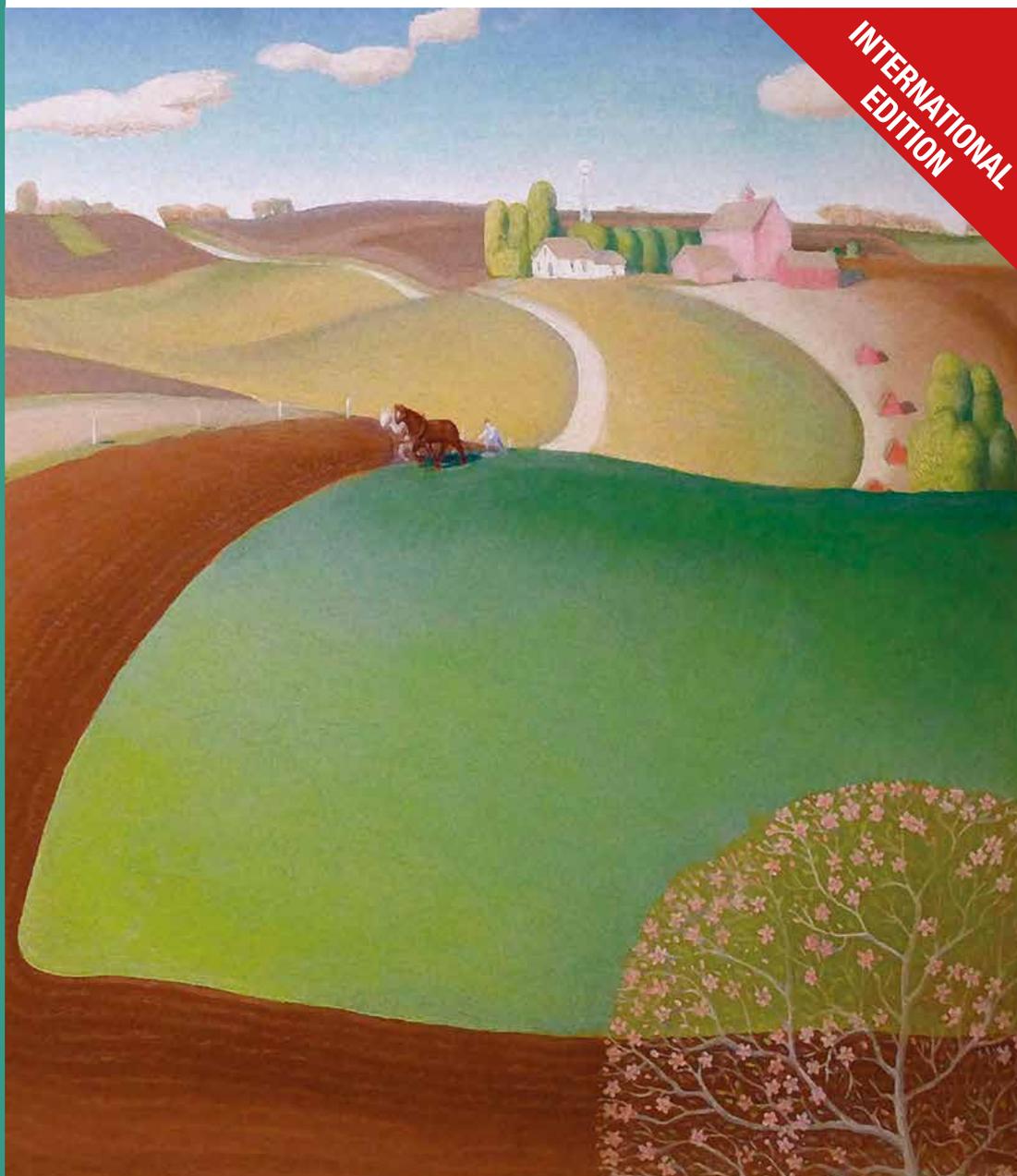


CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

ISTITUZIONE CULTURALE DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA
FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI

www.accademia1953.it

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

MARCH 2026 / N. 390

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

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all'Unione Stampa
Periodica Italiana



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E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,
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GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIO PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: *graphic elaboration of Spring Ploughing (1932) by Grant Wood; private collection*

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The need for serenity in kitchens

The fall of “the world’s best chef” reveals episodes of violence against colleagues.

In an important Italian daily’s letter column, a lady writes: *“The resignation from his restaurant of the world’s best chef, accused of violence of every type against his colleagues, is astounding. How can a culinary artist transform a kitchen into a labour camp rather than a place of joy? Hurrah for the beloved old trattorie where we spend reasonably (not 1,500 euros) and know that the kitchen workers aren’t insulted if a plate contains 7 peas and not the 8 prescribed by the refined recipe.”*

Besides the fact that in *trattorie*, even family-run ones, kitchens are not always idyllic and curses may fly, it is **well-known that the kitchens of major, award-winning restaurants host practically ‘military’ brigades** worthy of that French-derived word. **The climate fits the term.** Many people, many cooks, many interns and one big chief, indeed a “*chef*”, who not infrequently flies off the handle. But people endure anything to adorn their CVs with an internship from some hallowed three-starred establishment.

An example of kitchen mistreatment is that of René Redzepi

Our Focus from the now remote January of 2023 observed: “This is the type of news that leaves (even self-appointed) gastronomists reeling worldwide. **René Redzepi’s** Noma in Copenhagen, the world’s undisputedly best restaurant according to the prestigious review ‘The World’s 50 Best Restaurants’, will close at the end of next year. The acclaimed chef tersely blamed prohibitive costs, a need to rethink the industry, and **the necessity for a total reorganisation of the workplace and staff.** A restaurant with hundreds of applicants for unpaid internships can’t sustain its expenses: something is off here. With its three Michelin stars, and celebrated for such modern, vivacious ‘new Nordic’ dishes as ‘grilled reindeer heart on a bed of fresh pine and saffron ice cream in a beeswax bowl’, it nevertheless can’t keep going.” We’ve now understood why, or at least one of the reasons causing the situation to be ‘rethought’.

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia



René Redzepi

A recent *New York Times* article reports abuse accusations from 35 former Noma employees in grisly detail: Redzepi “punched employees in the face, jabbed them with kitchen implements and slammed them against walls. They described lasting trauma from layers of psychological abuse, including intimidation, body shaming

and public ridicule. He also threatened to use his influence to imperil his employees and their families”.

Meanwhile, Redzepi and the staff at Noma had opened a temporary pop-up in Los Angeles, but after the news reported by the press, he lost his main sponsors, including Cadillac and American Express, whose Platinum customers had been booked for six evenings. Another important company had bought about 100 thousand dollars’ worth of tickets at 1,500 dollars per person, which sold out in the first 60 seconds. In the end, René Redzepi relinquished the restaurant’s management, saying in an Instagram post that he assumed responsibility for his actions and that “an apology is not enough”, and also publishing a video apologising to his staff.

Even without abuse, the work pace in acclaimed kitchens is gruelling

Even without abuse, the work pace in acclaimed kitchens is gruelling and not everyone copes. It’s a world apart in culinary history, recalling the courts of kings and emperors in days gone by, and the castles and opulent abodes of sovereigns and presidents.

We rightly cherish the places whose **aim is not to amaze but to create good, honest food** representing our identity: the very same, after all, that UNESCO has recognised.



Elegance at the table with Valentino

by Giuseppe Benelli
Lunigiana Academician

The 'Emperor' of fashion also adeptly 'dressed' his table.

The life of **Valentino Garavani** revolved around beauty. "I love beauty; it's not my fault" was the catchphrase of the emperor of Italian fashion, who died in Rome on 19 January, aged 93. We exist in the world to discover beauty, and our task is to make the world a better place through the pleas-

ure-seeking gaze. **And beauty also resides on an elegant table where we enjoy** a healthy, balanced breakfast to start the day well, a pleasantly slow lunch to savour and appreciate food better, or a refined dinner in an intimate, engaging atmosphere.

In the documentary film *Valentino: The Last Emperor* (**Matt Tyrnauer**, 2008), the stylist maintains a sense of elegance expressed in its every aspect: clothing, naturally, but also design, furnishings, the table. A sense of taste that has rewritten the standards of refinement, associating his name with a particular shade of red, symbolising luxury and magic: the colour of love and eroticism, creativity and joy, blood and fire.

In his world, food is a sign of hospitality, balance and conversation

Like apparel, **what arrives at the table must likewise avoid the superfluous and strive for the impeccable.** In his world, food is a sign of hospitality, balance and conversation: an integral part of a style concept far from excess, embodying the subdued luxury that accompanied him throughout his life. **He loved an Italian cuisine that was essential, light, flawlessly executed, rooted in the quality of ingredients and moderate portions.** Red meat was rare; fish, vegetables, rice and sober pasta dishes were recurring staples. Pleasure lay in harmony, not opulence. This is recounted by **Martin Lazarov**, the chef who worked for years in Valentino's homes, inter-





viewed by *Corriere Milano*. His task was to reduce fats and maintain flavour without weighing down the body. The illustrated volume *At the Emperor's Table*, published by Maison Assouline in 2014, was a journey through Valentino's homes and his concept of hospitality, where "the joy of sharing" and the quality of conversation were paramount: a recollection of atmospheres, objects, rituals. **A manual of hospitality and entertainment**, wherein spectacular cutlery complements **recipes and food choices compatible with his restrained taste**. He said of himself: "I'm good at two things: clothes and decoration." Decoration is what makes a table special. Impressive luxury is not required; the essential ingredient is coherence with context, moment and occasion, which is, after all, the secret of elegance itself. "We should always surround ourselves with objects that we find most beautiful, and share them. Expensive china is unnecessary. I particularly love white and blue. There are affordable crockery sets with marvelous designs using those colours. Table decorations should reflect the place where the meal will occur, harmonising with its environment. Crockery colours harmonise subtly with flowers and candles, immediately creating a warm atmosphere. Elegance is the balance between proportions, emotions and surprises." He personally

chose the crockery with which he beautified his tables on each occasion, selecting favourite pieces from the cupboards of his various homes, even in his boat. "I love antique china sets, such as Meissen or Russian porcelain, and P.K. Silesia, a German manufacturer from the 1930s." From Meissen he particularly liked the magnificent porcelain swans. He paid punctilious attention to linens: "I've always loved pink and blue napkins, and also white."

Taste as balance, not excess

Taste as balance, not excess. **"Setting a table is not far from creating a beautiful evening gown**, where I position a flower with a bow and a flounce. I seek objects to combine on a table to make it more refined than a standard serving table." The joy of damask tablecloths and silver cutlery is sublimated in such **unique details as the contrast of yellow risotto with blue and white china**, or the embroidered monogramme VG (Valentino Garavani) on the corner of a napkin. **At the Emperor's Table is a collection of secret recipes and images** photographed by **Oberto Gili** in the dining rooms of Valentino's many homes around the world, full of artworks and memorable objects, designed as extensions of his aesthetic vision. From the historic villa on the Via Appia Antica to the Château de Wideville near Paris, from the London mansion in Holland Park to the chalet in Gstaad and the Park Avenue penthouse, each residence reflects a precise idea of harmony between art, architecture and decoration. The photographs show spaces where masterpieces 'converse' with boiserie, oriental carpets and natural light, rediscovering the image of collections as living, not confined in museum spaces. "Many books about my work have been published", observed Valentino, "and this is the first about **my hobby: dressing tables and serving distinctive dishes**. I have always loved beautiful things, but beauty also resides in a linen tablecloth, the aroma released by good

wine in a splendid glass, the fragrance of a special sauce, a floral table centrepiece. **I am Italian and most of my friends expect Italian food when they visit me**. My chef has developed and personalised excellent menus. The choice depends on the occasion rather than the home. Some are formal, requiring elaborate courses; for others, simplicity is best." He reminisces about gatherings with famous figures from the international jet set, where meals become choreography perfected in every detail: not ostentation, but respect. **"Even a simple recipe needs a pretty plate"**, he often said.

Eating with one's eyes first is a fundamental concept

The book also describes his almost sartorial attention to portions: dishes were never full, because **"true elegance always leaves space"**. The pages reveal rituals, including the insistence on perfectly aligned cutlery, the habit of **tasting everything silently before commenting**, and the preference for brief, immutable menus. **Among the dishes closest to his heart were tomato pennette** without garlic or pepper but perhaps with a soupçon of chilli; and **Milanese saffron risotto**, perhaps lightened somewhat, slimmed down and relieved of its fats. The same with other favourites, including turbot and potato timbale, goat cheese flan or caprese. He loved desserts, with which he exercised impressive self-control. Eating with one's eyes first is a fundamental concept: when food reaches the palate, the taste buds analyse it, but it is the brain that judges and appreciates it, from appearance to fragrance. Therefore Valentino **preferred a prized soup tureen as a table centrepiece**, rather than flowers which might interfere with the food's aromas or confuse the visuals. A luxurious, and sometimes reckless, life, but always gracious, amongst silks and flowers, porcelain and table settings fit for an emperor.

Giuseppe Benelli



The paradox of *fettuccine Alfredo*

by **Roberto Mirandola**
Padua Academician

*A dish unknown
in Italy symbolises
Italian cuisine abroad.*

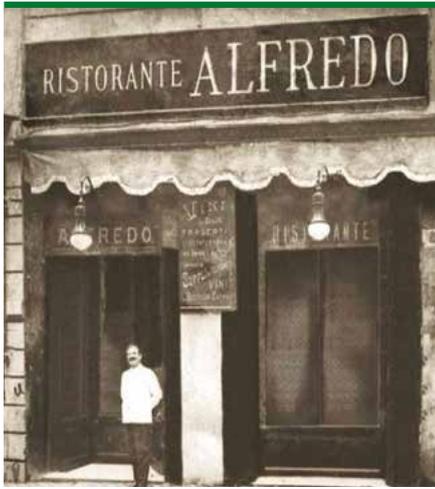
As with many other foods or products, the most famous Italian recipe - according to foreigners, especially in North America - has its own day: **National Fettuccine Alfredo Day, celebrated on 7 February every year** since 2016. That day celebrates a contradiction: a dish born in Italy, practically unknown to the vast majority of Italians, considered among the most iconic Italian

dishes abroad. Those few Italians who have heard of it consider it by now, rightly or wrongly, an American or Italian-American dish.

A curious history

Fettuccine all'Alfredo were invented in 1908 by a cook, son of restaurateurs, from the Trastevere in Rome: Alfredo Di Lelio (1883-1959). His wife Ines had recently given birth. To prepare a simple, quick and substantial meal for her, he dressed a plateful of pasta, prepared in his mother Angelina's *trattoria* in Piazza della Rosa, with butter and grated *grana* cheese. Nothing particularly innovative, as this can be considered a variant, or better, an evolution, of *pasta al burro* (butter pasta): a long-established, simple, flavoursome speciality. The stroke of genius was to identify this as a therapeutic recipe, to the point of including it on the menu of his own restaurant, which he opened in Rome in 1914, at 104/a Via della Scrofa. **His big break arrived in 1920**, when the golden couple of American cinema, **Douglas Fairbanks** and **Mary Pickford**, on the Roman leg of their honeymoon, defined the butter and cheese *fettuccine* from Alfredo's restaurant as 'signature pasta'; seven years later, they gave Alfredo a golden fork and spoon engraved with "To Alfredo the King of the Noodles - July 1927" and their individual signatures. From that day, there was a continuous flow of music and cinema celebrities (not only American) who, upon returning home, spread the fame of a dish which, again, is much better-known abroad than in Italy.





Alfredo Di Lelio in front of his restaurant

The "two Alfredos"

In 1943, possibly because of the war, Alfredo Di Lelio hung up his chef's hat and sold his restaurant in Via della Scrofa to two of his waiters: **Giuseppe Mozzetti** and **Ubaldo Salvatori**. Seven years later, in 1950, the 'sacred flame' was reignited when Alfredo **and his son Armando** (1908-1982), known as 'Alfredo II', **inaugurated a new restaurant: Il Vero Alfredo** ('The Real Alfredo') in **Piazza Augusto Imperatore**, later operated by another Alfredo Di Lelio (1948-2013), known as 'Alfredo III'.

Since then, Rome has had two Alfredo restaurants: Il Vero Alfredo and Alfredo alla Scrofa. For obvious demographic reasons, their owners have changed over time. 'The Real Alfredo' has always been operated by the Di Lelio family, now in its fourth generation with **Ines Di Lelio**, grandniece of the founder Alfredo I and sister of Alfredo III, and her daughter **Chiara Cuomo**. Alfredo alla Scrofa is also still operated by descendants of the purchasing waiters: **Mario Mozzetti** since 1991 and **Veronica Salvatori** until 2021.

How to make them...

Despite just four ingredients - pasta, butter, cheese and water - **preparing original fettuccine Alfredo is no simple task**. We must start with fettuccine made of equal parts Italian durum 00 flour and 0 *semola* flour, and whole eggs. The re-



sulting dough must rest in the fridge and then be rolled out as thinly as possible, and sliced into 7- or 8-millimetre strips cooked for 20-30 seconds in abundant salty water. Once drained, still steaming, they must be placed on an oval serving dish containing several softened cubes of butter made from centrifuged cream. Now, using a fork and spoon, ***mantecatura* (emulsification) begins, with a rotating vertical movement** maintaining a three-step rhythm, initially adding some cooking water and a generous covering of grated and fine-sifted *parmigiano reggiano* cheese aged 24 months. **This procedure creates a silky emulsion enrobing the tender, almost impalpable pasta.**

... and how not to make them

Having attained fame, fettuccine Alfredo **were increasingly 'fixed' by North American consumers and especially by the food industry**, seizing the huge economic potential of this unpatented sauce. Thus, **abroad**, we find fettuccine Alfredo made with spaghetti and garnished **with prawns, parsley or chicken, but even with pre-made sauces** containing roast garlic, bacon or the ubiquitous cream, producing the paradox of **a recipe containing none of its original ingredients** and of ready-made sauces that are 'Alfredo' in name only (and barely).



The famous cutlery gifted by Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks



Photos of stars inside Il Vero Alfredo restaurant

Curiosities

■ The “Most majestic fettuccine Alfredo, original recipe from 1908” at Il Vero Alfredo cost €22, while at Alfredo alla Scrofa the “Original fettuccine Alfredo” cost €27.50 (including 10% service charge).

■ Both Alfredo alla Scrofa and Il Vero Alfredo claim to have, almost a century later, the famous cutlery gifted by the two Hollywood stars. It was recently discovered that the original cutlery was confiscated in 1935 by a fascist bigwig

during the *Oro alla Patria* (“Gold for the Homeland”) initiative to defray expenses for the Ethiopian War. After the war, one of the owners’ first acts was to have replicas made by the same goldsmith. There are now two versions of the 1927 originals, one per restaurant, leaving it unclear whether both are authentic, or one, or neither.

■ In 1996, riding the wave of its pasta’s worldwide fame, Il Vero Alfredo opened two new branches: Alfredo di Roma in Mexico City and Alfredo di Roma Trattoria in Cozumel (a Mexican Caribbean island), both within hotels of the British

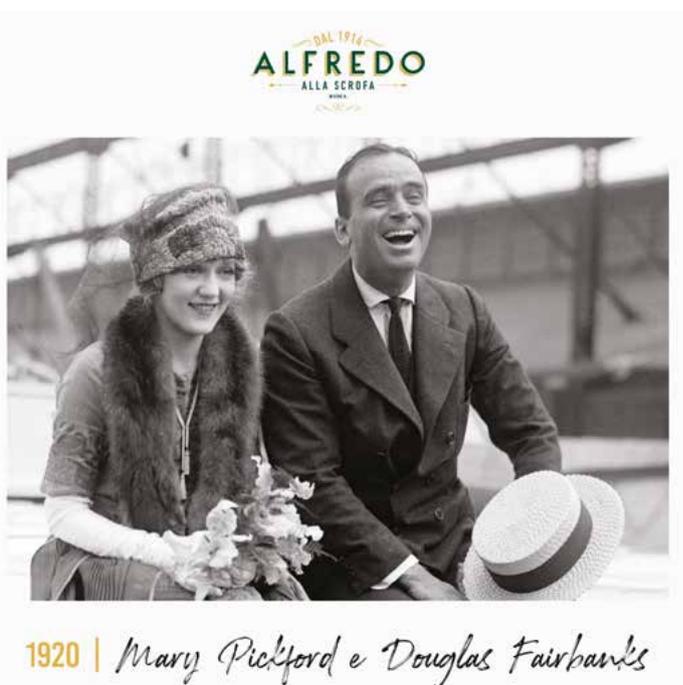
InterContinental chain. In 2024 a third branch opened: Il Vero Alfredo in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

■ Via della Scrofa, literally ‘Sow Street’, is in central Rome between the Campo Marzio and Sant’Eustachio neighbourhoods. Its bizarre moniker is attributed to a 15th-century inn which, over time, lent its name to the surrounding area. Piazza Augusto Imperatore, instead, is an urban square created by the fascist regime in 1937 to draw attention to the mausoleum of Emperor Augustus. The two restaurants are 500 metres apart.

Roberto Mirandola



Ines di Lelio and Chiara Cuomo



1920 | Mary Pickford e Douglas Fairbanks

Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks



The Calabrian who invented *the signature dish of Uruguay*

by **Anna Lanzani**

Buenos Aires Academician

*“Chivito”, meaning
‘little goat’,
is a sandwich,
and entirely goatless.*

It's called *chivito*, meaning ‘little goat’, but it contains no trace of goat. The national dish of Uruguay, a marvellous country looking out on the Atlantic Ocean, has Italian ‘DNA’. Its creation by the Calabrian **Antonio Carbonaro** occurred alongside the birth of a legend: Punta del Este, one of the world's most exclusive tourist destinations, where we met Antonio's daughter, **Graciela Carbonaro**.

“El Mejillón”, her father's and uncle's restaurant, is no longer operative, but Gra-

ciela - a historian by profession - has precise memories of her childhood in the vast international kitchen by the beach, and shares them generously, expertly positioning them within local history. **“Until the turn of the century, this area was dunes and sand continuously whipped by the wind”,** recounts Graciela. **There were only whalers' shacks; they took pelts to the nearby village riding on ostriches and dromedaries** opportunistically introduced by **Francisco Aguilar**. “Until 1860 we had no stone



A portrait of Antonio Carbonaro (1944)



lighthouse”, continues Carbonaro, “and only in 1891 did **Enrique Burnett**, of English origin, have the idea of planting maritime pines.” In the first three decades of the twentieth century, however, the peninsula’s destiny radically changed. Rich entrepreneurs from both Argentina and Uruguay, accustomed to European travel, intuited the area’s potential, and named it attractively: Punta del Este (‘Eastern Point’). They opened a luxury hotel, and around 1930 the ‘Punta’, previously only accessible by sea and reserved for about a hundred important families, welcomed a new breed of holidaymaker, though remaining an exclusive destination for very wealthy travellers. The railway extension, the opening of two new casinos, dance halls and concert halls, and the construction of elegant American-style Country Clubs attracted new tourists.

In the 1930s, the histories of Antonio Carbonaro and Punta del Este are intertwined

It was in those years that the history of Antonio Carbonaro became intertwined with that of Punta del Este. **The son of Calabrian immigrants from Siderno Marina**, Antonio at 13 started operating the lifts at the emblematic Parque Hotel and Casino in the capital, Montevideo. Ten years later he became purchasing manager, even for the restaurant. **In February 1939, the 23-year-old Antonio visited his brother Donato in Punta del Este; after a lively night at a casino, he realised that there was nowhere open serving food.** Tourists were changing, but offerings still followed the slow 1920s pace.

On 31 December 1944, while European winter skies echoed with air raid sirens and the Argentine summer was illuminated by the ‘wild nights’ of the tango age, he **opened El Mejillón Bar, the Punta’s first 24-hour venue.** On the outskirts of the old village but steps away from the casino, and strategically located for the nascent new neighbourhoods,

the first Mejillón was **accessible by a sandy path.** Inside were a mere 12 stools, two tables and a long wooden bar. **In a few years, while the rest of the world strove to recover from the war, night life in Punta del Este became synonymous with unrestrained luxury, and El Mejillón was one of its symbols:** a gathering place for intellectuals, entrepreneurs, politicians, diplomats, members of high society and artists, who ever more frequently included Punta del Este as an important tour stop. **The phrase “Let’s meet at the Mejillón” became commonplace in certain circles.**

The venue grew, acquiring mirrors and shelves which bore the best wines and liqueurs. **Delivery service became available**, especially aimed at the gamblers in the emblematic Hotel San Rafael, which arose around the same time. To cover the 24-hour service, **the staff** included 3 phone operators, **40 waiters, and six chefs: two Uruguayans, one Frenchman and three Italians.** The founder, Antonio Carbonaro, took turns at the till with his brother Donato. Graciela remembers when, as a child in the 1950s, she roamed around the huge kitchens and the Italian chefs would speak to her. “Bambina, bambina”, they called me”, she reminisces, using her grandparents’ language.

Uruguay’s national dish emerged by chance in that successful restaurant

This environment gave birth to Uruguay’s national dish: **chivito.**

In mid-July of 1946, a winter night in the Southern Hemisphere, Punta del Este was fiercely cold. Around dawn, a tourist, possibly from northern Argentina (regarding this detail, versions differ), **stopped his car by the Mejillón Bar and specifically requested goat meat:** he had eaten it in Córdoba and loved it. **Carbonaro was in the dining room as always, but the kitchens were closed** because at that hour, breakfast was being served to those who had spent

the night gambling, and only the bar was functioning. Besides, they had no goat meat. However, Antonio had a golden rule: “Nobody leaves here without being served”. **He personally went to the kitchen, prepared a rare fillet of beef, split and toasted a rosetta** (‘little rose’) **bun, filled it with the fillet and a slice of prosciutto, and served it, jokingly calling it chivito (little goat).** The customer greatly appreciated the sandwich, and its reputation quickly spread among the still small society of the era. **Antonio added his ‘creation’ to the menu and made it available 24 hours a day**, as its preparation did not require professional chefs.

In a society that craved fashions, **the idea became a huge success**, which grew in tandem with the fame of Punta del Este and the Mejillón. Besides the restaurant’s ordinary activity of serving far more sophisticated fare, **in the 1950s it made up to 1000 sandwiches a day**, creating work for two butcher shops and three bakeries. Carbonaro even introduced the *chivetera*, a griddle which, however, he didn’t think to patent. So simple was the sandwich, and so fashionable was Punta del Este, that very soon the whole country’s restaurants and bars began imitating Antonio’s creation. So he ‘lost’ exclusivity, but became the father of the national dish.

Anna Lanzani