging
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more as needed
- ½ ounce dried porcini (about ¼ cup loosely packed pieces), soaked in 1 cup warm water
- 6 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- 2 small anchovy fillets, drained and finely chopped (about 1 teaspoon)
- 1½ cups dry white wine
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 tablespoons butter (or extra-virgin olive oil)
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Sprinkle salt all over the tuna steaks, using about ½ teaspoon salt in all. Dredge each steak in the flour, coating both sides, and shake off the excess. Pour 4 tablespoons of the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, lay all the tuna in the pan, and sauté on the first side for about 1 minute, just until browned. Flip the steaks over, and brown the second side, another minute or so, then take the pan off the heat. Transfer the tuna to a platter, and keep in a warm place while you make the sauce.
Lift the rehydrated porcini pieces from the soaking water (reserve it), and chop them fine. Pour the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil into the skillet, set it over medium-high heat, toss in the garlic cloves, then stir in the chopped anchovy and porcini. Cook and stir until everything is sizzling nicely, then pour in the white wine, lemon juice, and porcini water (leaving behind any sediment). Add the thyme sprigs, and season with the remaining salt. Bring the sauce to a boil, and cook until reduced by about half.

When the sauce has thickened to a consistency you like, arrange the tuna steaks in the skillet again, and pour in any juices from the platter. Heat for a minute in the bubbling sauce, then turn the steaks over and cook briefly on the second side. The tuna should still be rare at this point; if you prefer your steaks better done, simply let them cook in the sauce longer.

Just before serving, drop the 2 tablespoons butter (or extra-virgin olive oil, if you prefer) into the pan, between the steaks, and stir it into the sauce as a final enrichment. Turn off the heat, and stir in the parsley. Serve the steaks on dinner plates, spooning sauce over them, or arrange them on a serving platter, with the sauce on top.

Laundry day in Riomaggiore, Cinque Terre

**MEAT SAUCE GENOVA-STYLE**

Sugo alla Genovese Serves 6 or more

*Sugo* is a word that means “sauce,” or sometimes “juice,” but here it tells only part of the story. *Sugo alla Genovese* is a traditional braised-meat dish that gives you a big pot filled with both a tender, succulent beef roast and a rich, meaty tomato sauce. Like others of my favorite braises (such as Braised Leg of Lamb in the Abruzzo chapter), it yields a bounty of sauce, enough to dress pasta as a first course and to serve as gravy on the sliced meat for a main course.

What makes this sugo distinctively *alla Genovese* is an unusual step in the procedure. After you have caramelized the aromatic vegetables and herbs and browned the meat, you begin building the sauce with red wine. Then you set the meat aside and purée the seasonings with pine nuts to create a complex thickened base for the sauce, reminiscent of *pesto alla Genovese*. This then goes back in the pan, and everything cooks together slowly for hours, resulting in a sugo that is absolutely delicious and certainly unique.

- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- 2 cups chopped onions
- ¼ ounce dried porcini (about ¼ cup loosely packed pieces)
8 fresh sage leaves
1 tablespoon fresh rosemary leaves, stripped from the stem
1 tablespoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
A 4-to-5-pound boneless beef shoulder roast (preferably a “top blade” or “top chuck shoulder” roast)
½ cup or so all-purpose flour for dredging
2 tablespoons butter
2 cups dry red wine
½ cup pine nuts, toasted
2 cups hot beef, poultry, or vegetable broth, plus more as needed
6 cups (two 28-ounce cans) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano for the table

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed saucepan or braising pan, preferably just a bit bigger than the roast, such as an enameled cast-iron French oven, round or oval, with a cover; a food processor

Pour the olive oil into the saucepan, set it over medium-high heat, toss in the garlic cloves, and, as they start to sizzle, stir in the onions. Heat the onions to sizzling, stirring occasionally, then scatter the porcini, sage, and rosemary in the pan, season with 1 teaspoon of salt, and cook until the onions soften and begin to caramelize, about 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, trim the beef of fat, and sprinkle all over with salt, using another teaspoon in all. Spread the flour on a plate, and dredge the roast thoroughly, coating all surfaces, then shake off any excess.

When the onions are wilted, push the sautéed seasoning to one side of the pan, drop the butter in the clear pan bottom, and, when it has melted, lay in the roast. Brown it well, turning it every few minutes to sear another surface, until it is nicely colored all over, 10 minutes or so. Pour the red wine into the pan, stir the seasonings all around the beef, and let the wine come to a vigorous boil. Cook until the liquid is reduced by half, then turn off the heat.

Remove the meat to a tray or platter. Transfer the cooked onions, seasonings, and reduced wine, scraping up all the juices, to the bowl of the food processor. Add the pine nuts and process for a minute or more, scraping down the sides of the bowl, until everything is puréed into a smooth, thick sauce base.

Scrape the base back into the saucepan; slosh out the food-processor bowl with some of the hot stock, and stir that in, along with the remaining 1 teaspoon of salt. Heat the pan over medium heat, stir in the tomatoes, slosh out the tomato containers with the rest of the hot stock, and stir that in, too.

When the liquids are well mixed, lay the meat back in the pan, along with any meat juices. If necessary, add more stock so that the roast is nearly totally submerged in sauce.

Still over moderate heat, bring the sauce to a slow boil, then cover the pan tightly and lower the heat, checking after a few minutes to see that the sauce is just at a slow, gently bubbling simmer. Cook the beef, fully covered, for 2½ to 3 hours, occasionally stirring the sauce to make sure that the pine nuts are not collecting on the bottom of the pan, and that the level of the sauce is barely reducing. Rotate the roast once or twice in the liquid, so all surfaces cook covered by sauce for some of the time.

When the meat is tender enough that a kitchen fork pierces it easily and pulls out with no resistance, turn off the heat. With sturdy tongs or spatulas, lift the beef from the pan and set it on a platter in a warm place. Skim the fat
from the surface of the sauce, then bring it back to a boil and cook until reduced by about half, stirring occasionally. You should have 3 to 4 cups of fairly thick sauce.

To serve the beef: Slice it crosswise into ⅜-inch-thick slices, and arrange them, fanned out or overlapping, on a warm platter. Moisten the slices with spoonfuls of hot sauce, and pass more sauce at the table.

If you have cooked the beef several hours or the day before serving, you can let the meat cool in the pan, in the full amount of braising sauce. Shortly before serving, remove the meat, then skim and reduce the sauce. Slice the beef while it is cool (it is easier this way), and reheat the slices slowly in a wide skillet with some of the hot, thickened sauce.

To serve a primo with sugo alla Genovese: Put 2 cups of sauce (for a pound of pasta) into a big skillet, and heat to a simmer while the pasta cooks. Drop the drained al dente pasta into the sauce, and toss until coated, then shut off the heat, and toss with grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano. Serve immediately in warm bowls.

The next recipe is for a wonderful stuffed breast of veal, but if you can’t find a suitable cut of veal, you can make a lovely and tasty facsimile of my cima alla Genovese using boneless turkey breast and following the basic procedures in the recipe for veal. The main difference is that a turkey breast of 5 pounds or more will need to be split into its two halves, each of which you will butterfly and pound with a mallet to a flat sheet; then you will put these together, slightly overlapping, to make a single slab big enough to wrap around the frittata stuffing. (Turkey breasts are sometimes separated into boneless halves before being packaged and sold; you will need two 2-to-3-pound breast pieces in that case.) Depending on how big the flattened turkey sheet is, you may need more or less frittata and hard-cooked eggs than given here.

I also recommend that you spread out the cheesecloth first and form and fill the meat slab on top of the cloth. Wrap the stuffing in the turkey, forming a loaf shape, then roll this up tightly inside the cloth, to secure the meat
around the stuffing. Tie the ends and the middle of the cloth-covered roll with twine, and poach it just as you would a veal roll—but only for 1 hour, because the turkey will cook much faster. Drain and cool the stuffed turkey under weights; slice and serve as detailed in the recipe.

**Veal Stuffed with a Mosaic of Vegetables**

Cima alla Genovese con Salsa Verde \(\frac{3}{4}\) Serves 6 to 8

Stuffed veal breast can be found in many regions, but the Genovese preparation, *cima alla Genovese*, is one of the most distinctive and delicious. It is one of my favorite Ligurian dishes, and whenever I am in Genova I seek it out at the local restaurants. Traditionally, it is a specialty of late spring and summer, because in the natural cycle, calves are mostly birthed in early spring, and the veal will be most tender within the next few months. Appropriately for a summer dish, *cima alla Genovese* is served at room temperature, accompanied by fresh *salsa verde*.

Here, though, I give you my home version of *cima*, one that I prepare all year around, whenever I want something special (and convenient) to delight lots of people. Because veal breast of appropriate size can be hard to find, I use veal shoulder and sometimes turkey breast, butterflied and flattened. I wrap the meat around a colorful filling: a big frittata with a medley of vegetables and a row of hard-cooked eggs. Poached in a log shape, the *cima* cools before it is sliced for serving. It is still always exciting for me (and will be for you) as each slice is revealed, the filling ingredients forming a unique mosaic within a frame of moist, tender meat.

The convenience of *cima* I also love. I can assemble the stuffed veal the night before, cook it early in the morning, and let it rest. Uncut, the roll keeps well (even for several days) and can be served whenever needed, without further cooking. In summer, it makes a fine *al fresco* lunch or dinner, or a picnic centerpiece. At holiday times, nothing is more beautiful on a buffet. And when there are guests in the house, I serve it at dinner and leave the rest as an elegant anytime snack.

- A 4-to-5-pound boneless veal shoulder roast

- **FOR THE STUFFING**
  - 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
  - 2 cups onions sliced in \(\frac{1}{4}\)-inch-thick half-moons
  - 1 cup carrot matchsticks 3 inches long and \(\frac{1}{4}\) inch thick
  - 2 cups zucchini matchsticks 3 inches long and \(\frac{1}{4}\) inch thick
  - 1 cup red bell pepper strips 3 inches long and \(\frac{1}{4}\) inch thick
  - 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
  - Freshly ground black pepper
  - 1 cup frozen peas, thawed
  - 4 cups loosely packed tender spinach leaves
  - 6 large eggs for the frittata
  - \(\frac{1}{2}\) cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
  - \(\frac{1}{2}\) cup milk
  - 5 or 6 large eggs, hard-cooked and peeled

- **FOR THE POACHING POT**
  - 1 medium onion, cut in chunks
  - 1 medium carrot, cut in chunks
  - 1 medium stalk celery, cut in chunks
  - 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
⅓ cup kosher salt

FOR SERVING

1½ cups Salsa Verde

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A sharp, long-bladed knife for butterflying the meat; a meat mallet; a heavy-bottomed nonstick skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter; kitchen twine; cheesecloth sheet, 3 feet long and 2 feet wide, double thickness; a wide, heavy saucepan, preferably an oval-shaped cast-iron French oven, 5-to-7-quart capacity, with a cover

To prepare the veal: Cut the strings or netting if the roast is tied (as it usually is), and lay out the meat in a slab. Trim off excess fat on both sides and any membranes or silver skin that cover the muscles. Turn the slab so the inside (where bones have been removed) faces up—it will be a rough rectangle of uneven thickness. The next step, butterflying, will enlarge and even out the slab to a nearly square sheet of meat of even thinness.

With a long, sharp knife, slice into the thickest part of the meat, cutting from the middle of the slab toward the edge almost all the way through—then open up the flap you’ve created, like opening a book. Pound the butterflied section of meat to even it out. In the same way, butterfly portions of meat on other parts of the slab to spread and thin the veal, pounding each section after you slice and unfold it. Butterfly small mounds of thick muscle where necessary to thin it, or—if a hole opens in the sheet—butterfly an adjacent portion of meat and use the flap to cover the hole. Continue the gradual butterflying until the veal is about 16 inches on the long sides and about 12 inches on the short edges—roughly square and about ½ inch thick. Cover the veal with plastic wrap while you prepare the stuffing frittata.

Pour the olive oil into the skillet, and set over medium-high heat. Toss in the sliced onions and carrot matchsticks; stir and cook for a couple of minutes, until sizzling, then toss in the zucchini and red-pepper strips. Sprinkle on ½ teaspoon of salt and several grinds of black pepper, and cook, stirring and tossing, for 5 minutes, until the vegetables are lightly caramelized but still al dente. Scatter in the peas and the spinach leaves, turning them over with the other vegetables until they start to wilt and release their liquid. Continue to cook the vegetables, stirring frequently, until the excess water in the pan has evaporated.

Meanwhile, beat the raw eggs with ½ teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, then whisk in the grated cheese and milk. When the spinach is cooked and dry, pour the egg mixture into the skillet. Cook, turning and scrambling the eggs with the vegetables, until the curds are set but still a bit wet and glistening. Remove the pan from the heat, and let cool briefly.

Uncover the flattened veal sheet, and season the top with the remaining ½ teaspoon of salt. Spread the vegetable frittata in an even mound the length of the veal, leaving several inches of the meat uncovered on both long sides, and an inch or so on the ends, to form flaps. Arrange the frittata so the vegetable sticks are distributed evenly and somewhat aligned lengthwise to give a mosaïc effect when you slice the cooked roll. Set the hard-boiled eggs in a line nestled in the vegetable frittata. Again, for the prettiest cross-section, align the eggs end to end. (If you can’t fit in all the hard-cooked eggs, enjoy any extras in another dish!)

Fold one long flap of the veal over the filling, then the other, enclosing the eggs in a long oval. Starting at one end, tie the veal closed with loops of twine, spaced about 3 inches apart: use one long piece of twine to form a connected series of loops, or make several tight loops, to secure the roll all along its length. Tuck the open ends of the veal against the roll, and tie another length of twine lengthwise around it, so it is completely closed.

Spread out the cheesecloth, set the meat on one of the short edges, and roll it up tightly in the cloth. Twist the cloth on each end of the roll—like a candy wrapper, tightening it up against the meat—and secure the twisted ends with twine. (If there’s lots of excess cheesecloth on the ends, cut it off.) Finally, tie three or four tight loops around the cloth-wrapped roll along its length, further compacting and securing it.
To poach the veal: Drop the chunks of onion, carrot, and celery, the bay leaves, and the ½ cup salt in the big saucepan, and set the tied roll on top. Pour in enough cold water to submerge the meat completely, cover the pot, and heat the poaching liquid to a gentle boil. Adjust the heat to maintain a steady, gentle bubbling, and let the veal cook, tightly covered, for 2 hours. The meat should remain completely covered while it cooks gently. Rotate the roll carefully in the pot once or twice, add water if necessary, and adjust the heat as needed.

Turn off the heat after 2 hours, and lift the roll out of the poaching liquid (use tongs to grasp the twisted ends). Let the water drain off, then set the veal on a wide sheet pan or cutting board on an even surface. Place another sheet pan on top of the meat, and weight it down with your big saucepan (you can discard the poaching liquid first) or heavy cans or other objects. Center the weights atop the veal roll so it is evenly compacted.

Keep the veal pressed for an hour or longer, until it cools to room temperature. Remove the weights, and pour off any liquid that has collected in the pan. Cut off the outer twine, and carefully unwrap the cheesecloth from around the meat; snip the inner loops of twine and remove it all. Transfer the veal to a cutting board, taking care to keep it intact.

When you’re ready to serve, slice the veal crosswise with a sharp knife, first cutting off one of the meaty end pieces (tomorrow’s treat!), until you expose the colorful mosaic of stuffing. Slice as many pieces of *cima* as you’ll serve—I like them about ½ inch thick—and arrange them overlapping on a platter. Or present individual portions, a slice or two on each plate, with spoonfuls of *Salsa Verde* alongside. Have bowls or goblets of *Salsa Verde* at the table, too.

---

**DESSERTS WITH ALMONDS**

In Liguria, nuts are used in all kinds of dishes: pestos, condiments, vegetable dishes, braises, and stews. Certainly desserts are no exception, as exemplified by these two wonderful baked treats—a buttery chocolate-chip cake, and a large jam-filled tart—that get great taste and texture from almonds. Indeed, almonds are incorporated in two forms: sliced almonds provide crunch to each mouthful, and almond flour lends flavor and pleasing texture to the sweet cake and tart dough.

Almond flour (or almond meal) may not be readily available, so buy or order it ahead of time from a specialty-food vendor. If you like, you can make your almond flour from blanched, skinless whole almonds in a food processor (or use unblanched whole almonds to make almond meal, which is slightly coarser and darker). Process the almonds until they become a flour.

These are both versatile sweets, and can be enjoyed plain or fancy. Dust them with confectioners’ sugar, cut them in small pieces, and pile them (neatly) on a platter for a buffet or to bring to a picnic, potluck, or bake sale. For more formal occasions, either dessert will be fabulous sliced in wedges and flanked with whipped cream, ice cream, or *zabaglione*. (These both keep well for several days, or can be frozen successfully. When company comes unexpectedly, just pop the cake or tart in a hot oven and it comes back as if just baked.)

**ALMOND TORTA WITH CHOCOLATE CHIPS**

*Torta di Mandorle* makes a 10-inch cake, serving 10 or more

- 10 ounces (2½ sticks) soft butter, plus more for the pan
- 1¼ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for the pan
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup sugar
5 large eggs
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon (about 2 teaspoons)
1 teaspoon pure almond extract
2 cups almond flour or almond meal
1 cup semisweet chocolate chips
½ cup sliced blanched almonds, lightly toasted

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 10-inch springform pan; an electric mixer with paddle attachment

Butter and flour the bottom and sides of the springform pan. Arrange a rack in the center of the oven, and heat to 350°. Sift together the all-purpose flour, baking powder, and salt.

In the mixer, cream the butter and sugar on medium-high speed until light and fluffy, about 2 minutes. On medium speed, add the eggs, one at a time, mixing each in thoroughly before adding the next; scrape down the sides of the bowl as needed. Beat in the lemon zest and almond extract, then raise the speed to high and beat the batter until very light, a minute or more.

On low speed, mix in half of the sifted flour mixture, beating just until it is incorporated; beat in half the almond flour. Scrape the bowl, and mix in the remaining all-purpose flour and remaining almond flour. Beat briefly on medium to a smooth batter, then, again on low speed, mix in the chocolate chips just until evenly distributed.

Scrape the batter into the prepared pan, and spread it in an even layer. Scatter the sliced almonds all over the top. Bake the torta for 45 minutes—rotating the pan halfway through the baking time—or until the cake is golden brown on top and a knife inserted in the center comes out clean.

Cool the cake in the pan for about 10 minutes on a wire rack. Run the blade of a paring knife around the edge of the cake, then open the spring and remove the side ring. Cool the cake completely before serving. Cut it in wedges, and dust with confectioners’ sugar or accompany with whipped cream, ice cream, or zabaglione.

CHERRY JAM TART
Torta di Pasta Frolla alla Genovese

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 10-by-15-inch jelly-roll pan; cookie cutters or a pastry wheel

To make the tart dough: Cream the butter and sugar in the mixer bowl on medium-high speed until light and fluffy. Add the flours and salt to the bowl, and beat on low speed just until the dry ingredients are incorporated and a cohesive dough forms.
Scrape the dough out of the bowl onto a work surface, and knead a few times, until it comes together in a ball. Divide into two pieces—a larger piece of two-thirds of the dough, and a small piece of a third of the dough. Press both pieces into flat rectangles, and wrap them well in plastic wrap. Refrigerate for 2 hours (or for a day) before rolling; freeze for longer keeping.

When you are ready to bake the tart, arrange a rack in the center of the oven and heat to 350°. Butter the bottom and sides of the baking pan. In a small bowl, cover the dried cherries with warm water (or rum or liqueur); let them soak and soften.

Place the larger piece of dough between two sheets of parchment, and roll it out to a rectangle a bit larger than the jelly-roll pan. Peel off the top layer of parchment, and invert the dough so it lies centered in the pan, then peel off the second parchment sheet. Gently press and push the dough into the pan to form a smooth, intact crust, even on the bottom and slightly thicker against the sides of the pan. Scrape off excess dough so the crust is flush with the pan sides, and save all the scraps. (If the crust tears or is too thin in spots, patch with the extra dough.)

For the tart filling, scrape all the cherry preserves into a bowl; drain the rehydrated cherries and stir them into the preserves. Spread all the filling in the crust, covering the bottom evenly.

Roll the smaller piece of dough between the parchment sheets to a round or oblong sheet (about as thick as you rolled the larger piece of dough). Peel off the top layer of parchment; to make a decorative top crust you can cut out circles or other shapes with floured cookie cutters or use a pastry wheel to cut diamonds or lattice strips. If you are short on top crust dough gather and reroll all the dough scraps to make more shapes, and lay them all over the tart, in any pattern you like, with the cherry filling peeking through. Sprinkle the sliced almonds evenly over the top of the tart.

Set the tart in the oven, and bake about 50 minutes, rotating the pan halfway through the baking time, or until the crust is deep golden brown and the filling is bubbling.

Let the tart cool completely on a wire rack. Cut in pieces of any size, and serve on individual dessert plates, or arrange the pieces on a serving platter for a buffet or picnic. Dust them with confectioners’ sugar, or accompany with whipped cream, ice cream, or zabaglione.
The Doria family is the first thing that pops into my mind when I think of Genova. A bold Genovese nobleman, Andrea Doria (1466–1560), established the Republic of Genova in 1520. The four Doria family palaces are all embellished with a very distinct architectural feature of gray and white bands of decorative marble. Genova has one of the largest historic centers in Italy. Interwoven among the medieval buildings, there are innumerable traditional shops with farm-fresh foods, delicious Ligurian fish, and pastry shops that bake such delights as the sweet bread pandolce Genovese. As you stroll through the historic center and soak in the rich architecture, savor some of the traditional baked goods. You can take a funicular to the hill above Genova and look down. But, to my mind, the best view of Genova is seen after climbing to the top of the lighthouse, La Lanterna (1543). A walk down Strada Nuova, lined with sixteenth-century palaces belonging to the most powerful Genovese families, allows you glimpses of grand staircases, atriums, and courtyards, taking you back over five centuries.

**Palazzo del Principe**, built by Andrea Doria, is an estate outside the city of Genova with its own port and magnificent terraced gardens. Inside, I particularly like the Loggia of the Heroes, where Doria ancestors are portrayed as gorgeous, muscular warriors. The most impressive room is the Salon of the Fall of the Giants, with its enormous frescoed figures of giants on their backs, struck by Jupiter’s thunderbolts.

**The Staglieno Cemetery** of Genova is my second-favorite place—it’s like an open-air museum. There are stone figures reaching out as if to hold on to life. Marble effigies lounge longingly on the steps in front of a sarcophagus, as if waiting for a loved one to return. The sculptures of saints and angels, portraits in marble, stone, and bronze, are executed to perfection.

**Imperia**, on the Riviera di Ponente, extending toward France from Genova, is actually two separate towns: the charming Porto Maurizio and the more industrial Oneglia. I have spent lovely evenings sipping an apéritif along the water in Porto Maurizio against a backdrop of pastel palazzos, listening to the soft splashing of fishing boats bobbing up and down in the port. I love the sandy beach here, and the picturesque alleyways.

**Cinque Terre** is a great place for hiking. As the train taking you there barrels through tunnels and hugs the earth’s ridges, the sparkling sea complements the hills that rise steeply from the coast. The hiking trail of the Cinque Terre leads to the five small villages Monterosso, Vernazza, Corniglia, Manarola, and Riomaggiore. Sheltered coves with beaches and lush vegetation-filled terraces are all a part of the Riviera di Levante, which extends from Genova to La Spezia.

**Portofino** is a small port town that is lovely to stroll through, perhaps with an ice cream, or to stop at for a sunset drink. Leave lots of time to visit the nearby Abbey of San Fruttuoso. Originally built to house the remains of the bishop of Tarragon, San Fruttuoso, the abbey has a double row of galleries that look right out to the sea. The dead center of the religious complex is the tenth-century cloister, with its thick columns and zoomorphic carvings. If you’re a scuba diver (I’m not), you can come face-to-face with the underwater Christ of the Chasms statue, his arms outstretched in thanks for the riches of the sea and in supplication for protection from ancient pirates and stormy seas.—**Tanya**
The Ligurian Riviera
Overleaf: Prosciuttificio Galloni, Langhirano

Emilia–Romagna
Many people consider Emilia-Romagna to be the epitome of Italian gastronomy. The region exemplifies the extensive offerings of Italian traditional regional products, such as Grana Padano, Parmigiano-Reggiano, mortadella, prosciutto di Parma, aceto balsamico, cotechino, Culatello di Zibello, lardo, porcini, and more. From this great region’s culinary culture, and the passion and artisanry of its people, stem some of the most magnificent meals in Italy. Lasagna imbottita, tagliatelle alla Bolognese, tortellini, tortellacci, cappelletti, cappellacci, tortelli, anolini, bollito misto, erbazzone, drizzles of balsamico tradizionale on everything from cheese to meat to strawberries and ice cream.

I learned this firsthand when I opened Felidia in 1981, from Dante and Nino Laurenti, who hailed from Corchia, a small town near Parma, at the foot of the Apennines in Emilia-Romagna. Nino was the sommelier and Dante the head captain in my newly opened restaurant. They were gents at the service of food, but what I loved most about them was their talent, passion, and commitment for the food of their native region and their willingness to share it with me and our guests. The first traditional anolini, tortellini, tortelli, and tagliatelle I learned to make was from them. Together we made cotechino, bollito misto, and even made and cured the whole prosciutto. They were away from their native land but held steadfast to the culinary culture of their upbringing. I was so enamored of their cuisine that I wanted to know more, and in the early eighties began my intense culinary missions of research to that region, which continue into the present; I continue to find gems of products, techniques, and flavors.

One of the first things you can expect on a table in Emilia-Romagna is platters of affettati, sliced cold cuts, flanked with sweet and pungent fruit mostarda, followed by golden pasta stuffed, served in soups, or dressed with simple or savory sauces. If not filled, golden strands of pasta are dressed with the world-famous Bolognese sauce, sage and butter, or the drippings of the succulent, finger-licking sauce of slow-cooked roast, be it fowl, veal, or pork. The leftovers of these slow-roasting meats usually turn into the delightful stuffed pastas. And these are just some of the delights you will encounter traveling through Emilia-Romagna.

In this region, one of the essential qualities of a good chef/cook is patience. In addition to the tradition of slow roasts there is the tradition of large pots of great soups made from capon and mixed meats, slowly simmering into a savory golden liquid to which some little stuffed pasta like tortellini or anolini are added. The stufato—it could be of beef, pork, or veal—slowly perks and braises, yielding yet another one of this region’s succulent dishes.

So, as you can imagine, this is not a hurried cuisine. Everything from the products that need to be produced and aged, to the roast, to the time-consuming soups and braises, to the rolling, cutting, and stuffing of pasta—this cuisine needs time and dedication. It is no wonder that this regional cuisine yields some of the tastiest and most satisfying dishes in all of Italy.

When you decide to begin cooking from this region’s culinary tradition, tagliatelle and stuffed pasta should be on top of your list, and it is the recipes for these that I share with you in this book and encourage you to make. The northern regions of Italy are known for their fresh pasta, just as the southern regions are known for their use of dry pasta. Hailing from the north, I can recall pressing my little fingers into the silky dough when I was a child and could not even reach the table.

With all due respect to my northern roots, fresh pasta in Bologna takes the prize. So, a few years ago, while in Emilia-Romagna, I went on a mission to learn how to make the pasta as they do in Bologna and compare it with the one made by Dante and Nino. I had heard about a mother, Renata Venturi, and her two daughters, Daniela and Monica, in Bologna, who made the best pasta and sold it in a small store called Le Sfogline, meaning “the sheets”—of pasta, of course.

Le Sfogline is located at 7B Via Belvedere, behind the Mercato delle Erbe, under a portico in the center of Bologna. There they make mounds of tagliatelle and anolini, tortelli, tortellini, and cappellacci. The fillings of the stuffed pastas changed according to season, but the shapes remained the same. The store was always bustling with discriminating Bolognese housewives, and each sale was packaged as a gift box, tied with a ribbon. One of the daughters was in charge of the money, always at the front, while the mother, with her muscular arms, was rolling the
dough in the back, and the other sister was in charge of making the stuffing and shaping the pasta.

The lesson was simple. Organic fresh eggs were used, with yolks the color of the sun, and freshly milled flour, local water, and lots of elbow grease to work the dough until it was resilient and yet as soft as silk when cooked. Of course, to dress the tagliatelle, or to make a lasagna pasticcata, the Bolognese sauce is essential. In simple terms, it is a meat sauce, but when it has been simmered for three hours with the best local ingredients, the sauce clings to the golden pasta like honey.

In this chapter, I give you a recipe for *carni bianche*—a “white” meat sauce, which is traditional but maybe not as known as the traditional Bolognese, and is a great change. I also have a meatless but equally rich sauce option with *salsa alla Romagnola*. But meat is not in short supply in Emilia-Romagna. Besides the famous *prosciutto di Parma*, if you travel about twenty miles south of Parma to Langhirano, you will be in the center of hanging-ham country; these ultimately cure into prosciutto. I learned that local farmers feed their pigs the remaining whey after making Grana Padano and Parmigiano-Reggiano, and this yields the best pork, which, combined with the constant flow of air coming down the Apennines with the Taro River, gives these prosciuttos their sweet, delicious flavor.

Traveling down the main road through the town of Langhirano, you can’t help noticing large warehouses with rectangular windows as high as the buildings, fitted with louvers. These louvers are raised or lowered according to the air movement, to cure the prosciutto properly. On one of these houses stands proudly the name of my dear friend Carlo Galloni, whose family has been producing great prosciutto for generations. If you happen to be in the area, do ring the bell and tell him you are Lidia’s friend. Otherwise, make sure that, next time you buy *prosciutto di Parma* in the States, you ask for Galloni.

Another good friend is Carmen Maletti. The Maletti family hails from Modena, the *aceto-balsamico* capital, and they produce an extraordinary *aceto balsamico tradizionale*, which is available in the States. I love visiting the *acetaia*, which is in the attic of the Maletti home; here there are hundreds of barrels, ranging from five to thirty liters, placed in ascending size order. The spout of every barrel is covered with a handmade white linen lace doily, so flies or other insects do not drop in while the balsamic vinegar ages. But what I enjoy most is being with Carmen in her kitchen. She is an extraordinary cook (her *anolini in brodo* rivals Dante’s), and I credit her with the *Anolini alla Parmigiana*, *Cipolline en Agrodolce*, and *erbazzone* recipes in this chapter. A jovial woman with a great laugh,
she always dresses in bright colors. A feast of food and a welcome with a big hug await me whenever I visit her and her family.

Sweet & Sour Little Onions

Cipolline en Agrodolce Serves 6

You will find many ways to please your guests with this simple dish. The juicy, glazed onions are delicious as an hors d’oeuvre to be passed around, tossed in a salad, or served as a side dish with meats and fish. Here, I use balsamic vinegar to give the glazing syrup lots of flavor and a lovely caramel color, but you could use good wine vinegar as well. In which case, use just half the vinegar called for, and 1 teaspoon of honey.

These onions are wonderful served warm from the pan or at room temperature and make a great house gift, packed in a nice jar with a label tied around the neck. They will keep in the refrigerator for a week or two and freeze well, too.

◆ 2 pounds cipolline onions, peeled but left whole
◆ 3 tablespoons butter
◆ 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
◆ ½ cup balsamic vinegar
◆ 1 to 2 tablespoons sugar

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed high-sided skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter

Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil, drop in all the peeled onions, and return the water to a simmer. Cook about 20 minutes, or until the onions are tender all the way through—pierce them with the point of a paring knife to test. Drain the cipolline and pat them dry.

Heat the butter in the big skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. When it is melted, scatter the onions in the pan, and toss to roll and coat them with butter. Season with the salt, and cook, tossing frequently, until the onions are brown and caramelized all over, about 5 minutes.

Pour the vinegar into the pan, and sprinkle the sugar into it (use more or less sugar to taste). Shake the skillet, rolling the onions around, as the vinegar comes to a boil and the sugar dissolves. Cook at a boil for 5 minutes or so, frequently tossing the onions, until the syrup thickens and lightly glazes the cipolline.

Serve the cipolline warm, right from the pan with syrup drizzled on top, or cooled to room temperature (the glaze will thicken and can be spooned over).
Here are two versions of erbazzone, the traditional vegetable tart of Emilia-Romagna: one with a filling of butternut squash, rice, and ricotta, and the second of cooked chard scented with fresh rosemary. The squash is perfect for autumn or winter, and the Swiss chard is great in spring or summer—with these two recipes, you’ll be covered for a whole year of home-baked erbazzone.

Both tarts are delicious and versatile, and can be served small as an hors d’oeuvre, or in larger portions as a main course, with a salad, or with a poached egg on top. Though I prefer erbazzone served warm, they’re fine at room temperature, terrific to take on a picnic or pack as a lunch-box treat. Frozen erbazzone can be reheated in the oven (or toaster oven) and is nearly as good as when first made.

First, however, I give you a tasty olive-oil dough to make the large bottom crust for any erbazzone—with either of my fillings or with ones that you have thought of. The dough takes just minutes to mix.

**Dough for Erbazzone**

*Makes about a pound of dough, for 1 erbazzone*

- 2 cups all-purpose flour, plus more for working
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor

Put the 2 cups flour and the salt in the food processor fitted with the metal blade. Pulse a few seconds to aerate. Mix the oil with ½ cup cold water in a spouted measuring cup. With the processor running, pour the liquid through the feed tube and process about 30 seconds, until a soft dough forms and gathers on the blade. If the dough is not gathering on the blade, it is probably too dry. Add more water, in small amounts, until you have a smooth, very soft dough.
Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface, and knead by hand for a minute, until it’s smooth and soft. Pat into a rectangle, and wrap in plastic wrap. Let rest at room temperature for ½ hour. (The dough can be refrigerated for up to a day, or frozen for a month or more. Defrost in the refrigerator, and return to room temperature before rolling.)

**Erbazzone with Squash Filling**

Erbazzone di Zucca — Makes 12 or more appetizer slices or several dozen hors d’oeuvres

- A butternut squash, about 1½ pounds
- 3 cups milk
- 1 cup Italian short-grain rice, such as Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 3 large eggs
- 2 bunches scallions, finely chopped (about 2 cups)
- 1¼ cups freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 1 cup fresh ricotta, drained
- 1 cup heavy cream
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- 1 batch Dough for Erbazzone (preceding recipe), at room temperature
- All-purpose flour for rolling the dough

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed saucepan, 4-quart capacity; a baking stone, if you have one; a 10-by-15-inch jelly-roll pan, or similar-sized rimmed sheet pan

To make the filling: Peel the butternut squash, slice it in half lengthwise, and scoop out the seeds. Cut the squash into a few big chunks, and shred them on the coarse-shredding holes of a box grater. Heap the shreds on a kitchen towel, wrap them up tightly, and vigorously wring the towel, squeezing out as much liquid from the squash shreds as you can.

Pour the milk into the saucepan, and set it over medium heat. Add the rice, butter, and ½ tea-spoon of the salt, and heat to a boil, stirring occasionally. When the milk is boiling, stir in the shredded squash, and adjust the heat to keep the milk simmering away until it has all been absorbed (though the rice will still be quite al dente), about 12 minutes. Scrape all of the rice and squash into a large bowl, and let it cool a bit.

In a small bowl, beat two of the eggs with the remaining 1½ teaspoons salt. When the rice and squash are no longer steaming, stir in the eggs, then the scallions, a cup of grated grana, all the ricotta, and the heavy cream. Season with freshly ground black pepper to taste, and stir the filling until thoroughly mixed.

When you’re ready to bake the erbazzone, set a rack in the bottom half of the oven—with a baking stone on it, if you have one—and heat the oven to 375°.

Roll out the dough on a lightly floured work surface, gradually stretching it into a rectangle that’s 5 inches longer and wider than the jelly-roll pan. Drape the sheet of dough over the pan, then gently press it flat against the bottom and rims, leaving even flaps of overhanging dough on all sides.

Spread the filling into the dough-lined pan in an even layer over the entire bottom. Fold the dough flaps over the
filling, making pleats at the corners, to form a top crust that looks like a picture frame, with the filling exposed in the middle.

Sprinkle the remaining ¼ cup grated cheese over the filling. Bake in the oven (on the heated stone) about 25 minutes, until the filling and crust have set but not colored. Beat the remaining egg in a small bowl, and brush it over the crust. Return the erbazzone to the oven, and bake another 25 minutes or more, until the crust is golden brown and the filling is crisp on top.

Cool the erbazzone on a wire rack for at least 30 minutes to set the filling before slicing. The erbazzone can be served warm or at room temperature, cut into bite-sized, appetizer, or large pieces, in any shape you like.

**ERBAZZONE WITH SWISS CHARD FILLING**

Erbazzone di Bietola makes 12 or more appetizer slices or several dozen hors d’oeuvres

- 2 pounds Swiss chard
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 plump garlic cloves, peeled and chopped
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- 4 large eggs
- 1 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- ½ cup fine dry bread crumbs
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh rosemary leaves
- 1 batch Dough for Erbazzone, at room temperature
- All-purpose flour for rolling the dough

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** An 8-quart pot for cooking the Swiss chard; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a baking stone, if you have one; a 10-by-15-inch jelly-roll pan, or similar-sized rimmed sheet pan

To make the filling: Cut off the stems at the base of each chard leaf, and if the central rib is thick and tough, cut it out. (Save all the stems and ribs for stock—I do!) Pile up the trimmed leaves, and slice them crosswise into ribbons, about 1 inch thick.

Bring 5 quarts of water to the boil in the big pot, heap all the chard into the pot, and stir, gradually submerging the strips. When the water boils again, adjust the heat to keep it gently bubbling, and simmer the chard until tender, about 10 minutes. Drain and cool off, then squeeze the leaves by handfuls, pressing out as much vegetable water as possible.

Pour the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium heat. Stir in the chopped garlic, and cook until sizzling and fragrant, then scatter the chard in the pan, loosening the compressed ribbons. Add 1¼ teaspoons salt, and stir and toss for a couple of minutes, until the chard strips are coated with olive oil and starting to cook. Transfer them to a large bowl to cool briefly.

Beat the eggs with the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, and stir them into the warm chard; then thoroughly blend in the grated cheese, bread crumbs, and chopped rosemary.

When you're ready to bake the erbazzone, set a rack in the bottom half of the oven—with a baking stone on it, if you have one—and heat the oven to 375°.
Roll out the dough on a lightly floured work surface, gradually stretching it into a rectangle that’s 5 inches longer and wider than the jelly-roll pan. Drape the sheet of dough over the pan, then gently press it flat against the bottom and rims, leaving even flaps of overhanging dough on all sides.

Spread the filling into the dough-lined pan in an even layer over the entire bottom. Fold the dough flaps over the filling, making pleats at the corners, to form a top crust that looks like a picture frame, with the filling exposed in the middle.

Bake in the oven (on the heated stone) about 45 minutes, or until the crust is golden brown and the filling is crisp on top.

Cool the erbazzone on a wire rack for at least 30 minutes to set the filling before slicing. The erbazzone can be served warm or at room temperature, cut into bite-sized, appetizer, or large pieces, in any shape you like.

TAGLIATELLE

Tagliatelle—also known as “fettuccine” or “lasagne” —are long flat ribbons of fresh pasta. And though you can find them all over Italy, nowhere are they made better than in Emilia-Romagna. And the cooks of Emilia-Romagna excel in marrying their golden tagliatelle with a brilliant variety of sauces that perfectly coat the strands and complement the rich flavor and tender texture of the pasta.

In the following pages are recipes for fresh tagliatelle and three distinctive sauces to dress it. This pasta is so good, it will be a delight served with nothing more than sweet butter and freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano. But I hope you’ll try all of the sauces I’ve brought you from Emilia-Romagna. If you’re in a hurry, try the uncooked walnut pesto with ricotta, or the luscious fresh Romagnola Tomato Sauce, which takes about half an hour to prepare. For a more complex dish, make the velvety long-cooked “white” ragù. And if you want to experience the quintessential dish of tagliatelle as it is made in the region, prepare the authentic Ragù alla Bolognese Ricetta Tradizionale.

HOMEMADE TAGLIATELLE

Makes 1½ pounds fresh tagliatelle, serving 6

In addition to tagliatelle, use this rich pasta dough to make all the forms of filled pasta from Emilia-Romagna—anolini, cappellacci, tortelli, and tortellini—that I detail later in the chapter.

- 3 cups all-purpose flour, plus more as needed
- 3 large eggs (cold)
- 3 large egg yolks (cold)
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons ice water, plus more as needed

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor fitted with steel blade; a pasta-rolling machine

Put the flour in the bowl of the food processor, and process for a few seconds to aerate. Mix the whole eggs and egg yolks, olive oil, and ice water in a measuring cup with a spout.

Start the machine running with the feed tube open. Pour in the liquids all at once (scrape in all the drippings), and
process for 30 to 40 seconds, until a dough forms and gathers on the blade. If the dough does not gather on the blade or process easily, it is too wet or too dry. Feel the dough and add either more flour or more ice water, in small amounts. Process briefly, until the dough gathers on the blade, and clear the sides of the bowl.

Turn the dough out on a lightly floured surface, and knead by hand briefly until it’s smooth, soft, and stretchy. Press it into a disk, wrap well in plastic wrap, and let it rest at room temperature for ½ hour. (You can refrigerator this dough for up to a day, or freeze it for a month or more. Defrost frozen dough in the refrigerator; return it to room temperature before rolling.)

To make tagliatelle: Cut the dough in six equal pieces. Keeping it lightly floured, roll each piece through the machine at progressively thinner settings into sheets that are 5 inches wide (or as wide as your machine allows) and at least 20 inches long. Cut the long sheets in half crosswise, giving you twelve strips, each almost a foot long.

One at a time, lightly flour each strip, and fold it over into thirds or quarters, creating a small rectangle with three or four layers of pasta. With a sharp knife, cut cleanly through the folded dough crosswise, at ½-inch intervals. Shake the cut pieces, opening them into long ribbons of tagliatelle. Dust them liberally with flour, gather into a loose nest, and set it on a floured towel or tray. Fold, cut, and unfurl all the strips this way, piling the tagliatelle in small floured nests. Leave uncovered to air-dry at room temperature, until ready to cook (or freeze the nests on the tray until solid, and pack in airtight ziplock bags).

**Tagliatelle with White Meat Sauce**

Tagliatelle con Ragù di Carni Bianche

In a traditional Ragù alla Bolognese, the ground meats are slowly cooked with tomatoes and red wine and stock, developing a velvety texture and deep, rich flavor. This “white” ragù streamlines the process and omits most of the tomato, producing a lighter and more delicate sauce with much of the complexity of the classic Bolognese. (And if you want to make it even lighter, you might use ground rabbit meat or turkey or chicken in place of the chopped beef.) Typically used to dress fresh tagliatelle, ragù di carni bianche is also delicious as a sauce for other pastas, lasagna, polenta, and gnocchi.

This recipe makes enough sauce to dress two batches of my fresh tagliatelle; use half the sauce for one dinner, and freeze the rest for a great meal to come.

**FOR THE SAUCE**

- 1 pound ground beef
- 1 pound ground pork
- 1 pound ground veal
- 2 medium onions, cut in chunks
- 1 medium carrot, cut in chunks
- 1 medium stalk celery, cut in chunks
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 4 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1½ cups whole milk
- 6 to 8 cups very hot light stock (chicken, turkey, or vegetable broth) or water
For the sauce: Put the ground meats in a large bowl; loosen, crumble, and toss the meats together with your fingers.

Drop the chunks of onion, carrot, and celery into the food processor, and mince fine, to an even-textured paste. Pour the olive oil and drop the butter into the big saucepan, and set over medium-high heat. When the butter has melted, scrape in the paste, or pestata, season with 1 teaspoon of the salt, and cook and stir the pestata until it has dried out and just begins to stick to the bottom of the pan, about 5 minutes.

Quickly crumble all the meat into the pan, stir with the pestata, sprinkle over it 1 more teaspoon of salt, and cook, tossing and stirring occasionally, until the meat starts to release its juices. Turn up the heat a bit, and continue cooking and stirring the meat as the juices evaporate, about 10 minutes, taking care that the meat doesn’t brown or crisp.

When the juices have disappeared, pour in the white wine, bring it to a bubbling simmer, and cook until evaporated, 2 or 3 minutes. Meanwhile, stir the tomato paste into the milk until blended. When the wine has cooked away, pour in the milk and cook, stirring, until it has cooked down.

Now ladle 2 cups or more of the hot stock (or water) into the pan, just enough to cover the meat. Stir in the bay leaves and the remaining salt, and bring the liquid to an active simmer. Cover the pan, adjust the heat so the liquid is steadily bubbling (not boiling rapidly), and cook for 15 to 20 minutes, as the broth gradually reduces. Stir in about 2 more cups hot stock, just to cover the meat again, then give another 20-minute period of covered cooking and reducing. Stir in a final addition of 2 cups stock, and cook, covered, until the ragù is thick and concentrated, 20 minutes or so. (The sauce should have cooked for at least an hour and incorporated 6 to 8 cups of stock in total.)

Taste the ragù and adjust the seasoning. If you’ve prepared it in advance, let it cool, then refrigerate and freeze as you wish. Or you can remove about half (for future use) and prepare tagliatelle now, keeping about 3½ cups of freshly cooked sauce in the big saucepan, to dress the pasta.

To cook the tagliatelle: Bring a large pot of well-salted water to the boil. Shake the nests of tagliatelle in a colander or strainer to remove excess flour. Drop all the pasta into the pot at once, and stir to loosen and separate the strands. Cover the pot, and return the water to a boil rapidly. Set the cover ajar, and cook the pasta, stirring occasionally, for 2 minutes or more, until barely al dente (the pasta will cook a bit more in the pan of sauce).

Meanwhile, heat the ragù to a simmer. If it has cooled (or been chilled or frozen), it will have thickened, so reheat it slowly in a wide pan, stirring in a cup or so of stock or water, to loosen it.

Lift the al dente tagliatelle from the cooking pot quickly, with a spider and tongs, drain briefly, and drop the pasta into the simmering ragù. Toss together, over low heat, for a minute or more, until all the strands are coated and perfectly cooked. Thin the sauce, if necessary, with hot pasta water, or thicken it quickly over higher heat.
Turn off the heat, sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the tagliatelle, and toss well. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil, toss again, and heap the pasta in warm bowls. Serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

TAGLIATELLE WITH WALNUT PESTO

Tagliatelle al Pesto di Noci  Serves 6 as main course

This uncooked dressing, enriched with ricotta and butter, is delicious and quite different from the herb-based pestos I’ve found in other regions. You can blend it together in a bowl while the pasta water is heating up and have a distinctive pasta appetizer or main course in minutes. To retain its vibrant, fresh flavors, it is important not to cook the pesto, just toss it with the tagliatelle and serve.

FOR THE PESTO

- 2 cups walnut halves or pieces, toasted
- 2 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- 1½ cups ricotta, preferably fresh, drained
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 tablespoons freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE PASTA

- 1 batch (1½ pounds) Homemade Tagliatelle
- 3 tablespoons soft butter
- Freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano for the table

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a large, deep serving bowl, big enough to toss all the pasta in

Heat a large pot of well-salted water to the boil while you are preparing the pesto.

Put the walnuts and garlic in the food processor, and pulse until the nuts are chopped into very tiny bits (but don’t grind them to a powder). Scrape the ground nut-garlic mixture into the large bowl, and stir in the ricotta, olive oil, grated cheese, parsley, salt, and pepper, until thoroughly blended.

When the pesto is ready and the water is boiling, shake the nests of tagliatelle in a colander or strainer to remove excess flour. Drop all the pasta into the pot at once, and stir to loosen and separate the strands. Cover the pot, and over high heat return the water to a boil rapidly. Set the cover ajar, and cook the pasta, stirring occasionally, for 2 to 4 minutes (or more, depending on thickness), until the tagliatelle are perfectly al dente—in this dish, the pasta does not cook further when tossed with the pesto.

Working quickly, lift out the tagliatelle with a spider and tongs, and drop into the bowl with the dressing. Drop the soft butter in dollops on the hot pasta, and toss until all the strands are nicely coated with the pesto—if the dressing is too thick, loosen it with a bit of hot water from the pasta pot as you toss.

Serve immediately in warm bowls, with more grated cheese at the table.
TAGLIATELLE WITH ROMAGNOLA TOMATO SAUCE

Tagliatelle alla Romagnola

Makes sauce for 1 batch (1½ pounds) tagliatelle or other pasta, serving 6

Just as the Neapolitans have their marinara, Romagnola cuisine also offers a savory, meatless tomato sauce as an essential pasta dressing. This version is made from fresh tomatoes—round, plum, or small cherry tomatoes can all be used—and cooks in the time it takes to heat the pasta water. A small amount of tomato paste is called for, and although you can omit it, I think it lends complexity to the sauce and makes it cling to the golden ribbons of tagliatelle so much better.

This recipe makes enough for one batch of fresh tagliatelle, but if you have plenty of fresh tomatoes, you should certainly double the sauce formula and freeze half to use another time.

FOR THE SAUCE

* 3 pounds ripe tomatoes (round, plum, or cherry varieties are all fine)
* 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
* 4 plump garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
* 1 sprig fresh rosemary (a short branch with lots of leaves)
* ¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
* 2 tablespoons tomato paste
* 1 teaspoon kosher salt
* 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

FOR THE PASTA

* 1 batch (1½ pounds) Homemade Tagliatelle
* ½ cup or so freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for the table
* 2 tablespoons or so extra-virgin olive oil for finishing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

For the sauce: Core the tomatoes, and cut them in half. With round or plum tomatoes, squeeze out seeds into a sieve placed over a bowl—save the juices and discard the seeds—then chop the tomatoes into ¾-inch pieces. Cherry tomatoes need only be cut in half.

Pour the olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Scatter the garlic slices in the pan, and heat for a minute or so, until they start sizzling. Toss in the rosemary sprig and peperoncino, let them heat for a few moments, then drop the tomato paste into a clear hot spot in the pan bottom. Toast the tomato paste for a minute, then pour in the chopped tomatoes, sprinkle on the salt, and stir all together.

Cook the tomatoes for a couple of minutes, until they begin to release their liquid. Pour in the reserved tomato juices from the bowl, along with ½ cup or so of water (use it to slosh out the tomato bowl). Bring the sauce to a boil, then adjust heat to keep it perking steadily. Cook, uncovered, until tomatoes break down into a chunky sauce, about 10 to 12 minutes. When the sauce is done, stir in the parsley and turn off the heat (or keep it barely simmering if you are ready to cook the pasta).

To cook the tagliatelle: Bring a large pot of well-salted water to a rolling boil. Shake the nests of tagliatelle in a colander or strainer to remove excess flour. Drop all the pasta into the pot at once, and stir to loosen and separate the strands. Cover the pot, and return the water to a boil rapidly. Set the cover ajar, and cook the pasta, stirring occasionally, for 2 minutes or more, until barely al dente (it will cook a bit more in the sauce).
Have the tomato sauce at a simmer; if it has cooled and thickened, loosen it with a bit of the hot pasta-cooking water. Lift the tagliatelle from the cooking pot quickly, with a spider and tongs, drain briefly, and drop into the simmering ragù. Toss together, over low heat, for a minute or more, until all the strands are coated and perfectly cooked. Thin the sauce, if necessary, with hot pasta water, or thicken it quickly over higher heat.

Turn off the heat, sprinkle ½ cup or so of grated cheese over the tagliatelle, and toss well. Drizzle a couple of tablespoons of olive oil all over, and toss again. Heap the pasta in warm bowls, and serve immediately, passing more cheese at the table.

---

**FILLED PASTA RECIPES**

*Anolini* are one of the classic filled pastas of Emilia-Romagna, very small, delicate pasta disks, enclosing morsels of savory pork filling, served in a rich broth. My version was inspired by the *anolini in brodo* prepared for me by Carmen Maletti at her home in Modena (where the Maletti family makes extraordinary *aceto balsamico tradizionale*).

Because *anolini* are small—and your loved ones will each ask for 15 or 20 of the little treasures, enough to go with every spoonful of broth—my recipe makes enough for ten servings, about 150 to 200 *anolini* (depending on how thin you roll the dough). Though this may seem like an enormous undertaking, I assure you that it is not. The dough and filling are easy to make (and can be done in advance), and the technique I give you for forming the *anolini* will produce dozens of little disks every few minutes. The procedure is fun—kids are great *anolini*-makers, I have found—and goes faster every time you do it. Even the first time you make these, I bet you’ll feel like a real pasta-maker from Bologna!

The effort will also reward you with a pasta delicacy that you can enjoy in many ways. In this recipe, I provide instructions for serving six, which will use about half your *anolini*, leaving you half to freeze for soup suppers in the months ahead. Simply cook up a handful of frozen *anolini* in hot broth, perhaps just for yourself, whenever you want. Of course, you could prepare your entire batch of pasta at once as a classic *anolini alla parmigiana* for a dozen guests—it would be a meal they would never forget.

And whether you are serving one or a dozen, *anolini* are always best in a rich homemade *brodo*, such as my Chicken Stock. They deserve such special treatment.

---

**ANOLINI WITH PORK FILLING IN CHICKEN BROTH**

*Anolini alla Parmigiana*  
Makes 150 to 200 *anolini*, serving 10 to 12, with cooking and finishing instructions to serve 6

- **FOR THE FILLING AND MAKING THE ANOLINI**
- ½ pound boneless *pork shoulder*
- ½ small *onion*, cut in chunks
To make the filling: Preheat oven to 425°. Cut the pork shoulder into 2-inch pieces, trimming away any excess fat or cartilage as you go. Put the meat in the small roasting pan along with the onion, carrot, celery, pancetta, porcini, and rosemary. Spread the tomato paste on the meat and vegetables, and toss to coat. Pour the hot stock into the pan.

Roast the meat and vegetables, uncovered, until the meat is brown and tender and the pan juices have reduced to a thick gravy, about 1 hour. (If the meat is tender and the juices are still too thin, remove the pan from the oven and reduce on top of the stove.)

Let the meat, vegetables, and juices cool. Toss in the cubes of mortadella and run the entire mixture through the meat grinder into a large bowl. Run day-old bread through the grinder to clean out the last bit of meat (and catch it in the bowl). Beat the egg with a pinch of salt, and pour over the meat, along with the grated cheese, nutmeg, and bread crumbs. With your hands, work everything together to make a smooth stuffing.

To make the anolini: Cut the dough in six equal pieces; work with two pieces of dough at a time, and keep the others covered. Roll one piece of dough through the pasta machine at progressively wider settings, always keeping it lightly floured, until you’ve created a long strip, as wide as your machine allows, and a little less than ¼ inch thick. Lay it out on the work surface. Roll out the second piece of dough to a strip of the same size.

Lay one strip in front of you. Mark where you will be making the anolini by lightly pressing the 1-inch cutter on the dough—don’t cut through it—fitting as many outlined circles on the strip as you can.
Scoop small portions of the filling—⅓ to ½ teaspoon—and mound them in the center of all the circles. With the pastry brush (or your fingertip) dipped in water, lightly moisten the rim of the outlined circle around the filling mounds. Lay the second strip of dough over the first, gently stretching and draping it to cover all the mounds. Now center the cutter over each filling mound, and press it firmly, cleanly slicing through both layers of dough and cutting out the anolini. Pull away the excess dough to separate individual pieces, lightly dusting with flour as needed. Press the edges of the pasta circles together if they have gaps. Arrange the anolini in a single layer on a floured and lined tray, and cover them lightly.

Now roll out and fill the remaining pieces of pasta dough, in pairs, to make two more batches of anolini, in the same way. Anolini that you will cook soon can be left on the tray, lightly covered. Freeze anolini for future use right on the trays. When they are frozen solid, transfer them to freezer bags, packed airtight and sealed.

To cook and serve anolini in broth for six, you will need about a hundred anolini, so everyone gets at least fifteen in a bowl of soup. (Of course, you can vary this number, depending on the size of your pasta pieces, the appetite of those you are feeding, and what else you’ve prepared for the meal.)

Fill a large pasta pot—preferably with a wide diameter, so the anolini won’t be crowded—with at least 6 quarts well-salted water, and bring to the boil. At the same time, heat the Chicken Stock in another pot, so it is just simmering. Have your soup bowls warm and ready for filling.

With the pasta water at a full rolling boil, spill in all the anolini, stir well, cover the pot, and return the water to the boil over high heat. Give the anolini another good stir, and let them cook for a quick minute, just until they’re barely al dente. Check one for doneness—the thickest part of the pasta should still be slightly resilient, since the anolini will continue to cook and soften in the brodo.

Turn off the heat and, with a big spider or other strainer, scoop out hot anolini, let them drain for a second, and spill fifteen to twenty into each of the warm soup bowls. Quickly ladle hot broth into each bowl (1½ to 2 cups a serving), and sprinkle over each a heaping spoonful or two of grated cheese. Serve each bowl of anolini in brodo while piping hot, with more grated cheese passed around the table.

If you want to serve the soup right at the table, bring out the pot of hot Chicken Stock and set it on a trivet, then drain the anolini and divide them among the soup bowls in the kitchen. Bring the bowls filled with anolini to the table, add the Chicken Stock, and serve.

**Tortellini with Ricotta-Fontina Filling**

Tortellini di Ricotta Makes about 180 tortellini, serving 9 or more, with cooking and finishing instructions to serve 4

Tortellini are probably the best-known and most popular of the many forms of filled pasta for which Emilia-Romagna is famous. Although they are made all over the region, tortellini are the special pride of Bologna, where, according to food historians, they were first created centuries ago. When I visited the great artisanal pasta-makers Renata Venturi and her daughters, Daniela and Monica, whom I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, they showed me their techniques of hand-rolling and shaping tortellini in their marvelous pasta shop, Le Sfogline.

Though tortellini are sold (usually frozen) in most markets in the United States, the recipe here will give you a big batch of fresh homemade tortellini, far superior to anything you can buy at the store. And you will see how easy and enjoyable the shaping is, especially the final twist that gives each piece its distinctive shape.

Although meat-filled tortellini might come to mind first, I love this ricotta version, dressed with a simple tomato sauce, such as my Marinara Sauce. A more complex sauce, such as Ragù alla Bolognese or mushroom guazzetto,
would also be delicious, as would a simple dressing of sage and butter. (If you want to try other pasta shapes than
tortellini, you can make tortelli or tortellacci with this ricotta-fontina filling.)

• FOR THE FILLING AND MAKING THE TORTELLINI
  • 1 pound fresh ricotta, drained
  • 8 ounces Italian fontina, shredded
  • ½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
  • ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
  • 2 large eggs
  • ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
  • 1½ pounds dough for Homemade Tagliatelle
  • All-purpose flour for rolling and forming the tortellini

• FOR COOKING AND DRESSING 4 PORTIONS OF TORTELLINI
  • 2 cups Marinara Sauce
  • 1 cup or so freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing
  • A drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A pasta-rolling machine; a rotary pastry cutter or pizza wheel; a narrow pastry brush; trays or baking sheets lined with floured
parchment or kitchen towels

To make the filling: Stir together the ricotta, fontina, grated cheese, and nutmeg in a large bowl. In a small bowl, beat the eggs with the salt, pour them over the cheeses, and stir everything with a wooden spoon until thoroughly blended and smooth.

Cut the dough in six equal pieces. You’ll make tortellini from one piece at a time; keep the others covered. Roll the first piece through the pasta machine at progressively wider settings, always keeping it lightly floured, until you’ve created a long strip, as wide as your machine allows, and a little less than ⅛ inch thick.

Lay out the strip on a lightly floured surface and, with the fluted cutter, cut it lengthwise in thirds, to form three long narrow strips, each about 2 inches wide. Cut vertically through the strips at 2-inch (or smaller) intervals, forming small squares of pasta. You should have thirty or more squares in all. Remove excess bits of dough (which can be kneaded together, rested, and rerolled for more pasta).

Place a scant teaspoon of the filling in the center of each square. With the pastry brush (or your fingertip) dipped in water, lightly moisten the edges of the squares around the filling.

To form each tortellino: Pick up one square and fold it over on the diagonal, creating a triangle with the filling inside; press the moistened edges together to seal it well. Next, grasp in your fingers the corners of the base of the triangle (its long side), twist them inward so the points of dough overlap, and pinch them together. As you make the twist, the stretching of the dough will make the fluted edges and the opposite point of the triangle will pop up, creating the plump hatlike tortellini shape.

Fold and twist the rest of the squares into tortellini; set them in a single layer on a lined and floured tray. Make more tortellini from the other cut pieces of dough (and the rerolled scraps of dough, too). Tortellini that you will cook soon can be left on the tray, lightly covered. Freeze tortellini for future use right on the trays until solid, then transfer them to freezer bags, packed airtight and sealed.
To cook and serve tortellini with marinara sauce for four, you will need seventy to eighty tortellini (eighteen to twenty per serving, depending on pasta size and your guests’ appetites).

Fill a large pasta pot with well-salted water and bring to the boil. Pour the Marinara Sauce into a large skillet or sauté pan (at least 12 inches in diameter); heat sauce to a simmer when you start cooking the pasta.

Drop all the tortellini into the rapidly boiling water at once, stir, and return to the boil over high heat. Cook for about 3 minutes (longer if frozen), until the thickest part of the pasta is cooked through and slightly al dente. Lift them from the cooking pot with a spider, drain briefly, and lay them in the simmering sauce. Tumble the tortellini over and over for a minute or so, until all are coated and perfectly cooked. (Loosen the sauce, if it is thick, with hot pasta water, or thicken it quickly over higher heat if necessary.)

Turn off the heat, sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the tortellini—and a flourish of extra-virgin olive oil if you like—and toss gently. Spoon the tortellini into warm bowls, and serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

**Cappellacci with Squash Filling**

Cappellacci di Zucca makes about 150 cappellacci, serving 8 or more, with cooking and finishing instructions to serve 4

In Emilia-Romagna, zucca (a pumpkinlike winter squash) is a traditional filling for cappellacci, stuffed pastas that are folded and twisted like tortellini but slightly larger. Butternut squash is the best substitute for Italian zucca, though you must squeeze out all the moisture after cooking it. With the sweetness and texture of crushed amaretti cookies and hints of lemon and nutmeg, this is a delicious and versatile filling, great in tortellini and tortelli as well as cappellacci.

Sage-infused melted butter is the customary (and perfect) dressing for this autumn and winter dish. For a variation, omit the sage, and brown the butter in a hot pan before drizzling it over the pasta.

**FOR THE FILLING AND MAKING THE CAPPELLACCI**

- 1 large butternut squash (about 3 pounds)
- 1½ tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 10 or more amaretti cookies, imported from Italy
- ¼ cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- ⅛ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 tablespoon freshly grated lemon zest
- 2 large eggs, beaten
- 1½ pounds dough for Homemade Tagliatelle
- All-purpose flour for rolling and forming the cappellacci

**FOR COOKING AND DRESSING 4 PORTIONS OF CAPPELLACCI**

- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter
- 12 fresh sage leaves
- 1 cup or so freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

**Recommended Equipment:** A rimmed baking sheet; a food processor; a kitchen towel or cheesecloth; a pasta-rolling machine; a 2½-inch-diameter round pastry or cookie cutter; a narrow pastry brush; trays or baking sheets lined with floured parchment or kitchen towels.
Heat the oven to 400° and arrange a rack in the center. Slice the squash lengthwise in half, and then quarters; scoop out and discard seeds. Arrange the wedges, peel side down, on the baking sheet, drizzle olive oil over the cut surfaces of the squash, and season with 1 ½ teaspoons of the salt. Tent the squash with aluminum foil, place the sheet in the oven, and bake 45 minutes, or until the squash flesh is very soft.

Meanwhile, grind the amaretti cookies in a food processor—using more cookies if necessary—to make a full cup of fine-textured dry powder.

Let the squash cool, then scoop all the flesh from the skin and heap it on the towel or cheesecloth. Bring the edges of the cloth together, enclosing the vegetable, and hold the bundle over a bowl or the sink. Twist the cloth, tightening the towel and squeezing the liquid from the soft flesh. When you’ve pressed out all the moisture you can, turn the wrung-out squash into a large bowl, and stir and mash it up with a large wooden spoon. Add the ground amaretti, the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, the grated cheese, nutmeg, and lemon zest, and stir them into the squash. Pour in the beaten eggs, and stir until thoroughly blended and smooth.

For the cappellacci: Cut the dough in six equal pieces and roll each out as described. Make cappellacci from one strip at a time. Lay it out in front of you on a lightly floured board. With the round cutter, cut as many 2½-inch circles as you can from the dough strip, pressing firmly and occasionally dipping the sharp edge of the cutter in flour so it doesn’t stick. Separate the circles, pulling away the scraps of dough (which can be kneaded together, rested, and rerolled for more pasta). You should get about two dozen circles from the strip.

Place a heaping teaspoon of squash filling in the center of each dough circle. With the pastry brush (or your fingertip) dipped in water, lightly moisten the rim of dough around the filling.

To form the cappellacci: Pick up a circle and fold it over into a half-round envelope, with the filling inside. Press the moistened edges of dough together to seal. Next, grasp the corners of the semicircle, twist them inward so the points of dough overlap, and pinch them together.

Fold and twist all the filled circles into cappellacci, arranging them in a single layer on a lined and floured tray. Make more cappellacci from the other rolled strips of dough (and the rerolled scraps of dough, too). Cappellacci that you will cook soon can be left on the tray, lightly covered. Freeze cappellacci for future use right on the trays until solid, then transfer them to freezer bags, packed airtight and sealed.

To cook and serve cappellacci for four, you will need sixty to seventy pieces. Fill a large pasta pot with well-salted water, and bring to the boil. Meanwhile, put the butter and sage leaves in a large skillet or sauté pan (at least 12 inches in diameter), and melt butter over low heat; keep the sauce warm—but not cooking—so the herb infuses the butter.

Drop all the cappellacci into the rapidly boiling water, stir, and return to the boil over high heat. Cook for 3 minutes or longer, until the thickest part of the pasta is cooked through. Lift out cappellacci with a spider, drain, and lay them in the pan of sage butter.

Tumble the cappellacci over and over until all are coated; add a few tablespoons of pasta cooking water to extend the sauce if necessary. Sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the cappellacci, and spoon them into warm bowls. Drizzle a bit of the sage butter left in the pan over each portion, and serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

**TORTELLI WITH CABBAGE OR CHARD FILLING**
Tortelli di Verza o Tortelli di Bietola Makes about 50 tortelli, serving 6, with cooking and finishing instructions to serve 4

Tortelli are filled pasta squares, like ravioli. These are the largest of the pasta shapes in this chapter—you need only eight to ten pieces per serving—and the simplest to make, too, since they need no twisting.

Here I give you two savory tortelli fillings that I discovered in Emilia-Romagna. The techniques for making tortelli are the same for this cabbage-and-pancetta filling and for the chard-ricotta filling that follows. (You can also make tortelli with the fillings I give you for anolini, tortellini, and cappellacci.)

As I often say, homemade pasta is so good that you need nothing more than butter (or extra-virgin olive oil) and cheese to dress it. So, in the master recipe, I dress the cabbage-filled tortelli with just melted butter (as is customary in the north of Italy)—I would do the same with the chard-filled tortelli. You could also dress them with a light tomato sauce, such as the Romagnola or my Marinara Sauce. And if you are making a meat roast or roast chicken for the same meal, the juices and drippings from the roasting pan would make a splendid dressing for your tortelli.

FOR THE CABBAGE FILLING AND MAKING THE TORTELLI

- A 2-pound head Savoy cabbage
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 4 ounces pancetta, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 3 cups simmering water
- 1 large egg
- 1 cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1½ pounds dough for Homemade Tagliatelle
- All-purpose flour for rolling and forming the tortelli

FOR COOKING AND DRESSING 4 PORTIONS OF TORTELLI

- 8 tablespoons (1 stick) butter
- 1 cup or so freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a cover; a pasta-rolling machine; a rotary pantry cutter or pizza wheel; a narrow pastry brush; trays or baking sheets lined with floured parchment or kitchen towels

To make the cabbage filling: Trim away tough or blemished leaves from the head of cabbage, cut out the entire core, and slice the head in quarters. With a sharp, long-bladed knife, thinly slice the cabbage wedges. You should have about 3 quarts of very fine shreds.

Put the olive oil and the butter in the skillet, and set over medium heat. When the butter melts, scatter in the chopped pancetta; let it cook for a few minutes, stirring occasionally, as it sizzles and renders most of its fat.

Heap the shredded cabbage in the skillet, season with the salt, and tumble it over to mix with the fat and pancetta. Pour in the hot water, cover the pan, and heat it quickly to a boil. Adjust the heat to maintain a steady bubbling simmer, and cook, covered, for about ½ hour, stirring and turning the cabbage now and then, until the shreds are very soft and the pan is nearly dry. Uncover, and cook away the remaining liquid (but don’t let the cabbage brown), then empty the pan into a bowl to cool.
When the cabbage is at room temperature, beat the egg with a pinch of salt, pour egg over the cabbage, and toss in with the shreds. Sprinkle the filling with the cup of grated cheese and the nutmeg, and toss until thoroughly blended.

For the tortelli: Cut the pasta dough in six equal pieces, and roll out as described. Make tortelli from one strip at a time. Lay a strip out horizontally in front of you on a lightly floured board. With the pastry wheel, trim the left, right, top, and bottom edges of the strip to form an even rectangle. Starting about 1 inch in from the left (short) edge of the strip and 1 inch above the bottom (long) edge, place a scant tablespoon of filling on the dough. Continue to make more mounds at 2-to-2½-inch intervals. You should be able to fit eight to ten mounds on the strip, depending on length.

With the pastry brush (or your fingertip) dipped in water, lightly moisten the top and bottom edges of the pasta strip; also wet the dough in a vertical line halfway between the mounds of filling. Fold the top edge down to align with the bottom edge, covering the mounds. Press lightly to seal the edges together, and press between the filling mounds, too. Finally, cut vertically (down) the lines between the mounds of filling. Arrange them in a single layer on a lined and floured tray. Continue to make more tortelli out of the other strips in the same way. Tortelli that you will cook soon can be left on the tray, lightly covered. Freeze tortelli for future use right on the trays until solid, then transfer them to freezer bags, packed airtight and sealed.

To cook and serve tortelli for four, you will need thirty to forty pieces—eight or more per serving.

Fill a large pasta pot with well-salted water, and bring to the boil. Meanwhile, melt the butter in a large skillet or sauté pan (at least 12 inches in diameter), and keep it warm.

Drop all the tortelli into the rapidly boiling water at once, stir, and return to the boil over high heat. Cook for about 3 minutes, or until the thickest part of the pasta is cooked through and perfectly al dente. Lift tortelli from the cooking pot with a spider, drain briefly, and lay them in the pan of melted butter.
Tumble the tortelli over and over, gently, until all are coated; add a few tablespoons of pasta cooking water to extend the sauce if necessary. Sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the tortelli, and spoon them into warm bowls. Drizzle a bit of the butter left in the pan over each portion, and serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

Cooking tortelli for six or more: If you want to serve all your homemade tortelli—enough for six portions (or eight small ones), you will need to cook them in two batches instead of all at once. For dressing this many pieces, I also suggest using a 14-inch skillet or sauté pan, increasing the melted butter to 12 ounces (1½ sticks). Cook half the tortelli for 3 minutes or so, drain, drop them into the skillet, and keep them bathed in the warm butter while you cook up the second batch. Add these to the pan, turn to coat them all with butter, sprinkle with cheese, and serve.

CHARD AND RICOTTA FILLING FOR TОРРЕLLI

Makes enough filling for about 50 tortelli

- 3 pounds Swiss chard
- 1 large egg
- Kosher salt to taste
- 8 ounces fresh ricotta, drained
- 1 cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

Cut off the stems at the base of each chard leaf. If the central rib of the leaf is thick and tough, cut it out. (Save the trimmings for stock.) Pile up the trimmed leaves, and slice them crosswise into narrow ribbons, about ½ inch wide. You will have almost 6 quarts of loose chard shreds.

Bring 5 or 6 quarts of water to boil in a big pot. When boiling, heap all the chard into the pot, and stir, gradually submerging the strips. Return the water to the boil, and adjust the heat to keep it gently bubbling. Simmer the chard until tender, about 10 minutes. Pour the strips into a colander to drain and cool off, then squeeze them by handfuls, pressing out as much liquid as possible. Loosen the clumps, and pile the chard in a large bowl.

When the chard is completely cool, beat the egg with a pinch of salt, pour it over, and toss with the chard shreds. Scatter the drained ricotta, the grated cheese, and grated nutmeg on top, and toss and stir until the filling is thoroughly blended. Follow the instructions in the master recipe to make tortelli, substituting the cooled chard filling for the cabbage filling.

VEAL SCALOPPINE BOLOGNESE

Scaloppine di Vitello alla Bolognese Serves 6

This traditional casserole of veal scaloppine is simple and simply delicious, with a multitude of harmonious flavors and textures. The scaloppine are quickly fried, then layered in the pan to bake, moistened with an intense prosciutto-Marsala sauce, and topped by a delicate gratinato of Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano. And though veal is customary, scaloppine of chicken breast, turkey breast, or even pork would be excellent prepared this way. The first step, of frying the meat, can be done in advance, but I recommend that you assemble and bake the casserole just
before serving: reheating will toughen the gratinato and accentuate the saltiness of the prosciutto.

- 12 veal scallops, 2 to 3 ounces each
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- All-purpose flour for dredging (1 cup or more)
- 4 large eggs
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 5 tablespoons butter
- 3 ounces thinly sliced prosciutto, cut in ¼-inch strips
- ½ cup dry Marsala
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 1 cup hot light stock (chicken, turkey, or vegetable broth) or water
- 5-ounce (or larger) chunk of Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A meat mallet with a toothed face; a large heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a large rectangular baking dish or casserole pan, such as a 4-quart Pyrex dish (15 by 10 inches)

Cutting open a form of Grana Padano DOP

Heat the oven to 400° and arrange a rack in the middle.

Flatten the veal scallops into scaloppine, one at a time. Place a scallop between sheets of wax paper or plastic wrap, and pound it with the toothed face of a meat mallet, tenderizing and spreading it into a thin oval, about ¼ inch thick. The pieces will vary in size.

Season the scaloppine with salt on both sides, using about ½ teaspoon in all. Spread the flour on a plate and dredge each scallop, coating both sides with flour. Shake off the excess and lay them down, spread apart, on wax paper. Beat the eggs with a pinch of salt in a wide shallow bowl.

Pour 2 tablespoons of olive oil and drop 3 tablespoons of butter into the big sauté pan, and set over medium-high heat. When the butter begins to bubble, quickly dip scallops, one by one, in the eggs, let the excess drip off, then lay them in the skillet. Fit in as many scallops as you can in one layer—about half the veal.

Brown the scallops on one side for about a minute, then flip and brown the second side for a minute. Turn them in the order in which they went into the skillet, and then transfer them to a plate. Remove any burnt bits from the skillet, and pour in the remaining olive oil; dip the remaining scallops in egg, and brown them the same way. (If
your skillet is not big enough, it is fine to fry the veal in three batches.)

When all the scaloppine are browned, arrange them in the baking pan, overlapping them so they fill the dish in an even layer.

To make the Marsala sauce: Wipe out the skillet, melt the remaining 2 tablespoons butter in it, and set over medium heat. Scatter in the prosciutto strips, and cook, stirring, for a couple of minutes or longer, until crisped on the edges. Pour in the Marsala and white wine at the same time, raise the heat, and bring to a rapid boil. Cook until the wines are reduced by half, then pour in the stock, heat to the boil, and cook for a couple of minutes more, stirring, until the sauce has amalgamated and thickened slightly.

Remove the pan from the heat, scoop out the prosciutto strips, and scatter them over the scaloppine in the baking dish, then pour the sauce all over the meat, moistening the scaloppine evenly.

To make the gratinato: shave the chunk of Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano with a vegetable peeler, dropping thin wide flakes of cheese over the scaloppine, lightly covering them.

Set the baking dish in the oven, and bake for 20 minutes or so, until the gratinato is nicely browned and very crisp (rotate the dish in the oven to ensure even coloring).

Remove the dish from the oven and, with a sharp knife or a spatula, cut around the scaloppine and lift them out, one or two at a time, with the topping intact, onto a platter or dinner plates. Drizzle the pan sauce around the scaloppine—not on top—and serve immediately.
Ravenna, home to early Christian emperors, is sparkling and mystical, harking back to the almost magical period of the early Christian Empire. The city flourished when Honorius moved the imperial court from Rome to Ravenna in the fifth century. The colorful mosaics, imperial tombs, and cylindrical towers (characteristic of Byzantine architecture) all tell of the power and might once alive in this city. Galla Placidia, Honorius’s sister, was the first to adorn the city with mosaics and monuments, and her tomb is a small cross-shaped building filled with predominantly blue mosaics, beautifully preserved. Entering the small tomb is like walking into a jewel-encrusted secret place, the walls shimmering with tiny golden squares laid by the hands of masters.

Ferrara, a fine example of city planning, is located on a plain near the Po River and was home of the Este dukes, a family that promoted Italian Renaissance ideals in their court. In the fifteenth century, they devised the plan of the city, with wide streets, public spaces, wonderful architecture, and paths atop the city walls. The Este family castle is surrounded by a moat, and has drawbridges with dungeons underneath the courtyard; you can still see some decoration from the castle’s heyday. The city is dotted with magnificent Renaissance buildings. Palazzo di Schifanoia should not be missed, in particular the Salone dei Mesi, decorated for Duke Borso d’Este, depicting the months of the year and mythological scenes.

Parma is known not only for its famous cured ham, but also for its beautiful women and classical music. As I walk through town, I can’t help humming Verdi’s Nabucco. I always end up at my favorite place, the rooms frescoed by Correggio in the Camera di San Paolo. It was commissioned by the abbess Giovanna, who is depicted on the fireplace as the mythological figure Diana. The room has been transformed by Correggio into a green, leafy space, the walls covered with an intricate, foliage-covered trellis. Angels peek through the leaves, brandishing Diana’s attributes, such as a bow and arrow.

Castles abound in the area surrounding Parma. My two favorite are Soragna and Fontanellato. The Meli Lupi family still live in the Castle of Soragna, and it occupies the center of town, reached by a large masonry bridge. It even has its own ghost, La Donna Cenerina, whose portrait is in the billiards room. Fontanellato, also in the center of its own town, is a surprise. Somehow one would not expect, when walking through this small town, to come upon a crenellated fairy-tale castle surrounded by a greenish-blue moat. Inside, there are sensual decorations of Diana and Atteone painted by Parmigianino.—TANYA
The chapel next to Giuseppe Verdi’s home in Busseto
Le Marche

Overleaf: The town of Sirolo on the Adriatic Coast in Le Marche
When I first visited Le Marche in 1958, it was difficult to get there, separated as it was by the Apennines from the main Venice-Florence-Rome travel corridor. But today, by the autostrada, you can easily make it from Bologna to the heart of Le Marche in less than two hours.

I was twelve years old when my parents took us to the Adriatic coastal city of Pesaro to see my aunt Anna Perini, my father’s sister. She had moved there from Pola with her husband when World War II began. We were about to leave Italy to immigrate to America, and we went to say goodbye. My aunt, like most housewives in those days, was a good cook, but the experience I had on that visit was extraordinary. I still recall the spaghetti with white clams that she made for us. The Adriatic coast of Le Marche is sandy, with the exception of some beautiful steep cliff promontories, and clams thrive in that sand. That day, she came home from the market with a bag full of clams, none any bigger than my thumbnail. She chopped lots of garlic and parsley, threw the pasta in the boiling water, rinsed the clams, and, shell and all, tossed them in the golden garlic and oil. By the time the pasta was cooked, the sauce was made. A steaming, garlicky plate of spaghetti peppered with little clamshells was put in front of me. Being from Pola, a sea town, and having a fisherman as an uncle, I was not intimidated by shells and bones in fish. But this was different; it became a game, a delicious game of slurping the tiny clams out of their little shells in between forkfuls of deliciously clammy spaghetti.

The next time I visited my aunt Anna was in 1966, on my honeymoon—and return I did to the fish market where Aunt Anna had gone eight years before. I bought a bag of those same little clams, called lupini (in English, striped Venus clams) or poveracce (Chamelea gallina). This time I cooked for all of them, spaghetti con poveracce, and it was every bit as delicious as I remembered. And to this day, Spaghetti with Clam Sauce remains one of my favorite dishes. My aunt passed away, at ninety-two, but I still visit my cousins, and as I travel from Pesaro to Ancona along the coast, I have many opportunities to sample the great seafood cookery of Le Marche. I always enjoy the brodetto at Nenetta, a seaside shack in Porto Recanati, which calls for thirteen different local fishes. I also love the Ziti all’Ascolana with tuna, a memorable and easy recipe; and Fish with Pepper Sauce.

Another delicious seafood tradition in this area of Le Marche is the preparation of crudo di pesce—raw fish—one of the best to be had anywhere. Around Senigallia, chef Moreno Cedroni, in his beach hut Il Clandestino and restaurant La Madonina del Pescatore, and chef Mauro Uliassi of the restaurant Uliassi have received many accolades, for their extraordinary work with raw fish. One of my own New York chefs, David Pasternack of our restaurant Esca, prepares some unusual crudo di pesce, and he continues to do research in this area.

Inland, Le Marche is covered with olives, which have been growing in these areas since the Greeks first brought them to Italy. Great olive oil also hails from this region, but Le Marche, especially around Ascoli, is famous for the olive variety called Ascolana tenera, tender Ascolana. Large green olives cured in brine, they are great for antipastos, with vegetables, and in meat dishes such as Chicken with Olives and Pine Nuts, an enticingly different dish.

The cuisine of inland Le Marche, as I have discovered on my repeated visits, is also delicious, very rich in meats and game. Squab, hare, quail, and rabbit are common. Two of my favorite recipes are the Stuffed Quail in Parchment and Rabbit with Onions. And I’ve been delighted to discover some distinctive dishes, such as Scrippelle Ribbons Baked with Cheese and Meatloaf with Ricotta. Legumes (lentils, chickpeas, dried beans) and grains (farro and barley) are used year-round in soups and salads and desserts. Farro with Roasted Pepper Sauce is an excellent side dish, but add to it some shrimp, clams, or mussels and you have a great main course. In Le Marche, not only is grano used for bread or as a main staple of the meal, but when it is mixed with some dried fruits and chocolate chips, it becomes a pauper in prince’s clothing, a dessert fit for any royal table.

Sheep husbandry is a way of life in the highlands of Le Marche, and lamb dishes like Lamb Chunks with Olives—Agnello ’ncip-’nciap, are common. And there is no lack of sheep’s-milk cheese in this region. Pecorino is eaten as an appetizer, grated in soups and pastas, and especially good and crunchy when used in Scrippelle Ribbons Baked with Cheese. But the prized cheese is the Pecorino di Fossa.
I first encountered Pecorino di Fossa when my friend Mario Piccozzi brought me to Gastronomia Beltrami to meet Vittorio Beltrami, the genius cheesemaker, madman, and philosopher. He looked like an Italian version of Einstein, his hair flying in the wind as he came out the door with open arms and grabbed Mario by the neck. He immediately ushered us in, pressed us to eat and drink something—the Italian welcome—and took us out to meet his animals and his wife, Elide, and daughters, Cristiana and Sara, who tend the rustic gastronomia. There, on an old, large wooden table, were the cheeses, as well as jams, mustards, and the Beltrami’s own wines, for visitors to taste and buy. I felt immediately welcomed by the whole family.

Then off we went to visit the animals. Vittorio petted them and called each one by name, and they seemed to respond. Indeed, it was a beautiful bond between a shepherd and his flock. On our way back, when he stopped in front of a slanted old wooden door, my nose caught wind of some cheese; he opened the door to reveal a narrow cave dug through the pumice, with descending steps.

As we went down into the cave, I noticed that on each side of the wall were shelves chiseled into the stone, and on them the forms of pecorino were set to age. As the humidity increased, so did the intensity of the mold flavor. Because Pecorino di Fossa is made from unpasteurized milk, all nutritive elements and flavors are kept intact, and the resulting cheese is soft and crumbly. It is prepared at the end of spring and beginning of summer, and then put in the wells to age from August to October, at which point it is cleaned and ready to be enjoyed. The Beltrami wells maintain a constant temperature between sixty-two and sixty-eight degrees, and the humidity reaches up to 100 percent. In these conditions, the bacteria and mold modify the cheese so much that in three months it matures into the characteristics of cheese typically aged for three years.

The story of the wells goes back to medieval times, when cheese was the most precious commodity. To save it and hide it from possible burglars, wells were dug out of soft rock like pumice, and the cheese was stored and kept safe. But little did the cheesemonger know at that time that he would get an extra bonus, a cheese that was deliciously aged, Pecorino di Fossa.

As Mario and I enjoyed Vittorio Beltrami’s marvelously complex and crumbly Pecorino di Fossa and washed it down with Rosso Piceno and Rosso Conero, the main DOC reds of Le Marche, the madman seemed mad no more.
Celery Steamed in a Skillet

Sedano in Umido Serves 6

Celery is plentiful and a wonderful vegetable, yet I see it mostly used in making stocks or salads. This way of braising celery is easy and flavorful, and makes a grand side dish for grilled fish or chicken. It can be cooked in advance and reheated when your guests come—or serve it at room temperature as an appetizer. I’ve also discovered that any leftovers make a very good chutney: chop coarsely and spread on a sandwich of cold cuts or cheese. Fantastic!

- 2½ pounds celery (1 large or 2 medium heads)
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- 2 medium onions, thinly sliced
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon pepperoncino flakes, or to taste
- ½ cup pitted black olives
- 3 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 cups hot water

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy saucepan, such as an enameled cast-iron Dutch oven, 10 inches wide with a 3-to-4-qt capacity, with a cover

Separate the heads of celery, and wash and trim the stalks. Shave tough outer ribs with a vegetable peeler or paring knife, removing thick skin and strings. Cut the stalks crosswise, including leafy parts, into 4-inch pieces (or smaller chunks if you prefer).

Pour the olive oil into the saucepan, set it over medium heat, stir in the garlic cloves and sliced onions, and heat until sizzling. Heap the celery in the pan, sprinkle over it the salt and pepperoncino, and stir and toss, coating the celery chunks with oil. Cook over medium heat about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, as the celery starts cooking. Stir in the olives, turn up the heat a bit, and sauté the vegetables about 15 minutes, tossing and stirring now and then, until the celery and onions are softened and caramelized on the edges.

Meanwhile, stir and blend the tomato paste in the 2 cups of hot water to make a braising liquid. When the celery is lightly browned, pour in the tomato water and bring it to a boil. Cover the pan, and adjust the heat to maintain a steady, gentle perking. Cook about 45 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the celery is completely tender and caramelized and the liquid has reduced to a glaze. Serve right away as a side dish, or let it cool to room temperature. Leftover celery will keep in the refrigerator for a few days and freezes well.
Zucchini with Anchovies & Capers

Zucchine in Salsa di Acciughe e Capperi

Serves 6 as a side dish

Zucchini is such an abundant and tasty vegetable, yet too often is bland and unpleasing when served. This preparation is simple and full of flavor. The anchovies provide much of it, and if you crave the anchovy taste you can increase the amount used. On the other hand, if you are apprehensive about anchovies, cut the amount in half. For extra spice, add crushed red pepper as well. Serve this hot, as an appetizer or a side dish, or prepare it in advance and serve at room temperature. It’s delicious either way (and thus an excellent buffet item). The savory zucchini makes a great pasta sauce, too—simply toss with hot drained ziti (or other short hollow pasta) and top with grated cheese.

- 2½ pounds small zucchini
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- 6 anchovy fillets, finely chopped
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ cup drained small capers

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Trim the ends of the zucchini, and slice them into ¼-inch-thick sticks, 2 to 3 inches long.

Pour the olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over medium heat. Toss in the garlic cloves, cook for a minute or so, until sizzling, then drop the chopped anchovy into the pan. Cook, stirring, another minute or two, until the anchovy melts in the oil.
Scatter the zucchini sticks in the skillet, and toss and stir to coat them in oil. Season with salt, and cook about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the zucchini are cooked through, limp, and lightly caramelized. Finally, toss in the capers and cook another minute or two to blend the flavors. Serve hot or at room temperature.

**Farro with Roasted Pepper Sauce**

Farro con Salsa di Peperoni Serves 8 to 10 as a side dish

Farro, a variety of wheat also known as emmer, was one of the first domesticated crops. It is a low-yielding grain and difficult to cultivate; hence it fell out of favor in much of the world. But in Italy, farro has always been appreciated. The Roman legions ground it to make *puls*, a version of polenta, and today it is still used to make great soups, or side dishes like this recipe. Served warm or at room temperature, it is wonderful with grilled meats, and a great item on a buffet table. If you want to turn it into a main course, just add shrimp, clams, mussels, or canned tuna.

Though farro is the best choice for this recipe, you can substitute spelt, barley, or other grains, adjusting cooking times. And in place of bell peppers, you can flavor the dish with other vegetables such as zucchini or eggplant in the summer, or squash and/or mushrooms in the fall.

- **FOR THE PEPPER SAUCE**
  - 2 medium red bell peppers
  - 2 medium yellow bell peppers
  - 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
  - 4 teaspoons kosher salt
  - ½ cup golden raisins
  - 1 medium onion, thinly sliced
  - 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
  - 1 garlic clove, crushed and peeled
  - ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
  - 4 cups (one 35-ounce can) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand

- **FOR THE FARRO AND FINISHING THE DISH**
  - 1 pound farro
  - 1 bay leaf, preferably fresh
  - 1 teaspoon kosher salt
  - 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
  - 1 cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
  - 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A baking sheet lined with baking parchment; a heavy 3- or 4-quart saucepan for the farro; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Preheat the oven to 350°. Rub the peppers all over with 2 tablespoons olive oil, season with ½ teaspoon salt, and place on the parchment-lined baking sheet. Roast for 30 minutes or so, turning the peppers occasionally, until their skins are wrinkled and slightly charred. Let the peppers cool completely.
Meanwhile, cook the farro. Rinse the grain, drain in a sieve, and put it in the heavy saucepan with 6 cups cold water, the bay leaf, salt, and olive oil. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally, then set the cover ajar, and adjust the heat to maintain a steady, gentle simmer. Cook about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the farro is cooked through but still *al dente*. Turn off the heat, pour off any liquid not absorbed by the grain, and keep covered.

While the farro cooks, prepare the sauce. Put the raisins in a small bowl, pour hot water over them to cover, and let soak. Peel the charred skin off the cooled peppers; slice them in half lengthwise, discard the stem, and scrape out the seeds. Cut the peppers into 2-inch squares, and let the pieces drain and dry in a sieve.

Pour 2 tablespoons olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over medium heat. Scatter in the sliced onion, bay leaves, garlic clove, and peperoncino, and cook, stirring, for a couple of minutes, until the onion begins to soften.

Stir in the crushed tomatoes and 1 cup water with which you’ve sloshed out the tomato bowl. Season with 2 teaspoons salt, bring the sauce to an active simmer, and cook until slightly thickened, about 10 minutes.

Drain the plumped raisins, squeeze out excess water, and toss them into the simmering sauce. Heap the farro into the pan, and stir to blend the grain and sauce. Season with another teaspoon of salt, or more to taste, and gently stir in the cut pepper pieces. Cook over medium-low heat, stirring, until the farro is very hot. Turn off the heat, drizzle over the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, sprinkle the grated cheese and parsley on top, and stir well. Serve hot immediately, or let the grain cool and serve at room temperature.

**Spaghetti with Clam Sauce**

*Spaghetti con Sugo di Vongole* Serves 6

This is a very flavorful rendition of pasta and clam sauce, a bit more complex than the one Aunt Anna made for me on my first visit to Le Marche. It can also be made with other seafood, such as shrimp or calamari, in place of the clams—just keep in mind the varying cooking times of whatever shellfish you use. If you are not in the mood for seafood, omit it altogether and double the artichokes. And who is to say that you can’t do this recipe with chicken breast? Just add slivers of breast meat before the artichokes, cook and stir for a few minutes, then proceed with the basic recipe.

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- 1 cup (a 6-ounce jar) marinated artichoke hearts, drained and thinly sliced
- ¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- ¼ teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ cup white wine
- Juice of 1 orange, freshly squeezed (about ¼ cup)
- 3 dozen littleneck clams, scrubbed, rinsed, and drained
- Kushe salt for the pasta cooking water
- 1 pound spaghetti

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy saucepan, such as an enameled cast-iron Dutch oven, 10 inches wide, 3-to-4-quart capacity, with a cover; a large pot for cooking pasta

Pour the olive oil into the saucepan, and set it over medium-high heat. Toss in the garlic slices, and heat and stir for a minute or so, until sizzling. Drop in the artichokes, stir, and season with the peperoncino and oregano. When the artichoke slices are sizzling, pour in the wine and orange juice, and heat to a boil.
Immediately dump in the clams, shake the pan to spread them evenly over the bottom, and put on the cover. Adjust the heat to keep the liquid at a steady simmer, and cook just until the clamshells open, 5 minutes or so. Remove open clams to a colander set in a bowl; cook any tightly closed clams a bit longer, about 3 minutes. When all the clams are out of the pan and draining, turn off the heat (and discard any shellfish that have not opened at all).

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water to a boil (6 quarts, with a tablespoon of kosher salt).

Shake the clams in the colander to collect all their juices in the bowl below, and pour this liquid back into the saucepan. Bring the clam juices to a boil over medium-high heat, and reduce to a thin sauce consistency (turn off the heat before it gets thick). Meanwhile, pluck the cooled clam meat from the shells, and chop it finely.

Now cook the spaghetti—if you’re in a hurry, it can cook at the same time as you reduce the sauce and shuck and chop the clams. Have the clam cooking sauce barely simmering in the pan, and stir in the chopped clams just before the spaghetti is al dente.

Lift the cooked pasta from the pot, let it drain briefly, drop it into the saucepan, and toss well until all the strands are nicely coated with clam sauce. Sprinkle on the chopped parsley, toss again, and serve the pasta right away in warm bowls.

**Scrippelle Ribbons Baked with Cheese**

Fettuccine di Scrippelle Serves 6

Crâpes, or scrippelle, are a big part of the menu in Le Marche, as a garnish in soups, filled with grated cheese, or used like pasta, as they are in this delicious casserole. In fact, if you are reluctant to make your own fresh pasta, this might be a first step. The scrippelle are easy to make and can be fried in advance, then sliced into ribbons for the recipe.

- FOR THE SCRIPPELLE
  - 6 large eggs
  - 1½ cups cold water
  - % cup (loosely packed) fresh marjoram or basil leaves, chopped
  - 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
  - 1 teaspoon kosher salt
  - Freshly ground black pepper to taste

- EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL FOR THE CRêPE PAN

- FOR THE SAUCE AND CASSEROLE
  - 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for the baking pan
  - 1 medium onion, chopped (about 1 cup)
  - % cup white wine
  - 2 tablespoons tomato paste
  - 1 teaspoon finely grated lemon zest
½ teaspoon kosher salt

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed nonstick skillet or cast-iron crêpe pan, 10-inch diameter; a heavy saucepan, 10 inches wide, with a 3-to-4-quart capacity; a large oval baking dish or shallow casserole with a 3-quart capacity

To make the scrippelle: Whisk together the eggs, the water, chopped herbs, flour, salt, and pepper in a large bowl until well blended.

Brush the skillet with olive oil. Set over medium-high heat, and cook until hot but not smoking. Ladle a level ½ cup of the batter into the pan, then quickly tilt and swirl the pan to coat the bottom. Let cook about 1 minute, until the batter is set all over and the bottom is browned, then flip with a spatula and cook another minute, until the second side is well browned. Drop the crêpe out of the pan onto a dinner plate. Cook all the scrippelle in the same way, piling them up when done. If they stick or the pan seems dry, brush with more oil. You should get about 10 scrippelle.

When you’re ready to assemble and bake the dish, heat the oven to 425° and arrange a rack in the middle.

For the sauce: Pour the olive oil into the saucepan, and set it over medium heat. Stir in the chopped onion, and cook until wilted, about 4 or 5 minutes. Pour in the white wine, and boil for a minute or two, to reduce the alcohol. Meanwhile, stir the tomato paste in 1½ cups hot water until dissolved. Pour the tomato water into the pan, and stir in the lemon zest and salt. Simmer the sauce until slightly thickened, about 10 minutes.

To make the scrippelle ribbons, roll up each scrippella and slice it crosswise into ½-inch-thick spirals. Unfurl these into strips, resembling fettuccine, and heap them in a large bowl. Sprinkle half of the grated cheese on the ribbons, and toss well. Brush the baking dish with a thin film of olive oil.

Spread about a quarter of the sauce over the bottom of the baking dish. Spread a third of the ribbons loosely in the dish, and sprinkle over them a couple tablespoons of the remaining cheese. Create two more layers the same way, distributing sauce, ribbons, and grated cheese evenly in the dish, reserving the last quarter of sauce to drizzle over the top. Take care not to compress the scrippelle strips, so the casserole remains light and airy.

Bake, uncovered, until the top is crisp and golden, about 20 minutes. Serve immediately.
Ziti with Tuna Ascoli-Style

Ziti all’Ascolana Serves 6

Ascoli is a city in the Marche region known for its big green olives. They add a distinctive local flavor to this sauce of tomatoes and canned tuna, a pasta dressing found in many regions of Italy. If you can’t find Ascolane olives, other green Italian olives will do. Do not be afraid to alter some of the other ingredients to make your own version of this tasty sauce. For example, anchovies add complexity, but you could omit them if you choose. And though chopped parsley is fine, a little mint and/or a little oregano could go far. Also, do not feel compelled to use the exact pasta shape: I call for ziti here, but fusilli, shells, or mafalde could all add a new dimension to this dish.

- Kosher salt for the pasta water
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- ½ cup green brine-cured Italian olives, such as Ascolane, Castelvetrano, or Cerignola, pitted and chopped
- 3 anchovy fillets, chopped (about 1 tablespoon)
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 3 cups (one 28-ounce can) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- A 6-ounce can tuna in olive oil, preferably imported from Italy
- 1 pound ziti

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Bring a big pot of salted water to the boil.

Pour the olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over medium heat. Scatter in the garlic, and cook, stirring, for a minute or so, until sizzling, then add the olives, anchovies, and peperoncino. Cook and stir for a couple of minutes, as the anchovies melt in the oil. Pour in the tomatoes, rinse the can with 1 cup water, and pour that in. Bring the sauce to a bubbling simmer, and let it perk, uncovered, for about 10 minutes.
Drain the tuna, and break it up into bite-sized chunks. When the sauce has been bubbling a while, stir in the tuna without breaking up the pieces. Simmer the sauce another 5 minutes, or until it is nicely thickened and full of flavor.

Start cooking the ziti (or other pasta) about the same time you add the tuna to the skillet. When the pasta is al dente, lift it from the pot with a spider, let it drain briefly, and drop it into the barely simmering sauce. Toss together until the pasta is evenly coated with sauce, sprinkle the chopped parsley (or other herb) over all, and briefly toss again. Serve immediately in warm bowls.

**Fish with Pepper Sauce**

Pesce ai Peperoni Serves 6

This tasty sauce goes well with all kinds of fish. In the recipe, I use firm white fish, frying the fillets first, then briefly simmering them in the sauce. The acidity and intensity of the sauce also complement more oily fish, such as bluefish and mackerel. I like to grill bluefish whole (rather than fry them), then remove the skin and bones, and serve topped with sauce.

- 3 medium bell peppers, both red and yellow
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 medium onion, chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 medium stalks celery, roughly chopped (about 1 cup)
- ¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 6 sprigs fresh marjoram
- 8 fresh sage leaves
- Finely grated zest of 1 orange (about 1 tablespoon)
- 2 cups canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- About 2 pounds firm white fish fillets with skin, such as grouper or halibut
- ½ cup all-purpose flour

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A medium skillet, 9- or 10-inch diameter, with a cover; a high-sided sauté pan or braising pan, about 12-inch diameter, with a cover; a food mill or potato masher; a heavy-bottomed nonstick skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

To roast the peppers: Heat the oven to 350°. Rub the peppers all over with 1 tablespoon of olive oil, season with ½ teaspoon salt, and place them on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Roast for 30 minutes or so, turning occasionally, until the skins are wrinkled and slightly charred. Let the peppers cool completely, then peel off the loosened, charred skin. Slice the peppers lengthwise, discard the stem, and scrape out the seeds. Cut the halves crosswise in ½-inch strips, and let them drain and dry in a sieve.

Pour ½ cup olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium heat. Stir in the onion and celery, season with 1 teaspoon of the salt and the peperoncino, and cook them for a few minutes to soften. Stir in the marjoram, sage, and orange zest, and heat until everything is sizzling, then pour in the tomatoes along with a cup of water used to rinse the tomato can and bowl. Partially cover the pan, heat to a boil, and adjust the heat to keep the sauce perking steadily. Cook about 20 minutes, until the onion and celery are tender, then remove the pan from the heat.

Pour the sauce into a food mill set over a clean saucepan and pass it through (or mash the sauce with a potato masher and press it through a wire strainer). Rinse the skillet with a cup of water, and stir into the strained sauce. You should have about 2½ cups sauce in all. Stir in the pepper strips, and keep the sauce over low heat while you flour and fry the fish.
Season the fillets with the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, and lightly dredge them in the flour, coating both sides and shaking off the excess. Pour the remaining olive oil into the nonstick skillet, and set over high heat. Lay the fillets in the pan, flesh side down, and let them cook, without moving, until the first side is nicely browned, about 3 minutes. Carefully turn the fish, and cook until the skin side is crisp, 2 to 3 minutes more.

Turn off the heat, spoon any excess oil out of the pan, and pour in the pepper sauce so it surrounds the fillets. Bring to a bubbling simmer, and cook the fish in the sauce just until cooked through, 5 minutes or so, depending on thickness.

Remove the pan from the heat, and lift the fillets with a spatula onto a large warm platter. Spoon the sauce over the fish, sprinkle the parsley on top, and serve immediately.

**Rabbit with Onions**

*Coniglio con Cipolla* Serves 4 to 6

Every region in Italy cooks rabbit, and I love it—it is tasty, healthy, and low in fat. So in every one of my books I include a rabbit recipe.

Though a whole cut-up rabbit is traditional, I recommend rabbit legs for this delicious braise. They are worth looking for—easier to handle, more moist when cooked, and yielding a good portion of meat versus bones. (If you can’t find legs, a whole rabbit, cut in serving pieces, will work fine in this recipe.) Should you have any leftovers, do what I do: shred the meat off the bones back into the sauce, and freeze. It will be a great dressing for pasta when you are late and tired and want a quick, delicious meal.

- 3 ounces thickly sliced *pancetta* or *prosciutto* ends
- 4 plump *garlic* cloves, peeled
- 2 tablespoons loosely packed *fresh sage* leaves (6 to 8 large leaves)
- 6 tablespoons *extra-virgin olive oil*
- 6 bone-in *rabbit legs* or a *whole rabbit*, about 3½ pounds, cut into serving pieces
- 1 teaspoon kosher *salt*
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose *flour*
- ½ cup *white wine*
- 1 tablespoon *red-wine vinegar*
- ½ cup *chicken broth* or *water*
- 1 pound *cipolline onions*, peeled

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A food processor; a deep skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter, with a cover

Using a food processor, mince the pancetta, garlic, sage, and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil into a fine-textured *pestata.*

Pour the remaining olive oil into the skillet, set it over medium-high heat, and scrape in the *pestata.* Cook and stir until the *pestata* has dried and just begins to stick to the bottom of the pan, about 3 to 4 minutes. Meanwhile, put the rabbit legs (or cut pieces) in a big bowl, season all over with the salt, then sprinkle the flour over them and toss to coat the legs evenly.

Lay the legs or pieces in the pan in one layer, reduce the heat, and cover the pan. Cook gently for about 10 minutes, allowing the meat to give up its juices and brown very slowly, until the legs are lightly colored on one side.
Flip them over, cover the skillet, and slowly brown the second side, another 10 minutes or so.

Stir together the wine, vinegar, and chicken broth or water, and pour into skillet, swirling to blend the liquid and meat juices. Turn up the heat a bit, drop the cipolline into the spaces between rabbit pieces, scatter the capers in the pan, and bring the braising liquid to a simmer. Cover, and cook gently about 30 minutes, or until the rabbit is tender and the braising liquid has thickened. Uncover, and cook to reduce the pan juices to a thick glaze, turning and tumbling the legs and onions to coat them all over.

Serve the rabbit legs and cipolline right from the skillet, or heap them on a platter or in a shallow serving bowl. Spoon out any sauce and capers left in the pan, and drizzle over the rabbit.

**Ascolane Olives**

Ascolane olives were a delicacy even in Roman times. The elder Pliny praised the excellence of *picenae* (as they were then called), and there is documentation in old records of the practice of removing the pits from these delicious olives. The hollow cores of these big olives were undoubtedly stuffed in many ways over the centuries, but the most celebrated is the traditional olive *all’Ascolana* (invented about 200 years ago), in which the olives are stuffed with chopped meat and herbs, then breaded and fried.

**Chicken with Olives & Pine Nuts**

*Pollo con Olive e Pignoli* Serves 6

Pan-cooked chicken, caramelized and sticky to the fingers, moist and flavorful inside, is a favorite food around the world. If there are chicken-lovers in your family (as in mine), this Le Marche version is sure to be a hit. Its special taste and texture come from the region’s big fat Ascolane olives, which imbue the chicken with flavor, and the crunch of native pine nuts.

Though authentic Ascolane olives are fantastic in this dish, they’re only occasionally available in the United States. But other varieties of green, brine-cured Italian olives (such as Castelvetrano or Cerignola) will be delicious, too; just keep in mind that the saltiness of olives will vary, and season accordingly.

“How about black olives?” you ask. And I say, “Black oil-cured olives will be delicious as well; even a green-and-black combination would be nice.”

Choose your preferred chicken pieces, too. A whole bird, cut up, is fine, though all dark meat—drumsticks and thighs—is my favorite. And if you are in a hurry (or watching your fat intake), use breast pieces. With these, you can cut the oil and butter in the recipe in half and, because breast meat cooks faster, brown the pieces initially for only 10 minutes, turn them, add the olives, then cook for an additional 10 minutes.

- 3½ to 4 pounds assorted cut-up chicken pieces
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 3 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
- 1 cup brine-cured green Italian olives or oil-cured black Italian olives
-½ cup white wine

**Recommended Equipment:** A 12-inch cast-iron or other heavy skillet or sauté pan, with a cover; an olive pitter
Rinse the chicken pieces, and pat dry with paper towels. Trim off excess skin and all visible fat. Cut drumsticks off the thighs; cut breast halves into two pieces each. Season the chicken all over with the salt.

Put the olive oil and butter in the pan, and set over medium-low heat. When the butter is melted and hot, lay in the chicken pieces, skin side down, in a single layer; drop the garlic cloves and bay leaves in the spaces between them.

Cover the pan, and let the chicken cook over gentle heat, browning slowly and releasing its fat and juices. After about 10 minutes, uncover the pan, turn the pieces, and move them around the pan to cook evenly, then replace the cover. Turn again in 10 minutes or so, and continue cooking covered.

While the chicken is browning, pit the olives (if they still have pits in them). If you’re using small olives like Castelvetrano, use a pitter and keep them whole. If you have larger olives (such as Ascolane or Cerignola), smash them with the blade of a chef’s knife to remove the pits, and break them into coarse chunks.

After the chicken has cooked for 30 minutes, scatter the olives onto the pan bottom, around the chicken, and pour in the wine. Raise the heat so the liquid is bubbling, cover, and cook, gradually concentrating the juices, for about 5 minutes.

Remove the lid, and cook uncovered, evaporating the pan juices, occasionally turning the chicken pieces and olives. If there is a lot of fat in the bottom of the pan, tilt the skillet and spoon off the fat from one side.

Scatter the pine nuts around the chicken, and continue cooking uncovered, turning the chicken over gently until the pan juices thicken and coat the meat like a glaze.
Turn off the heat, and serve the chicken right from the skillet, or heap the pieces on a platter or in a shallow serving bowl. Spoon out any sauce and pine nuts left in the pan, and drizzle over the chicken.

**Meatloaf with Ricotta**

Polpettone di Manzo con Ricotta Serves 8 or more

Most of you have made meatloaf on occasion; you may even have a family-favorite recipe that you make frequently. Well, I want to introduce you to the Marchegiano style of meatloaf, with ricotta added to the mix, which renders the loaf tender and tasty—not heavy and dense, as they so often are.

Another textural delight in this loaf are cubes of mozzarella, oozing and moist when the meatloaf is served hot and fresh from the oven. However, if you plan on having extra meatloaf to enjoy the next day—I think it is almost better that way—I think it is almost better that way—omit the mozzarella, because the cubes harden and won’t melt again. In this case, use an additional cup of ricotta in the loaf mix.

- 1 cup milk
- 3 cups day-old bread cubes, from a loaf of country bread
- 3 pounds ground beef (freshly ground preferred)
- 3 large eggs, beaten with a pinch of salt
- 1 pound drained fresh ricotta (about 2 cups), plus more for the sauce if you like
- 1 bunch scallions, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
- ½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- ¼ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley
- ½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- ½ pound fresh mozzarella, cut in ½-inch cubes (about 2 cups)
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

**Recommended Equipment:** A sturdy roasting pan, 10 by 17 inches or larger

Preheat oven to 375°. Pour the milk over the bread cubes in a bowl, and let soak for a few minutes, until the bread is saturated.

Squeeze the soft bread a handful at a time, pressing out as much milk as you can (discard milk, or give it to a pet), then tear bread into small shreds and toss back into the bowl. Crumble the ground beef into the bowl, and add the eggs, ricotta, scallions, grated cheese, parsley, nutmeg, salt, and pepper. Fold and toss everything together, and squeeze the mixture a few times between your fingers to distribute all the ingredients evenly. Scatter the mozzarella cubes on top, and fold and mash them throughout the loaf mix.

Brush the roasting pan with 2 tablespoons of olive oil. Gather the meat mixture in the bowl, turn it into the pan, and shape it into a fat oval loaf. Drizzle with the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil. Cover the pan with foil—tent it so it doesn’t touch the meat—and bake 45 minutes. Remove the foil, and continue to bake until the meatloaf is browned all over and completely cooked through, another 1 hour and 30 minutes or so. (If you check the loaf with a meat thermometer, it should reach a temperature of 160°.) Remove the loaf from the oven, and let it rest for about 10 minutes.

Heat the tomato sauce to a simmer in a saucepan as the meat rests. Turn off the heat, and, if you like, stir ½ cup
or so fresh ricotta into the sauce. Cut the loaf crosswise in the pan or on a cutting board, in slices as thick as you like. Serve on warm dinner plates, topped with a spoonful or two of sauce, and pass more sauce at the table (or, for family-style serving, arrange the slices on a warm platter, topped with some of the sauce). To accompany this meatloaf, I love braised broccoli rabe (*broccoli di rape*) or escarole, served on a separate plate or platter.

**Lamb Chunks with Olives**

_Agnello ’ncip-’nciap_ Serves 6 or more

This is one of those delicious dishes that are complex in taste but easy in preparation. In Le Marche it is made with lamb and Ascolane olives, because that is what the land provides, but it could be made with other green olives; black olives, such as *taggiasche* or Gaeta, would be fine, too. As in the recipe for Chicken with Olives and Pine Nuts, the simple pan-cooking method used here is typical of Le Marche. Try preparing other meats, such as beef or pork, the same way—keeping in mind that the cooking time will vary—and the results will be excellent. And though lamb shoulder is delicious and economical, more expensive lamb would be extraordinary prepared in the same style. This dish is good any time of year, too. In the winter, serve it with polenta and braised bitter greens such as *broccoli di rape*; in summer, a tossed green salad would go nicely.

- 3½ pounds boneless lamb shoulder or leg
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 7 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 2 tablespoons fresh rosemary leaves, stripped from the branch
- 1 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons red-wine vinegar

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A deep skillet or sauté or braising pan, 11- or 12-inch diameter, with a cover

Trim the exterior fat from the lamb shoulder or leg, and cut the meat into 2-inch pieces, removing fat and bits of cartilage as you find them. Pat the pieces dry with paper towels, and season all over with 1 teaspoon of the salt.

Pour the olive oil into the pan, and set it over medium heat. Scatter in the crushed garlic cloves and peperoncino. When the garlic is sizzling, lay in all the lamb pieces in one layer, scatter the rosemary on top, and season with the remaining teaspoon salt. When the meat starts to sizzle, cover the pan, lower the heat, and let it cook gently, browning slowly and releasing its fat and juices.

After about 10 minutes, uncover the pan, turn the pieces, and move them around the pan to cook evenly, then replace the cover. Turn again in 10 minutes or so, and continue covered cooking for another 10 to 15 minutes, until the lamb is nicely browned all over and the pan juices have thickened and caramelized. If there is a lot of fat in the bottom of the pan, tilt the skillet and spoon off the fat from one side.

Stir the wine and vinegar together, and pour them into the skillet, swirling them with the pan juices. Turn up the heat, bring the liquids to a boil, and cook them down quickly to form a syrupy sauce. Drop the olives into the pan, all around the lamb chunks, then cover and adjust the heat to a bubbling simmer. Cook for another 10 minutes or so, again concentrating the juices and marrying the flavors. Finally, cook uncovered for a few minutes, tumbling the meat and olives in the pan, coating them with the sauce.

Serve immediately, right from the skillet, or heap the meat chunks on a platter or in a shallow serving bowl.
Spoon out any sauce and olives left in the pan, and drizzle over the lamb.

Alternating rows of young olive trees and blooming lavender in Le Marche

**Stuffed Quail in Parchment**

Quaglie Incartate • Serves 6

I love this dish, and you will, too—and your guests will be impressed. Set the table for a special eating experience, including a few scissors to pass around and a bowl for the parchment paper. Then pre-sent guests with closed, tempting packets: when they cut open the parchment, the sight and bursting aroma of savory-stuffed quail will fill them with anticipation, and they will dive right in.

As an accompaniment, I would serve a bowl of hot polenta, farro, or wild rice, or a bowl of beans and black kale. Serve family-style, putting the bowl in the middle of the table, so everyone can spoon some onto the plate next to the quail.

- 12 semi-boneless quail (4 to 5 ounces each)
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 tablespoon plus ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 firm, tart apples, such as Granny Smith (about 1 pound)
- ½ cup fine dry bread crumbs
- ½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 2 tablespoons toasted pine nuts, coarsely chopped
- 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- ½ tablespoon fresh thyme leaves, chopped
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- ½ cup apple cider, or as needed
RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: Wooden toothpicks; a dozen rectangular pieces of parchment paper, about 10 by 14 inches each; 2 large, rimmed baking sheets, such as half-sheet pans (12 by 18 inches)

Preheat oven to 400°, and arrange two racks in the center of the oven. Pluck off any pinfeathers that remain on the quail (and remove skewers, or other material that hold the quail in shape). Rinse each bird in cold water and pat dry. Put them all in a large bowl, and toss with 2 tablespoons olive oil and 2 teaspoons salt, so they’re evenly coated.

Peel, cut in half, and core the apples, then shred the halves through the large shredding holes of a box grater. Squeeze handfuls of the apples over a bowl, to collect the juices, and put the squeezed-out shreds in another bowl. You should end up with about 2 cups apple shreds and ½ cup or so juice.

Stir the apple, bread crumbs, grated cheese, pine nuts, parsley, and thyme together. Drizzle over this the lemon juice and 2 tablespoons olive oil; season with 1 teaspoon salt and several grinds of black pepper. Toss well, so the stuffing is evenly moistened and seasoned.

To stuff the quail: Set them, breast side up, on a cutting board. Spoon or push about 2 tablespoons of stuffing into each body cavity. Fold the quail’s legs together neatly and compactly—like a lady crossing her legs—and stick a toothpick through the tendons to hold them together. Tuck the wings under the back, so they stay in place.

Pour in enough apple cider to the reserved juices to make 1 cup total, then stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil and ½ teaspoon salt.

Lay a cut piece of parchment in a shallow pasta or soup bowl, and set a bird in the middle of the paper, with the legs facing one long side of the paper. Top the quail with a sage leaf and a short branch of rosemary, and drizzle over it about 1½ tablespoons of the seasoned juice. Pull the short edges of the parchment up over the quail, join them and fold them over an inch or so, so they hold together, and then fold over several more times, so the bird is enclosed with just a bit of space around it. Now tuck the open ends of the folded paper underneath the quail, forming a neat, fully closed packet.

Place all the wrapped quail on the baking sheet, leaving at least 2 inches between them—you will probably need two sheets to hold them all. Set the sheets on the oven racks, and roast the quail about 25 minutes; then switch the sheets top to bottom and rotate them back to front, to ensure even cooking.

Roast another 20 minutes or so (45 minutes in all), until the juices are bubbling and the quail are tender and nicely browned. (To test for doneness, remove one packet from the oven and unwrap. If it has a good roasted color and the juices look like light maple syrup, it should be done. If too pale, rewrap, roast another 5 to 10 minutes, and check again.)

Serve right away, placing two wrapped packets on each dinner plate, with scissors for cutting the parchment (and a bowl for the paper) on the table.

AMBROSIA OF WHEAT BERRIES, FRUIT & CHOCOLATE

Dolce di Grano Makes about 8 cups, serving 8 to 12
In the culinary world today, dishes with whole grains are “in,” but they have always been part of Italian regional cuisine, even as desserts. Put together from whatever grains and nuts were in the house, and minimally sweetened with available fruit, traditional desserts like this wheat-berry ambrosia are among my favorites. In that spirit, this recipe can be a guideline for your own creativity.

This is a versatile and practical dessert, too. Prepare the mixture of wheat berries, dried fruit, and chocolate in advance, and refrigerate it. Let it return to room temperature before serving (though it is nice slightly chilled in summer). It’s also great for a buffet with whipped cream or scoops of vanilla or chocolate ice cream on top.

- 1 cup wheat berries (about 6 ounces), soaked overnight
- 1 fresh bay leaf
- 2 cups pitted and halved fresh sweet cherries
- 1 cup dried apricots, cut in thirds
- ½ cup pitted dried dates, coarsely chopped
- 4 ounces semisweet chocolate, cut in ¼-inch chunks
- 1 cup chopped toasted hazelnuts
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ cup honey
- 2 tablespoons Saba or aceto balsamico tradizionale

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 4-quart saucepan with a lid; balloon-shaped wineglasses for serving

Drain the soaked wheat berries, and put them in the saucepan with 3 quarts fresh cold water and the bay leaf. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally, cover slightly ajar, and adjust the heat to maintain a steady simmer. Cook until the wheat berries are tender but still slightly firm to the bite, about 40 to 45 minutes. Drain off any liquid that has not been absorbed, discard the bay leaf, and let the wheat berries cool.

Put the wheat berries, cherries, apricots, dates, chocolate, and hazelnuts in a large bowl, and fold them together. Sprinkle the cinnamon over them, and drizzle the honey and Saba on top. Tumble the mixture together gently to distribute the spice and sweetening throughout.

To serve: Scoop ¾ to 1 cup of the grano mixture into each wineglass. Top each with a dollop of whipped cream, and serve immediately.
In URBINO you can visit one of Italy’s finest palaces. It was built by Federico da Montefeltro, a true Renaissance man, under whose patronage architects and painters flourished. Inside, Piero della Francesca’s masterpiece, the Ideal City, is a clear embodiment of the humanist thought supported at his court. The ideal city is depicted as absolutely still and flat, yet it is a complex reflection of geometry, perspective lines, and amazing detail. I love the Urbino Palace. Even the storage rooms and washrooms in the basement are interesting. The greatest treasure of the Urbino Palace is Federico’s study, with its richly colored woods inlaid on flat walls, creating a marvelous three-dimensional effect: cupboards open and scrolls tumble out; a gorgeous landscape lies beyond the windows.

Children love to explore Italy’s largest limestone caves at FRASASSI Caves. The caves are dramatically illuminated, and the main cave, the Grotto of the Wind, is so huge that the guide always proudly announces that the Cathedral of Milan would easily fit inside. My children enjoy the rickety bus ride to the entrance of the cave, the spaceshiplike airlock doors that clang shut as you move forward, and the deep descent into the earth.

On a hill with a view past Porto Recanati to the sea is the quiet town of LORETO, one of the most revered sites in the Roman Catholic world. There, in the elaborate Basilica of Loreto, is the simple brick house where the Virgin Mary is reputed to have been born, brought here miraculously on angels’ wings from Nazareth. The most beautiful Luca Signorelli frescoes, depicting religious scholars, the Evangelists, and Saint Paul, are in the church, each figure very lifelike, with an individual personality. Don’t miss the sacristy on the other side, painted in the fifteenth century by Melozzo da Forlì. It is a masterpiece in perspective.

Leave the coast behind and head inland to visit some of the most picturesque castles in Italy. You can drive in a circle essentially from Senigallia and back, visiting the lovely brick castle of MONDAVIO, CORINALDO Castle with its gorgeous intact fortified walls, as well as the castle at FRONTONE and the CASTELLONE DI SUASA. Along the way, you’ll feel you are taking a trip back in time as the little town of PALAZZO slowly unfolds up the hill. The fourteenth-century city gate and fortified walls make this tiny city a gem to visit. It takes only four minutes to walk from one side of the town to the other, but you will absorb centuries of Italian small-town tradition. Near Palazzo is SAN SETTIMIO, where the hills have been transformed into a country vacation spot where you can ride horses, hunt, explore the land, and swim in a glorious pool that overlooks the Marche countryside. Each guest room is a small converted stone farmhouse, which you’ll feel is your home away from home.—TANYA
Overleaf: Olive trees punctuate the Umbrian landscape.
It could be said that Umbria is the heart of Italy. Geographically it is, lying smack in the middle of the peninsula, landlocked in the bosom of Italy. Overshadowed by its sibling, Tuscany, Umbria is like the timid child who has been hiding its beauty and its treasures. But now the world is listening and discovering the beauty of its undulating mountains, and its cities where art and music abound, particularly works from Etruscan and medieval times, as well as Renaissance art, rivaling what can be found in any city in Italy. Equally alluring is the cuisine, which reflects the generosity of the land. The intense aromas and flavors of the Norcino, considered the best black truffle in Italy, whether grated on top of strangozzi, a handmade chunky spaghetti, or made into a paste with butter and anchovies and spread on a crostino, make for an unforgettable eating experience. The best lentils in Italy—sweet, meaty, and flavorful—are the small ones from Castelluccio, a medieval town perched on top of a hill in the middle of a plain high in the Sibylline Mountains.

The Sibylline Mountains, since 1993 a national park, are part of the central Apennines, situated between Umbria and Le Marche. In Roman times, these mountains were the haunt of Sibyl, the enchantress who lured travelers to their doom. Today, the park is full of wildlife, but is most spectacular in June, with its extraordinary display of wildflowers. When I was visiting there in June 2006, I literally landed from the sky into this kaleidoscope of flowers. My friend Anselmi, an extraordinary producer of wine in the Veneto, had to go there himself to visit Marco Caprai, a fellow wine producer, and had offered to take me with him. The blades of the helicopter were humming before I could put on my jacket, and off we went. As we were approaching from the heavens, we could see Castelluccio firmly ensconced on the hill, while on the plain millions of flowers in every color of the spectrum were swaying in the breeze, and beautiful horses galloped through the pastures, their shining manes flowing in the wind. It seemed as if Sibyl might appear any minute to mount them.

The Apennine Mountains are also a great source of wild meats—boar, hare, pheasants, and others. The Umbrians are known for their skills as butchers, sausage-makers, and curers of meats, especially pork. As you travel through Italy, you may notice butcher shops called norcinerie, meaning that they only handle pork meat.

But chicken is also appreciated in Umbria, especially when paired with ripe grapes in season, which was a serendipitous find for me on one of my visits to Gubbio with my son-in-law, Corrado Manuali, whose family hails from there.

Corrado’s grandmother Giuseppina Radicchi and grandfather Giuseppe Manuali were born on two opposite hills surrounding Gubbio. They met in the winter of 1922, when Giuseppina was standing in the snow, her shoes in shreds, and Giuseppe noticed her shivering feet and fell in love. They married and had three children, one of them being Gianfranco, Corrado’s father. Corrado always reminisces nostalgically about the summers he spent with Nonna Giuseppina in Gubbio when he and Giuseppe, the caretaker’s son, would play on the funivia, the tram that goes up to the top. Today, Giuseppe owns one of the best restaurants in Gubbio, La Fornace di Mastro Giorgio, where local specialties are featured.

One of my favorite eateries in all of Umbria—to which I make a pilgrimage almost every summer with Corrado, Tanya, and Lorenzo and Julia (their kids, my grandchildren)—is a bakery–trattoria–truck stop called Il Panaro, near Gubbio. We drive there for the torta al testo (or crescia, as it known locally), a freshly baked bread resembling focaccia, split and stuffed with a choice of savory fillings: prosciutto or sausages; or pecorino, ricotta, or stracchino; or meat and cheese together; or foraged seasonal greens, braised with garlic.

It is not just the delicious crescia that draws me back to Il Panaro year after year. I love the setting, perched on a little hill, just off the highway, where you always see a line of parked trucks. Hidden behind trees is the wood-burning oven where the crescia bakes, as well as the long wooden tables at which the truck drivers and other guests sit, waiting for their torte. Being outside and basking in the Umbrian scenery, with the smell of the charcoal in the air and a light taste of ash on the tongue, I am filled with a wonderful sense of family and of the heritage of food from one generation to another.

Any direction you look in Umbria, your eyes are bound to fall on olive trees. The cultivation of the olive in
Umbria goes back to the first century B.C. Today, it is a very important part of the regional economy, and Umbria produces some of the most prized olive oil in Italy. The climatic condition of this region allows the olives to mature slowly, so their flavor is intensified while the acidity is kept low.

Filled Focaccia—Torta al Testa

Where there is olive oil there is wine, and Umbria has long been renowned for its white wine Orvieto, a crispy, easy-to-drink, food-friendly wine. But ever more red wine is taking center stage in Umbria these days, especially Torgiano Rosso and Sagrantino. The Lungarotti family has been producing wonderful wines for generations in Torgiano. Since Giorgio Lungarotti, the patriarch, passed on, his two daughters, Teresa Severini and Chiara Lungarotti, run the company, while their creative mother, Maria Grazia, an art historian, is responsible for the wine-and-olive-oil museum at the Tre Vaselle, the family-run hospitality center.

The new visionary and revolutionary award-winning winemaker in Umbria today is Marco Caprai. In 1998, I went to Montefalco to visit Arnaldo Caprai, Marco’s father. I heard that he had begun making wines, and I was especially interested in a new local variety that he was vinifying, Sagrantino. But as we talked over lunch, I felt his heart was more in the quality linen-and-lace business he ran. Not so his son Marco, who has all that it takes to make great wines, and is credited for producing consistently award-winning, world-class wines from Umbria. It is now said that Marco Caprai is bigger than life, and Sagrantino is his revolutionary product.

Lentil Crostini

Crostini con Lenticchie Serves 6

This savory, thick lentil spread is a great topping for a crostino, especially when made with tiny, firm lenticchie di
Castelluccio, which give the mouth-feel of caviar. It can also serve as a fine side dish for any grilled meat, or as the base for risotto or soup. Then again, with the addition of crumbled sausage, it would make a great pasta sauce. So get creative: make a double batch of the lentil topping here, and have fun with all the leftovers.

- 1 cup small lentils, preferably lenticchie di Castelluccio
- 2 medium stalks celery, with leaves, finely chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 2 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- 1 cup chopped onion
- ¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 2 cups canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed saucepan, 3-to-4-quart capacity, with a cover; a large heavy skillet or sauté pan

1. Rinse the lentils, and put them in the saucepan with the celery, bay leaves, and 3 cups cold water. Bring to a boil, cover the pan, and adjust the heat to maintain a gentle, steady simmer. Cook until the lentils are almost tender, about 20 minutes (or longer, depending on size).

2. Meanwhile, pour 4 tablespoons of the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium heat. Stir in the garlic and onion, and cook for 5 minutes or more, until the onion is soft and glistening. Drop the peperoncino into a hot spot in the pan, and let it toast for a minute, then stir in the crushed tomatoes, season with 1 teaspoon salt, and bring the sauce to a simmer. Let it bubble gently about 5 minutes, until slightly thickened.

3. When the lentils are just slightly undercooked, pour into their pan all the tomato sauce from the skillet, and stir into the lentils. Return the sauce to the simmer, and cook, partially covered, until the lentils are fully cooked and tender, about 10 minutes. Remove the cover, stir in the remaining teaspoon salt, and let the lentils cook slowly, stirring frequently, until they're very thick and starting to fall apart, another 10 minutes or so. Remove the pan from the heat, and stir in the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil.

4. I prefer the lentils hot or warm as a crostini topping or contorno, but they are very good at room temperature, too. For crostini, grill or toast the bread slices, spoon a mound of lentils on each crostino, and drizzle on a bit of fine olive oil.

Clockwise from the left: Lentil Crostini—Crostini con Lenticchie; Filled Focaccia—Torta al Testo; Crostini with Black Truffle Butter—Crostini con Burro e Tartufi
Crostini con Burro e Tartufi  

Serves 6 to 8

You don’t need complicated dishes to enjoy the wonderful flavor and aroma of black truffle—bread and butter will do, as this easy recipe proves. Fresh black truffle, if available, always makes great truffle butter. And fresh Norcino truffle, the Umbrian variety plentiful in season around the city of Norcia, considered the finest black truffle in Italy, makes the very best butter. Fresh is always better, but you can use a good-quality jarred Umbrian black truffle. Black truffle from other countries like France is good as well. It’s sold by many specialty-food stores and Internet vendors, at a range of prices.

- 6 to 8 thick slices (about 5 by 3 inches) day-old semolina bread
- ½ ounce fresh black truffle, or ½-ounce jar whole black truffles
- 2 anchovy fillets

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A mini–food processor

Preheat oven to 350°. Lay the bread slices flat on a baking sheet, and toast them in the oven for 4 minutes, turn the slices over, and toast for another 4 minutes or so, until they’re light gold. Cool the toasts on a wire rack.

If using a fresh truffle, brush it clean with a kitchen towel or vegetable brush. With a sharp vegetable peeler, shave off any tough bits from the exterior of the truffle (save these for sauces or other cooked dishes). Jarred truffles will be ready to use, without cleaning or trimming.

Grate the truffle on the fine holes of a grater,-reserving a small solid piece. Put the butter and anchovies in the mini–food processor, and pulse until smooth. Fold in the grated truffle.
Spread the butter on the cooled crostini. Grate the reserved piece of truffle over the crostini, giving each one a dusting of truffle. Serve immediately.

**Filled Focaccia**

*Torta al Testo* makes 2 torte

Here’s my version of our family’s favorite Umbrian road food: the *torta al testo* (or crescia) baked and served at Il Panaro, the outdoor eatery and truck stop near Gubbio (see this chapter’s introduction). The unique wood-oven-baked character of the Il Panaro *torta* is hard to replicate in the home kitchen, yet I’ve found that baking the breads in a cast-iron skillet gives very nice results. The dough is easy to mix and shape, so even if you’re a bread-baking novice you’ll have success with this one.

### FOR THE FOCACCIA
- 1 package active dry yeast
- 3½ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for working the dough

### FILLINGS FOR THE TORTE
- Thinly sliced prosciutto (about 6 slices for each torta)
- Grated Taleggio or stracchino (about 5 ounces for each torta)
- Prosciutto-and-grated-cheese combination (about 4 slices prosciutto and 3 ounces cheese for each torta)
- Broccoli di rape or other greens, sautéed with garlic

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A food processor fitted with a steel blade; a wooden rolling pin; two 10-inch cast-iron skillets (or just one, if that’s what you have)

Dissolve the yeast in ¼ cup warm water in a small bowl; let it sit for several minutes, until it starts to bubble. Put the flour and salt in the bowl of the food processor, and pulse for a few seconds to blend.

Combine the dissolved yeast with a cup of warm water. With the processor running, pour all the liquid into the flour. Process until the dough clumps on the blade and cleans the sides of the bowl, about 20 seconds. Process another 20 seconds, for a total of about 40 seconds. (If the dough does not gather on the blade or process easily, it is too wet or dry. Feel the dough, then work in more flour or warm water, in small amounts.)

Turn the dough out on a lightly floured surface, and knead for a minute into a smooth round. Put it in a large, oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise until doubled, about 1 hour.

Put a rack in the bottom third of the oven, and heat it to 450°. Deflate the risen dough, and cut it in half. Flatten each piece into a round, about 9 inches in diameter, and lay each in a cast-iron skillet. Press and stretch the dough to fill the entire bottom of the pan, then dimple the top all over with your fingertips. (If you only have one suitable skillet, put one piece of dough back in the oiled bowl and let it rise again, covered, while you shape and bake the first torta. When the skillet is empty, deflate the second piece of dough, shape it, and bake it.)

Bake the breads about 15 minutes, until light brown on top. Turn them out to cool on a wire rack. Another option is to cook it on top of the stove in the skillet over medium heat, flipping it several times until done, about 10 to 15 minutes.

To fill the torte: Slice off the top half of each with a long serrated knife, and cover the bottom with slices of prosciutto, grated cheese, sautéed greens, or a combination of these. Replace the tops of the torte, set them on a baking sheet, and return to the oven. Bake another 10 minutes or so, until the torte are golden and the fillings hot. (If
you like, lift the top of the torta and scatter salad greens on the hot fillings, then cover.) Slice the torte into pieces or wedges and serve.

**MEATBALLS IN BROTH**

**Polpette in Umido** Serves 8 to 10

In Umbria, small meatballs are often served simply, floating in a bowl of hot chicken broth. This is a fine custom, in my opinion: it makes the soup more special and substantial, and the broth enhances the carefully homemade meatballs. The diminutive pork-and-veal *polpette* in this recipe incorporate small amounts of plump raisins, pine nuts, and orange zest—delicate flavors that might be overwhelmed by bold pasta sauce but stand out in a spoonful of light, clear broth. You can either fry or poach the meatballs (the fried have more flavor; the poached are healthier), but either way they are delicious.

- FOR THE MEATBALLS
  - 1 1/3 pounds ground pork
  - 2/3 pound ground veal
  - 2 large eggs, beaten with a pinch of salt
  - 1/2 cup fine dry bread crumbs
  - 1/2 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
  - Zest of 1 medium orange (about 2 teaspoons)
  - 1 tablespoon pine nuts, toasted and chopped
  - 1 tablespoon golden raisins, softened in hot water, drained, and chopped
  - 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
  - All-purpose flour for dredging, about 2 cups or as needed
  - 1/2 cup vegetable oil, or as needed, for frying meatballs

- FOR SERVING
  - 3 to 4 quarts Chicken Stock
  - Freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** 2 trays or baking sheets, and wax paper or parchment; a heavy nonstick skillet, 12-inch diameter or larger, for frying the meatballs, or a large pot for poaching them; a 6- or 8-quart soup pot

Crumble the ground pork and veal into a large bowl, breaking up any clumps with your fingers, and toss to mix them. Pour the beaten eggs over the meat, and scatter on top the bread crumbs, grated cheese, orange zest, chopped pine nuts and raisins, and salt. Fold and toss and squeeze the meat through your fingers to distribute all the ingredients evenly.

Scoop up a small amount of the meat mix—about a heaping teaspoon—and roll it in your palms to form a 1-inch ball (the size of a large grape). Set it on a tray lined with wax paper or parchment, and form the rest of the mixture into meatballs—you should have sixty or more. Now either fry or poach the meatballs, before final heating in stock for serving.

To fry the meatballs: Spread a good layer of flour on a large plate or tray. Pour a thin layer of vegetable oil in the skillet, and heat it slowly.

Dredge a batch of the meatballs in flour—twenty or thirty, depending on the size of your skillet. Roll each in the
flour until coated, and set them all on a tray. Heat up the oil in the skillet over medium-high heat, and drop in the floured meatballs. Fry them for about 5 minutes, turning and moving them occasionally, until browned on all sides. Remove them to a tray or platter lined with paper towels. Repeat with the remaining meatballs, and brown them the same way. Between batches, remove browned bits from the skillet and add more oil as needed.

Alternatively, to poach the meatballs: Fill a big pot with 3 quarts of lightly salted water, bring it to a boil, and drop in half the meatballs. Cover the pot, and return the water to a boil quickly. Adjust the heat to keep the water simmering gently, and poach the meatballs, uncovered, about 5 minutes, until cooked through.

Lift them out with a spider or strainer, let drain briefly, and set them in a bowl in a warm spot. Poach the rest of the meatballs the same way, then discard the poaching water.

To serve: Heat the broth in the soup pot until simmering. Gently drop in the fried or poached meatballs, and slowly bring the soup back to the simmer, so the meatballs heat all the way through.

Fill warm soup bowls with broth and meatballs—six or more in each bowl—and serve while very hot, with plenty of freshly grated cheese at the table for sprinkling over the top.

The view from the funicular with the city of Gubbio below

**Pasta with Tender Greens**

_Pasta alle Erbe_ Serves 6

Here’s a typically simple, rustic pasta from Umbria, which would be made with seasonal local leafy greens, both cultivated and foraged wild varieties. Although we don’t have many of the same choices as in Italy, there are plenty of suitable leafy greens available in our American markets now. Certainly chard, spinach, and common chicory are delicious in this dish, and young beet, collard, dandelion, mustard, or turnip greens would be good, too.

Many dried pastas are delicious with this dressing of greens, and I particularly like dried egg fettuccine (with its extra richness and color); gemelli and orecchiette are also good choices. And I love homemade fresh gnocchi with this sauce, too.

- 1 pound tender _leafy greens_ (such as chard, spinach, or young beet greens)
- 6 tablespoons _extra-virgin olive oil_, plus more for finishing the pasta
4 plump garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
2 teaspoons kosher salt, plus more for cooking pasta
½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 pound dry fettuccine (preferably made with egg)
1 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a cover; a large pot, 8-quart capacity or larger, with a cover, for cooking the pasta

Wash the greens well, and pat them dry on towels. Cut off any tough stems, and coarsely chop the leaves into strips. You should have about 10 cups chopped greens.

Pour the olive oil into the skillet, and set over medium-high heat. Scatter in the garlic slices, and cook for a minute or two, until they’re sizzling and starting to color. Dump in all the greens, season with the salt and peperoncino, and toss and turn to coat them in oil. Cover the skillet, and cook until all the greens are wilted, turning and stirring them once or twice, 3 minutes or longer (depending on which greens you’re cooking).

Stir the tomato paste into 1 cup hot water until blended, and pour it into the skillet. Bring it to a boil, then cover the pan and adjust the heat to maintain a steady bubbling simmer. Cook for about 15 minutes, until the greens are tender and the sauce has a good consistency for dressing pasta.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt). Drop in the fettuccine, stirring and separating the strands. Cover the pot, return the water to a boil over high heat, then set the cover ajar and cook the pasta until barely al dente.

Lift the fettuccine from the water with tongs and a spider, let it drain for a moment, and drop it into the simmering sauce of greens. Toss pasta and sauce together for a minute or two, until the greens are distributed evenly in the fettuccine and the pasta strands are coated with moisture and fully cooked. If the greens are too dry, thin the sauce with as much as a cup of hot pasta water; if too soupy, thicken the sauce quickly over higher heat.

Turn off the heat, sprinkle a cup of grated cheese over the pasta, and toss well. Drizzle over it a tablespoon or two of olive oil, toss again, and heap the pasta in warm bowls. Serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

POOR MAN’S SUPPER

Cena dei Poveri Serves 6

This colorful salad combines grilled fresh peppers with the savory condiments from the Umbrian pantry—anchoyves, capers, olives, and, of course, olive oil. I like to serve it on a platter of affettati (sliced prosciutto and other cured meats), or as a topping for grilled bread. And with the addition of fresh mozzarella, hard-cooked eggs, or boiled potatoes, it becomes a light yet satisfying summer lunch. The basic salad in the recipe can be assembled ahead of time and refrigerated—let it come to room temperature before adding embellishments and serving.

6 bell peppers, preferably a combination of red and yellow
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
7 anchovy fillets, coarsely chopped (about 1 tablespoon packed)
1 cup pitted black oil-cured olives
2 tablespoons small capers, drained
2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
1 plump garlic clove, peeled and thinly sliced

Preheat the oven to 350°. Rub the peppers all over with 3 tablespoons of the olive oil, season with ½ teaspoon salt, and place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Roast for 30 minutes or so, turning the peppers occasionally, until their skins are wrinkled and slightly charred.

Let the peppers cool completely. Slice them in half through the stem end, discard the stem, peel off the skin, and scrape out the seeds. Slice the halves into 1-inch strips, and lay them in a sieve to drain and dry.

Put the drained peppers in a large bowl, and scatter on top the chopped anchovies, olives, capers, parsley, peperoncino, and garlic. Season with the remaining ¼ teaspoon salt, and drizzle over it the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil. Tumble and toss to coat everything well. Let the salad sit, so the flavors blend, for 15 minutes (or longer) before serving.

Serve family-style on a platter of sliced meats, or on individual plates as an appetizer salad or luncheon dish (with such additions as hard-cooked eggs, potatoes, or mozzarella). The salad will keep in the refrigerator for several days; let it come to room temperature before serving.

**POTATO-MUSHROOM CAKE WITH BRAISED LENTILS**

*Torta di Patate e Funghi con Lenticchie* Serves 6 to 8 (with leftover lentils)

This dish is a very satisfying vegetarian main course, as well as a good *contorno* for grilled sausages, chicken, or lamb chops. Leftover lentils can be turned into a delicious soup with the simple addition of some flavorful stock, or you can incorporate the lentils into risotto or another rice dish.

FOR THE LENTILS

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
⅛ cup finely chopped onion
½ cup finely chopped carrot
½ cup finely chopped celery
2 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
2 tablespoons tomato paste
1 cup small lentils, preferably lenticchie di Castelluccio
2 fresh bay leaves
1 teaspoon kosher salt

FOR THE POTATO-MUSHROOM CAKE
2 pounds russet potatoes
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1 pound mixed fresh mushrooms (such as porcini, shiitake, cremini, and common white mushrooms), cleaned and thinly sliced
2 teaspoons kosher salt
2 medium leeks, washed, drained, and thinly sliced
2 plump garlic cloves, peeled and chopped
½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
2 tablespoons fresh Italian parsley leaves, chopped
2 teaspoons fresh thyme leaves, chopped

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy saucepan, 3-to-4-quart capacity, with a cover; a heavy-bottomed nonstick skillet or sauté pan, 10-inch diameter or larger

To cook the lentils: Set the saucepan over medium heat, and pour in the olive oil. Stir in the onion, carrot, celery, and garlic, and cook for 5 minutes or so, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are softened. Clear a spot in the bottom of the pan, drop in the tomato paste, and let it toast and caramelize in the hot spot for a minute or two, then stir it in with the vegetables.

Spill in the lentils, drop in the bay leaves, stir them around the pan, and pour in 6 cups cold water. Cover the pan, and bring the liquid to a boil over high heat, stirring now and then. Set the cover ajar, adjust the heat to keep the water bubbling gently, and cook for about 25 minutes, or until the lentils are tender to the bite though still quite soupy. Stir in the salt, and turn off the heat.

Meanwhile, wash the potatoes well and put them, whole and unpeeled, in a large pot. With enough cold water to cover them by about 2 inches, bring to a steady boil, and cook the potatoes just until they are easily pierced with a fork or sharp knife—don’t let them get mushy or fall apart. Drain, cool, and peel the potatoes, then cut them crosswise into ½-inch-thick rounds.

Pour 2 tablespoons of the olive oil into the big skillet, set it over medium-high heat, and stir in the mushrooms. Season them with ½ teaspoon salt, and cook, stirring occasionally, as liquid from the mushrooms is released and boils off. When the pan is dry and the mushrooms are browned and caramelized on the edges, take the skillet off the heat and scrape the mushrooms into a bowl.

Pour the remaining 4 tablespoons olive oil in the skillet, set it over medium heat, and stir in the leeks and garlic. Cook and stir until the leeks begin to soften, about 4 minutes, then lay all the potato slices in the pan; season with 1 teaspoon salt. With a wide spatula, turn the potato rounds over to coat them in oil. Let them cook and gradually take on color, turning them occasionally, until all the rounds are nicely golden, 8 minutes or so.
Scatter the mushrooms and grated cheese on the potatoes, and tumble to mix them in. Sprinkle on the chopped parsley and thyme and the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, and stir in gently. Spread the seasoned potatoes and mushrooms evenly in the skillet, and press down firmly, with the back of the spatula or some other firm utensil, fusing the slices into a one large pancake.

Cook the cake until brown and crispy on the underside, about 5 minutes—lift the edge of the cake to check it. Cover the skillet with a big plate, and, holding them together with hot pads or towels, invert the skillet, dropping the potato cake onto the plate. Slide it back into the skillet and brown the second side, another 5 minutes. Slide the finished cake onto a cutting board.

To serve: Reheat the lentils and ladle them onto a warmed serving platter; center the whole potato cake on top. For individual portions, spoon the lentils into warmed shallow bowls, cut a wedge of the potato cake, and place it on top.

**Strangozzi**

Passionate as I am about pasta, especially fresh homemade pasta, in all its forms, it is always a thrill for me to discover a new recipe for dough, a new shape, or a new technique (not to mention dressings, which are truly infinite in their variety). And though I’ve been making fresh pasta since I was a child and studying the subject throughout my culinary career, my recent travels through Italy’s regions have added a few treasures to my list of favorite fresh pastas.

One of these is the distinctive strangozzi (some say stringozzi) of Umbria. These long pasta strands are as different as can be from the rich and refined tagliatelle of Emilia-Romagna or the tajarin of Piemonte. Strangozzi are made from a plain dough of wheat flour, water, and salt (no egg, no olive oil) and rolled a bit thicker than usual. But they have a satisfying wheately taste, and such substance and texture that eating strangozzi is a joy for any true pasta-lover.

In this group of recipes, I share with you an easy formula for dough and a clever method for forming and unrolling long strands of strangozzi that I learned in Umbria. It is slightly complicated but very efficient—and lots of fun. Then you’ll find recipes for three typically tasty Umbrian sauces, delicious with strangozzi and with other pastas, too.

**Homemade Strangozzi**

Makes 1½ pounds fresh strangozzi, serving 6

- ½ pound all-purpose flour, plus more for working the dough (1¼ cups)
- 1¾ cup fine semolina flour, plus more for working the dough
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1¼ cups ice water, plus more as needed

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor fitted with a steel blade; a pasta-rolling machine; a pizza cutter or pizza wheel; a long serrated knife; 3 baking sheets

Put the flours and the salt in the bowl of the food processor, and process for a few seconds, to aerate. With the food processor running, pour in the water through the feed tube. Process for about 30 seconds, until a dough forms and gathers on the blade. If the dough does not gather on the blade or process easily, it is too wet or dry. Feel the dough, and add either more flour or more ice water, in small amounts.

Turn the dough out on a lightly floured surface, and knead by hand briefly, until it’s smooth, soft, and stretchy. Press it into a disk, wrap well in plastic wrap, and let it rest at room temperature for at least ½ hour. (Refrigerate the dough for up to a day, or freeze for a month or more. Defrost in the refrigerator, and return to room temperature before rolling.)
Cut the dough in six equal pieces. Keeping it lightly floured, roll each piece through the machine at progressively thinner settings (but not to the thinnest setting), extending it into a strip about \( \frac{1}{8} \) inch thick, 20 inches long, and 5 inches wide (or as wide as your machine allows). Trim the edges so the rolled strips are even rectangles, and lay them flat on lightly floured trays or baking sheets. Dust the tops with flour, and cover loosely with a kitchen towel. Let the sheets dry for 15 to 30 minutes to make the next steps easier.

To form strangozzi: Lay out one pasta strip on the floured surface in front of you, and roll it up from both short ends, making two fairly tight coils that meet in the middle, like an old-fashioned scroll. With a very sharp knife, slice the scroll crosswise, down through both coils of dough, at \( \frac{1}{4} \)-inch intervals. From a 5-inch scroll, you should be able to cut about twenty cross sections; each one is a rolled-up strand of strangozzi.

To unfurl the strangozzi, try this clever method that I learned in Umbria: After slicing the scroll, slide the long blade of a serrated knife (or similar thin blade) under the cut pieces, without separating them. Make sure that the knife edge runs exactly under the center line of the scroll, where the two coils meet.

Now lift the knife, and all the cut pieces, off the table. Twist the knife so only the sharp edge, not the flat of the blade, is in contact with the dough. Jiggle the knife gently. If you’ve centered the blade correctly, the coils of all the cut pieces will begin to unroll, on either side of the knife blade, and soon you’ll be holding a score of strangozzi strands. If the dough is sticky in spots, unroll reluctant coils with your fingers. Finally, lower the strands to the work surface, slide them off the knife, gather all into a loose nest, and set it on a floured towel or tray. (If you have problems with this procedure, or don’t have a suitable long implement, unfurl the strangozzi by separating the cut pieces by hand and shaking the coils loose one at a time.)

Make strangozzi from the rest of the long dough rectangles. Leave the nests of pasta uncovered, to air-dry at room temperature, until you’re ready to cook them (or freeze the nests on a tray until solid, and pack in airtight ziplock bags).

**Strangozzi with Tomato-bacon Sauce**

Makes 7 to 8 cups, enough for 2 batches strangozzi or 2 pounds dried pasta, serving 12

Like pasta itself, tomato sauces for pasta come in endless varieties. This one gets a depth of flavor from vegetable pestata and good bacon. The recipe makes enough sauce to dress two batches of pasta. Use half on fresh strangozzi, and pack up half for a future meal: it will keep in the freezer for 4 to 6 weeks and will be wonderful on any pasta you choose.

- **FOR THE SAUCE (A DOUBLE BATCH)**
  - 1 medium onion, cut in 1-inch chunks
  - 1 medium carrot, cut in 1-inch chunks
  - 1 medium stalk celery, cut in 1-inch chunks
  - 4 plump garlic cloves, peeled
  - 4 ounces thick-sliced bacon (about 4 slices)
  - 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
  - 1/2 teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
  - 6 cups (two 28-ounce cans) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
  - 3 tablespoons loosely packed fresh marjoram leaves, chopped
  - 4 stalks or big sprigs fresh basil
1 teaspoon kosher salt

FOR COOKING AND DRESSING THE PASTA (A SINGLE BATCH)

1 batch (1½ pounds) Homemade Strangozzi

1 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing

Extra-virgin olive oil, best-quality, for finishing the pasta

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy-bottomed deep skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or wider; a large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta

Drop the onion, carrot, celery, and garlic into the food processor, and mince finely to an even-textured pestata. Slice the bacon strips crosswise into ½-inch pieces.

Pour the olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Scatter in the bacon pieces, and cook them, stirring occasionally, until they’ve rendered much of their fat, about 4 minutes. Push aside the bacon, and spread the pestata in a clear space in the skillet; let it cook in the hot spot, stirring occasionally, for 5 minutes or so. As the vegetables wilt and dry, sprinkle the peperoncino in the hot spot and let it toast.

When the pestata just begins to stick to the pan bottom, pour in the tomatoes and 2 cups of slosh water (used to rinse the tomato cans and bowl). Stir in the marjoram, basil sprigs, and salt, and bring the tomatoes to a boil over high heat; adjust the flame to maintain a steady bubbling simmer. Cook the sauce, uncovered, for about ½ hour, until it has good flavor and is reduced to a consistency you like for dressing pasta.

You can use some of the sauce right away—you’ll need half of it to dress strangozzi—or let it cool, then refrigerate or freeze for later use.

For cooking and dressing strangozzi: Bring a large pot of well-salted water (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt) to a rolling boil. Heat half the tomato-bacon sauce, about 3½ cups, to a bare simmer in a wide skillet or sauté pan (if you’ve just made the sauce, use the same pan). If the sauce has cooled and thickened, loosen it with some of the pasta water.

Shake any excess flour from the nests of strangozzi, and drop all the pasta into the pot, stirring and separating the strands. Rapidly return the water to a rolling boil, and cook the strangozzi for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until barely al dente.

Lift out the pasta quickly, let it drain for a moment, and drop it into the simmering sauce. Over low heat, toss strangozzi and sauce together for a minute or two, until all the strands are coated and perfectly al dente. (Thin the sauce, if necessary, with hot pasta water, or thicken it quickly over higher heat.)

Turn off the heat, sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the strangozzi, and toss well. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil, toss again, and heap the pasta in warm bowls. Serve immediately, passing more cheese at the table.
Strangozzi con Salsa di Bietole e Mandorle

Makes sauce for 1 batch strangozzi or other pasta, serving 6

This is a fresh and extremely flavorful preparation for strangozzi. The dressing has two components, tender cooked Swiss chard and an uncooked pesto of fresh basil and mint leaves and toasted almonds. (Other leafy greens, such as spinach, chicory, and arugula, could be used, and walnuts could replace the almonds, but the recipe here is true to the region.) It is best to prepare the greens and pesto shortly before you cook and serve the pasta, but if you follow the recipe steps, the dish is actually quite quick-cooking and simple. It is only the multitude of tastes and textures that are complex and tantalizing!

FOR THE CHARD AND PESTO

- 2 pounds Swiss chard
- 1 cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves
- ¼ cup loosely packed fresh mint leaves
- 4 plump garlic cloves—2 crushed and peeled, and 2 peeled and thinly sliced
- 10 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- ½ cup sliced almonds, toasted
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste

FOR COOKING AND FINISHING THE PASTA

- 1 batch (1½ pounds) Homemade Strangozzi
- 1 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing
- Extra-virgin olive oil, best-quality, for finishing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy-bottomed deep skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or wider; a large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta.
For the chard and pesto: Bring a large pot of well-salted water (at least 6 quarts with 1 tablespoon salt) to the boil. As it heats, rinse and drain the chard leaves, and cut off the stems; if the central rib of the leaf is thick and tough, cut it out. (Save the trimmings for stock.) Pile up the leaves, and slice them crosswise into strips about 1 inch wide.

When the water’s boiling, heap all the chard into the pot and stir, submerging the strips. Return the water to the boil, and cook the chard until tender to the bite, about 10 minutes. With a spider or other strainer, lift out the chard strips, and drop them into a colander. Turn off the heat, but save the potful of hot water for cooking the strangozzi.

When the chard has drained and cooled a bit, squeeze the strips by handfuls, pressing out the liquid. Loosen the clumps, and pile the strips in the colander.

To make the herb-and-almond pesto: Put into the food-processor bowl the basil and mint leaves, the crushed garlic cloves, 3 tablespoons of olive oil, and 1 teaspoon salt. Process to a chunky paste, about 10 seconds, then drop in the toasted almonds and process again for 10 seconds, or until you have a smooth bright-green paste.

Pour the remaining 7 tablespoons of olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Scatter in the sliced garlic, and cook for a minute or so, until it’s sizzling. Drop in the chard strips, season with pepperoncino and the remaining ½ teaspoon salt, and stir the chard around the pan. Ladle in ½ cup of hot water from the pot where the chard was blanched, add to the chard, and bring it to a boil. Cook rapidly for a couple of minutes, until the water has reduced by half, then lower the heat so the greens are barely simmering.

For cooking and finishing the pasta: Meanwhile, bring the chard cooking water back to a rolling boil. Shake the excess flour from the nests of strangozzi, and drop all the pasta into the pot, stirring and separating the strands. Cover the pot, and rapidly return the water to a rolling boil; set the cover ajar, and cook the strangozzi for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until barely al dente.

With a spider and tongs, quickly lift out the strangozzi, drain for a moment, and drop them into the skillet with the simmering chard. Toss them together quickly, and spread all of the herb-almond pesto on top. Rinse out the food-processor bowl with ½ cup or so of hot water from the big pot, and pour that in with the pasta. Over low heat, toss the pasta, the chard, and the pesto together for a minute or two, until the strangozzi are all coated with the dressings and perfectly al dente. If the dressing is soupy, reduce it quickly over high heat; if it’s too dense, thin it with more pasta water.

Turn off the heat, sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the strangozzi, and toss well. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil, toss again, and heap the pasta in warm bowls. Serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

**Strangozzi with Veal & Chicken Liver Sauce**

Strangozzi con Ragù di Vitello e Fegatini di Pollo ¼ Makes 6 cups, enough for 2 batches strangozzi or 2 pounds of dried pasta, serving 12

Dress your fresh strangozzi with this meaty, multitextured sauce—ground veal and chopped chicken livers cooked in a tomato base—for a hearty dish that will delight carnivores and pasta-lovers simultaneously. This is also a great sauce to incorporate into risotto. If you are not enthusiastic about the flavor of chicken liver, use only ½ pound, for a subtle flavor boost. But if you love the organic richness of livers, as I do, use a whole pound. This recipe makes a big batch of sauce, so you can use half and freeze half (it will keep well for 4 to 6 weeks).
FOR THE SAUCE (A DOUBLE BATCH)

- 1 medium onion, cut in 1-inch chunks
- 1 medium carrot, cut in 1-inch chunks
- 1 medium stalk celery, cut in 1-inch chunks
- 4 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- 1½ pounds coarsely ground veal shoulder (preferably freshly ground)
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- ½ to 1 pound chicken livers, cleaned and finely chopped
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 3 cups (one 28-ounce can) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand

FOR COOKING AND DRESSING THE PASTA (A SINGLE BATCH)

- 1 batch (1½ pounds) Homemade Strangozzi
- 1 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing
- Extra-virgin olive oil, best-quality, for finishing the pasta

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy-bottomed deep skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or wider; a large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta

For the sauce: Drop the onion, carrot, celery, and garlic into the food processor, and mince finely to an even-textured pestata. Crumble the ground veal into a bowl, breaking up any clumps of meat.

Pour the olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Scrape in the pestata, spread it around the pan, and let it cook, stirring occasionally, until it begins to stick to the pan bottom, about 5 minutes. Lower the heat a bit, and scatter the ground veal in the pan, crumbling apart any clumps. Season the meat with 1 teaspoon salt, and stir the meat and pestata together. As the veal starts to sizzle and release its juices, raise the heat, and cook, stirring often, until all the liquid has evaporated and the meat is dry and lightly caramelized, about 10 minutes.

Clear a space in the center of the pan, dump in the chicken livers, and cook them in the hot spot for a minute or two, until they’re all sizzling and lightly colored, then stir the livers and veal together.

Pour in the white wine, bring it to a boil over high heat, and let it cook until almost completely evaporated. Pour in the crushed tomatoes and 2 cups of slosh water (used to rinse the tomato can and bowl), season with the remaining teaspoon of salt, and stir with the meats.

Bring the sauce to a boil, adjust the heat to keep it bubbling steadily, and let it cook, uncovered, for 20 minutes or so. Lower the heat to maintain a gentle simmer, and cook the sauce for another hour, or until it has good flavor and is reduced to a consistency you like for dressing pasta. You can use some of the sauce right away—you’ll need half of it to dress strangozzi—or let it cool, then refrigerate or freeze for later use.

For cooking and dressing the strangozzi: Bring a large pot of well-salted water (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt) to a rolling boil. Heat half the meat sauce, about 3 cups, to a bare simmer in a wide skillet or sauté pan (if you’ve just made the sauce, use the same pan). If the sauce has cooled and thickened, loosen it with some of the pasta water.
Shake any excess flour from the nests of *strangozzi*, and drop all the pasta into the pot, stirring and separating the strands. Rapidly return the water to a rolling boil, and cook the *strangozzi* for about 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until barely *al dente*.

Lift out the pasta quickly, let it drain for a moment, and drop it into the simmering sauce. Over low heat, toss *strangozzi* and sauce together for a minute or two, until all the strands are coated and perfectly *al dente*. (Thin the sauce, if necessary, with hot pasta water, or thicken it quickly over higher heat.)

Turn off the heat, sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the *strangozzi*, and toss well. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil, toss again, and heap the pasta in warm bowls. Serve immediately, passing more cheese at the table.

---

**Baked Fish with Savory Bread Crumbs**

*Tinche al Forno*  
*Serves 6*

Landlocked Umbria does not have a seafood cuisine. But its mountain lakes, rivers, and streams abound in freshwater fish, such as the tasty tench. This simple preparation is one I found in Umbria, and it is excellent for fillets of our sweet-water varieties, such as carp or whitefish, or even light ocean-fish fillets like sole. Serve with a salad, or with the Potato-Mushroom Cake with Braised Lentils.

- 2 pounds whitefish fillets
- ¾ teaspoon kosher salt
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Juice of a large lemon (about 3 tablespoons)
- ½ cup white wine
- 6 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- ½ cup fine dry bread crumbs
- Zest of a large lemon (about 2 teaspoons)
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh Italian parsley
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste, chopped fine
- Fresh lemon slices, for serving

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A 4-quart shallow rectangular baking dish; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a cover

Preheat the oven to 400°.

Lightly salt the fish on both sides, using about ¼ teaspoon salt in all. Pour 3 tablespoons of the olive oil, the lemon juice, white wine, and another ¼ teaspoon salt into the baking dish, and whisk together well. Drop in the garlic cloves, and stir with the dressing. Lay the fillets in the dish, turn and swish them in the dressing so both sides are thoroughly moistened, and arrange them, skin side down, in one layer.

Toss the bread crumbs in a bowl with the lemon zest, parsley, oregano, chopped peperoncino, and the remaining ¼ teaspoon salt. Drizzle with the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil, and toss the crumbs well until evenly moistened with oil.
Spoon the seasoned bread crumbs on top of the fillets in a light, even layer. Bake, uncovered, until the crumbs are crisp and golden and the fish is cooked through, about 15 to 20 minutes.

Lift the fish out with a spatula, and set on a warm platter to serve family-style, or on individual plates. Spoon over it the juices left in the baking dish, and serve right away, with lemon slices on the side.

**CHICKEN WITH GIARDINIERA**

Giardiniera di Pollo Serves 6

*Giardiniera*—mixed pickled vegetables—is a ubiquitous and versatile pantry staple in Umbria, as in other parts of Italy. Originally a means of preserving the summer vegetable bounty for the lean winter months, it is now a popular vegetable preparation all year round. Sometimes homemade but more frequently bought in jars from the grocery, *giardiniera* usually combines crisp chunks and slices of carrot, cauliflower, celery, and sweet or hot peppers; olives, onion, cucumbers, and turnips are in some brands of *giardiniera*, too. The pickling medium might be vinegar, brine, oil, and spices in a variety of combinations and proportions.

*Giardiniera* right from the jar can be served as an antipasto, a salad, or a side dish. Embellished with freshly poached chicken, as in this recipe, *giardiniera* becomes a delicious and colorful dish, suitable as an appetizer at dinner, a main course for lunch, or a practical and appealing picnic or buffet salad.

When I have time, I make my own *giardiniera*, which I shared with you in *Lidia’s Italian-American Kitchen*. But with many fine imported varieties of *giardiniera* available in most markets, I almost always have a jar of the store-bought kind in the fridge or cupboard, for immediate enjoyment. And with convenience in mind, you don’t always have to poach a chicken to enjoy *giardiniera di pollo*. Pick up a roast chicken from the market, or use leftover roast chicken or turkey, to make this terrific dinner salad in no time at all.

✽ FOR THE POACHED CHICKEN

✽ A 3½-to-4-pound roasting chicken

✽ 1 medium onion, quartered through the root

✽ 1 large carrot, halved crosswise

✽ 1 large stalk celery, halved crosswise

✽ 2 fresh plum tomatoes

✽ 6 or so stalks fresh Italian parsley, with lots of leaves

✽ 1 tablespoon whole black peppercorns

✽ FOR THE SALAD

✽ 3 cups giardiniera, store-bought or homemade, drained

✽ A 6-ounce jar marinated artichoke hearts, drained

✽ ½ cup pitted oil-cured black olives

✽ ¼ cup chopped fresh Italian parsley

✽ 3 tablespoons small capers, drained

✽ 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, or more to taste

✽ ¼ cup red-wine vinegar, or more to taste

✽ 1½ teaspoons kosher salt, or more to taste

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed soup pot or saucepan, 8-quart or larger, with a cover
To poach the chicken: Rinse the bird, and put it in the pot with all of the seasoning ingredients nestled around it. Pour over it cold water to cover, and bring to a boil, then cover the pot and adjust the heat to maintain a gentle simmer. Cook until the chicken is tender, about 45 to 50 minutes.

Lift the chicken from the pot, set it in a colander or strainer over a bowl, and let it cool. Remove the fat and skin, and discard. Take the meat off the bones, remove any cartilage or tendons, and tear the chicken into nice salad-sized shreds (about ½ inch wide and 2 inches long)—you should have about 5 cups chicken pieces. (If you want to finish the stock to put away, return the bones, cartilage, and the broth in the bowl to the poaching pot, and simmer for another hour or more. Strain and cool it, then refrigerate or freeze.)

To assemble the salad: Toss the chicken, giardiniera, artichokes, olives, parsley, and capers in a large bowl. Drizzle over it the olive oil and vinegar, and tumble and toss to coat all the salad pieces. Taste, and adjust the seasoning with more salt, olive oil, or vinegar. Give it a final toss, and serve.

**Veal Scaloppine Umbria Style**

Scaloppine all’Umbra Serves 6

This dish showcases the skillful skillet cookery and flavorful pan sauces that delighted me in Umbria. After lightly frying the veal scallops, you start the sauce with a pestata of prosciutto, anchovy, and garlic, build it up with fresh sage, wine, broth, and capers—and then reduce and intensify it to a savory and superb glaze on the scaloppine. Though veal is most prized in this preparation, I have tried substituting scallops of chicken breast and pork; both versions were quick and delicious. Serve the scaloppine over braised spinach, or with braised carrots on the side.

- 2 ounces prosciutto, roughly chopped
- 4 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- 3 small anchovy fillets
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 12 veal scallops (2 to 3 ounces each)
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 8 fresh sage leaves
- 1 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed lemon juice
- ½ cup light stock (chicken, turkey, or vegetable) or water
- 2 tablespoons small capers, drained
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a meat mallet; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Using the food processor, mince the prosciutto, garlic, anchovies, and 2 tablespoons of the olive oil into a fine-textured pestata.

Flatten the veal scallops into scaloppine, one at a time: place a scallop between sheets of wax paper or plastic wrap, and pound it with the toothed face of a meat mallet, tenderizing and spreading it into a thin oval, about ¼ inch thick.
Salt the scaloppine lightly on both sides, using about ½ teaspoon salt in all. Put the butter and remaining olive oil in the skillet, and set it over medium-low heat. When the butter begins to bubble, lay as many scaloppine in the pan as you can in one layer (about half the pieces). Cook the first side for a minute or two, just until the meat becomes opaque but doesn’t darken; flip the scaloppine, and lightly fry the second side the same way. Remove the first batch of veal to a plate, and fry the remaining scaloppine.

When all the scaloppine have had the first fry, raise the heat and boil off any accumulated meat liquid until the skillet is nearly dry. Drop in the pestata, stir it around the pan, and let it cook for a couple of minutes, until it’s sizzling and rendering fat from the prosciutto. Scatter in the sage leaves, stir, and heat them until sizzling, then pour in the wine and lemon juice. Bring to a boil, and cook to reduce the wine by half. Pour in the stock, heat to a bubbling simmer, and return the scaloppine to the pan, sliding them into the liquid so they’re moistened. Toss in the capers, and sprinkle the remaining salt over all.

Adjust the heat to keep the sauce simmering gently and reducing gradually. Cook for about 10 minutes, turning the scaloppine over once or twice, until almost all the moisture has evaporated, concentrating the sauce into a thick coating on the meat and pan bottom.

Remove the skillet from the heat, and sprinkle the parsley over the veal. Tumble the scaloppine over, coating them all with sauce and parsley, and serve immediately. Be sure to scrape every bit of concentrated sauce from the skillet, onto each serving of scaloppine.

Sausages in the Skillet with Grapes
Salsicce all’Uva Serves 6

The Umbrian town of Norcia is, among other distinctions, so famous for the skill of its pork butchers and the quality of their products that the term norcineria throughout Italy designates a shop that purveys pork and pork specialties of the highest quality—and nothing else.

This is one of the memorable pork dishes that I discovered in Umbria recently. And though there are no sausages better than those made by an Umbrian Norcino in his hometown, this will be wonderful with any good-quality sweet sausage available in yours. The name—Sausages in the Skillet with Grapes—describes the ingredients and cooking method perfectly. Just keep in mind that the cooking here is slow and gentle, not high-temperature grilling as one usually does with sausages.

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 8 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- 2½ pounds sweet Italian sausages, preferably without fennel seeds (8 or more sausages, depending on size)
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 1½ pounds seedless green grapes, picked from the stem and washed (about 3 cups)

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a cover

Pour the olive oil into the skillet, toss in the garlic cloves, and set it over low heat. When the garlic is sizzling, lay in all the sausages in one layer, and cover the pan. Cook the sausages slowly, turning and moving them around the skillet occasionally; after 10 minutes or so, sprinkle the peperoncino in between the sausages. Continue low and slow cooking for 25 to 30 minutes in all, until the sausages are cooked through and nicely browned all over. Remove the pan from the burner, tilt it, and carefully spoon out excess fat.
Set the skillet back over low heat, and scatter in the grapes. Stir and tumble them in the pan bottom, moistening them with meat juices. Cover, and cook for 10 minutes or so, until the grapes begin to soften, wrinkle, and release their own juices. Remove the cover, turn the heat to high, and boil the pan juices to concentrate them to a syrupy consistency, stirring and turning the sausages and grapes frequently to glaze them.

To serve family-style: arrange the sausages on a warm platter, topped with the grapes and pan juices. Or serve them right from the pan (cut in half, if large), spooning grapes and thickened juices over each portion.

**Pork Chops with Capers**

Costate di Maiale con Capperi  Serves 6

Here is another gem from the treasure of pork dishes I found in Umbria, especially around Norcia. Like the preceding recipe for sausages and grapes, this calls for a leisurely approach to cooking, slowly caramelizing the pork and building a fantastic glaze for the chops, with the mingled flavors of lemon, peperoncini, capers, and wine. I always prefer chops on the bone, but you can make this recipe with boneless pork-loin cutlets as well. Since they are usually thinner, they’ll need less cooking time, though gentle and slow browning is still called for.

I like to accompany these with an intensely flavored vegetable such as braised broccoli di rape or mashed parsnips (or both!).

- 6 bone-in pork loin chops, 1 inch thick, 6 to 8 ounces each
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- ½ cup all-purpose flour for dredging, plus more as needed
1 large lemon, sliced in thin rounds
6 whole Tuscan-style pickled peperoncini, drained
3 tablespoons small capers, drained
¼ cup white wine
1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 14-inch diameter

Trim the fat from the pork chops, if necessary, leaving only a thin layer, and salt them lightly on both sides, using ½ teaspoon salt in all.

Put the butter and olive oil in the skillet, and set it over medium-low heat. When the butter begins to bubble, scatter in the garlic; let it heat and gently sizzle. Meanwhile, spread the flour on a plate or tray, and dredge the chops on all sides. Shake off excess flour, and lay the chops in the skillet in one layer. (It may appear at first that there’s not enough room for all, but as the meat shrinks you will be able to nestle the chops in.)

Strew the lemon slices on top of the chops, and drop the peperoncini in between them. Cook the chops slowly, keeping them at a gentle sizzle, turning and moving them in the pan about every 5 minutes, as they take on color gradually and evenly.

After 20 minutes or so, when the pork is lightly browned and caramelized on both sides, scatter in the capers, shake the pan to drop them onto the bottom, and turn up the heat to medium-high. When the capers are sizzling, push the chops aside, and pour the wine and lemon juice into the clear hot spot. Bring to a boil, and shake the pan so the wine flows around all the chops. Sprinkle over pan the remaining salt, and adjust the heat to keep the pan juices bubbling, steadily reducing and thickening. Turn the chops occasionally, so both sides are moistened and evenly cooked.

After about 10 minutes of reducing the liquid, when the juices are syrupy and glaze the chops, remove the pan from the heat. Sprinkle the chopped parsley all over, and give the chops a final turn in the pan. Serve right away, drizzling a bit of the remaining pan sauce over each chop.

Honey-Orange Crumb Cookies

Panmelati makes about 75 pieces

Panmelati are a delightful and surprising confection. Sweet, chewy, orange-infused, and crusted in nuts, they could be mistaken for fancy candy balls, but they are actually a kind of no-bake cookie, fashioned from a simple dough of bread crumbs cooked in honey. A great way to recycle old bread, these are quickly made, fun to roll, and a delicious treat with tea, coffee, or a dessert wine.

- 4 medium oranges, washed and dried
- 2 cups honey
- 1 cup fine dry bread crumbs
- 2 cups finely chopped toasted walnuts
- Vegetable oil for rolling the cookies

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed saucepan, 3-quart capacity; a clean, smooth, hard countertop or other work surface, about 2 feet square, such as a large metal baking sheet; a long metal spatula; parchment-lined tray or baking sheet.
With a sharp paring knife or vegetable peeler, shave off the peel of the oranges in long strips. Scrape away the bitter white pith from the inside of the peel, then dice the strips of zest into small pieces, about ¼ inch square. You should have about a cup of diced peel. (Enjoy the rest of the orange as a fruit.)

Pour the honey into the saucepan, set the pan over medium heat, and stir in the cut orange peel. Slowly bring the honey to a simmer, and cook, stirring frequently, until the squares of peel are slightly translucent, about 3 minutes.

Stir the bread crumbs and 1 cup of the chopped walnuts into the honey, and return to a simmer. Stirring frequently, simmer the mixture gently for 6 minutes or so, until the bread crumbs have absorbed most of the honey, forming a dough that pulls away from the sides of the pan. Take the pan off the heat.

With a brush or your fingers, spread a thin film of vegetable oil on your clean countertop or other hard work surface. Scrape the dough out of the pan onto the oiled surface and, with the lightly oiled blade of the metal spatula, spread it into a rough round or oblong layer, about ½ inch thick.

Pour the remaining cup of chopped walnuts onto a plate or tray. Rub a bit of vegetable oil on your fingers and hands (so the dough won’t stick), break off a bunch of teaspoon-sized pieces of warm dough—a dozen or so—and rapidly roll them into bite-sized balls, the size of grapes.

While still warm, roll the balls in the nuts, so the whole surface gets a light nut coating, and place them on the parchment-lined tray. Working quickly, shape another batch of balls, and coat them with nuts.

When cool, store panmelati in a cookie tin or other airtight container, lined with wax paper. They will keep for about a week.

**Dry Fruit Strudel As Made in Assisi**

Rocciata di Assisi Makes about 2 dozen cookies

You roll up this rocciata, a thin pastry with a fruit-and-nut filling, just as you do a strudel—but you don’t bake it like a strudel. Instead, you slice the roll into thin rounds, lay them flat, and bake them into two dozen rich and beautiful spiral cookies. In this version, I macerate dried fruit overnight in vin santo, one of my favorite sweet wines. There’s always a bit of fruity wine left over, and I cook it into a delicious syrup to drizzle over the cookies.

Delicious when dunked in a good espresso, and even better when dunked in grappa, these cookies are nice to have around, as well as to give as gifts at the holidays. And I make them after the holidays, too, since they’re such a brilliant way to use up all the dried fruit and nuts I have left over from the festivities.

- 8 ounces assorted dried fruit (such as raisins, apricots, cherries, and prunes), chopped in ¼-inch pieces
- 1 apple, peeled, cored, and chopped in ¼-inch pieces
- ¼ cup sugar
- ¼ cup vin santo
- ¼ cup roughly chopped mixed nuts (such as almonds, walnuts, and hazelnuts), toasted
- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- Pinch of kosher salt
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large egg

**Recommended Equipment:** 2 half-sheet pans (12 by 18 inches) or other large baking sheets; parchment paper; a long, sharp serrated knife
A day before baking the cookies, prepare the fruit: Mix the chopped dried fruit and chopped apple in a bowl, toss with ½ cup of the sugar, pour in the *vin santo*, and stir. Cover with plastic wrap, and macerate overnight in the refrigerator.

The next day, strain the fruit, catching and reserving the juices in a small saucepan. Return the fruit to the bowl, and toss with the chopped nuts.

To make the dough: Stir together the flour, the remaining ¼ cup sugar, and a pinch of salt in a large bowl. Drizzle in the olive oil, tossing the dry mix with a fork to form coarse crumbs. Beat the egg with 1 tablespoon water, and pour over the crumbs, tossing and mixing them into a slightly sticky dough. Wrap the dough in plastic, press it into a small flat block, and let it rest briefly.

Arrange two racks in the oven, and heat it to 375°. Line the baking sheets with parchment paper.

Unwrap the dough, place it between two other pieces of parchment paper, and roll it into a thin rectangular sheet, 12 by 15 inches. Remove the top parchment, and spread the fruit-nut filling on the dough, leaving a 1-inch margin uncovered on all sides. Gently pat the filling so it adheres to the dough.

Roll up the dough like a jelly roll, starting at one of the longer sides, into a cylinder or log about 15 inches long. You can lift the bottom parchment to support the dough sheet as you fold it over into a spiral, enclosing the filling. When the log is finished, wrap it fully in the parchment paper (so it doesn’t stick to the table), and roll it back and forth a few times to make it more compact (and easier to cut).

Unwrap the log, and trim off the ends with the serrated knife. Next, slice the log crosswise every ½ inch or so, into disk-shaped spiral cookies. (If these begin to crumble as you cut, re-form the log into a compact shape, and start cutting again.) Lay the cookies flat and spaced apart on the lined baking sheets.

Place the sheets on the two oven racks, and bake for about 15 minutes, then rotate the pans—top to bottom rack, and back to front—and bake another 15 minutes or so, until the dough is golden brown and the filling is bubbling.

Meanwhile, heat the reserved fruit juices to the boil in a small saucepan, and cook until syrupy and reduced to about ¼ cup. Remove the baking sheets from the oven onto wire racks, and while the cookies are still hot, drizzle the fruit syrup over them.

Let the cookies cool completely. They will keep for a week or two if well wrapped or in a cookie tin.
CHOCOLATE BREAD PARFAIT

Pane e Cioccolata al Cucchiaio Serves 6

This recalls for me the chocolate-and-bread sandwiches that sometimes were my lunch, and always a special treat. And it is another inventive way surplus is used in Umbrian cuisine, with leftover country bread serving as the foundation of an elegant layered dessert. Though it is soaked with chocolate and espresso sauce and buried in whipped cream, the bread doesn’t disintegrate, and provides a pleasing textural contrast in every heavenly spoonful.

- 8 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
- 8 ounces country-style white bread, crusts removed
- ½ cup freshly brewed espresso
- 2 tablespoons dark rum
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1½ cups chilled heavy cream
- 1 cup sliced almonds, toasted

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large rimmed tray or baking sheet, such as a half-sheet pan (12 by 18 inches); a spouted measuring cup, 1 pint or larger; 6 parfait glasses or wineglasses, preferably balloon-shaped

Put the chopped chocolate in a bowl set in a pan of hot (not boiling) water. When the chocolate begins to melt, stir until completely smooth. Keep it warm, over the water, off the heat.

Slice the bread into ½-inch-thick slices, and lay them flat in one layer, close together, on the tray or baking sheet.

Pour the warm espresso into a spouted measuring cup, stir in the rum and sugar until sugar dissolves, then stir in...
half the melted chocolate. Pour the sauce all over the bread slices, then flip them over and turn them on the tray, to make sure all the surfaces are coated. Let the bread absorb the sauce for a few minutes.

Meanwhile, whip the cream until soft peaks form, by hand or with an electric mixer.

To assemble the parfaits: Break the bread into 1-inch pieces. Use half the pieces to make the bottom parfait layer in the six serving glasses, dropping an equal amount of chocolatey bread into each. Scrape up some of the unabsorbed chocolate sauce that remains on the baking sheet, and drizzle a bit over the bread layers. Next, drop a layer of whipped cream in the glasses, using up half the cream. Top the cream layer with toasted almonds, using half the nuts.

Repeat the layering sequence: drop more soaked bread into each glass, drizzle over it the chocolate sauce from the tray and the remaining melted chocolate. Dollop another layer of whipped cream in the glasses, using it all up, and sprinkle the remaining almonds on top of each parfait. This dessert is best when served immediately, while the melted chocolate is still warm and runny.
Spoleto is a magnificent city filled with Roman artifacts—the Roman theater, the gorgeous house of Vespasian’s mother (Vespasia Polla), and the ancient city gates. The elegant façade and portico of the cathedral only hint at the beauty inside: it was Fra Filippo Lippi who worked on the frescoes depicting the Life of the Virgin. In the central scene, Lippi painted a self-portrait (dressed in a white monk’s tunic) as well as a portrait of his son. The title “Fra” signifies a cleric or monk, but Fra Filippo Lippi fell in love with a nun and had a son, Filippino Lippi.

I first visited Spoleto with my husband and was impressed by the Ponte delle Torri, a graceful bridge built on the remains of a Roman aqueduct, consisting of long, slender arches that look like a delicate piece of lace hung out to dry between the mountain and the city of Spoleto. The city slowly tumbles down a slope and ends at the Via Flaminia, beyond which are rolling hills. In these hills, I experienced my first wild-boar hunt. It was thrilling to look through night-vision binoculars, making sure that I was downwind (boar have a very sensitive sense of smell), and although we didn’t bring any boar home that night, the hunt was exciting.

Follow in the footsteps of Saint Francis and visit the Assisi basilica which houses his tomb and some of the most important frescoes of the Renaissance, by such artists as Giotto, Cimabue, and Simone Martini. It is an imposing structure to honor a man who lived so simply and owned nothing. But the simplicity is felt deep inside the basilica, in the burial chamber, where there is absolute stillness, echoing on the barren rock.

As you walk through the Roman arch, Porta Consolare, up the stone roads of Spello (actually made for horses to walk up), each balcony or set of small steps is bursting with geraniums of all colors. Flowers in Spello are not only a matter of personal pride, but at the end of May, for the Feast of Corpus Domini, there is a town-wide festival, the Infiorata, for which flowers are used to make elaborate pictures and designs along the streets. There are also spectacular frescoes by Pinturicchio to be found in the Baglioni Chapel.

Foligno holds a special place for me in particular—the Palazzo Trinci, built and decorated by the Trinci family, Renaissance rulers of Foligno. The palazzo itself is a shining example of the Renaissance residence, and the frescoes inside reflect the interests of the family: the planets, the ages of man, and other Neoplatonic subject matter.

Bevagna is charming and welcoming to tired legs that have walked many hill towns; it is located on a low, fertile plain surrounded by waterways. One of the most splendid experiences I have had in Umbria was the medieval festival in Bevagna in June, when the whole town dresses up in medieval garb. Plays are performed in the streets, stalls sell wares, and even blacksmiths display their trades on every corner of the town. The main square, Piazza Silvestri, is one of the most charming in Italy. There the medieval buildings are placed asymmetrically, quite different from the usual “square” square.

Montefalco is well known for the wonderful wine Sagrantino and for its ancient walls, still largely intact. Seek out the town hall with its graceful portico. I also enjoy the fourteenth-century Church of St. Francis, which now serves as a pinacoteca, or art gallery.

They say that all Egubini—the people of Gubbio—are a bit crazy. My husband’s paternal relatives were all born in Gubbio, and I cannot say that I disagree; they are crazy in a jovial kind of way. It is the best Umbrian
city to visit with children. Mine have gone there several times. Each time, we have our ritual: We park down at
the bottom, and complain as we walk up the steep hill, but once we’re in the Piazza dei Consoli, the long haul is
rewarded with a balcony looking onto the Umbrian landscape. The square is enormous and reminds me of an
outdoor dance hall, with a long balustrade to admire the view. We then venture into the town hall and walk
through the secret passageways and never miss the lower rooms, which my children like to call the dungeon,
and the medieval toilets, where we enjoy bathroom humor. We then venture down to the “crazy fountain,” as
the kids like to call it. Legend has it that if you walk around the fountain three times, splashing yourself with its
water, you, too, will become as crazy as the Egubini. Needless to say, we do it every time, just to make sure no
craziness has worn off from our last visit. Throw all caution to the wind, and get in a tiny round cage on the
funicular that takes you to the mount above Gubbio. My children also enjoy staying in the nearby Capuchin
monastery, which has been converted to a hotel, Park Hotel ai Cappuccini. Rooms in the older part of the hotel
were monk cells.—TANYA
ABRUZZO

Overleaf: Maccheroni with Zucchini—Maccheroni all’Aquilana
I love the people of Abruzzo. They are welcoming, giving, and jovial—and usually there’s a concertina at hand so they can give expression to their feelings. The food of this mountainous region reflects the character of the people—sincere, warm, inviting, gutsy, and full of flavor. From the resilient dry pasta to the handmade maccheroni alla chitarra, from the tender roasted lamb to the complex richness of the pecorino they make and the golden, aromatic saffron they harvest, all these flavors of Abruzzo are hard to forget.

It was a misty late-autumn day in 2007, and the peaks were white with snow, when Mario and I drove up and up the serpentine road leading to the village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio, nestled between the hills of the Appennini that rise to their highest peak, the Corno Grande of the Gran Sasso d’Italia Massif. And then it appeared: from the distance we could see the church steeple and the round stone tower of Santo Stefano di Sessanio on top of a hill, and beneath, the white stone houses of the town, huddled like mushrooms in a protective mass. (This tower is now rubble, after the April 2009 earthquake.) As we neared Santo Stefano, we saw that the dwellings had been built side by side to form a wall of houses, a defensive and forbidding perimeter typical of the mountain villages.

Inside the town, the feeling changed. We strolled the shining cobblestoned streets that spiraled up to the tower with magnificent terrazzas overlooking the valleys of Pescara and Tirino below. White smoke billowed from the chimneys of the fourteenth-century houses, and when we peeked through the lace curtains of the small wood-framed windows we saw people moving about their kitchens, and out wafted the delicious aromas of soup perking on the stove.

Santo Stefano di Sessanio is famous for the small, tender lentils grown in the surrounding fields, and I am sure that in some of those huddled stone houses, on the central hearths, the pots were of lentil soup. And I thought there would be scrippelle, the traditional local crâpes, to serve in the soup, or to be stuffed with spinach, mushrooms, or meat, or perhaps sweetened for dessert.

Now hungry, Mario and I found our way to the one open café. The town was half empty, many shuttered houses awaiting the return of summer, when families drive up from big cities to recapture their past, living and cooking the ways of the mountain. Fortunately, there is an ever greater demand for this kind of setting; many abandoned houses are now being refurbished by local entrepreneurs and sold as small summer units.

We had a very different adventure in another mountain valley, the Valle Scannese, outside of the picturesque town of Scanno. Here we discovered some of the best pecorino cheese I have ever tasted—and there are countless local pecorinos to try—made by Gregorio Rotolo and family. The “madman of cheese,” as he is known in the Valle Scannese, Gregorio is passionate about his animals. What makes good cheese, he says, is the milk. His cows, goats, and sheep graze in pastures at two thousand meters (more than sixty-five hundred feet), and the diversity of the plants and flowers at that altitude is what imparts the flavor to the milk, and hence the cheese. It is all organic, and the cheese is made of unpasteurized milk. I had an extraordinary pecorino scorza nera and ricotta scorza nera, pecorino and ricotta rubbed in black all-vegetable ash. As the cheese aged, it absorbed the subtle flavor of the ash, and there was a creaminess and complexity to the ricotta I have never experienced before.

Gregorio and his sister, with her family, also run the Bio Agriturismo Valle Scannese, an agricultural hostelry for tourists, where, in a simple setting, everything they serve is organic, produced either by them or by neighboring farms. The walls of their dining room are decorated with extraordinary photos of Scanno and its residents, taken by a local photographer, Cesidio Silla. And while we were enjoying the food offerings on a late Sunday afternoon, we were fortunate to see the herds of cows, sheep, and goats slowly descending the hills, heading back home for the night. It was a sight, particularly in that setting, with the good cheese and other food, that I will cherish all my life.

But why would I travel to these mountains in the fog and cold of late fall, you might wonder.

The answer is that I had to travel to satisfy a curiosity that had been growing in me for years—a curiosity about saffron. I had cooked with it and delighted in its flavor, color, and aroma for many years, and wanted to experience its harvest from the crocus plant.

So that is why I was out in the fields of Navelli early one frosty morning, watching the women wrapped in shawls,
and the men with their old-fashioned country caps on, all with baskets hanging over their arms, bent over rows of
crocus plants. They were selectively picking the still-unopened buds of the crocus flower, which had sprouted
overnight. Only the unopened ones were picked, before the morning sun had a chance to cast its warm rays on the
delicate stigmas; this way, the maximum aroma is preserved, and it is easier to extract the precious golden saffron
thread. If touched by the sun, like Cinderella by the stroke of twelve, the saffron might lose its magic. And then, just
as the sun rises, they go home and empty the baskets of crocuses, in a pile on the table.

Not long ago, this precious commodity was becoming extinct; the young were not willing to undertake the hard
work of cultivating the crocus. But Silvio Sarra, now in his seventies, a native of Civitaretenga, in the commune of
Navelli, believed in the tradition of his ancestors, and thirty years ago formed the Cooperativa Altopiano di Navelli,
with a handful of producers, and revived in the area the tradition of cultivating the crocus. He and his sister Gina run
a small local agriturismo in Civitaretenga, Casa Verde, where one can enjoy the local flavors—especially in late
October, when the crocus blooms.

It was in the Casa Verde that Silvio and Gina showed us how to sfiorare the saffron—that is, to pluck the stigma
from the crocus flowers. It is mostly the women who do the work, seated around the table chatting as their hands
move fast to pull out the yellow threads from the mound of purple crocus flowers in front of them. Eventually, small
mounds of golden threads pile up in front of them on the table, as the plucked purple flowers drop to the floor. There
is always a fire crackling in the hearth. The man of the house, Silvio, at least during my visit, collects the little
mounds from each woman and spreads them on the mesh of a sieve, which he then hangs, at a distance, on top of the
coals. By the time the women have accumulated another pile, in twenty minutes or so, the batch of saffron is dried.
And so for a week or more the harvest and drying of saffron happens on the kitchen tables, in the houses of the little
towns of the altopiano di Navelli. As we descended from the mountains, heading toward the sea, we entered the
lower hill country of Abruzzo, quite a different realm, of fields and vineyards. Here, too, we made some wonderful
discoveries and friends. Although not considered one of the premier wine regions in Italy, Abruzzo produces four
DOC varieties—the Contro Guerra, Trebbiano d’Abruzzo, Montepulciano d’Abruzzo, and Montepulciano
d’Abruzzo Colline Teramane (which was recently elevated to DOCG status). I’ve enjoyed the wines from some of
the more established Abruzzese producers (usually brought to my attention by my son, Joe), but I’ve really become
convinced that world-class wines are coming from the region after meeting Leonardo Pizzolo, from Valle Reale in
Popoli, on my last visit.

Leonardo comes from the Veneto region, not too far from my own origins, and one evening over dinner he
confessed that he fell in love with the unspoiled beauty of Valle Reale, situated between the soaring Apennine peaks
of the Gran Sasso range to the north and the Majella range to the south, and decided to plant grapes, build a winery,
and live here. Less than a decade old now, his Azienda Villa Reale is already producing award-winning wines like
his San Calisto—100 percent Montepulciano, from old vineyards, aged in oak casks. A well-made Montepulciano is
always a great pairing for the gutsy maccheroni alla chitarra.

As much as I love the terrain and food of inland Abruzzo, I was delighted to reach the coast on my last visit and
find many treats that I’d never discovered before. As we traveled south from Ortona along the seashore, I was
thrilled by the sight of the trabocchi, the traditional fishing huts built on stilts at the end of long narrow wooden
walkways that protrude into the sea. From these huts, fishermen cast their nets and catch fish as they swim by—a
mixture of small to medium fishes, which are mostly baked or fried and used in soups or brodetto.

The regional maritime gastronomy of Abruzzo is deliciously simple and is known for the brodetto of assorted
local fish cooked in an earthenware dish, as well as the scapece, a fish specialty cooked and preserved in vinegar
with abundant saffron, which gives it its golden-yellow color. And there is not a more elegant combination than the
artisanal dry pasta from Abruzzo called paccheri tossed with the sauce of the brodetto from coastal Abruzzo.

The tragic earthquake in Abruzzo in April 2009 not only shook the ground, but also shook my heart. Many of the
places I have come to enjoy are now rubble. Thank goodness, all the people I have enjoyed are fine and, in true
Abruzzese fashion, have taken on the task of toiling to rebuild their lives.
ABRUZZESE CHESTNUT & LENTIL SOUP

Zuppa di Lenticchie e Castagne Makes 3½ quarts, serving 8 or more

Legumes are a specialty of growers in L’Aquila, the big inland province of Abruzzo, and the pride of the region is the small, tender lentils grown in the mountain village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio. Since my recent visit to this remote, rugged settlement, I have had no doubt that it was in just such a place that this hearty and warming winter soup, thick with lentils and chestnuts, was created. These native foods, so good together, can surely sustain one through long cold winters in the high country.

Unfortunately, the delicious lenticchie of Santo Stefano di Sessanio are a limited commodity and not available here. Instead, I recommend using lentils from Castelluccio in Umbria in this soup. Ordinary lentils are fine as well, though some larger types may need soaking or longer cooking time.

Chestnuts, grown along the length of the Apennines, are also essential to Abruzzese cuisine. In season, they’re enjoyed in everything from pastas to desserts, and then, like lentils, dried for winter cooking or milled into flour. Though this soup can be made with fresh (or frozen) chestnuts, I use dried chestnuts, as is often the case in Abruzzo. These are available year-round and spare you the work of peeling. I also like the way they cook slowly without disintegrating, giving the soup a particularly nice texture. They do require an overnight soak, however, before you start cooking.

- ½ pound dried chestnuts
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- 3 sprigs fresh thyme
- 3 sprigs fresh marjoram
- 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
- 1 cup canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 4 quarts water
- 8 large fresh basil leaves
- 1 pound lentils
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt
- Freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor)
- Extra-virgin olive oil, excellent-quality, for serving
Rinse the dried chestnuts, and put them in a bowl with cold water to cover by at least 4 inches. Let soak in a cool place for 8 hours or overnight, and drain them when you start cooking the soup.

Pour the olive oil into the soup pot, set over medium-high heat, and drop in the crushed garlic cloves. Cook for a couple of minutes, until they’re sizzling and lightly colored, then drop in the herb sprigs and bay leaves, and cook for a minute. Stir in the crushed tomatoes, bring the juices to a boil, and cook for a minute or two, to concentrate the flavors.

Pour in the water, stir well, add the basil leaves and drained chestnuts, and cover the pot. Bring to a boil over high heat, then set the cover ajar and cook at a gentle boil, reducing gradually, until the chestnuts have softened and have started to crumble, about 1½ hours.

Rinse the lentils, and stir them into the soup along with the salt. Return to a full boil, and cook, cover ajar, for 30 minutes or more, until the lentils are tender (timing depends on lentil size and variety) and the broth is flavorful.

Ladle the soup into warm bowls. Sprinkle a couple of tablespoons of freshly grated cheese over each portion, and finish with a swirl of excellent olive oil. Serve right away, with more grated cheese at the table.

Celery Soup
Minestra di Sedano

Makes about 4 quarts, serving 8 or more

A minestra paesana of humble ingredients, this is a delightfully satisfying and flavorful soup. The soup base is built on a pestata, a bit of tomato, and, if you have one, a piece of hard rind left from grating cheese. (I hope you save these! They are a great addition to almost any soup or stock.)

One of my favorite vegetables, celery—and lots of it—gives the soup a delicate yet distinctive taste. And just before serving, a few handfuls of ditalini (or other short pasta) cook in the broth, to provide texture and substance. Don’t add the pasta until you are almost ready to serve, because it becomes soft and soggy left in the soup. In Abruzzo, as elsewhere in Italy, only al dente pasta should grace a soup bowl—and that’s what this recipe will give you.

- 6 ounces pancetta or bacon, in 1-inch pieces
- 1 cup onion cut in 1-inch chunks
- 4 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- 8 or more stalks celery with leaves (about 1½ pounds)
- 1 piece (2 inches or so) outer rind of pecorino, Grana Padano, or Parmigiano-Reggiano (optional)
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 4 quarts water
- 2 tablespoons kosher salt

FOR FINISHING AND SERVING THE SOUP

- 1 pound ditalini (for the whole batch of soup)
- Freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor)
Extra-virgin olive oil, best-quality, for serving

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy-bottomed soup pot or saucepan, 6-quart capacity or larger

Using the food processor, mince the pancetta, onion, and garlic to a fine-textured pestata. Slice the celery stalks (and leaves) crosswise into ½-inch-thick chunks—you should have 6 cups of sliced celery or a bit more. If you have a piece of cheese rind, scrape off any mold and rinse it.

Pour the olive oil into the soup pot, and set over medium-high heat. Scrape in the pestata, and cook, stirring, until it has dried and just begins to stick to the bottom of the pan, about 5 minutes.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes and the water, and stir up the pestata. Drop in the cheese rind and the 2 tablespoons salt, cover the pot, and bring the soup base to a boil. Cook, covered, at a steady boil for 20 minutes or so, to develop flavor.

Uncover the pot, and stir in all of the sliced celery. Bring the soup back to a boil, then adjust the heat to keep it at a bubbling simmer. Cook, cover off, for another hour or so, until the celery is very soft and the soup has reduced by about a quarter. Taste, and check that the broth has enough flavor and body—if it is thin, cook longer to concentrate the taste. Adjust the seasoning, making sure there’s enough saltiness to season the ditalini pasta. (You can finish and serve all or some of the soup now, or let it cool, then refrigerate or freeze.)

To complete the soup with pasta: Heat to the boil only the amount of soup you’ll be serving, measuring 1½ to 2 cups per portion (eight or more servings from the whole batch). When it is bubbling, stir in ¾ cup ditalini for every quart of soup.

Cook, stirring occasionally, until the pasta is al dente, 10 minutes or so. Turn off the heat, and immediately ladle the soup into warm bowls. Sprinkle a couple of tablespoons of freshly grated cheese over each portion, and finish with a swirl of excellent olive oil. Serve right away, with more grated cheese at the table.

Meatless Pecorino Meatballs

Polpettine di Pecorino e Uova. Makes about 60 small polpettine, serving 6 as a main course, 10 or more as a first course, and many more as a buffet appetizer

These crispy, savory balls, simmering in tomato sauce, are delicious and surprising: though they have all the texture and flavor that a meatball-lover would ask for, there’s not a bit of meat in them—just eggs, grated cheese, and bread crumbs plus garlic and basil. They are certainly a testament to the ingenuity of Abruzzese cooks, who have fashioned the simplest staples of a rustic kitchen into a treat for all occasions. Serve the polpettine as a special snack or party hors d’oeuvre—when they’re freshly fried and crispy, you won’t even need any sauce. And with the sauce, they make a delightful primo or vegetarian main course.

A good-quality pecorino for grating is essential here and will give you the most authentic flavor. If you’ve found one you like, use it exclusively in the polpettine and for serving. If your pecorino is sharp and/or salty, substitute Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano for half the cheese in the recipe.

- 8 large eggs
- 3 cups fine dry bread crumbs
- 3 cups freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor)
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh basil (about 20 large leaves)
- 2 plump garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped
- 1 cup vegetable oil, or more as needed
- 2 batches (6 to 7 cups) Tomato Sauce
- Fresh basil leaves for garnishing

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy-bottomed high-sided skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, for frying; a heavy saucepan, 6-quart capacity or larger, for finishing the polpettine in sauce

Beat the eggs well in a large mixing bowl. Heap the bread crumbs, grated cheese, salt, chopped basil, and garlic on top of the eggs, and mix everything together well, first with a big spoon or spatula and then with your hands. The dough should come together in a soft mass, leaving the sides of the bowl. If it is very sticky, work in more bread crumbs a bit at a time.

Break off tablespoonful pieces of dough, and one by one roll them in your palms into a smooth ball. Place the polpettine on a board or tray covered with wax paper or parchment—you should get about sixty balls total.

Pour \( \frac{1}{8} \) inch oil into the skillet, and set over a medium flame. When the oil is hot enough that a test ball starts sizzling on contact, lay in as many polpettine as will fill the pan with clear space around them—you should be able to fit in twenty or thirty. Adjust the heat so the oil stays hot and the rounds are sizzling and browning nicely but not burning. Turn them frequently, so they fry on all sides. When the balls are evenly browned and crispy, lift them from the pan, let the oil drip back in for a moment, then lay them on paper towels to drain.

Fry all the polpettine in batches this way, adding more oil as needed. As a snack or hors d’oeuvre, serve each freshly fried batch while hot and crispy.

To finish and serve polpettine with tomato sauce, heat 6 cups of the sauce to a simmer in the big saucepan. Drop in all the balls, and return the sauce to a simmer, gently turning the polpettine so all are submerged and coated. Cook for about 5 minutes, or just until the polpettine are heated all the way through.

Immediately spoon out the balls in portions: Heap ten or so in warm pasta bowls, with sauce on top, for main-course servings; garnish with a sprinkle of grated cheese and a basil leaf. As a first course, serve four to six polpettine on plates, in a pool of sauce. Or pile all the balls up high in a deep platter to share them family-style. Sprinkle cheese over the top, and serve right away.

A note of advice: Keep in mind that the longer the polpettine stay in the sauce the more they will absorb it and become soft—quite delicious, but delicate to handle. Plan to serve them as soon as they are heated through. If they’ve soaked up most of the sauce in this time—or if your guests are late—heat up about 1 cup more, spoon it over the polpettine, or pass it at the table.

**Crespelle with Spinach**

Scrippelle agli Spinaci  Serves 6 or more

Italians have many local and regional names for *crespelle* (what the French, and most Americans, call crêpes) and innumerable ways to enjoy them. In Abruzzo, these traditional thin pancakes are called *scrippelle* and are the versatile foundation for both savory and sweet dishes.

Here’s a typically simple casserole of spinach-filled *scrippelle*, lightly dressed with tomato sauce and a shower of grated cheese. Serve bubbling hot from the oven as an appetizer or a fine vegetarian main dish (even meat-lovers will be satisfied).
The batter for these scrippelle is a bit thicker than the usual crespelle batter, but it is easy to work with and produces a pancake with fine texture. The Abruzzesi use them in all sorts of creative ways: layered with cheeses and sauce like a lasagna or a pasticiatta, rolled and stuffed and baked like manicotti. A popular technique is to stack and slice the scrippelle into thin, tagliatelle-like ribbons. These ribbons are often used as a soup garnish (see box), or in clever desserts, as I show you later in this chapter.

FOR THE SCRIPPELLE

- 4 large eggs
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons cold water
- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 4 tablespoons soft butter, or as needed

FOR FILLING AND BAKING THE SCRIPPELLE

- 1½ pounds tender spinach leaves, rinsed well, tough stems removed
- 5 tablespoons butter, plus more for the baking dish
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 cups Tomato Sauce or Marinara Sauce
- 1¼ cups freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), or more as needed

Recommended equipment: An electric mixer fitted with whisk attachment, or a sturdy wire whisk; a 9-inch crêpe pan or a 10-inch nonstick skillet (with a 9-inch bottom); a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a large baking dish or shallow casserole, 10 by 15 inches, or similar size

To make the scrippelle batter with an electric mixer: Put the eggs and salt in the mixer bowl, and whisk on medium speed until foamy. Lower the speed, mix in the water, then stop and sift the flour on top. Whisk on low just until smooth. Follow the same mixing procedure if using a hand whisk. You should have about 3 cups of batter.

Brush the crêpe pan with a thin coating of butter. Set over medium heat until hot but not smoking. Ladle about ¼ cup of batter into the pan, then quickly tilt and swirl the pan so the batter coats the bottom. Let cook about 30 seconds to 1 minute, until the bottom is lightly browned all over. Flip with a spatula, and cook another 30 seconds or so, until that side is lightly browned. Flip the crespella onto a dinner plate. Cook all the crespelle in the same way—a dozen or so total—stacking them on the plate when finished. Brush the pan with butter if it becomes dry or the scrippelle are sticking. If you won’t be using the scrippelle right away, wrap them in plastic wrap when cool, so they don’t dry out. Refrigerate, well wrapped, to use the next day (or freeze).

To make the spinach filling: Bring a large pot of salted water to boil. Add all the spinach at once, stir, and cover the pot. Blanch until tender, about 4 or 5 minutes, then drain in a colander. Let the spinach cool, firmly squeeze all the moisture from the leaves, and chop them coarsely. (This step can be done ahead of time: cool and refrigerate chopped spinach for use the next day.)

When you are ready to fill and bake the scrippelle, heat the oven to 425° and arrange a rack in the center.

Melt 3 tablespoons of the butter in the large skillet over medium heat. Scatter the spinach in the pan, and season with 1 teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring, for a minute or so, just enough to heat the spinach through.

Heat the tomato sauce in a small pot until bubbling, then turn off the heat and whisk in 2 tablespoons of butter until incorporated. Spread another 2 tablespoons of butter, or as needed, in the baking dish, coating the bottom and
To fill each scrippella: Lay it flat, scatter about a tablespoon of chopped spinach in the center, and sprinkle ½ tablespoon or so grated cheese on top. Fold the scrippella in half and then into quarter-rounds. Repeat until all the scrippelle are filled and folded.

Spread ½ cup of the tomato sauce in the bottom of the buttered baking dish. Arrange the filled and folded scrippelle in the dish in overlapping rows, with the pointed ends covered and the pretty fanlike edges visible. Spoon the remaining sauce on top of the scrippelle, in streaks down the center of the rows—don’t try to cover them completely. Sprinkle the remaining grated cheese (or a bit more if needed) lightly all over the top.

Cover the pan with aluminum foil, making sure the foil doesn’t touch the cheese. Bake for about 15 minutes, remove the foil, and bake until the sauce is bubbling and the gratinato topping is golden and crispy, about 10 minutes more. Serve very hot, right from the dish.

SCRIPPELLE IN SOUP, ABRUZZO-STYLE

A delicious soup becomes a great dish when it gets the right garnish. In Abruzzo, cooks use scrippelle to give their fine soups an extra dimension of taste, texture, and substance.

A favorite technique (which I recommend to you) is to slice the scrippelle into thin strips like pasta, let them dry, then drop them into soups (or into the bowl before the soup goes in) to become marvelous instant noodles. For even more flavor—and great crunch—fry these scrippelle ribbons until very crisp in a skillet, and use them as a garnish.

Another wonderful method is to grate a bit of good pecorino over a round scrippella and fold it in quarters (just as the pancakes are folded for the spinach casserole). Place one of these packets in each bowl, pour over it the steaming soup, and serve. As I hope you will soon find, the pleasure of even the plainest broth is immeasurably increased through this simple touch.

GET YOURSELF A CHITARRA!

Some of you are probably wondering, “Do I really need an imported chitarr to make this maccheroni?” I say yes. You and your family will find it great fun to cut pasta dough through a chitarr and then enjoy the pleasures that only fresh homemade maccheroni’s distinctive textural character can give.

Fortunately, it is now easy to find and purchase a sturdy chitarr (some made in Abruzzo) for under $50 in the United States. I recommend a traditional chitarr, with two sets of strings on the frame, which allows you to cut very thin pasta strands (especially nice for cooking in soups) as well as perfect thick, four-sided maccheroni. Make them once, and I am certain you will use your chitarr often! (And remember that, just as a guitar needs to be tuned before playing, so does the maccheroni chitarr. Before each use, pluck on the strings and make sure they are taut and properly set in their notches on the chitarr frame. Most chitarre have instructions for tightening the strings, usually a simple matter of turning the knobs that hold them.)

If you don’t yet have a chitarr, though, you can make the pasta dough, roll it, and cut strands with the cutting attachment of your pasta machine or by hand. And if you only have dry pasta, you can certainly use what you have in place of fresh maccheroni with any of my sauce recipes. Spaghettoni or linguine will always work well, and recently I’ve noticed that many top pasta manufacturers now make long dry “spaghetti alla chitarr,” with thick, square-cut strands that resemble maccheroni cut on a chitarr. Although they will never replace homemade maccheroni in my kitchen, they are a fine pasta to use in any of the recipes here.

HOMEMADE MACCHERONI ALLA CHITARRA

Makes about 1 pound, serving 6 as a primo or 4 as main dish

The dough for maccheroni alla chitarr is has to be slightly firmer than usual for fresh pasta; it requires a bit more
flour, so it will cut neatly when pressed against the chi\textipa{r}ra. If you have a kitchen scale, weighing the flour is best: start with 10 ounces of flour, equivalent to 2 cups of unsifted flour, slightly packed, and add more as needed. Though I always tell you that you can make fresh pasta dough by hand (because it is so easy!), here I recommend the food-processor method, to incorporate the greater amount of flour quickly.

- 2 cups (10 ounces) all-purpose flour, plus more as needed
- 4 large eggs
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor fitted with a steel blade; a pasta-rolling machine or wooden rolling pin; a wooden chi\textipa{r}ra

Measure 2 full cups of unsifted flour (or weigh out 10 ounces), and dump it all in the food-processor bowl; process for a few seconds to aerate.

Beat the eggs with the salt in a spouted measuring cup. With the food processor running, quickly pour in all the eggs through the feed tube. Process continuously, as a dough forms and gathers on the blade and cleans the side of the bowl. If the dough does not come together or clean the bowl after 30 seconds or so, stop the machine, scrape down the sides, and sprinkle in a couple of tablespoons more flour. Process for a few more seconds—and add more flour if necessary—until a fairly firm ball of dough forms.

Turn the dough out on a lightly floured surface, and knead by hand for a minute or more, until it is smooth and firm. If it’s at all sticky, incorporate more flour as you knead. Press the dough into a disk, wrap tightly in plastic wrap, and let rest at room temperature for at least $\frac{1}{2}$ hour. (You can refrigerate the dough for up to a day, or freeze for a month or more. Defrost in the refrigerator, and return to room temperature before rolling.) Cut the dough in four equal pieces.

If using a pasta machine: Roll each piece through the machine at progressively thinner settings, to form long wide strips, about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick (no thinner) and as wide as your machine allows. If the strip grows longer than the strings of your chi\textipa{r}ra, cut it crosswise into two shorter strips.

To roll by hand: Lightly flour the work surface and your rolling pin. Flatten each piece of dough into a rectangle with your palm, and roll it from the center, gradually lengthening it into a broad strip about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick. Don’t roll the dough too thin or longer or wider than the strings of your chi\textipa{r}ra.

To cut maccheroni: Lay a strip of dough over the strings of the chi\textipa{r}ra (on a two-sided chi\textipa{r}ra, use the more widely spaced strings). Using gentle but constant pressure, roll your pin lengthwise up and down the pasta, so the strings cut it cleanly into strands of maccheroni that fall onto the tray of the chi\textipa{r}ra. Dust the freshly cut strands with flour, and gather them into a loose nest on a floured tray. Cut all the strips into maccheroni, and collect them in floured nests. Leave the tray uncovered at room temperature until you are ready to cook the pasta.

To cook a whole batch of maccheroni: Bring to boiling a large pot of well-salted water (at least 6 quarts with a tablespoon or more of salt). Using your hand or a colander, shake excess flour off the nests of maccheroni, and drop them into the pot. Stir and separate the strands as the water returns to a rolling boil, then cook the pasta for 4 to 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, until al dente. (See the many sauce recipes that follow for instructions on dressing maccheroni alla chi\textipa{r}ra.)

To freeze the cut maccheroni: Set the whole tray in the freezer. When the nests are solid, seal them in airtight plastic bags and pack in a container, so they don’t get crushed. (Frozen maccheroni can be dropped right into the pasta cooking pot; stir gently to separate the strands as they soften.)
Though many distinctive foods of Abruzzo are relatively little known outside of the rugged region, the fresh egg pasta called maccheroni alla chitarra is famous all over Italy and beyond. No doubt it is primarily known for the unique way it is made: sheets of rolled-out pasta are pressed against the taut strings of a chitarra—a guitar—and fall apart into long strands.

This cutting method is not just a charming old custom, however. The chitarra makes pasta strands that, when cooked, have wonderfully satisfying texture and substance. In my opinion, this sensation of mouth-feel is one of the great gustatory pleasures, and maccheroni alla chitarra provides it in every bite.

The Abruzzesi are unabashed in their enjoyment of their signature pasta (which they always call maccheroni, never spaghetti alla chitarra), cooking it up for quick dinners and grand holiday meals. And if they don’t have time to make it themselves, they’ll buy a fresh-cut batch from a small local pastificio, or pasta shop, on the way home.

In these pages, I’m giving you a taste of this rich regional pasta tradition with the preceding recipe for homemade maccheroni alla chitarra, as well as a variety of typical dressings, both simple, uncooked condiments and more elaborate cooked sauces. These are but a small sample of the many maccheroni dishes you’ll find in Abruzzo, enough to provide you with many fine meals and, I hope, spark your own creativity with one of the world’s great pastas.

**Uncooked Olive Oil Sauce**

The resourceful cooks of Abruzzo are never at a loss for quick and delicious ways to dress maccheroni alla chitarra or the excellent dry pastas made in the region. As these recipes for uncooked dressings show, they can take whatever’s on hand—locally pressed olive oil, a few cloves of garlic, their beloved hot pepper, a cluster of fresh herbs, a pinch of saffron, a handful of nuts, or other native ingredients—and produce a wonderful sauce in minutes.

The foundation for these simple sauces—and the endless variations you might enjoy in Abruzzo—is the
distinctive fruity olive oils of the region. Extra-virgin oils from the provinces of Teramo, Pescara, and Chieti have achieved DOP (name-protected) status and are available here. Certainly these superb oils will give your maccheroni (or other pasta) a truly authentic Abruzzese flavor, but any top-quality Italian extra-virgin olive oil will make a delicious sauce, too.

Please don’t limit your enjoyment of these sauces to pasta, because they are marvelously versatile condiments for meats, fish, poultry, and vegetables, too. They need only a whirl in the food processor and they will keep for weeks. I hope you try them all!

**Basil, Parsley & Walnut Pesto**

Pesto di Noci e Basilico Makes about 1½ cups, enough for a pound of *Maccheroni alla Chitarra* (preceding recipe) or other pasta

This distinctively flavored pesto is a superb dressing for *maccheroni alla chitarra*, spaghetti, or linguine, or a short dry pasta such as gemelli, lumache, or rigatoni. It’s a great condiment, too: put a spoonful on fish or chicken hot off the grill for a real treat. Make extra pesto when basil and parsley are plentiful, in summer, and freeze it in small containers to use through the winter.

- 1½ cups loosely packed fresh basil leaves
- 1 cup loosely packed fresh Italian parsley leaves
- 4 plump garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 cups walnut halves or pieces, toasted
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus a bit more for storing

**TO DRESS THE PASTA**

- 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A food processor

If you’re using the pesto right away to dress *maccheroni alla chitarra* (or other pasta), heat a large pot of salted water to a boil before processing the sauce.

To make the pesto: Heap the basil, parsley, garlic, walnuts, and salt into the food processor. Pulse several times, to chop everything together coarsely, then, with the machine running, pour in the ½ cup olive oil in a slow, steady stream. Stop and scrape down the sides of the work bowl, and process to a uniformly fine bright-green pesto.

Put all the pesto into a large, deep bowl, big enough to toss all the pasta in. Meanwhile, start cooking the *maccheroni* or other pasta. Shortly before it is done, ladle ½ cup or so of the boiling pasta water into the bowl, and stir to warm and loosen the pesto—use only as much water as needed to bring the pesto to tossing consistency.

When the *maccheroni* is perfectly *al dente*, lift it from the pot with tongs and a spider, drain it for an instant, then drop it into the bowl. Toss the pasta and sauce together thoroughly. Sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over it, then toss again. Serve immediately in warm bowls, with more cheese at the table.

To store and use the pesto later: Scrape it from the food processor into a small jar or container. Smooth the top surface, and cover it with a thin layer of olive oil or a piece of plastic wrap to prevent discoloration. Refrigerate for a week, or freeze for several months; warm to room temperature before using.
Parsley Sauce with Fresh Ripe Tomatoes

Pesto di Prezzemolo con Pomodori Freschi Makes enough parsley sauce (with or without tomatoes) for a pound of Maccheroni alla Chitarra or other pasta

This recipe actually gives you two flavorful sauces, to use as a dressing for pasta or to give a fresh accent to all sorts of dishes, from steamed vegetables to roasted meats. The basic sauce is a simple, loose parsley pesto, quite good and easily whipped up any time of year. In summer, I cut ripe, sweet tomatoes into small pieces and mix them into the pesto. The juices and flesh of the tomatoes merge with the parsley sauce, creating a new dressing with multiple dimensions of flavor and texture.

**2 cups loosely packed fresh Italian parsley leaves**

**3 plump garlic cloves, peeled**

**½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes or to taste**

**1 or 2 teaspoons kosher salt**

**¾ cup extra-virgin olive oil**

**1½ pounds ripe tomatoes, either full-sized or cherry tomatoes**

**1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor)**

**To Dress the Pasta**

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor

To make the basic sauce: Put the parsley leaves, garlic, peperoncino, and 1 teaspoon salt in the food-processor bowl. Pulse several times to chop the leaves coarsely, then, with the machine running, pour in all the olive oil in a steady stream. Stop and scrape down the sides of the work bowl, and process to a fine-textured, very loose pesto. Use this parsley sauce right away to dress pasta or as a condiment. To store, scrape the sauce into a small container, cover the top surface with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for a day (or freeze for later use; defrost at room temperature).

For parsley sauce with tomatoes: Prepare the tomatoes before processing the basic sauce. For full-sized round tomatoes, cut out the cores, slice the tomatoes in half, and squeeze out the seeds, then cut the flesh into 1-inch chunks. For cherry tomatoes, simply slice them in half. Put all the cut tomato pieces in a deep bowl, and toss with 1 teaspoon kosher salt. Let the tomatoes sit for a few minutes to release their juices while you process the parsley sauce, as detailed above. Pour the freshly made parsley sauce over the cut tomatoes, and toss together well. Use within an hour or two. If it waits longer the freshness and bright color of the parsley vanishes.

To dress the pasta with either the basic parsley sauce or the parsley-tomato sauce: Put the sauce in a bowl big enough for tossing. Cook the pasta until al dente—take some of the boiling pasta water to loosen the parsley sauce only if it seems too dense to toss. When the maccheroni is done, drain and drop it into the bowl with the sauce. Toss well, then sprinkle over it a cup or so of grated cheese, and toss again. Serve immediately in warm bowls, with more cheese at the table.
What made my visit to the saffron-producing region of Abruzzo particularly exciting was learning that the threads gathered there are considered one of the finest saffron varieties in the world. Grown only in a handful of highland fields in and around Navelli, the zafferano d’Aquila (saffron from Aquila) is prized for its intense fragrance, flavor, and color.

As I learned from Silvio Sarra, the wonderful man who welcomed me to the harvest, the high quality of zafferano d’Aquila was recognized as early as the thirteenth century, when the saffron crocus was introduced to Navelli. Soon traded all over Europe, the spice became a mainstay of the region’s economy, and for seven centuries, hundreds of acres of crocuses were cultivated in Aquila Province. During the twentieth century, though, changing world markets nearly wiped out Navelli’s saffron industry, with its labor-intensive methods and high costs.

However, there were some who did not want the crocus fields and the saffron of Aquila to disappear. Silvio Sarra himself, along with other local farmers determined to save their agricultural traditions, continued to grow and harvest saffron. Together they established a consortium to preserve the uniqueness of zafferano d’Aquila, ultimately earning a DOP designation, which protects the crop’s cultivation zone, methods, and standards. We hope the Consortium for the Protection of Zafferano d’Aquila will allow us to enjoy this precious culinary commodity for generations to come.

I am happy to tell you that genuine Aquila saffron is now imported and sold here. Because of its scarcity, though, you can expect it to be considerably more expensive than other saffrons. Lower-priced good-quality saffron will certainly work fine in my recipes, but now that you know about zafferano d’Aquila, I think that you will find it well worth its price. Just a few fragrant threads will impart great flavor to your dishes, and they’ll connect you to the beautiful plains of Navelli, where they were grown.

A Saffron Secret

I learned this little trick about enhancing the aroma of saffron from the elders in Navelli who cook with the saffron that they produce. Carefully drop the saffron strands (as much as the recipe calls for) into a metal
spoon. Hold the spoon over a low open flame for just a few seconds, toasting the threads very gently—the
perfume will tell you it’s working! Before they overheat, spill the threads out of the spoon into a bowl for
steeping or grinding, as called for in the recipe.

Saffron-Infused Olive Oil

Infusione di Zafferano, Prezzemolo, ed Olio d’Oliva Makes about ⅔ cup, enough for a pound of Maccheroni alla
Chitarra or other pasta

Just a small amount of saffron can imbue extra-virgin olive oil with the spice’s captivating perfume and distinctive
flavor. This versatile condiment is a great way to bring a light and seductive touch of saffron to your dishes, without
overwhelming them. It makes a delicious (and colorful) dressing for maccheroni alla chitarra or other pasta, or to
season almost any mild-flavored dish.

1 teaspoon loosely packed toasted saffron threads
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 teaspoon kosher salt
3 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

TO DRESS THE PASTA
1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A mortar and pestle or spice grinder; a mini–food processor

Put the toasted saffron threads into the mortar or spice grinder, and pulverize to a powder.

Pour the olive oil and the salt into a small mixing bowl. Add the crushed saffron. Rinse the mortar with a
tablespoon of hot water, collecting any remaining bits of ground saffron, and pour that into the saffron oil. Whisk to
mix thoroughly.

If you are not using the saffron oil right away, transfer the oil to a small container and let it infuse at room
temperature for at least ½ hour. Shortly before using, whisk chopped parsley into the oil. (To store the oil—
preferably before adding parsley—cover the container and refrigerate for up to a week.)
To dress maccheroni alla chitarra (or other pasta) with the saffron oil: Cook the pasta in a large pot of salted water until al dente. Drain the cooked maccheroni, and drop the strands into a big warm bowl, drizzle the oil all over the top, and toss well (and quickly) to coat all the strands of pasta with golden oil. Sprinkle over it a cup or so of grated cheese, and toss again. Serve immediately in warm bowls, with more cheese at the table.

**Olio Santo, a Heavenly Spicy Olive Oil Condiment**

One reason I feel such an affinity for the cooking of Abruzzo is the generous use of peperoncino—hot red chili pepper, fresh or dried. Lavish spiciness is typical of southern Italian cuisines, and although I am from the north, I love it, and it makes me feel right at home.

The Abruzzesi refer to their favorite red chilis as diavolicchio, diavolillo, or diavolino—all of which mean “little devil”—and when you taste them you’ll know why. Often, these devilish peperoncini are steeped in olive oil, creating a spicy-hot condiment called olio santo or “holy oil.” If you love heat, a drizzle of this oil makes a good dish more heavenly.

Olio santo is an indispensable condiment in Abruzzo, set on the table so that everyone can regulate the level of heat in a dish to his or her own taste. Whether it’s a soup, a pasta, or a main dish, if you want more heat, all you need to do is sprinkle over it a teaspoon of holy oil, give it a stir, and get immediate results.

To make your own olio santo, pour a cup of good extra-virgin olive oil into a glass jar, and drop in a teaspoon of kosher salt and 2 tablespoons of small whole dried peperoncini, about ten little peppers. Cover tightly, and let the oil infuse at room temperature for at least 2 days. Give it a good shake, and use. Store in the sealed jar, in a cool place, for a month or more.

(If you are a peperoncino-lover, too, be sure to try the heavenly pasta from Basilicata, Fiery Maccheroni. Its peperoncino-paste dressing is also a hot all-purpose condiment.)

**Maccheroni with Fresh Lemon & Cream**

Maccheroni all’Agro Serves 6 as a first course or 4 as a main course

Agro means “sour,” and in this refreshing and fast pasta sauce, there’s plenty of lively acidity: white wine, freshly squeezed lemon juice, and grated lemon zest. These are nicely balanced with butter and cream, and all the cooking takes barely 5 minutes—less than the time you need to cook your maccheroni alla chitarra. Be sure that all your ingredients are ready—and the pasta water is at the boil—when you start cooking the sauce. Best with maccheroni alla chitarra, this dressing is also delicious with fresh tagliatelle or dry spaghetti or linguine.

- 3 tablespoons butter
- Finely grated zest of 2 lemons (about 4 teaspoons)
- 1 cup dry white wine
- Juice of 2 lemons, freshly squeezed (about ⅓ cup)
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 cup heavy cream

**FOR COOKING AND FINISHING THE PASTA**

- 1 batch (1 pound) Homemade Maccheroni alla Chitarra or other pasta
- 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing
- Extra-virgin olive oil, best-quality, for serving

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger
To cook the *maccheroni*: heat a large pot of well-salted water (6 quarts or more) to the boil.

Drop the butter into the big skillet, and set it over medium heat. As the butter melts, scatter in the grated lemon zest; stir it around until sizzling. Pour in the white wine and lemon juice, add the salt, stir, and bring the liquids to a bubbling simmer. Cover the skillet, and let cook for a couple of minutes.

Uncover the pan, and slowly pour in the cream, whisking it steadily into the simmering wine and lemon juice. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the liquids reduce to a saucy consistency you like, 2 or 3 minutes more.

After whisking in the cream, start cooking the pasta. Shake excess flour off the fresh *maccheroni*, and drop it into the boiling water, stirring to separate the strands. Return the water to a rolling boil, and cook the pasta for 4 to 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, just until *al dente*.

With the lemon-and-cream sauce at a simmer, quickly lift out the *maccheroni* and drop it all into the skillet. Toss the pasta until well coated, loosening the sauce with a few spoonfuls of hot pasta-cooking water if needed.

Turn off the heat, sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the *maccheroni*, and toss well. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil, toss again, and heap the pasta in warm bowls. Serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

**MACCHERONI WITH ZUCCHINI**

*Maccheroni all’Aquilana* Serves 6 as a first course or 4 as a main course

In this recipe, careful cooking brings out the wonderful flavor of fresh zucchini to make a lovely dressing for *maccheroni* (or other pasta). Select small, firm zucchini, though—preferably right from the garden!—and if you can, pick, or purchase, zucchini flowers at the same time. They make the dish especially festive.

As the name *all’Aquilana* suggests, this has distinctive touches of the cooking of Aquila, a city in the high inland province of Abruzzo: you can’t miss the fragrant presence of saffron (presumably the splendid *zafferano d’Aquila*), and the sauce’s final enrichment with egg yolks is a typical embellishment in regional kitchens. All together, this is a flavorful and satisfying first or main course. It’s thoroughly vegetarian—though you can use poultry stock in place of water for a somewhat richer dish.

- ¼ teaspoon toasted *saffron* threads
- 4 or 5 small, firm *zucchini* (about 1½ pounds total, or 1 pound zucchini and 24 fresh zucchini flowers)
- ¼ cup *extra-virgin olive oil*
- 1 cup chopped *onion*
- 3 cups or so hot *water* or *light poultry stock*
- 1 cup finely chopped *scallions*
- 2 teaspoons *kosher salt*
- 2 tablespoons chopped *fresh Italian parsley*
- 2 large *egg yolks*

**FOR COOKING AND FINISHING THE PASTA**

- 1 batch (1 pound) *Homemade Maccheroni alla Chitarra*
- 1 cup freshly grated *pecorino* (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing
- *Extra-virgin olive oil*, best-quality, for serving
RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Put the toasted saffron threads in a small dish with 2 tablespoons of hot water, and let them steep.

To cook the maccheroni: heat a large pot of well-salted water (6 quarts or more) to the boil.

Trim the zucchini, slice them lengthwise into thin strips, then cut the strips into thin 2-inch-long matchsticks. If you have zucchini flowers, trim off any remnants of stem, pull out the inside filaments (the flower’s stigmas), and chop the flowers into fine shreds. Pour the olive oil into the big skillet, turn on medium-high heat, and stir in the chopped onion. Cook the onion for a few minutes, stirring occasionally, until wilting and translucent but not browning. Ladle in ½ cup or so of the hot water or stock, and cook the onion in the bubbling liquid for a few minutes more, to soften.

Before the liquid evaporates, scatter the zucchini matchsticks (and, if using, the shredded zucchini flowers) into the skillet, and stir them in with the onion, then add the chopped scallions and the salt. Cook over high heat, stirring, as the zucchini releases more juices. Let boil and reduce for a couple of minutes—again, don’t let the pan get dry—then ladle in another 2 cups hot water, stir well, and mix in the saffron threads and saffron-infused water, and the chopped parsley. Bring the sauce to a boil, let it reduce for a couple of minutes to tossing consistency, then lower the heat to keep it barely simmering while you cook the maccheroni alla chitarra.

For cooking and finishing the pasta: With the pasta water at a rolling boil, shake excess flour off the fresh maccheroni, and drop the strands into the pot, stirring and separating them. Return the water to a full boil, and cook the pasta for 4 to 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, just until al dente.

Meanwhile, beat the egg yolks in a mixing bowl with a small wire whisk, and gradually whisk in the last ½ cup of hot water, to thin and temper the yolks. When the pasta is cooked, lift out the maccheroni, drain briefly, and drop them into the skillet. With tongs, quickly toss the pasta in the simmering zucchini until the sauce is well distributed among the maccheroni strands.

Turn off the heat, and immediately pour the tempered egg yolks in a thin stream all over the maccheroni. Keep tossing and tumbling the pasta, to amalgamate the yolks in the sauce and cook them in the residual heat.

Next, sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the maccheroni, toss well, then finish with a drizzle of olive oil. Toss and heap the pasta in warm bowls, and serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

Maccheroni with Meat Sauce

Maccheroni alla Frentana. Makes about 6 cups, enough for 2 pounds of maccheroni alla chitarra or other pasta

I love ground-meat sauces that cook slowly for hours, allowing an exchange of flavors between the meat, cooking liquids, and seasonings and concentrating them into a dense, delicious dressing. Emilia-Romagna is famous for such sauces, the classic Ragù alla Bolognese and Ragù di Carni Bianche among them. This Abruzzese sauce is quite similar in its procedures, though it uses only pork rather than a mixture of ground meats. It also has some of the typical flavoring touches of the region, notably a generous dash of peperoncino and a greater volume of tomatoes, rendering it a bit more acidic and definitely more lively than a conventional, mellow Bolognese. It’s a great dressing
for homemade maccheroni alla chitarra, and wonderful with other pastas, too.

At home, whenever I’m preparing a dish like this that takes a long time—and yields such delicious results—I make more of it than I need for one occasion. Another great, effortless meal is a good reward for the hours and effort devoted to cooking the sauce. That’s why I have formulated this recipe to yield enough ragù to dress a pound of maccheroni or other pasta on the day it is cooked, with an equal amount to pack away in the freezer.

♦ FOR THE SAUCE
♦ 1 cup onion cut in 1-inch chunks
♦ 1 cup carrot cut in 1-inch chunks
♦ 1 cup celery cut in 1-inch chunks
♦ 2 pounds ground pork butt, freshly ground preferred
♦ ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
♦ 2 teaspoons kosher salt
♦ 1 teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
♦ 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
♦ 1 cup dry white wine
♦ 3 cups (one 28-ounce can) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
♦ 4 cups hot chicken, turkey, or vegetable stock or hot water, plus more if needed
♦ 3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil (about 12 large leaves)

♦ FOR COOKING AND FINISHING THE PASTA
♦ 1 batch (1 pound) Homemade Maccheroni alla Chitarra or other pasta
♦ 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing
♦ Extra-virgin olive oil, best-quality, for serving

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a heavy saucepan, such as enameled cast iron, 10-inch diameter or wider, 4-quart capacity, with a cover, for cooking the meat sauce; a large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or wider, for dressing the pasta

♦ For the sauce: Drop the chunks of onion, carrot, and celery into the food processor, and mince finely to an even-textured pestata. Dump the ground pork into a large bowl and break up any lumps.

♦ Pour the olive oil into the big saucepan, and set over medium-high heat. Scrape in the pestata, stir in 1 teaspoon of the salt, and spread it around the pan. Cook, stirring occasionally, as the vegetables wilt and dry, until they just begin to stick to the bottom of the pan, about 5 minutes. Drop the peperoncino into a hot spot on the pan bottom for a few moments, then stir it into the pestata.

♦ Lower the heat to medium, drop in the bay leaves, then scatter the ground pork into the pan, again breaking up any clumps of meat with your fingers. Sprinkle the remaining teaspoon salt over it, and stir everything together. Keep tossing the meat and breaking up any clumps until it starts sizzling and releasing its juices. Raise the heat a bit, and cook until all the meat juices have evaporated—about 15 minutes—stirring frequently.

♦ When the meat is dry and lightly caramelized, pour in the white wine, stir well, raise the heat a bit more, and simmer until the wine has evaporated completely, about 2 or 3 minutes. Pour in the crushed tomatoes, and stir with the meat. Slosh the tomato containers with 2 cups of hot stock or water (to get all the good juices), and stir this into the sauce along with the chopped basil. Set the cover on the pot, and bring the sauce to a simmer, then set the cover slightly ajar, and adjust the heat to keep it bubbling gently.
Simmer the sauce for about an hour, letting it reduce slowly, then stir in another cup or so of hot stock, so the meat is just covered by liquid. Let the sauce cook and reduce for another hour, then stir in the fourth cup of stock, or more if needed, and simmer for another hour—3 hours total. If the sauce is thin, uncover the pot and cook over higher heat, stirring, to reduce and concentrate to a consistency you like. Adjust the seasoning, stirring in more salt to taste. You can use some or all of the sauce right away, or let it cool, then refrigerate or freeze any amount. Cooled or chilled sauce will have thickened; reheat it slowly, stirring in more stock or water to loosen it.

For cooking and finishing the pasta: Bring a large pot of well-salted water to the boil. To dress the whole 1-pound batch of *maccheroni*, put 3 cups or so of the meat sauce into the wide skillet; loosen with stock or water if necessary, and heat to a simmer.

Shake excess flour off the fresh *maccheroni*, and drop the strands into the boiling water, stirring and separating the strands. Return the water to a rolling boil, and cook the pasta for about 4 minutes, until barely *al dente*.

Quickly lift out the *maccheroni* and drop them into the skillet. Continuously toss the pasta in the simmering sauce until all the strands are coated and perfectly *al dente*. Adjust the consistency of the sauce if necessary: thin it with hot pasta water, or thicken it quickly by cooking down over higher heat.

Turn off the heat, sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the *maccheroni*, and toss well. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil, toss again, and heap the pasta in warm bowls. Serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

**Grind Your Own Meat for a Better Ragù**

Grabbing a package of ground meat from the supermarket case is a convenience that all of us are accustomed to. For this pork ragù and other recipes with ground meat, however, I always prefer to grind my own meat or ask the butcher (if there is one) to grind a selected piece of meat (or whole pieces of different kinds of meat for a blend).

I recommend this practice for several reasons. First, buying whole meat allows you to determine its freshness and quality, an impossibility when it has been ground and sealed in plastic. Second, because illness-causing contamination spreads easily in ground meat—especially in bulk commercial processing—you can minimize the health risks by grinding a small, selected batch yourself (or having it done while you watch). Further, you can choose meat cuts that have the percentage of fat you want in your dish and grind them to the ideal texture, a great advantage since most supermarket meat is ground to the same mushy fineness.

Grinding meat in your kitchen is easy, whether you use a stand-alone grinder (electric or hand-cranked) or a meat-grinding attachment for a heavy-duty electric mixer, which is what I use. All of these are widely sold and reasonably priced. Be sure you get several disks (or dies), with various sizes of holes, for coarse and fine grinds.

Here’s what to do for a great pork ragù: Start with a 2-pound chunk of boneless pork butt (actually cut from the shoulder), which has fine flavor and suitable fat content. I always look for certified, organically raised meat, too. Cut the meat into chunks, and grind it once through a coarse die, then grind a second time either through a finer die or through the coarse die again. That is what I do—two coarse grindings—for a ragù with the chunky, meaty texture I love.

**Farro Pasta with Arugula & Ricotta**

*Pasta di Farro con Rucola e Ricotta* Serves 6

This wonderful country-style pasta dish requires almost no cooking, but fresh, flavorful ingredients are essential. Most important is to find fresh whole-milk ricotta (not the processed, packaged variety), often sold in good Italian
markets and whole-food stores. If you can find artisan-made sheep’s- or goat’s-milk ricotta, that would be best of all.

Another key ingredient is dry pasta made from farro, a kind of wheat berry usually cooked as a whole grain (try my Farro with Roasted Pepper Sauce). Farro pasta is quite popular in Abruzzo and is manufactured there, in many shapes, by both small artisanal pastifici (pasta factories) and the big pasta companies. Look for it in your market, or order it online either ziti or spaghetti would be my choice for this dish. It is delicious, nutritious, and moderately priced.

You’ll also need tender ruccola (arugula), good grated pecorino, and excellent extra-virgin olive oil. Once you have all your ingredients, the preparation is fast and easy.

- Kosher salt for the pasta pot
- 4 ounces tender, small arugula leaves, stems trimmed (about 1½ cups tightly packed)
- 1 pound farro ziti, spaghetti, or other farro pasta
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cups whole-milk ricotta, preferably fresh
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

To cook the pasta: bring a large pot of well-salted water (6 quarts or more) to the boil.

Meanwhile, rinse the arugula leaves well, then drain and dry them in a salad spinner or with paper towels. Slice or chop the leaves into rough strips, about ½ inch wide.

When the water is at a rolling boil, drop in the farro pasta, stir, and separate the strands. Return to the boil, and cook the pasta until al dente, stirring occasionally.

As the pasta cooks, pour 4 tablespoons of the olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over low heat. Spoon in the ricotta, and break up the curds with a wooden spoon, spreading and gently warming the cheese and oil in the pan—don’t let them get hot or start cooking. Season with 1 teaspoon salt.

When the pasta is al dente, lift it from the pot, drain for a moment, and drop it into the skillet. Still over low heat, toss the pasta for a minute or more, until the strands are evenly coated with ricotta—incorporate spoonfuls of hot pasta water if the ricotta is stiff and not flowing.

Turn off the heat, sprinkle the grated cheese and remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil on the pasta, and toss well again. Finally, scatter the shreds of arugula on top, and tumble into the pasta for a few moments, so the greens barely wilt. Serve immediately in warm bowls, with more grated cheese at the table.

RICOTTA WITH REAL FLAVOR

Ricotta is produced from whey, the liquid left after milk has been curdled to make cheese. In America, ricotta is usually made from the whey of cow’s milk, most of it manufactured into the bland, moist product you find in the dairy case. Fresh whole-milk ricotta is drier and tastier. Containing no preservatives, it is usually hand-packed into containers to be sold within a day or two. Such fresh ricotta can be quite good—it is what I use at home—but it still can’t match the flavor of fresh ricotta in Italy, where more strongly flavored whey from sheep’s milk, water buffalo’s milk, or goat’s milk is the foundation. In the hands of a master cheesemaker like my friend Gregorio Rotolo, near Scanno in Abruzzo, ricotta can become a true delicacy.
The good news for us is that a new generation of artisan cheesemakers in America are producing fine sheep’s- and goat’s-milk ricottas. Look for them at farmers’ markets and specialty shops. Or, for a treat from the Old World, you can order fresh sheep’s-milk ricotta flown in from Italy, delivered to your door (see Sources, for these products).

**Paccheri with Seafood**

Pasta con il Pescato dei Trabocchi Serves 6

On my recent visits to Abruzzo, I have been impressed as never before by the region’s Adriatic coast, with its picturesque trabocchi, the little fishing shacks that hover over the water at the end of long wooden piers, and by the fresh coastal cuisine we enjoyed, meal after meal.

Here’s a recipe inspired by the delightful lunches of that visit, which we sometimes ate in view of the trabocchi, where the smoke rising from the ends of the piers told me the fishermen were cooking lunch, too. It is just the kind of fresh-from-the-sea dish they make, lots of shellfish quickly cooked in garlicky tomato sauce, then tossed with a pasta that traps the nuggets of fish and sauce in its hollows. My choice are the fat tubes called paccheri, a sort of giant rigatoni. In my opinion, there is no greater gustatory experience than the marvelous squirting that fills your mouth when you bite into paccheri full of sauce and juicy seafood.

This *pasta di trabocchi* also has the distinctly Abruzzese touch of saffron (picked in the high plains of Navelli) to add complexity and depth to the sauce. And for me, saffron has a magical effect on the palate, creating the illusion of distant, mystic places. It’s a fitting flavor in a dish of the sea, and a symbol for those that travel the sea, the mariners of the Abruzzo coast.

- ½ teaspoon toasted saffron threads
- ½ pound sea scallops (preferably “dry,” not soaked in preservative)
- ½ pound medium-sized raw shrimp (about 30 shrimp)
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil, or as needed
- 6 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- ½ teaspoon (or more!) peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 3 cups (one 28-ounce can) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 pound littleneck clams, scrubbed, rinsed, and drained
- 1 pound mussels, scrubbed, rinsed, and drained
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh Italian parsley

**FOR COOKING AND FINISHING THE PASTA**

- 1 pound paccheri, large rigatoni, or other short dry pasta with lots of hollows
- Extra-virgin olive oil, best-quality, for serving

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed, high-sided skillet or sauté pan, preferably 14 inches wide, with a cover; a big pot for cooking the pasta

- Put the toasted saffron threads in a small cup with 2 tablespoons of hot water, and let them steep.
- Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil, at least 6 quarts with 1 tablespoon of salt, for the pasta.
- Prepare the seafood: Cut the sea scallops in quarters. Remove the shells from the shrimp (leaving the tails if you like), and the small digestive vein along the back, then rinse and pat them dry.
Pour 3 tablespoons of the olive oil into the big skillet, toss in the crushed garlic and peperoncino, and cook over medium-high heat until the garlic is fragrant and lightly colored. Scatter the cut scallops in the pan so the pieces are all separated, let them sizzle and sear for a minute, then stir and turn them over. Cook another minute or so, only until the flesh is opaque, and remove with a slotted spoon.

Immediately pour in the crushed tomatoes (and ½ cup water sloshed in the tomato container to rinse). Raise the heat to high, stir in the salt, and bring the tomato sauce to a boil. Adjust the heat to keep it bubbling steadily (but not spattering) for 8 minutes, to develop flavor and reduce slightly.

For cooking and finishing the pasta: Meanwhile, start cooking your pasta at approximately the same time the tomato sauce starts to bubble—from that moment, the sauce will take about 12 minutes to finish, and paccheri (or other pasta) may need a few minutes more or less. As a guideline for coordinating your cooking, plan to boil any pasta for 2 minutes less than the package suggests.

When the tomato sauce has bubbled for 8 minutes, drop in the scallops, clams, mussels, and the saffron and soaking water; stir quickly to distribute the shellfish in the sauce, and cover the pan. Raise the heat to high, and cook, shaking the covered pan vigorously (and holding the cover on) every ½ minute or so.

Cook 2½ minutes, or just until the shells have opened. Toss the shrimp into the pan, and stir them into the sauce. Let it come back to a boil, then turn down the heat so the sauce is barely simmering. (If the pasta has to cook much longer, turn off the heat and cover the pan, so you don’t overcook the shellfish.)

As soon as the paccheri are cooked al dente, scoop them from the pot with a spider, drain briefly, and drop them into the pan of barely simmering sauce. Toss and tumble the pasta, shellfish, and sauce over and over, coating and filling the paccheri hollows. Drizzle another couple of tablespoons of olive oil all over the dish, sprinkle with chopped parsley, and immediately serve up portions in warm bowls.

**LAMB CHOPS WITH OLIVES**

Agnello alle Olive  
Serves 6

This is a lovely, careful way to prepare thick lamb chops—quite different from the usual fast grilling approach—and it makes them extraordinarily flavorful and tender. The chops brown gradually in a heavy skillet over relatively low heat, steadily building the flavors of caramelization, and then cook covered with a small amount of liquid and seasoning elements.

This short period of moist cooking doesn’t draw the meat juices into the liquid (as it would in long stewing or braising) but instead brings the seasoning flavors more intensely into the meat itself. Here, lemon, olives, and oregano give the chops the tangy taste of Abruzzo. For a great winter meal, accompany them with something cozy, like polenta, mashed potatoes, or smothered cabbage or cauliflower. In summer, a tossed green salad is all you need.

Either rib chops or loin chops are suited for this recipe, though my choice is the loin chop, which offers portions of both the loin and the tenderloin muscles (like a T-bone steak). You could use lamb shoulder chops, too, but they’d need nearly twice as much time to cook covered. They wouldn’t be as amazingly tender as loin or rib chops, but they would be delicious (and cost a lot less). With any kind of chop, a heavy cast-iron pan is perfect here, because of its steady heat-retaining qualities, but it must be well seasoned, so the meaty caramelization is not lost on the pan bottom.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 bone-in lamb loin chops, about 1½ inches thick (about 5 ounces each, trimmed of fat)
1 teaspoon kosher salt
½ cup all-purpose flour
4 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
Juice of 1 lemon (about 2 tablespoons)
1 cup pitted black olives, preferably taggiasca or Gaeta
1 teaspoon dried oregano
¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large well-seasoned cast-iron frying pan or other heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, preferably 12-inch diameter, with a cover

Pour the olive oil into the cast-iron skillet, and set over medium-low flame to heat slowly. Salt the chops lightly all over, using ½ teaspoon salt in all. Spread the flour on a plate, dredge the chops on both sides, and shake off excess flour.

When the pan and oil are hot, lay in the chops—they should all fit snugly in one layer. Let them cook gently for 3 minutes or longer, until lightly browned on the first side, then flip them over and brown the second side gradually. As they cook, drop the crushed garlic cloves in the spaces between them, to sizzle and caramelize in the pan bottom—turn the cloves as they darken (and don’t let them burn). Turn the chops again a couple of times, giving both sides another 2 or 3 minutes of browning, until well browned all over—about 10 minutes in all.

Pour the lemon juice and ½ cup water into the pan, around the chops, and sprinkle the remaining salt over them. When the liquid is bubbling, drop the olives in between the chops, and shake the pan to distribute them. Sprinkle the oregano and peperoncino over the olives, then cover the pan.

Adjust the heat to keep the juices bubbling gently and slowly concentrating. Cook, covered, turning the chops a couple of times, until the pan juices have thickened and adhere to the meat like a moist glaze—about 10 minutes or longer, depending on thickness.

Remove the pan from the heat, and let the chops rest for a couple of minutes, taking in the moisture. Serve right from the skillet, with the olives and pan juices spooned over the chops.

A shepherd and his flock in the hills of Abruzzo
BRAISED LEG OF LAMB

Ragù d’Agnello Serves 8 or more

Slowly braised meats are a specialty of cooks in the high country of Abruzzo. With a fire always burning in the hearth or on a stove, it makes sense to keep a pot stewing. And from the ubiquitous flocks of sheep there’s always some mutton or lamb that will benefit from long cooking. Here’s a typically tasty example: a leg of lamb, bone removed, laid open in a flat slab (what we call “butterflied”), then slathered with a savory bread filling, rolled and tied up, and cooked for hours in a savory tomato sauce.

This is a great dish for a festive occasion, because a big leg will easily serve eight or more. To savor it Italian-style, I encourage you to present this in two courses, using the sauce to dress maccheroni alla chitarra or other pasta for a primo (first course), and serving the sliced lamb leg as the main course. Mashed potatoes and braised broccoli or chicory would be excellent accompaniments to the meat.

Keep the recipe procedure in mind when purchasing boneless leg of lamb. You want a leg that’s been butterflied but preferably left untied. However, do ask the butcher for a length of the netting, or meat stocking, that slips over a rolled leg to hold it in shape; this will come in handy once the meat is stuffed and ready to cook. If the butcher is accommodating, specify that you want the leg butterflied to lie flat with an even thickness, so you can coat the meat generously with the bread seasoning and roll it up neatly. Should you end up with meat that is too thick in places, you can flatten it yourself with a meat mallet, or by butterflying, that is, sliding a knife into the thick muscle and opening it up.

2½ cups crustless country bread cubes, a couple of days old or slightly dried
1 cup grated pecorino
3 plump garlic cloves, peeled and chopped
4 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
A 5-to-6-pound boneless leg of lamb, preferably butterflied and untied
1 tablespoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 cups chopped onions
4 bay leaves, preferably fresh
3 small branches fresh rosemary with lots of leaves
3 sprigs fresh thyme
6 cups (two 28-ounce cans) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy 7- or 8-quart saucepan or enameled cast-iron French oven, with a cover; kitchen twine and butcher’s netting

To make the filling: Put the bread cubes in a mixing bowl, and pour in enough water to cover them. Toss the cubes in the water, and let them soak it up for a few minutes. When they’re saturated, dump the cubes into a strainer (along with any water remaining in the bowl), and squeeze the bread to get out most of the water. Put the soft, wet bread back in the bowl, tearing it into shreds with your fingers. Scatter the grated cheese, chopped garlic, and parsley over the bread, and stir everything together vigorously (or work together with your hands) into a spreadable paste.

Lay out the butterflied lamb leg, and trim any thick fat from the outside surface (a few traces are okay). If the boneless leg was rolled and tied by the butcher, cut away the strings or netting, then unroll it and trim any thick fat. Turn the meat over so the inside of the leg (where the bone was) faces up, and arrange it to form a flat, solid oblong slab. If necessary, pound or butterfly thick muscles so the meat slab is evenly thick.

Drop mounds of the bread paste on the lamb, and spread it to cover the whole surface, leaving a margin around
the edges (so it won’t ooze out). Now roll up the meat to form a snug, loaf-shaped roll. Loop short pieces of twine around the roll every few inches along its length, to keep it in shape, and knot securely. Press and tuck in the flaps of meat at the ends of the roll, and secure them with twine looped lengthwise around the roll and tied tight. If you have butcher’s netting, slip it over the rolled meat, and stretch first, then tie it securely. Season the outside of the tied roll with 1½ teaspoons salt.

Pour the olive oil into the big pan, and set over medium-high heat. Lay the meat in the hot oil, and let it sizzle for a minute or two without moving, until browned on the bottom. Rotate the roll, and brown more of the meat surface for a couple of minutes, then rotate again, until the lamb leg is nicely caramelized all over.

Push the meat to the side of the pan, clearing as much space in the middle as possible, and spill in the chopped onions. Stir and spread them in the pan as they start to sizzle, scraping up the bits of caramelization from the pan bottom; shift the lamb to stir the onions all around. After 4 or 5 minutes, when the onions have softened, drop in the bay leaves, rosemary, and thyme, and stir for another minute, to toast the herbs.

Move the meat to the center of the pan, and pour the crushed tomatoes around it. Slosh out the tomato bowl and cans with 2 cups water, and pour that in, along with more water if needed, until three-quarters of the rolled lamb is submerged in the liquids. Sprinkle the remaining 1½ teaspoons salt all over, and stir the tomatoes, water, onions, and seasonings together. Cover the pan, and bring the braising liquids to a boil over high heat, then adjust the flame to keep a steady, gentle bubbling around the lamb. Cook, tightly covered, checking the liquid level occasionally to see that it is not cooking too fast or reducing rapidly. Every 40 minutes or so, rotate the meat so the top of the roll gets submerged, and add water, if needed, to maintain the level of braising liquids. Reduce until the liquid covers three-quarters of the lamb.

Cook the lamb for 2 to 2½ hours, or until a long fork can pierce the thickest part of the leg and slide out easily. If the sauce is concentrated and velvety, the dish is done; turn off the heat, and let the leg rest in the sauce for 30 minutes or longer before serving.

If the meat is tender but the sauce is too thin, transfer the meat to a platter (in a warm place) and cook the sauce uncovered, reducing it to a velvety consistency. If you want to dress pasta with the sauce, however, don’t let it get too thick. Turn off the heat, and replace the lamb in the sauce to rest.

After the rest period, remove the lamb leg and finish the sauce: Pick out the herb stems and bay leaves, skim off any fat that has collected on the top, and taste and adjust the seasoning. Serve the sauce as is, or pass it through a food mill if you want it to be smoother (and to remove the rosemary leaves).

To serve the lamb: Cut and remove the twine or netting. Slice the leg crosswise into ½-inch-thick slices, and arrange them, fanned out or overlapping, on a warm platter. Moisten the slices with spoonfuls of warm sauce, and pass more sauce at the table.

This braised lamb also makes an excellent primo (pasta course). To serve as a primo: Put 2 cups of sauce (for each pound of pasta) into a big skillet, and heat to a simmer while the pasta cooks. Drop the drained al dente pasta into the sauce, and toss until coated, then shut off the heat, and toss with grated pecorino or Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano. Serve immediately in warm bowls.

To cook the lamb a few hours or even a day in advance, let it cool in the sauce and refrigerate overnight. To serve, slice the meat while it’s cool. Put a shallow layer of sauce in a wide skillet, and lay in the lamb slices. Slowly heat the sauce to bubbling, spooning it over the meat until heated through. Arrange the slices on a platter.
**Scrippelle Ribbons with Apricot-Orange Sauce**

**Fiocchi di Scrippelle all’Arancio**  Serves 6 or more

This special dessert is so good—and so much fun to prepare and serve—I hope you’ll be persuaded to make and keep *scrippelle* (crêpes) on hand all the time, as they do in the kitchens of Abruzzo. Here, you slice the *scrippelle* into strips (they look like fresh fettuccine!) and toss them in a hot caramel, apricot, and citrus sauce that you’ve got bubbling in a skillet. Serve the beautifully glazed ribbons still warm, with whipped cream melting on top.

This recipe calls for a full batch of the thin pancakes (the same ones used for the savory *Crespelle* with Spinach), but it is easy to adjust the amounts to make a larger or smaller dessert. Even if you have only a couple of extra *scrippelle* in your freezer, you can still transform them, with this basic technique, into a treat for two.

Let your creativity loose: Just like pasta, *scrippelle* ribbons can be dressed for dessert in countless ways. Add rum or liqueur to this caramel sauce, or vary it with other fruit preserves or juices. Shape the ribbons into a little nest for a scoop of ice cream. Or drizzle melted chocolate over the warm ribbons, sprinkle with chopped toasted hazelnuts, and top with a dollop of whipped cream.

- 1 batch *scrippelle* (about a dozen), cooked and cooled
- 1 cup sugar
- 2 tablespoons soft butter
- 1 cup apricot preserves
- Juice of 1 lemon, freshly squeezed (about 2 tablespoons)
- Juice of 1 orange, freshly squeezed (about ¼ cup)
- 1 cup chilled heavy cream, whipped to soft peaks, for garnish
- ¼ cup pine nuts, toasted, for garnish

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy-bottomed nonstick skillet or sauté pan, 10-inch diameter or wider

To make the ribbons: Stack three or four cooled *scrippelle* evenly, and roll them up into a cylinder, about the size of a cigar. With a sharp knife, slice the roll crosswise every ⅓ inch (for thin strips like tagliatelle) or every ⅔ inch (for wider strips, like fettuccine). Separate and unfurl the cut pieces into ribbons. Continue to slice up all the *scrippelle* this way.

Put the sugar in the skillet, pour ½ cup water over it, and shake the pan a bit to spread out the moistened sugar. Set the skillet over medium-high heat, and, without stirring, let the sugar dissolve into a syrup and come to a boil. Don’t stir or shake the pan as it bubbles away, evaporating all the water, and nearing the temperature of caramelization—this can take 10 minutes or more. Have the remaining sauce ingredients (butter, apricot preserves, and citrus juices) near at hand, as well as a long wooden spoon for stirring, and thick kitchen towels for holding the pan.
When the syrup bubbles become noticeably thicker, watch closely for it to take on color, usually near the edge of the skillet. At the first signs of darkening, lower the heat and swirl the syrup, so it caramelizes evenly to a deep-golden color. Still over low heat, drop in the butter and the apricot preserves, and stir steadily as they melt into the caramel. Pour in the lemon and orange juices, stirring carefully, because the caramel will bubble and splatter.

Raise the heat, and bring the sauce back to a boil, stirring steadily. Adjust the heat to keep it at a simmer, and drop in the scrippelle ribbons. Toss and tumble the strips with tongs or long-handled utensils, for a minute or more, until they’re heated through and glazed all over with the caramel sauce.

Turn off the heat, lift out one serving of ribbons, and drop it onto a dessert plate—giving the ribbons a twist as you release them to make a pretty nestlike mound. Top each serving with a big spoonful of whipped cream and a scattering of pine nuts. Drizzle any sauce left in the skillet over and around the ribbons, and serve right away.
When I am hiking in the Abruzzo national parks, three places I enjoy most are Santo Stefano di Sessanio, Castel del Monte, and Rocca Calascio. Santo Stefano di Sessanio is a town of stark gray stone. The 2009 earthquake caused some damage, but the industrious Abruzzese people are hard at work repairing it. Castel del Monte is a small borgo with a wonderful Baroque church, Madonna del Suffragio, in which the statue of the Madonna wears clothing typical of the area. The ancient fortress atop Rocca Calascio is filled now only with overgrown vegetation, but at the greatest elevation in central Italy—about fifteen hundred meters—it still stands like a crumbling giant on high.

If you’re a lover of sweets, it’s worth making a stop at the town of Sulmona, famous for its candy-coated almonds known as confetti. The sugar-coated almonds were first made by the Clarisse nuns, who lived in the nearby convent of the Church of Santa Chiara. About fifty-four different types of confetti are made, varying from simple sugar-coated, to chocolate-filled, to confetti dipped in gold. My favorite shop is Hansel & Gretel, where the confetti displays are set out as floral arrangements. Be sure to take some home with you!

After each saffron harvest, the women of Abruzzo set aside a pouch of saffron and then visit the goldsmith in Scanno to barter the saffron for a new piece of jewelry. The town is revered for its gold-filigree work, which is like delicate lace executed in gold. The symbolic jewel of this tradition, the presentosa, is a pendant in the shape of a star with one or two central hearts surrounded by little spirals of filigree.

Bominaco is not far from the crocus fields of the Navelli plateau, and you can enjoy frescoes inside the oratory of San Pellegrino. Here saints, evangelists, fathers of the church, and zodiacal signs and stories were painted with meticulous attention to detail by anonymous Abruzzese artists (including one of the best Last Judgments I have seen, in which devils eat sinners, sinners are boiled in cauldrons, and the whole scene evokes the rings of Dante’s hell). It is not only the paintings’ striking beauty I enjoy, but also the challenge of identifying who’s who in them.

I always stop at the Ducal Palace in Tagliacozzo to look at the late-fifteenth-century frescoes with scenes from Christ’s life. One of my favorite pieces is The Adoration of the Magi, which features the local rulers of the Orsini family and their distinguished relatives all looking elegant in their different poses. Rich in tone, detail, and complexity, these frescoes were most certainly painted by an extremely skilled master, although unattributed.

In Atri, a town surrounded by medieval walls, the Church of Santa Maria Assunta houses some of the most important early-Renaissance frescoes in Abruzzo, painted by Andrea De Litio, who eventually left Abruzzo to work in Tuscany. The frescoes are made up of 101 panels, with twenty-six scenes depicting the life of the Virgin Mary and Christ. The more you look at them, the more you appreciate the compulsive amount of detail and the deep quality of expression.—Tanya
The village of Santo Stefano di Sessanio in northern Abruzzo
Molise is the youngest of the Italian regions and the second smallest, after Valle d’Aosta. It is not a big tourist destination, but I found the landscape of verdant plains rolling down from the Apennines to the Adriatic a most peaceful and pastoral setting. The region is sparsely populated, which lends to its unspoiled charm, and although the farmlands are rich, the economy of Molise throughout history has been meager, based on agriculture and the transporting transumanza, of shepherds and their flocks from Abruzzo into Puglia. Judging from my last visit, though, things seem to be changing. The agriculture is developing into food industries, and the marketplaces are vibrant, filled with local produce—fruits, legumes, and cheeses—and the most common crops of the region: wheat, broad beans, and potatoes. There is, as well, a clothing industry developing.

Although the younger generations have moved away, seeking employment in the big cities, I have a sense that, with local and government incentives, the exodus will soon be diminishing, and the young will be returning to repopulate and set up shop in the land of their forefathers. Foreign tourism remains almost nonexistent, but many Italians spend their vacations in these medieval, almost deserted towns in the hills of Monti del Matese, above Campobasso, the capital.

When I traveled with my friend Mario Piccozzi down from Roccaraso in Abruzzo in the summer of 2007, we stopped for lunch the first day near Bajano, and thereafter at other little trattorias, and it was evident that pasta, fresh and dry, was king in this small region. One of the simple and delicious recipes that I took home with me from that trip was gemelli with cauliflower, and as we headed toward the Adriatic, there was more pasta, particularly pasta with seafood, such as Braised Octopus with Spaghetti and simply prepared Spaghetti with Calamari, Scallops, and Shrimp, called Spaghetti di Tornola, named after the old tower of defense on the tip of the promontory of Termoli, the largest fishing port in Molise. Molise is strong on dry pasta, but in the home kitchens there is still much fresh pasta being made. Some of the extraordinary recipes I found during that trip are Fresh Cavatelli with Cauliflower, Fresh Cavatelli with Favas, and Fresh Cavatelli with Eggs and Bacon. What I found very interesting and unique were the names given to fresh pasta, like malefante (pasta cut 3 by 2 inches; see Fresh Pasta Strips with Beans and Bacon); or taccozze (1-by-1-inch squares; see Fresh Taccozze Pasta with Sea Bass). Then there were the -sagne (lasagna, lasagnelle), tagliatelle, and crejoli, similar to the maccheroni alla chitarra in Abruzzo. The names were enough to intrigue me and send me back to my own kitchen to try them out.

Whether in the sauces for pasta or in meats or fish preparations, in Molise the tomato dominates, as does the peperoncino. Inland, game, goat, lamb, pork, and beans are used in abundance. With the hilly terrain and rich pastures comes milk, and where there is milk there is cheese. The most notable cheese of Molise is the caciocavallo, and the best of this is from the town of Agnone. Made from cow’s milk, caciocavallo resembles provolone. Its name—cacio = cheese; cavallo = horse—refers to the way traveling shepherds, who made the cheese, would let it dry hanging across a pole on the back of the horses or mules as they traveled. Scamorza is also produced in Molise, a cheese similar to mozzarella that is left hanging to age, and ends up looking like a pear, which is sometimes smoked. Pecorino is also produced in the area, and all are part of the rustic and savory Molisano table.

When cheese is made, there is always leftover whey, which is used to produce ricotta, and we had some simply delicious fried ricotta during that trip for which I share the recipe with you—Ricotta Fritta.

I had never realized before how rich the upper Molise is in truffles, especially around the town of San Pietro Avellana. The black truffle—Tuber aestivum, or scorzone—and in season the very valuable white truffle, Tuber magnatum pico, abound. In specialty shops and in homes in Molise, you will find delectable cheeses, olive oils, and vegetables preserved in jars, infused with these truffles.

And with these delicious truffles, one thinks of wine. There are only three DOC wines produced in Molise—the Biferno, Molise, and Pentro. Red, white, and rosé Biferno is made around Campobasso. Red, white, and rosé Pentro is made at Isernia. The Molise, in red and white varietals, as well as the Falanghina white varietal is made almost all over the region.

There is also a tradition of silver- and goldsmithing in these parts, and I had heard of coppersmiths who still
produced copper pots in artisanal fashion in Agnone. So up the winding road Mario and I climbed, only to come back down the hilly terrain, four hours later, happy, with the backseat full of copper pots, which, once I got to Rome, I had to figure how to pack and ship home. They arrived safely in New York, and now they are a shining reminder in my kitchen of that glorious trip to Molise.

**Fish Soup with Vegetables**

Brodo di Pesce con Verdure. Makes about 4 quarts, serving 8 to 10

I love all kinds of Italian fish soups, having sampled countless versions of *zuppa di pesce*, served with just enough tomatoey sauce to slurp up with a spoon, as well as *brodo di pesce*, a flavorful fish stock usually with nothing but rice. A new discovery for me, though, was this Molisano version of *brodo di pesce*, with chard and peppers floating between chunks of seafood in a savory broth. Served with grilled bread or a slab of grilled polenta, it is indeed a complete meal. Relish it with a glass of crispy white wine from the region’s distinctive Falanghina grape varietal, and you can taste Molise beckoning you.

- 12 ounces monkfish fillet (silver skin removed)
- 8 ounces sea scallops, preferably “dry” (not soaked in preservatives)
- 1 pound large shrimp
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium onions, chopped (about 2 cups)
- 5 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
- ¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 1 tablespoon plus ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 4 Anaheim peppers, seeded and diced (about 2 cups)
- 1 cup canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 6 quarts cold water
- 1 pound Swiss chard, sliced in ½-inch shreds

**Recommended Equipment**: A heavy-bottomed saucepan or soup pot, 7- or 8-quart capacity, with a cover

Slice the monkfish into ½-inch chunks. Pull off the side muscle or “foot” from the scallops, and discard. Remove the shells, tails, and digestive vein from the shrimp; rinse them and pat dry.

Pour the olive oil into the soup pot and set it over medium heat. Scatter in the onions, sliced garlic, and peperoncino, and season with ½ teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the onions are softened and slightly caramelized, about 8 to 10 minutes, then stir in the diced peppers, and cook another 3 minutes or so, until the peppers are tender.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes, raise the heat a bit, and cook, stirring, until the tomatoes have dried out, about 3 to 4 minutes. Pour in the water and the remaining tablespoon salt, stir well, cover the pot, and bring the water to a boil over high heat. Adjust the heat to maintain a gentle boil, and cook covered for an hour; then stir in the Swiss-chard shreds. Return the broth to a steady simmer, and cook uncovered for 45 minutes, or until the chard is very tender and the broth has reduced to 4 quarts.

To finish the soup: Add the chunks of monkfish to the simmering broth, cover, and cook for 5 minutes. Drop in the scallops, stir, and simmer for 7 minutes more. Add the shrimp, return the broth to a bubbling simmer, and cook for a minute or two, just until the shrimp are cooked through. Serve immediately in warm shallow soup bowls.
Fried Ricotta

Makes about 24 pieces, serving 4 to 6 as a savory appetizer or 6 to 8 as a dessert

Life in the hilly inland of Molise was for centuries a pastoral existence, and the traditional staples of the pastoral table are still essential elements in cooking alla Molisana. Ricotta, a nutritious and always available by-product of cheesemaking, thus appears on the table in many forms, such as gnocchi, with pastas and vegetables, and in soups—or eaten just plain, with bread. Here’s one of the most delicious ways that ricotta can be enjoyed: drained, shaped in small pieces, breaded, and fried, ricotta fritta gains new dimensions of texture and flavor. Serve these fried ricotta morsels as a savory appetizer or main course, in a puddle of tomato sauce or on top of braised vegetables. On the other hand, if you top them with some poached peaches or peach preserve or fruit jam with a dollop of whipped cream, you have a glorious dessert.

- A 15-ounce container fresh ricotta, drained
- ½ cup all-purpose flour for dredging
- 2 cups fine dry bread crumbs
- 2 large eggs
- Pinch of kosher salt
- ½ cup vegetable oil

FOR SERVING AS A SAVORY
- 2 cups Tomato Sauce
- 12 fresh basil leaves, shredded (about 3 tablespoons)

FOR SERVING AS A DESSERT
Put the drained ricotta in a bowl. With the ice-cream scoop or other implement, scoop out tablespoon-sized balls of ricotta, and set them on a parchment-lined tray or sheet pan (you should have about twenty-four ricotta balls total). Set the tray in the freezer, and chill the balls until firm, about 30 minutes.

Spread the flour on a small plate, and the bread crumbs on a large plate. Whisk the eggs with a pinch of salt in a wide, shallow bowl. Dredge the balls in the flour, and gently flatten them into thick patties. Coat the patties in egg, then dredge them until well coated in the bread crumbs, but not heavily so. Return the breaded patties to the parchment-lined tray.

When you are ready to fry the patties, pour the vegetable oil in the skillet and set over medium heat. The oil is ready when the tip of a patty sizzles on contact. Drop the patties into the skillet in batches, so they are not crowded, and fry for 1 to 2 minutes on each side, until golden brown and crispy. Lift them from the skillet with a slotted spatula, and drain briefly on paper towels.

Serve ricotta fritta while still hot.

For a savory appetizer or main course: spoon a pool of hot tomato sauce onto each serving plate, set 4 to 6 fried patties per portion in the sauce, and scatter shredded basil on top.

For a dessert dish: top portions of 3 or 4 patties per serving with warmed peach preserves (or any fruit jam or poached fruit) and whipped cream.

The Short Story of Pasta

With so much pasta, I decided this would be a good place to share with you some information about the history, the making, and the cooking of pasta.

Evidence has been found that the Chinese were eating pasta over four thousand years ago, but, as much as it is said that Marco Polo brought pasta from China, it seems that pasta came to Italy from the Arab world into Sicily. There is reference to a homogeneous mixture of water and flour around the second century, by the Greek physician Galen. The Jerusalem Talmud records a kind of boiled dough that was eaten in Palestine from the fifth to the third century B.C. And in a dictionary compiled by Isho bar Ali in the ninth century in Syria, he defines itriyya as strings made of semolina, dried, and then cooked. It seems that the nomadic Arab tribes made sheets of dough, dried them in the sun, and packed them for travel. When they reached the new camp, they would drop the dried pasta in boiling water, perhaps with other condiments, and the meal was ready. And when they hopped over and occupied Sicily, this tradition most likely came with them and traveled up the peninsula.

There is also a reference in Horace’s work in the first century B.C. to lagunum, a fine sheet of dough that was cooked, which the Romans enjoyed. These are all speculations. References to pasta in Italy as we know it today did not appear until the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

The important elements in good dry-pasta-making are four: the quality of the semolina, its taste, and its gluten content, and the quality of the water. Why is durum wheat preferable? Because it is a hard wheat and has almost double the gluten that regular soft white flour does. Gluten is a form of protein, giving the pasta a resilient texture when cooked. Since Molise and Abruzzo are situated at the foot of the Apennines, the waters with which they make the dry pasta are pristine and flavorful. What is also important is that the dough be kneaded properly to build the glutens, and mixed at low temperatures to retain resiliency and consistency, so the pasta remains al dente when cooked. Once the dough is developed, it is drawn through bronze cutters and
formed into shapes. The pasta is then dried in a long, slow process, to ensure uniformity of texture and to retain the maximum flavors of the durum wheat, which when cooked blossoms into a gentle aroma.

Cavatelli are a short, hollow form of fresh pasta that should definitely be part of your repertoire of homemade pasta varieties. Of all the shapes of fresh pasta that I share with you, this is one of the simplest to create, because all you need is your fingers. It is a shape that cooks well and remains al dente, a gutsy pasta that is great to eat, with lots of texture. Cavatelli are also fun to make—even little ones can do it—and easy to freeze for future meals.

Most of all, I like cavatelli because they go so well with all kinds of sauces—in particular, zesty vegetable sauces. In the coming pages, I’ll first tell you how to make cavatelli, and then present four dressed cavatelli dishes, typical of the many you will find in Molise. Of course, the sauces in these recipes are delicious with other pastas; in place of fresh cavatelli, you can substitute a pound of dried cavatelli, gemelli, short fusilli, strozzapreti, rotini, and other short dried pastas with good results. (And keep in mind that pastas made with whole wheat, barley, buckwheat, and other flours will add interesting flavor, nutritional value, and complexity to your pasta dishes.)

**Fresh Cavatelli**

Makes about 1½ pounds, serving 6

- 1 pound fine durum-wheat flour (about 3¼ cups), plus more as needed
- 1½ cups very cold water, plus more as needed

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A food processor fitted with a steel blade

Put the flour in the bowl of the food processor, and process for a few seconds, to aerate. With the food processor running, pour in the water through the feed tube. Process for about 30 seconds, until a dough forms and gathers on the blade. If the dough does not gather on the blade or process easily, it is too wet or dry. Feel the dough, then work in more flour or cold water, in small amounts, using the processor or kneading by hand.

Turn the dough out on a lightly floured surface, and knead by hand for a minute, until it’s smooth, soft, and
stretchy. Press it into a disk, wrap well in plastic wrap, and let rest at room temperature for at least ½ hour. (You can refrigerate the dough for up to a day, or freeze for a month or more. Defrost in the refrigerator, and return to room temperature before rolling.)

\[\text{To form the cavatelli, lightly flour your work surface. Pinch off golf-ball-sized pieces of dough, and roll them out under your palms into long ropes about the thickness of a pencil. Cut the ropes into 1-inch segments or short cylinders; keep pieces in front of you, horizontally (left to right). Flour your hands, especially the tips of the three middle fingers of your right hand unless you are left-handed. Hold these fingertips tightly together, and press them into one of the cut segments, and gently roll toward you.}\]

\[\text{As your fingertips make indentations in the segment, roll it toward you more so the dough both lengthens and curls around the fingertips. As the curl is complete, lift your fingers up quickly, so the dough segment drops off. It should now resemble a short concave shell—or a hollowed-out boat or canoe—with the impression of your fingers in the hollows and along the edges.}\]

\[\text{Adjust the pressure of your fingers as needed—if the dough cylinders are not lengthening and forming a hollow, press harder. If they’re just flattening beneath your fingers, press a bit more gently. Once you get up to speed, you should be able to roll the cavatelli with a quick downward flick of your fingertips.}\]

\[\text{Sprinkle the finished cavatelli liberally with flour, and spread them out in a single layer on floured baking sheets. Leave them uncovered, to air-dry at room temperature, until ready to cook. (Or freeze the cavatelli on the sheets until hard, and pack them in airtight plastic bags.)}\]

**Fresh Cavatelli with Fava**

Cavatelli con le Fave e Ricotta Salata \(\text{Serves 6}\)

In this dish, the cavatelli are dressed with a sauce of fresh fava beans, always a great treat in season. Another special ingredient here is *ricotta salata*, or salted ricotta, a marvelous product made from fresh sheep’s-milk ricotta that is pressed, dried, and aged for a few months, until fairly firm, retaining the mild, milky taste of fresh ricotta yet with more complexity. It is a traditional accompaniment to fresh favas—a delicious pairing you will taste here—but *ricotta salata* is a great final seasoning on many other pastas as well. As I instruct in this recipe, *ricotta salata* is best grated on top of the pasta just before you serve it. Put a chunk of it on the table with the grater, and let people shower over more *ricotta salata* as they dig deeper into their bowls.

\[\begin{itemize}
  \item 4 pounds fresh fava beans in the pods
  \item 2 teaspoons kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot
  \item ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
  \item 1 large onion, chopped (about 1 ½ cups)
  \item 4 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
  \item ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
  \item 1 batch (1 ½ pounds) Fresh Cavatelli, or 1 pound dried pasta
  \item ½ cup freshly grated pecorino
  \item 6-to-8-ounce chunk *ricotta salata*
\end{itemize}\]

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A large pasta pot; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a hand grater with large shredding holes (a flat, box, or rotary grater); a wire strainer

\[\text{To blanch the favas: Fill the pasta pot with 4 quarts water, and heat to a boil. Split open the fava pods, and collect}\]
the beans, still covered with a thick skin. When the water is boiling, drop in the favas, and blanch them for 2 minutes, just until they turn green and the skin has loosened. Lift out the beans with a wire strainer, and drop them into a bowl of ice water, to set the color. When they’re chilled, drain the beans and peel off the skins; you should have about 3 cups of fully peeled favas. Now pour at least 2 more quarts of water and 1 tablespoon salt into the hot blanching water, and heat again to the boil, to cook the cavatelli.

To make the sauce: Pour the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium heat. Stir in the onion, garlic, and peperoncino. Cook until the onion is translucent, about 3 to 4 minutes. Ladle a cup or so of the pasta cooking water into the skillet, and simmer until the onion begins to soften, about 2 to 3 minutes. Spill in the favas, and season with the salt, ladle in another 3 cups of pasta water, and bring to a steady simmer. Cook, uncovered, for 15 to 20 minutes, until the favas are very tender and beginning to break down and thicken the sauce. Keep the sauce barely simmering while you cook the pasta.

With the pasta water at a rolling boil, drop in the cavatelli, stir, and return quickly to a boil. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes, until the cavatelli are al dente, lift them out with a spider or strainer, drain briefly, and spill them into the skillet. Toss well, to coat the cavatelli evenly with the fava dressing. Turn off the heat, sprinkle the grated pecorino over the skillet, and toss again. Heap the cavatelli in warm bowls, and shred the ricotta salata chunk through the large holes of the hand grater, showering slivers on each serving. Serve immediately, passing the rest of the chunk of ricotta salata and the grater at the table, for adding seasoning as needed.

FRESH CAVATELLI WITH CAULIFLOWER

Maccarun ch’i hiucc Serves 6

Cauliflower is one of my favorite vegetables, and I regret that many people don’t sufficiently appreciate its unique flavor and nutritional value. This is not the case in Molise, where it is cooked often and creatively, as exemplified by the following two simple vegetarian pasta dishes. The first recipe, maccarun ch’i hiucc, is zesty with garlic and peperoncino.

- ½ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 7 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
Fill the large pot with salted water (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt), and heat to a boil.

Pour the olive oil into the skillet, set over medium-high heat, and scatter in the sliced garlic. Let the garlic start to sizzle, then toss in the peperoncino and parsley; stir and cook for a minute. Ladle in a cup of the pasta cooking water, stir well, and adjust the heat to keep the liquid in the skillet simmering and reducing gradually while you cook the cauliflower and pasta.

With the pasta water at a rolling boil, drop in the cauliflower florets, and cook them for about 3 minutes, until barely tender. Drop in the cavatelli, stir, and return the water quickly to a boil. Cook another 4 to 5 minutes, until the cauliflower is fully tender and the pasta is *al dente* (if you are using dried pasta, it will, of course, take longer).

Lift out the florets and cavatelli with a spider or strainer, drain briefly, and spill them into the skillet. Toss well, to coat all the pasta and vegetable pieces with the garlicky dressing, then turn off the heat, sprinkle the grated cheese over the skillet, and toss again. Heap the cauliflower and cavatelli in warm bowls, and serve immediately.

**Fresh Cavatelli with Cauliflower, Almonds & Toasted Bread Crumbs**

*Casarecce Vruocchele e Vredocchie* Serves 6

The second recipe for cavatelli with cauliflower, *casareccie vruocchele e vredocchie*, has a bit more complexity with toasted almonds and bread crumbs. Typically, this kind of dish is made with fresh homemade pastas like cavatelli—*casarecce* means “homemade”—but a short dried pasta such as gemelli can be substituted.

- 8-inch chunk day-old *country bread* (6 ounces)
- 7 tablespoons *extra-virgin olive oil*
- 4 plump *garlic* cloves, peeled and sliced
- ¼ teaspoon *peperoncino flakes*, or to taste
- 1 small head *cauliflower*, cut in small florets (about 1 pound)
- ½ teaspoon *kosher salt*, plus more for the pasta pot
- 1 batch (1½ pounds) *Fresh Cavatelli*, or 1 pound dried pasta
- ½ cup sliced *almonds*, toasted and coarsely chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped *fresh Italian parsley*

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A large pasta pot; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a large bowl for tossing and serving the pasta

Fill the large pot with salted water (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt), and heat to a boil.

Grate the bread chunk on the coarse holes of a box grater into a mixing bowl; you should have about 2 cups of fluffy crumbs. Pour 5 tablespoons of the olive oil into the skillet, set it over medium-high heat, and scatter in the sliced garlic and peperoncino. Let them sizzle for a minute or so, then dump in the bread crumbs, and stir to moisten
Toast the crumbs for about 5 minutes, tossing them and shaking the pan almost continuously, until they’re golden and crisp; adjust the heat so neither the bread crumbs nor the garlic gets too dark. Turn off the heat, and pour the toasted crumbs and garlic into the serving bowl.

Meanwhile, start cooking the cauliflower and cavatelli. With the cooking water at a rolling boil, drop in the salt and cauliflower florets, and cook them for about 3 minutes, until barely tender. Drop in the cavatelli, stir, and return the water quickly to a boil. Cook another 4 to 5 minutes, until the cauliflower is fully tender and the pasta is al dente.

Quickly drain (you can empty the pot into a colander) and spill the pasta and florets on top of the bread crumbs in the bowl. Sprinkle over the bowl the almonds, parsley, and salt, and toss everything together well, until the crumbs and almonds are evenly distributed and coat the pasta and cauliflower florets. Drizzle the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil all over, and toss again. Serve immediately, right from the bowl.

**Fresh Cavatelli with Eggs & Bacon**

Cavatelli ‘ncatenati Serves 6

In times past in poor regions like Molise, when meat was scarce, eggs were an available and affordable source of protein. A dish of pasta dressed with eggs combined the nutrients of two staple foods for a meal that was naturally nutritious and sustaining. I love these pastas sauced with eggs, and tasty versions can be found all over Italy, especially in Abruzzo, Molise, and Lazio (Rome), where the most famous dish of this type, *spaghetti alla carbonara*, originated. This Molisano version is particularly appealing, with cavatelli, scrambled eggs, and bacon, and with grated Fontina Val d’Aosta tossed in at the end—a bit out of region, but absolutely delicious here. In Molise they would use grated pecorino, of course, and it is lovely that way, too.
¼ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons butter
8 ounces slab or thick-cut bacon, cut in ½-inch pieces
5 large eggs
1 batch (1 ½ pounds) Fresh Cavatelli, or 1 pound dried pasta
2 cups shredded Fontina Val d’Aosta

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A large pasta-cooking pot; a heavy-bottomed nonstick skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

- Fill the large pot with salted water (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt), and heat to a boil.

- Pour the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Drop in the butter, let it melt, then scatter in the bacon pieces. Cook the bacon, stirring and tossing the pieces, for 5 minutes or so, until they’re crisp and caramelized. (If the bacon rendered lots of fat, you can pour off half the fat from the pan.)

- Beat the eggs and ¼ teaspoon salt in a bowl until well blended.

- When the water is at a rolling boil, drop in the cavatelli, stir, and return the water to a boil. Cook the cavatelli 4 to 5 minutes, until *al dente*, lift them from the pot, drain briefly, and spill them into the skillet.

- Over medium heat, toss the cavatelli with the bacon pieces, coating the pasta with the oil, butter, and bacon fat, too. Pour the beaten eggs all over the pasta, stirring and tumbling them together; keep scraping the coagulating egg from the sides and bottom of the pan, and incorporate it in with the wet eggs. Cook for a minute or two, just until all the egg is lightly cooked and custardy and evenly scrambled into the cavatelli.

- Turn off the heat, scatter the shredded fontina over the eggs and pasta, and toss thoroughly to blend in the cheese as it melts. Serve immediately.

---

**Malefante & Taccozze**

*Malefante* and *taccozze* are two of the many interesting forms of fresh pasta I found in Molise. Both are simple flat shapes, cut from the same plain pasta dough: *malefante* are short rectangular strips, and *taccozze* are small diamonds. I give you the formula for the dough and instructions for cutting the shapes in the first recipe below.

The following two recipes are for finished pastas with quite different flavors: *Malefante* are dressed in a loose sauce of cannellini (and their cooking liquid) with lots of crisp bacon pieces. The *taccozze* come in a souplike fish stew, with chunks of sea-bass fillet and bits of fresh tomato. In fact, the little pasta diamonds are cooked right in the sauce, not in a separate pot of water.

The soupy consistency of both of these dishes, compared with typical Italian pastas, is a reflection of custom and tradition but practicality, too. Given their flat and rather wide surfaces, both *malefante* and *taccozze* have a tendency to stick together. With sauces of the usual density, it would be difficult to keep the pieces apart and coat them on both sides. The greater amount of liquid in the recipes here makes it possible to separate the pasta pieces as you tumble them with the sauce.

Though I generally believe that pasta dishes should not have a wet or soupy quality, I love these two. Indeed, the bean-and-bacon sauce for the *malefante* can easily cook to conventionally thick density, depending on how much bean cooking liquid you start with. In most instances, you will need to add water to really soften the beans and keep the sauce loose enough to coat the pasta. But I have found that if I add more water than necessary, creating a sauce that has to be slurped, I get a distinctly different dish that I actually prefer.
In addition to adjusting the sauce consistency to your taste, there are many ways to vary the texture of the pasta dough or how you roll it. You might add eggs to the dough (the basic recipe calls only for water), or use a combination of whole-wheat and white flour. And if you use finely ground durum wheat flour in place of all-purpose flour, the pasta will have more of the taste you would find in Molise. Finally, you can give your malefante and taccozze a chewy, full mouth-feel simply by leaving the dough a little thicker when you roll it out. I found countless such variations in pasta during my travels in Molise and always appreciate these creative distinctions.

**Fresh Pasta for Malefante & Taccozze**

**Makes about 1½ pounds dough**

- 1 pound all-purpose flour (about 3½ cups), plus more as needed
- 1¼ cups very cold water, plus more as needed

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor fitted with a steel blade; a pasta-rolling machine; a rotary pasta cutter or pizza wheel, or a sharp knife and ruler

To make the pasta dough: Put the flour in the bowl of the food processor, and process for a few seconds to aerate. With the food processor running, pour in the water through the feed tube. Process for about 30 seconds, until a dough forms and gathers on the blade. If the dough does not gather on the blade or process easily, it is too wet or dry. Feel the dough, then work in more flour or ice water, in small amounts, using the processor or kneading by hand.

Turn the dough out on a lightly floured surface, and knead by hand for a minute, until it's smooth, soft, and stretchy. Press it into a disk, wrap well in plastic wrap, and let rest at room temperature for at least ½ hour. (You can refrigerate the dough for up to a day, or freeze for a month or more. Defrost in the refrigerator and return to room temperature before rolling.)

To roll out the dough with a pasta machine: Cut the dough in six equal pieces. Keeping them lightly floured, roll the pieces at progressively thinner settings, gradually stretching them into strips about 2 feet long and as wide as your machine allows, usually about 5 inches. For easier handling, cut each strip in half crosswise, so you have twelve strips about a foot long. Lay them flat on a lightly floured surface, and keep covered with towels.

To make malefante: One at a time, slice the strips lengthwise into long ribbons, about 1 inch wide or a bit more, using a rotary pasta cutter or a sharp knife and a ruler to guide the blade. You should get four such ribbons from each of the machine-rolled strips. Next cut the ribbons crosswise into 2½-inch-long segments, the malefante. Sprinkle and toss the cut pieces liberally with flour, and lay them out flat, not touching, in one layer on floured baking sheets. Leave the malefante uncovered, to air-dry at room temperature, until you cook them.

**Fresh Taccozze Pasta with Sea Bass**

Taccuncill e San Pitre **Serves 6**

The Italian title calls for John Dory as the fish, and by all means use it if you can find it, but otherwise sea bass will be just as delicious.

- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped (about 1 cup)
- 1 pound red potatoes, peeled and cut in ½-inch cubes
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 medium stalks celery with leaves, chopped
To make the sauce: Pour the olive oil into the big pan, set it over medium heat, and scatter in the onion. Cook, stirring, for 3 or 4 minutes, until it begins to soften. Toss in the potato cubes, stir with the onion, and spread them out in the pan; cook for 5 minutes or so, tumbling them over occasionally, until they start to caramelize and stick to the pan bottom. Clear a space in the pan, and drop in the tomato paste; let it caramelize and toast in the hot spot for a minute, then stir together with the onion and potatoes.

Drop in the celery and bay leaves, sprinkle on the salt, stir, and get everything sizzling, then pour in the cold water. Stir up the vegetables, cover the pot, and bring the water to a boil over high heat. Adjust the heat to keep it bubbling nicely, and cook for 30 to 40 minutes, until the potatoes start to fall apart and thicken the sauce.

Drop in the cubes of fish and tomatoes, stir to distribute them, and heat the sauce back to an active simmer. Cook, uncovered, for 15 minutes or so, until the sea bass is cooked through and the tomatoes have softened and dissolved into the sauce.

Before cooking the *taccozze*—right in the sauce itself—I shake the diamond shapes by handfuls in a colander or strainer, removing excess flour. Then I drop all of the pasta at once into the simmering sauce. Stir and lift the *taccozze* with tongs, separating the flat pieces if they are stuck together. Cover the pan, and bring the sauce to a boil over high heat; cook the *taccozze* for about 4 minutes, stirring frequently, until *al dente*. Serve immediately in warm soup bowls.

**Fresh Pasta Strips (Malefante) with Beans & Bacon**

Malefante con Fagioli e Pancetta Serves 6

- **FOR THE BEANS**
  - ¾ pound dried *cannellini beans* (about 1½ cups), rinsed and soaked overnight
  - 3 bay leaves, preferably fresh
  - 2 tablespoons *extra-virgin olive oil*
  - ½ teaspoon *kosher salt*

- **FOR THE SAUCE**
  - 6 tablespoons *extra-virgin olive oil*
  - 12 ounces *slab or thick-cut bacon*, cut in ½-inch pieces
  - 7 plump *garlic cloves*, peeled and sliced
  - 3 large stalks *celery* with leaves, chopped
  - 3 tablespoons *tomato paste*

- **FOR COOKING AND DRESSING MALEFANTE**
1 batch (1½ pounds) Fresh Malefante
Kosher salt for the pasta pot
1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 3-quart pot for cooking the beans; a wide, heavy-bottomed sauté pan or braising pan, preferably 14-inch diameter, with a cover; a large pasta-cooking pot

Drain the soaked beans and put them in the pot with fresh cold water covering them by an inch or so; add the bay leaves and olive oil. Bring to a boil, lower the heat to keep the liquid simmering steadily, and cook, partially covered, about 40 minutes or until the beans are just cooked through, but not mushy. Turn off the heat, stir in ½ teaspoon salt, and let the beans cool in the pot with the cooking liquid.

To make the sauce: Set the big pan over medium heat, and add the olive oil. Scatter in the bacon, and let cook until the fat has rendered, about 5 minutes. Add the sliced garlic, and let sizzle for a minute, then stir in the celery. Cook until the celery begins to soften, about 4 to 5 minutes.

Clear a space in the pan, and drop in the tomato paste; let it caramelize in the hot spot for a minute or two, then stir the paste into the celery and bacon. Pour in the cooked beans with their cooking liquid, stir well, and pour in a cup or more of water to cover all the solids with enough sauce liquid. (If you want the dish to have a soupiest consistency when finished, add 2 or more cups water now.)

Bring the sauce to a simmer, and cook until the celery is tender and the beans are creamy, about 20 minutes, stirring in more water as needed to keep the beans and bacon immersed (or to maintain a soupiest consistency). When the sauce is done, turn off the heat, and keep the sauce covered until you start cooking the malefante.

Meanwhile, as the sauce is cooking (or later if you prefer), fill the large pot with well-salted water and heat to a rolling boil. For a whole large batch of malefante, heat at least 7 or even 8 quarts of water with 1½ tablespoons salt.

Shake the malefante by handfuls in a colander or strainer to remove the excess flour, then drop all the pieces into the boiling pasta water at the same time; stir and separate them with a spider or tongs so they don’t stick together. Cover the pot, bring the water back to a boil over high heat, and cook the malefante, stirring frequently, for 4 minutes or so, until al dente. (If the sauce is off the heat, return it to the simmer now to dress the pasta.)

Lift out the malefante with a spider, drain for a moment, and spill them into the simmering sauce, working quickly. Toss pasta and sauce until all the strips of pasta are coated. Adjust the consistency of the dish, adding more pasta water if you want it looser, or thickening it quickly over high heat.

Turn off the heat, sprinkle a cup or so of grated cheese over the malefante, and toss well. Heap it into warm pasta bowls, and serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

**Spaghetti with Calamari, Scallops & Shrimp**

Spaghetti di Tornola Serves 6

For me, there’s no better way to dress spaghetti than with a fresh seafood sauce. And this sauce, from the old fishing port of Termoli in Molise, is as simple and delicious as any. In the restaurants by the docks in Termoli (near the old citadel called Tornola), just-caught seafood is served in a brodetto. You eat the seafood, and then the kitchen will toss spaghetti into the sauce you’ve left in your bowl. In my version of spaghetti di Tornola, the calamari, scallops, and shrimp are part of the pasta dressing, but you can eat the brodetto in separate courses, Termoli-style, if you like.
In summer, I use my mother’s home-grown, sun-ripened cherry tomatoes to make an exceptional sauce, but in winter, a couple of cups of canned plum tomatoes make a fine substitute.

- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot
- ½ pound medium calamari, cleaned
- ½ pound sea scallops (preferably “dry,” not soaked in preservative)
- 1 pound large shrimp
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus 2 tablespoons more for finishing the pasta
- 6 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- 4 cups cherry tomatoes, halved; or 2 cups canned Italian plum tomatoes, crushed
- ¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 1 pound spaghetti
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh Italian parsley

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Fill the large pot with salted water (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt), and heat to a boil.

To prepare the seafood: Cut the calamari bodies, including the tentacles, into ½-inch rings. Pull off the side muscle or “foot” from the scallops and discard. Remove the shells, tails, and digestive veins from the shrimp; rinse and pat dry.

Pour the olive oil into the skillet, set it over medium-high heat, scatter in the sliced garlic, and cook, stirring occasionally, until it begins to sizzle and color, about 1 to 2 minutes. Dump in the cherry tomatoes, sprinkle on the teaspoon salt and the peperoncino, and cook for about 5 minutes, stirring and tossing tomatoes in the pan, until softened and sizzling in their juices but still intact.

Start cooking the pasta first and the seafood right after, so they are ready at the same time. Drop the spaghetti into the boiling water, stir, and return the water to a boil.

As it cooks, scatter the calamari rings and tentacles in the pan with the tomatoes, and get them sizzling over medium-high heat. Let the pieces cook for a minute or two, then toss in the scallops, and spread them out to heat and start sizzling quickly. After they’ve cooked for a couple of minutes, toss in the shrimp, ladle in a cup of boiling pasta water, stir the seafood and sauce together, bring to a steady simmer, and cook for 2 or 3 minutes, just until the shrimp turn pink and begin to curl.

As soon as the spaghetti is barely al dente, lift it from the pot, drain briefly, and drop into the skillet. Toss the pasta and the simmering sauce together for a minute or two, until the spaghetti is nicely coated with sauce and perfectly al dente, and the seafood is distributed throughout the pasta. Turn off the heat, sprinkle on the basil and parsley, and drizzle on another 2 tablespoons olive oil. Toss well, heap the spaghetti into warm bowls, giving each portion plenty of seafood, and serve immediately.

**BRAISED OCTOPUS WITH SPAGHETTI**

Polpi in Purgatorio Serves 6
I love this simple method for cooking whole octopus so it explodes with flavor. You just put it in a heavy pan and let it cook very slowly (with only olive oil, sliced onions, and olives to season it) for a couple of hours. As it cooks, it releases all of its natural, tasty water, which serves as a braising liquid. Though the meat loses some volume, its flavor is retained in the liquid, which naturally cooks into a great dressing for spaghetti or other pasta. In this recipe, the meat is cut into chunks that are tossed with the spaghetti and cooking juices. For a special occasion, though, you can serve the whole octopus, uncut (or two smaller octopuses, as called for here). If you dress the spaghetti with the juices alone and set the octopus on top, with the tentacles curling around and under, it makes a beautiful presentation.

You can also serve this delectable cephalopod—either whole or cut into pieces—over freshly cooked soft polenta or slabs of grilled polenta. And any leftover octopus meat or sauce can be incorporated into a terrific risotto; with so much flavor in them, just a small amount of leftovers is all you’ll need to make a great risotto for two.

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 large onions, thinly sliced (about 4 cups)
- 2 cleaned octopuses (about 1½ pounds each)
- 1 cup Gaeta or other brine-cured black olives, pitted
- ¼ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot
- 1 pound spaghetti
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy saucepan, 4-quart capacity, with a cover; a large pasta-cooking pot; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Pour 6 tablespoons of the olive oil into the saucepan, and set it over low heat. Scatter the onion slices over the bottom of the pan, and lay the octopuses on top. Scatter the olives over the octopuses, cover the pan, and let the octopuses heat slowly, releasing their liquid, and starting to cook in it. After an hour or so, uncover the pan and check to see that there is plenty of octopus liquid in the pan. If it seems dry, add 1 cup of water at a time. This recipe should yield 2 cups of sauce when the octopus is done.

Continue the covered slow cooking for another hour, until the octopuses are very tender. Start testing for doneness after 1¾ hours: stick the tines of a fork in the thickest part of each octopus; when the fork slides out easily, the meat is done.

Remove the octopuses from the pot, and let them cool slightly. To make a meaty octopus sauce, cut both octopuses into ¾-inch chunks, skin and all (or you can leave the octopuses whole for serving). Measure the liquid remaining in the saucepan. Again, you should have about 2 cups total. If the volume is greater, return the juices to the saucepan and boil to reduce it. Put the cut octopus meat and the juices in the skillet for dressing the pasta.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a rolling boil (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt). Drop in the spaghetti, stirring and separating the strands. Cover the pot, return the water to a boil over high heat, then set the cover ajar and cook the pasta until barely al dente.

As the spaghetti cooks, bring the octopus meat and sauce in the skillet to a rapid simmer; taste, and add ¼ teaspoon salt if needed (octopus is naturally salty). Stir in the parsley.

Lift the spaghetti from the pot, drain briefly, and drop it into the skillet. Toss the pasta and the simmering sauce together for a minute or two, until the spaghetti is nicely coated with sauce and perfectly al dente, and the octopus chunks are distributed throughout the pasta. Turn off the heat, drizzle over the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, and toss again. Heap the spaghetti into warm bowls, making sure each portion gets plenty of octopus pieces, and serve immediately.
THREE MEATS BRAISED IN TOMATOES WITH RIGATONI

Ragù Misto alla MolisanaMakes meat to serve 6 to 8 and enough sauce for 2 pounds pasta

This is one of those bountiful braises that you make when you want to delight a big table of family or friends, offering them an assortment of tender meats and pasta dressed with the braising sauce. Like other slowly cooked braises, this gives you two courses from one saucepan. Serve pasta dressed with the meaty-tasting tomato sauce as a first course—there’s enough to dress 2 pounds of rigatoni. And then serve the pork, veal, and sausage as a second course.

Of course, you don’t have to serve it all for the same meal. Use half the sauce to dress a pound of pasta, freeze the rest, and you have a future meal all ready to go. And after serving the ragù, take any leftover bits and pieces of meat, shred and chop them up, clean the meat from the veal-chop bone, and blend all of it in with any leftover sauce. I bet you’ll have enough sauce with meaty morsels for a lasagna or other baked pasta—yet another meal from that one big braising pan.

FOR COOKING THE MEATS AND SAUCE

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for finishing
- 6 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- 2 large onions, chopped (about 3 cups)
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary
- 1 bay leaf, preferably fresh
- 3½ teaspoons kosher salt
- 2-pound chunk boneless pork butt
- 1½-pound veal shoulder chop
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 1 cup red wine
- 10 cups (three 28-ounce cans) Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 1 pound sweet Italian sausages (without fennel seeds)
FOR COOKING AND SERVING A PASTA COURSE

- 2 pounds rigatoni (or just 1 pound; see headnote)
- 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy saucepan, such as an enameled cast-iron French oven, 8-quart capacity, with a cover; a large pasta-cooking pot; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Pour the olive oil into the big saucepan, and set it over medium heat. Scatter in the sliced garlic, let it sizzle and start to color for a couple of minutes, stir in the chopped onions, rosemary, and bay leaf, and season with 1 teaspoon of the salt. Cook for 7 or 8 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the onions are softened and translucent.

Season the pork and veal chop all over with 1 1/2 teaspoons salt. Push the onions to one side of the pot, and lay the meat pieces in the pan bottom. Brown the meats slowly, turning frequently so all sides are evenly colored, about 10 minutes in all. When the meats are nicely browned, sprinkle the peperoncino in the pan bottom to toast for a minute, then stir the onions back into the center of the pot, scraping up the meat juices.

Turn up the heat, pour in the red wine, bring to a boil, and cook until almost completely evaporated. Pour in the crushed tomatoes, slosh out the cans with 4 cups of cold water, and add that as well. Stir in the remaining teaspoon of salt. Cover the pan, and bring the sauce to a boil over high heat, then adjust the flame to keep a gentle, steady bubbling. Cook covered for an hour, stirring and turning the meat pieces over occasionally, then set the cover ajar to allow the sauce to reduce gradually as it bubbles away. Cook another hour, until the pork and veal are just tender, then drop in the sausages and continue simmering for another 45 minutes to an hour.

After nearly 3 hours of total braising, the meats should be extremely tender and readily broken apart; the sauce should be thick and flavorful. Check the concentration of the sauce during the long cooking: If it seems too thin, remove the cover altogether. If it’s reducing too fast, cover the pan tightly and lower heat.

If you’ll be serving the meats and dressing pasta right away, remove the meat to a warm platter, take out a couple of cups of sauce for the meat, and leave the rest in the big saucepan to dress pasta (about 8 cups sauce for 2 pounds rigatoni, or 4 cups sauce for 1 pound). If you’ll be serving the meat and sauce later, leave them both in the saucepan to cool; refrigerate, or freeze for longer keeping.

To cook and dress rigatoni with sauce: fill the pasta pot with plenty of well-salted water (at least 6 quarts water with a tablespoon salt for 1 pound of rigatoni; 8 quarts and 1 1/2 tablespoons salt for 2 pounds), and heat to a rolling boil. Stir in the rigatoni, return the water to a boil, and cook until the pasta is just al dente.

Meanwhile, if you’re using the sauce right away, bring it back to a simmer in the big saucepan or a big skillet, preferably 14 inches in diameter. If the sauce has cooled and thickened, loosen it with some of the pasta cooking water.

Lift the rigatoni out of the pot, drain briefly, and drop them into the sauce. Toss well for a minute or so, over low heat, until the rigatoni are nicely coated and perfectly al dente. Turn off the heat, sprinkle on the grated cheese, and toss again; if you like, drizzle on more olive oil, and toss that in as well. Serve the pasta right away, transferring it to a large warm bowl to serve family-style, or heaping it in individual warm pasta bowls. Serve immediately, passing more cheese at the table.

To serve the meat as a secondo or main course: Slice the pork and veal. Pour the reserved sauce in a skillet, lay in the slices and sausages, and place over low heat until the meat is heated through. Serve on a warmed platter with some of the sauce, passing the rest.
Molise, the second-smallest region in Italy (after the Valle d’Aosta), is also its newest: until 1963, it was joined with Abruzzo. It has a relatively small economy, focusing on agriculture and, on the coast, fishing.

Campobasso, the regional capital, has been destroyed by earthquakes throughout the ages, but the heart of the city, crowned by the massive Castello Monforte, still boasts ancient churches and winding medieval roads; I am almost surprised, when walking a narrow Campobasso alley, suddenly to spill out onto a large piazza with tall trees. It is through these streets that, in June, the region’s most important festival, Sagra dei Misteri (Festival of Mysteries), makes its way, a winding parade of wooden religious symbols.

Not far from Campobasso is Saepinum, a town founded by Samnites, a highly civilized people who predated the Romans. When the Romans themselves moved in, they built a theater and temples to Apollo and Jupiter, the remains of which can still be seen.

Isernia, another ancient Roman city, boasts a Roman aqueduct and bridge, and its streets still follow the Roman grid network of cardo and decumanus, the two main intersecting streets. The elegant Fraterna Fountain reuses old Roman stonework and looks like a mini-palazzo, with six portico arches in front.

I once went to Larino in late May for the festival in honor of the town’s patron saint, San Pardo. The whole town was decorated, and hundreds of carts, covered in handmade silk flowers, were pulled through the city streets by snow-white oxen. Larino’s cathedral is one of the most ornate in Molise, and its amphitheater the oldest in all of Italy.

Termoli is a busy port and one of Molise’s best beach resorts. Its cathedral houses the relics of martyrs brought back to Termoli after the Crusades. The imposing castle, built in the thirteenth century by Frederick II, once protected Termoli from pirates and marauding Saracens (maybe they wanted their bones back).

Agnone is a musical town, famous for bells, from lowly cow bells to ornate pontifical bells. But I come to Agnone to see Luca Giordano’s moving portrait of the Holy Family in the Church of San Marco. Like most of Giordano’s paintings, it is an upward spiral of movement, all billowing robes and dramatic light.

Anyone who enjoyed Umberto Eco’s Name of the Rose will want to visit the Castel San Vincenzo, situated on a high plain with snow-covered mountains in the distance. Originally built to defend the Benedictines from the Saracens, the Castel contains the ninth-century Abbey of San Vincenzo al Volturno; its frescoes are a treat for the eye. In the Crypt of the Epiphany, you’ll find the martyrdom of St. Stephen, but my favorite is the martyrdom of St. Lawrence, or San Lorenzo; he is being grilled at a very high temperature but merely appears to be sunbathing.

Monteroduni wins the prize for Molise’s most impressive castle, the Pignatelli. I love its square shape and four cylindrical towers, one on each corner. Built, destroyed, and rebuilt, the castle is at the apex of the town, and houses objects from the Pignatelli family, a museum devoted to local agricultural life. It even has an old torture chamber.—Tanya
Overleaf: The town of Tursi in southeastern Basilicata
My friend Franco Luisi has been inviting me for years to visit Lucania, his region, now called Basilicata, nestled in the instep of the foot of Italy. I did take a quick visit to Basilicata during one of my research trips to Puglia. I had gone to Altamura in search of the best bread in Italy, as claimed, when Franco came to meet me and swept me across the regional border into Basilicata. Matera was the first city where we stopped, and I knew then and there that this was a special place, a place somewhat forgotten, but once you crossed its borders there was no letting go. That visit led to many subsequent trips to this place of mystical landscapes and very special people—people who want you to love their land and the intense flavors of their foods.

My friend Franco had returned with his wife to live in San Martino d’Agri, in the middle of Basilicata, where he was born. Franco is a wine merchant who has made his home in the United States with his family for more than fifteen years, but the call of his Lucania was too compelling, so he returned to Italy to settle in Rome—close enough, since San Martino d’Agri is only four hours away.

With Franco, I explored the food bounty of this little-known and sparsely populated region. The fare is pasta, vegetables, mountain cheeses such as pecorino and provola, and lamb and pork, plus a taste of fish in the coastal towns. But within this seemingly limited list there was a world of flavors to discover. Durum-wheat pasta, dry or freshly made, reigns; Bucatini with Sausage, Pasta with Baked Cherry Tomatoes, Ditalini with Broccoli di Rape, Rigatoni with Lentils, and Fiery Maccheroni are just some of what I discovered and want to share with you.

One Sunday, Franco’s sister Angela was unstoppable as she made for us ferricelli, fresh pasta, which she rolled on a knitting needle and dressed with a sausage sauce; then lasagnelle, which she dressed with Sarconi beans and tomato. With her two forefingers she dragged the dough on a board to create raschiatelli, which looked like larger cavatelli, and she dressed them with broccoli di rape. The Sarconi beans, from the town of the same name, were especially memorable. These tender, meaty, plump white beans resembling canellini turned the lasagnelle dish into a rare treat. What was ever present in each one of these dishes was the diavollicchio, the local chili pepper, used mostly in powdered form. The best of these peppers come from Senise, a small town in the center of Basilicata, next to the Lago di Monte Cotugno. The classic appetizer here is the Zafaran crusck. And what would that be? Well, it’s like a chip made with thin-skinned, tender peppers from Senise. First they are air-dried, then popped into hot oil to crisp, and they are eaten as a snack.

What I found amazing is that a sprinkle of the chili powder changed an otherwise mundane dish, such as boiled potatoes, into something festive. But also try tossing some fried fresh Senise peppers with boiled potatoes and you’ll have another flavor revelation.

Even Franco got into the kitchen with his sister that Sunday during my visit, and showed me his favorite dish. He quickly sliced an abundant amount of garlic, let it cook in extra-virgin olive oil until golden, then turned off the heat and sprinkled one heaping teaspoon of the peperoncino powder into the hot oil, exclaiming, “Alla Zift.” Now there is no such word in Italian, but he kept repeating it—Zift, Zift—and I realized it was the sound that the pepper makes when it hits the hot oil. He dressed a pound of cooked pasta with that, and behold, the most delicious three-ingredient recipe I have ever tasted.

The condiment of choice in Basilicata is some form of fresh or cured pork, and luganighe, the sausages of the Lucani, are the front-runner. In a land where summers are hot and meat is scarce, the best way to preserve it is to make it into sausages or salamis, add some herbs and peperoncino to keep those nasty bacteria away, and you have flavoring for pasta and soups for the whole year. One of my favorite soups from Basilicata is Wedding Soup—Minestra Maritata, with mixed vegetables, little meatballs, and cubes of provola cheese.

There is great olive oil produced in Basilicata, and the renowned wine is Aglianico del Volture, a full-bodied red from the primitive varietals of which Paternoster is a very good producer. But on one early morning we headed out to visit Azienda Agricola Gli Angeli di Crocco in Montalbano Jonico, where we had some excellent Malvasia and a plateful of extraordinary just-picked figs. Azienda Crocco, run by a father-and-son team, is perched on a hill surrounded by a multitude of the most fascinating and beautiful dry clay formations, called calanchi. These calanchi
make up the sides of the surrounding hills, which seem like drapes flowing in the wind, and extend serpentlike for miles, resembling the Great Wall of China. An amazing sight, but, then, this is the terroir from which Matera, the dwelling in stone also known as I Sassi, was formed.

The wines from the hills of Basilicata were long traded for the baccalà of the Nordic waters. As in most of Italy, baccalà has found its way, along with Zuppa di Pesce, onto the seafood menus of Basilicata, especially on the seacoast around Maratea, a beautiful summer resort.

For one of the smallest, least populated, and least known regions of Italy, Basilicata has a lot on its table, and there is no more faithful son than Franco Luisi singing its much-deserved praises.

**Wedding Soup**

Minestra Maritata Makes about 5 quarts

In the dialect of the Lucani (as natives of Basilicata are known) maritare means “to wed,” and I have always thought that this wonderful soup was so named because it was customarily served at wedding celebrations. Recently, however, while doing some research, I came upon another explanation of why it is called maritata—because it weds vegetables (in the soup base) with meat (in the polpette), and with this added protein it becomes a complete and balanced one-course meal. I like both interpretations of the name and believe they’re compatible. Certainly a young couple, on the brink of their first night as newlyweds, can use this fortifying nourishment!

There are many ways to prepare and serve a soup with multiple elements like this one, and you can of course play around with the recipe here. One variation is to fry the meatballs rather than poaching them. Though it takes a bit more work, it does give another layer of flavor (see my recipe for Meatballs in Broth in the Umbria chapter, for instructions on frying little meatballs for soup). Another option is to add cubes of provola to the soup just before serving. If you can get a good-quality Italian provola (mild provolone), this embellishment is superb. I’ve included instructions for this step at the end of the main recipe.

- FOR THE VEGETABLE SOUP

  - 1 medium onion, cut in chunks
- 2 medium stalks **celery** with leaves, cut in chunks
- 1 small **carrot**, cut in chunks
- 4 plump **garlic** cloves, peeled
- ½ cup loosely packed **fresh basil** leaves
- ½ cup **extra-virgin olive oil**
- 7 quarts cold water
- 1 head **escarole** (about 1 pound), cut in ½-inch shreds
- 1 bunch **Swiss chard** (about 1 pound), cut in ½-inch shreds
- 1 large **fennel** bulb (about 1 pound), trimmed and sliced ¼ inch thick
- 1 pound **zucchini**, cut in ½-inch pieces (about 3 small zucchini)
- 2 tablespoons **kosher salt**

**FOR THE MEATBALLS**

- 4 ounces stale **country bread**, crusts removed (about 3 or 4 slices)
- ½ cup **milk**, or more as needed
- 1 pound **sweet Italian sausage** (without fennel seeds)
- 1 large **egg**, beaten
- ½ teaspoon **kosher salt**
- Freshly ground **black pepper** to taste
- 2 tablespoons chopped **fresh Italian parsley**

**FOR SERVING**

- Freshly grated **pecorino** (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano), plus more for passing
- **Extra-virgin olive oil**, best-quality
- ½ pound **provola**, cut in ¼-inch cubes (optional)

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A food processor; a heavy-bottomed soup- or stockpot, 8-quart capacity or larger, with a cover; a 4-quart saucepan for blanching the meatballs

Using the food processor, mince the onion, celery, carrot, garlic, and basil into a smooth paste (**pestata**).

Heat the olive oil in the soup pot over high heat, and scrape in the **pestata**. Cook, stirring, until the **pestata** has dried out and just begins to stick to the bottom of the pan, about 5 minutes. Pour the cold water into the pot, stir up the **pestata**, put on the cover, and bring the water to a boil. Lower the heat, and simmer the broth for about 15 minutes, blending the flavors, then stir in the greens, the fennel, the zucchini, and the 2 tablespoons salt. Return to the simmer, and cook covered for 45 minutes or so, until the greens are tender. Remove the cover, and cook at an active simmer for another 45 minutes or longer, until the soup has reduced in volume and the flavors are concentrated to your taste.

While the soup simmers, prepare the meatballs. Tear the bread into chunks, put them in a small bowl, and pour in just enough milk to cover them. Let soak for a few minutes, until completely saturated, then lift the bread out of the bowl and squeeze out the milk in your fists (use the milk for another purpose). Tear the moistened bread into shreds, and toss them into a large bowl.

Remove the sausage meat from the casing, and crumble it in with the shredded bread, breaking up any meat
clumps with your fingers. Pour the beaten egg over the meat, and sprinkle the salt, freshly ground black pepper, and parsley on top. Fold and toss and squeeze all the ingredients through your fingers to distribute them evenly. Scoop up a small amount of the meat mix—about a heaping teaspoon—and roll it in your palms to form a 1-inch ball (the size of a large grape). Continue to form balls until all the meat is used up.

Meanwhile, fill the 4-quart saucepan with 3 quarts of lightly salted water to poach the meatballs, and bring it to a boil. Drop in the meatballs, cover the pot, and return the water to a boil quickly. Adjust the heat to keep the water simmering gently, and poach the meatballs, uncovered, about 5 minutes, until cooked through. Lift them out with a spider or strainer, let drain briefly, and drop them into the finished soup (discard the poaching water).

Bring the soup to a simmer, and cook meatballs and soup together for about 5 minutes. (If you’ll be serving the soup later, put the meatballs in a bowl. Reheat them in the soup, and simmer 5 minutes just before serving.)

Turn off the heat, and ladle the soup, with plenty of vegetables and meatballs, into warm bowls. Sprinkle each serving with some of the grated cheese, and give it a drizzle of your best olive oil. Serve right away, passing more cheese at the table.

If you are adding provola to the soup, as I like to do, drop in the cubes just after the meatballs have simmered in it and you’ve turned off the heat. Give the soup one good stir to distribute the provola pieces, which will begin to melt right away, and immediately ladle individual portions into your warm bowls. (Don’t leave the provola in the soup pot for a long time before serving, because it will become stringy.)

POTATOES WITH PEPERONCINO

Patate Lessate con Diavolicchio Serves 6
Potatoes will never taste the same after you have tried this dish. This preparation captures the beauty of the cooking of Basilicata: straightforward, simple, but full of brilliant flavor. Even if you are not so passionate about hot pepper, I encourage you not to be timid with the peperoncino in this dish.

Of course, this kind of simple cooking depends on fine ingredients. Excellent olive oil and good potatoes are key. I like russets, but Yukon Gold or waxy varieties would work, too.

- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 2 pounds large russet potatoes
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 5 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: Spice grinder or small mortar and pestle; a 4-quart saucepan; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 8-to-10-inch diameter

Put the peperoncino flakes in the spice grinder or mortar and pestle, and grind to a fine powder.

Put the potatoes in the 4-quart pot with water to cover them by about 2 inches, and bring to a boil. Cook just until the potatoes are easily pierced with a fork or sharp knife blade (don’t let them get mushy), then drain and let them cool. Peel off the skins, and cut the potatoes crosswise into round slices, about ⅓ inch thick. Put the slices in a large warmed serving bowl, sprinkle the salt over them, and toss well to season. Cover the bowl with a cloth kitchen towel to keep them warm.

To make the dressing: Pour the olive oil in the skillet, and set over medium heat for a couple of minutes. Strew the sliced garlic and sprinkle the ground peperoncino in the hot oil, and let both sizzle, stirring occasionally, until the garlic is golden, 2 to 3 minutes. Turn off the heat, and stir in the chopped parsley. Drizzle the seasoned oil from the skillet over the warm potatoes, and toss to coat all the slices. Serve immediately.

ARTICHOKE, FRESH FAVAS & POTATOES

Claudedda Serves 6 or more

The trio of seasonal vegetables here lends a distinctive flavor and texture to this skillet-cooked vegetable dish. Crisp and soft at the same time, it is a deluxe version of home fries, with the artichokes and favas adding color and excitement to the familiar flavor of pan-fried potatoes. It’s a great dinner vegetable dish, as well as a terrific accompaniment to eggs at a springtime breakfast or brunch. (If you are watching your carbs, omit the potatoes and increase the amounts of other vegetables by half.)

- 1½ pounds russet potatoes
- 3 pounds fresh fava-bean pods, shelled
- 1 lemon for acidulated water
- 6 medium artichokes (about 3 pounds)
- 6 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 ounces pancetta, cut in ½-inch pieces
- 2 small onions, thinly sliced
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
Put the potatoes in a pot with water to cover them by about 2 inches, and bring to a boil. Cook just until the potatoes are easily pierced with a fork or sharp knife blade (don’t let them get mushy), then drain and let them cool. Peel off the skin, and cut the potatoes crosswise into round slices, about ½ inch thick.

To prepare the favas: Bring 4 quarts of water to boil in another saucepan, drop in the shelled favas, and blanch about 2 minutes, until they turn bright green. Drain the beans, and drop them right away into a large bowl of ice water. When chilled, drain the favas again; peel off (and discard) the inner skins. You should have about 2 cups peeled favas.

To prepare the artichokes: Fill a large bowl with a couple of quarts of cold water, and squeeze in the juice of the lemon, dropping in the cut lemon halves, too. Snap off the thick outside artichoke leaves; cut off the top third of the remaining leaf tips, and trim the stem tip. Peel the globe of the artichoke, removing the stubs of the plucked leaves and the skin covering the stem, to expose the lighter-colored tender flesh. Slice the artichoke in half lengthwise, and scrape out the choke (if present) with a paring knife or the edge of a teaspoon. Slice the artichoke halves into 1-inch-thick wedges, and drop them into the bowl of acidulated water.

Pour 4 tablespoons of the olive oil into the big skillet, set it over medium heat, and scatter in the pancetta pieces. Cook for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally, as they render fat, then stir in the onion slices, sprinkle in the peperoncino, and cook another 4 minutes or so, until the onions are sizzling and wilting. Drain the artichoke wedges and spread them in the pan; stir and toss gently to coat them with oil. Cover the skillet, and cook for about 15 minutes, until the artichokes are tender, stirring now and then.

Spread the sliced potato rounds in the pan, scatter the favas on top, and turn them over with a stiff spatula, mixing them with the hot vegetables. Cover and cook for 10 minutes or so, stirring and turning the vegetables over gently so the potatoes don’t break apart too much. If they’re sticking to the bottom of the skillet, loosen with a few tablespoons of water, scrape them up, and turn them over. If there’s liquid in the pan, remove the cover and cook it away over slightly higher heat. When the potatoes start to brown, sprinkle on the salt, and drizzle the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil all over.

Cook, uncovered, for another 5 to 10 minutes, occasionally lifting and tumbling the vegetables over with the spatula. As you do, scrape up the crusty glaze that forms on the skillet bottom, and turn it with the vegetables, to incorporate the crustiness throughout. When everything is golden and lightly crusted, turn off the heat. Serve the ciaudedda family-style while still hot, right from the skillet.

**Bucatini with Sausage**

Bucatini con Salsicce Makes about 7 cups, enough for 2 pounds of bucatini or other pasta, serving 12

This recipe makes a wonderful tomato-and-sausage sauce for pasta. Typical of Basilicata, it is uncomplicated yet yields a complex and delicious flavor. It is important to use the best sausage, preferably a mix freshly made by a real Italian butcher. If there’s one available to you, ask for sweet, all-pork sausage, preferably a medium grind of meat with some texture, rather than a fine grind, which tends to be pasty. To save work, since you want the meat to be loose, ask for the sausage mix before it is put in the casing. As for the pasta, I recommend bucatini, which is what I first had in Basilicata. But I like spaghetti with this, too—a whole-wheat spaghetti would be especially nice.

**1 ½ pounds sweet Italian sausage** (preferably without fennel seeds)
1 cup white wine

¼ cup whole Tuscan-style pickled peperoncini, drained (about 24 small peppers)

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for serving

6 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced

1 teaspoon kosher salt

6 cups (two 28-ounce cans) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand

1 pound bucatini (or perciatelli or thick spaghetti)

½ cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano), plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed, high-sided skillet or sauté pan, 14-inch diameter; a large pot for cooking the pasta

Remove the sausage meat from the casings, and put it in a large bowl. Break it up with your fingers into the smallest possible bits, pour the white wine over it, and toss the crumbled meat until it’s evenly moistened. Remove the stems of the drained peperoncini, scrape out the seeds (or leave some, if you like it hot), and slice the peppers crosswise into ¼-inch rings.

Pour the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium heat. Scatter in the sliced garlic, and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 3 minutes. Toss the sausage meat into the skillet, and spread it out, breaking apart any clumps, and stirring with the oil and garlic. Raise the heat a bit, and cook for 5 minutes or so, stirring now and then, as the meat juices bubble and evaporate. When the pan is dry and the sausage starts sizzling, season it with the salt, and scatter the peperoncini slices in the pan. Stir and cook for a minute or two, until the peppers are sizzling, too.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes and 3 cups of water (with which you sloshed out the tomato containers), and stir well. Cover the pan, bring the liquid to a boil over high heat, then set the cover ajar and adjust the heat to keep a steady bubbling boil. Cook for an hour or so, until the sauce has reduced by nearly half, stirring more frequently as it thickens; if it is still loose, cook uncovered for a few minutes more. When the sauce has a consistency you like for dressing pasta, turn off the heat. You can use some of the sauce right away—you’ll need half of it to dress a pound of bucatini—or let it cool (then refrigerate or freeze) for later use.

For the pasta: Fill the large pot with salted water (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt), and heat to a rolling boil. Drop in the bucatini, stirring and separating the strands. Cover the pot, return the water to a boil over high heat, then set the cover ajar and cook the pasta until barely al dente. Meanwhile, heat half the sausage sauce in the big skillet back to a bare simmer; if it has cooled and thickened, loosen it with some of the pasta water.

When done, lift the bucatini from the pot, let drain for a moment, and drop it into the sauce. Toss together for a minute or two, until all the strands are coated and perfectly al dente. Turn off the heat, sprinkle the ½ cup grated cheese over the pasta, and toss well. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil if you like, and toss again. Spoon the pasta into warm bowls, and serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.
Pasta with Baked Cherry Tomatoes

Pasta con Pomodori al Forno

Serves 6

The deep flavor and delightfully varied textures of this pasta dressing develop in the oven, where you bake the cherry tomatoes coated with bread crumbs just before you toss them with pasta. Roasting them this way intensifies their flavor, and the bread crumbs become crunchy. It is a lovely dish to make when sweet cherry tomatoes are in season, but it is also good with the lesser cherry-tomato varieties you get in winter; these can be used successfully here because of the concentration of taste and texture during baking.

This dressing is suitable for almost any pasta, but I particularly like it with spaghetti, gemelli, or penne. Because the tomatoes are at their best as soon as they come out of the oven, the dressing and pasta should be cooked simultaneously, and I have written the recipe to ensure that you will have your pasta and baked tomatoes ready for each other at the same time.

- 3 pints cherry tomatoes, halved
- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup fine dry bread crumbs
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot
- ¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 1 pound spaghetti, gemelli, or penne
- 10 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 1 cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves, shredded
- ½ cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano), plus more for passing
- 4 ounces ricotta or ricotta salata
Arrange a rack in the center of the oven, and heat to 350°.

Toss the cherry-tomato halves in a large bowl with 3 tablespoons of the olive oil. Sprinkle over tomatoes the bread crumbs, salt, and peperoncino; toss well to coat the tomatoes evenly. Pour the tomatoes onto the parchment-lined sheet, and spread them apart in a single layer. Bake until the tomatoes are shriveled and lightly caramelized (but not dried out), about 25 minutes in all.

Meanwhile, fill the large pot with salted water, and heat to a rolling boil. When the tomatoes are nearly done, drop the pasta into the pot, stir, and return the water to a boil.

As soon as the pasta is cooking, pour the remaining olive oil into the big skillet, set it over medium-high heat, and scatter in the sliced garlic. Cook for a minute or two, until it is sizzling and lightly colored, then ladle in about 2 cups of the pasta cooking water, and bring to a vigorous boil, stirring up the garlic. Let half the water evaporate, then lower the heat, stir in the chopped parsley, and keep the sauce barely simmering.

As soon as the tomatoes are done, remove them from the oven.

When the pasta is al dente, lift it from the water, drain for a moment, and drop it into the skillet, still over low heat. Toss pasta quickly with the garlic-and-parsley sauce in the pan, then slide the baked tomatoes on top of the pasta. Scatter the basil shreds all over, and toss everything together well, until the pasta is evenly dressed and the tomatoes are distributed throughout. Turn off the heat, sprinkle on the grated cheese, and toss once more.

Mound the pasta in a warmed serving bowl. Shred the ricotta all over the top of the pasta, and serve immediately.

**Ditalini con i Broccoli**

Serves 6

Small ditalini and well-cooked broccoli di rape are all you need to make a delicious, warm, nourishing, and comforting dish—moist and almost soupy in consistency. Of course, you need the basic seasoning of the Basilicata cook, too: olive oil, garlic, lots of peperoncino, and pecorino. If you feel the need to add more to this simple dish, slivers of chicken breast can cook right in the pot with the ditalini and will give a meaty substance. Another natural addition would be cubes of provola just before serving (see Wedding Soup, for tips on adding provola to a soupy dish).

- ¼ pounds broccoli di rape (a large bunch)
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot
- 1 pound ditalini
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano), plus more for passing

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger
To prepare the broccoli di rape: Separate the big stems of the bunch, breaking apart any that are attached, and trim them one at a time. First, slice off the bottom of the stem with a paring knife—just the dried part, where the stem was first cut, usually no more than an inch or so. With the blade of the knife, lift the outer skin of the stem, starting at your fresh bottom cut, and peel it toward the top in one long strip. Pull off the large, tough leaves attached to the lower stem, too. Peel away more strips of skin (and lower leaves) until only the pale inner stem remains, with all the tender leaves and broccoli di rape florets at the top. Trim and peel the other stems this way, then chop them all crosswise in short lengths, ⅜ inch or so.

Meanwhile, fill the large pot with salted water (at least 6 quarts water with 1 tablespoon salt), and heat it to the boil. When the broccoli di rape is trimmed and chopped, begin cooking the pasta and sauce at the same time.

With the pasta water at a rolling boil, stir in the ditalini, return to the boil, and let it cook, stirring occasionally.

Pour 6 tablespoons of the olive oil into the big skillet, set it over medium heat, scatter in the garlic slices, and cook for a couple of minutes, until sizzling and starting to color. Sprinkle the peperoncino onto the pan bottom, let it toast for a few seconds, then spill in all the broccoli di rape. Raise the heat, sprinkle the salt over it, spread, and stir the broccoli di rape in the pan and get it cooking. Ladle in about 3 cups of boiling pasta water, stir with the vegetables, and adjust the heat so the water is at a bubbling simmer. Cover the skillet, and cook for 4 to 5 minutes, until the broccoli di rape is tender.

Uncover the pan, and immediately scoop the ditalini from the pasta pot with a spider or large strainer—they should be slightly undercooked—and spill them into the simmering sauce. Stir the pasta and broccoli di rape together, drizzle on the remaining olive oil, stir again, and bring the sauce to a vigorous simmer. Cook for a few minutes, until the ditalini are perfectly al dente and the sauce has thickened—it should have a soupy, but not watery, consistency. (If the ditalini need more cooking, keep the skillet covered; if they are almost al dente when they go into the skillet, cook uncovered to reduce the sauce quickly.)

When pasta and sauce are done, turn off the heat, sprinkle the cup of grated cheese on top, and stir it in. Serve immediately in warm bowls, with more cheese at the table.

Rigatoni with Lentils

Rigatoni con Lenticchie Serves 6

Lentils and pasta are a traditional pairing in Italian cooking, and most of the regions in the southern part of the boot enjoy pasta con lenticchie in some form, usually in soups. In this dish, which I was served in Basilicata, the lentils were cooked with other vegetables into a sauce that served as a delicious dressing for rigatoni. It was excellent that way. This sauce seems to me even more delightful as a dressing for whole-wheat or barley pasta.

- 1 cup small lentils, preferably lenticchie di Castelluccio
- ¼ cup carrot cut in ¼-inch dice
- ¼ cup celery cut in ¼-inch dice
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 4 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 3 cups (one 28-ounce can) Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
Rinse the lentils, and put them in the saucepan with the diced carrot and celery, the bay leaves, and 3 cups cold water. Bring to a boil, cover the pan, and adjust the heat to maintain a gentle, steady simmer. Cook until the lentils are just tender, about 25 minutes (or longer, depending on size).

When the lentils are almost cooked, pour the olive oil into the large skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Scatter in the garlic slices, and cook for a minute or two, until sizzling and starting to color; sprinkle the peperoncino onto the pan bottom to toast as the garlic sizzles. Pour in the crushed tomatoes, slosh out the can with a cup of cold water, pour that into the skillet, stir well, and bring to the boil. Simmer the sauce for 5 minutes or so, just to thicken up a bit.

When the lentils are tender, pour them into the skillet with the tomatoes, season with the salt, stir everything together, and heat the sauce to a bubbling simmer. Cook for 25 minutes or so, until the lentils are quite tender and the sauce has thickened to a consistency you like for dressing pasta. If you’re going to cook the pasta right away, keep the sauce at a bare simmer. For later use, let it cool, then refrigerate. (If it thickens after cooling, loosen it with pasta water when you reheat it.)

To cook the rigatoni or other pasta: Fill the big pot with salted water, and heat to a rolling boil. Stir in the pasta, and cook it until barely al dente. Scoop the rigatoni from the water, let drain for a moment, and drop it into the skillet of sauce, simmering over low heat. Toss together for a minute or two, until the rigatoni is evenly dressed and perfectly al dente.

Turn off the heat, sprinkle on the chopped parsley and a cup of grated cheese, and toss well. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil, toss again, and serve immediately in warm bowls, with more cheese at the table.

**FIERY MACCHERONI**

Maccheroni al Fuoco Serves 6

Like many traditional Lucani dishes, this one is fashioned from the handful of ingredients one would find even in the most humble peasant pantry: dried peppers, yesterday’s bread, a chunk of hard cheese, olive oil, and garlic. Minimal yet delicious.

The fire in fiery maccheroni, of course, comes from dried diavolicchio, the hot chili peppers so beloved in Basilicata and other southern regions. Here, whole dried peperoncino pods are soaked until soft, then puréed into a pesto to dress the pasta. Toasted bread crumbs play an important role in this dish, too, when they’re tossed in just before serving. They pick up the paste and garlicky olive oil, cling to the strands of pasta (preferably bucatini or perciatelli), and give crunchy, fiery sparks of flavor to every enjoyable bite.

- ¼ ounce whole dried Italian peperoncini
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus more to cover pepper pesto
- ¼ cup coarse bread crumbs from day-old country bread
- 1 pound bucatini (or perciatelli or thick spaghetti)
- 1 tablespoon plus 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- ½ cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano)

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor or mini-chopper; a large pot, 8-quart capacity, for cooking the pasta; a baking sheet, a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

To soften the peperoncini: Remove the stems, put them in a heatproof bowl or measuring cup, and pour over them 2 cups of boiling water. Let them soak for several hours (preferably overnight), until they are very pliable.

To make the pepper pesto: Drain the peperoncini (discard the soaking water), and put them in the bowl of the food processor with 6 tablespoons of the olive oil. Process to a smooth paste (though you may see a few seeds), scraping down the sides several times. If you are not using the pesto right away, pack it into a small container, smooth the top, and cover the pesto with a thin film of olive oil (a little will go a long way).

To toast the bread crumbs: Spread them on a rimmed baking sheet and place it in a 350° oven. Bake the crumbs for about 8 minutes, shaking the pan a couple of times, until they’re crisp and golden.

When you are ready to cook the pasta, fill the large pot with water and 1 tablespoon salt, and heat to a rolling boil. Drop in the bucatini, stir to separate the strands, return the water to a boil, and let it cook, stirring occasionally.

As soon as the bucatini goes in the pot, pour the remaining olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Scatter in the sliced garlic, and cook for a minute or so, until it’s sizzling, then scrape in the pepper pesto, spread it over the pan bottom, and let it toast for a minute. Ladle in about 2 cups of the boiling pasta water, sprinkle in the 1 teaspoon salt and chopped parsley, and stir well. Bring the water to a boil, and cook until half of it evaporates, about 3 minutes, then lower the heat to keep the sauce barely simmering.

When the bucatini is al dente, lift it from the pot, let drain for a moment, and drop it into the skillet. Toss pasta and sauce together until all the strands are evenly coated. Turn off the heat, sprinkle on the grated cheese, and toss; scatter the toasted bread crumbs over the top, and toss a final time. Serve immediately in warm bowls.

Fish Soup

Zuppa di Pesce Serves 6
In the coastal areas of Basilicata, the varied catch of the day is the basis of this uncomplicated yet very tasty fish soup. Here I recommend using monkfish and grouper fillets, both with firm texture, so they won’t fall apart in the zuppa. Halibut is another good choice. Indeed, many varieties of fish and shellfish can be prepared this way, as long as you adjust the cooking time so the flesh remains intact and avoid overcooking. If using clams or mussels, use a wider pot, so the shells do not break the meaty fish as they open.

For a more substantial dish, place a slice of grilled or toasted country bread, or a few slices of spicy potato, *Patate Lessate con Diavolicchio*, in each soup bowl before ladling in the zuppa di pesce.

- 1 pound *grouper* fillet, with skin
- 1 pound *monkfish* fillet, membrane removed
- 1½ teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 cup all-purpose flour for dredging the fish
- 2 cups water
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 5 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 1½ cups white wine
- 6 sprigs fresh thyme
- 2 bunches scallions, trimmed and chopped (about 2 cups)
- 1 tablespoon white-wine vinegar
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh Italian parsley

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy saucepan, such as an enameled cast-iron French oven, 10 inches wide, with a 3-to-4-quart capacity

Cut the grouper and monkfish into six portions each (twelve pieces in all), and season on all sides with salt, using about ½ teaspoon. Spread the flour on a plate, and dredge all the fish pieces, lightly coating all sides. Meanwhile, heat a couple of cups of water to the simmer in a small pan or kettle.

Pour the oil in the big saucepan, set it over medium-high heat, scatter in the garlic and peperoncino, and cook for a minute or so, until they’re sizzling. Quickly lay the fish pieces in the pan in a single layer, shaking off any loose flour before they go in, and placing the grouper pieces skin side down. Leave as much space as possible between the pieces. Without moving the pieces, fry the fish on the first side for about 2 minutes, until a light crust forms. Flip the pieces over, and fry the second side for 2 minutes or so, until lightly colored and crusted, then remove all the fish to a large plate.

Raise the heat, and pour in the white wine and 1½ cups of the hot water. Drop in the thyme sprigs and the remaining salt, and bring the liquids to a boil. Let them bubble for 5 minutes or so, until the volume has reduced by about a third.

Lay the fish pieces back in the saucepan, toss in the scallions, and simmer for another 4 to 5 minutes, until the fish is cooked through. Sprinkle on it the vinegar and chopped parsley; stir and swirl the pan to blend them with the zuppa. Turn off the heat, and serve immediately in warm shallow soup bowls: lay a piece of grouper and one of monkfish in each bowl, and spoon over them some of the sauce.

If you’ve toasted or grilled bread slices, or prepared *patate lessate con diavolicchio* to go with the soup, set a bread slice or cooked potato slices in each bowl first, then lay the fish pieces on top.
**Baccalà Lucana-Style**

Baccalà alla Lucana  Serves 6

*Baccalà* (salt cod) is cooked in many ways in every region of Italy—in the north, where I grew up, as well as in Basilicata, in the far south. Of course, the preparation styles vary immensely, and I like them all!

This *Baccalà* dish has the characteristic flavors of Basilicata, incorporating both hot peperoncino flakes and roasted peppers (jarred peppers are fine to use here). It is a good recipe to try if you’ve not cooked *Baccalà* before, easy to make and with appealing, familiar flavors.

- 2 pounds (or a bit more) boneless *Baccalà* (salt cod fillet)
- 1½ pounds (two 12-ounce jars) roasted red peppers
- 1 cup all-purpose flour for dredging
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 6 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- ½ cup white wine
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

To remove the salt from the salt cod, put the fish in a large, deep container that fits in your sink. Run fresh cold water into the container, filling it completely, so water is spilling over. Keep a slow, steady drip of fresh water to soak the *Baccalà* for at least 12 hours, up to a couple of days. Occasionally dump out and refresh the water. To decide if *Baccalà* has been soaked sufficiently, press a finger against it at a thick part, and touch it to the tongue. If
it’s palatably salty, it is ready to be cooked. Drain the baccalù, pat dry, and cook right away or store in the refrigerator, well wrapped, and cook within a day or so.

When you’re ready to prepare the baccalù, drain the roasted red peppers and cut them into strips about 2 by 3 inches.

Cut the Baccalà into six serving-sized pieces. Spread flour on a plate, and dredge the pieces, lightly coating both sides, and shaking off the excess. Pour 6 tablespoons of the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Lay the codfish pieces in the pan in a single layer, and fry for about 5 minutes, until the underside is colored, then flip the pieces over. Scatter the sliced garlic and the peperoncino over the pan bottom, in between the fish pieces. Cook for several minutes, to brown the second side, then turn them all over again.

Nestle the roasted-pepper pieces in between the fish pieces, to start cooking on the pan bottom. Stir the wine, ½ cup water, and the salt together in a spouted measuring cup, and pour this evenly over the fish pieces; drizzle the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil over them as well. Shake the pan to distribute the liquids evenly throughout, and bring them to a simmer. Cook for about 8 minutes, or until the fish is done to your liking. Sprinkle with the chopped parsley, and serve immediately.

**Farro with Pork Ragù Potenza-Style**

Grano al Ragù alla Potentina  Makes about 4 cups, serving 6 with farro

This ragù, in the tradition of Potenza (the capital of Basilicata), is a versatile sauce, equally delicious with cooked grains such as farro, wheat berries, or barley, or as a dressing for almost any pasta you choose. This recipe gives a combination I particularly love, with cooked farro stirred into the pot of ragù just before serving. The nuttiness of the grain and the earthiness of the pork sauce are flavors that remind me of the bountiful Sunday and holiday dinners that are traditional in the lower part of the peninsula. And though it is a dish steeped in old traditions, it is healthful and economical, and will certainly shine on today’s table, for any occasion.

FOR THE RAGÙ

- 2 pounds boneless pork shoulder
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ tablespoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons chopped garlic (about 5 cloves)
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- ½ cup white wine
- 3 cups (one 28-ounce can) canned Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- ¼ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

FOR THE FARRO AND SERVING

- 1 pound farro
- 1 fresh bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano), plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy saucepan, such as an enameled cast-iron French oven, 5-quet capacity, with a cover; a heavy 3- or 4-quart saucepan
For the *ragù*: Trim the fat from the exterior of the pork. Cut it into bite-sized morsels, about ¾-inch cubes, trimming more fat and bits of cartilage as you divide the meat. Pat the pieces dry with paper towels.

Pour the olive oil into the big pan, set it over medium heat, and toss in the pork. Spread the pieces in the pan, and season with the salt. Cook the pork slowly for 15 minutes or so, turning and moving the pieces occasionally as the meat releases its juices and they cook away.

When the pan is dry and the pork starts to sizzle and crackle, clear a hot spot on the bottom, and drop in the chopped garlic and peperoncino. Stir and toast them for a minute or so in the hot spot, until the garlic is fragrant and sizzling, then stir and toss with the meat cubes. Raise the heat a bit, pour in the white wine, stir, and bring to a boil. Let the wine bubble until it is nearly evaporated and the pork is sizzling again. Pour in the crushed tomatoes and a cup of water that has been sloshed around to rinse out the tomato can, grate on the fresh nutmeg, and stir.

Cover the pan, and heat the tomatoes to a boil, then adjust the heat to maintain a steady, gentle perking. Cook for about 1½ hours, until the pork is tender all the way through and falls apart under gentle pressure, and the sauce has thickened. If the liquid is still thin toward the end of the cooking time, set the cover ajar, and raise the heat a bit to reduce it rapidly.

Meanwhile, prepare the farro, first rinsing it well and draining it in a sieve. Put it in the smaller saucepan with 6 cups cold water, the bay leaf, salt, and olive oil. Bring to a boil, stirring occasionally, then set the cover ajar, and adjust the heat to maintain a steady simmer. Cook about 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the grains are cooked through but still *al dente*. Turn off the heat, pour off excess liquid, and keep the farro warm until the *ragù* is done.

To finish the dish: Have the *ragù* simmering and stir in the farro thoroughly. Cook together for a minute, so the grain is very hot. Turn off the heat, sprinkle the grated cheese on top, and stir in. Spoon the dressed farro into warm bowls, and serve immediately, with more grated cheese at the table.

**Torta with Prunes**

*Torta alla Prugne* A 9-inch cake, serving 8 or more

Italians love *prugne*, the name for both fresh and dried plums (which we call prunes). Italy is one of Europe’s largest plum-producers, and the fresh fruit is a favorite in season. But dried plums, *prugne secche*, are in such demand year-round—for snacking, cooking, and baking—that today Italy ranks as one of the world’s biggest importers of prunes (many tons of them grown in California!).

I, too, love *prugne secche*, particularly in crostatas (tarts) and torte such as this cake, which I found in Basilicata. Morsels of prune, poached in a wine syrup, dot the golden, buttery cake, and each bite bursts with their concentrated essence of fruit flavor. It’s a great treat for the holidays, or on any winter’s day—a delicious reminder of the sweet taste of summer.

- 1¼ cups (about 7 ounces) pitted *prunes* (preferably soft, not old and dry)
- 1 cup plus 1 tablespoon *sugar*
- Finely grated zest of 1 *lemon* (about 2 teaspoons)
- 1 cup *red wine*
- 12 tablespoons (1½ sticks) *butter*, at room temperature
- 1 tablespoon fine dry *bread crumbs*
1 cup all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon baking powder
½ teaspoon baking soda
4 large eggs, separated
¼ teaspoon kosher salt

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A 9-inch springform pan; standing electric mixer with paddle and whisk attachments (or a hand whisk)

To poach the prunes: Cut them into bite-sized morsels. Put them in a small saucepan with ⅓ cup of the sugar, the lemon zest, and the wine. Set the pan over medium-low heat, and bring to a boil, stirring occasionally to dissolve the sugar. Let the syrup bubble gently and steadily for 15 minutes or so, reducing slowly, until it has thickened and barely covers the shiny poached prunes. Leave the prunes in the syrup to cool completely, then drain through a sieve, collecting and saving the remaining syrup, about ¼ cup. (You can poach the prunes hours or a day ahead of time and leave them soaking in the syrup. Drain well before assembling the cake.)

To make the cake: Arrange a rack in the center of the oven, and heat to 350°. Secure the bottom disk in the springform, and grease the inside surfaces with a tablespoon of the soft butter. Stir the bread crumbs and a tablespoon of sugar together. Coat the buttered bottom and sides of the cake pan completely with the crumb mixture, and shake out any loose crumbs.

Sift together the flour, baking powder, and baking soda.

Put the remaining sugar and butter in the mixer bowl and, using the paddle attachment, cream together for several minutes on high speed, scraping down the bowl several times, until light and smooth.

Beat in the egg yolks one at a time; scrape down the bowl, and fluff up the batter on high speed after incorporating each yolk. On low speed, blend in the dry ingredients, mixing just until completely moistened and incorporated.

In a clean bowl, whip the egg whites with the salt to firm peaks, using the whisk attachment or a hand whisk. Stir in a third of the whites to lighten the cake batter, then gently fold in the remainder. Scrape the batter into the prepared pan, and spread it to fill the springform in a flat, even layer.

Scatter the drained prune pieces all over the top of the batter, spaced evenly, covering the whole cake. Put the pan in the oven, and bake for about 45 minutes (rotating it after 25 minutes), as the batter rises around the prune pieces. When the top is golden brown and a cake tester inserted into the center comes out clean, remove the cake to a wire cooling rack. Drizzle the remaining wine syrup all over the top of the warm cake, and let it cool for ½ hour or so before loosening and removing the side ring.

Serve the torta slightly warm or at room temperature, cut in wedges—plain or topped with whipped cream.
A local man comes home from shopping near Monte Cotugno
IN AND AROUND BASILICATA . . .

Basilicata, known locally as Lucania, hits the sea at the arch of the boot of Italy. If you’ve seen The Passion of the Christ, which was filmed in and around the city of Matera, you will recognize the territory. The porous tufa stone of Matera was excavated for centuries, and thousands of cave dwellings were dug into the mount, like the honeycombs of a beehive. Chapels and even some spacious churches were created this way by the monks. Today, the sassi appear as if from a distant past. Elaborate fresco cycles decorate some of the religious caves, and the largest cave, Santa Maria della Valle, even has a garden. The cave dwellings were inhabited as late as the early 1950s, after which the government ruled it illegal.

Melfi is famous for its chestnuts, but it also has one of the most beautiful Norman castles. Set apart on a large expanse of land, atop a gently sloping hill, the castle is enormous in size, yet simple in design and decoration. As austere as the outside is, the interior reflects the sumptuous lifestyle of the nobles who lived there for centuries after its original construction in the eleventh century. The Rapolla sarcophagus (A.D. 165), housed inside the castle, is one of the most beautiful Roman sarcophagi I have ever seen. The carving is sublime, and, judging by the beautiful young woman sculpted on the top, the deceased must have been gorgeous.

Lagopesole Castle still retains the spirit of Frederick II. Sitting high on a hill, this is the last castle he built (mid-thirteenth century), and he used it for one of his favorite pastimes, hunting. The sandy-colored stone with which the castle was built appears to me at the same time warm and stark in the blazing sun of the region. The spirits of Manfredi and Elena, fourteenth-century inhabitants of the castle, are said still to occupy it. The chapel inside, with some fresco remains lingering on the walls, is colossal and beautiful in its austerity.

Venosa Castle was built during the Angevin period (fifteenth century). Surrounded by a moat and with a drawbridge, this is a fun castle to take the kids to. Mine loved looking at the writings on the walls, by prisoners who were held way up in the towers of the castle. In Venosa, Horace’s birthplace, I enjoy the eerie feeling I get at the unfinished church of Santa Trinità, which is behind the (completed) abbey church. At first it appears as if Santa Trinità has been destroyed, but really it was never finished. The twelfth-century monks began this huge construction borrowing stone from the nearby Roman amphitheater.

The hilltop town of Maratea is a jewel that maintains its local flavor. It overlooks the glistening blue sea below, and the climb to get down to its beaches is well worth the effort. The small port below reminds me of Portofino, except that it isn’t filled with tourists.

Metaponto has some impressive Roman temple remains, in particular the Temple of Hera. One of the most important cities in Magna Graecia, Metaponto played a crucial role when allied with Hannibal against Rome. There are ruins of a Greek amphitheater, and nearby some of Italy’s best white sand beaches. If you are really interested in archaeology, see the sites and remains of the Siris and Heraclea colonies. Siris is well known for being founded by the Trojans.—TANYA
Left: Frescoes from the Church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Tursi; right: the Monastery and Church of Santa Maria d’Orsola (seen through the arch)
This is a strip of beautiful coast between Maratea and Diamante.
Calabria is in the most southern tip of the boot, surrounded by five hundred miles of coastline with beautiful turquoise water and deserted pebble beaches. Inland, the terrain is rugged, with mountains that stretch like tense fingers to the shore.

The cuisine of Calabria is not an expansive cuisine; it is, in the true sense of the word, a simple cuisine, reflecting the place. The basic ingredients are olive oil, onions, peperoncini, tomatoes, pork, fish, caciocavallo cheese, durum-wheat pasta, and bread.

Some of the unique regional products that flavor this cuisine are: the onion from Tropea, a purple torpedo-looking sweet onion that is much used in Calabria and sought after in the world—so much so that the Queen of England has her regular allocation delivered to the castle kitchen. And then there are little red hornlike Aspic peppers that in late summer hang, tied like cordon of coral, off balconies, walls, and cantinas. They are left to dry anywhere with direct sunlight and some ventilation, then used in cooking the rest of the year. They can be eaten whole, fried until crisp, crushed, powdered, or made into paste with olive oil. Every household seems to have one or more of these Ferrari-red garlands hanging somewhere.

So much is the peperoncino valued that there is a yearly sagra, or festival, in honor of it. There is as well the Accademia del Peperoncino, which has its office in Diamante. On my last visit, looking for information, I came to the accademia to find a busy team of officeworkers scurrying around, because that night the sagra was taking place, and four thousand people were expected—Mario and I among them.

I love peperoncino and use it a lot in my cooking, but being on location helped me realize how much of a tradition and a way of life this little pepper represents to the people of Calabria and their cuisine. Brought here by the Spaniards after they discovered the New World, chili peppers found their ideal habitat in Calabria. In the past century, over a million people left Calabria to seek a better life in other parts of Italy as well as abroad, especially in the United States. Ironically, they took with them their favorite food, crushed peperoncino, now found on every pizzeria counter across America.

I first discovered Calabria in 2006, when Mario and I decided to drive around the whole perimeter of the region, across its central mountains, and over one of its highest peaks, the Aspromonte.

Calabria is a place in a precarious position. It is a dead end, unless you are heading to Sicily. But in order to reach Sicily, you have to get to Reggio Calabria, the capital city, and then take a ferry over the Strait of Messina. Thus it’s much easier to fly from Rome to Palermo and bypass Calabria altogether. Before this recent trip, the closest I got to Calabria was in 1995. I went to Sicily with a group of friends, hoping to stop off in Calabria en route. We sailed the Sea Cloud, a magnificent three-masted sailboat built in 1931 for E. F. Hutton and his wife, Marjorie Merriweather Post. From southern Sicily we headed up toward the Strait of Messina. There is a strong current in these waters most of the time, but on that faraway day the seas seemed to be angry. And although the sailing was exhilarating, we never did dock in Reggio Calabria as we had planned. This, I reminded myself, is the strait about which Ulysses had been warned. The two monsters Scylla and Charybdis awaited, one on each side: Scylla, the monster with six heads on the Calabrian coast, and Charybdis, across the gulf, on the Sicilian coast, swallowing up any ship coming close to the whirlpools of the changing tides. Am I grateful we got away!

But this time, with Mario, I made it to Calabria. We went by land, leaving the autostrada from Naples to take a side road down to the Tyrhenian Sea. There we reached Maratea, a beautiful seaside city where we had a great lunch in a small trattoria, consisting of fried olives, Calabrese Salad—Insalata alla Calabrese, and Spicy Calamari—Calamari Piccanti.

The intensity of the flavors was evident in every bite, reminding me a lot of Sicilian food but somehow more naïve and rustic, and certainly more fiery. The evening we spent down the coast in Diamante, where the Sagra del Peperoncino was alive with music. The tents were festooned with wreaths of peperoncino, and tables were full of pyramids of piled-up glass jars filled with the red peperoncino in oil, in vinegar, a paste, dry powder—every way one can imagine. The grounds looked like Christmas, even though it was midsummer. Smells of sausages, lamb,
baked pasta wafted through the air, and we made sure we had some of each. I particularly remember the Stuffed Baked Pasta—Schiaffettoni, Shepherd’s Rigatoni—Rigatoni alla Pastora, and Steamed Swordfish Bagnara-Style—Pesce Spada all’Uso di Bagnara.

Next stop was Tropea, where I went looking for La Rosa di Tropea, the famous red onion from Tropea. But I also found a stupendous turquoise beach, which, I later discovered, was rated in the Sunday New York Times in January 2007 as one of the world’s best beaches. The city itself is perched on a high promontory, with a skyline of Renaissance churches, and sandstone palazzos. The sanctuary of Santa Maria dell’Isola stands at the highest point on an isolated rock, with only a thread of sandy beach connecting it to the mainland, as if guarding Tropea.

The red torpedo onions have been growing in this region since the Greeks occupied it. The sandy soil and hot climate in “La Costa degli Dei”—the “Coast of the Gods,” as this strip of land is called—is ideal for growing these onions. The Tropea onion is synonymous with the Calabrian cuisine from this area. It is sweet and quite digestible, thanks to such sugars as glucose, fructose, and saccharose. It is claimed to have antiseptic properties as well, but most of all it tastes great, whether raw, fried, stuffed, or in pastas and soups such as Onion Soup—Zuppa di Cipolla. It also features in Eggplant, Onions, and Potatoes—Patate, Cipolle e Melanzane.

In Tropea we met up with my friend Raffaele La Gamba, who lives in Brooklyn but hails from this part of Calabria. Every holiday when we meet in New York, on his table there must be flavorful ’nduja, the spiciest dip-spread-sauce I ever tasted, and I mean ever.

So I wanted to know where and how this spreadable fiery salami is made. We headed out to Spilinga, a small town that was the ’nduja epicenter, and went to visit Luigi Caccamo, the ’nduja artisan. ’Nduja is made from the head trimmings of the pig, as well as some fatback, skin, belly fat, and other organ trimmings. It is all minced and then tossed with almost an equal amount of fiery peperoncino. After resting for a few days, the mixture is stuffed into the large intestines of the pig. It is tied up like salami and hung in a controlled-temperature setting to mature. We tasted it as a spread, and slightly warmed as a dip on crusty bread, but we also had a firecracker pasta with ’nduja in the tomato sauce. I bade Raffaele a fiery goodbye, to enjoy the rest of his vacation.

Next, we visited the town of Bagnara, between Tropea and Scilla, nestled in a sickle-shaped bay. Down a high promontory, the winding road led us to this fishermen’s town of little houses that seemed to be clinging to the rocks. Here they have fished swordfish since the days of the Greeks, and they still do it the same way today, harpooning the fish by hand.

But swordfish is not the only good thing in Bagnara. Italians travel from afar to enjoy the notorious ice cream and torrone of Bagnara. And there are other surprise flavors and sensations to be found in this rugged land. One unique flavor that I adore, especially in ice cream, is bergamot—a fruit of the citrus family, pear-shaped, yellow in color, and intense in aroma. Bergamots are cultivated only in a narrow strip of the Calabrian coast extending for about sixty miles between the Tyrrenian and the Ionian Seas. The perfumed lemony essence of this fruit is used in candy and desserts, as well as in pharmaceutical and cosmetic products.

Ever on the lookout for recipes I could bring home, we stopped at Bovalino Marina, where a friend of Mario treated us to an excellent meal. On their terrace, above orchards of olive trees overlooking the Ionian Sea, we enjoyed Orecchiette with Favas and Cherry Tomatoes—Orecchiette con Fave e Pomodorini, Pork Chops Shepherd-Style—Maiale all’Uso dei Pastori, and finished with some Almond Biscottini—Biscottini alle Mandorle, and Stuffed Figs Sibari-Style—Fichi Ripieni alla Sibarita

We continued our search, zigzagging past Catanzaro, up the Silagian Mountains, where we had, in the most simple setting, some of the most intense and flavorful foods for lunch. Baked Cavatappi in Tomato Sauce—Cavatappi al Forno, Chicken Catanzaro-Style—Pollo alla Catanzarese, and Sesame Candy—Dolcetto di Sesamo were on the menu, and we washed it all down with Cirò, claimed to be one of the best as well as the oldest wine in Calabria.
Calabrese Salad

Insalata alla Calabrese Serves 6

Peppers play a central role in this Calabrian version of potato salad. Fresh green peppers are fried as a main salad ingredient; and peperoncino, dried crushed red-pepper flakes, serves as an essential seasoning.

The peppers you want for this are the slender, long ones with sweet, tender flesh, which I have always just called “Italian frying peppers.” These days, with the greater popularity of peppers and chillis here in America, markets sell a number of varieties that are suitable for frying, such as banana peppers, wax peppers, Hungarian peppers, and Cubanelle peppers.

In addition to this delicious salad with potatoes, you’ll find many wonderful uses for fresh peppers, fried Italian-style. Season them with olive oil and slices of garlic, let them marinate, and enjoy them as part of an antipasto or layered in a sandwich. Or sprinkle a little wine vinegar on the peppers (with the olive oil and garlic) for a condiment-like salad that is just perfect with grilled fish or chicken.

1 pound russet potatoes
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
6 Italian frying peppers (also called banana peppers and Cubanelles), preferably 5 inches or longer
12 plump garlic cloves, peeled
1 small red onion, halved and very thinly sliced
½ teaspoon kosher salt
½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
2 tablespoons red-wine vinegar

Put the potatoes in a pot with water to cover them by about 2 inches, and heat to a steady boil. Cook just until the potatoes are easily pierced with a fork or sharp knife blade (don’t let them get mushy), then drain and cool them. Peel off the skins, cut the potatoes crosswise into round slices about ½ inch thick, and put them in the salad bowl.
Pour \( \frac{1}{4} \) cup of the olive oil into the big skillet, and set over medium-high heat. When the oil is hot, put the whole peppers in it and cook for a couple of minutes, until they're sizzling and starting to color on one side, then turn them and brown the other side. Keep turning and moving the peppers around so they cook and color evenly.

After 5 minutes, when the peppers have been turned a couple of times and are sizzling nicely, scatter the garlic cloves in between them. Now lay another, smaller skillet or a heavy pot cover on top of the peppers, and press down for more thorough browning. Cook for another 5 minutes or more, rotating the peppers a couple of times, until they are browned and blistered on all surfaces. Remove from the heat, and let the peppers cool for a few minutes, with the weight still in place.

When the peppers can be handled, cut off the stems, peel off the skin, slice them open, and scrape out the seeds. Slice them lengthwise in strips about 1 inch wide; if the peppers were very long, cut the strips crosswise into nice lengths for eating, 3 inches or so.

Assemble and dress the salad while the pepper strips are still warm (though it is also good at room temperature). Put the pepper pieces and the onion slices in the bowl with the potatoes, and sprinkle the salt and peperoncino over them. Drizzle the remaining \( \frac{1}{4} \) cup olive oil and the vinegar on the vegetables, and toss well. Serve right away.

---

**Onion Soup**

Zuppa di Cipolla Serves 6

In the introduction to this chapter, I tell about the extraordinary red onion from Tropea. Its healing qualities have been promoted since Roman times. And though not widely publicized, the wine-red onion is particularly valued by the men of the coast for its capacity to enhance a certain romantic vigor—a legend now confirmed by recent scientific research, we were told, that found la cipolla rossa di Tropea naturally rich with the same compound as delivered by the drug Viagra!

I can’t comment on that, but I can tell you with certainty that one can only love any dish featuring the Tropea onion, whether raw or cooked. This wonderful soup, with lots of onions and good San Marzano tomatoes, is the one that we sampled in Calabria and that I have since re-created at home. Made with American-grown sweet onions, it is almost as good as the original version. It can be a meal in itself, or a very special opening course.

- \( \frac{1}{4} \) cup extra-virgin olive oil
Pour the olive oil into the pot, set it over medium heat, and scatter in the sliced garlic. Let the garlic sizzle for a minute, then fill the pan with the onion slices, and sprinkle the salt over them. Stir the onions so they’re all coated with oil. Cook them slowly, stirring frequently, for 15 minutes or so, until they are reduced in volume and translucent, lightly colored but not browned.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes and water (some of which you’ve used to slosh out the tomato container). Stir in with the onions, cover the pan, bring to a boil, then adjust the heat to keep the soup simmering gently. Cook covered for 45 minutes (the onions should be very tender). Uncover and cook another 15 minutes, or until the soup has reduced by about a quarter.

When ready to serve, toast or grill the bread slices. Cut the provola into six or more slices. Put a slice of hot bread in the bottom of each of six warm soup bowls, and lay a slice of the cheese on top. With a big slotted spoon, scoop up the onions and tomatoes from the soup, and drop portions over the bread and cheese in each bowl. Finally, ladle in hot broth to fill the bowls, sprinkle grated pecorino over each, and serve immediately.

**Eggplant, Onions & Potatoes**

*Patate, Cipolle e Melanzane*  
*Serves 6*

When summer is in full swing and there are mounds of beautiful purple eggplants available, here’s a wonderfully refreshing salad you can make. Since the eggplant is poached rather than fried, it is a light and healthful dish. The flavors and textures of the eggplant, onion, and potato are harmonious, but you can use fewer or no potatoes and more eggplant.

- 2 small firm **eggplants** (about 1 pound total)
- 1 pound small **red onions**
- 1 pound **russet potatoes**
- 1½ cups plus 2 tablespoons **red-wine vinegar**
- 2 tablespoons **extra-virgin olive oil**
- 1 teaspoon **kosher salt**
- 1 tablespoon packed **fresh mint** leaves, shredded
- ½ teaspoon **dried oregano**

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A wide, shallow saucepan or high-sided sauté pan, 4-quart capacity, for poaching the eggplant and onions; a large bowl for mixing and serving the salad

Trim the ends from the eggplants, and shave off some lengthwise strips of the skin with a vegetable peeler,
leaving some strips on, creating a striped appearance. Slice the eggplants lengthwise into 6 or more long wedges, about 1 inch thick. Peel the red onions, and slice them lengthwise into quarter-round wedges, not cutting at the root; you want the wedges attached.

To poach the eggplants and onions: Put 1½ cups of the vinegar and 2 quarts cold water in the shallow saucepan, and heat to a boil. Drop in the eggplant wedges and the split-open onions, cover the pan, and return to a boil. Set the cover ajar, and adjust the heat to maintain a steady gentle boil. Cook about 30 minutes, occasionally tumbling the vegetables over to poach evenly, until quite soft and tender.

Meanwhile, put the potatoes in another pot, with water to cover them by about 2 inches, and cook just until the potatoes are easily pierced with a fork (don’t let them get mushy). Drain the potatoes, and let them cool briefly. Peel off the skins, and cut them in half lengthwise, then crosswise into ½-inch-thick half-rounds. Put the potato pieces in the salad bowl, and cover to keep them warm.

When the eggplant and onions are fully cooked, gently lift them out of the poaching liquid with a spider or strainer, and lay them out on a tray or baking sheet in one layer. While the eggplant is still warm, scoop out the central clumps of seeds from the wedges, then cut them crosswise into 2-inch chunks. Separate the onion wedges, and then the layers. Put all the vegetable pieces—they should still be warm to the touch—in the bowl with the potatoes.

To dress the salad: Drizzle the olive oil and remaining 2 tablespoons vinegar over the salad, sprinkle the salt on it, scatter in the shredded mint, and crumble the dried oregano over all. Gently toss the vegetable pieces to coat them all with dressing without breaking them apart. Serve immediately.

Orecchiette con Fave e Pomodorini

Serves 6
A technique I have always liked, when preparing vegetables for a pasta dish, is to toss them in the pot with the pasta as it boils. Depending on which takes longer, I put the vegetable in first and then add the pasta, or vice versa. Either way, I believe this maximizes the flavor and nutritional value of the vegetables, and I know the pasta absorbs some of the vegetable flavor as they cook in the same water.

I was glad to see this technique used frequently in preparing pasta dishes in Calabria, like this one, where orecchiette and arugula are cooked in the pot together before they are tossed with the other dressing vegetables, favas, and cherry tomatoes. Great to make in spring when fresh favas are in the market.

- 3 pounds fresh fava-bean pods, shelled
- ¼ cup plus 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small onion, thinly sliced
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes, halved
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- 1 pound orecchiette
- 1 pound arugula leaves, washed and trimmed: young leaves left whole, larger leaves torn into pieces
- ½ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for passing at the table

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A medium saucepan for blanching the favas; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a large pot for cooking the pasta

In the medium saucepan, bring about 4 quarts of salted water to boil, drop in the shelled favas, and blanch about 2 minutes, until they turn bright green. Drain the beans, and drop them right away into a large bowl of ice water. When chilled, drain the favas again; peel off the inner skins and discard. You should have about 2 cups peeled favas.

Pour ¼ cup of the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium heat. Scatter the favas and sliced onion in the pan, stir, and cook until the onion is translucent, about 3 to 4 minutes. Drop the cherry tomatoes into the skillet, and season with the salt. Cook until the cherry tomatoes release their juices and begin to break down, about 5 minutes; keep the sauce warm, but not cooking, until the pasta is dressed.

Meanwhile, fill the pasta pot with salted water, and heat to a rolling boil. Drop in the orecchiette, stir, and return to the boil. Cook the pasta until it’s approximately 5 minutes from being done (according to the cooking time on the package), then stir the arugula into the pot.

Cook the pasta and arugula together for another 4 minutes or so, until the orecchiette is al dente, then lift both from the pot with a large strainer (or empty the pot into a colander if you prefer), and drop the pasta and arugula into the skillet of sauce. Toss everything together for a minute or two, over low heat, then turn off the heat, drizzle on the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil, and toss well. Sprinkle the grated cheese on top, and toss again. Heap the pasta in warm bowls, and serve immediately, with more cheese at the table.

**Shepherd’s Rigatoni**

Rigatoni alla Pastora Serves 6

As the name of this traditional dish suggests, it is made from the few ingredients available to a shepherd in remote pastures. Yet, in my experience, some of the best pasta sauces in Italy come from such a limited larder of ingredients. A fine example is this dressing for rigatoni, created with a bit of sausage, dried grating cheese, fresh ricotta, peperoncino, and fresh basil. And if you toss in other fresh herbs in season, your rigatoni alla pastora will have a slightly different taste each time.

- 1 pound sweet Italian sausage (without fennel seeds), removed from casings
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
1 pound rigatoni
½ teaspoon kosher salt
2 cups fresh whole-milk ricotta, drained (about 1 pound)
¼ cup grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, plus more for the table
¼ cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves, shredded

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot for cooking the pasta; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Fill the pasta pot with salted water, and heat to a rolling boil.

For the sauce, crumble the sausage meat in a bowl, breaking it into small clumps with your fingers. Pour the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Sprinkle in the peperoncino, let it toast for a few seconds, then scatter the crumbled sausage in the pan. Cook the sausage, stirring and breaking up any clumps, for 10 minutes or so, as the meat juices are released and cook away, until it is all well browned and crispy.

Meanwhile, when the sausage is sizzling, drop the rigatoni into the boiling pasta water; stir, and cook at the boil. When the sausage is browned and crisp, ladle about ½ cup of the pasta cooking water into the skillet, and deglaze the pan bottom, scraping up the browned bits. Season the sausage meat with the salt, and stir with the bit of moisture in the pan.

When the pasta is al dente, lift it from the pot, drain briefly, and drop it into the skillet. Toss the rigatoni and sausage together, then turn off the heat, and stir in the ricotta and grated cheese. Scatter the basil on top, and toss well to dress the pasta evenly. Heap the rigatoni in warm bowls, and serve immediately.

**Baked Cavatappi in Tomato Sauce**

Cavatappi al Forno Serves 6

I love baked pastas of all kinds (as you probably know), as long as the gratinato, the cheese topping, is properly applied with a light touch, and baked sufficiently, so the cheese is deeply colored, melted, and perfectly crisp at the same time. This Calabrian baked cavatappi has two touches I particularly appreciate: a layer of sliced hard-cooked eggs inside (lending more taste and more protein), and an extra dimension of crunch from bread crumbs on top. You can enhance many other baked pasta recipes this way.

Kosher salt for the pasta pot
1 pound cavatappi or penne
4 cups Tomato Sauce
1 cup freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
2 tablespoons soft butter
6 hard-cooked eggs, peeled, sliced in ½-inch rounds
1 pound shredded provola or provolone, preferably imported from Italy
¼ cup fine dry bread crumbs
2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot for cooking the pasta; a 4-quart rectangular baking dish or oval gratin dish
Fill the pasta pot with salted water (at least 1 tablespoon salt), and heat to a rolling boil. Stir in the cavatappi, and cook at the boil until al dente (about 2 minutes less than the package directions). Drain the pasta well in a colander, and put it in a big bowl. Pour in 2 cups of the tomato sauce, sprinkle over it ½ cup of the grated grana, and toss well, to dress all the cavatappi evenly.

Meanwhile, heat the oven to 400°; brush the baking dish with the butter. Spill in half of the dressed pasta, spreading it out to fill the pan bottom in an even layer, and arrange the cooked egg slices on top. Scatter half the shredded provola evenly over the eggs, then spread a cup of tomato sauce on top of the cheese. Next, arrange all the remaining pasta in a flat, even layer, then spoon ¾ cup tomato sauce on top. Sprinkle the remaining grated grana and the rest of the provola over the pasta; scatter the bread crumbs over all, and drizzle the last bit of tomato sauce on the top.

Tent the baking dish with a sheet of aluminum foil, arching it so it doesn’t touch the crumb topping and pressing it against the sides. Set the dish in the oven, and bake for 35 minutes, then remove the foil, and bake another 15 minutes or so, until the top is nicely browned and crusty. Serve hot!

**Stuffed Baked Pasta**

**Schiaffettoni** Serves 6

In Calabria, as in other regions of southern Italy, there’s a general preference for dried pasta, even for baked stuffed pastas. Usually, stuffed pastas like cannelloni or manicotti are formed from flat pieces of fresh pasta, topped with filling, and then rolled up to make the familiar tube shape. But with this recipe, you stuff pasta for baking as they do it in Calabria, using the dried tubular pasta called paccheri; first cook them just to soften, then spoon in a savory sausage-and-ricotta filling. Fill a big pan with the stuffed paccheri, drape them with tomato sauce and grated cheese, and bake.

As with other baked pasta casseroles, you can multiply this recipe many times and make enough schiaffettoni to feed any size crowd. The individual paccheri can be stuffed and the big pan (or pans) fully assembled in advance; bake at the last minute, while your guests are being seated. And best of all, you know everyone will love it.

- 2 pounds sweet Italian sausage (without fennel seeds)
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for the baking dish
- 1 medium onion, chopped (about 1 cup)
- 2 plump garlic cloves, peeled and sliced
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot
- 1 cup white wine
- 1 pound paccheri
- 3 cups fresh whole-milk ricotta, drained (about 1½ pounds)
- 3 cups freshly grated Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 2 hard-cooked eggs, peeled and finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 3 cups Tomato Sauce

**Recommended Equipment:** A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger; a large pot for cooking the pasta; a 4-quart rectangular baking dish

To cook the sausage, remove it from the casings and crumble the meat in a bowl, breaking it into small clumps with your fingers. Pour the olive oil into the skillet, set it over medium heat, and scatter in the onion and garlic. Cook for 5 minutes or so, stirring occasionally, until the onion is translucent and softened, then scatter the crumbled sausage in the pan. Cook the sausage, stirring and breaking up any clumps, for 15 minutes or so, until the meat
juices have all cooked away and it is starting to brown.

Sprinkle over it the teaspoon salt, pour in the wine, and stir well. Raise the heat a bit, bring the wine to a boil, and cook, stirring frequently, until it has all evaporated and the meat is browning in a dry pan. After 30 minutes or so, when all of the sausage is brown and crispy, scrape it into a large bowl and let cool.

Meanwhile, fill the pasta pot with salted water, and heat to a rolling boil. Drop in the paccheri, stir well, and return the water to a boil. Cook the paccheri until flexible but still quite al dente. Test doneness by plucking one out of the water and pressing it gently. It must be soft enough that you can squeeze it without snapping the tube, yet firm enough to stay open, without collapsing, while you fill it. When cooked enough, quickly lift out all the paccheri with a spider or strainer, and drain them well in a colander.

Heat the oven to 400° and brush the baking dish with olive oil.

For the stuffing, dump the drained ricotta into the bowl with the sausage, and stir together, mixing the meat and ricotta well. Stir in 1 cup of the grated grana, the chopped hard-cooked eggs, and parsley, until smooth.

Spread a cup of the tomato sauce in the bottom of the baking dish. With a soup spoon, fill the paccheri one at a time with the sausage-ricotta stuffing. Lay them in the baking dish, close together, in neat rows, filling the pan with one layer of stuffed pasta tubes—if you have more, arrange them in a second layer on top. Spoon and spread the remaining sauce over the paccheri, and sprinkle the remaining grated cheese on top.

Tent the baking dish with a sheet of aluminum foil, arching it above the pasta and pressing it loosely against the sides. Set the dish in the oven, and bake for 45 minutes, then remove the foil, and bake another 15 minutes or so, until the cheese is nicely browned and crusty and the sauce is bubbling.

To serve: lift out as many paccheri as a wide spatula will comfortably hold, being careful to keep the topping in place, and with the help of another smaller spatula or knife slide each portion onto a warm dinner plate.
It always pleases me when such a simple recipe can be so good. But every ingredient and every step must be perfect—the calamari, fresh; the olive oil, the best; and the pan must be hot for the quick cooking.

I always prefer to buy whole calamari and clean them myself (you can see how easy it is to do in my book *Lidia’s Italian-American Kitchen*). I also like to leave the skin on the bodies, because it takes on a lovely color when cooked. However, now that squid are frequently sold already cleaned, which is a convenience, the body skin is usually peeled off as well. So, if you like the skin, as I do, ask the fishmonger at your market to leave it on. If that’s not possible, don’t worry: the dish tastes marvelous either way. (And if you are not a fan of squid, you could also prepare scallops, swordfish, or even a fillet of cod using this recipe.)

Spicy Calamari

Calamari Piccanti Serves 6

Dry the calamari well, and put in a large bowl. Pour over them ½ cup of the olive oil, and add the garlic, 1 teaspoon salt, and the peperoncino. Toss to coat and let marinate at room temperature for 30 minutes to an hour.

---

- 2 pounds cleaned **calamari**, whole bodies (skin on or off) and tentacles
- ¾ cup **extra-virgin olive oil**
- 6 plump **garlic** cloves, peeled and crushed
- 1½ teaspoons **kosher salt**
- ½ teaspoon **peperoncino flakes**, or to taste
- 2 tablespoons freshly squeezed **lemon juice**
- 1 tablespoon chopped **fresh Italian parsley**

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or wider
When you are ready to cook the calamari, make the dressing. In a small bowl, whisk together the remaining ¼ cup olive oil, the lemon juice, remaining ½ teaspoon salt, and the chopped parsley until emulsified.

Set the skillet over high heat, and when it is very hot, lift the calamari out of the marinade with tongs, let drain briefly, and then lay a batch of them flat in the dry skillet. Sear the calamari, turning several times, until the edges of the bodies and the tentacles are caramelized and crispy, about 2 minutes per batch. If you are using unskinned calamari, the skin will darken to a deep-reddish hue.

As the calamari come out of the skillet, arrange them on a warmed platter. When all of the calamari are done, drizzle the dressing over them, and serve right away.

**STEAMED SWORDFISH BAGNARA-STYLE**

Pesce Spada all’Uso di Bagnara Serves 6

As I wrote in this chapter’s introduction, the fishermen of Bagnara, a beautiful port on the Calabrian coast just north of the Strait of Messina, are renowned for their skill in catching the magnificent swordfish that migrate to this corner of the Tyrrhenian Sea every year. During our recent visit, I was not surprised to learn that the cooks of Bagnara are equally skilled when it comes to cooking *pesce spada* as well. The recipe I share with you here is among the simplest and best I have ever tasted, anywhere. Of course, as always in seafood cookery, the freshness of the fish is the key to success, so be sure to get swordfish at its absolute best.

- 2 pounds swordfish steak, 1¼ inches thick, with skin
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 lemon, thinly sliced
- 5 tablespoons small capers, drained
- 4 plump garlic cloves, peeled and thinly sliced
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1½ tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A 4-quart baking dish, 10 by 15 inches, or similar size; a roasting pan large enough to hold the baking dish inside it (on the rack); a sturdy flat metal baking/roasting rack to fit inside the roasting pan

Heat the oven to 425°.

Cut the swordfish steak into six serving pieces. Pour the olive oil into the baking dish, and scatter in the lemon slices, capers, and garlic. Turn the lemon slices over to coat them with oil, and gather them on one side of the dish. Season the swordfish pieces on both sides with salt, lay them in the dish in one layer, and turn each one over several times to coat it with oil on all the surfaces. Distribute the lemon slices on top.

Meanwhile, bring a pot of water to the boil. Set the baking rack in the big roasting pan, and pour in boiling water to the depth of an inch. Put the dish of swordfish on the rack in the roasting pan, and tent the big pan with a large sheet (or two) of aluminum foil. Arch the sheet over the fish, and press it against the sides of the roasting pan.

Carefully set the covered pan in the oven, and bake just until the swordfish is cooked through, about 10 to 12 minutes. Remove the foil, and lift the baking dish from the pan and out of the oven. Immediately crumble the oregano over the hot swordfish and into the pan juices, then sprinkle the parsley over all. Serve right away, placing each piece of swordfish in a warm shallow bowl and spooning over it some of the cooking juices.
**Chicken Catanzaro-Style**

Pollo alla Catanzarese Serves 6

In these days when the choice of chicken dishes seems limited to variations of grilled chicken breast, this recipe is a refreshing departure. You butterfly (split open) a whole chicken, fill it with a savory stuffing, close the bird up again, and pan-roast it in a cast-iron skillet, creating a wonderful sauce at the same time. It is beautiful and bursting with flavor. And though the chicken is plump, the dish is light and fresh-tasting.

- A 3½-pound roasting chicken
- ¼ cup fine dry bread crumbs
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh Italian parsley
- 3 anchovy fillets, finely chopped
- Finely grated zest and juice of 1 large lemon
- ½ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ½ cup small capers, drained and chopped
- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt
- 6 small onions, peeled and halved
- 3 tablespoons red-wine vinegar

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** Toothpicks; a 12-inch cast-iron pan with a domed cover; a wide spatula for flipping the chicken

Remove the giblets and any excess fat from the cavity of the chicken. Do not trim away extra skin, because you will need it to close up the stuffed chicken later. With the chicken breast up, slice along the neck cavity with the tip of a boning knife to find and expose the wishbone (or collarbone); loosen it and pull out. Turn the chicken over and, with a chef’s knife, cut forcefully from neck to tail along both sides of the backbone, freeing it from the body (and saving it, plus the other bones and giblets, to make stock, of course). Now, with the bird still on its breast, pull apart the split sides and fold them open like a book. With the boning knife, cut under and detach the ribs from the inside flaps of the torso; cut out the breastbone from the meat on both sides of the breast. Turn the chicken over, so the skin side is up, and press down on the now boneless breast to flatten the bird.

To make the stuffing: Put the the bread crumbs in a small bowl and stir in the chopped parsley, anchovies, lemon zest, nutmeg, cinnamon, and 2 tablespoons of capers. Drizzle over it 3 tablespoons of the olive oil, and toss all with a fork until the crumbs are evenly seasoned and moistened with oil.

Season the chicken all over with the salt. Lay it skin side down, spread open the body flaps (the legs and wings will be underneath them), spoon about two-thirds of the crumb stuffing into the center, and press it flat. Fold the flaps of torso closed, and bring them together in a tight seam, closing the gap where the backbone had been. This will bring the wings and legs together, too. To keep this package closed, draw loose skin from one side over the other side, at the neck and tail end of the seam, and pin them in place with toothpicks (wings will now be on top, and the stuffing will be enclosed).

Next, carefully turn the chicken over, breast-skin side up. Starting at the neck, work your fingers under the skin, loosening it from the meat without tearing the skin or pulling it off the breast. Push the remaining crumb stuffing into this pocket, then rub the outside of the skin to spread and smooth the stuffing over the breast meat (under the skin). With toothpicks, pin the skin closed at the neck end and anyplace where the skin has come loose and the stuffing can leak out.
Set the cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat for a minute or two. When it’s hot, pour in the remaining olive oil, and carefully lay in the chicken breast side up. Cover the pan, and let the chicken cook and brown on the seam side, about 5 minutes. With a wide spatula and tongs, carefully lift and flip the chicken to cook breast side down. Replace the cover, and let it brown on that side for 5 minutes more.

Turn the chicken over again (breast side up), and scatter the onions all around the bird, turning them on the pan bottom to coat them in oil. Put the cover back on, lower the heat, and cook slowly for about 40 minutes, until the onions are tender and the chicken has released all its fats and juices. Tilt the skillet, spoon off excess fat, and carefully flip the chicken once more—it should be breast down now. Raise the heat a bit, scatter in the remaining capers, and cook uncovered about 4 minutes, to brown the breast again.

Turn the chicken for the last time, so it is breast up, pour in the lemon juice and vinegar, swirl them in the pan, and bring to a simmer. Put the cover on, lower the heat to maintain the simmer, and cook for 10 to 15 minutes, until the chicken is very tender, the onions are soft and caramelized, and the juices have concentrated.

Carefully lift out the chicken and slide it onto a cutting board. Let the bird rest for 5 to 10 minutes, remove the toothpicks, and cut it into serving pieces. Spoon onions and pan sauce from the warm skillet over each portion of chicken, and serve.

**Pork Chops Shepherd-Style**

Maiale all’Uso dei Pastori  Serves 6

Juicy pork chops, smothered with slowly cooked onions and topped with melted cheese, are certain to make mouths water. You can prepare these in advance—browning the chops and cooking the onions—then complete the skillet cooking and baking as your guests are seated. Thick chops from the pork loin are my favorite, and the ones used in the recipe. Leaner rib chops will work as well but should be cooked a few minutes less.

- 6 bone-in pork loin chops, about 1 inch thick, 6 to 8 ounces each
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour, for dredging
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 medium onions, halved and thinly sliced (about 4 cups)
- 3 plump garlic cloves, sliced
- 6-ounce chunk provola or provolone, preferably imported from Italy
- 1 cup white wine
- ½ cup grated pecorino

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy-bottomed ovenproof skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or wider

Trim excess fat from the pork chops, leaving only a thin layer on the edges. Season both sides of the chops with 1 teaspoon of the salt. Spread the flour on a plate, and dredge the chops, lightly coating both sides.

Meanwhile, pour the olive oil in the skillet, and set it over medium heat. Shake excess flour from the chops, and lay them all in the skillet in one layer (depending on the size of your pan, you may have to snuggle them in). Gently brown the pork on the first side, about 4 minutes; turn the chops over, and brown the second side, another 4 minutes. Remove the chops to a plate and keep warm.
Scatter the onions and garlic in the skillet, stir them around the pan, season with the remaining salt, and cover. Cook the onions slowly, stirring occasionally, and scraping the pan bottom to mix the crusty browned bits with the onion juices.

Meanwhile, if you’ll be finishing the dish right away, set a rack in the middle of the oven and heat it to 400°. Slice the provola in 6 or more thick slices about the size of the pork chops.

After the onions have cooked for 15 minutes or so, and are quite tender and colored with the pan scrapings, uncover, and push them all to one side of the skillet. Lay the pork chops back in, one at a time, spooning a layer of soft onions on the top of each chop. When they’re all in the pan, lay the provola slices over the onions.

Raise the heat, and when the meat is sizzling again, pour the wine into the skillet (in the spaces between the chops, not over them). Swirl the pan so the wine flows all through it, and bring to a boil. Sprinkle about a tablespoon of pecorino on each chop, then carefully move the skillet from the stove to the oven.

Bake the chops for 10 minutes or so, until the cheese toppings are bubbly and crusty. Carefully remove the skillet from the oven, and let the chops rest in it for a few minutes. To serve, lift out each chop with a spatula, keeping the cheese topping intact, set it on a dinner plate, and spoon some of the skillet juices and onions around it.

**Stuffed Figs Sibari-Style**

Fichi Ripieni alla Sibarita Makes about 2 dozen, serving 6 to 8

Throughout southern Italy, almond-stuffed figs are a traditional holiday treat, made in every household to offer visiting family and friends. Makes sense for a region that historically had little wealth, and where figs and almonds were abundant and always stored for winter use. Figs and almonds are also a naturally delicious pairing, in my opinion. Though it is not fancy, a dried fig with a single toasted almond tucked into it is transformed into a delicious sweet.

In Calabria, though, the preparation of stuffed figs, fichi ripieni, is not always so simple. The region’s figs are prized for their excellence, both fresh and dried. And especially in the northern province of Calabria—in the area of Sibari, where figs grow best—they’re stuffed in all sorts of ways, with different nuts, spices, sweetenings, cocoa, or candied fruits. All of these flavorful ingredients are mixed together to make the stuffing for fichi ripieni alla Sibarita, figs stuffed Sibari-style, considered one of Calabria’s signature dishes. There are many versions of this classic. In most, the figs are baked after stuffing, usually with saba (cooked grape must) or other syrup. Sometimes the figs are then packed in some preserving medium for long storage and more flavor, such as saba, spiced sugar, or sweetened liquor. My version is really a dessert, best served right away. The stuffed figs are baked in a pool of pomegranate and lemon juice, which concentrates in the oven into a luscious thick syrup that I drizzle over the warm figs. It’s a great dessert anytime of year, but particularly during the holidays it has the spirit of an old Italian custom.

- 1 cup pomegranate juice
- Juice of 1 large lemon, freshly squeezed (about 3 tablespoons)
- ½ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 cup chopped toasted almonds
- 1 cup chopped toasted walnut halves
- ¼ cup honey
- ½ cup cocoa powder
- ¼ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground cloves
Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven, and heat to 350°. Pour the pomegranate juice, lemon juice, and ½ cup sugar into the baking dish, and whisk together until the sugar dissolves. For the stuffing, put the chopped nuts in a bowl, pour in the honey, and stir well so all the nuts are coated. Sprinkle on the cocoa powder, cinnamon, cloves, and the last tablespoon sugar; stir and toss until thoroughly distributed.

With a sharp knife, slice into each fig from top to bottom—following the line of the stem—splitting it but leaving the split halves still attached. Fold open each fig like a book, exposing the cut surfaces, and top each half with a spoonful of the nut stuffing. Press the stuffing into the fruit interior, so it sticks and stays, then place the open fig in the baking dish, with the stuffing on top, resting in the juice on the bottom. Stuff all the figs this way, and arrange them in the dish.

Tent the baking dish with a sheet of aluminum foil, arching it so it doesn’t touch the stuffing, and pressing it against the sides. Bake the figs for 20 minutes, until the juice is bubbling and the figs are softened, then remove the foil, and bake another 35 to 40 minutes, basting the figs two or three times with the juice, until the figs are caramelized and tender and the juice has reduced to a syrup. Let the figs cool in the baking dish for at least 5 minutes before serving warm, or leave them to serve later at room temperature. Put three or four figs for each serving on a dessert plate or in a bowl, and drizzle some of the pan syrup over them.

**Almond Biscottini**

Biscottini alle Mandorle Makes about 40 small biscotti

Every region of Italy has its own version of biscotti, and these plain and simple twice-baked cookies from Calabria are great for the home baker. They are tasty and crumbly, and I like the accent of the toasted sliced almonds. When you cut the logs of dough after the first baking, you’ll likely have crumbs and some broken pieces, but don’t throw them away. Save them to sprinkle over ice cream or poached fruit, or to fold into a zabaglione—they add crunch and a sweet taste to all kinds of desserts.

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ teaspoon baking powder
A big pinch kosher salt
2 large eggs
½ cup sugar
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon (about 2 teaspoons)
⅛ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
2 tablespoons and 1 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup toasted sliced almonds (3½ ounces)

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A standing electric mixer with paddle attachment; a large baking sheet lined with parchment paper; wire cooling racks; a sharp, serrated knife

For the cookie dough: Sift or stir together the flour, baking powder, and salt in a large bowl. Crack the eggs into the mixer bowl, and add the sugar. Start the mixer on low speed, and beat until blended. Scrape down the sides of the bowl, increase to medium speed, and beat for a couple of minutes, until the sugar and eggs are pale yellow and fluffy; beat in the lemon zest and vanilla.

Stop the mixer, scrape down the sides of the bowl, and dump in the flour mixture all at once. Mix on low speed to form a crumbly dough. Increase to medium speed, drizzle in the olive oil in a slow, steady stream, and beat until the dough forms a ball. Stop the machine, spill in the sliced almonds, and mix on low for just a few seconds, to incorporate the nuts.

On a lightly floured work surface, divide the dough into two pieces. Roll each piece into a log about 2 inches thick and 12 inches long. Arrange the logs on the parchment-lined baking sheet, and refrigerate until firm, about 1 hour.

Meanwhile (or later, when you’re ready to bake the cookies), arrange a rack in the center of the oven, and heat to 350°. Bake the sheet of chilled logs for about 40 minutes, until the dough is lightly colored and set, rotating the sheet front to back during baking to ensure even cooking. With a long metal spatula, transfer the logs to wire racks, and let them cool for about 30 minutes.

For the second baking, have the oven at 350°. Slice the dough logs on a cutting board with the serrated knife, cutting diagonally to form oval biscotti about ½ inch thick. Lay the cookies flat in rows on the baking sheet (lined with the same parchment paper), and set it in the oven.

Bake the biscotti for 7 minutes, remove the pan, and quickly flip them over. Return the sheet to the oven (rotated back to front), and bake another 7 minutes or so, until the cookies are crisp, crunchy, and golden. Transfer them to wire racks, and let them cool completely before serving. Store biscotti in an airtight container lined with wax paper; they will keep 2 to 3 weeks.

Sesame Candy

Dolcetto di Sesamo Makes about 5 dozen pieces

Here’s another sweet that, like figs stuffed with almonds, is usually made around the holidays. It is simply a caramel syrup with sesame seeds stirred in, poured onto a counter to cool in a thin layer, and cut into bite-sized candies. A smooth, nonporous surface like marble, granite, or stainless steel is best for the cooling; avoid porous wooden surfaces or Formica.

1¼ cups sesame seeds (about 6 ounces)
Scant 1 cup sugar
3 tablespoons honey
2 teaspoons butter
Extra-virgin olive oil
½ cup toasted slivered almonds
Finely grated zest of 1 lemon
Finely grated zest of 1 orange
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A rimmed baking sheet; a small, heavy-bottomed saucepan; pastry brush and sturdy metal spatula; parchment or wax paper

Preheat oven to 350°. Spread the sesame seeds on a rimmed baking sheet, and place it in the oven. Toast the seeds until light golden, shaking them on the baking sheet occasionally, about 8 minutes. Let the seeds cool on the sheet.

Put the sugar, honey, butter, and 2 teaspoons water in the saucepan, and set it over medium-low heat. Stir with a wooden spoon frequently as the butter melts and the sugar dissolves and the syrup comes to a boil. Simmer until the syrup is a deep-caramel color, about 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, brush a nonporous work surface (such as granite or stainless steel) with olive oil; coat the metal spatula with olive oil as well. When the caramel is done, turn off the heat, and stir in the sesame seeds, almonds, citrus zests, and cinnamon. Pour (and scrape) the molten candy from the pan onto the work surface, and quickly spread it into an even rectangular layer, about ½ inch thick. Allow it to cool and firm up for a minute or two, to firm up but not harden.

With a serrated knife and a straight edge, slice the sheet of candy into 1-inch strips. Then cut diagonal slices 1 inch apart. Divide the strips into diamond-shaped pieces. With a metal spatula separate the pieces, and arrange them in a single layer, not touching, on trays lined with parchment or wax paper, and let them harden completely. Store them in an airtight container with parchment or wax paper between the layers.
Cathedral of Gerace in the province of Reggio Calabria
In the busy city of **Reggio Calabria**, look for the Bronzi di Riace at the National Museum. The piercing eyes of these ancient Greeks make you feel there is a soul within. These statues were found off the coast and are amazingly well preserved. Of great interest also is the sculpture bust of a *Philosopher of Porticello*, a rare example of Greek portraiture. The sculptor has captured his subject’s personality in stone. The cathedral in Gerace is the subject of a legend that gold was hidden inside the columns of the church. There have been thefts throughout the years, and it is said that people have even tried to steal the columns themselves.

**Cirò** is a town with many beaches and daytime activities. Carafa Castle is well restored, and you can bask in the sun on the Punta dell’Alice, an old Roman settlement with many artifacts, in particular the Saracen Markets, where a golden row of antique arches are reflected like honeycombs in the adjacent sea. A short distance outside the city are the ruins of a Greek temple dedicated to Apollo, and as you move away from the coast you’ll find the town of **Crucoli**, where lovely textiles are made and baskets are woven. Visiting Crucoli is really getting into the heart of Calabria.

**Isola Capo Rizzuto** is a charming town with a wonderful little island just off the coast that is connected to the mainland at low tide. You can wander through the meandering streets to reach the antique Castello.

**Tropea**, famous for its sweet red onions, also has one of Calabria’s best beaches—the Piazza Vittorio Veneto is the center of summer life in Tropea. The cafés are teeming with chic vacationers. Located in the center of town is the cathedral, which dates back to Norman times; of note, you’ll find the *Madonna del Popolo* in the Galluppi family chapel and the so-called Black Crucifix. A symbol of the town is the Church of Santa Maria dell’Isola, located on a rock that juts out into the sea. It is home to a Benedictine Sanctuary. This is a lovely place to bring a picnic lunch and admire the yellow stone church that is so beautiful against the glimmering blue sea.

**Sibari**, once the Greek town of Sybaris and known for great luxury, is worth a visit for its umbrella-pine-tree-lined, soft-sand shores. The immense archaeological site of ancient Sybaris provided many of the artifacts in the Sibartide National Archaeological Museum. Sibari is not far from the Pollini National Park, one of Italy’s more recently founded parks, established in 1993 to protect the Bosnian pines of the area. The dense nature of the area has sheltered the towns within, which maintain the ancient culture and language of the Albanian settlers who migrated here in the sixteenth century.—**TANYA**
Sardinia

Costa Smeralda
I first set foot on Sardegna, the second-largest island in the Mediterranean, in 1978, when my son, Joseph, was ten, and Tanya six. We went there as part of our regular three-week vacation in Italy, and also to do some research in what was then unknown territory. The wines of Sardegna were just beginning to come to the American shores; I had read about bottarga, the salted dry mullet roe, and about malloreddus, the local semolina gnocchi, and I was curious and eager to experience them all.

We landed in Olbia and rented a car; our first stop was Porto Cervo. There we rested for a few days, to enjoy the sea and the local maritime cuisine, especially the spiny lobster. You’ll find my Roast Lobster with Bread Crumb Topping—Aragosta Arrosta, based on that delectable dish. In the Porto Cervo restaurant, where we sat facing the dock with its azure waters and glistening yachts, another new taste experience was saffron malloreddus with a sausage sauce. I’ve had it many times since that trip, and each time I am reminded of that first unforgettable taste.

But to truly know Sardinia, one needs to travel inland as well. So we soon moved on and drove to Nuoro, in the heart of the mountains, where the culture I had read about came alive. Sardinian cooking is mostly the rustic fare of the hills and mountains. It is hearth-and-spit cooking—roasted meats, skewered suckling pig, sausages, whole lambs and goats roasted on poles surrounded with aromatic olives, rosemary, juniper, and myrtle branches for flavoring. Inland Sardinia is a land of shepherds; the earliest evidence of sheep-rearing dates back to the pre-nuragic era, 1800 B.C. And it is still thriving today, more than in any other region of Italy. The impressive nuraghi, stone-built structures from that period, can still be found in the landscape today. It is said that the shepherds of that time used these structures to watch over their flocks in the distance.

It follows that there is an abundance of cheese in Sardegna. Sweet sheep’s-milk cheeses, Fior Sardo and Pecorino Sardo, are eaten either fresh or aged and used in cooking, as are cacicavallo and provolone. One of my favorite preparations is their Provolone Turnovers—Pardulas. Good milk produces great cream, and several years later, when I returned to Sardegna with Mario, I had this stupendously simple dessert of semolina cooked in cream with myrtle sauce (see Semolina Pudding with Blueberry Sauce—Mazzafrissa. Even simpler and just as delightful was a slice of fresh sheep’s ricotta with some bittersweet miele di corbezzolo, honey from the strawberry-tree flower.

In Oliena, near Nuoro, we stayed at a most charming country inn, Su Cologone, set in the valley of Supramonte, amid olive trees and grapevines. The restaurant of the same name offers lots of local products and a traditional cuisine. Here I had for the first time Flatbread Lasagna, an unusual cauliflower dish, and a bread-and-cabbage casserole with a soup variation using similar ingredients. All of these inexpensive country dishes I have brought back with me and translated for you, so you can enjoy making them for friends and family in your own kitchen.

It was summertime, and eggplants were everywhere. I’ve always associated Sicily with eggplants, but Sardegna seems to be a close second. At one meal we had Baked Eggplant in Tomato Sauce, and the next evening we had Baked Eggplant with Onions and Fresh Tomatoes. I have returned several times now to Su Cologone to taste and retaste the local specialties and flavors. On one subsequent visit with Mario, I had my first encounter with fregola, a homemade pasta that is shaped into small balls reminiscent of peppercorns. The dish I particularly liked and took notes on so I could share it with you was Baked Fregola Casserole.

On my most recent trip to Sardegna, in June 2008, Mario had made all the arrangements with his Sardinian friend and associate Franco Azzara. Franco met us at the Olbia airport, and our first stop was his house, between Olbia and Santa Teresa di Gallura, to meet the family and have an espresso with a side of liquore di mirto, myrtle liquor made by his wife. We then all proceeded to Alghero, on the western shore, to enjoy a lobster alla Catalana.

There is a very Spanish feel and flavor to Alghero, since it was a Catalan colony for many years. And in this refreshing spiny-lobster salad with tomatoes and celery, dressed with boiled eggs, the name and the flavor are a blend of Catalan and Sardinian. But I must give credit where it is due, and the recipe I give you blends the traditional dish with Franco’s rendition. As to the delicious Spaghetti with Cold Tomato-Mint Sauce—Spaghetti al Sugo Freddo, it was Franco who let me in on the secrets of this old family recipe.

The coast south of Alghero, Costa Verde, is less well known than the Costa Smeralda, north of Olbia, where the
rich and famous have their summer residences, but it is just as beautiful. It is lined with magnificent high sand
dunes, some of them covered with the local flowers and fauna, which lead into the emerald-green waters. Franco
took us west of Guspini to the Hotel Le Dune in the location called Piscinas not far from Oristano. There, in a
solitary setting, stands a building dating back to the eighth century, which is now a national monument and has
twenty-six rooms open to guests. Completely submerged in nature, the setting is of peace, and the cuisine of the sea.
I must add that the journey over the rough roads is not easy, but it is worth the trip.

On the way back from Oristano we headed toward Oliena, where I wanted to see how the pane carasau and its
thinner version, called carta di musica, were made. There we met with the gallant, ever-so-Sardinian Anna Rosa
Fancello, who took us to see her sister-in-law, who makes the pane carasau by hand. This typical unleavened crispy
thin disk, used by shepherds on their long trips to pasture, is the quintessential Sardinian bread, eaten with cheese
and cold cuts as well as used in soups. I was amazed at the dexterity of the whirling hands as Anna Rosa’s sister
shaped the pane carasau, and it was fascinating to hear from both sisters about the local traditions and the culture of
this bread. Today, the bread is mostly made in small, somewhat automated family shops, as we found in the
Pintapane bakery, run by Piero of the Corrias family in Oliena.

Being isolated in the middle of the Mediterranean has made Sardinia the most idiosyncratic of Italian regions. The
island’s history has been shaped as much by foreigners, Spaniards in particular, as by other Italians.

Just as the food culture is unique in Sardegna, influenced by the different occupations through the ages, so is the
wine culture. The varietals unique to Sardegna are the Girò, Cannonau, Nuragus, Monica, and the Vernaccia di
Oristano. There are also various clones of the typical Mediterranean Moscato and Malvasia grapes, and there is a
definite Mediterranean character and taste to the wine of Sardinia. Sella & Mosca is one of the first producers to
capitalize on these Sardinian varieties and to bring them to America and the rest of the world. With new technology,
Sardinia is now producing delicious world-class wines.

On that trip back to Olbia from Oliena, having eaten pane carasau, we needed some wine to wash it all down, and
we went to visit the unique winery Pedra Majore, run by the Isoni di Monti brothers and their families. The winery
was situated on the most amazing granite formations on top of a hill. One thing that is so spectacular about traveling
through Sardinia is that enormous granite rock formations will appear when you least expect them, especially around
the coast, and they look like majestic sculptures—as if they had been arranged by a curator for your pleasure. The massive stones, weathered through time, take on the appearances of animals, people, and other figures.

Here in this winery, one primary rock looked like a sitting dog, surrounded by a cluster of beveled rocks that formed an enclosed space. That space, we soon realized, was a welcoming kitchen where kid, *capretto*, was being roasted on a spit, and Carabineros, giant red shrimp, were on a hot griddle alongside. Soon we were happily eating and sipping their delicious white, I Graniti, Vermentino di Gallura.

### Provolone Turnovers

PardulasMakes about a dozen

If you are traveling in Sardinia, this is the dish to have. And if you want a taste of Sardinia at home, this is the dish to make. Pardulas resemble large ravioli, stuffed with sliced provolone. They’re not cooked like pasta, though, but fried until crisp and oozing melted cheese. They’re like grilled cheese sandwiches—kids love them. In fact, everybody does.

Pardulas make a great appetizer flanked by some tossed salad or sliced tomatoes. For a more elaborate and substantial turnover, add some blanched asparagus or broccoli, or prosciutto or ham, to the stuffing; just cut down a bit on the cheese to make room. And if you make them half-sized, they’re a terrific hors d’oeuvre to pass at a cocktail party. They are traditionally served drizzled with honey but are delicious just fried and plain.

For convenience, make and fill *pardulas* in advance and fry them when your guests arrive. If necessary, you can fry them up to 30 minutes ahead of time and keep them warm in the oven.

- 3 cups durum-wheat flour
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons butter, cut in small chunks, at room temperature
- 9 ounces provolone, in 12 thin slices
- Vegetable oil for frying
- Honey for drizzling (optional)

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A food processor; a 3½-inch round cookie cutter; a heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger

Put the flour, salt, olive oil, and butter chunks in the food-processor bowl. Process until the fat has been incorporated and the mixture has a sandy texture. With the processor running, pour 1 cup minus 2 tablespoons water through the feed tube, and process just until a dough forms and gathers on the blade and cleans the sides of the bowl. If the dough is too sticky, add another tablespoon or two of flour; if too dry, add 2 tablespoons water. Process briefly, until the dough comes together, turn it out on a lightly floured surface, and knead by hand a few times, until it’s smooth and soft. Press the dough into a disk, wrap it well in plastic wrap, and let it rest at room temperature for at least ½ hour.

To make the *pardulas*: Cut the rested dough in half. On a lightly floured surface, roll each piece out to a rectangular sheet about 12 by 16 inches—the dough should be about ¼ inch thick. To mark twelve circles, press the cookie cutter lightly on the sheet of dough but do not cut through it. Break each provolone slice into three or four pieces, and arrange them, overlapping, to fit inside one of the traced circles, leaving space around the edges. (If the cheese slices are large or thick, or weigh an ounce or more, don’t try to fit them all inside the dough circle. Each *pardula* should have about ¾ ounce cheese.)

Roll the other half of the dough to roughly the same size as the first. Pick it up and drape it over the bottom dough, covering all the rounds of sliced cheese. Gently press the top sheet around the cheese layers so the edges are distinct. Dip the cookie cutter in flour, center it over one portion of cheese, and cut through both layers of dough, to
the work surface, cutting out one *pardula*. Cut all of them the same way, then pull away the excess dough between them. Pinch the edges of each *pardula*, sealing the cheese inside.

Pour vegetable oil into the big skillet to a depth of ½ inch, and set it over medium heat. Let the oil heat gradually until a piece of dough starts to sizzle when dipped in (without darkening immediately). Carefully slide as many of the *pardulas* into the pan as fit comfortably, with some space between them. Fry until crisp and golden, about 2 to 3 minutes per side. If the cheese begins to leak out during frying, flip the *pardulas* to their other side. Drain the *pardulas* on paper towels, and keep them warm in a low oven.

Serve as soon as possible, while the *pardulas* are crispy and hot and the cheese is molten (with honey drizzled on top, if you like).

**Flatbread Lasagna**

*Pane Frattau* Serves 4

*Pane frattau* is a traditional dish of Sardinian shepherds, made from *pane carasau*, the thin, long-keeping flatbreads that were a staple food during the shepherds’ extended sojourns in mountain pastures. Some clever shepherd discovered long ago, I imagine, that he could turn the dry bread into a fast, warm meal by soaking and layering it with hot tomato sauce and cheese, lasagna-style.

Now considered a classic of Sardinian cooking, *pane frattau* is a dish that I love to make at home. No baking is required, and everything can be heated on the stovetop (quicker than a shepherd’s campfire, I am sure) and quickly assembled. With a perfectly poached or fried egg as the crowning touch, it makes a beautiful brunch or supper dish, belying its peasant origins.

Regard this recipe as a guideline. Though the listed ingredient amounts serve four, you can multiply them to serve a crowd or divide them to make *pane frattau* for two—or just for yourself. I recommend my Tomato Sauce, but any basic tomato sauce of your choice would be fine, too. And though I prefer poached eggs to top the *pane frattau*, a fried egg, sunny side up, would be just as authentic and satisfying. Either way, just be sure to cook the eggs at the last minute and serve the dish right away. I also suggest that you try layering *pane frattau* as is rather than water-soaked *pane carasau*. It is great that way, too!

- 4 (or more) rounds *pane carasau*
- 3 to 4 cups Tomato Sauce
- 4 large eggs
- 2 tablespoons distilled white vinegar, or as needed
- 1½ to 2 cups freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor)

**Recommended Equipment:** A tray or baking sheet lined with paper towels; a wide skillet, sauté pan, or shallow saucepan for poaching the eggs; four gratin dishes or shallow bowls for individual servings

Break each sheet of *pane carasau* into three or four pieces—just small enough to fit in the individual serving dishes. Fill a large bowl with hot water, and drop in a batch of broken bread pieces. Let them soak for a few seconds, so all are moistened, then remove and spread them on the paper-towel-lined tray. The pieces should still be somewhat firm; don’t let them get soggy. Moisten the rest of the *pane carasau* the same way.

Heat the tomato sauce to a gentle simmer in a small saucepan, and keep it hot.

Get ready for poaching the eggs: Pour water in the skillet to a depth of 2 inches, and add the vinegar (1 tablespoon per quart of water). Gradually heat to a simmer.
Assemble the individual dishes of pane frattau just before cooking the eggs: Spread 3 to 4 tablespoons of sauce in the bottom of each dish or bowl, and sprinkle over each a tablespoon of grated cheese. Cover the sauce and cheese with a layer of moist pane carasau pieces (keep in mind that you’ll need three such layers in each dish, or twelve portions of bread). Spoon another 3 to 4 tablespoons sauce on top of the flatbread, and sprinkle over it another spoonful of cheese. Now repeat this layering twice more—bread, sauce, cheese; bread, sauce, cheese—using more or less of each to taste.

Poach the eggs at the last minute: One at a time, break them into a small ramekin or cup, and gently slide each one into the simmering water. Cook the eggs 2 to 3 minutes for a firm white and still-runny yolk (or longer if you like). Lift each egg out with a slotted spoon, drain for a moment on paper towels, and lay it atop a dish of pane frattau. Give each egg a final dusting with cheese, and serve immediately.

CAULIFLOWER WITH OLIVES & CHERRY TOMATOES
Cavolfiori alle Olive Serves 6

I love cauliflower, but I know not everyone shares my passion for this nutritious but sometimes bland vegetable. This recipe shows that the right cooking method and complementary ingredients can make a cauliflower dish that can steal the show.

As is my way with most vegetables, I skillet-cook the cauliflower—slowly sautéing it with little or no added moisture. That way, more of the essential vegetable flavor is retained and intensified, adding layers of caramelization. Here, too, the companion vegetables enhance the cauliflower, with olives lending earthy complexity, and cherry tomatoes giving acidity and freshness. This can be made in advance and reheated. And if you happen to have some left over, it can be the base for a great risotto, or for dressing a plate of pasta for two.

- 1 large cauliflower (about 2½ pounds)
- 1 medium onion
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
4 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled
2 teaspoons kosher salt
¼ teaspoon pepperoncino flakes, or to taste
1½ cups cherry tomatoes
½ cup pitted black Italian olives, such as Gaeta or taggiasca

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a tight-fitting cover

Tear off the tough outer leaves at the base of the cauliflower, and cut out the tough core. Cut the branches into small florets (about 1 inch), and cut any small tender leaves into pieces. Peel the onion and, without trimming away the root end, slice it into eight thin wedges. The onion layers should still be attached at the root end, so each wedge remains intact.

Pour the olive oil into the skillet, set it over medium heat, and toss in the garlic cloves. When they start to sizzle, strew the cauliflower over the pan bottom, and drop in the onion pieces here and there. Season with the salt and peperoncino, reduce the heat to medium-low, and cover the pan. Let the vegetables cook without stirring for 20 minutes or so, softening in their own juices, until the florets and wedges begin to take on color on the bottom. If the pieces are soft but not caramelizing, uncover the pan, raise the heat a bit, and cook a few minutes longer.

When the vegetable pieces are caramelized on one side, gently tumble them over. Scatter the cherry tomatoes and olives in the pan, stir gently to distribute them, then cover and cook until the tomatoes release their juices, about 5 minutes.

Finally, remove the cover, raise the heat, and bring the pan juices to a boil. Cook until the juices are syrupy and the vegetables are caramelized all over, another 5 to 10 minutes. Heap on a platter or in a casserole dish; serve warm or at room temperature.

GALLURESE BREAD & CABBAGE SOUP
Zuppa Gallurese Serves 6 to 8

Gallura is the traditional name for the northeastern corner of Sardinia, across from Corsica, and the region’s distinctive dialect and delicious dishes are termed Gallurese. Here is a most unusual rendition of zuppa Gallurese. Surprisingly, it comes in the form of a casserole, with layers of bread, Savoy cabbage, provolone, and pecorino, drenched in chicken stock and baked. The end result is an amazing dish that has the comforting character of a soup and the cheesy lusciousness of a lasagna or pasticcata. I know you will find it delightful.

A dozen or so slices whole-wheat country bread, cut ½ inch thick, from a round or oval loaf
A small head Savoy cabbage (about 1½ pounds)
¼ teaspoon kosher salt
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
1-pound chunk mild provolone (not aged), preferably imported from Italy
1 tablespoon soft butter for the baking dish
½ cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor)
4 cups Chicken Stock

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A rimmed baking sheet; a large pot or saucepan, 6-quart capacity; a 3-quart baking dish or oval gratin dish; heavy aluminum foil
Arrange a rack in the middle of the oven, and heat it to 400°. Trim the crusts from the bread slices, lay them flat on the baking sheet, and put the sheet in the oven as it heats. Toast the slices, turning them over once, until lightly browned on the edges. Remove and let cool, leaving the oven on.

Meanwhile, bring 4 or 5 quarts lightly salted water to the boil in the big pot. Slice the cabbage head in half, and cut out the core completely, so the leaves can separate. Discard all tough and torn outer leaves, lay the cabbage halves cut side down, and slice crosswise into 1-inch strips. Drop the cabbage strips into the water, return to the boil, and cook until tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Pour the strips in a colander, rinse under cool water, and let drain. Put them in a bowl, sprinkle them with the salt and olive oil, and toss well.

Slice the chunk of provolone into slabs, about ½ inch thick. Butter the sides and bottom of the baking dish.

To assemble the casserole: Cover the bottom of the baking dish with a layer of bread slices, trimming the pieces as needed to fit snugly and fill any gaps. Spread half of the seasoned cabbage strips in a layer over the bread. Lay all of the provolone slabs on top of the cabbage, evenly distributed in a single layer. Sprinkle on half of the grated cheese. Next, spread the remaining cabbage out in an even layer, and top that with the remaining bread in another snugly fitted layer.

If the final layer of the bread rises over the baking dish, press down gently with your palm to compress the layers a bit, making room for the stock. Slowly pour the stock all over the bread and down the insides of the pan, so everything is moistened. Sprinkle the rest of the grated cheese over the top.

Carefully tent the dish with a sheet of heavy aluminum foil, arching it so it doesn’t touch the food surface, and pressing it against the sides. Set the dish on the baking sheet, and place in the oven. Bake the casserole for about 45 minutes, until the juices are bubbling actively, and remove the foil. Continue baking for 20 minutes or more, until the top of the casserole is golden brown all over.

Serve the soup steaming hot. Set the baking dish on a trivet, cut portions with a knife, and lift them out with a wide spatula or serving spoon into warm shallow bowls. Scoop up any remaining liquid with a spoon and pour it over the portions.

Baked Eggplant

I know from years as a restaurateur that just about everyone, even the meat-and-potato type, loves eggplant parmigiana, hot from the oven, stuffed with molten cheese. I love that Italian-American classic, too, but there are many more great eggplant dishes I’ve encountered in my travels through Italy, which I want to share with you.

In Sardinia, I was delighted to find a tradition of baked eggplant dishes, with ingredients, tastes, and textures that I knew would appeal to Americans. Here are two—I couldn’t choose between them, so I decided to give you both. They have tomato: fresh tomatoes in one, savory tomato sauce in the other. They have cheese: grated pecorino topping on one, a vein of young pecorino (or mozzarella) chunks in the other. Best of all, they have thick layers of tender yet meaty eggplant. And in these preparations, the eggplant slices don’t need frying (as in most eggplant parmigiana recipes), which saturates them with more olive oil than necessary. No frying and great flavor—I love these and am sure you will, too.

These are practical dishes as well. Best served hot, they are both also excellent at room temperature. And you can prepare either in advance, baking it three-quarters of the way to start, then finishing it when your guests arrive. Leftovers, if you have any, are a treat. A baked-eggplant sandwich is one of my favorites!

Baked Eggplant with Onions & Fresh Tomatoes

Melanzane al Forno • Serves 6 to 8
2 pounds small firm eggplants, preferably 6 to 8 ounces each
1 tablespoons plus ¼ teaspoon kosher salt
1½ pounds ripe plum tomatoes
1 pound young pecorino or low-moisture mozzarella, cut in ½-inch cubes
¼ cup fresh basil leaves, loosely packed to measure, chopped
¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 large onions (about 1½ pounds), peeled, sliced in ½-inch rounds
6 plump garlic cloves, crushed and peeled

FOR THE BREAD CRUMB TOPPING
1 cup dry bread crumbs
1½ tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme
½ teaspoon dried oregano
¼ cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor)
Grated zest of a small lemon (about 1 teaspoon)
2 pinches kosher salt
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
Fresh basil leaves, shredded, for serving (optional)

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large colander; a 4-quart baking dish, 10 by 15 inches, or other shallow casserole of similar size; heavy aluminum foil; a baking sheet

Trim the stem and bottom ends of each eggplant and, with a vegetable peeler, shave off ribbons of skin lengthwise, creating a zebra-striped pattern all around. Slice the eggplants crosswise into ½-inch-thick rounds. Lightly salt the slices on both sides, using about a tablespoon in all, and layer them in the colander, set in a bowl or the sink. Invert a dinner plate over the piled slices, and weight it with cans or other heavy objects, to press out the vegetable liquid. Let the rounds drain for 30 minutes to an hour, then rinse them, and pat dry with paper towels.

Meanwhile, arrange a rack in the middle of the oven and heat to 400°.

Trim the stem end of the plum tomatoes, and cut them in half crosswise. Squeeze the halves over a strainer set in a bowl, scraping out and catching the seeds in the strainer and collecting the tomato juices in the bowl. Cut the tomatoes into ½-inch chunks, put them all in a bowl, and toss with the cubes of cheese, chopped basil, peperoncino, the remaining ¾ teaspoon salt, and 4 tablespoons of the olive oil.

Brush the bottom and sides of the baking dish with about 2 tablespoons of the olive oil. Lay the onion rounds in the bottom in one layer, with the garlic cloves scattered among them, and drizzle over them the remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil. Lay the eggplant slices over the onions in an even layer, overlapping a bit if necessary. Scatter the tomato and cheese chunks evenly on top of the eggplant, and drizzle the collected tomato juices all over.

Put the bread crumbs and all the dry seasonings in a bowl, toss to blend, then drizzle over them the 2 tablespoons olive oil, and toss well, until the crumbs are evenly moistened. Sprinkle them evenly over the top of the eggplant, tomato, and cheese layer.
Tent the baking dish with a sheet of heavy aluminum foil, arching it so it doesn’t touch the crumb topping, and pressing it against the sides. Set the dish on the baking sheet, place in the oven, and bake for 45 minutes, until the juices are bubbling actively. Remove the foil, and continue baking for another 30 minutes or so, until the eggplant is lightly caramelized on the edges but tender and easily pierced with the tip of a knife, and the bread-crumb topping is browned and crisp.

Let the eggplant rest for 20 minutes before serving (it will absorb the sauce, and the cheese will settle a bit, too). Serve as you would lasagna, cutting portions with a knife and lifting them out with a wide spatula into warm shallow bowls. If you like, sprinkle shredded fresh basil over each portion.

Anna Rosa Fancello of Oliena makes the best pane carasau.

Baked Eggplant in Tomato Sauce

Melanzane in Teglia Serves 6

- 2 pounds small firm eggplants, preferably 6 to 8 ounces each
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 2 cups Marinara Sauce, Tomato Sauce, or other light flavorful tomato sauce
- ½ cup pitted oil-cured black olives
- 4 Tuscan-style pickled peperoncini, drained, stemmed, and thinly sliced (about ¼ cup)
- 2 tablespoons small capers, drained
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh basil leaves
- 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor)

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large colander; a 3-quart baking dish, 9 by 13 inches, or other shallow casserole of similar size; heavy aluminum foil; a baking dish

Trim the stem and bottom ends of each eggplant and, with a vegetable peeler, shave off ribbons of skin lengthwise, creating a zebra-striped pattern all around. Slice the eggplants crosswise into ½-inch-thick rounds. Lightly salt the slices on both sides, using about a tablespoon in all, and layer them in the colander, set in a bowl or the sink. Invert a dinner plate over the piled slices, and weight it with cans or other heavy objects, to press out the vegetable liquid. Let the rounds drain for 30 minutes to an hour, then rinse them, and pat dry with paper towels.
Meanwhile, arrange a rack in the middle of the oven, and heat to 400°.

Put the tomato sauce in a bowl, and stir in the olives, sliced peperoncini, capers, and basil. Spread about ½ cup of the sauce over the bottom of the baking dish. Lay in half the eggplant slices in a single layer, overlapping a bit if necessary. Drop spoonfuls of tomato sauce, another ½ cup total, on top of the eggplant layer, and sprinkle over it half the grated cheese. Lay in the remaining eggplant rounds in an even layer, spoon and spread the remaining sauce over them, and scatter the rest of the cheese all over the top.

Tent the baking dish with a sheet of heavy aluminum foil, arching it so it doesn’t touch the crumb topping, and pressing it against the sides. Set the dish on the baking sheet, place in the oven, and bake for 45 minutes, until the juices are bubbling actively. Remove the foil, and continue baking for another 15 minutes or so, until the cheese topping is golden brown and the eggplant is caramelized on the edges yet tender and easily pierced with the tip of a knife.

Let the eggplant rest for 20 minutes (to absorb the sauce). Cut portions with a knife, and lift them out with a wide spatula into warm shallow bowls.

**Malloreddus**

*Malloreddus* is a traditional Sardinian pasta or gnocco (dumpling) made from semolina dough imbued with saffron. Like potato gnocchi, *malloreddus* are shaped by quickly rolling small bits of dough against a hard, patterned surface (a fork for potato gnocchi and a perforated grater for *malloreddus*). This flicking motion creates a short oval shell with a hollow inside and a textured outer surface, perfect for picking up a dressing or sauce. And the hard wheat dough gives each piece a wonderful chewy texture. In short, *malloreddus* is a little pasta with a big mouth-feel.

**Homemade Malloreddus**

**Makes 2 pounds, serving 8 or more**

This recipe makes a large batch of *malloreddus*, enough to serve eight. You don’t need to cook it all, because it freezes easily and keeps well. *Malloreddus* can be dressed simply with butter and grated cheese or almost any sauce you like. My favorite version, though, is the first one I ever had, in Porto Cervo many years ago: *malloreddus* with sausage and tomato sauce (recipe follows).

- 1 teaspoon saffron threads
- 1½ pounds semolina flour, plus more for working the dough

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A food processor fitted with the metal blade; a grater with fine holes, with a large bottom opening; floured trays or baking sheets

Drop the saffron threads into ½ cup of hot water in a spouted measuring cup, and let steep 5 minutes or longer. Pour in ¾ cup cold water (so you have 1¼ cups total).

Put the flour in the bowl of the food processor, and start the processor running. Pour in almost all of the saffron water through the feed tube (the threads can go in, too), reserving a couple of tablespoons. Process for 30 to 40 seconds, until a dough forms and gathers on the blade and cleans the sides of the bowl. If the dough is too sticky, add another tablespoon or two of flour. If it is too dry, add the remaining water. Process another 10 to 20 seconds.

Turn the dough out on a lightly floured surface, and knead by hand for a minute, until it’s smooth, soft, and stretchy. Press it into a disk, wrap well in plastic wrap, and let rest at room temperature for at least ½ hour. (Refrigerate the dough for up to a day, or freeze for a month or more. Defrost in the refrigerator, and return to room temperature before rolling.)
Cut the dough into eight pieces; work with one at a time, and keep the others covered with a towel or plastic wrap. Roll the dough under your hands on a clean work surface, first forming a smooth log and gradually stretching it into a long rope ½ inch thick. With a dough scraper or knife, chop the rope into ⅓-inch-long segments, like tiny cylinders; separate and lightly dust them with flour.

To form malloreddus: Hold the grater-shredder at an angle against the work surface, turned so the back side or underside is exposed. You want this smooth surface of perforated holes to mark the pasta, not the rough surface of sharp edges and burrs that you would use for grating. (If you are using a box grater, you want the inside of the finest grating-shredding face; you’ll need to reach it through the bottom of the box.)

Pick up one small piece of dough, and place it on the grater face. Press into it with your lightly floured thumb, and quickly push down and away—rolling it against the holes and flicking it off the grater in one movement. It’s just like rolling gnocchi against the tines of a fork (and similar to plucking a guitar string). Roll all the cut segments into malloreddus, dust them with flour, and scatter them on a lightly floured tray, not touching.

Repeat with the remaining pieces of dough. When all the pasta is formed, you can leave the malloreddus at room temperature until you are ready to cook. Or freeze them solid on the trays, and pack them airtight in plastic bags.

**Malloreddus with Sausage-Tomato Sauce**

*Malloreddus con Sugo di Salsiccia e Pomodoro* makes 2 quarts, enough for 2 batches of malloreddus or dried pasta; a single batch of homemade malloreddus dressed with sauce Serves 8

This is a great sauce, almost a universal pasta dressing, but particularly suitable for malloreddus. Because it is so good and useful, I make it in large batches and pack it in small portions for freezing. There are times when I want to make some pasta for two (or sometimes just for me), and there’s nothing better than having a small container of tomato-sausage sauce on hand to dress it.
FOR THE SAUCE (A DOUBLE BATCH)

- 1½ pounds sweet Italian sausage
- 1 cup white wine
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for finishing the pasta
- 2 cups chopped onions
- 1 plump garlic clove, peeled and sliced
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more for the pasta pot
- ½ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 6 cups (two 28-ounce cans) Italian plum tomatoes, preferably San Marzano, crushed by hand
- 1 branch fresh basil with lots of leaves

FOR COOKING AND FINISHING THE PASTA (A SINGLE BATCH)

- 1 batch (2 pounds) Malloreddus
- 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing
- 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A heavy-bottomed, high-sided skillet or sauté pan, 14-inch diameter, with a cover; a large pot for cooking the pasta

- Remove the sausage casings, and crumble the meat into a large bowl. Pour over it ½ cup of the wine, and mix this in with your fingers, breaking up any big meat clumps, so the sausage is evenly moistened.

- Pour the olive oil into the big skillet, and set it over medium heat. Stir in the onions, and cook until they begin to soften, about 5 minutes; scatter the sliced garlic in the pan, and season with the salt and peperoncino. When everything is sizzling, crumble in the sausage, and stir with the onions. Pour in the remaining ½ cup wine, raise the heat a bit, and cook, stirring, as the wine cooks away and the sausage becomes all browned, about 10 minutes.

- Pour in the tomatoes and a cup of water (which you’ve used to slosh and rinse the tomato cans and bowl). Submerge the basil branch in the liquid, cover the skillet, and bring to a boil. Set the cover ajar, adjust the heat to keep the sauce bubbling steadily, and cook for an hour or more, until the sauce has developed good flavor and reduced to the consistency you like for dressing pasta. Remove and discard basil branch. You can use some of the sauce right away—you’ll need half of it to dress a batch of malloreddus—or let it cool, then refrigerate or freeze for later use.

- For cooking and dressing the pasta: Bring a large pot of well-salted water (at least 7 quarts water with 1½ tablespoons kosher salt) to a rolling boil. Heat half the sausage-tomato sauce, about 4 cups, to a bare simmer in a wide skillet or sauté pan (if you’ve just made the sauce, use the same pan). If the sauce has cooled and thickened, loosen it with some of the pasta water.

- Shake the malloreddus in a colander or strainer to remove excess flour, and drop all of it into the pot, stirring to keep the pieces from clumping together. Cover the pot, and rapidly return the water to a rolling boil, stirring once or twice, then cook the malloreddus, partly covered, until barely al dente, 5 to 6 minutes.

- Lift out the pasta in big bunches with a spider, drain for a moment, and spill them into the simmering sauce. Over low heat, toss the malloreddus and sauce together for a minute or two, until all are coated and perfectly al dente. (Thin the sauce, if necessary, with hot pasta water, or thicken it quickly over higher heat.)
Turn off the heat, and sprinkle the grated cheese over the *malloreddus* and toss well. Finish with a drizzle of olive oil, toss again, and heap the pasta in warm bowls. Serve immediately, passing more cheese at the table.

---

**Fregola**

This little jewel of a pasta is made entirely by hand, no machines needed. As the recipe teaches you, the process is simple—all you do is shake, shake, shake—and if you have kids, they will take to it naturally. They (and you) will delight in the accomplishment, especially when you enjoy your *fregola* in all sorts of dishes. My method will give you a small amount of very tiny pasta balls, which are a wonderful treat in a bowl of soup. The main batch of slightly larger *fregola* can be cooked, then sauced, like any other pasta, or served plain as an accompaniment to braised meats or stews, to soak up the sauce. Or use them in the delicious Baked *Fregola* Casserole recipe that follows.

*Fregola* keep well either in the cupboard, sealed in a jar or ziplock bag, or frozen. So make plenty in advance, and keep them on hand as a versatile homemade pantry staple.

**Handmade Pasta Pearls**

Fregola Makes about 8 ounces large *fregola*, serving 6 as a side dish or 4 in a baked casserole, plus a small amount of tiny *fregola* for garnishing soup

- 2 cups semolina flour

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: 3 large, rimmed baking sheets; parchment paper; a fine-mesh wire strainer or sieve, about 8 inches wide; a large medium-mesh wire strainer or sieve, about 8 inches wide; a small wire-mesh skimmer, or a large spoon

Spread the semolina flour in an even layer on one of the baking sheets, and line the other two with parchment paper.

Pour ¼ cup of water in a cup or bowl; dip your fingers into the water, and rapidly shake them all over the semolina, moistening the flour with small droplets of water. Keep dipping and shaking until you’ve used up half the water in the bowl (2 tablespoons), then shake the sheet pan, congealing the wettest flour into small bits and balls of dough, or *fregola*.

Now dip into and shake out the rest of the water in the bowl, directing it over the dry flour on the tray. Shake the baking sheet again to form more *fregola* (there will still be a good deal of dry flour remaining as well).

Place the medium-mesh strainer on top of the fine-mesh strainer, and hold them with one hand over the semolina tray. With the small wire skimmer (or a spoon) in your other hand, scoop up the *fregola* that have formed, shaking off excess flour, and spill them into the nested strainers. Shake to separate and sift the *fregola*: the large *fregola* will remain in the medium strainer; the smaller *fregola* will fall into the fine strainer; and excess flour will land back on the tray.

Spill the large *fregola* onto one of the parchment-lined pans and the smaller *fregola* onto the other. If any *fregola* are larger than ¼ inch or so, pinch or cut into smaller pieces.

Now put another ½ cup of water into the bowl, and repeat the procedure of dipping, dripping, and shaking water over the semolina. Periodically, shake the sheet to form more *fregola*, lift them out, then sift and separate them. Continue until almost all of the flour has been transformed into *fregola*. You will have used ¾ to 1 cup water in all.

Meanwhile, arrange two racks in the center part of the oven, and heat it to 325°. When all the *fregola* are formed,
and spread on pans according to size, place the pans in the oven. Toast the pasta, shaking the pans once or twice, until the fregola harden, about 10 minutes for the small ones and about 20 minutes for the larger. Let them cool on the sheet pans; pack into jars or plastic bags, and store in the cupboard or freezer.

**Baked Fregola Casserole**

**Fregula Stufada** Serves 6 as a first course or 8 as a side dish

This tasty and easy casserole is a wonderful way to enjoy homemade fregola and makes a great accompaniment to braised chicken or veal. If I have not convinced you to make your own, use packaged dried fregola, available at specialty stores or online. Commercial fregola is usually a bit larger than the homemade, so follow the package guidelines for cooking the pasta al dente.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for the baking dish
- 1 cup chopped onion
- 4 ounces pancetta, cut in ¼-inch dice (about 1 cup)
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes
- 2 bay leaves, preferably fresh
- 2½ teaspoons kosher salt
- ¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- 8 ounces (about 2 cups) homemade Fregola (preceding recipe)
- ½ cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano)

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A heavy-bottomed skillet or sauté pan, 12-inch diameter or larger, with a cover; a pot for cooking the fregola; a 3-quart baking dish, 9 by 13 inches, or shallow casserole of similar size

Pour the olive oil into the skillet, and set it over medium-high heat. Stir in the onion, and cook, stirring occasionally, until it begins to soften, about 2 to 3 minutes. Scatter the diced pancetta in the pan, and let it cook and render its fat, stirring occasionally, until it starts to brown, 3 or 4 minutes.

Drop in the cherry tomatoes and bay leaves, season with ½ teaspoon salt and peperoncino, and pour in ½ cup water. Cover the skillet, bring the water to a simmer, then set the cover slightly ajar and cook just until the water evaporates and the tomatoes pop open and release their juices, about 10 minutes. (If the pan dries before the tomatoes pop, add another ¼ cup water.) Turn off the heat; remove and discard the bay leaves.

Meanwhile, heat 4 quarts of water with 2 teaspoons salt to a rolling boil in the pasta pot. Stir in the fregola, and cook until al dente, about 8 minutes. Empty the pot into a colander or large strainer to catch the fregola. Spill them into the skillet, and stir the pasta, tomatoes, and pancetta together until thoroughly blended.

Heat the oven to 400°F, and brush the bottom and sides of the baking dish with olive oil. Pour all the sauced fregola into the dish, and spread in an even layer. Sprinkle the grated cheese over the top, and set the dish in the oven. Bake, uncovered, 20 to 25 minutes, until the top is golden brown and crisp on the edges.

Serve piping hot. Spoon the fregola into warm bowls as an appetizer, or, to serve family-style, put the baking dish on the table.
SPAGHETTI WITH COLD TOMATO-MINT SAUCE

Spaghetti al Sugo Freddo — Serves 6

Our friend Franco Azzara made this memorable pasta dish for us during a recent visit to his home in the Gallura region of Sardinia. I marveled at how quickly he put it together, and at the complex flavor of the raw sauce—just fresh tomatoes, basil and mint, and other savory seasonings, whipped up in a food processor, no cooking necessary. I thank him for sharing this Azzara family recipe, one that I know you will enjoy both for its ease and convenience and for its brilliant flavors.

FOR THE SAUCE

- 12 ounces ripe cherry tomatoes, about 2½ cups
- ½ cup loosely packed fresh basil leaves
- ¼ cup loosely packed fresh mint leaves
- ¼ cup pine nuts, lightly toasted
- 2 small anchovy fillets, finely chopped (2 teaspoons)
- 1 plump garlic clove, crushed and peeled
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ⅛ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
- ⅓ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ cup small capers, drained

FOR THE PASTA

- 1 pound spaghetti
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley
- 1 cup freshly grated pecorino (or half pecorino and half Grana Padano or Parmigiano-Reggiano, for a milder flavor), plus more for passing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot for cooking the pasta; a food processor; a large, deep serving bowl
Fill the big pot with salted water (at least 6 quarts with a tablespoon kosher salt), and heat to a rolling boil.

To make the sauce: Rinse the cherry tomatoes, basil, and mint leaves, and pat dry. Put them all in the food-processor bowl along with the pine nuts, anchovies, garlic, salt, and peperoncino. Process until puréed, scraping down the work bowl as needed. With the machine running, pour in the olive oil in a slow, steady stream, forming a thick, emulsified sauce. If serving now, scrape the sauce into a warmed deep serving bowl, and stir in the whole capers.

When the pasta water is boiling, drop in the spaghetti, stirring and separating the strands. Cover the pot, return the water to a boil over high heat, then set the cover ajar, and cook the pasta until al dente. While the pasta cooks, ladle some of the boiling water into the serving bowl to warm it. Scrape in the sauce, and stir in the capers.

Lift the spaghetti from the pot, let drain for a moment, drop it into the bowl, and toss well, until all the strands are coated with sauce. Sprinkle over it the parsley and grated cheese, and toss again. Serve immediately, passing more grated cheese at the table.

LOBSTER SALAD WITH FRESH TOMATOES

Aragosta alla Catalana Serves 6 as an appetizer salad or 4 as a main-course salad

Throughout history, Sardinia has been a territorial prize for the great powers of the Mediterranean Basin, and every period of dominion has left its mark on the island. One of the most distinctive influences—both cultural and culinary—was the 400-year rule of imperial Spain, from the early 1300s to the early 1700s. Today, in Alghero, on the west coast of Sardinia, residents still speak a form of the Catalan language. And the spiny lobster that abounds in the waters off Alghero is prepared alla Catalana—cooked, chopped into large pieces, and tossed into a salad.

In Sardinia, it is expected that you will grab a chunk of lobster from the salad with your fingers and dig into the shells with gusto. Here at home, I do the same thing with our great Atlantic lobsters, which are certainly as good as if not better than their Mediterranean cousins. I prepare them alla Catalana and serve them Sardinian-style, with lots of moist napkins and bowls for the shells, encouraging everybody to dig in.

1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus 6 tablespoons for the lobster pot
2 live lobsters, 1½ pounds each
3 or 4 ripe fresh tomatoes (about 1½ pounds), or 1 pound sweet, ripe cherry tomatoes
2 or 3 tender stalks celery with a nice amount of leaves
Juice of 2 large lemons, freshly squeezed (about ¼ cup)
2 large hard-cooked eggs, peeled and chopped
¼ teaspoon peperoncino flakes, or to taste
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A large pot, 8-quart capacity or larger, for cooking the lobster; a sharp, heavy chef’s knife; moist napkins and bowls for the lobster shells, on the table

Fill the pot with 6 quarts water, add 6 tablespoons salt, and bring to a rolling boil. When the water is at a rolling boil, drop in the lobsters and start timing: cook them, uncovered, for 10 minutes total, after the water returns to the boiling point (and then keep it boiling). At the end of 10 minutes (or a couple of minutes longer if the lobsters are larger than 1½ pounds), lift the lobsters from the pot, rinse with cold water, drain, and let them cool.

Core the tomatoes, and cut them into wedges, about 1 inch thick; if you have cherry tomatoes, cut them in half.
Chop the celery stalks crosswise into 1-inch pieces, and chop the leaves roughly. Toss tomatoes and celery together in a large bowl with ½ teaspoon of the salt.

When the lobsters are cool enough to handle, twist and pull off the claws and knuckle segments where the knuckles attach to the front of the body. Lay the clawless lobsters flat on a cutting board, and split them in half lengthwise, from head to tail, with the heavy chef’s knife. Separate the meaty tail piece from the carcass (or body) of the four split halves.

Now cut the lobster into pieces of whatever size you like; put the pieces in a large mixing bowl as you work. Separate the knuckles from the claws, and crack open the shells of both knuckles and hard claw pincers with the thick edge of the knife blade, or kitchen shears, exposing the meat. Chop the knuckles into pieces at the joints.

Cut the tail pieces crosswise into chunks, or leave them whole, which I prefer. Cut the carcass pieces crosswise in two, with the legs still attached (though you can cut the legs off). I like to leave the tomalley and roe in the body pieces, as a special treat while eating the salad. Alternatively, remove tomalley and roe and whisk them into the dressing (or remove them and discard, if not to your liking).

To make the dressing: Whisk together the lemon juice, chopped eggs, peperoncino, and remaining ½ teaspoon salt. Pour in the olive oil in a slow stream, whisking steadily to incorporate it into a smooth dressing.

To serve: Add the tomatoes and celery to the bowl of lobster pieces. Pour in the dressing, and tumble everything together until evenly coated. Scatter the parsley on top, tumbling to distribute. Arrange the salad on a large platter, or compose individual servings on salad plates.

**Roast Lobster with Bread Crumb Topping**
Aragosta Arrosta Serves 6

This terrific lobster preparation reminds me of a dish that was popular on the menus of Italian-American restaurants when I first came to the United States. Lobster oreganata, as the dish was called, was a split lobster topped with bread crumbs, seasoned with dry oregano, and baked. On recent visits to the Sardinian coast, I’ve often had its prized spiny lobsters prepared in quite similar fashion. So, though I am pleased to bring you this recipe for authentic Sardinian aragosta arrosta (roast lobster), I am quite sure that Italian-American restaurants and immigrants had the same idea many years ago.

As with the preceding Aragosta alla Catalana, I like this dinner to be a hands-on, fully absorbing experience. After my guests have salad or a vegetable appetizer, I give everyone a half-lobster without the distraction of side dishes, furnishing guests with plenty of wet towels and bowls for empty shells. Then we all just concentrate on getting every morsel of meat out of these amazing crustaceans.

- 3 live lobsters, about 1½ pounds each
- 1 cup dry bread crumbs
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh Italian parsley
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ¼ cup plus 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 cups dry white wine
- Lemon wedges for garnishing

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A half-sheet pan (12 by 18 inches) or other large, rimmed baking sheet; heavy aluminum foil; moist napkins and bowls for the lobster shells, on the table

About ½ hour before you plan to cut up the lobsters, put them in the freezer. They will become inactive as their temperature drops (but don’t let them freeze).

Arrange a rack in the center of the oven, and heat it to 400°.

Split the lobsters in half lengthwise, one at a time. Hold each lobster flat on a cutting board, and place the point of a heavy chef’s knife through the shell just behind the head, with the blade lined up between the eyes. Bring the blade down firmly, splitting the head in two. Turn the lobster so you can align the knife blade from behind the head along the tail, and cut down through the entire body and tail in one stroke.

When all the lobsters are split, remove and discard the sac and nerve tissue in the head cavity, and the thin intestinal tract that runs along the back between the shell and tail meat. Arrange the six lobster halves on the baking sheet, cut sides up, claws extended to keep the lobsters in place without rolling.

Toss together the bread crumbs, chopped parsley, and ¼ teaspoon of the salt in a bowl; drizzle in ¼ cup of olive oil, and toss well, until the crumbs are evenly moistened. Sprinkle the crumbs over the cut surfaces of the lobster halves, covering all the meaty parts; lightly press crumbs into the cavities, too. Pour the wine and the remaining 3 tablespoons olive oil into the pan around the lobsters (not on the crumbs); sprinkle the remaining salt into the wine and oil, and stir.

Tent the pan of lobsters loosely with a sheet of heavy aluminum foil (don’t let it touch the topping), and carefully set the pan in the oven. Roast for 10 minutes, remove the foil, and roast another 20 to 25 minutes, until the lobsters are cooked through and the crumbs are crisp and golden.

Serve the lobsters immediately, placing a half on each dinner plate, or all the halves on a big platter to share.
family-style. Spoon any juices in the pan over the lobsters; place lemon wedges on the plates or platters. Make sure the napkins and bowls for the shells are handy, and dig in.

**Semolina Pudding with Blueberry Sauce**

Mazzafrissa  Serves 6

Semolina cooked in cream becomes a thick, delicious porridge, with an almost puddinglike consistency, that can be enjoyed many ways. In Sardinia I have had it as an appetizer with honey drizzled on top, and as a dessert with a sauce of *mirto*, or myrtle. I loved both! And I’ve made it as a warm breakfast treat, too.

Here I give you **mazzafrissa** as a dessert, with a lovely blueberry sauce (strawberries or cherries or other seasonal berries would be good, too). Scoop the warm cereal into serving bowls and top with the blueberry sauce, or serve the sauce on the side and let your guests help themselves.

- **FOR THE BLUEBERRY SAUCE**
  - 1 pint blueberries, rinsed
  - ⅓ cup honey
  - Juice of 1 orange, freshly squeezed (about ¼ cup)

- **FOR THE SEMOLINA PUDDING**
  - 2½ cups heavy cream
  - ½ teaspoon kosher salt
  - ¼ cup semolina flour

**RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT:** A sturdy wire whisk; a fine-mesh strainer or sieve, 6 inches wide or larger

To make the blueberry sauce: Stir together the blueberries, honey, and orange juice in a small saucepan. Bring to a boil over medium heat, stirring occasionally, then adjust the heat to keep the sauce simmering gently. Cook, uncovered, for 20 minutes, or until the berries break down and the juices reduce to a syrupy sauce. Keep the sauce warm while you make the pudding.

To cook the semolina: Pour the cream into a medium saucepan, add the salt, and set over medium heat. When the cream comes to a boil, whisk in the semolina, pouring it into the pan gradually, in a thin, steady stream. Continue whisking until all the flour is incorporated. Cook and whisk until the mixture thickens and begins to pull away from the sides of the pan, 10 minutes or so.

Set the strainer over a bowl, and scrape in the cooked semolina. Let the fat drain into the bowl for at least 5 minutes (or longer, if you wish). The amount of excess fat will vary with the heavy cream; discard any that collects in the bowl.

Serve the pudding warm or at room temperature, topped with the blueberry sauce.
Porto Cervo
Sardinia is an island of great natural beauty. Most people come to enjoy nature, and during the summer months its beaches are full of vacationers.

But there are also fascinating places to explore. If you are interested in textiles, there are skillful artisans all over Sardinia worth seeking out. I particularly like the geometric patterns and soft colors woven into navy or gray backgrounds. For those interested in archaeology, the stone edifices known as *nuraghi*, dating back to before 1000 B.C., can be seen throughout the island. Su Nuraxi di Barumini is one of the most important.

Not far from the fishing village of *Cabras*, there is the early Christian Church of San Salvatore, which was built on a pagan center of nuragic origins and rebuilt in the sixth century as a church. On the walls are graffiti drawings of animals such as peacocks, panthers, and elephants, along with Arab writings that speak of Muhammad and Allah, reflecting the rich cultural crossroads of Sardinia. The small white pilgrims’ houses, called *cumbessias*, that surround the small church are used nine days a year, between August and September, to celebrate the feast day of San Salvatore.

The Church of the Santissima Trinità of Saccargia in *Codrongianos*, built by Camaldolite monks in 1116, has a black-and-white-striped exterior. Located not far from Sassari, going toward Olbia, it is the most important Romanesque building on the island. One can see sweeping vistas of rolling hills through the double-arched windows; the interior is rather austere, with frescoes of Christ against a blue sky, the apostles and saints around him.

*Alghero*, famous for its lobster dish *aragosta alla Catalana*, is the city in Sardinia with the strongest Spanish influence (Catalan is the official language), having been colonized for a long period of time. In the town of Alghero, craftsmen working in their shops turn coral into delicate pieces of jewelry. Not far from the city is Neptune’s Grotto, an elaborate complex of sea-level stalagmite and stalactite caves, which offers a fun excursion for the whole family.

The port of *Arbatax* is known for its “red rocks” in the sea. The red hue of the stone makes a gorgeous natural contrast against the water. Not far, just a short boat trip across the water, is an island known as *L’Isolotto*, where the underwater reefs are spectacular.

*Carloforte*, on the island of San Pietro, in the Sulcis Archipelago, is a Genovese enclave, where Ligurian traditions are maintained today. A private island nearby, *Isola Piana*, is largely a nature preserve, uninhabited except for a small village for tourists, Residenza Villamarina. The small island has no cars, mopeds, or bikes—even dogs are prohibited—in order to preserve the rich natural fauna.—Tanya
BOLOGNESE SAUCE

Ragù alla Bolognese Ricetta Tradizionale About 3 quarts, enough for 6 pounds of pasta

- 2 pounds ground beef (15 percent fat content)
- 2 pounds ground pork (15 percent fat content)
- 2 cups dry white wine
- 6 ounces bacon or pancetta
- 5 fat garlic cloves, peeled
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium onions, minced in a food processor or finely chopped
- 2 large stalks celery, minced in a food processor or chopped
- 1 carrot, shredded
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 2 cups dry red wine
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 cups canned plum tomatoes and juices, passed through a food mill or crushed by hand
- 8 to 12 cups hot turkey or vegetable broth or plain hot water, or more if needed
- Freshly ground black pepper to finish the sauce

RECOMMENDED EQUIPMENT: A food processor; a 10- or 12-inch-diameter heavy-bottomed saucepan or Dutch oven, 6-quart capacity

To prepare the meat and pestata: Put all 4 pounds of ground meat into a large mixing bowl. With your fingers, crumble and loosen it all up. Pour the white wine over the meat, and work it all through your fingers again so it’s evenly moistened.

To make the pestata: Cut the bacon or pancetta slices into 1-inch pieces, and put them in the bowl of a food processor with the peeled garlic. Process them into a fine paste.

Cooking the sauce base: Pour the olive oil into the heavy saucepan, and scrape in all of the pestata. Set the pan over medium-high heat, break up the pestata, and stir it around the pan bottom to start rendering the fat. Cook for 3 minutes or more, stirring often, until the bacon and garlic are sizzling and aromatic and there’s a good deal of fat in the pan.

Stir the minced onions into the fat, and cook for a couple of minutes, until sizzling and starting to sweat. Stir in the celery and carrot, and cook the vegetables until wilted and golden, stirring frequently and thoroughly over medium-high heat, about 5 minutes or more.

Turn the heat up a notch, push the vegetables off to the side, and plop all the meat into the pan; sprinkle the salt on. Let the meat brown for a few minutes on the pan bottom, then stir, spread, and toss with a sturdy spoon, mixing it into the vegetables; make sure every bit of meat browns and begins releasing fat and juices. Soon the meat liquid will almost cover the meat itself. Cook at high heat, stirring often, until all that liquid has disappeared, even in the bottom of the pan. This will take ½ hour to 45 minutes, depending on the heat and width of the pan. Stir occasionally, and as the liquid level diminishes, lower the heat so the meat doesn’t burn.

When all the meat liquid has been cooked off, pour in the 2 cups red wine. Raise the heat if you’ve lowered it, and stir the meat as the wine comes to a boil. Cook until the wine has almost completely evaporated, about 5 minutes. Now drop the 2 tablespoons tomato paste into a clear space on the pan bottom. Toast it for a minute in the hot spot, then stir to blend it with the meat, and let it caramelize for another 2 or 3 minutes.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes, and stir; slosh out the tomato container with a cup of hot broth, and pour that in, too. Bring the liquid to a boil, stirring the meat, and let the liquid almost boil off, 5 minutes more.

Pour in 2 cups of hot broth, stir well, and add more if needed to cover the meat. Bring it to an active simmer, cover the pan, and adjust the heat to maintain slow, steady cooking, with small bubbles perking all over the surface of the sauce.
At this point, the Bolognese should cook for 3 hours. Check the pot every 20 minutes, and add hot broth as needed to cover the meat. The liquid level should be reducing by 1½ to 2 cups between additions: if it’s falling much faster, and it takes more than 2 cups to cover the meat, lower the heat to slow the evaporation. If the sauce level drops slowly or not at all, raise the heat and set the cover ajar to speed its concentration. Stir well at every addition.

During the final cooking, you want to reduce the level of the liquid—at the end, the meat should no longer be covered with sauce but appear suspended in a thick, flowing medium. If the meat is still submerged by a lot of liquid, remove the cover to cook off moisture quickly.

A few minutes before the end of cooking, taste a bit of meat and sauce, and add salt if you want. Grind 1 teaspoon of black pepper right into the sauce, stir it in, and cook about 5 minutes before removing the pan from the heat.

If you’ll be using the sauce right away, spoon off the fat from the surface, or stir it in as is done traditionally. Otherwise, let the sauce cool, then chill it thoroughly, and lift off the solidified fat. Store the sauce for several days in the refrigerator, or freeze it (in measured amounts for different dishes) for use within a few months.

Marinara Sauce

Salsa Marinara

Makes about 1 quart, enough to dress 6 servings of pasta

The difference between marinara sauce and tomato sauce is this: Marinara is a quick sauce, seasoned only with garlic, pepper, and, if you like, basil or oregano. The pieces of tomato are left chunky, and the texture of the finished sauce is fairly loose. Tomato sauce, on the other hand, is a more complex affair, starting with pureed tomatoes and seasoned with onion, carrot, celery, and bay leaf, and left to simmer until thickened and rich in flavor.

Make this sauce with fresh tomatoes only when the juiciest, most flavorful ripe tomatoes are available. (Increase the amount of olive oil a little if you make the sauce with fresh tomatoes.) Otherwise, canned plum tomatoes make a delicious marinara sauce.

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 8 garlic cloves, peeled
- 3 pounds ripe fresh plum tomatoes, peeled and seeded, or one 35-ounce can peeled Italian plum tomatoes (preferably San Marzano), seeded and lightly crushed, with their liquid
- Kosher salt to taste
- Peperoncino flakes to taste
- 10 fresh basil leaves, torn into small pieces
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste

Heat the oil in a 2- or 3-quart nonreactive saucepan over medium heat. Whack the garlic cloves with the flat side of a knife, toss them into the oil, and cook until lightly browned, about 2 minutes.

Carefully slide the tomatoes and their liquid into the oil. Bring to a boil, and season lightly with salt and peperoncino. Lower the heat so the sauce is at a lively simmer, and cook, breaking up the tomatoes with a whisk or spoon, until the sauce is chunky and thick, about 20 minutes. Stir in the basil about 5 minutes before the sauce is finished. Taste the sauce, and season with salt and pepper if necessary.

Vegetable & Herb Sauce

Salsa Verde

Makes 3 cups

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ cup finely minced roasted bell peppers, freshly prepared or bottled
- ½ cup minced fresh Italian parsley leaves
- ½ cup minced red onion
- ¼ cup diced gherkin pickles
- ¼ cup red-wine vinegar
- 1 hard-cooked egg, shelled and minced, yolk and white kept separate
- 2 tablespoons capers, drained and minced
Kosher salt to taste

Freshly ground black pepper to taste

In a medium-sized mixing bowl, stir together all the ingredients except the salt and pepper until thoroughly mixed. Season with salt and pepper. Serve at room temperature.

**Tomato Sauce**

*Salsa di Pomodoro* - Makes about 3½ cups, enough for 1 pound dried pasta or 1½ pounds fresh, serving 6

- 3 pounds ripe fresh plum tomatoes, peeled and seeded, or one 35-ounce can peeled Italian tomatoes, seeded and lightly crushed, with their liquid
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small onion, chopped (about ½ cup)
- ¼ cup finely shredded peeled carrot
- ¼ cup finely chopped celery, including leaves
- 4 fresh bay leaves, or 2 dried bay leaves
- Kosher salt to taste
- Peperoncino flakes to taste

Pass the tomatoes through a food mill fitted with the fine disk. Heat the oil in a 2- or 3-quart nonreactive saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion, and cook, stirring occasionally, until wilted, about 3 minutes. Add the carrot and celery, and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden, about 10 minutes.

Add the food-milled tomatoes and the bay leaves, and bring to a boil. Season lightly with salt and peperoncino. Once it’s boiling, lower the heat so the sauce is at a lively simmer, and cook, stirring occasionally, until thickened, about 45 minutes.

Remove the bay leaves. Taste, and season with salt and peperoncino if necessary.

**Chicken Stock**

*Brodo di Pollo* - Makes about 4 quarts

- 3 pounds chicken and/or capon wings, backs, necks, and giblets (not including the liver)
- 1 pound turkey wings
- 5 quarts cold water
- 1 large onion (about ½ pound), cut in half
- 3 medium carrots, trimmed, peeled, and cut into 3-inch lengths
- 2 large ripe tomatoes, quartered, or 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 8 garlic cloves, unpeeled
- 10 sprigs fresh Italian parsley
- 12 black peppercorns
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt

Rinse the poultry pieces in a colander under cold running water, and drain them well. Place them in a stockpot with an 8-to-10-quart capacity. Pour in the 5 quarts water, and bring to a boil over high heat. Boil for a minute or two and you will see foam rising to the surface. Skim off and discard the foam, lower the heat to a strong simmer, and cook 1 hour, occasionally skimming the foam and fat from the surface.

Add the remaining ingredients except the salt to the pot. Bring to a boil, then lower the heat to a simmer. Cook, partially covered, 2 to 3 hours, skimming off the foam and fat occasionally.

Strain the broth through a very fine sieve, or a colander lined with a double thickness of cheesecloth or a clean kitchen towel. If you plan to use the stock right away, wait a
minute or two and spoon off the fat that rises to the surface. The last little traces of fat can be “swept” off the surface with a folded length of paper towels. It is much easier, however, to remove the fat from chilled stock—the fat will rise to the top and solidify, where it can be easily removed.

Variation: Mixed Meat Stock

For a rich meat stock, simply substitute 3 pounds meaty veal and beef bones—such as beef shin, veal shank bones, and/or short ribs—for 2 pounds of the chicken or capon parts and all the turkey wings. Continue as described above.
Shopping on the Internet for specialty ingredients and imported food items is getting easier all the time, as more vendors offer their goods and their Web sites become more informative and easier to navigate. Here are several Internet sites I recommend for finding and purchasing authentic Italian ingredients for my recipes. Of course, many items are seasonal and will be available at some times and not others, or they might be in stock at one site and not another. It’s always a good idea to check a few sites for the ingredient you need (at the best price too!).

- **A. G. Ferrari Foods** ([www.agferrari.com](http://www.agferrari.com))
- **Amazon.com** Gourmet Food ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))
- **BuonItalia** ([www.buonitalia.com](http://www.buonitalia.com))
- **Corti Brothers** ([www.cortibros.biz](http://www.cortibros.biz))
- **D’Artagnan** ([www.dartagnan.com](http://www.dartagnan.com))
- **DiPalo Selects** ([www.dipaloselects.com](http://www.dipaloselects.com))
- **Gourmet Pasta Cheese and New York Prime Meats** ([www.pastacheese.com](http://www.pastacheese.com))
- **Gustiamo.com “Italy’s Best Foods”** ([www.gustiamo.com](http://www.gustiamo.com))
- **iGourmet.com** ([www.igourmet.com](http://www.igourmet.com))
- **ItalianConnectionUSA** ([www.italianconnectionusa.com](http://www.italianconnectionusa.com))
- **Murray’s Cheese** ([www.murrayscheese.com](http://www.murrayscheese.com))
- **Todaro Bros.** ([www.todarobros.com](http://www.todarobros.com))

**Sources for Specific Recipe Items**

- **Almond flour**—Available from [iGourmet](http://www.igourmet.com) and [Bob’s Red Mill](http://www.bobsredmill.com)
- **Bottarga**—Available from [Gourmet Pasta Cheese and New York Prime Meats](http://www.pastacheese.com)
- **Chestnuts**—Fresh imported Italian chestnuts are available from Melissa’s World Variety Produce ([www.melissas.com](http://www.melissas.com)), cooked and peeled chestnuts are available from Melissa’s and iGourmet ([www.igourmet.com]), dried and canned chestnuts are available from Amazon ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)).
- **Chitarre (stringed pasta cutters)**—Available from [PastaMakers.com](http://www.italiankitchenware.com) and [CreativeCookware](http://www.creativecookware.com)
- **Extra-virgin olive oil from Abruzzo**—Available from A. G. Ferrari Foods ([www.agferrari.com](http://www.agferrari.com))
- **Farro pasta**—Available from [Gourmet Pasta Cheese and New York Prime Meats](http://www.pastacheese.com) and A. G. Ferrari Foods ([www.agferrari.com](http://www.agferrari.com))
- **Lenticchie di Castelluccio (lentils from Umbria)**—Available from [Gourmet Pasta Cheese and New York Prime Meats](http://www.pastacheese.com)
- **Paccheri (tubular dried pasta)**—Available from [ItalianConnectionUSA](http://www.italianconnectionusa.com) and Todaro Bros. ([www.todarobros.com](http://www.todarobros.com))
- **Pane carasau**—Available from [iGourmet](http://www.igourmet.com) and [GourmetSardinia](http://www.gourmetsardinia.com)
- **Peperoncini (whole dried Italian red peppers)**—Available from BuonItalia ([www.buonitalia.com](http://www.buonitalia.com))
- **Saffron from Aquila (Abruzzo)**—Available from Gustiamo ([www.gustiamo.com](http://www.gustiamo.com))
- **Sheep’s-milk ricotta (imported from Italy)**—Available from [Gourmet Pasta Cheese and New York Prime Meats](http://www.pastacheese.com)
- **Taggianca olives (from Liguria)**—Available from A. G. Ferrari Foods ([www.agferrari.com](http://www.agferrari.com)) and Amazon ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))
- **Trofie pasta**—Available from Amazon ([www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com))
THE PUBLIC TELEVISION SERIES OF Lidia’s Italy: Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy

TRENTINO–ALTO ADIGE

SIMMERING CHICKEN IN BEER
Roasted Chicken with Beer
Dumplings with Speck
Celery Root & Apple Salad

BRAISING BEEF WITH BEER
Beef Braised in Beer
Whole-Grain Spaetzle
Baked Apples

YOU SAY TOMATO, I SAY APPLE
Spaghetti in Tomato-Apple Sauce
Cauliflower & Potato Salad
Sweet Ricotta Dumplings with Strawberry Sauce

YODELING IN THE ALTO PIANO
Horseradish & Apple Salsa
Potato-Celery Root Dumplings
Braised Rolls with Mustard & Vegetables

APPLES: SALAD, SOUP, AND DESSERT
Country Salad
Apple & Bean Soup
Chunky Apple-Apricot Bread Pudding

MOLISE

CONQUERING CAULIFLOWER
Fresh Cavatelli with Cauliflower, Almonds & Toasted Bread Crumbs
Fresh Pasta Strips (Malefante) with Beans and Bacon

FROM THE SHORES OF MOLISE
Spaghetti with Calamari, Scallops & Shrimp

FOR WHOM THE BELL TOLLS
Fresh Cavatelli with Favas
Three Meats Braised in Tomatoes with Rigatoni

TO COZZE OR NOT TACCOZZE
Fish Soup with Vegetables
Fresh Taccozze Pasta with Sea Bass

LE MARCHE

TERRA E MARE LE MARCHE
Ziti with Tuna Ascolli-Style
Spaghetti with Clam Sauce

WEEKNIGHT STOVETOP CHICKEN
Chicken with Olives & Pine Nuts
Celery Steamed in a Skillet

FLORA + FAUNA = FLAVOR
Lamb Chunks with Olives
Stuffed Quail in Parchment

MEATLOAF LIKE NO OTHER
Meatloaf with Ricotta
Ambrosia of Wheat Berries, Fruit & Chocolate

UMBRIA

THE UMBRIA FAMILY JEWELS
Sausages in the Skillet with Grapes
Meatballs in Broth
Honey-Orange-Crumb Cookies
STUFF IT YOUR WAY
Crostini with Black Truffle Butter
Filled Focaccia
Veal Scallopine Umbria-Style

THE UMBRIAN TWIST
Strangozzi with Tomato-Bacon Sauce
Strangozzi with Chard & Almond Sauce

BREAKING THE BREAD
Poor Man’s Supper
Baked Fish with Savory Bread Crumbs
Chocolate Bread Parfait

THE ROCK OF ASSISI
Strangozzi with Veal & Chicken Liver Sauce
Pork Chops with Capers
Dry Fruit Strudel as Made in Assisi


MILANO CLASSICO
Risotto Milan-Style with Marrow & Saffron
Braised Veal Shanks

EVERYDAY ROASTED DUCK
Everyday Roasted Duck
Rice & Lentils
Almond Cake alla Mantovana

NOT TO RISOTTO
Rice & Butternut Squash
Rice with Fresh Sage
Traditional Rice & Chicken

THE DELIGHTS OF BRAISING
Braised Stuffed Cabbage Rolls
Skillet-Braised Chicken Bundles

AMBER WAVES OF PASTA
Tagliatelle with Walnut Pesto
Tagliatelle with White Meat Sauce

SUNDAY DINNER IN EMILIA-ROMAGNA
Anolini with Pork Filling in Chicken Broth
Veal Scallopine Bolognese

AIRY PASTA PILLOWS
Tortellini with Ricotta-Fontina Filling
Cappellacci with Squash Filling
Tortelli with Cabbage or Chard Filling
Tagliatelle with Romagnola Tomato Sauce

DELICIOUSLY VEGETARIAN
Sweet & Sour Little Onions
Erbazzone with Squash Filling
Erbazzone with Swiss Chard Filling

Gnocchi Sardinia-Style
Malloreddus with Sausage-Tomato Sauce
Semolina Pudding with Blueberry Sauce

SARDINIAN LOBSTER SALAD
Lobster Salad with Fresh Tomatoes
Spaghetti with Cold Tomato-Mint Sauce
Cauliflower with Olives & Cherry Tomatoes

CASSEROLING IN SARDINIA
Baked Eggplant in Tomato Sauce
Baked Eggplant with Onions & Fresh Tomatoes
SARDINIAN TURNOVER
Provolone Turnovers
Gallurese Bread & Cabbage Soup

DELICIOUS CRUMBS
Handmade Pasta Pearls
Baked Fregola Casserole
Roast Lobster with Bread Crumb Topping

CALABRIA

Sweet and Spicy Calabria
Onion Soup
Spicy Calamari
Sesame Candy

CALABRIA LIGHT BUT LUSCIOUS
Steamer Swordfish Bagnara-Style
Calabrese Salad
Eggplant, Onions & Potatoes

PRAISE THE SHEPHERD
Pork Chops Shepherd-Style
Stuffed Figs Sibari-Style

THE CATANZARO IN THE CHICKEN
Chicken Catanzaro-Style
Baked Cavatappi in Tomato Sauce
Almond Biscottini

LIGURIA

ROLLING OUT A GENOVESE BUFFET
Veal Stuffed with a Mosaic of Vegetables Served with Salsa Verde

HARVEST CLASSICS FROM LIGURIA
Rice & Zucchini Crostata
Stuffed Vegetables
Bread Salad with Summer Vegetables

INTOXICATING ANTIOXIDANTS
Vegetable Soup
Trenette with Pesto Genova-Style
Cherry Jam Tart

HUGGABLE LIGURIAN FOOD
German Potato Salad
Almond Torta with Chocolate Chips

FISHING FOR TUNA IN GENOVA
Meat Sauce Genova-Style
Green Beans Genova-Style
Tuna Genova-Style

BASILICATA

THREE PASTAS IN A FLASH
Bucatini with Sausage
Ditalini with Broccoli di Rape
Rigatoni with Lentils

HOT STUFF
Fiery Maccheroni
Artichokes, Fresh Fava & Potatoes
Farro with Pork Ragù Potenza-Style

THE LIQUID MARRIAGE
Fish Soup
Wedding Soup
Pasta with Baked Cherry Tomatoes

POTATOES WITH A TWIST
Potatoes with Peperoncino
Bocconcì Lucana-Style
FROM WINE TO CHOCOLATE
Polenta with White Beans & Black Kale
Beef Filet with Wine Sauce
Chocolate-Biscotti Pudding

FONTINA HOT AND COLD
Fondue Valle d’Aosta-Style
Veal Chops with Fontina
Roasted-Pepper & Olive Salad with Fontina

FROM A VALLE D’AOSTA OVEN
Soup with Bread & Fontina Ponticciato
Layered Casserole with Beef, Cabbage & Potato

HEARTY AND GOOD
Baked Penne & Mushrooms
Rice & Chestnuts
Almond Pudding

GRAZING IN ABRUZZO
Lamb Chops with Olives
Farro Pasta with Arugula & Ricotta
Strippelle Ribbons with Apricot-Orange Sauce

STRUMMING THE PASTA
Homemade Maccheroni alla Chitarra
Maccheroni with Fresh Lemon & Cream
Maccheroni with Zucchini

THE LAMB AND THE CHESTNUT STORY
Abruzzese Chestnut & Lentil Soup
Braised Leg of Lamb

PASTA BY ANY NAME
Maccheroni with Meat Sauce
Paccheri with Seafood
Crespelle with Spinach
RECIPE FINDER BY COURSE

APPETIZERS
Crostini with Black Truffle Butter
Erbazzone with Squash Filling
Erbazzone with Swiss Chard Filling
Filled Focaccia
Fondue Valle d’Aosta-Style
Fried Ricotta
Lentil Crostini
Provolone Turnovers
Sweet & Sour Little Onions

SOUPS
Abruzzese Chestnut & Lentil Soup
Apple & Bean Soup
Celery Soup
Fish Soup
Fish Soup with Vegetables
Gallurese Bread & Cabbage Soup
Meatballs in Broth
Onion Soup
Soup with Bread & Fontina Pasticcio
Vegetable Soup
Wedding Soup

SALADS AND SIDE DISHES
Artichokes, Fresh Favas & Potatoes
Bread Salad with Summer Vegetables
Cabbage Salad with Speck
Calabrese Salad
Cauliflower with Olives & Cherry Tomatoes
Cauliflower & Potato Salad
Celery Steamed in a Skillet
Celery Root & Apple Salad
Country Salad
Dumplings with Speck
Eggplant, Onions & Potatoes
Farro with Roasted Pepper Sauce
German Potato Salad
Green Beans Genova-Style
Polenta with White Beans & Black Kale
Poor Man’s Supper
Potato-Celery Root Dumplings
Potatoes with Peperoncino
Roasted-Pepper & Olive Salad with Fontina
Spinach Genova-Style
Stuffed Vegetables
Zucchini with Anchovies & Capers

CONDIMENTS
Holy Oil (condiment of olive oil infused with hot peperoncino)
Horseradish & Apple Salsa
Saffron-Infused Olive Oil

PASTAS AND RISOTTOS/RICE
Anolini with Pork Filling in Chicken Broth
Baked Cavatappi in Tomato Sauce
Baked Fregola Casserole
Baked Penne & Mushrooms
Baked Rice Frittata
Basil, Parsley, & Walnut Pesto
Braised Octopus with Spaghetti
Bucatini with Sausage
Cappellacci with Squash Filling
Ditalini with Broccoli di Rape
Farro Pasta with Arugula & Ricotta
Fiery Maccheroni
Fresh Cavatelli
Fresh Cavatelli with Cauliflower
Fresh Cavatelli with Cauliflower, Almonds & Toasted Bread Crumbs
Fresh Cavatelli with Eggs & Bacon
Fresh Cavatelli with Fava
Fresh Pasta for Malefante & Taccozze
Fresh Pasta Strips (Malefante) with Beans & Bacon
Fresh Taccozze Pasta with Sea Bass
Handmade Pasta Pearls
Homemade Maccheroni alla Chitarra
Homemade Malloreddus
Homemade Tagliatelle
Homemade Strangozzi
Maccheroni with Fresh Lemon & Cream
Maccheroni with Zucchini
Maccheroni with Meat Sauce
Malloreddus with Sausage-Tomato Sauce
Orecchiette with Fava & Cherry Tomatoes
Paccheri with Seafood
Parsley Sauce with Fresh Ripe Tomatoes
Pasta with Baked Cherry Tomatoes
Rice & Butternut Squash
Pasta with Tender Greens
Rice & Chestnuts
Rice with Fresh Sage
Rice & Lentils
Rice Lombardy-Style
Rice & Zucchini Crostata
Rigatoni with Lentils
Risotto with Gorgonzola
Risotto Milan-Style with Marrow & Saffron
Scrippelle Ribbons Baked with Cheese
Spaghetti with Calamari, Scallops & Shrimp
Spaghetti with Clam Sauce
Spaghetti with Cold Tomato-Mint Sauce
Spaghetti in Tomato-Apple Sauce
Strangozzi with Chard & Almond Sauce
Strangozzi with Tomato-Bacon Sauce
Strangozzi with Veal & Chicken Liver Sauce
Stuffed Baked Pasta
Tagliatelle with Romagnola Tomato Sauce
Tagliatelle with Walnut Pesto
Tagliatelle with White Meat Sauce
Three Meats Braised in Tomatoes with Rigatoni
Tortelli with Cabbage or Chard Filling
Tortellini with Ricotta-Fontina Filling
Traditional Rice & Chicken
Trenette with Pesto Genova-Style
Whole-Grain Spaetzle
Ziti with Tuna Ascoli-Style

VEGETARIAN MAIN COURSES (ASIDE FROM PASTA)

Baked Eggplant with Onions & Fresh Tomatoes
Baked Eggplant in Tomato Sauce
Crespelle with Spinach
Erbazzone with Squash Filling
Erbazzone with Swiss Chard Filling
Flatbread Lasagna
Meatless Pecorino Meatballs
Potato-Mushroom Cake with Braised Lentils

FISH AND SEAFOOD

Baccalà Lucana-Style
Baked Fish with Savory Bread Crumbs
Fish with Pepper Sauce
Fish Soup
Fish Soup with Vegetables
Lobster Salad with Fresh Tomatoes
Roast Lobster with Bread Crumb Topping
Spicy Calamari
Steamed Swordfish Bagnara-Style
Tuna Genova-Style

MEAT AND POULTRY

Beef Braised in Beer
Beef Filet with Wine Sauce
Beef Rolls with Mustard & Vegetables
Braised Leg of Lamb
Braised Veal Shanks
Braised Stuffed Cabbage Rolls
Chicken Catanzaro-Style
Chicken with Giardiniera
Chicken with Olives & Pine Nuts
Everyday Roasted Duck
Farro with Pork Ragù Potenza-Style
Lamb Chops with Olives
Lamb Chunks with Olives
Layered Casserole with Beef, Cabbage & Potato
Meatloaf with Ricotta
Pork Chops with Capers
Pork Chops Shepherd-Style
Rabbit with Onions
Roasted Chicken with Beer
Sausages in the Skillet with Grapes
Skillet-Braised Chicken Bundles
Stuffed Quail in Parchment
Veal Chop Gratinato
Veal Chops with Fontina
Veal Scaloppine Bolognese
Veal Scaloppine Umbria-Style
Veal Stuffed with a Mosaic of Vegetables

DESSERTS

Almond Biscottini
Almond Pudding
Almond Cake alla Mantovana
Almond Torta with Chocolate Chips
Ambrosia of Wheat Berries, Fruit & Chocolate
Baked Apples
Cherry Jam Tart
Chocolate-Biscotti Pudding
Chocolate Bread Parfait
 Chunky Apple-Apricot Bread Pudding
Dry Fruit Strudel as Made in Assisi
Fried Ricotta
Honey-Orange Crumb Cookies
Scrippelle Ribbons with Apricot-Orange Sauce
Semolina Pudding with Blueberry Sauce
Sesame Candy
Stuffed Figs Sibari-Style
Sweet Ricotta Dumplings with Strawberry Sauce
Torta with Prunes
**A Note about the Authors**

**Lidia Matticchio Bastianich** was born in Istria. She is a cookbook author, restaurateur, and one of the best-loved chefs on television. Her cookbooks include *Lidia's Italy*, *Lidia's Family Table*, *Lidia’s Italian-American Kitchen*, *Lidia’s Italian Table*, and *La Cucina di Lidia*. She is also founder and president of Tavola Productions, which produces quality broadcast shows like *Lidia's Italy*, the companion show to the book of the same name.

Lidia is the chef/owner of acclaimed New York City restaurants Felidia, Becco, Esca, and Del Posto as well as Lidia’s in Pittsburgh and Kansas City. Along with her son, Joseph, Lidia produces award-winning wines at the Bastianich and La Mozza wineries in Friuli and Maremma. With her daughter, Tanya Bastianich Manuali, and Shelly Burgess, she heads an exclusive travel company, Esperienze Italiane, that implements excursions to Italy that combine gastronomy with art history.

Lidia stays active in community service on behalf of the James Beard Foundation, UNIFEM, and Public Television. She resides with her mother, Erminia, on Long Island and is the proud grandmother of Lorenzo and Julia Manuali and Olivia, Miles, and Ethan Bastianich.

**Tanya Bastianich Manuali** attended Georgetown University, then lived and taught in Italy before completing her Ph.D. in Italian Renaissance art at Oxford University in 2000. She has developed a product line that includes Lidia’s specialty sauces that are sold in fine stores nationally and has brought the company into the twenty-first century with the creation of the Lidia’s Italy Web site, [www.lidiasitaly.com](http://www.lidiasitaly.com), a comprehensive site featuring in-depth, up-to-the-minute information on Lidia, her restaurants, and her recipes.

Tanya was a coauthor of *Lidia’s Italy* and has worked on the companion television series for both that book and *Lidia Cooks from the Heart of Italy*, supervising the filming in Italy and integrating cultural material into the shows and books. Having grown up in the restaurant industry, Tanya is also a partner with her mother, Lidia, and brother, Joseph, in Felidia, Lidia’s Kansas City, and Lidia’s Pittsburgh.

Tanya is married to a Roman, Corrado Manuali, and they live in New York with their two children, Lorenzo and Julia. They travel to Italy frequently and consider it their second home.
LIDIA COOKS FROM
THE HEART OF ITALY

LIDIA MATTICCHIO BASTIANICH
AND TANYA BASTIANICH MANUALI
WITH DAVID NUSSBAUM

A KNOPF e BOOK