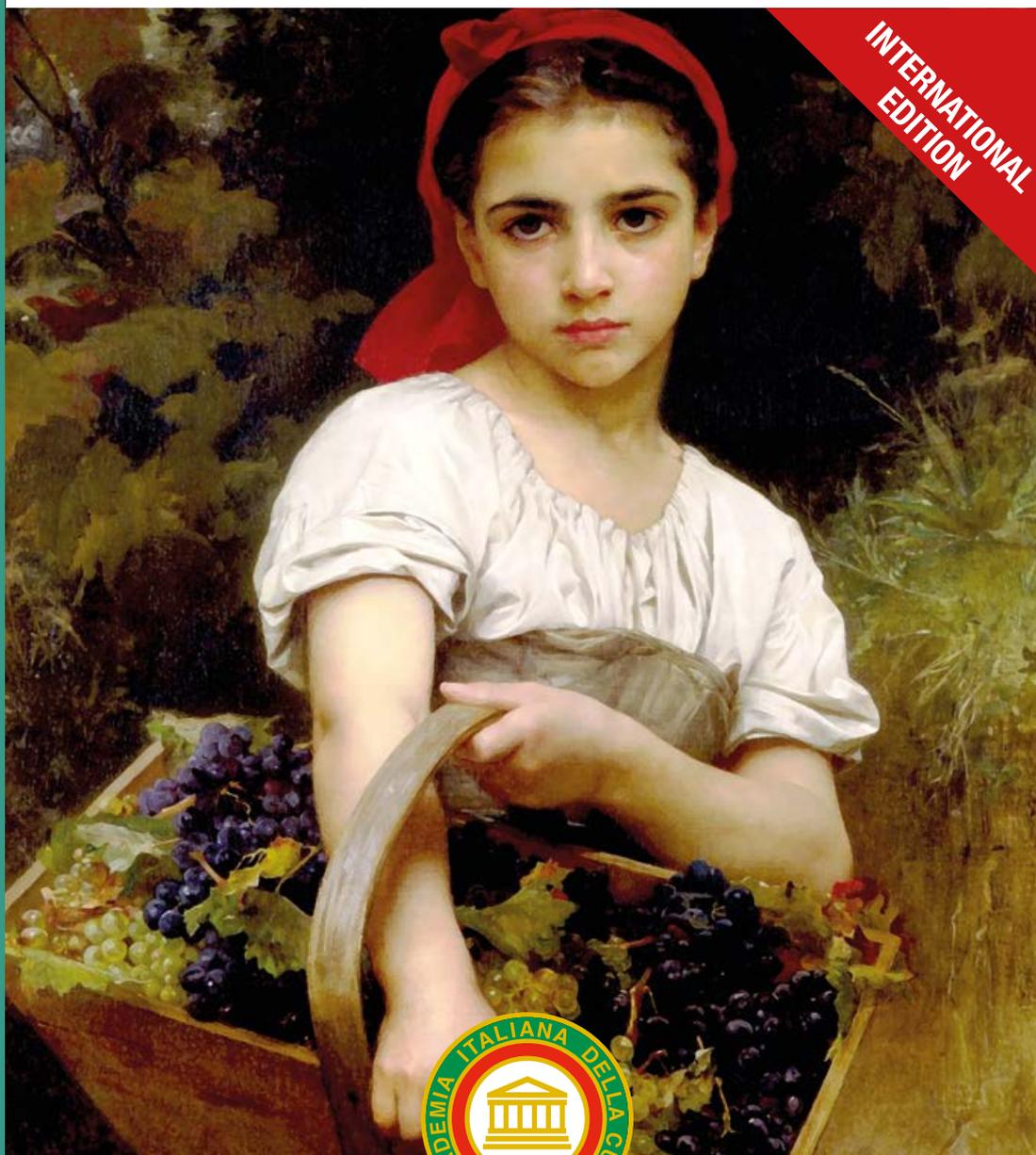


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**On the cover:** graphic elaboration of *The Grape Picker* (1875) by William-Adolphe Bouguereau; Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen, Denmark

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# Summer hits

*This year, blue crabs and high restaurant prices have dominated the news in the media.*

Until a few years ago, August was the month for UFO sightings. In summer, scarce news caused newspapers to fill up on stories about flying saucers and assorted alien visitors to sell what copies they could. Alas, nowadays bad news (the news that sells) is never scarce, taking no summer holiday break. But this year's summer hits have been two: **the invasion of the blue crabs** and **insane restaurant prices**, a phenomenon soon christened *Scontrinopoli* ('Receiptgate').

## *Will blue crabs make it big at the table?*

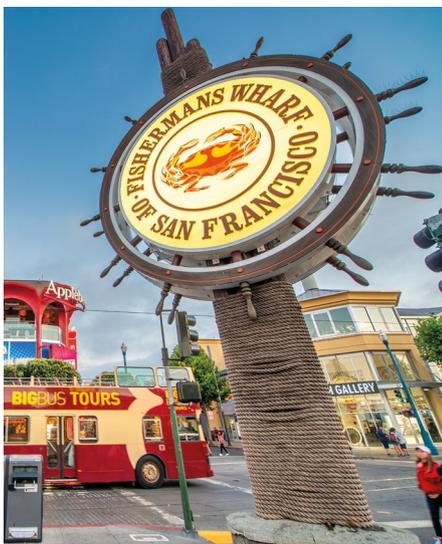
Crabs are prized in the USA. On the Atlantic coast, particularly in Baltimore, Chesapeake Bay blue crabs are much appreciated and are made into crab cakes or fried as 'soft-shell crabs' when moulting, as in Italy with *moleche*. Blue crabs are considered so precious that their harvest is regulated and only permitted at certain times of year. On the opposite coast, facing the Pacific, especially in San Francisco, the Dungeness crab (known in Italy as *granciporro*) has pride of place, attracting tourists to Fisherman's Wharf. Finally, another tasty treat is Alaskan King Crab, a giant whose legs are feasted upon after boiling. Italy is less crab-crazy; in the Veneto there are the aforementioned *moleche* and especially the delectable *granseola*. Will blue crabs make it big at the table? We hope so, as they would then be overfished

**by Paolo Petroni**  
*President of the Accademia*

and cleared from our seas, giving other molluscs and crustaceans a chance to thrive in peace.

## *Menus give itemised prices: there's no point complaining about them later*

Regarding 'receipt madness', we should clarify that **menus** (which by law must be displayed and offered for customers' perusal) **are binding contracts**, though atypically formulated, between restaurateurs and customers. Once we sit at a table and order food, we accept the conditions offered by the restaurateur, who is obliged, in turn, to respect them. The menu must, by law, provide itemised prices (by portion or weight), and no exceptions are allowed. So if a coffee is expensive when drunk at a table in Porto Cervo or Piazza del Campo in Siena, or a plate of spaghetti is pricey in the piazzetta of Portofino, we must know this before ordering. It's useless to complain afterwards. It's different if absurd additional costs are imposed, such as for an extra empty plate (especially if there's already a cover charge) or cutting a sandwich in half. In such cases one shouldn't pay; but those are extremes of uncouth stupidity, as with charging for lukewarm water for a baby bottle. But the summer is over, and these topics are slowly, regrettably, being replaced by far more worrisome news.





# Italian-inspired cuisine and products in Brazil

by Gerardo Landulfo  
São Paulo Delegate

*Immigrants popularised Italian recipes with local ingredient substitutions.*

**D**ishes which fly the Italian tricolour flag but are **unknown in Italy** were created in Brazil and elsewhere by the millions of Italians who emigrated to the Americas between the late 19<sup>th</sup> and mid-20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Desirous of recreating their home cooking, they **often could not find the right ingredients**; furthermore, geography and sanctions imposed during the Second World War distanced these transplants from their ancestral homeland. That was the origin of 'Italian-sounding' food, cleverly and imaginatively devised by native and foreign-born restaurateurs alike, often without knowledge of Italy's lan-

guage or cuisine. Yet we cannot generalise, but must honour the efforts of so many immigrants whose food culture and customs began taking over the world, creating the main markets for products and equipment 'Made in Italy', besides encouraging culinary tourism.

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*Import restrictions made recourse to local products necessary*

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In the particular case of Brazil, which hindered imports until the early 1990s,



buying authentic Parmigiano Reggiano was impossible; thus **no unfair competition or misinformation was intended by the local terms *parmesão* or *tipo parmesão* ('parmesan-type' cheese).** Produced on a large scale from the 1950s, the first *parmesão* became better known as *Faixa Azul*, a brand name deriving from the blue band hand-painted by **Vito d'Aprile**, a master cheesemaker who had arrived from Parma.

**Another example dates from distant 1911**, which might have marked the birth of a '*stracchino*-type' cheese had not the Italian **Mario Silvestrini** chosen the brand name 'Catupiry' ('very good' in Tupí-Guaraní languages) which entered Brazilian usage to mean **creamy spreadable cheese**. Rather than harkening back to some venerable family recipe, Silvestrini paid homage to his adoptive country, garnering commercial success for the quality of his work without using images or geographical references evoking Italy.

Crucially, Brazil is a multi-ethnic nation, where **names for foods often refer to the immigrants who first introduced or cultivated them**, such as the two types of *abobrinhas* (courgettes): Italian and Japanese. Yellow lemons are called *limão siciliano* to distinguish it from green limes, *limão taiti* ('Tahiti lemon'). The difference between *calabresa* and *toscana* variants of *linguiça* (sausage) is that the former is spiced with chillies popular in Calabria.

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*Cantinas - family-run restaurants - experienced a boom in the 1990s*

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Until the middle of the last century, in São Paulo **so-called 'Italian' food was of southern origin**, due to the many immigrants from Campania, Calabria and Puglia. **However, the first two professional Italian chefs arrived from Lombardy** in 1953, bringing a menu brimming with 'novelties' to the historic and elegant Grand Hotel Ca' d'Oro: Milanese saffron risotto, *casoncelli alla bergamasca*



(a type of northern stuffed pasta) and mixed boiled meats with Cremona relish. New restaurants and *cantinas* (family-run *trattoria* restaurants) then experienced a boom, **adapting recipes to suit customers** in a rapidly growing city. An example: ***filé à parmegiana*** (fillet parmigiana), similar to the *Milanese Napolitana* ('Neapolitan Milanese') breaded fried steak with tomato popular in Argentina. Classics of *cozinha italo-brasileira* (Italian-Brazilian cuisine) also include such pizzas as *frango com catupiry* (chicken and melted cheese) and *portuguesa* (cooked ham, eggs and onions); *sardella* (Calabrian spicy fish sauce, with added sweet pepper and using anchovies instead of whitebait); ***capelete à romanesca*** (meat-stuffed *cappelletti* pasta in a creamy ham and pea sauce reminiscent of *fettuccine alla papalina*); and *polpetone à parmegiana* (meat loaf stuffed with *mussarela* cheese, covered with tomato sauce and *tipo parmesão* cheese).

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*Brazilian tourists in Italy seek non-existent meals*

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Brazilian tourists in our *Bel Paese* are often disappointed by the impossibility of tasting these dishes *in loco*: not even a plate of *espagete à bolonhesa* in Bologna! Then again, between the two world wars the population of São Paulo rose from bare-

ly over 500,000 to over 2 million, with proportionately multiplying restaurants and *pizzerie*, mostly owned by Italian descendants who had never visited Italy or Brazilians or other foreigners with various roots, using ingredients other than the original ones and offering one-dish meals (meat or fish with a side of pasta) to please a mixed clientele.

In the 2000s, however, *trattorie* or restaurants offering *cozinha italiana contemporânea*, which have replaced *cantinas*, are numerous. Owners and cooks are Italian or Brazilian with Italian experience, and regional recipes are gaining ground. Yet nowadays many consumers in Brazil don't bother perusing supermarket food labels: they select brands or flavours based on habit. This explains why, for instance, Portuguese olive oil is the most purchased while its Italian counterpart accounts for only 7% of the market, notwithstanding minimal price differences. In collaboration with the Italian Consulate-General in São Paulo and the Italian-Brazilian Chamber of Commerce, ITALCAM (Câmara Ítalo-Brasileira de Comércio, Indústria e Agricultura de São Paulo), the São Paulo Delegation is participating in the project *The Extraordinary Italian Taste*, which aims to bolster authentic Italian products and combat the 'Italian-sounding' phenomenon, thereby protecting true Italian cuisine and promoting high-quality ingredients imported from Italy.

**Gerardo Landolfo**



# Confirmation doughnuts

by **Maurizia Debiaggi**

*Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician*

*Brasadè ('bracelets') come from the village of Staghiglione, in the Oltrepò Pavese area.*

**N**ot every doughnut has a silver lining, but no such doubts apply to *brasadè*, the traditional doughnuts prepared in Staghiglione village

following Signora Carla's ancient recipe. To reach her bakery in the Oltrepò Pavese area, one must follow a path flanked by a seemingly endless vista of hills and vineyards leading to Borgo Priolo, a village of about 1,300 souls in the heart of this Lombard wine-growing 'terroir'. Here, not only has time apparently stopped, but culinary traditions, deeply rooted in farming culture, have remained proudly intact.

**Carla Bernini** and her daughter own the village's last remaining oven producing these typical doughnuts, given De-

nominazione Comunale d'Origine (Municipal Designation of Origin) status in 2004.

The spacious workshop within the bakery, recognised as a *negozio storico* ('historical shop') in 2010 by the regional government of Lombardy, is pervaded by a comforting fragrance akin to an aromatic embrace which instantly imparts well-being - but, in the words of **Süskind**, "scent is like music: it can be described, but only by smelling it can we understand it".

*The long history of brasadè is, in some ways, similar to a novel*

The origins and history of these doughnuts are documented in the village church archives.

In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, about 15 families living in Staghiglione made these doughnuts, and many sold them as far as Tortona, Pavia, and the Montferrat and Lomellina areas, travelling on horses and carts.

**Brasadè means 'bracelet'**, because in former times, between the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, they were given as a snack to altar boys when they spent many hours in church during vespers. The youngsters kept these doughnuts on a string around their arms, under their robes, and nibbled them when they felt the pangs of hunger. In the same era, godmothers and godfathers gave these *brasadè* on a string to their charges undergoing Confirmation, and the number of 'threads' given was proportional to their wealth.

Today, over two centuries later, these doughnuts are still sold in the same arrangement: five doughnuts on one side of the string, five on the other, and the



eleventh *brasadè* functioning as a clasp to close the circle.

### *The recipe is shrouded in mystery*

Unlike these doughnuts' history, their recipe and its rationale are shrouded in mystery, **though its ingredients and cooking methods are known**: flour, lard and/or butter, sugar, salt and bicarbonate of soda, worked into a dough and formed into rings which are first boiled and then, once dry, baked in an oven. Carla has reconstructed the doughnuts' history from family accounts heard from when her uncle Mario, among the few descendants of the original 15 families, produced *brasadè* in Staghiglione, continuing the trade of *ciambellaio* (doughnut baker) undertaken by his family from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-20<sup>th</sup>, without revealing the secret recipe to anyone. Since 1970, Carla has been making them in her oven as did her mother, who had assembled secrets and techniques patiently gathered from her relatives. That patience paid off in shiny, slightly flaky doughnuts, neither too salty nor too sweet, "almost" like Uncle Mario's, perfect for dunking into milk, tea or... even red wine!

**The particularity of *brasadè*** lies in the **long life** imparted by their production methods, including 'double cooking'. Indeed, in days of yore *ciambellai* (the plural) prepared them in winter to sell at village fairs in spring; before being sold, the doughnuts were cooked again at low temperature, which 'dried' them and made them even more delicious.

### *The symbolic significance associated with Confirmation*

**What is the ancient flavour of *brasadè*? Like their fragrance, it is not easy to describe**; yet it's what motivated me to climb the green slopes leading to Staghiglione: the call of a true local 'comfort food', well known to those who were



children in the Seventies in Oltrepò Pavese and found those doughnuts for sale in markets, always arranged on a string. Even just nibbling them was fun: hard and compact, they required a small initial effort, but once they were 'broken in', they crunched between one's teeth and the flavour took over until 'one bite summoned the next'!

Early 19<sup>th</sup>-century *ciambellai* may have exported these doughnuts to nearby regions. Indeed, very similar products are found in Emilia Romagna: *brazadela* in Ferrara province and *busslanein* from Val Tidone, or, in Friuli, *colàz*, especially common around Udine and Pordenone. ***Brazadela, busslanein and colàz*, beyond recipe variations, share something else with *brasadè*: association with a religious ceremony.** They were given

for the sacrament of confirmation, and before being eaten, they were hung on a ribbon to the confirmands' clothes. Staghiglione doughnuts were additionally threaded by 'tens, plus one to fasten', just as rosary beads are arranged in 'decades', with each of the ten beads representing a Hail Mary, separated by a distinct eleventh item, a small medallion or larger bead, representing an Our Father.

In this light, these 'Confirmation doughnuts' appear to be much more than an ancient culinary tradition; they are also an interesting element in a culture that often imbues food with symbolic value, in this case associated with faith or spirituality, making it a means of spiritual expression.

**Maurizia Debiaggi**



# Salumaria: charcuterie of the sea

by **Claudio Nacca**  
*Roma Eur Delegate*

*A neologism for the use  
of charcuterie  
techniques to cure fish.*

**T**his increasingly widespread neologism, combining *salumeria* ('charcuterie') and *mare* ('sea'), most concisely and effectively expresses a new concept that was once the domain of small artisanal workshops specialising in smoking or otherwise preserving seafood, and has now forcefully irrupted into the high-end restaurant world thanks to the painstaking research conducted by certain particularly seafood-loving chefs.

Some trace this movement to **Josh Niland's** *The Whole Fish Cookbook*, which illustrates the real possibility of treating this prized food in unprecedented ways. This book encourages readers to consider fish for what it is: a rich protein source whose every cut deserves the same respect that meat has long received.

From choosing the raw material to processing it, from ageing and curing techniques to tricks for making skin crispy, Josh Niland questions all that many chefs thought they knew on the matter.

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*The fish is aged, seasoned  
and cured as if it were meat*

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In essence, very fresh **high-quality large fish** can be aged, seasoned and cured similarly to meat. This valuable raw material **can yield maritime pancetta, speck, guanciale, prosciutto, sausage and mortadella**, versatile elements in many recipes including such classics as *carbonara* or *amatriciana*, wherein they admirably replace pork *guanciale* or *pancetta*, infusing these traditional dishes with distinctive but no less pleasant flavours.

Drawing from the resources of seas but also lakes and rivers, genuine professionals have **revivified the art of charcuterie**, creating specialities able to present **the most delicious fish** in unexpected new ways: **as cured meats**, they prove **even more versatile**, whether to stuff sandwiches or provide alternatives to the 'same old' seafood recipes, thereby satisfying modern customers' increasing demand for creativity and innovation.

At the root of 'marine charcuterie' is **the necessity to prolong the shelf life of otherwise perishable ingredients**, as fish are, using ingenious ways to preserve them so as to enjoy them safely long after they've been harvested. In this case, the brilliant flash of intuition





was to borrow such long-established methods as **drying, smoking, seasoning and salting**, transferring them from land meats to fish.

Hence the cured fish increasingly found throughout Italy. The north, for instance, offers **regina di San Daniele** ('queen of San Daniele'), the fishy counterpart of PDO San Daniele **prosciutto: a rainbow trout smoked** using wood flours, berries and aromatic herbs to preserve the delicate flavour of its lean flesh.

Trout is also the protagonist of another product, this time from Piedmont, called **salame di trota** ('trout salame') and prepared by dicing the trout flesh, seasoning it with aromatic herbs and giving it the classic salame shape, which is then steamed or smoked.

The most versatile ingredient (and surely one of the most popular) in *salumaria* is tuna, **whose red, flavoursome, iron-rich flesh in many ways resembles land-based meat**: it can yield **bresaola** (prepared similarly to its beefy original, through salting, seasoning and drying with controlled temperature and humidity), **sausages, salami** (such as the 'fisher-style' **pescatorini from Puglia**, small salami combining tuna, swordfish and other oily fish, resembling the classic 'hunter-style' **cacciatorini**), **thunnus** (aged tuna fillet), and such specialties as **musciame** and **ficazza**.

*Tuna is perhaps the most versatile ingredient*

**Musciame** is a delicacy found in **Liguria, Sardinia and Sicily** (but also some parts of Spain), as it originated from the

Arab dominion in Europe: it is a **compact block of bluefin tuna ventresca** (belly) worked in various phases (dried and preserved in oil) and **sliced as cured meats are**, to be served with a side of tomatoes or on **crostini**.

Instead, **ficazza** is from Sicily, more specifically Favignana. This **tuna salame uses less 'noble' tuna cuts** that are often rejected, and is notable for its intense flavour. Various tuna cuts are minced, mixed, salted, spiced with pepper and placed in pork casings.

Already cited among the ingredients of **pescatorini**, **swordfish has ample use in other sausage-like preparations** thanks to its popularity and characteristics. Examples include smoked swordfish fillet, swordfish **lonzino** (cured 'loin') with wild fennel, and swordfish-based **fish salame**. Swordfish also co-stars with yellowfin tuna and calamari in a tooth-

some recipe: **seafood mortadella**, very similar to its classic pork version, whose elastic texture and intense aroma conquers hearts and palates.

*The other side of the coin: salty prices*

The other side of the coin is that such products are still associated with **high-level restaurants** and **niche** boutique shops, with prices disproportionate, therefore, to the cost of raw materials and labour. Prejudices against 'contamination' of original recipes may prevent the diffusion of these products and related information, without, however, extinguishing the hunger for knowledge and experimentation proper to Academicians.

**Claudio Nacca**

## AMATRICIANA WITH TUNA GUANCIALE

**Ingredients:** 400 g of paccheri pasta, 500 g of pachino cherry tomatoes, 300 g of tuna guanciale, 50 g of PDO pecorino romano, 1 clove of garlic, 1 chilli pepper, 2 anchovy fillets, 1 dl of extra-virgin olive oil.



**Preparation:** after carefully washing and chopping the tomatoes, gently fry them until soft for 5 minutes in the oil alongside the chopped garlic, spicy pepper and anchovies. Add the tuna guanciale, thinly sliced, and cook for another 6-7 minutes. Meanwhile, immerse the pasta into a pan containing abundant boiling water, cook for 7 minutes, and be sure to drain it while still al dente and immediately mix it into the sauce in the pan. Stir in a thread of oil and a dusting of aged pecorino romano to make it creamier. Serve in well-heated plates, dusted with more pecorino.