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**EDITOR IN CHIEF**  
PAOLO PETRONI

**COPY EDITOR**  
SILVIA DE LORENZO

**LAYOUT**  
SIMONA MONGIÙ

**TRANSLATOR**  
ANTONIA FRASER FUJINAGA

**THIS ISSUE INCLUDES ARTICLES BY**  
MORELLO PECCHIOLI,  
PAOLO PETRONI,  
MAURO RUGGIERO,  
GIANCARLO SARAN.

**PHOTO CREDITS**  
ADOBE STOCK.



**PUBLISHER**  
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA  
Via NAPO TORRIANI 31 - 20124 MILANO  
TEL. 02 66987018 - FAX 02 66987008  
PRESIDENTE@ACCADEMIA1953.IT  
SEGRETERIA@ACCADEMIA1953.IT  
REDAZIONE@ACCADEMIA1953.IT  
WWW.ACCADEMIA1953.IT



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# A brilliant year filled with events and achievements

*New challenges await us  
as we defend our food culture  
in Italy and abroad.*

**W**ith this December issue we bring our seventieth anniversary year to a close. We abandon our beautiful birthday logo, returning to the original one that will accompany us for years to come. It's been a brilliant year, full of events and achievements: **an extraordinarily unifying year for our Academicians**, who will treasure the splendid volume *1953-2023*, dedicated to our Academy's origins, present and future. I am certain that all participants have perceived and shared this celebratory atmosphere during all the convivial gatherings marking the end of the year.

*We will face new challenges and activities  
while defending our cuisine*

We will now face new challenges and activities while defending our cuisine and food culture in Italy and abroad, where Delegations and Legations have blossomed and nowadays **are major players in combating counterfeit Italian products and restaurants**. The relevant Ministries, of Culture, Agriculture and Foreign Affairs, have confidently entrusted this role to us. For all three, our Association plays a crucial, determining part in furthering **the recognition of Italian cuisine for UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage status**. Over the coming year we shall therefore be notified, as needed, about the various related activities to be undertaken.

All Academicians must then collaborate with their Delegates and Legates to render our *Restaurant Guide* and our new *Good Table Guide* ever more reliable and comprehensive. Meanwhile, window stickers and display signs are currently being sent to over 1000 restaurants reviewed by the Guide.

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



*Monitoring restaurants  
is particularly important nowadays*

Monitoring restaurants is particularly important nowadays because **the sector is facing various problems**, from unjustified price hikes to worsening service entrusted to casual, poorly paid and shoddily instructed staff. Attention should be shifted from showy open kitchens (revealing that cooks 'plate' but don't cook) to dining rooms, which need more work on furnishings and customer care. 'Starred' chefs, often wily managers but absent, ghost-like, from their kitchens, make news and money (sold-out New Year's Eve dinners for 400/600 euros apiece, wines not included!), but **our traditional cuisine**, so widely praised and loved, **needs something other than show chefs championed by the press** and public relations machines. As this academically exhilarating year approaches its end, I wish to thank the Editorial Office in Rome for this magazine and our newsletter and all the staff of the Milan Headquarters for their work, undertaken with precision, professionalism and passion for all that we do. Finally, heartfelt thanks to the President's Council, which convened several times and whose support was a determining factor for all the initiatives undertaken. Best wishes for a prosperous 2024!





# G-astronomy: food in space!

by **Mauro Ruggiero**  
Prague Academician

*Interview  
with astronaut  
Paolo Nespoli.*

Paolo Nespoli between the Academician  
Mauro Ruggiero (left) and Prague Delegate  
Claudio Poggi



**T**he International Space Station (ISS), a research laboratory floating in space, is the world's most important scientific and technological collaboration programme, involving the USA, Russia, Japan, Canada and the 11 European ESA (European Space Agency) countries. The Italian astronaut **Paolo Nespoli** undertook several ISS missions until 2017. He was interviewed about the interesting theme of space gastronomy on the occasion of the important event "Italian Cuisine Out of this World", organised in Prague by the Italian Embassy and Italian Cultural Institute and supported by our Prague Delegation.

## *What are ISS menus like?*

Food in space is a complex issue. Space agencies have had to find **food-packing methods that can withstand the journey and, especially, last a long time.** Alongside this, **the food must be varied**, satisfying the astronauts' preferences as much as possible; contain vitamins and proteins; and maintain the body's health in an environment which degrades it through microgravity. It must be prepared long in advance, allowing for **consumption even a year later.** It is prepared so as to last around 15 days after being opened. NASA long perceived food as mere fuel to feed the human machine, but it is far more: it has a social aspect, especially for us Italians. Acknowledging this, a quarter of astronauts' food is now provided by their home

agency. As a result, national space catering agencies now compete to find **solutions that satisfy both ISS guidelines and astronauts' taste buds, giving rise to so-called 'bonus food'.**

## *What are your 'space food' preferences?*

One day I was talking to an American school. A high-level NASA manager was visiting the school and asked me what I thought of the American food that we had aboard the ISS. I certainly couldn't reveal what I really thought! So, to defuse the situation, I replied that some days before **I had had a pizza craving** and as a joke had called a pizza restaurant near my home and ordered a pizza. When asked where it should be delivered, I had answered 'the Space Station'. At a certain point the manager looked perplexed, and after a while he said that I shouldn't worry because they "would figure something out". Some weeks later, a supply craft arrived, and Houston told us that there was a surprise for us in drawer number 425. Once the ship docked, we immediately investigated and found some boxes: they had sent four pizzas for six astronauts...

**Often Italian products have been sent here to make me feel somewhat at home;** I have always used them to organise a dinner for everyone, to show them that for us Italians, food is not just nutrition for the body but also has the social purpose of encouraging people to gather and converse.

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### *How is food prepared for space missions?*

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There are four food categories: dehydrated, thermostabilised, irradiated and dried. For example, irradiated foods are usually nitrogen-packed meats exposed to a source of gamma rays, so a steak won't go off even after a year, and when you open it, it smells as if it were just off the grill.

**Some foods, however, cannot be consumed in space. Liquids pose particular problems.** Liquids aboard the ISS usually consist of water with added soluble powders producing, for example, coffee, tea or fruit juices. But **fizzy drinks are tricky** because gas doesn't evenly distribute itself throughout a drink as it would on Earth. Once they tried bringing champagne, but it was a disaster. Besides, water plays a distinctive role aboard the ISS, because it is continuously recycled; hence the astronaut joke "we'll drink to-day's coffee tomorrow".

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### *What are the difficulties of eating and drinking in zero gravity?*

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The main problem is that **in space, things tend not to stay where we leave them.** The moment one touches anything, it scoots away. The same applies to food: if it's not damp - the damper it is, the more



it sticks to the sides of its container - it flies off. When we eat, we cut the edge off a sachet containing the food and eat out of it. Our cutlery consists of scissors and a long spoon: **we have no forks or knives.** We can easily finish our meal using these long cocktail spoons that reach all the way into the food sachets. However, things aren't easy if the food won't stick well to the sides of the packaging.

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### *How to guarantee that a mission's astronauts will receive all the necessary nutrients?*

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During the first missions, it was discovered that the astronauts had lost a lot of weight. Sadly, however, **they had not lost body fat but muscle mass.** Agencies therefore began barcoding food sachets: when astronauts eat, they scan each barcode. This tracks what they have eaten, and at the end of the day their protein, calorie and vitamin intake is clear. In theory we work less in space; however, paradoxically, to avoid losing weight **we must eat even more calories than we would eat on Earth.** It's counterintuitive but true! For example, if on Earth I need

1600 kcal, in space I'll need at least 2200.

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### *In 2007 he offered his crewmates the first Italian-style space dinner party*

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That event was promoted by our Academy's former Miami Delegate **Emanuele Viscuso**, who persuaded NASA, ASI (the Italian Space Agency) and ESA of the necessity to offer something special to astronauts. At the time, there was no 'bonus food'. NASA believed that it had solved the food problem. Some, however, kept saying that it was not so, and that the social, convivial aspect of food was missing.

Through Viscuso's efforts and thanks to ASI, which was finally persuaded to sponsor the convivial gathering with NASA, a trial was organised, eventually resulting in 'bonus food'. Since then, some have requested *fregola* (Sardinian pasta similar to couscous), others mackerel; I believe **Samantha Cristoforetti** requested spirulina, while a Belgian astronaut asked for *foie gras*... And on my last mission, I requested raw *prosciutto*.

**Mauro Ruggiero**





# Mostarda relish: part of the Christmas ritual

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

*Fragrant, spiced  
and pungent,  
it accompanies roast  
or boiled meats.*

**G**ian Galeazzo Visconti, Duke of Milan from 1395 to 1402, was greedy: for new territory, but also for good food. He was **particularly fond of mostarda from Voghera**, a small town near Pavia. In December 1397, he wrote to the town's podestà (highest civil authority) requesting that the apothecary **Petrus de Murris** (Pietro de Murri) prepare "a large tub of fruit and mustard relish [*uno zebro grande de mostarda de fructa cum la senavra*] as he knows how, which so pleases the illustrious lady, our consort [Caterina Visconti] and all our relatives; and ensure that it is good as always... We would be most grateful for this *mostarda* to be delivered in person before the Holy Christmas".

*Visconti's epistle is a reference point in the history of mostarda*

Visconti's epistle is a reference point in the history of *mostarda*, its association with other dishes, and culinary traditions. It informs us that **as early as 626 years ago, mostarda was already served with roast or boiled meats**, and that mediaeval princelings - ordinary people couldn't afford it - considered it **part of the Christmas ritual**. These associations and traditions have reached us intact: each yuletide gift hamper has its jar of *mostarda* relish alongside the standard *pandoro* (or *panettone*), sparkling wine, *zampone* (pig's trotter sausage), lentils and *grana* cheese. Interesting is the reference to the *zebro*, the tub or small barrel containing *mostarda*. Until the 1950s, before the advent of supermarkets and industrial food packaging, every Christmas under its festoons of hams and *cotechino* sausages every tiny food shop displayed its festive tub of

brightly coloured Cremona-style whole-fruit *mostarda* to be sold by weight, wrapped in waxed paper.

*Italy is rich in mostarda variants, often greatly differing from each other*

Italy is rich in *mostarde* (the plural) which differ, often vastly so, from each other. Hailing from Cremona, ***mostarda cremonese* is a triumph of roundness and colour**; its frisky flavour suits intense, hearty dishes. In a different region, from Vicenza in the Veneto, we find ***mostarda vicentina*, rather more aggressive and pungent** and again suitable for dishes able to withstand its personality. The Mantua type, ***mantovana*, is aristocratic, redolent of the Renaissance**: it admirably complements the *amaretti* biscuits in pumpkin *tortelli* pasta, but also desserts, including *panettone* and *pandoro*. The Bologna version, ***bolognese*, is tart** but extroverted, democratic, accepting of both bourgeois and peasant alliances. Because of such variation, dictionaries and cookbooks struggle to categorise this preparation, which **inhabits the border between sauces, condiments and sweets**. **Pellegrino Artusi**, the prophet of Italian gastronomy, unsure of where to place it in his index to *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (*Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*; 1891), relegated "***mostarda in the Tuscan manner***" (which "excites the appetite and favours digestion") to the section "Cose diverse" ("Various Things"), alongside coffee, tea and oil-marinated mushrooms. Whatever one's view, the fact remains that *mostarda* is vastly appreciated in Italian cuisine because **it goes with everything, or nearly**



**so:** boiled meats (*cotechino*, *zampone*, boiled tongue, capon), roast meats, game, stuffed pasta, desserts whether humble or otherwise, and even ice cream. And since “la bocca non si stracca se non sa di vacca” (“the mouth won’t tire until it tastes of cow”, meaning that meals must end with cheese), *mostarda* even plays well with *grana*, *caciocavallo*, *provolone*, *bagoss*, *pecorino*, *asiago* and all their cheesy brethren.

*Mostarda* as we know it nowadays dates to the final two centuries of the Middle Ages, and comes to modern tables with a well-established identity. Its earliest known written descriptions are from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. The *Liber de coquina* (*Book of Cooking*) written at the Neapolitan Angevin court, probably prompted by **Frederick II** himself, has a section *de musto et mustarda* (‘on must and *mostarda*’) with a recipe for *composto lombardico* (Lombard compote): boiled must and mustard seeds combined and kept in a small barrel for four months before being used as a sauce on pork or salted tench (fish).

A French text from 1288 mentions a similar product.

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*Its name derives from the union of two Latin words: “mustum ardens”*

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The word *mostarda* derives from the union of two Latin words: *mustum ardens*. The *ardens*, ‘ardent’, may refer both to the **boiling must** (*mustum*) and, especially, to the concoction’s **spicy flavour**, due to its pungent mustard seeds. At this point, **a distinction appears between Italian and Gallic mustard**, though their names have the same origin. The French call the mustard plant *moutarde*, used by extension for mustard and all mustard-containing products. The best-known type of Italian *mostarda*, instead, consists mostly of fruit with added sugar and essential oil of mustard. ***Mustum ardens* was first used for preserving food**, especially fruit. Mustard infusion could expand the consumption season of quinces, pears, apples, cherries, figs and other fruits, as well as vegetables such as pumpkin. The art of preparing



*mostarda* was well known in 14<sup>th</sup>-century monastery kitchens, though it hadn’t been invented there. The ancient Romans, as exemplified by **Columella** and **Apicius**, reduced must by lengthy boiling to obtain *sapa*, or *defructum*, to preserve apples, blackberries and figs. This did not involve mustard, better known as a digestive aid and sauce ingredient. **Pliny the Elder** suggested grinding mustard seeds with minced pine nuts and almonds.

Thanks to its mustard, sugar and spices, such as cloves and cinnamon, *mostarda* was used not only to flavour meats but also to preserve them.

15<sup>th</sup>-century recipe books brought *mostarda* from the Middle Ages into the Renaissance. **Maestro Martino** (Martino de Rossi), the 15<sup>th</sup>-century Gualtiero Marchesi, was cook to the Patriarch of Aquileia, and famous throughout Europe. His *Libro de arte coquinaria* (*Book of Culinary Art*) suggests three *mostarda* recipes, but they are chiefly sauces to flavour other foods. The first is the general recipe (mustard, almonds, vinegar, white breadcrumbs). The second, *mostarda rosca o pavonaza* (‘red or purple *mostarda*’), included raisins and cinnamon. The third was for travel, “*da portar in pezi cavalcando*” (‘to transport in pieces while riding’): nuggets of mustard, cinnamon, raisins and cloves to dilute in vinegar or mulled wine.

Cooks and historians are prone to intertwining history and gastronomy when tackling Martino’s work. Two of the foremost, born and raised in lands where *mostarda* is a religion, are **Bartolomeo Sacchi** of Cremona, known as Platina, who served two popes in the latter 15<sup>th</sup> century; and **Teofilo Folengo** of Mantua, father of macaronic Latin. The first mentions *mostarda* in *De honesta voluptate et valetudine* (*On honest indulgence and good health*); the

second, in his macaronic narrative poem *Baldus*, describes the procession of dishes appearing at a royal banquet: “*lexi, rostum, pernas, fasanos, caprettos, lepores...*” (“boiled meats, roasts, hams, pheasants, kids, hares...”) accompanied by a plethora of sauces, including *mostarda* “*quae per nasum mittit senapram*”: “which sends mustard up our noses”, tickling our mucosae.

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*Southern Italian mostarde reverse course, heading for sweetness*

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Besides the celebrated *mostarde* of **Cremona** and **Voghera** (using whole fruit), Mantua (traditionally made only with *Campanino* apples) and Vicenza, ***mostarda* from Carpi** was once famed and worthy of the pope’s table. In his mock-heroic epic poem *La secchia rapita* (*The kidnapped bucket*, 1621), **Alessandro Tassoni** of Modena describes a bigwig of the papal court receiving “two jars of delicious *mostarda* from Carpi” as a gift. What about southern Italian *mostarde*? They tend to reverse course and head for sweetness. In **Puglia** there is a grape jam called *mostarda*. **Sicilian *mostarda* is a dessert**; delicious and aromatic, it consists mostly of cooked must with durum wheat flour. Still in Sicily, ***mostarda* in Militello is made of prickly pear juice** and has a dedicated festival in October. We must not forget ***mustazzoli***, biscuits made with flour and honey or hot must, whence their name derives. ***Mostarda calabrese*** (from Calabria) is a dessert with a long tradition prepared in the grape harvest season: cooked must, flour, a dusting of cinnamon and various dried fruits.

**Morello Pecchioli**





# Marchesi in every home

by **Giancarlo Saran**  
Treviso Academician

*A companion  
to home cooks,  
offering accessible  
and clear examples.*

**H**is mere name fills even the hearts of amateur cooks, who casually potter about for friends and relatives, with a sort of culinary intimidation. **Gualtiero Marchesi is an iconic figure**, one of the human milestones in the history of Italian cuisine poised for world conquest. **Italy's first three-starred**

**Michelin chef**, he collected prestigious accolades from various corners of the world. **Paolo Petroni's** playful but respectful observation situates him adroitly: "Gualtiero's impact on Italian culinary history is similar to the Beatles' effect on music a decade earlier". More concretely: "No Italian cook at the time would have dared speak of art, design, or cross-pollination with other cuisines, because the idea that cuisine should be narrated and used as a means of expression lay far in the future". **He reinterpreted celebrated artists' works and styles on a plate.** Who doesn't recall **Fish Dripping, a dish inspired by Jackson Pollock**, or his delicious homages to **Lucio Fontana, Alberto Burri** and many others? Then there were his personal inventions, most famously **riso, oro e zafferano** ('rice, gold and saffron'). Pure genius. Yet few remember that **there was once another, human-sized Gualtiero Marchesi eager to spread the news about good food** and encourage familiarity with, and re-

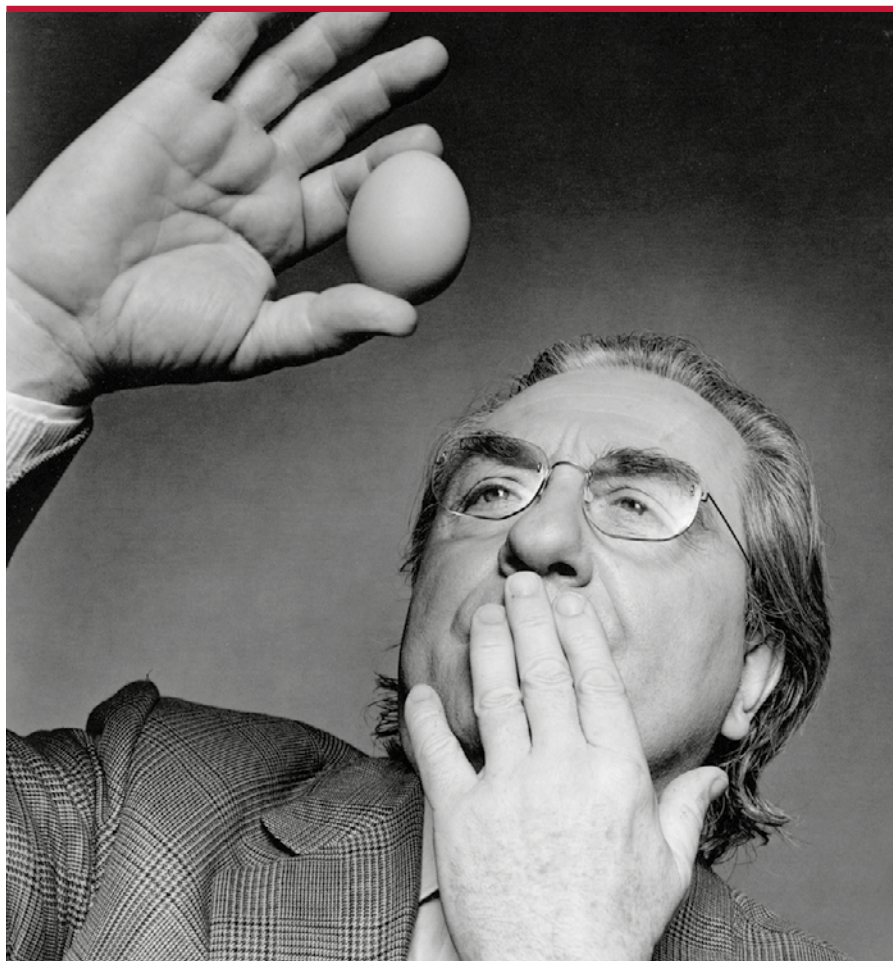
spect for, techniques and raw materials **in a manner accessible to home cooks**, bombarded as never before by the food industry's distractions: ready meals, pre-packaged foods, massive-scale distribution. A mission of the utmost importance, because it is precisely **the flavours imprinted upon new generations which create the basis** - a madeleine of memory on the palette of the palate - **for how we later perceive sophisticated cuisine** in prestigious restaurants; while he wrote, the rustic restaurants of human resistance crept closer to extinction under the media barrage of cathode ray cuisine created more to amaze than to convey knowledge.

*Tricks and tips for seekers of taste  
and pleasure in the kitchen*

It was on these foundations that the **Divine Gualtiero published his *Oltre il fornello* (Beyond the Stove)**, released in 1986, with a new edition in 2009. **Marchesi's explanatory skill captivates us as we leaf through its pages.** Beyond the stove, he masterfully blends disparate ingredients: curiosity, reading pleasure, a pinch of whimsy. **This little culinary encyclopaedia** can come to our aid at any moment, dispelling our doubts during our quest for flavour and joy, contentment and conviviality in the comfort of home. **One's choice of deep-frying fat is crucial**, for instance. Beef suet is ideal: it withstands high temperatures and least affects the flavour of what it fries. It's hard to find, but in lieu of it, **even top-quality olive oil is best avoided**, as it soaks into the foods being fried, altering their taste. **Peanut oil is more suitable**: its high







fishmonger's counter; thanks to its firm, compact flesh, **if handled correctly** "it is **delicious and similar to lobster in texture**". Continuing our voyage through Neptune's realm under the wise guidance of the Divine Gualtiero, we encounter **cuttlefish ink**. This "**most exalted among marine inks**" is versatile, bringing out the best in pan-browned medallions and roasted or stewed morsels. **Sea inks are not interchangeable** colouring agents, though: "*Calamari* [European squid] and *totani* [European flying squid] also contain a dark liquid which they secrete as a smokescreen" to cover their escape from voracious tuna or swordfish, but conflating these defensive inks "**would be like assuming that a chicken liver has the same fragrance as a goose liver**".

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*Simple details derived from  
our grandmothers' experience*

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smoke point of nearly 200 degrees Celsius ensures crispy batter, protecting the flavour of small fish, crustaceans and vegetables.

**Highly effective tips about preparing meat**, whether to enrich a hearty broth or to make flavoursome *bollito* (mixed boiled meat), also abound. In the first case, small pieces immersed in cold water and "brought lazily to a temperature just below boiling point" will make for tasty broths. To enjoy meat in its own right, however, large pieces should be immersed into boiling, already seasoned water. This immediately prevents the escape of mineral and fatty components that ensure the best flavour on the plate.

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*Moving from the stable  
to the fishing line: how to choose  
fish for the home hearth*

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Moving from the stable to the fishing line, there is the unavoidable reference to **seabass**, the "**sea wolf**" "**so aristocratic that it would rather not mingle**

**with other fish**". But here too, attention is crucial in choosing which one is destined for the 'home fires'. **Ideally seabass should weigh at least a kilogramme**, as its more developed flesh will be firmer than that of "a mere youngster" of a few hundred grammes. This creature "harmonises wonderfully with gentle field fragrances", particularly wild fennel; but for those who dare, a master's touch can pair it with an intriguing sea urchin sauce after it comes out of the oven. **Salmon similarly deserves respect**: it is best consumed raw, purchased by those who have marinated and smoked it as is meet and proper. "**Cooking** subjects it to a merciless metamorphosis, reducing it to **unrecognisable pulp as dry and stringy as tuna from a tin**." Not even **the humble red mullet, promoted to "woodcock of the seas"**, is denied the touch of Marchesian originality. It is best grilled or pan-fried whole, de-scaled but not gutted, and then deboned when cooked. The same applies to the unfortunate **monkfish, described as "appalling in appearance"** when it lonesomely stares at us from the

The book offers oodles more **nuggets of Marchesian domestic wisdom**: those tips honed by grandmotherly experience which we nearly lost, about such apparently simple details as **the freshness of eggs**, no longer patiently gathered in the home courtyard amid the familiar clucks of free-roaming hens. The top of the shell is porous; hence the air chamber separating it from the albumen progressively shrinks. Knowing this, we can place an egg in salted water. If it sinks, it's fresh; as the days pass, it loses air and thus freshness, and as it ages, it "**floats indecorously, assuming a horizontal stance**".

Considering all this, **even a simple boiled egg has its exigencies**. It must be boiled slowly for half an hour, so that the heat will enter gradually, firming its yolk without compromising its fragrance. The final touch is immersion in ice-cold water. This temperature contrast yields the perfect result, which we can variously deploy as required by recipes, or even take out on picnics, baskets at the ready, as was once common.

**Giancarlo Saran**