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ACADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



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EDITION



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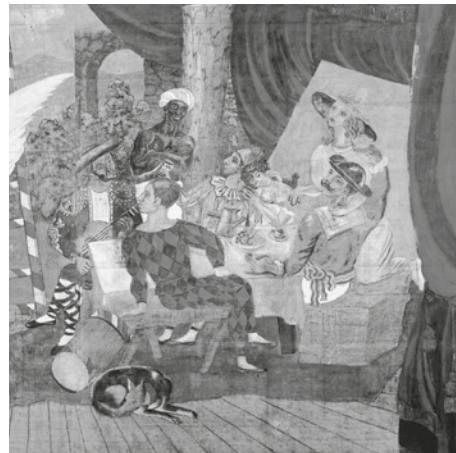
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On the cover: detail of the theatre curtain painted by Pablo Picasso for the ballet “Parade” (1917). On display at the Barberini Palace in Rome as part of the exhibition “Picasso: Between Cubism and Classicism” at the Scuderie del Quirinale (Quirinale Stables) exhibition space until 21 January 2018.



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Mystery on a plate

New equipment and unusual ingredients often form the basis of success for many renowned chefs.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
President of the Academy

Autumn is the traditional season for updated restaurant guides (which we will discuss when the main ones are all in print): for now the available ones are those from the newspaper *L'Espresso* and the magazine *Gambero Rosso*. The various dishes denoting the 'greats' of the restaurant business exhibit similarities (plagiarism?) and common elements. To amaze and impress customers and critics, but also to inflate prices, they frequently resort to exotic ingredients whose odd names are unfamiliar to most, hence the proliferation of 'yuzu juice' and 'cocoa nibs'. Recipes are further 'embroidered' with various powders, including those deriving from capers (at times even taking the form of 'caper vapours'), raspberries and porcini mushrooms. Many other ingredients, especially of Asian origin, pop up in celebrated chefs' preparations: kumquat, wasabi, seaweed, the aforementioned yuzu, rhubarb and mastic. Eel is making something of a comeback, though often heavily camouflaged, and even sea snails occasionally turn up, sometimes in stuffed pasta. Foie gras, which should be abolished, is regrettably making a splash. Considering

their skill, why don't these chefs whip up some delicious liver dishes using our own geese rather than resorting to French livers afflicted by steatosis? But above all there is a flurry of crèmes, purées, juses, mousses, emulsions, and sauces both sweet and, especially, savoury. One cannot then help recalling the new machines and gadgets that have revolutionised kitchens, beginning with the innovator Ferran Adrià and followed by a tide of Spanish inventions. Today no kitchen lacks a Roner, a low-temperature vacuum cooker once rarely encountered (the bain-marie was mostly employed instead) and now frequently overused. There are also juicers, induction cookers, trivalent ovens (convection, steam and combined), and hot-air fryers. Not to mention the Gastrovac, for low-pressure oxygen-free 'oil cooking', and the newly indispensable Pacojet, a specialised liquidiser which transforms frozen sauces and other ingredients into table-ready creams and much more: kitchen jargon has now acquired the concept of 'pacossing'. Desiccators are likewise highly fashionable, and one can also acquire a digital cooking pot for braising, frying, sautéeing, boiling and pressure-cooking. This makes it easier to understand the spectacular success of the biannual fair which recently concluded in Rho, **HostMilano 2017**, the world's largest hospitality fair offering the most groundbreaking equipment and machines for restaurant kitchens. It attracted 190,000 'professional visitors', an increase of 24% over the 2015 edition, from 177 nations. In addition to European countries, the most represented nations were China, the USA, and states in the Middle East and the former Soviet area. It seems that these machines not only aid and speed up food preparation but also modify tastes, facilitating the acceptance of once unthinkable dishes. Technical procedures are, therefore, now available to everyone, but only the experience, talent and professionalism of cooks can dominate such equipment. Less capable cooks are overwhelmed by the technology, producing standardised fare misrepresented as amazing innovations with correspondingly high prices.





In Trieste, “where beauties abound of both land and sky”

The city of Umberto Saba hosted the Academic Councillors and Regional Coordinators during a labour-intensive and well-attended work meeting.

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO



Starting with the welcome dinner, splendidly organised by Delegate Paolo Penso at the “Antica Trattoria Suban”, the numerous guests found themselves immersed in Trieste’s characteristically cosmopolitan, multi-ethnic and multi-religious atmosphere: a variegated mosaic where transnational culture is also expressed through food, and Mario Suban, to whom President Petroni awarded the Nuvoletti Prize, demonstrated his ability to combine regional traditions with the kaleidoscope of diverse cultures which have intertwined in the city. So we find liptauer (a local, but also Austro-Hungarian and Croatian cheese) and crostini with lard

and Terrano wine; flavoursome prosciutto cooked *en croute* (embodying the aroma of Mitteleuropa); *jota carsolina* (sauerkraut, bean and potato soup) and *palacinke* (Croatian crêpes) with goat cheese; juicy baked veal shank with potato *kipfeln* (German crescent-shaped biscuits); Rigó Jancsi cake (named after a Romani violinist); *putiza* (walnut chocolate honey cake) and *presnitz* pastry (with links to the Austro-Hungarian empress Elizabeth or Sisi).

The following day, following a welcome address by President Petroni, the Academic Council’s meeting was opened by the Regional Coordinator for Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Renzo Mattioni, who than-

ked the President for having chosen Trieste. Speaking of that city, he again highlighted the cultures that have coexisted and sometimes collided there, all contributing to the region’s cuisine.

Initiating the proceedings proper, Paolo Petroni dwelt on two topics which, despite the Academy’s generally rosy situation, reveal an imbalance: the absence of female officials in some Delegations, and the lack of conferences in many of them.

Regarding the first issue, the President asserted, with unanimous approval by the Council, that the phenomenon of total female absence requires firmly targeted rectification.

Concerning the second point, it was revealed that 163 Delegations had held no conferences at all in 2016. Attendees agreed on the importance of organising local events attracting media attention and a regional audience, to highlight current food-related problems and opportunities, revitalising the Academy’s role as a paladin of tradition but also, and especially, as an authoritative protagonist of ongoing societal change.

Having finally emphasised the Academy’s excellent performance in terms of Italian and international presence, with 297 Delegations and a slight incre-



President Petroni and Delegate Paolo Penso deliver the Nuvoletti Prize to Mario Suban. On the left, his daughter, Federica Suban



The Treasurer, Roberto Ariani



The Delegate for Trieste,
Paolo Penso



The Regional Coordinator for Friuli-Venezia Giulia,
Renzo Mattioni

ase in members, Petroni spoke of the publications forming the *Food Culture Library* book series, whose latest volume, *The Use of Cheeses in Regional Cooking Tradition*, was sent to all Academicians on the occasion of the Ecumenical Dinner; he then announced the annual theme for 2018: "Sweet and Savoury Pastry". Treasurer Roberto Ariani then initiated a discussion of the Budget for 2018. Ariani highlighted some entries: among the sources of revenue, the Ministry of Culture's contribution is important not so much for its magnitude as its value in signalling governmental recognition of the Academy's role; noteworthy among the expenses is that for the new edition of the *Good Traditional Table* guide, which, as Petroni announced, could also be distributed in bookshops, joining the repertoire of Academic publications aimed at a general audience. Indeed it differs from standard restaurant guides, providing not the ratings of 'inspectors'



The Academician
Mara Rondi

but useful information such as friends might offer. Among the Academy's interactions with national institutions, Ariani emphasised its contribution to the La Vigna International Library for establishing a section dedicated entirely to the 8000 books on food and wine bequeathed by Alfredo Pelle, former President of the "Franco Marenghi" Study Centre, when he passed away almost a year ago. The President of the Board of Auditors, Gianni Limberti, deemed the projections for the 2018 Budget reliable, with the Board's assent, after comparing them with the preliminary figures for 2017. The Council then unanimously approved the Budget.

The Council's meeting was adjourned following President Petroni's announcement of the next Delegates' Assembly, to be held in Verona between 18 and 20 May, followed by a gala dinner in the splendid eighteenth-century villa Palazzo Verità Poeta.

The second portion of the morning was dedicated to the Regional Coordinators, who detailed the progress of the activities undertaken following their previous meeting in July. On that occasion the hope was expressed that local activities would increase in depth without the necessity for overly large gatherings (even involving too many Regional Study Centre members). The Regional Coordinators passed the microphone around to explain actions taken to rationalise and streamline the Centres' role. In particular, Gabriele Gasparro, RC for the 8 Roman Delegations, opined that although "all

roads lead to Rome", still it is desirable to limit 'encroachment' across Delegation borders and, where it occurs, liaise well in advance with the hosting Delegate. Mario de Simone (RC for Campania) highlighted the reconstitution of the Caserta Delegation, while Guido Schiaroli (RC for Umbria) proudly announced the forthcoming establishment of the Assisi Delegation. Many speakers manifested enthusiasm and a yearning for activity, demonstrating how determined the Academy's 'corps' is to play an increasingly decisive regional role.

There followed a wonderful tour of the city leading up the San Giusto Hill overlooking the gulf, and then through the narrow streets of the old ghetto, emerging in the splendid Piazza dell'Unità d'Italia just in time for the gala dinner. There, President Petroni thanked the Trieste Delegate, the representatives of local government bodies, Regional Coordinator Mattioni, and Mara Rondi, widow of the sorely missed Delegate Giuliano Relja, inviting all present to attend the forthcoming meeting in Verona.

After savouring the *baccalà mantecato* (whipped salt cod) on grilled polenta, risotto with scampi from Istria, line-fished bass in *court bouillon*, and *semifreddo* frozen mousse with *pinza triestina* (traditional orange-flavoured Easter brioche) and toasted almond streusel, paired with excellent wines, the guests proceeded out of the Savoia Excelsior Palace, praising the spirit of conviviality and friendship which had permeated the gathering.

SILVIA DE LORENZO



A moment during the gala dinner



Reflections on today's cuisine

Some go to restaurants not so much to enjoy a specific dish, but to brag about having sampled the virtuoso performance of a particular cook.

BY ROBERTO ROBAZZA

Treviso Academician

A question heard with a certain frequency is: "Where is Italian cooking headed?" And everyone has different reasons for asking: as different as the elements underpinning the cuisine, or the many cuisines, found in Italy. Indeed, it is, I believe, commonly recognised now that there is no national Italian cuisine. One might, however, hazard an answer using 'cuisine' in its broadest sense, namely: cuisine goes wherever consumers permit. Allow me to explain. Until the seventies and eighties, in my area, one went to restaurants to eat, not for 'tastings'; but above all, one went motivated by a craving for a certain dish. Having decided what speciality one desired most, one chose the restaurant accordingly: the one where the cook (not the chef) interpreted it in the manner most gratifying to one's 'taste'. Food news professionals - journalists and food gui-

de writers - chiefly praised the signature dishes of the restaurants in the country's various regions. A tourist, new to a certain location and desirous of tasting its local specialities, would be directed to the restaurant which created it most competently. The star was, therefore, the dish itself - and the restaurant patron's taste preference.

Today, due to an anthropological evolution of cuisine (again taken in its broadest sense), ordinary citizens are subjected to such conditioning by the media that they frequent restaurants to sample (not to eat) what a cook with a lesser or greater degree of 'celebrity' feels like placing on their plates, and very often they do not know in advance what they will eat, which depends on the flair of the chef (no longer the cook). In particular, consider the fashion for the 'tasting menus' found ever more frequently in restaur-





rants headed by culinary ‘stars’. The only certainty is that after the meal one must declare the ‘excellence’ of what was ‘sampled’, if only to justify the price or be accused of poor discernment or even lèse-majesté. The star today, therefore, is the chef!

To a large extent the media-imposed social evolution of cuisine is depriving consumers of self-determination in ‘taste’, substituting their own for a version packaged by television and the press in homage to the restaurant divas, creating material for entertainment as well as communication.

The food writing broadcast by media outlets, especially those with a wide audience, is increasingly about cooks (chefs) rather than dishes, especially local recipes linked with regional ingredients. We can say that nowadays one goes to restaurants not so much to enjoy a certain dish but to talk about sampling a certain cook’s virtuosic performance! With this I do not mean to say that these new professionals are incompetent. The skill of today’s ‘kitchen staff’ is undoubtedly very high; there are techniques and a basic ‘culinary’ culture which were not found in the past; and average restaurant offerings are certainly of high quality, but these are becoming standardised through a certain ‘excessive creativity’ (this is not a paradox). This has demoted consumers, once arbiters of their own taste, substituting the preferences of the chef of the moment. This is not only the case for ‘decorated’ chefs and their limited clientele, but is, I believe, an ever



more general phenomenon, and I think we are witnessing the beginning of an outright standardisation of taste on every level. In a country such as ours, which has a thousand local cuisines rather than one national cuisine, and which has gained a reputation abroad not for one homogeneous style but for as many differing styles as its food sources, cuisine is undoubtedly ‘ingredient-based’ more than ‘school-based’, because of its inextricable bond with regional territories, where the true actors and promoters of the food world are farmers and the artisans of taste, and so the foregoing process must be resisted as much as possible. Of course, it is not easy to stand against such a pervasive tendency sustained by powerful economic interests, but it may be worth attempting, while remaining aware that an indispensable prerequisite in so doing is to recreate in consumers a partially lost food culture which allows a resurgence, perhaps in a more ‘mature’ form, of personal taste. There are, in truth, some cooks, including important ones, who have maintained their territorial roots. They have succeeded in intelligently renewing the use of pri-

mary ingredients in a manner equally flavoursome, though lighter and more appetising to modern preferences, while retaining them as ‘protagonists’ of the dish, without exaggerating in imposing their own ‘fancy’ or ‘inspiration’. Through them and Hotel Schools, a ‘new path’ could be forged for educating young cooks to under-

stand that one goes to restaurants wishing to enjoy a given dish where it is prepared best, and possibly with reliable quality standards, rather than to submit to the cook’s ‘inspirations’. Exactly, that is, what happened in the past!

At one time, when economic resources were much more limited, restaurant-goers expected a ‘return on investment’, knowing precisely what that ‘return’ should be; now we should strive to obtain the same result, no longer out of necessity but guided by both expertise and ethics. Let us become, once more, arbiters of our own taste, which alone guides our choices, without thereby feeling ashamed. Cooks should be the ones who adapt to diners’ tastes, rather than the latter being subjected to the tastes of the former. One final consideration: the cook should be the means of reaching the goal represented by good food (having ascertained the quality and variety of the basic ingredients fortunately available to us). We are now living in a time when the chef usurps the role of ‘ultimate goal’, irrespective of the food offered!

ROBERTO ROBAZZA

THE ACADEMY SILVER PLATE



An elegant silver plated dish engraved with the Academy logo.

This symbolic object may be presented to restaurants that display exceptional service, cuisine and hospitality.

Delegates may contact the Milan Headquarters (segreteria@accademia1953.it) for more information and orders.



The “chemist’s menu”

It includes an immense list of products, including a cornucopia of supplements.

BY ANTONIO RAVIDA

Honorary Delegate for Palermo Mondello

A few years ago it would have been unthinkable to read “Nutrition” among the signs found at the chemist’s. Today it is the default and surprises nobody. Why? For the simple reason that the latest pharmacopoeia is not limited to the admittedly vast realm of clinical requirements, prescriptions, and more or less justifiably publicised properties of substances whose health benefits allow us to live better and extend a state of acceptable or even splendid health into old age. Having confirmed these new circumstances, we should not be surprised by the media flurry of tempting health advice representing both Aladdin’s lamp and the treasure of Ali Baba for the overly numerous demiurges of nutrition, con men, hypochondriacs and, luckily, genuine scholars performing research in the pharmaceutical companies and laboratories which do not survive merely through publicity, privilege and wealth. The relentless flood of health advice through social media, radio, television, the press, and any others among the manifold conduits of information induce us to ‘go shopping’ at the chemist’s, as if it were a supermarket or ordinary food shop. This upends habits and uproots food traditions, however ancient or multiethnic. Would we exaggerate in asking if we are on the verge of what we might call a medicalisation of eating? Some go to the chemist to buy chocolate fortified with 17 precious health-giving ingredients including several vitamins. Then there are the legendary garlic pills, clearly not as appetising as an irreplaceable plateful of spaghetti with garlic and olive oil, but just as use-



ful for blood pressure regulation, intestinal cleansing, and, it is said, its properties as an aphrodisiac. The ‘chemist’s menu’ includes an impressive parade of products, including myriad supplements which are neither affordable nor covered by medical plans, but which, even in times of economic hardship, are so desired that shoppers exit the chemist’s shop laden with overfilled bags. Such substances’ purview includes cardiovascular risks, prostate cures, tumour anxiety, and psychological and psychiatric problems. In addition to the incessant drumbeat of vegetarian and vegan prohibitions, generally worthy of only minimal attention, there is the Moloch of all pills, namely astronaut food. Fortunately the World Health Organisation renders fair pronouncements, bolstered by its data resulting from serious research. For example, regarding the consumption of red meats and charcuterie, it has been found that in 18% of colorectal cancer cases, the maximum safe amount is 50 grammes daily (in Italy, average consumption is 20 grammes

per day). Physicians and nutritionists who pay attention to the science of healthy eating concur with the WHO by insisting on the principal antidote: portion control. Overfilled plates and excessive condiments are to be avoided. The golden rule is always the same: prioritise quality over quantity, neither capitulating to temptation nor exaggerating with minuscule portions. ‘Chemist’s menus’ are welcome, as long as they permit the occasional self-indulgence; and one must recall the old Italian saying “gluttony is deadlier than the sword”.

Beyond the oddities perpetrated by the increasingly numerous tricksters targeting foodies, one must urgently set clear standards regarding informed use of pharmaceutical products, serious and verifiable data, and an ethical pact between physicians, consumers (who must equally avoid anorexia and bulimia), educational institutions at every level, the pharmaceutical industry, and pharmacists themselves. Difficult? Yes. Impossible? No.



The colours of nature at the table

Beautiful to behold, healthy to eat.

BY ROSALIA SORCE
Syracuse Academician

Beauty is not only skin-deep at the table, and we might even say that the way to a person's stomach is often through their eyes! Indeed, colours influence us throughout life, and food is no exception: they may be as important as the quality and quantity of what we eat. Food, colours and health are closely linked: good health depends to a large extent on good food, often perceptible through colour which may also be an expression of mood. Every colour naturally found in primary ingredients may have a different effect on our bodies. Hence chromotherapy, a method of alternative medicine which uses colours for therapeutic purposes, is also applied in nutrition. It posits that each colour has effects on the mind and body which may restore equilibrium by affecting mood, sleep and concentration. It has very ancient roots, because humans have always attributed considerable importance to the health effects of colours. It

was already an established practice among the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans to cure various ailments with heliotherapy, meaning exposure to sunlight; Ayurvedic medicine assigns a colour to every chakra. Traditional Chinese medicine associates colours with flavours, pairing red with bitterness, yellow with sweetness, white with spiciness, black with saltiness, and green with sourness. Most importantly, however, the pigments which colour fruits and vegetables have not only visual but often health-giving functions which may affect the entire body; indeed there appears to be an instinctive component in selecting foods containing the necessary substances. In English the expression "five a day" suggests that we provide our bodies with essential nutrients by consuming at least five portions of differently coloured fruits and vegetables per day. At the table, colour is often paramount, influencing the choice of one food over another according to mood. Colour predisposes us to taste or avoid a food by providing indications about its quality and freshness: if it's green, the brain prepares itself for unripeness; if it is beginning to go brown, the brain expects rottenness. Awareness of the significance lurking behind fruit and vegetable colours allows us to discern many of their properties.

Orange inspires cheer, serenity, *joie de vivre* and optimism. It is the colour of equilibrium (being equidistant between red and yellow) and at table it stimulates appetite and mind-body synergy. Eating orange foods helps us to be more thoughtful, aware, and attuned to true necessity and our own emotions. If the





skin requires attention, and we must strengthen our immunity, orange is the way to go: oranges, tangerines, apricots, pumpkin, carrots, egg yolks, melons and peaches. Yellow is the colour of the sun, and shares its energy-giving properties! It infuses cheerfulness, well-being, extroversion and clarity of thought. At noon, when the sun reaches its peak, it is advisable to eat more intensely yellow foods, while in the second part of the day, a cooler shade of yellow is preferable, such as those found in pineapple, papaya, yellow wax beans and Belgian endive. Lemon, pineapple, melon, maize, potato and banana help to detoxify the liver and purify the body. As well as improving mood, yellow seems to be the favourite colour of gourmands.

In a general sense, red symbolises energy, whether positive or negative. It is the colour of passion, strength, vitality, self-assuredness and success as well as carnality. Eating red means rediscovering one's own strength and keeping depression and melancholy at bay. Red food stimulates the metabolism, improves circulation, protects the heart, and aids in maintaining physical fitness. Red is a very strong colour, with an important emotional potency which will surely affect diners: it functions as a stimulant, including one of the appetite. It is very rich in vitamin C and lycopene, and is therefore also an excellent antioxidant. Bright red foods should be consumed earlier in the day: strawberries, tomatoes, radishes; while from noon to midnight, red fades into darkness, hence one should choose beets, red grapes, red pulses and plums. Tomato, strawberry, plum, pepper, cherry, watermelon and currant favour drainage and circulation. Tomato, watermelon, strawberry, cherry, radish, beet, and blood orange assist the function of the adrenal glands. Eating them can prevent atherosclerosis and fragile capillaries. They strengthen vision and immunity and favour iron absorption.



Green is a symbol of nature, calm and relaxation. It is the 'detoxifying' colour par excellence. It facilitates healthy living, transmits energy, de-stresses and relaxes, reinstating stability. Peas, basil, beet greens, asparagus, broccoli, kiwi, lettuce, parsley, spinach and courgettes contain chlorophyll, carotenoids, folic acid and folates. Broccoli, chicory, cabbage, lettuce, rocket, spinach, kiwi, and wild and aromatic herbs combine these active ingredients with essential oils which are difficult to find elsewhere. Such foods contain substances which boost immunity and have relaxing properties: they protect from germs and bacteria, being also useful for children; they lower cardiovascular risks and have powerful anti-ageing effects. All green leafy vegetables contain chlorophyll, carotenoids, lutein, magnesium, folates (or vitamin B₉) and vitamin C, useful in preventing heart disease and tumours and important for the nervous system, vision and blood pressure. Eating green contributes to increasing serenity and sustaining the nervous system. Additionally, green counteracts gluttony: excessively swift eaters would have to consume vast amounts of green foods to overeat.

Particularly rich in antioxidants, blue-violet is the colour most associated with anti-ageing effects. It protects from heart disease, neoplasia and strokes, detoxifies the immune system, improves memory and promotes a healthful old age. Purple is the colour of the intellect; blackberries, dark grapes, aubergines, red onions and beets are foods rich in magnesium and

help to counteract stress. Foods ranging from indigo to violet are rich in magnesium and other elements which aid brain function as well as moderating appetite. Figs, forest berries, aubergines, plums, radicchio and grapes contain anthocyanins, carotenoids and resveratrol. They are excellent against circulatory or vision problems, strengthen capillaries and guard against urinary infections, protecting the reproductive mechanisms and reinforcing immunity.

Black is the colour of fertility and carries a potent erotic charge despite being symbolically considered an absorber of energy. What black foods are found in nature? Many seeds, which indeed are symbolic of life. Black foods should be consumed in the evening because they favour sleep and are easily digestible. However, foods that are black with a reddish or brownish tinge, such as tea and coffee, should be enjoyed earlier in the day because of their energising properties.

White is a symbol of peace, honesty and intelligence. It is the colour of simplicity and purification, associated with such basic foods as milk, rice, and carbohydrates in the form of grains, flakes, flour or semolina. It is advisable to consume white foods in the first part of the day, because they induce tranquillity and balance, helping us to confront daily challenges. Fennel, onion, white cabbage, celeriac, Belgian endive, apple, pear and banana contain, inter alia, flavonoids, vitamin C and selenium, which are useful for the heart and bones and protect immunity. Garlic, onion, spring onions and celery contain isothiocyanates, allicin, flavonoids, quercetin and vitamin C. They thin the blood, combat anaemia and positively affect the functions of the lungs and bones.

In the kitchen it is wonderful to experiment and play with colour, bearing in mind that food must also be a feast for the eyes.

ROSALIA SORCE