

# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



**ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA**  
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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA  
È STATA FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI  
E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,  
CESARE CHIODI, GIANNINO CITTERIO, ERNESTO DONÀ  
DALLE ROSE, MICHELE GUIDO FRANCI, GIANNI MAZZOCCHI  
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ARTURO ORVIETO, SEVERINO PAGANI, ALDO PASSANTE,  
GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIO PONTI, DINO VILLANI,  
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,  
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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*On the cover: : Graphic elaboration of Un coin de table (1895-1900) by Paul Cézanne; Barnes Foundation, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.*



# The Academy rewards the Ambassadors of Taste

*President Petroni: “Our associations share the goals of enhancing and safeguarding Italian cuisine”.*

*Interview by journalist MARIELLA CARUSO*



*Signing the ‘giant cheque’ for the Orio Vergani Prize.  
From the left: Paolo Marchi, President Petroni, Cristina Bowerman*

Safeguarding and enhancing Italian culinary tradition is one of the goals of the **Italian Academy of Cuisine** founded by Orio Vergani on the 29<sup>th</sup> of July 1953. It is in the name of Vergani, who passed away in 1960, that since 1984 individuals, organisations or associations are rewarded for honouring Italian food culture in Italy or abroad through their activities.

This year’s prize, consisting of a medal, a certificate and a cheque for 10,000 Euros, was awarded to the **Italian Association of Taste Ambassadors**.

“By partnering with the Association led by **Cristina Bowerman** in several events during International Italian Food Week, we got to know professionals who share our values of promoting and protecting our food heritage within Italy and abro-



*The Roman Delegates attending the event, with Paolo Petroni, Cristina Bowerman and Roberto Ariani.  
From the left: Antonio Bertani, Salvatore Di Giulio, Gabriele Gasparro, Alessandro Di Giovanni, Claudio Nacca, Publio Viola*



ad. This is why we chose them to receive our award”, explained the Academy’s President, **Paolo Petroni**, delivering the prize during a press conference organised at **Romeo Chef&Baker**, alongside the **Taste Ambassadors’** annual assembly.

### President Petroni, what is the current relevance of Orio Vergani?

“Vergani decided to found the Academy because he had realised that food traditions were disintegrating: he could find tortellini with cream sauce in Venice, Rome or Milan, but not local dishes, replaced by shrimp cocktails and pilau rice with prawns. We overcame that moment in history; then came *nouvelle cuisine* with its tiny portions and plating borrowed from French cooking, which was a disaster. Later, luckily, traditional regional cooking was re-evaluated and ingredients rediscovered which are far superior to those found years ago. Now some threat of degeneration has resurfaced: we Italians don’t understand its strength and risk following international fads. If eminent food guides praise northern Italian or South American cuisine, cooks believe that they will have success by following their methods. Obviously we don’t ban innovation, but we must be very careful to avoid straying from the standards of our cuisine in the name of standardisation, which is currently a substantial risk”.

### From which standards must Italian cooking never stray according to the Academy?

“First and foremost, good taste. Then, respecting ingredients: it is useless to serve capers from Pantelleria or Cantabrico anchovies while being unable to recognise them by taste. The cook must not misrepresent or distort the flavour of the primary ingredients, and must know how to present a traditional recipe in a recognisable manner: for example, an excellent carbonara need not be identical to that found in traditional Roman inns, but must recall its flavour”.

### It is commonly thought that Italian cuisine cannot be codified...

“Indeed, it cannot. Italian cuisine, as such, does not exist, which is why we

*The Academicians applaud in the conference room*



*The splendid celebration’s final toast.  
From the left: Roberto Ariani, Cristina Bowerman, Paolo Marchi, Paolo Petroni*

are called the Italian Academy of Cuisine rather than the Academy of Italian Cuisine. Ours is not even a province-dependent cuisine, but varies over a much smaller territory, since by travelling only a few miles one encounters different recipes and traditions. I am Tuscan, but in Florence there is *ribollita* while in Livorno there is *cacciucco*. The Academy is often accused of calcifying cuisine because we have registered several recipes, but we do this only to preserve historical heritage rather than demanding that everyone slavishly follow these recipes”.

### What are the aims of the Italian Academy of Cuisine?

“Those of its founder, Orio Vergani: safeguard (therefore preserve) and enhance (bring into the future) Italian cuisine. Its other major goal is to have the significance of Italian cuisine recognised at the European level and by UNESCO. UNESCO’s recogni-

tion of the ‘Mediterranean Diet’ as part of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity applies to all countries around the Mediterranean basin. We Italians have been unable to make the most of the study carried out by the American Ancel Keys in Calabria. Even the apparent recognition of pizza in fact covered only the art of the Neapolitan pizza makers”.

### Given the unlikelihood of ‘Italian cuisine’ receiving recognition, what else has some chance of being recognised?

“Certainly pasta, internationally emblematic of Italian cuisine, which has supplanted French cooking in the restaurants of the best hotels. One can ascertain that a restaurant is Italian by observing that the menu is arranged by appetisers, first courses and second courses and that the dishes include pasta or risotto”.

**MARIELLA CARUSO**



# Voyage from Artusi to Adrià

*The new cuisine is no longer chef-centric but human-centric: so asserts Adrià, whose restaurant Condividere ('Sharing') will open on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June in Turin.*

BY ANTONIO GADDONI  
*Imola Delegate*



In today's ubiquitously televised 'showbiz cuisine', the cook's biography matters more than the flavours brought to the table, just as wine is now subordinated to words and only sells if reviewed favourably in food guides. Let us hope for a return to traditions tempered by a willingness to innovate, respecting the motto of Curnonsky (Maurice Edmond Sailland), the twentieth century's 'Prince of Gastronomy': "good cooking is when things taste of what they are".

Artusi, as we are frequently reminded by food and wine critic Pierantonio Bonvicini, laid down the rhythm and mores of cuisine, inter alia through his dictum "Conti corti e tagliatelle lunghe" (literally, "short bills and long tagliatelle") and his advice on diet and hygiene: a veritable bulwark against the culinary affectations which have run rampant for centuries (wine clarified with fish glue and poppy oil mixed into olive oil, for example). It surely is no

coincidence that Artusi's manual for young women remains one of the world's most widespread books.

If the 18<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the diffusion of tea and coffee, the 19<sup>th</sup> was the century of great inventions in the culinary field, such as the chef's hat and the restaurant as we understand it today. The first food guide, the *Almanach des Gourmands*, was published in Paris between 1803 and 1812 by Grimod de la Reynière; in 1871, the Liebig company perfected the meat extract used in bouillon cubes; in 1886 Knorr released powdered soup; and baking powder was invented in 1894. It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that Georges Auguste Escoffier, one of history's greatest cooks, began his career.

The 20<sup>th</sup> was the century of *nouvelle cuisine*, born in the 1970s: "all in the bill, nothing on the plate", lamented food critics. In the eighties, fast food held sway, while in the nineties we saw the rise of ethnic fusion cuisine and

molecular gastronomy, whose father was Ferran Adrià: his historic restaurant El Bulli in Roses, north of Barcelona, closed in 2012, but brought a paradigm shift in cooking.

In 2004, Ferran Adrià was included in *Time 100* (*Time* magazine's list of the hundred most influential current figures). El Bulli garnered three Michelin stars and ranked first in *Restaurant* magazine's *The World's 50 Best Restaurants* for three consecutive years, from 2006 to 2009. Then came the more recent era of foodie television: televised cooking difficult to replicate at home. Finally, there is the resurgence of Ferran Adrià, who gathered 500 people in Spain, each with a specialised area of expertise, to invent a new cuisine reinstating the human being, rather than the chef's biography, as the rightful focus of the entire endeavour; and this is to be unveiled in Turin on the 8<sup>th</sup> of June.

"Communicating: the past is fundamental for understanding the future, and it must be clear that when we share food, we are more importantly sharing knowledge", asserts Ferran Adrià, who has chosen Italy for opening his first restaurant outside Spain: Condividere, in collaboration with Lavazza. The interiors were created by the Oscar-winning set designer Dante Ferretti, and the kitchen will be supervised by the brilliant young Italian chef Federico Zanasi. "The idea behind Condividere" - Adrià reminds us - "will be a view of gastronomy which revolves around human beings and their need for socialisation and sharing, their search for quality and their love of food".



# Precious health-giving foods

*A map of the beneficial substances contained in foods which interact with our genes.*

BY NICOLA BARBERA

Milano Duomo Academician

A careful and healthy diet helps us to avoid weight gain and age better by contributing to the prevention of many diseases, particularly those of the digestive and cardiovascular systems, by maintaining a low level of oxidation inside the body, thereby limiting cholesterol accumulation in the blood and consequently reducing the risk of hypertension and arteriosclerosis.

Beneficial foods, precious allies in our quest for health, include fish (especially oily fish), vegetables, seasonal fruit, legumes and cereals (preferably whole-grain).

Let us delve into greater detail by beginning with **aromatic herbs**, which, used in small doses, not only add flavour and personality to many recipes, but also

- each in its own specific way - favour the secretion of gastric juices, facilitate the reduced use of salt and other condiments, and have medicinal properties thanks to their essential oils rich in active principles with purifying, diuretic, tonic, relaxing or antibacterial functions. Some examples: **mint**, in addition to being refreshing and aiding digestion, is anti-inflammatory in cases of irritable bowel; **sage**, whose name is etymologically related to 'health' (from the Latin *salvia*, from *salvus* - 'healthy', 'whole', also meaning, and related to, 'safe'), has antispasmodic properties; **thyme** is an antibacterial used by the Romans to make cereals last longer; the essential oil of **dill** has medical and therapeutic uses; **myrtle** is noted for its digestive properties; and **parsley** is rich in vita-

min C, which aids iron absorption and protects from free radicals.

**Vegetables**, closely related to aromatic herbs and likewise beneficial to health, include **cabbages**, rich in vitamins and minerals, veritable dietary supplements which slow cellular ageing by counteracting free radicals, besides defending against colon tumours; cabbage can be eaten raw or briefly steamed. The characteristic sulphuric odour which cabbage releases during cooking can be reduced by adding a slice of peeled lemon into the cooking pot and/or a cotton ball soaked in wine vinegar between the pot and the lid. Oddly enough, cabbage was allegedly the only food of Diogenes of Sinope (the cynic philosopher of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC who believed that the wise could forgo the unes-





sential). **Carrot** (originally white, like **parsnips**, or purple, reddish or black until the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when botanists in the Netherlands used selective breeding and hybridisation to obtain an orange carrot honouring the ruling House of Orange-Nassau), is the vegetable richest in beta-carotene, favouring the production of melanin which protects the skin from the sun's ultraviolet rays while creating a pleasing tanned appearance. The bulbous leaf sheaths at the base of **fennel**, 85% of whose worldwide production comes from Italy, are edible and are known in Italian as *grumolo*; what is commonly known as 'fennel seed', actually fennel fruit, is used as an aromatic agent or in tisanes against abdominal bloating. Fennel is an effective diuretic and digestive aid.

The vegetable garden has long been a crucial food source in rural culture, enriched over time with new vegetables of Asiatic origin, such as **aubergine** and **artichoke**, whose cynarine favours bile secretion by the liver and hence fat absorption. Interestingly, **tomato**, particularly rich in fat-soluble lycopene, improves with cooking. This excellent cardiovascular protector also hinders prostate cancer. Of Peruvian origin, tomato was originally regarded with suspicion in Europe and initially used as an ornamental plant, especially in its yellow variety (hence its Italian name *pomodoro*, 'golden apple'), but finally entered French kitchens in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

For millennia, **edible herbs** constituted first a staple food for human ancestors before the advent of hunting, and then a convenient source of fresh and varied seasonal fare. Leafy greens, typical winter produce, include **spinach**, **lettuce**, and such herbs as **chard**, **chicory** (whose leaves may be jagged or have wide white midribs; the sprouts at the heart of chicory plants are known as *puntarelle*) and **beet greens** (known in Tuscany as *bietoline*) are important for health because they contain folic acid, magnesium, vitamin C and fibre, which help to boost natural defences and de-

toxify the body, thereby promoting a healthy heart and figure. To minimise the loss of minerals and vitamins, vegetables should be boiled in an open pan, which preserves their brilliant colours; it is better still to steam them.

**Legumes** are hearty, affordable (recalling St. Francis' praise of water in the *Canticle of the Sun*: "multo utile et humile et pretiosa" - most useful, humble and precious) and of ancient origins: there is evidence of lentils in south-western Asia around 7000 BC. **Beans** contain lecithin, capable of emulsifying fats and cholesterol; **peas**, of Persian origin, are the most digestible pulses due to their low starch content. Health-wise, legumes should be eaten at least three times a week: in soups, combined with cereals (rice and peas, pasta with beans or chickpeas, beans and barley etc), helpfully replacing a steak, but also alongside fatty foods, whose excess fats they can absorb, as in the classic New Year's dish of sausage and lentils (*cotechino e lenticchie*). Legume-cereal pairings are complementary because they combine the carbohydrates from the cereals and the proteins from the legumes; furthermore they contain high fibre and no cholesterol. Another advantage is that legume cultivation has a low environmental impact. The intestinal bloating which can result from eating legumes can be reduced by eating them puréed.

One hardly need mention fresh fruit, which is always healthy and can be eaten every day, even several times a day. The health benefits of **apples** are proverbial; **pears** contain 16% of the recommended daily allowance of fibre and are thirst-quenching and easily digestible, being therefore particularly advisable in the diet of children and the elderly. **Watermelon**, similarly to other red fruits including **strawberries**, **raspberries** and **cherries**, contains vitamin C, magnesium, selenium, flavonoids and lycopene (like tomato), and is therefore beneficially antioxidant; **melons**, **peaches** and **apricots**



combat the signs of ageing, contribute to the health of skin and eyes, and are hydrating and refreshing. **Bananas** are nutritious and rich in potassium and vitamin B; **plums**, **blackberries**, **blueberries** and **black figs** help to reduce fatigue, especially in the legs, and slow ageing, thanks to their carotenoids. In the autumn, **table grapes** (the seedless varieties are known as 'apyrene', from the Greek 'lacking a seed/nucleus') gently and beneficially prepare the organism for the change in seasons: the skin of black grapes contains vegetable polyphenols including resveratrol, a strong antioxidant and cardiovascular protector, therefore countering cell degeneration (which begins in our thirties!). In winter, in terms of local (Italian) fruit, Mother Nature is especially generous with **citrus fruits** rich in vitamins: **oranges** (which boost immunity), **grapefruits** (protective against heart attacks and prostate cancer), and **mandarins** (easy to eat even for children, because their thin and fragrant peel separates easily from the flesh). Freshly squeezed citrus juice should be drunk not only at breakfast, but as a thirst-quencher throughout the day, especially to replace overly sweetened 'fruit juices'.

Let us conclude this overview, however patchy and incomplete, by acknowledging the new frontier represented by nutrigenomics, which aims to regularise our metabolism by studying how substances in food interact with our genes, thereby modulating cellular responses: many diseases originate from cell membrane inflammations caused by diet.

NICOLA BARBERA