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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
BASTONI, ARNOLDO MONDADORI, ATTILIO NAVA,
ARTURO ORVIETO, SEVERINO PAGANI, ALDO PASSANTE,
GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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On the cover: Graphic elaboration of *La nappe à carreaux rouges* (1910), by Pierre Bonnard; private collection.

Restaurants that sell 'hot air'

Leaving aside chef Nicola Dinato's self-effacing humour, minuscule portions of the ubiquitous trendy ingredients are frequently sold for exorbitant prices.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
President of the Academy

An accomplished Michelin-starred restaurateur has cheekily admitted to including 'hot air' among the many excellent victuals on his menu. This is in fact a sort of 'cloud' made of tapioca puffed up in the oven and then fried; it is hollow inside, literally containing hot air. Similarly delicious is the Red Guide's comment on the starred chef: "techniques and excellent raw materials vie to create results of impressive heft".

The *Espresso* newspaper's restaurant guide, awarding one chef's hat, expresses itself similarly: "Technique and creative flair go hand in hand", after declaring this restaurant's cuisine a "multiverse". The *Espresso* also dedicates an intense cameo to Massimo Bottura, affirming inter alia that "art is alive because it inhales our breath and exhales it back to us as a finished message. Art has the power to change our minds". When it comes to describing top restaurants, our valiant reviewers and food critics raid the dictionary for bombastic adjectives, plunging headlong into effusive hyperbole and reckless rhetoric as if jousting in a lexical tournament. Very often, however, these exalted chefs do truly sell hot air, and at a high price. Minuscule portions of the usual trendy ingredients combined often in excessive numbers, thereby drowning out each other's flavours, aiming to impress by outclassing one's star-studded colleagues with one's superior imagination while, alas, perhaps committing basic technical faux pas. The clientele is varied and some are impervious to exorbitant prices, and so we find an appetiser of *crudo di fassona* ham for 48 Euros, a Milanese saffron risotto for 42 Euros, *tagliatelle* with *ragù* meat sauce for 60 Euros, a portion of bass for 90 Euros, a scant steamed scampi starter for 125 Euros, *spaghetti alla chitarra* pasta with mullet roe for 95 Euros, and a mullet fillet for 110 Euros. These are merely some examples of real prices in renowned restaurants. These prohibitive delicacies can be enjoyed on rare special occasions or to sample the creativity of Italy's leading restaurateurs,



but they cannot constitute the load-bearing pillars of Italian cuisine. The 2019 edition of our *Good Traditional Table* Guide was recently presented to the press: it aims to familiarise the public with ordinary and sometimes slightly elevated, but not elite, restaurants in which to enjoy our flavoursome traditional fare. We inhabit different worlds, admittedly, but both restaurant worlds must coexist, perhaps while striving to avoid extreme hot-air affectations.

P.S. Counterorder, comrades! Following the counterorder illustrated in our September Focus, we now have another: meat is healthy! Animal proteins are beneficial and steak may be safely enjoyed, since it contains an abundance of vitamin B12. After the WHO sounded the alarm on the carcinogenic potential of red meat, a British research project from the University of Oxford has rehabilitated 'flesh', which aids brain and muscle development and skeletal growth. All told, you have probably figured out that we might as well eat what we please, in moderation, without going overboard but also without the holy terror of enjoying our favourite foods.



A prestigious team

The Academy's cultural role becomes ever more vigorous.

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO



The members of the renewed "Franco Marengi" Study Centre met at the Principe di Savoia hotel in Milan. The many new members joined after demonstrating their interest in participating in this authoritative body. The team will remain in office for the next three years. As noted by President Petroni, additional members can be appointed up to a maximum of 15, and one seat will be reserved for the person replacing Gualtiero Marchesi: an authority in the restaurant world,

but "outside the mainstream media". After a welcome by the Study Centre's President, Sergio Corbino, the speakers introduced themselves and their background, already displaying professionalism and competence but especially passion and enthusiasm for their upcoming roles.

Then came the self-introduction of Vice-President Giuseppe Benelli, formerly a lecturer in theoretical and linguistic philosophy at the University of Genoa. As well as being the President of the

Giovanni Capellini Academy of Sciences in La Spezia and other prestigious bodies, as President of the Fondazione Città del Libro (City of Books Foundation), which organises the Bancarella Prize, in 2006 he created the Culinary Bancarella Prize in collaboration with the Academy, speaking of which he noted what an incredible public interest there is in food-related publications. Other university lecturers, both at the University of Milan, joining the team were Andrea Vitale, already a member of the Centre, who teaches food law and economics, restaurant management and law, and workplace security management in food businesses, and Luca Chiesa, who teaches and conducts research on food security.

Two other new members are long-standing journalists: Gigi Padovani, a food critic, already a member of the Centre and the winner of several prizes including the Culinary Bancarella and the AIG's Prix de la Littérature Gastronomique, and Morello Pecchioli, who created and has curated the *Taste* page of the daily *L'Arena di Verona*.



Roberto Zottar



Gigi Padovani



Giuseppe Benelli (in the foreground) with Aldo Tammaro

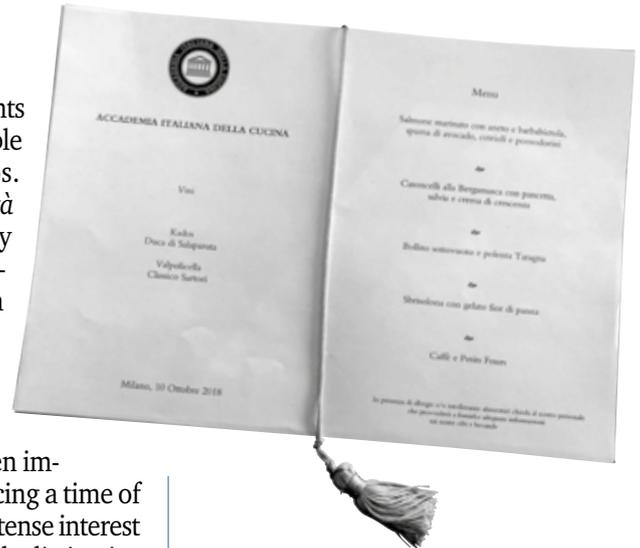


He currently writes for *Vitae*, the magazine of the Italian Association of Sommeliers, and the Italian daily *La Verità*. Giancarlo Saran, an Academician of the Treviso Delegation, is co-author of two columns for the same daily: *Peccati di Gola* (*Sinful Indulgence*, containing restaurant reviews) and *La Storia in Tavola* (*History at the Table*); with ‘gastronaut’ Davide Paolini he also co-authored *Il Gastronomo nel Veneto* (*The Gastronomer in the Veneto*), published by the newspaper *Il Sole 24 Ore*. Professor Aldo Tàmmaro of the Milano Brera Delegation is emeritus chief of geriatrics at the Pio Albergo Trivulzio Geriatric Institute in Milan, to which he has dedicated much of his scientific activity and cultural and practical interests relating to the link between lifestyle (physical activity, diet, nutrition) and health and longevity. Gorizia Delegate Roberto Zottar is an expert wine taster certified by the Italian National Association of Wine Tasters (ONAV) and a member of the Duchy of Friulian Wines, and since 2017 he is responsible for the food portion of the programme *Vita nei Campi* (*Life in the Fields*) on Italy’s national radio station RAI Radio 1.



Giancarlo Saran (left) with Luca Chiesa

gazine, to render its contents and graphics more palatable for patrons of bookshops. Indeed, the monthly *Civiltà della Tavola* is already fully equipped for a larger audience, since it can count on print runs and cultural contents capable of attracting readers and maintaining a high-quality publication, especially today when important periodicals are facing a time of crisis. This topic elicited intense interest from the Centre. The highly distinctive cover was praised, as was President Petroni’s idea of arranging the articles’ topics into thematic sections and examining the possibility of some colour pages. A suggested strategy to spark readers’ interest was to decouple the magazine’s first portion, the articles, which would be in bookshops, from the second, about the Academy’s activities, which would only be added to the issues received by Academicians. Other suggestions abounded: emphasising current events - “the world must know what is happening within Italian cuisine” (Morelli) - but also culinary history on a plate - “people eat history” (Padovani); alerting the public against fake news (Tàmmaro); and retaining the President’s Focus article, which is essential, iconic, a signature feature (Chiesa, Pecchioli, Vitale). Everyone pledged their maximum collaboration to the magazine, with articles, reviews and interviews. The order of business included many other topics, including a ‘dream’ of President Petroni: a history of Italian cuisine in cartoon format for primary and secondary school children. Everyone pronounced this an engaging idea, committing to create an outline of topics within the next six months. Paolo Petroni then spoke of the Academy’s publications already in bookshops, to which the new *Good Traditional Table Guide* has now been added. Regarding the restaurants reviewed by the Academy, he asked for the participants’ opinion regarding the “President’s Star Picks” (which to retain and



which to replace) and supplied them with assessment forms and comment forms for the online Guide. This discussion was also animated, with the many participants exuding a desire to take action, be involved, and work enthusiastically for our Academy.

“FRANCO MARENGHI” STUDY CENTRE

Sergio Corbino
President

Giuseppe Benelli
Vice-President

Elisabetta Cocito
Secretary

Luca Chiesa
Gigi Padovani
Morello Pecchioli
Giancarlo Saran
Aldo E. Tàmmaro
Andrea Vitale
Roberto Zottar



Walking together

The Regional Coordinator's role is important and can be effectively performed.



*Top left: Franco Zorzet (Veneto);
centre: Rosa Cartella (Western Sicily)
and Rossana Galletti (Western Tuscany)*



*Lower left: Flavio Bisello (Marche);
centre: Fabio Giavolucci (Romagna)*



The Principe di Savoia hotel in Milan hosted a meeting of Regional Coordinators, many (15 out of 26) newly appointed. The appointment of new officials is a lengthy and very complex endeavour, noted President Paolo Petroni in his opening remarks, following the decision not to merge the roles of Councillor and Coordinator, thereby allowing these roles

to be distributed among a greater number of Academicians. Petroni also noted the significant changes among Delegates with the recent replacement of several who had filled that role for over twelve years. The Coordinators for Valle d'Aosta (only two Delegations) and Basilicata (possibly still to be appointed) were not nominated. The President recalled the establishment of the post of Coordinator, initially termed 'Regional Delegate', and its increasing importance due to the need for liaison when a region is divided into two areas or when a territory contains numerous

Delegations. Consequently the Coordinator's role was incorporated into the Statute, facilitating the coherent organisation of the Academy's events and conferences within the area of jurisdiction and gather its Delegates at least annually to agree on projects, avoiding duplicates. A delicate operation, the President emphasised, which however can be performed effectively through a positive and proactive attitude. Petroni also reminded the members, especially the new ones, that the By-laws mandate that Coordinators be members of the Regional Study Centres, but that their organisational meetings refrain from overlapping with those of the RSCs, since they are meetings with a practical purpose, to which the Directors of the RSCs can be invited, rather than social gatherings. Before yielding the floor to the participants, Paolo Petroni invited them to ask him any questions to clarify the nature of their duties.



REGIONAL COORDINATORS' MEETING

Massimo Percotto (Friuli - Venezia Giulia)



Giuseppe De Simone (Campania)



Anna Maria Lombardi (Molise)



Some suggested greater involvement by Coordinators in awarding 'temples' (equivalent of 'stars'), prizes and Good

Cuisine Diplomas to restaurants (Alessandro Corso, Southern Puglia; Ciriaco Danza, Northern Puglia; Gabriele Gasparro, Rome; Franco Zorzet, Veneto; Anna Maria Lombardi, Molise). Pier Paolo Veroni (Emilia) praised the increased feminine presence in Delegations, providing the President with another opportunity to point out his efforts to ensure this, as well as the reduction of Academicians' average age, currently 58-59 years.

to make the Academy a presence in this important milieu, despite the current difficulties involved (affecting all Guides except the Michelin).

Indeed, the Academy has every right to participate in the food guide market, since its guide was the first in Italy (created in 1961 on the initiative of Orio Vergani) to describe the dishes offered by the restaurants under review. The Michelin guide, created in 1957, was only a list of restaurants.

After its press launch, the Guide will sell for 13.90 Euros in bookshops. This is another project, alongside the *Food Culture Library* book series, which seeks to increase the Academy's visibility as an authoritative voice in the fine dining world.



Ciriaco Danza (Northern Puglia)

Wishing the Regional Coordinators all the best in their demanding tasks, Paolo Petroni moved to the next issue, that of the *Good Traditional Table Guide*. He announced that the new Guide, published by Vallardi, would be sold in bookshops, not so much to make vast sales but rather



From left: Giovanni Maria D'Amario (Abruzzo), Francesco Panu (Sardinia), Piero Spaini (Eastern Piedmont) with Alberto Negro (Western Piedmont)



Announcing the annual theme

The Ecumenical Dinner's theme for 2019 - Fresh and stuffed pasta and gnocchi - finds the Regional Study Centre Directors ready to get to work.



President Paolo Petroni between Sergio Corbino and Elisabetta Cocito

In the lower image: on the left, Sergio Corbino with Girolamo Cusimano (Western Sicily) and Graziella Soldato (Abruzzo); on the right: standing, Silvana Chiesa (Lombardy); sitting, Giorgio Viel (Friuli-Venezia Giulia)

The team of Regional Study Centre Directors (RSCD) also contains new faces. After announcing the merger of the two former areas of Lombardy (now united under RSCD Silvana Chiesa) and of Trentino with Alto Adige (under one RSCD, Gianni Gentilini), Paolo Petroni invited participants to introduce themselves briefly to know each other better. He also announced the new “Franco Marengli” Study Cen-

tre team, expressing optimism about the RSCs' continued and fruitful contribution to the Academy's activities, especially in publishing - speaking of which, the new *Food Culture Library* volume, *Sweet and Savoury Cakes and Pies in Traditional Regional Cuisine*, was distributed hot off the press.

The Directors' roles are now established, the President added, as is their relationship with the Regional Coordinators who will be able to participate in the Regional Study Centres' meetings but without overlapping duties; in turn, the RSCDs will be able to collaborate on identifying new and timely themes for the meetings.

The RSCDs were informed of upcoming publishing projects, including an important restyling of the magazine *Civiltà della Tavola*, for which they were invited to collaborate substantially by contributing articles reflecting detailed first-hand experience of their areas, new topics and interesting talks at meetings. The discussion that followed found the





Ettore Bove (Basilicata)



President Petroni awards the Orio Vergani medal to executive chef Fabrizio Cadei with sous chef Marco Tamagnone



RSCDs in strong agreement about the new format (there was even talk of 'a revolutionary project') which also calls for collaboration by the members of the FMSC, already enthusiastically ready for action.



Among the publications, Paolo Petroni presented the 2019 edition of the *Good Traditional Table Guide*, published by Vallardi and available for the first time in bookshops for 13.90 Euros. A new opportunity for the Academy to be visible to a larger audience, thereby becoming a new player in the field.

Before concluding the meeting, the President announced that the book which until now had been issued in spring will no longer be produced, because its print run turned out to be unfeasible (it was not sent to Academicians). Instead, he introduced the annual theme for 2019, which will be the subject of the book distributed among all Academicians during the Ecumenical Dinner (and will also be available in bookshops): *Fresh and stuffed pasta and gnocchi*. With compliments from the Regional Study Centre Directors about the projects under way,



Davide Rossi (Romagna)

capable of maintaining the rigour of an authoritative Academy which is also meritoriously able to overhaul itself, the participants adjourned to an excellent meal prepared by chef Fabrizio Cadei of the adjoining restaurant Acanto, with one Michelin star: salmon marinated with dill and beets, avocado foam, cucumbers and cherry tomatoes; Milanese saffron risotto with braised marrowbone; small Milanese schnitzels with mixed greens and Pachino tomatoes; coffee foam with puffed rice and cold Port-infused custard. (S.D.L.)



*Top left: Enza Buonfrate (Southern Puglia)
Bottom, from left: Maria Attilia Fabbri
Dall'Oglio (Roma);
Cettina Pipitone Voza (Eastern Sicily)*



Far from the stars

The new Good Traditional Table Guide, available for the first time in bookshops, awards no points but indicates where traditional Italian cuisine is best prepared.

President Petroni with Marcella Meciani and Carlo Ottaviano



During a well-attended press conference, President Paolo Petroni presented the new edition of the *Good Traditional Table Guide*, published by Vallardi and available for the first time in bookshops for 13.90 Euros. The meeting was chaired by the journalist Carlo Ottaviano; the speakers included Marcella Meciani, Editorial Director at Vallardi.

Ottaviano immediately addressed the topic with two observations: the Guide's image outside the media sphere of the showbiz chefs, and its aloof position from fads, because cuisine is serious business. Marcella Meciani voiced her agreement, emphasising the editor's non-conformist stance in publishing a Guide dedicated not to televised cooking or Michelin-starred chefs but to 'good tables', meaning those restaurants where one might invite a friend visiting one's town or direct anyone wishing to try local traditional fare. President Petroni pointed out that the Academy does not favour food con-

cocted only to surprise people or innovation taken to excessive levels which does not induce customer loyalty, since diners may try a starred restaurant once and not return, partly due to its exorbitant costs. Instead the Academy, he continued, appreciates traditional but not ossified cuisine, resulting from subtle innovations which don't follow fashions but render food more palatable to a modern audience. The restaurants reviewed in the Guide are, for instance, those to which one may return to enjoy a well-crafted favourite dish.

Ottaviano further noted some of the Academy's Guide's defining characteristics which set it apart from the rest: the manageable number of restaurants reviewed (around 900, including some abroad), the ability to guide the reader to a reasonably swift choice, and the absence of points - stars, chef's hats, forks - using reviews from Academicians, ordinary diners, rather than dedicated inspectors. A useful tool is the 'do not miss' feature (indicating

signature dishes that one might wish to enjoy repeatedly). All told, the Guide's choices are not restaurants with 'all bark and no bite', but those where there is plenty to bite, and with pleasure.

Paolo Petroni concluded the conference on this very note, observing that one should go to restaurants not in thrall to restaurant guides' assessments, but to judge what is truly served there. The danger nowadays is for chefs to have their cuisine influenced by sponsorships or by the marketing ploys of companies which profit from certain products.

The Academy's Guide has a long tradition: it was the first published guide (in 1961) which reported what was on offer in the restaurants under review (the Michelin Guides of 1956 and 1957 merely indicated whether the establishments were luxurious). It was strongly desired by Orio Vergani who cared deeply about making the most of traditional Italian cuisine.