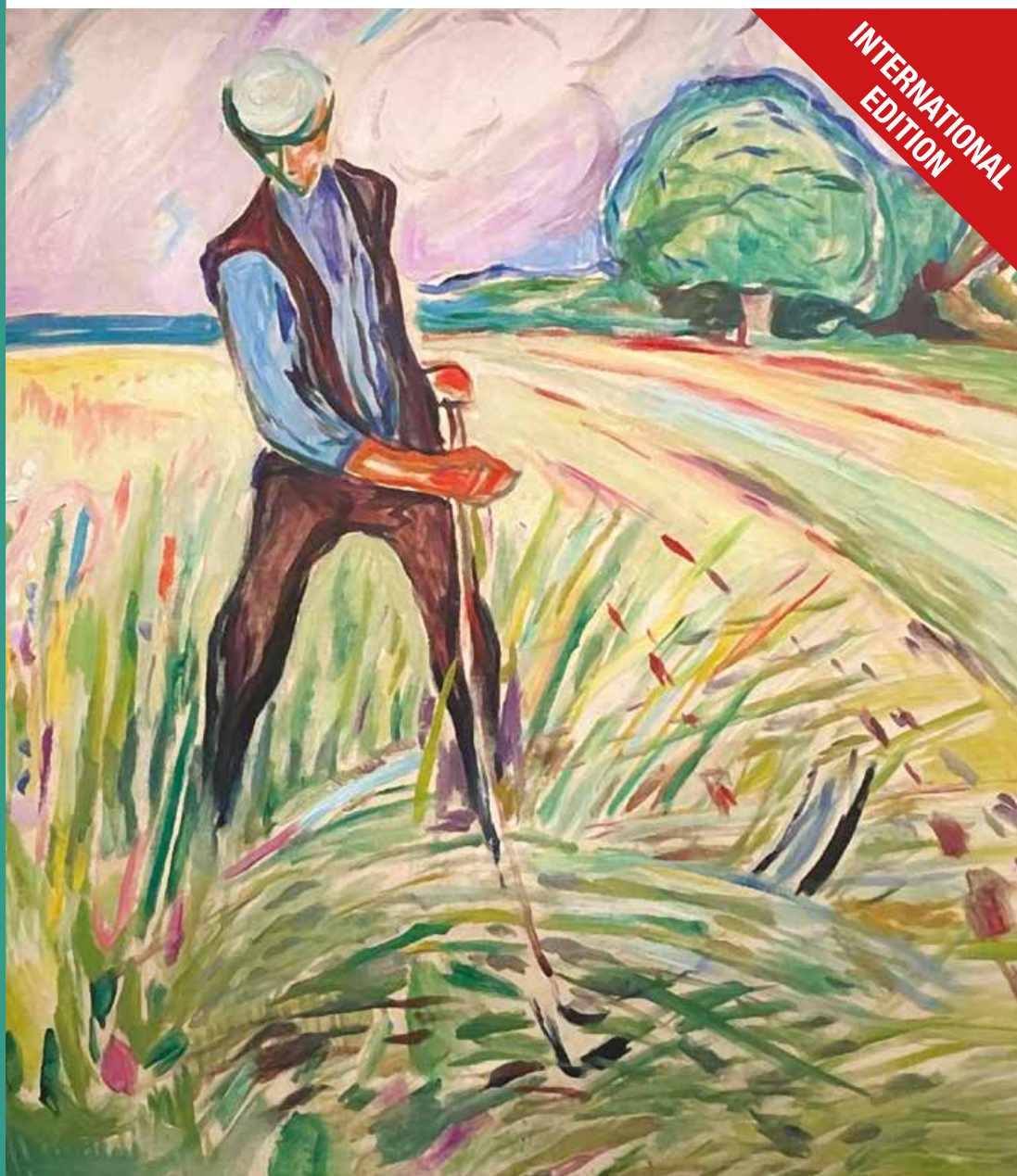


CIVILTÀ TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

ISTITUZIONE CULTURALE DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA
FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI

www.accademia1953.it

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

MAY 2025 / N. 381

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MONTHLY MAGAZINE
REG. N. 4049 - 29-5-1956
TRIBUNALE DI MILANO

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On the cover: graphic elaboration of *The Haymaker* by Edvard Munch, displayed until June in the exhibition "Munch. Il grido interiore" ("Munch: the inner scream"), Palazzo Bonaparte, Rome

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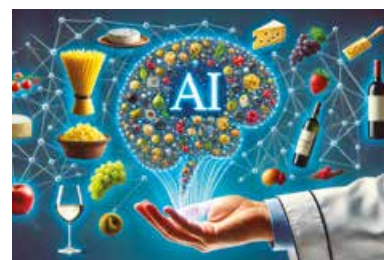
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Disappointments and precarity *weigh down culinary arts students*

The restaurant sector still suffers from the damage wrought by Covid.

by **Paolo Petroni**
President of the Accademia

We have hinted on several occasions at the apparent paucity of cooks and waiters despite well-populated classes at the so-called Hotel Schools now officialised as **IPSSAR**, meaning *Istituto Professionale di Stato per i Servizi per l'Enogastronomia e l'Ospitalità Alberghiera* (Professional State Institute for Food, Wine and Hotel Services). Let us attempt an explanation. Such schools offer five-year programmes, like all secondary schools potentially leading to university, though students can already gain a professional diploma for employment purposes after the first three years. Furthermore, after their first two years, identical for everyone, students will have to choose a specialisation: **Food and Wine, Table Service and Sales** or **Tourist Hospitality**. This educational path was once considered a sort of refuge for those unwilling or unable to attend **high school**, which, after five years, provided access to university or a useless qualification.

The culinary talent show that made youth dream of a new world

Then in 2011, besides many other cooking shows, **television** began broadcasting **MasterChef**, the most famous culinary talent show. It opened young people's imaginations to a new world. Chefs appeared like demigods to be revered with 'yes, chef' and 'thanks, chef'. In a few years, Hotel School matriculations boomed amid youthful dreams of culinary stardom. **But reality is much harsher than television.** Crucially, Hotel Schools offer few cooking lab hours, and none in the first two years, when the syllabus requires all subjects considered obligatory in general education. So students must pore over books pondering Italian language and literature, mathematics, physics, biology, chemistry, motor sciences, law and economics, languages and so forth, with cooking barely mentioned. **Much knowledge; little competence.** Cooking labs begin, sparsely, in the third year. Disappointments and drop-outs abound. An increasingly urgent problem is that of lab expenses. Ingredients cost, and many are necessary: meat,



poultry, fish, vegetables and more are needed in abundance to let students learn techniques, and thus they hope for sponsors and supplier agreements. **Hence the success of private cooking schools.**

Being a cook or a waiter is hard work

The real blow, however, came from **Covid**: restaurants closed for many months while the State paid cooks and waiters to stay home. Those devastating effects are still felt. Culinary school graduates repurposed themselves to work in large-scale distribution or in jobs having little or nothing to do with their studies. Being a cook or a waiter is hard work and rules out parts of one's social life: it consequently requires **considerable passion**, but must also be compensated with a proper, serious contract and pay commensurate with ability and experience. Until a few years ago, cooks earned well and had stable jobs. Now, amid short-term, on-call and zero-hour contracts, with rare exceptions **wages are very modest. The restaurant sector is one of the worst-affected by work precarity**, with employees often harvested not from culinary institutes but from the non-EU people for both the dining room and the kitchen.



May brings roses on a dish

by **Giancarlo Burri**
Padua Academician

*The Queen of Flowers
brings fragrances
and flavours.*

“What’s in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet.” These very famous lines, which **William Shakespeare** has Juliet speak in the presence of her Romeo, implicitly recognise the richly layered fragrances (mixtures of terpenes, most importantly geraniol) of the **approximately 150 species of rose**, categorised as **Old Garden, Wild or Modern**, appreciated since time immemorial in cosmetics and phytotherapy but also to aromatise foods and beverages. The first written testimony about roses in cuisine dates from Imperial Rome, in the *De re coquinaria* by **Apicius**, with recipes for *Patina de rosis*, a sweetish egg

pudding prepared with rose petals, brains, black pepper and sweet wine, and *rosatum* wine, aromatised through slow infusion with rose petals and sweetened with honey.

*Rosewater plays
an important
role in food history*

An iconic product of rose petals from such varieties as *Rosa gallica*, *Rosa damascena* (or Bulgarian rose) and *Rosa centifolia* (or Provence rose), much appreciated for its versatility and efficiency, rosewater originated in remote antiquity.

From ancient Persia, it spread first throughout the Arab world and then to Europe thanks to the Crusades, **accompanied by the fame of its cosmetic, curative and culinary virtues**. It was credited with protecting against epidemics, such as plague; in his *Istruzione sopra la peste (Instructions concerning the plague)* of 1576, **Michele Mercati** suggests draping *lazzaretti* (plague hospitals) with “sheets soaked in vinegar, & rose water, and hung on the walls and beams, and sometimes about the bed”; but rosewater was considered purifying in its own right. **A legend narrates** that when Jerusalem was reconquered from the Crusaders, Saladin had five hundred camels enter the city laden with rosewater to ‘decontaminate’ the city. Besides its undisputed soothing, anti-ageing and purifying properties which make it a classic natural cosmetic to this day, rosewater has also been important in culinary history.





Its culinary diffusion in Italy mostly occurred in the Renaissance, though it remained **a preserve of the rich** due to its high cost (about a kilogramme of rose petals are necessary to produce a litre of rosewater). It appeared in the most celebrated culinary treatises by acclaimed professional cooks. Recipes included **Martino da Como's** *biancomangiare quaresimale* (lenten blancmange made of boiled fish, almonds, pea broth and orange juice) and sumptuous *torta di ciliegie* (cherry cake: "the blackest available" cherries with spices, cheese, eggs and sugar); **Bartolomeo Scappi's** *tortelletti di cappone* (capon dumplings, filled with mixed boiled meats, raisins and eggs, cooked in broth); and **Cristoforo da Messisbugo's** *pastelli di marzapane* (marzipan-filled biscuits: soft, intensely sweet, made of marzipan, sugar and eggs, and fried in butter) and refreshing *vivanda di amarene o di pere moscatelle* (cherry or pear compôte: fresh fruit boiled in dark red wine with cinnamon and butter), to cite a few examples.

"Sugar, rosewater, lemon and fresh water strained through white cloth: this is the summer drink of the Turks". This recipe for a previously unpublished non-alcoholic aphrodisiac beverage, written around 1517, is signed by **Leonardo Da Vinci** and found in the *Codex Atlanticus* (folio 482r) kept in the Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan. **Fun fact:** although alcohol is not illegal there, Formula 1 pilots in Bahrain celebrate on the podium not with traditional champagne, but with a rosewater-based beverage called Waard.

Rose-based preparations

In the 17th century, Genoa was pre-eminent in rose-based preparations, especially in monasteries: "jams and sugar preserves are the best made anywhere in the world, and most excellent are those of many Nunneries, and likewise the rose sugars, citron liquor and other medicines", reports **Giovan Domenico Peri** in *Il Negotiante (The Merchant)*.

Still bearing its ancient name of *zucchero rosato* ('rose sugar'), a **fresh rose petal preserve** made from Damask, French, Beach or Moss roses, originally created as a pharmaceutical product, **is now a**

PAT (Traditional Agrifood Product) from Liguria: "Confettura extra di petali di rosa, zucchero rosato, conserva di rose" (premium rose petal jam, rose sugar, rose preserve) with a complex protocol whereby petals are manually mixed with sugar and then blended and boiled with glucose and lemon juice.

Rose syrup (the one from Alta Valle Scrivia is particularly prized) is a historic, traditional preparation which is mixed with white wine as an **aperitivo**, with cold water for a refreshing **summer drink** or with warm water in winter, not only as a pleasant beverage but also to defend against seasonal ailments.

Rosolio was originally made in mediaeval nunneries to honour important visitors (there is also evidence of it at the Medici court, and thanks to **Catherine de' Medici**, a great enthusiast, it became very common in France). It is **making an assertive comeback**, and now found in **trendy cocktails** in the most fashionable bars of London and New York. Eventually converted into a 'ladies' liqueur', it is equal parts water, sugar and alcohol in which essences have been steeped, releasing their fragrance and flavour into the drink: traditionally **rose petals**, whence, according to one interpretation, its name derives.

Giancarlo Burri





White and fragrant hawthorn

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

Its little red fruits lend themselves to many preparations.

The season for hawthorn, whose fruits are so small as to seem insignificant, has recently begun. Admittedly, the splendid seasons of yore are gone, and hawthorn hedges are increasingly rare; but the flowers of *Crataegus monogyna*, as the common hawthorn is named scientifically, remain white and fragrant messengers of spring and of life's renewal, alongside primroses, violets and birdeye speedwell. Hawthorn flowers are bright and solar: "Oh! Valentino, clothed anew,/ like the blossoming clusters of the hawthorns!", versified the enchanted poet **Giovanni Pascoli**. When primary school provided the basic elements of education by ex-

ercising the memory through the classics, nobody left the fifth year without having memorised this touching poem by the bard from Romagna. Let us pause here, lest we dip our pens too deeply into the ink of nostalgia, a plangent sentiment looking to the past. Let us return to **the delightful shrub that is the common hawthorn, beautiful to behold but only to be handled with care, as it is very spiny**: Pascoli's clusters are those young spiky branches which 'dress' in shoots and white blossoms in spring, yielding in late autumn to red fruits, little crimson pomes that children once fought over with blackbirds and starlings.

It is also known as the heart plant because of its therapeutic properties



The hawthorn owes its genus name, *Crataegus*, to the hardness of its wood: *kratos* means 'hard' in Greek. It belongs to the Rosaceae family. Its red fruits, a few millimetres in diameter, have a sweetish white pulp surrounding a stone. The hawthorn is also known as the heart plant because it **counteracts hypertension, arrhythmias, mild cardiopathy and anxiety**. It also helps with fever and insomnia. The ripe fruits are useful against diarrhoea and urine retention. "Be careful though", warns the biologist and nutritionist **Maria Antonietta Carrozza**: "pharmaceutical products derived from hawthorn must only be taken under medical supervision".



Few know it, but **these little fruits also have a good culinary use**. They are healthy, rich in vitamin C, and eaten since the dawn of human history, as indicated by seed finds in prehistoric sites. Hawthorn fruits, or haws, yield **a delicious jam** with or without other fruits or spices added: they are both healthy and scrumptious. Consider that these fruits help **cells to absorb oxygen and prevent fatigue**. Being small, with fiddly little seeds, they require patience and require straining to remove the seeds; but the result pays off and is excellent, perhaps with some added cinnamon or vanilla. Another processing method yields **a jelly appreciated by gourmets who combine it with aged cheeses**.

Ancient legends and Christian symbolisms

Hawthorn fruits are known by differing dialectal names throughout Italy. In Verona they are called *marandèle*; in Emilia, *chegapoi* (*cacapolli*: 'pooing hens') or *cagabosoi*; in Brescia, *pignatine*; in Bergamo, *brügni*; and the plant and fruit have a hundred names from North to South: *russulidda*, *spinazzo*, *cerasedda*, *spinapolicc*, *calavrign*, *brissulin*, *prisset*, *beccabò*, *bruzzulino*, *bruscolino*, *pappa de volp*, *pom d'la Madona*... This last name - Virgin Mary's (Madonna's) apple - recalls ancient legends and Christian symbols. **One legend narrates**

that Jesus's crown of thorns was made of hawthorn. This shrub, which in the 'language of flowers' indicates prudence (necessary to gather the fruits without injury), is associated with the **Virgin Mary** both due to its white flowers, symbolising purity, and its red fruits denoting her sorrows. Hawthorn is also the plant that offered its branches for Mary to hang the baby Jesus's clothing to dry. Immediately those branches bloomed with marvellous milk-white flowers. According to a Christian tradition, **Joseph of Arimathea**, the disciple who requested Jesus's body from **Pilate** and buried him, travelled to Britain and thrust his hawthorn staff into the ground, whereupon it blossomed (some say as the Glastonbury Thorn). Before Christ, **the Greeks decorated wedding altars with hawthorn, considering it a bringer of fertility.** The **Romans** hung sprigs of *alba spina* ('white thorn', cf. the Italian *biancospino*) **over newborns' cradles** to deter evil spirits. Before either of those, **the plant was venerated by the Hittites**, a population in Asia Minor, who prayed thus to it: "You are the hawthorn bush: in spring you dress in white; at harvest time you wear blood-red. Just as you gather wool from the sheep that passes under you, take from this initiate, who walks under the gate of your branches, any evil, impurity and wrath of the gods." **For centuries, hawthorn hedges marked property boundaries.** Then came land

registries, topographers, lawyers and lawsuits in their millions.

The Celts maintained that the places where hawthorn grew are inhabited by magical creatures and sylvan spirits. In one of their legends, the sorcerer Merlin, bewitched by Vivian (or Nimue), falls into a deep sleep under (or inside) a hawthorn tree. In the Middle Ages, it was believed that an ointment of hawthorn ashes could cure leprosy if smeared on leprous lesions. To this day, having hawthorn growing in one's garden is considered lucky. Woe betide those who cut some to bring it indoors, though: the effect would be the opposite.

Many chefs cook with it

Hawthorn fruits can be used for making beneficial teas and extracts, but it is wise to seek advice from a physician or herbalist about contraindications. **Also excellent and healthy is hawthorn syrup**, made with ripe hawthorn fruits, water, sugar and a stick of cinnamon. The procedure is rather simple: place the fruits in a pan with warm water, cook for a few minutes, remove them and dry them. Meanwhile, place a saucepan with water and sugar on the hob. When the syrup starts to boil, add the fruits which must cook well, and mix thoroughly until uniformly blended. Pour the result into jars with some cinnamon, allow to cool, close the jars hermetically and store them in a dark cellar. **Hawthorn fruits can also yield a liqueur.**

Many chefs cook with it. **Dimitri Mattiello** from Vicenza, who operates Casa Dimitri in Val Lione, **combines hawthorn jam with seared goose liver**, brioche bread and jelly.

Giovanni Santini of Dal Pescatore (three Michelin stars) asserts that **bees make excellent hawthorn honey**. "I use it in a very popular dish: risotto with Via Lattea goat cheese and hawthorn." To think that in the past, the poorest people made do by drying the fruits, grinding them into flour and mixing them into bread dough!

Morello Pecchioli



Restaurants and Artificial Intelligence

by Attilio Borda Bossana
Messina Delegate

A new culinary frontier?

Spaghetti brilliance with tomato sauce: not a starred chef's recipe, nor a traditional dish rediscovered, but a product of DishGen, one of the culinary 'engines' operated through artificial intelligence by inserting textual

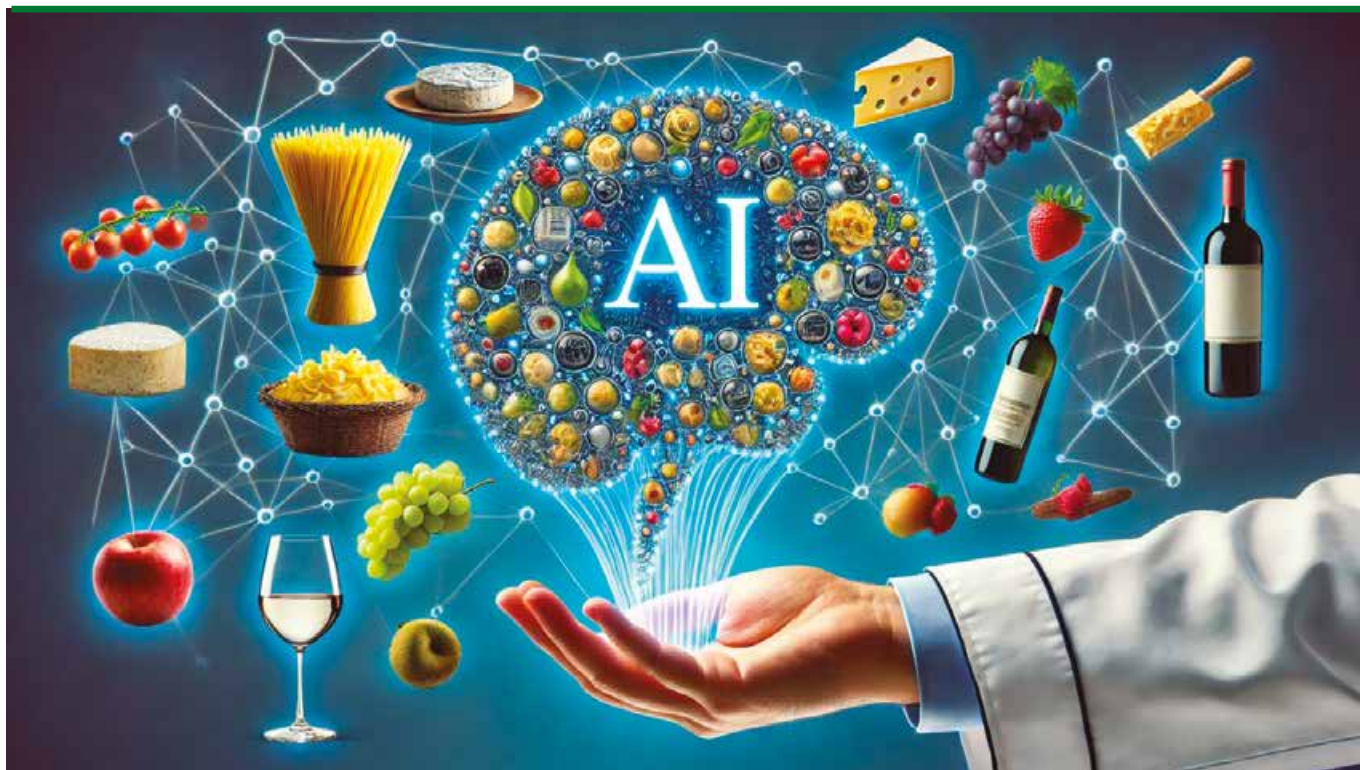
instructions. When answering the request, **the cyberchef added the comment: "Discover the authentic taste of Italy with this simple but delicious tomato spaghetti recipe.** Prepared with *al dente* pasta and a delicious ripe tomato, garlic and perfumed basil sauce, this dish is a hymn to the freshness of its ingredients. Ideal for a family dinner or an intimate night in, it exalts the beauty of classic Italian cuisine." Before the preparation instructions, the recipe lists the ingredients for 4 portions with 12 ounces (about 340 grammes) of spaghetti;

2 cups of ripe cherry tomatoes, halved; 4 cloves of garlic, minced; ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil; 1 teaspoon of sea salt; ¼ teaspoon red chilli flakes (optional); ½ cup fresh basil leaves, torn; and grated *parmigiano reggiano* cheese. Prompts require only available ingredients to obtain suggestions for starters, main courses or desserts, and the algorithm will produce a unique recipe alongside a disclaimer: "This recipe was generated by artificial intelligence and DishGen has not verified its accuracy or safety. It could contain errors. Always use your judgement when following recipes generated by Artificial Intelligence."

AI applications will influence the food world

Is this a new culinary frontier? Hard to say, but if we assess the results of applications observed in other fields, from digital health to the 'internet of things', from 'fintech' and 'insurtech' to privacy and computer safety, the outlook is assuredly positive. The uses of Artificial Intelligence will certainly influence the food world and thus **culinary preparations will also register its effects.** In **early December 2022**, Open AI, the major company founded by **Elon Musk** and **Sam Altman**, launched ChatGPT, a form of generative Artificial Intelligence, meaning that it can create new and original content based on information provided. From that moment, among the many AI systems and fields of application, **human interaction processing data have also been inserted into the**





world of cooking. In that very year, when four New York Times food critics were summoned to test a menu generated by AI through the Gpt-3 system, the editorialists had inserted their own culinary preferences and asked the system to suggest a Thanksgiving dinner menu. The results were **deemed satisfactory, but the food “soulless”**: technical innovation meets and clashes with the concept of humanity. Artificial intelligence is emerging as a culinary novelty, yet eating is not mere fulfilment of a basic need, but also social behaviour. **Even the internet itself**, whose tech-

nical foundation is ARPANET, the network which first connected computers in September 1969, **made recipes more accessible**, relegating manuals, cookbooks and granny's notebooks to secondary status. **AI's new culinary milestone** offers home cooks and professionals alike the chance to **create recipes from zero, adapting them to their own preferences** or dietary needs, thanks to advanced algorithms and a fertile database of ingredients and tried and tested recipes.

Until recently, culinary inspiration came chiefly from tradition, remembered re-

cipes, and expert chefs with their iconic menus, and later by food bloggers; but now, recipes are facing a generative AI revolution. Many AI assistants generate recipes and even produce images, possibly confusing users with tempting, photogenic restaurant menu pictures.

Seven out of ten restaurants will increase AI use in the coming years

Seven out of ten restaurants will use or increase AI usage in the coming years, with chatbots and generative instruments, **to offer contents that match clients' tastes ever more closely.** This increased reliance on technology will be aided by the public-facing aspects of restaurants, using robots, automated ordering and booking, and software to manage communication and marketing strategies, rendering the evolution of tech-ridden restaurants ever more concrete. **The 2023 research paper “Technology in the Restaurant World - Scenarios and Opportunities” by the Osservatorio Ristorazione** ('Restaurant Observatory'), testing Italian restaurants' attitude to tech, has noted that the process will allow one restaurateur out of two to spare staff up to 20 hours of





work per week. The enquiry was undertaken through a survey of data from the Plateform booking web app, installed by over 2000 restaurants throughout Italy, and from the Ristoratore Top agency community composed of over 13 thousand entrepreneurs. The survey revealed that 84% of restaurateurs use technological instruments in their dining halls, mostly to manage payments, bookings and orders, and 9% already use self-service ordering systems, whether totems or digital menus integrated with payment systems, though only 1% have robot waiters. These are **barely glimpsed scenarios, but this trend indicates that AI is revolutionising how restaurants work** and interact with customers, and sheds light on significant changes in the restaurant world's tech panorama.

A "fourth industrial revolution" which also "beguiles" the culinary world

The current historic era is characterised not only by geopolitical change but also a radical transformation, a "fourth industrial revolution" which evolves through the technological developments of "in-

dustry 5.0" and even "beguiles" the culinary world.

In a recent interview with *The Observer*, the Monégasque chef and entrepreneur **Alain Ducasse** compared haute cuisine to haute couture: "Fine dining will always be there." According to the chef, the restaurant world is increasingly veering towards a refined approach, and the École Ducasse, his network of institutes

founded in 1999 to transmit *savoir-faire* in cuisine and pastrymaking, will use AI to manage prices, menu composition and social media content. All this will free more time for creativity, which is a human characteristic, generating emotions and producing art which, like excellent cooking, always offers an authentic and personal experience.

Attilio Borda Bossana

