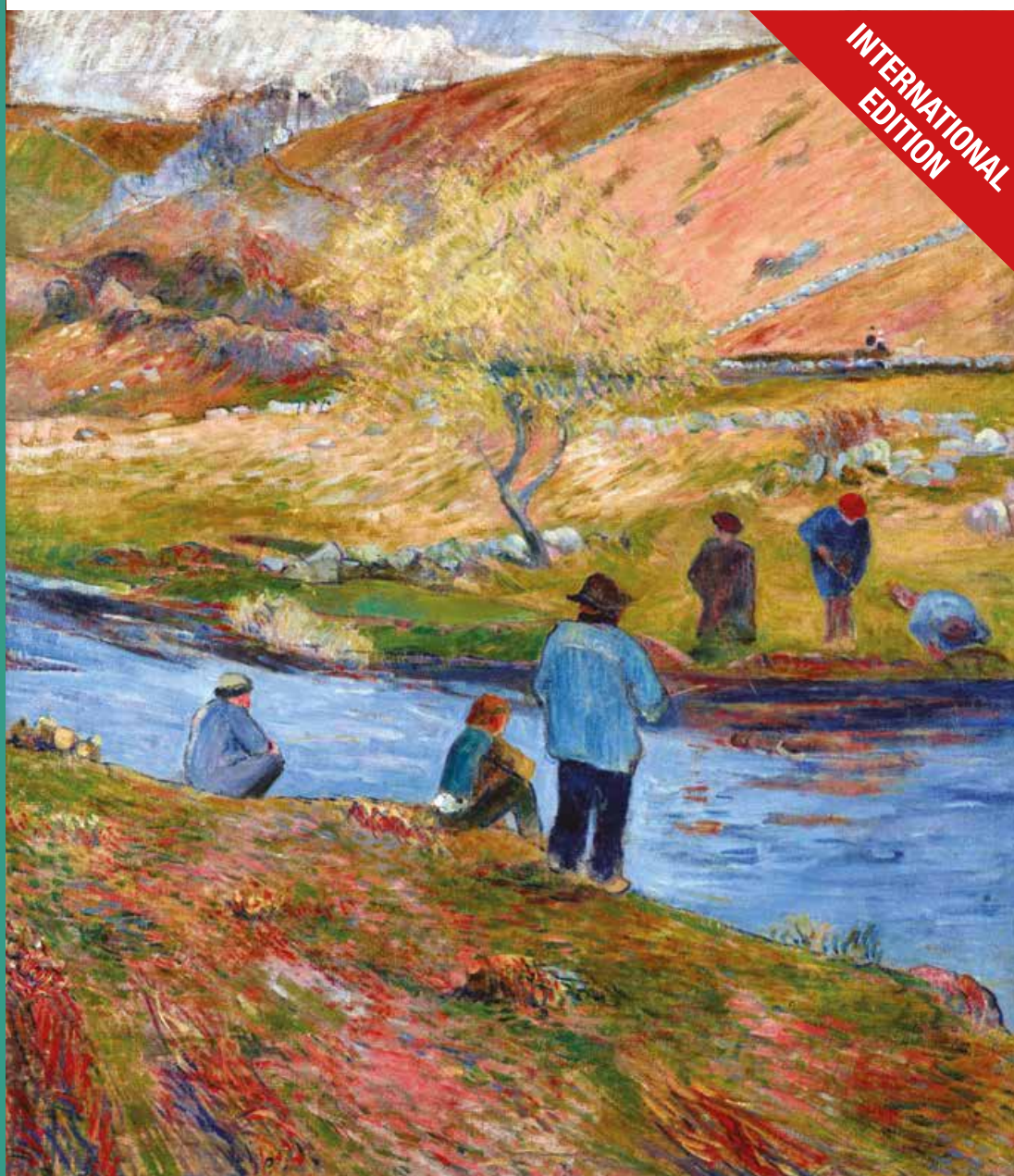


# CIVILTÀ TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



**ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA**

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**On the cover:** graphic elaboration of *Breton Fishermen* (ca. 1888) by Paul Gauguin; Onyx Art Collection, Zürich

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# When chefs turn their mastery from cuisine to social ethics

*Today some hold that cuisine should not only amaze but “nourish minds and society”.*

**R**eviews published in our Restaurant Guide fully exemplify the editorial activities furthering our institutional goals, in accordance with article 17 of our By-laws. Inserting entries is the task of Delegates or Legates, who must however be aided concretely by the Advisory Board and Academicians.

**An important aspect, not always respected, is the content of reviews.** It must not be produced through formal convivial gatherings, which are perforce limited to a single experience, and what's more, previously arranged with restaurateurs; it comes, instead, from Academicians' personal experiences. An extreme example is a noted restaurant that serves only fish, fulsomely praised by our Guide for a splendid, exceptional game menu served on a single occasion, expressly for one of the Academy's Delegations.

Our Guide stands out because it is not compiled by paid, centrally controlled inspectors, consisting instead of experiences freely selected by individual Academicians; this presents problems for reviewing extremely costly fine dining restaurants that are almost impossible to book. Furthermore, restaurants with two or three Michelin stars frequently change menus, even during one season, and **their executive chefs are almost invariably absent**, monopolised by their business activities. **This hinders objective, continuous evaluation of their cuisine.**

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*Restaurateurs increasingly influenced  
by sociocultural phenomena*

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Besides these aspects, ultimately we are facing sociocultural phenomena that increasingly influence restaurateurs. Some say the era of form is over, but that's untrue: all great chefs create culinary works of art whose beauty we feel guilty about ruining by eating them. Others engage in far-fetched pontification. The owner of one renowned restaurant and trattoria has affirmed: “I don't just serve you a tomato. I take you by the hand and lead you to see the field it came from. Because **a restaurant is not merely a place for eating, but a cultural domain**, an identity laboratory. So the table becomes an

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



emotional map, a geography of hands, faces, histories.” A splendid vision - no mere plate of tomato spaghetti!

An eminent starred chef has expressed an even more refined thought. Answering a particular query about how ‘signature cuisine’ is changing, he answered: “It's becoming more mature. Amazing people is no longer enough (implying that amazement was previously sufficient); one must nourish minds and society. The time for egocentrism has passed; nowadays we work for the common good.” Moving to the role of Italian cookery, after acknowledging that we have a spectacular cuisine, he cautioned that: “We are still presenting a postcard: granny, sunshine, home-made pasta. It's lovely, but it's no longer enough. **We need new narratives: not nostalgic but visionary**, in the language of an urban, migrant, hybrid Italy.”

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*New visionary narratives on one hand;  
our view of Italian cuisine on the other*

---

We'll stop here, before **venturing into philosophical and sociological matters beyond our expertise**. Maybe if we submit these refined concepts to Artificial Intelligence, it will explain how the migrant hybrid Italy behaves in the kitchen. And we thought it merely meant finding able foreigners in many Italian restaurant kitchens! But no: it's all about new visionary narratives. Let's hold on to our simple Guide, perhaps improving and updating it. It represents our vision of Italian cuisine.



# Cooking for Popes

by Giuseppe Delprete

*Legazione per lo Stato della Città del Vaticano Academician*

*Papal dining since the 19<sup>th</sup> century with quotes on food, sobriety, justice and conviviality.*

**T**he election of **Leo XIV** has opened new horizons for the Church, offering a chance to reflect on less known but profoundly significant aspects of papal life: **cuisine and the value of food.**

Starting from 19<sup>th</sup>-century popes, we trace the dietary history of Peter's heirs, enriched with quotations from their pronouncements on food, sobriety, justice and conviviality. First, the diet of **Leo XIII** (1878-1903) began with coffee and cow and goat milk from his native town of Carpineto Romano. He also consumed reduced broth, beaten egg yolks with Marsala, chicken and, sparingly, fruit. Bordeaux wine, gifted by a Burgundian convent, was never absent. But: "It is necessary", he wrote, "**that daily food be the fruit of one's labours and not the pri-**

**vilege of a few**" (*Rerum Novarum*, n. 15). Our sources do not reveal culinary particularities regarding his successor, **Pius X** (1903-1914), but it is anecdotally claimed that Pope Sarto (his surname) hardly ate meat and **consumed mostly grains** (bread, polenta), various vegetables and abundant fruit. In 1907 he told some workers: "**Where bread is missing, everything is missing**", acknowledging food as **a fundamental human right**: one which was in crisis at the table of **Benedict XV** (1914-1922), **overshadowed by 'hunger for Peace'** amid many papal appeals for the end of the Great War, which he defined as a 'useless slaughter' and which witnessed **a 'Church in the trenches'** with 'kha-ki-clothed priests' offering not only the desired Peace but also whatever food was available, which became a symbol of humanitarian intervention and pacifying mediation.

With **Pius XI** (1922-1939), food itself became a vehicle of education for the common good. A man of moderation, as head of the Vatican City State and an international statesman he did not encourage talk of his behaviour at the table. A statement of his remains emblematic, however: "**Man shall not live by bread alone, but also cannot live without it**" (*Quadragesimo Anno*, n. 135).

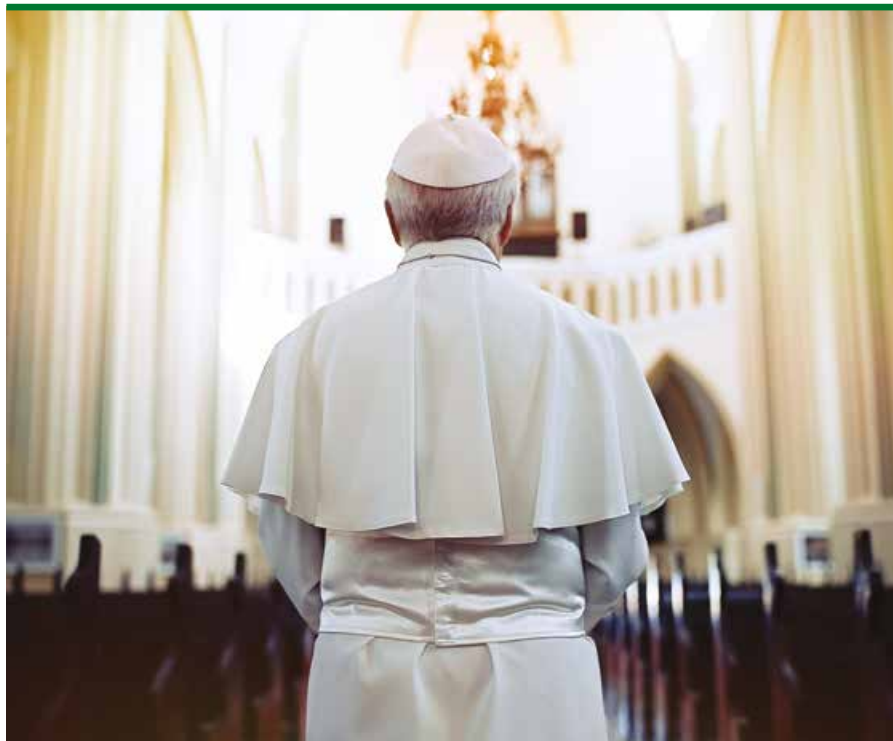
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## *Fettuccine alla papalina*

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As for **Pius XII** (1939-1958), because of his many commitments **he ate alone and frugally.** We are told that, when the nun in charge of the kitchen summoned him to lunch, the pope was welcoming soldiers just returned from the war, and replied: "Sister, lunch can wait!" His personal style is notably represented by





'fettuccine alla papalina' (papal fettuccine), **an egg pasta commissioned for a diplomatic meal** by the Vatican Secretary of State Cardinal Pacelli (as the pope then was) **from the owner of the Ristorante del Colonnato** (now closed) in Via del Mascherino, near the Vatican. That owner, **Cesaretto Simmi**, invented **a variant of carbonara**, replacing guanciale with raw ham and pecorino with parmigiano reggiano, eliminating pepper, and adding butter to make the dish creamier. Beyond anecdotes, Pius XII often spoke about food as a gift of Providence and of humanity's responsibility towards the weakest. **"Daily bread"**, he said, **"is a gift and a duty: a gift from God, and a duty of humanity to their brethren"** (Radio message for Lent, 1952). **John XXIII** (1958-1963), instead, **brought his memories of Bergamo peasant cuisine to the Vatican**, along with a smile that welcomed everyone. For him, **the refectory was a place for togetherness and fraternity**, as recorded in his diary: "We should all learn to sit more often at the table with the poor, the smallest, the hungry" (*Journal of a Soul*). A light, orderly, restrained cuisine was also favoured by **Paul VI** (1963-1978), in line with his reserved, contemplative personality. He **courageously tackled the themes of development and world hunger**: "The ordeal of hunger challenges the conscience of humanity", he

wrote (*Populorum Progressio*, n. 45), delivering the first forceful **papal appeal about globalised food justice**.

We didn't have enough time to learn the dietary habits of **John Paul I** (1978), but it is known how, infused with humility and domestic recollections, **he remembered home cooking** with the same spirit of tenderness that characterised his brief tenure: "God is our father", he memorably said, "but, even more, our mother: nourishing us like a mother, he teaches us gently" (General Audience, 13 September 1978). Food embodies maternal care, but also the nurturing language of a God that protects and nourishes us.

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*"Each people has its culture, and also its cuisine"*

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Again, **sharing, communication and joy are what meals meant for John Paul II** (1978-2005). Wojtyła loved simple, frugal food, **with emphasis on Polish cuisine**: from *pierogi* to *pączki* to *kremówka*, later called *kremówka papieska* (papal mille-feuille). He affirmed: **"Every people has its culture and also its cuisine: it is a heritage to preserve"** (Speech at the Cultural Congress, 1982). Similarly, **Benedict XVI** (2005-2013) **loved his Bavarian culinary traditions**.

As Cardinal Ratzinger he famously frequented the Cantina Tirolese (Tyrolean Cellar) in Borgo Pio. Gratitude pervaded all: "Thanking God before meals", he said at an Angelus in 2006, "means not taking food for granted, because it comes through grace".

The cuisine of **Pope Francis** (2013-2025), instead, **alternated between Argentine and Italian recipes**, and he notably had a fondness for sweets and pizza. However, decrying food waste, **Bergoglio promoted food as a universal right**: "It is a scandal", he declared, "that food is thrown away while many suffer hunger" (General Audience, 5 June 2013).

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*Pope Prevost, as capable in the kitchen as his mother*

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Finally, even in the first few weeks after his election **Leo XIV**, as culinarily capable as his mother, has already shown attention to cuisine, revealing that the lady who prepares his food is Neapolitan. Furthermore, after the pope attended **lunch with the Augustinians** for the birthday of the Order's Prior General, Fr. Alejandro Moral Antón, the 'birthday boy' recounted how the meal included appetisers, pasta, salmon and a cake. But Pope Prevost clearly has a hankering for deep-dish pizza from his native city of Chicago, while as a bishop in Peru he favoured *ceviche* or **Andean stew, even being satisfied with roast sweetcorn ears and bread**.

Thus, the dietary history of popes, alongside their pronouncements, transcends the value of mere food consumption and ends with the meta-historical, eternal food which, for believers, **is coterminous with Christ, who satisfies an existential hunger at the great table** where, quoting **Saint Augustine** in homage to Leo XIV, "...the lord of the table is himself the banquet. No-one feeds his guests on himself; that is what the Lord Christ did, being himself the host, himself the food and drink." (Sermon 329).

**Giuseppe Delprete**





# Poppies:

## *the good, the fair and the fragile*

by **Morello Pecchioli**

*Honorary Academician for Verona*

*It is not only edible but also a sign that the few fields where it still grows are unpoisoned.*

**W**hat have poppies to do with culinary history? This red, apparently rather fragile flower, perched atop a long thin stem which makes it a lamppost among flowers, is not even edible. But wait: like other wildflowers – carnations, lavender, primroses, marigolds – **poppies are edible!** **Poppy shoots** can be eaten **in salads** in spring with other wild herbs, seasoned

with olive oil and lemon; **the leaves at the base of the stem can be boiled** like Good-King-Henry, blue sow thistles, nettles and spinach; **the seeds can be used in soups or yoghurt**, but are especially good **on buns**, flatbreads, breadsticks and pretzels, the ‘bread prayers’ found in Alto Adige and excellent with ham and cheese. The seeds, **often combined with lemon**, yield excellent sweets: cakes, doughnuts, *bussolani* biscuits. **In Poland** every self-respecting Christmas meal must end with ***makowiec*, a pastry filled with poppyseed paste**. Cooked poppy leaves can be used as a filling for tortelli or other stuffed pasta. In the journalist **Giacomo Danesi’s** book *My Grandmother Ate Flowers*, **Iginio Massari**, a great pastry chef from Brescia, suggests “poppyseed *cantucci* biscuits with green peppers, parmesan and pine nuts”.

*If a field has no poppies, it means that it has been treated with pesticides or weed killers*

Thanks to God and organic farming, which prohibits artificial chemicals, after many years we are again seeing fields of wheat or other grains livened up by the scarlet of the field poppy, *Papaver rhoeas*, known in Italian as *rosolaccio*. **It is the Van Gogh of the countryside**, the **Monet** of the grain field, which it paints with its impressionistic ruddy brush strokes, gladdening the eyes and breaking the monotony of open plains. To those who object that it is an invasive plant and that until recently a wheat field incarnadined by poppies was called “the farmer’s shame”, we retort that it is more shameful and damaging to sully



fields with pesticides, weed killers and other chemical poisons that contaminate above and below the soil, the air and the groundwater, making us suffer the consequences of systematic pollution for years to come.

To think that **poppies, cornflowers and other flowers naturally protect grain!** Indeed, their colours attract good insects that attack the bad: the parasites which damage cereals. This is not our claim but that of **National Geographic**, in an article reporting **the results of research** from Britain and Switzerland. It's biodiversity, Your Honour.

So pay attention to fields of ripe wheat: no rubicund sprinkling of poppies means that it's been treated with pesticides or weed killers. We don't like that and neither would **Fabrizio De André**, in one of whose iconic songs a poppy-strewn field is the resting place of **Piero**, the soldier who wouldn't shoot a man just because his uniform was of a different colour: "Dormi sepolto in un campo di grano/ non è la rosa non è il tulipano/ che ti fan veglia dall'ombra dei fossi/ ma sono mille papaveri rossi" ("You sleep in a wheat field; neither the rose nor the tulip watch over you in the shadows of the trenches, but a thousand red poppies"). Poppies **have always inspired love and anti-war sentiments** in writers and songwriters. In "Il mare dei papaveri" ("The sea of poppies"), **Riccardo Cocciante** tells his beloved: "The sea of poppies sways; the sky looks down with quiet complicity." In "Southampton Dock", **Pink Floyd** see "A mute reminder of the poppy fields and graves." In his ballad "Children's Crusade", **Sting** censures those who sent children to fight: "Poppies for young men, death's bitter trade".

**The expression 'tall poppy' for the publicly successful** is ancient, found among the Romans. In *Ab Urbe Condita*, **Livy** recounts how King **Tarquinius Superbus** showed his son **Sextus Tarquinius** how to get rid of enemies: using a stick he decapitated the tallest poppies in his garden. **Sextus** understood, massacred the most important citizens of **Gabii**, and thus overcame the city.



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*The Latin papaver indicates the poppyseed mush for making children sleep*

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The Swedish naturalist **Carl Linnaeus**, father of binomial classification, gave the field poppy its scientific name in 1753: **Papaver rhoeas**. Linnaeus **kept the Latin term papaver** (which some trace to the Celtic *papa*, 'mush'), meaning the poppyseed gruel for nudging children into the world of dreams, and **added the Greek verb rheo**, 'run, flow', possibly because **its petals float away at the first hint of a breeze**.

Curiously, the **use of soporific poppyseed gruel has survived in some parts of Italy**. In **Salento**, the dialectal word *papagna* indicates a sedative extracted from poppy pericarps to calm the friskiest children. Crucially, *Papaver rhoeas* must not be confused with *Papaver somniferum*, the opium poppy, common in Abruzzo and with dangerous effects.

**Another curiosity** is associated with the so-called **proof of loyalty and requited love**. Here's how it works: one holds a poppy bud in one hand and strikes it with one's other hand. If a smack, as of a kiss, rings out, the beloved is faithful; if not woe betide them.

**As a medicinal plant**, the poppy is **used cosmetically** to prepare skin unguents and a cleansing liquid for washing away facial impurities. Women formerly used poppy petals to redden their cheeks and lips. **Herbalists** also make poppy-based expecto-

rants and decongestants. **Phytotherapists** use poppyseeds to make **relaxing tisanes**. Their phytosterols help to lower 'bad cholesterol' in blood. But beware: any poppy use must occur under strict medical supervision. **Poppies are good and beautiful, but contain substances which require caution.**

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*The crimson flower is potentially symbolic*

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Poppies are potentially symbolic. In **Greek myths**, **Hypnos**, god of sleep, was depicted wearing a crown of poppies. His son **Morpheus**, god of dreams, was also adorned with poppies. Sleep is but a short symbolic step away from the sleep eternal. During the Eleusinian Mysteries annually celebrated in the sanctuary of **Demeter** at Eleusis, the goddess was offered poppies as a symbol of the earth but also of oblivion.

In **Christian symbolism** the sanguine hue of poppies recalls the **Passion of Jesus** and his blood on the cross. Another association is that by growing in wheat fields, poppies draw attention to the bread of the Eucharist, the Body of Christ (*Corpus Domini*).

In **Raphael's Madonna del Prato** (*Madonna of the Meadow*), kept in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna, visible behind the Mother and Child there are **two poppies symbolising the future Passion of Christ**.

**Morello Pecchioli**





# The irony of seasoned bread

by Luigi Zaccagnini, Bucharest Delegate  
and Angelo Sinisi, Bucharest Academician

*A bruschetta may  
now cost 20 euros:  
same four ingredients,  
different 'story'.*

**W**hen simplicity dresses up as luxury and marketing makes dough rise, one might think that once upon a time there was stale bread, toasted at the fireplace, rubbed with tomato, drizzled with olive oil and seasoned with a pinch of salt and, at most, a sprinkling of dried origano. That was an afternoon morsel, a quick lunch or a snack to avoid waste; **it was called, simply, pane condito (seasoned bread), or, more elegantly, bruschetta.**

Nowadays, **that same slice of bread** is found in trendy restaurants bearing such names as '**rustic toast** with organic tomato emulsion, unfiltered EVOO and origano aroma'. The price, alas, is **between 7 and 12 euros**; but if a couple of smoked salmon slices are added, welcome to the world of the 20-euro bruschetta! Yes, we're still talking about bread, oil, tomato and salt, but **packaged with masterly shrewdness.**

*Humble fare has risen  
to queenly status in many  
high-end restaurants*

In recent years, humble fare has risen to queenly status in many high-end restaurants; **more than just ingredients, what changes is the narrative**, and food marketing knows it well: one only need

evoke such concepts as 'organic', 'local', 'ancestral' or 'artisanal' to activate in the consumer's mind the idea of superior quality, authenticity and, paradoxically, luxury.

**The psychology of modern consumerism feeds on such words**; today we don't merely buy a dish, but history, identity, an emotion to share, and especially... to post.

**Social media play a crucial role** in such a transformation; **a well-photographed bruschetta**, with judiciously selected colours, careful framing and perhaps the sea in the background, can become viral content, attracting influencers and growing a venue's reputation and prices. In a world wherein 'I eat, therefore I post', even toast becomes coveted: the more instagrammable it is, the more value it has, especially if accompanied by terms like 'experience', 'local' and 'revisiting tradition'.







**Another fundamental variable determining price is location**, such that a bruschetta enjoyed at a table in a village *trattoria* costs 4 euros and the same served in a panoramic lounge overlooking a popular scenic port can easily surpass 15 euros. If, then, the venue is in a 'VIP' area, such as a square in the historic centre or a beach with a DJ at sunset, **premium pricing magic blossoms**. One pays not merely for the bruschetta but for the atmosphere, status and shareable photos, despite still just eating bread with tomato.

*Price inflation is not a scam  
but a well-managed  
branding operation*

The real turning point arrives when **the bruschetta gains two thin slices of smoked salmon and an attractive name** such as 'Nordic salmon marinated in botanic gin with an orange zest finish'. The price? **Easily 18-20 euros for two slices of bread**. But make no mistake: *this is not*

*a scam*. It is a well-managed branding operation, in which **the raw materials remain humble, but the context, the narrative and the environment are elevated**; and that's the way we like it, because, let's just admit it: nowadays even food has become a status symbol. It behoves us to clarify that we are not criticising restaurateurs, who have every right to offer their fare at whatever price they see fit (many do it honestly, selecting excellent ingredients and honouring the local territory with care, passion and research). We are just **affectionately teasing, emphasising the power of language in value perception**. Because, in the end, the four ingredients remain the same: bread, tomato, oil and salt; what makes the difference is not only taste, but also narrative. In any case **bruschetta remains one of the most brilliant dishes** from Italian cuisine: born into poverty, it has survived through centuries, fashions, wars, and perhaps even 'designer restaurants'. **Today we savour it served on slate slabs**, with raw linen napkins and a poetic description occupying half a page; *but its taste, if properly produced, remains that of home*. What changes is the frame, and how much we're prepared to pay to make ourselves believe that a slice of toasted bread surmounted by tomato has transmuted itself into a 'gourmet experience'.

**Luigi Zaccagnini, Angelo Sinisi**

