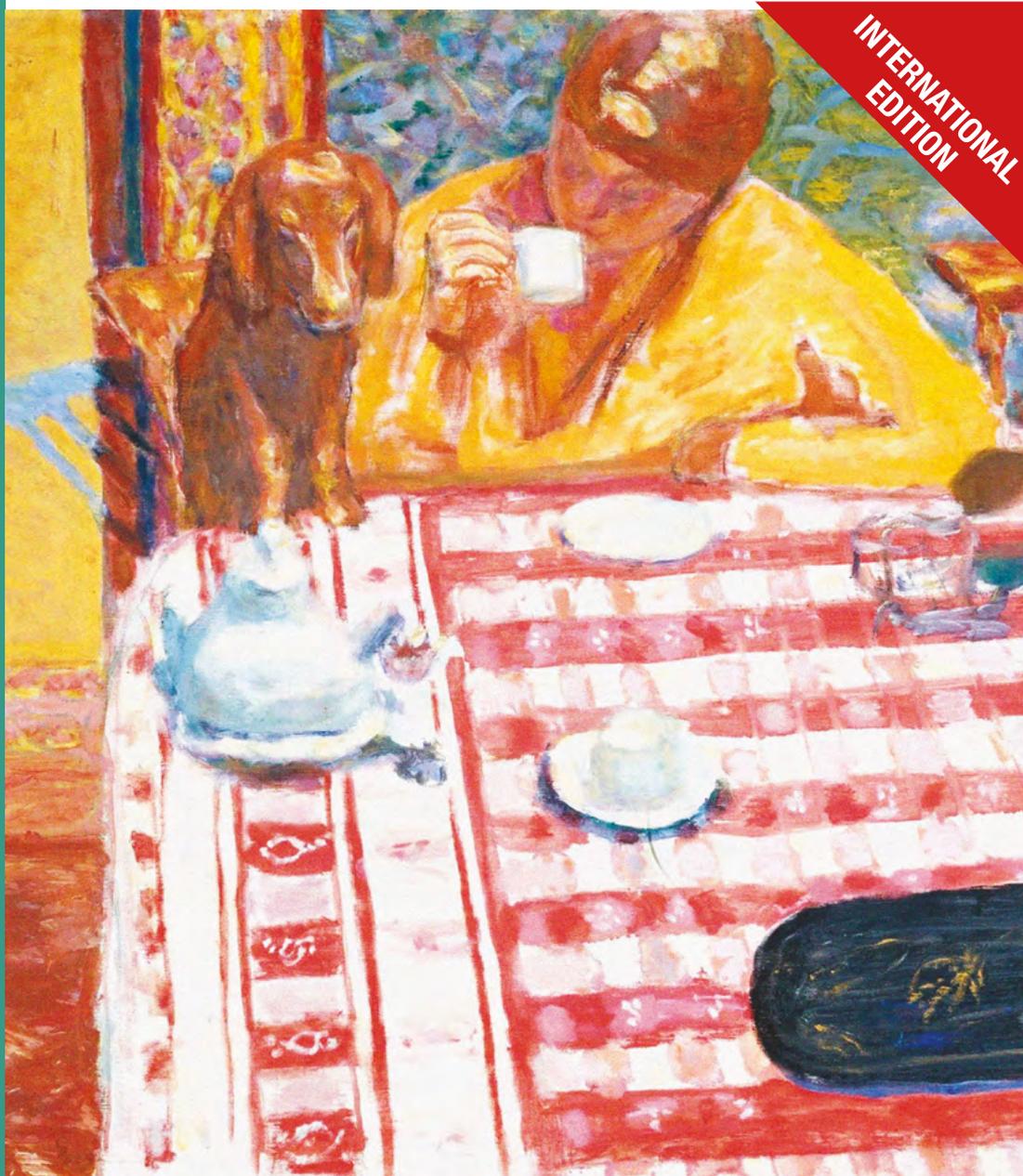


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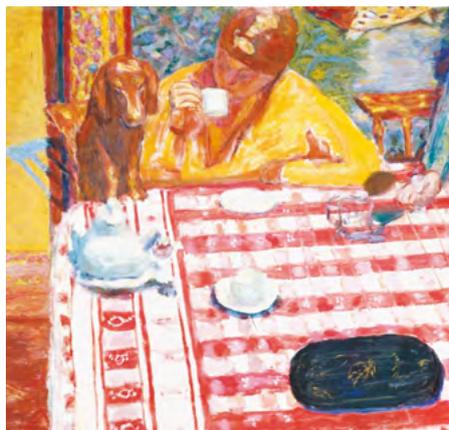
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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: graphic elaboration of *Coffee* (1915) by Pierre Bonnard; Tate Modern, London

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Gianfranco Vissani leaps to *the defence of traditional Italian cuisine*

*A forerunner of televised gourmet cuisine,
he is back on TV to defend
the elevation of our homeland's
many magnificent ingredients.*

For various reasons (distance, closing dates, holidays and his absences) I have not had the pleasure of tasting **Gianfranco Vissani's** culinary creations at his restaurant in Baschi, Umbria. I have, however, occasionally had the chance to meet him and exchange a few words, thereby ascertaining his gruff but frank and earnest personality. Once a renowned cook, he gained fame as former prime minister Massimo D'Alema's favourite chef and became ubiquitous in television, including on very famous, widely viewed programmes. His appearances gradually thinned out, Michelin confiscated one star (he has one left over), and *Gambero Rosso* docked him a fork. But he sometimes appears by invitation, and with his able and indefatigable son Luca, he recently opened the new venue **TerritOri**, specialising in traditional dishes and ingredients from Umbria.

*A great cook, preparing magisterial dishes
with skilled creativity*

Beyond his always exuberant, never subtle style of expression, he has been, and remains, a great cook, using exceptional creative skills to produce magisterial dishes, including his excellent *bucatini all'amatriciana*. He recently appeared on the television programme **Porta a Porta** (*Door to Door*) in an episode which discussed (and, obviously, publicised) the book *La cucina italiana non esiste* (*Italian Cuisine Doesn't Exist*) by **Alberto Grandi**, of which we have already spoken in a previous editorial. Among rather embarrassed, embarrassing personalities, **he alone assiduously defended Italian cuisine**, turning to the author and saying - and here I quote from memory - "But who is this fellow? Where have you found him?" A most concise demolition. A few days ago he leapt back into the fray with an interview in the newspaper *La Verità*, affirming: "All of them are living mannequins posing as cooks without knowing the characteristics and provenance of products. And then there are the youngsters, by now obsessed with

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia



*Gianfranco Vissani at work
Photo: Huffington Post*

chasing instagram 'likes' in hopes of becoming famous cuisine influencers. If only I could save these younglings who make tiramisù with cream on TikTok".

His love of Italian regional traditions is irrepressible

With his colourful language, **he has returned to his roots**; he does not deny his first love, the gourmet restaurant *Casa Vissani*, but his love of Italian regional traditions is irrepressible. The celebrated chef's own words complete and confirm the contents of last month's Focus. **The era of appearances**, of curlicues, of sprays, of dustings, and confound it, of low-temperature cooking too, **is approaching its twilight**. Let great cooks - and they do exist - unleash their inventiveness and ability, making the most of the many magnificent ingredients offered by our homeland.



Italian cuisine in Singapore

by **Giorgio Maria Rosica**, *Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Delegate*
and **Maurizia Debiaggi**, *Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician*

Excellent ingredients imported from Italy and talented chefs with solid regional roots have ignited a true passion among Singaporeans.

"Singapore is not a melting pot, but a society where each race is encouraged to preserve its unique culture and traditions, and appreciate and respect that of others". So said **Lee Hsien Loong**, then Prime Minister, in May 2017 during the official inauguration of the Singapore Chinese Cultural Centre. This ethos has fostered **the uniquely distinct identity of the various ethnicities** (Chinese, Malay, Indian and European) **whereby food, a fundamental component of every culture, also receives great attention**, respect and investment, as it reflects tradition, diversity and ethnic harmony.

Singapore lacks an agriculture of its own, but elevates gastronomy to a strategic industry. Its Ministry of Tourism has staked much on the development of culinary excellence to sustain its diverse and substantial tourism industry, establishing Singapore as a destination for financial, health and cultural tourism and world-class gourmet centre.

This means promoting and bolstering not only Chinese, Malay, Indian and Peranakan cuisines but also Japanese, Italian, French and other cuisines.

Large-scale events, promotions and international festivals bring talented, renowned emergent chefs to Singapore from around the world, creating incentives for the creation of both casual and high-level restaurants. Consultancy and subsidies also generously help restaurateurs to adopt cooking techniques, cutting-edge culinary technologies and ingredients and products of the highest quality.

What characterises Italian cuisine in Singapore?

In this vibrant culinary scene, **Italian cuisine is among the best-loved.** Singapore, now barely 59 years old, first welcomed Italian expats during the 'economic boom' thirty years ago. **It has no 'immigrant cuisine'**: so, no 'chicken parmigiana' or 'spaghetti with meatballs', but authentic food, in step with the times and... *al dente!*

Italian cuisine has only recently reached Singapore, but through profes-



signals: chefs, entrepreneurs and entrepreneur-chefs, who have spread awareness about authentic Italian cuisine, but especially **chefs who have become exemplars**, offering opportunities to brilliant young later arrivals from London, Paris, Tokyo and New York.

Today, the city-state (population: five and a half million) hosts **a significant number of Italian restaurants offering a wide array of traditional and contemporary dishes** from *pizzeria* and other informal eateries to first-class restaurants, demonstrating **the variety encompassed by our cuisine**.

Among these, eight restaurants are mentioned in the Michelin Guide for 2024: four have garnered a star, and 29 are in our Academy's online Guide, showcasing the high quality of Italian cuisine available.

In multicultural Singapore, our Delegation has operated since 2002, attentively monitoring Italian restaurants and using targeted cultural initiatives to encourage the preservation of regional culinary traditions, values and authenticity in an area with approximately 750 million inhabitants. This perfectly fits the vision of Singapore's Ministry of Tourism, which encourages and favours the Delegation's activities. International Italian Food Week, now in its ninth year, substantially rounds out the work of bringing Italian cuisine to the population at large, including in South-East Asia.

Important products: a few numbers

The ten-member ASEAN group stands out as a leader in global food and drink imports, which have increased by around 10% between 2022 and 2023. In the past three years, Italian food and drink exports to Singapore have increased by 15.1%, reaching a total of 145 million dollars. Furthermore, **Italy has for several years been the second-largest provider of wine from Europe** to this market.

Early July 2024 marked the sixth con-



secutive year of **Italian Food & Beverage Singapore**, a prestigious platform permitting selected Italian food and beverage companies to meet qualified local buyers. The repertoire presented is in constant growth, confirming the interest in Italian food and wine found throughout South-East Asia. As always, the principal products **are balsamic vinegar, olive oil, cheeses, ice cream, Parma ham, jams, pastas, spreads, sauces, chocolates, truffles and olives**, to name but a few. Even our mineral waters are gaining popularity in Singapore. In such a milieu, numerous entrepreneurs have opened successful shops specialising in Italian delicacies. From

culatello di Zibello to artisanal *panettone*, gourmet delights have contributed to an environment in which Italian cuisine can prosper and be integrated into local food culture.

How do Singaporeans respond to our cuisine?

Singaporeans **have a true passion for our cuisine**. They love it. It is not rare to witness them savouring a caprese, since the prized water buffalo mozzarella from Campania and the ubiquitous burrata arrive weekly in Singapore. Or we might find them enthusing over Milanese saffron risotto or hand-made tagliatelle - helping themselves with a spoon, but we can forgive them!

Local food guides or, better still, online platforms on life in Singapore, such as Honeycombers or SethLui, indicate that the city contains over **30 Italian restaurants offering authentic regional dishes**, which are greatly appreciated and described as "delights unforgettable to eyes and taste buds alike!"

**Giorgio Maria Rosica,
Maurizia Debiaggi**





Are jujubes making a comeback?

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

Once widely loved, jujubes are now revisited as a tart and sweet haute cuisine ingredient.

Poor jujube, as adored by Italy's past generations as it is ignored by their modern scions! **To think that it boasts millennia of history!** After being brought from the East by the Romans during the time of the emperor **Augustus**, it appeared in the writings of **Pliny** and **Columella** and starred for centuries in the exalted fruit bowls of monarchs, dukes, marquesses and counts, but also graced the humble

wooden bowls of serfs, democratically endowing princes and paupers alike with abundant vitamin C (40mg per 100g of jujubes) as a bulwark against inclement weather. So it goes: pushed unto the very edge of the precipice, the jujube is close to plunging into oblivion, joining hundreds upon hundreds of forgotten fruits, vegetables and grains. This graveyard of biodiversity threatens to swallow the daughter of *Ziziphus jujuba*, as the plant is known scientifically; its origin in China has also given the jujube the name 'Chinese date', though it resembles green apples in tartness and olives in size.

October is Jujube Fair season in Arqua Petrarca

Yet there is a realm in Italy there the jujube is queen, if only for the month of October: **the Euganean Hills**. There, in the enchanting village of Arqua Petrar-

ca where the poet **Petrarch** (Francesco Petrarca) found refuge and inspiration in his final years, the jujube is placed on a pedestal during the fair dedicated to it. The festival, in its **44th edition**, will take place on **two Sundays this year**: 6 and 13 October. It attracts thousands of tourists and enthusiasts from all over Italy.

The jujube of the Euganean hills - in the Veneto region it is called *sisola* or *zizola* - is **the area's representative fruit**, so distinctive that the Ministry of Agriculture and Forests has **registered it as a PAT** (Traditional Agrifood Product). Jujubes have been grown in this area for centuries. Their cultivation on the volcanic hills around Padua and several other parts of the Veneto, including the Venetian lagoon (where there is a September Jujube Fair in Lio Piccolo), was initiated by the **Most Serene Republic of Venice**, whose merchants wove a dense web of eastern trade routes and **loaded** their brigantines, foists and galleys not only with silk, spices, precious metals, pearls and costly damask, but **also hundredweights of jujubes**.

Jujube trees were ever-present in the orchards of the Venetian patricians' mainland villas, and placidly vegetated in aristocratic palace gardens until the mid-20th century.

Fresh jujubes are tart; they become sweet after drying out for a fortnight

Fresh jujubes are tart. They become sweet after drying out for a fortnight or so. Besides delighting the palate, they also **cheer the tongue with lively idi-**



oms and metaphors. For example, a graceful, full-figured woman is known in Italy as a *giuggiola*: a jujube. This image has crossed the Atlantic thanks to Italian emigrants and their descendants who rose to fame, such as **Dean Martin**, born Dino Crocetti, of Abruzzese stock. An immensely popular singer and actor, Dean Martin sang: “*They call the lady Giuggiola, Giuggiola, Giuggiola/ and I’m in love with Giuggiola, Giuggiola...*” We know not what fascinating woman inspired the handsome Dino to caress her with his warm voice. In all likelihood it was the most jujubeous of his thespian colleagues, the tender **Marilyn Monroe**, with whom Hollywood gossips claimed that he had had a love affair. But apart from this detail, which will remain shrouded in mystery, the song is interesting because it reveals how much **the jujube and its ‘broth’ have become symbolic of goodness, beauty and enchantment even across the ocean.** It was the first dictionary of the Italian language, the *Vocabolario della Crusca*, which in 1612 reported the expression *andare in brodo di giuggiole* (literally ‘go into jujube broth’) as meaning essentially ‘be in seventh heaven,’ ‘be beside oneself with ecstasy’. To tell the truth, **originally this ‘broth’ was not made of jujubes but succiole, a Tuscan word for boiled chestnuts,** named thus because one must suck (*succhiare*) their pulp out of their shells to enjoy them fully. Farmers in the Appennines really did make broths and soups from chestnuts. The *succiole* became *giuggiole* because of their similar sound, and perhaps their shared sweetness.

The golden age of jujubes lasted for centuries

The golden age of jujubes lasted for centuries. In the fifth century BC, the Greek historian **Herodotus** wrote in his *Histories* that the Egyptians and Phoenicians made a sort of wine out of jujubes. **The Romans considered *Ziziphus jujuba* to be a symbolic tree, repre-**



senting the virtue of prudence. They therefore used its branches for decorating temples of Minerva, goddess of wisdom and, indeed, prudence. **In the Renaissance, jujubes were prized by cooks at Italian courts.** The Gonzaga rulers of Mantua, who loved sweet-and-sour food (such as the famed pumpkin *tortelli* whose filling includes *amaretti* biscuits and the apple-mustard relish called *mostarda di mele campanine*), were *giuggiola* enthusiasts, ordering many jujube trees to be planted. **The popularity of jujubes plummeted in the 1950s.** The boom, new lifestyles and the development of organised large-scale distribution gave us the illusion that everything would change: no more hunger, misery phased out, poor foods forgotten, however delicious they had been. One, of course, was the jujube.

Health benefits and ancient customs

This dainty fruit **can be transformed into jams, preserves and syrups,** or be candied or preserved in liquor. **In Arquà Petrarca, brodo di giuggiole (‘jujube broth’) is serious business: it’s a liqueur made from dried zizole.** We have mentioned its high vitamin C content, but under every jujube skin lies a veritable mine of health benefits. **Calming jujube infusions help with relaxation, attenuating stress and**

insomnia. In Asia, especially in **China,** a **jujube paste is used for accelerating wound healing** and reducing pain. Jujubes, which **counteract free radicals,** have antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, digestive, emollient and expectorant properties. They are used for making decoctions and cosmetically for moisturising skin. Inevitably, some jujube-related **customs have nothing to do with science** but reveal how revered jujubes are **in Asian countries.** Around the Himalayas there is the belief that the fragrance of jujube flowers can induce love; if the beloved swallows a sip of jujube elixir, voilà: they will fall at the feet of the jujube alchemist. **According to an ancient Chinese custom, jujubes are placed on wedding beds** to bring fertility. Considering the population in the Middle Kingdom, the charm seems to have worked.

Is a new jujube season beginning? There are positive signs. Jujubes are appreciated in jams where they complement other fruits well: quinces, table grapes, cherries, lemon zests... They are used in sweets and are **newly prized by eminent cooks** who are emulating their Renaissance colleagues by employing them **as a sweet-and-sour ingredient** in haute cuisine. Jujubes ripen between late summer and early autumn, and can be found throughout October in farmers’ markets, for sale by small growers, in some whole-foods supermarkets and, of course, in Arquà Petrarca and environs.

Morello Pecchioli



Plastic bottle caps: *proliferating pollution*

by **Gabriele Gasparro**
Roma Delegate

Tethers, however inconvenient, prevent bottle caps from being scattered randomly.

Since July, when the consumption of mineral water and other bottled beverages increases, we have discovered **caps hanging off bottles after being unscrewed**. This results from yet another European regulation on the heels of a rule from 2019 which forbade the sale of certain single-use plastic products including plates, cutlery and straws to prevent their dispersal in the environment.

Plastic dispersal is a serious problem

Plastic dispersal is a serious problem: **according to the WWF, plastic is now the third most common human-made material on Earth**, after steel and con-

crete. It has been calculated that over eight thousand million tonnes of plastic have been produced in the past sixty years. We wonder why, with so much plastic around, this directive targets tiny plastic bottle caps. **Often plastic bottle caps are discarded randomly**, littering the environment, whereas the aim is to ensure their disposal in recycling bins alongside bottles. **This may appear frivolous, but it is not.**

Over twenty million caps have been gathered while cleaning beaches

Plastic bottle caps are seriously polluting beaches and the general environment in Europe. Environmental associations have gathered over twenty million bottle caps and other lids during a worldwide beach cleanup operation. In 2019, **the Legambiente environmentalist association surveyed 93 Italian beaches**, finding an average of one bottle cap per metre of beach. The North Sea Foundation counts plastic bottle caps among the most lethal forms of ocean waste. **Sea mammals, birds and fish mistake them for food**, with fatal consequences. As always, there have been opponents; for example, some beverage producers claim that the costs of tethered caps outweigh their benefits and that such caps require more plastic. Other companies have declared the opposite. Belligerent mockery has also been generated in the political world, as often happens when easily criticised European rules are enacted.

