

# 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](http://www.accademia1953.it)

**INTERNATIONAL EDITION**

FEBRUARY 2020 / N. 323

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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 a detail  
from Still Life with Masks (1896) by James Ensor;  
Hamburger Kunsthalle, Hamburg

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# Pizza: a mixed blessing for Italian cuisine

by Paolo Petroni

President of the Accademia

*Italian cuisine abroad is often represented by pizza, and in Italy too it is offered by many restaurants and even a few prize-winning chefs.*

**T**he Italian Academy of Cuisine frequently receives requests to found Legations in cities and states which are off the beaten path and far from the main tourist and commercial routes. The first question we pose these applicants is whether their area has Italian restaurants. The answer is always yes, but qualified: these are pizza restaurants. **In remoter areas, there can be no Italian restaurant without pizza.** An example: in the pleasant city of Lille in France, of the 5 Italian restaurants represented in our Guide, all 5 serve pizza. There's no business without pizza, is the refrain we hear. A Syrian friend interested in opening a Legation in Damascus confirms that there are only pizza restaurants in that city. For us, pizza means Italy: alongside spaghetti, it is our cuisine's representative dish; but in many foreign countries, it is not associated with Italy, so that sometimes in America one hears the question: "What's the Italian for pizza?" However, **pizza has also invaded many restaurants in Italy.** Beyond the 'pure' *pizzeria* which only serve pizza and calzone in all their manifold variations, there are hybrid pizza restaurants which also offer a few pasta dishes and not much besides, and finally, traditional restaurants which also have a pizza menu.

These different categories attract different clientele: families, children, birthdays, or a younger crowd.

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*Restaurants without pizza, and eminent chefs, observe this phenomenon with interest*

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Restaurants without pizza, and eminent chefs, observe this phenomenon with both apprehension and interest. Pizza has evolved significantly in recent years, through the (re)discovery of ancient and whole-grain flours, sourdough, long leavening times, water buffalo mozzarella and other special cheeses, PDO extra-virgin olive oil, top ingredients with short supply chains, and imaginative, often expensive toppings. Beyond the soft, airy, wide-crust 'Neapolitan' pizza, now increasingly confined to no-frills Neapolitan pizza restaurants, and the thin, crispy 'Roman' pizza as well as the many child-friendly variants including pizza with chips or 'ethnic' pizzas such as 'kebab pizza', **we now have 'gourmet' pizza.** Everything nowadays is 'gourmet', from hamburgers to motorway café sandwiches. **A 'gourmet' pioneer is Carlo Cracco, whose new restaurant in the Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II in Milan has launched its own 'personal' pizza margherita,** not without attracting criticism. By now, many great chefs have joined the pizza party. Gourmet pizza is generally served already cut into slices, each of which must contain a selection of all the toppings, allowing each diner to enjoy the pizza's entire flavour palette in every bite. Not only acclaimed restaurants but simple pizza restaurants too have embraced this **new trend, offering pizzas with unusual flavours and improbable ingredients:** lemon, honey, figs, caviar and so on. This phenomenon confirms pizza's world-conquering magnetism, and the need to make it profitable even for large-scale restaurant businesses.





# Foreign chefs in Italy

## cooking Italian food

by Gigi Padovani

Honorary Academician for Torino Lingotto

*Rather than offering 'ethnic' dishes from their homelands, they have fallen in love with Italian cuisine, which they prepare in their restaurants, including 'starred' ones.*

**T**he first haute-cuisine vegetarian restaurant? Joia, in Milan, led by **Pietro Leeman** from Ticino (Switzerland). The ideal carbonara? Many find it in the centre of Rome, in the Roscioli delicatessen and restaurant run by **Nabil Hadj Nassen**, from Tunisia. The most famous risottos in Lombardy? They can be enjoyed in Miramonti l'Altro in Concesio (Brescia), two Michelin stars, with the Frenchman **Philippe Lévêille** at the helm. The two most famous 'two-macaron' restaurants in Florence and Rome? The Enoteca Pinchiorri (led by **Annie Féolde**, from France) and La Pergola (cuisine by **Heinz Beck**, from Friedrichshafen, Germany). The dishes which have won over the most refined Roman

palates? Those of the Colombian chef **Roy Caceres** at the Metamorfosi (1 Michelin star). Bottura's sous chef, who now runs two award-winning Italian restaurants, one in Milan and one in Tokyo? The Japanese **Yoji Tokuyoshi**. The list could continue with other less famous cooks, but the result is the same: **Italian cuisine has, by now, won over many foreign chefs**, who, rather than offering the fare of their own homelands, **have chosen to tackle the recipes of ours**, often learning from their spouses, as described by Heinz Beck, who married the Sicilian Teresa Maltese, or as in the case of Caceres' Sardinian wife, who taught him to prepare delicious hand-rolled *fregula*.

Fig-leaf squab, foie gras, apple and ginger by Roy Caceres





The well-earned success of Italian cuisine abroad is often discussed, but what may be overlooked is the considerable magnetism exerted by our country over those who travel here to learn the basics of Mediterranean cuisine - as Tokuyoshi did - or to eke out a living in Sicily, which happened almost forty years ago to Nabil Hadj Hassen, the chef at the restaurant in Via De' Giubbonari where actors, journalists and politicians love to gather. "I was impressed", says Nabil, "by the flavours I found in Italy, and when I arrived here at Roscioli in Rome sixteen years ago, I fell in love with all the bounty offered on their counters, products which allow a high standard of cooking. I also learned Roman cuisine, and to lend creaminess to carbonara I came up with the idea of keeping the egg in a *bain marie* to avoid ruining it on the stove. I also love Sicilian food, which I encountered on Pantelleria and in Palermo: especially *cannoli* and *caponata*".

*Sometimes, the homage to Italian cuisine is chiefly expressed through ingredients, technique and taste*

These cooks do not always tread the narrow path of Italian tradition. The Enoteca Pinchiorri has two menus: a classic one offering such dishes as grilled *mora romagnola* pork or crispy hazelnut pastry, and a 'contemporary' one featuring, for

instance, a tamarind purée with lamb sirloin. Hence the "homage to Italian cuisine" is expressed more through "ingredients, technique and taste" - quoting the menu - than by adherence to Tuscan tradition. Others have chosen different paths, for example Pietro Leeman, who studied the culinary arts first in Switzerland with Fredy Girardet at Crossier and then with Gualtiero Marchesi in Milan, before feeling the need to broaden his horizons with a journey to East Asia, where he discovered the Confucian rigour of Yuan Mei's meditations contained in his

treatise *Suiyuan Shidan* (*Recipes from the Garden of Contentment*). This Chinese gastronomist and contemporary of Brillat Savarin is a "point of reference", writes Leeman, "for the definition of 'right' and 'good' in China". This is because, the Swiss chef confides, **cultural exchange is stimulating and inevitable**, so that an 'advantageous ingredient', even if it comes from East Asia or South America, can immediately be included in a local dish. As Carlo Petrini frequently recalls, cuisine is a 'melting pot': this is famously exemplified by the multi-ethnic roots of tomato spaghetti, but is also true of such 'unsuspected' recipes as *babà*, which is not Neapolitan, or the Austrian pork *wiener schnitzel*, a close relative of the Milanese cutlet (*cotoletta* or *costoletta*). **Admixtures cause cuisine to grow, even in Rome**: an example is Heinz Beck, whose *cacio e pepe* (traditional Roman sheep's cheese and pepper pasta) contains deep-water rose shrimp marinated in lime. Must we accuse the German cook of *lèse-majesté* against one of the best-loved Roman dishes?

Roy Caceres, who is celebrating the tenth birthday of his elegant restaurant *Metamorfosi* in Rome's upper-class Parioli



neighbourhood, explains: "Perhaps we, who have grown up with different flavours in other countries, are precisely the ones who, arriving in Italy, can analyse dishes of your tradition somewhat more freely than Italian cooks, 'imprinted' with their mothers' and grandmothers' cooking. I don't have memories of my mother's tortellini or lasagna. However, **I'm not aiming to upend tradition in my restaurant**: mine is not 'fusion' but 'contaminated' cuisine, because I don't forget that





Lidded risotto by Roy Caceres

So Roy learned certain recipes from his Sardinian mother-in-law, while also feeling free to draw inspiration from his grandfather Salomon, who arrived in Colombia from Syria, with playful contaminations whereby *bulgur* (cracked parboiled wheat) is combined with raw meat or squab is encased in a purple maize crust. Caceres is convinced that the team of haute cuisine chefs which by now represents Italy internationally has been enriched by the addition of these 'expats' who adore our food. "In this season I love broccoli and apples, and **I use these simple ingredients to produce creative dishes** - explains the South American chef - **but I'm not aiming to shock with technique or daring combinations.** For me what counts is harmony. I wish to offer my customers a unique experience. After all, nowadays everyone can plate well and use refined techniques; what counts today is merely the taste of a well-executed dish". Was this not expressed by Pellegrino Artusi, whose two-hundredth birthday will occur this year? He did not like pampered, affected, smug chefs; what matters is passion, meticulous care and expert precision - whether we are born in Colombia, in Tunisia, in Germany, in Switzerland or in France.

**Gigi Padovani**

a traditional dish is always the result of successful evolution rooted within a given territory".

*Caceres' career is marked by innovative dishes which respect Italian ingredients*

Caceres has had an exemplary career, marked by innovative dishes which respect Italian ingredients. **In 2010 he created the "65° egg carbonara", celebrating the creaminess of the most popular dish in Rome;** having studied futurist cuisine including Marinetti's famous manifesto against the 'cult of pasta', in 2016 Roy created 'Anti-Pasta', transforming a fish soup into carbohydrate-free *tagliatelle*. Far more traditional is the 'lidded risotto', with king oyster mushrooms and hazelnuts, created after the Colombian cook's Damascene conversion to Italian risotto. Chatting with Roy Caceres, born in 1977, who reached Italy in 1993 and initially pursued his vocation as a basketball player, we discover a rather surprising cultural trajectory. After learning the ropes in restaurants in Cortina d'Ampezzo and then in the Locanda Solarola in Castelguelfo, he developed a passion for our cuisine and began learning about it without any formal training. He began by perusing basic texts including Eugen Pauli's manual *Tecnologia Culinaria (Culinary Tech-*

*nology)*, adopted as a textbook by the illustrious hotel academy in Lucerne where Gualtiero Marchesi studied, progressing to food history books by Massimo Montanari, and then to classic recipe books, from Apicius to Bartolomeo Scappi and Platina, from Nino Bergese to Paracucchi. "And, naturally, Artusi: it's here in my cooking library", he says with a smile. "When I arrived in Italy, **I was impressed by the wide variety of ingredients, and by a food culture deeply rooted in past centuries, with great biodiversity in products and recipes:** from one village to the next, one finds different interpretations of each food".





# Amarone: protagonist in the pot, *star of the goblet*

by **Morello Pecchioli**

*Honorary Academician for Verona*

*Vigorous but velvety,  
it adapts wonderfully  
to modern gastrosophy.*

**B**etween the 28<sup>th</sup> and the 30<sup>th</sup> of September in the year of our Lord 489, the Ostrogoths under Theodoric and the Heruli under Odoacer fought mercilessly on the banks of the river Adige, just outside the walls of Verona, littering the battlefield with dead men and horses. Those were dark times. The barbarians were savagely scrambling over the remnants of the recently fallen Western Roman Empire. After the carnage, the people of Verona, exhausted by hunger and barbarian incursions, implored the victorious Goths for permission to butcher the fallen horses. Theodoric allowed this, and the forebears of

the Scala family fell to slicing, tearing and hacking with scythes, knives, machetes and any other blades they could find, sharp or otherwise. They claimed the prime cuts of the animals without overlooking their humbler parts. **This horse flesh, marinated for a long time in spices, onions and the wine of nearby Valpolicella to hide the stench of putrefaction, turned out to be delicious.** The “strong and robust” wine was **Acinatico, ancestor of modern Amarone.** And so the ***pastissada de caval* was born.**

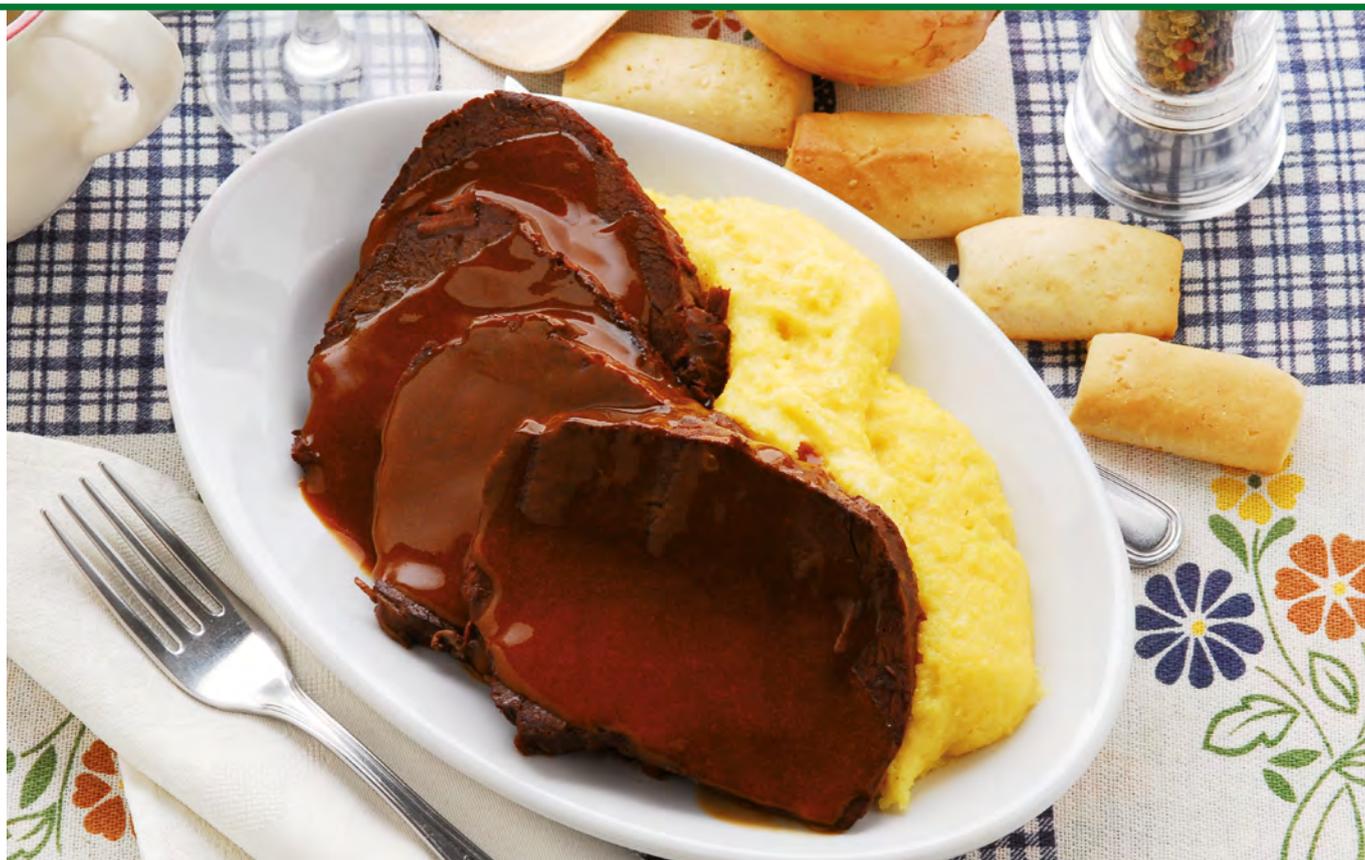
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*“Pastissada” was conceived  
and perfected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century*

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So goes the legend, which, as fables often will, flatters the humble masses: in what world would serfs have noble wine and spices at their disposal? According to the historian Andrea Brugnoli, author of the invaluable *Verona illustrata a tavola (Illustrated Veronese Cooking)*, *pastissada* as we know it now was conceived and perfected in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when the city, a stronghold of the Austrians and then of the Savoy dynasty, had a particularly high equine population - horses and mules - used for military purposes. Low prices and cooking methods which concealed the origin of the meat promoted its diffusion on the tables of the poor, who overcame their prejudices against horse flesh by softening it through slow cooking and flavouring it with spices, herbs and wine. Nowadays the legendary *pastissada de caval* is distilled into poetry: “Se te vol farte un regal/ un regal a la Cangrande,/ compra carne de caval/ e



po' dopo pensa in grande" ('To give yourself a gift worthy of Cangrande [della Scala], buy horse flesh and think large'). These alternating rhymes were composed by the humanist cook Giorgio Gioco. This Veronese chef recommended lengthy cooking over a low flame ("par 'na pastissada fina/ cinque ore de cusina" - 'for a fine *pastissada*, five hours of cooking') and to serve the result on freshly cooked polenta. "Pair it with the same wine used in its preparation: protagonist in the pot, star of the goblet. It will be a dinner worthy of applause". And if any is left over, it makes a sublime sauce for gnocchi. *Pastissada* ticks all the boxes: flavour, history, colour, vitality, culture. But how to reconcile it with our palates which has become fussier over the centuries, no longer satisfied by delicious but heavy flavours? **How can Amarone, which derives its vigour and majesty from grapes that wake full of energy after their slumbers on the drying mats, fit into modern gastro-ophy?** How can we tame red-blooded, Herculean Amarone in the cooking pot? "Dosage is the answer", taught Gioco, who always kept an open bottle of Amarone in his kitchen: "It can live up the flavour of any dish, even a delicate one. Con-

sider pumpkin risotto. A threadlike drizzle of Amarone is like Ariadne's thread: a life-saver. Amarone is an ally of cooks, an extraordinary wine which has conquered the world. No tamer's whip and stool are necessary to bring it to heel: it is already domesticated. Vigorous but velvety. Majestic but approachable".

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*From risotto to tortelloni,  
this wine's aroma perfectly  
complements other ingredients*

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If *pastissada de caval* boasts roots reaching back over a millennium, **risotto with Amarone** is the modern recipe which best represents the culinary versatility of the ancient Acinatico wine. In Valpolicella no restaurant fails to offer it to wine tourists. **Created three decades ago, it has transcended the borders** of Valpolicella, Verona and Italy itself. In New York, the version prepared by the Melotti risotto restaurant in the East Side is a must. Even mayor Bill De Blasio has tasted it. In Tokyo, lovers of Italian food have encountered it at the Tre Corone restaurant, prepared by Guido Orben from Villafranca. In London it graces the menu at the

River Cafè, a small gourmet venue overlooking the Thames.

**But Amarone**, proud rooster in the coop of Italian good eats, **also gladly weds pasta**, as restaurant menus all over Italy will attest: lasagna with hare sauce and Amarone; *spaghetti alla chitarra* (square-section 'guitar-sliced' spaghetti) with Valpolicella red wine; *pappardelle* with Amarone and duck *salmis*; drunken *maccheroni*...

In Valeggio, the capital of stuffed *agnolin* pasta in the province of Verona, the pasta workshop of the Remelli brothers offers customers not only various filled *tortellini* and *tortelli*, but **also deep wine-coloured tortelloni with Amarone and braised meat**. The wine's aroma is in perfect harmony with the other ingredients. On the border between Valpolicella and Lessinia, in the town of Croce allo Schioppo near the splendid Ponte di Veia, a massive natural arch sculpted by a stream over millions of years, **Amarone weds mountain cheeses**. For a dozen years, Corrado Benedetti, a creative cheese artist and last scion of a long cheese-making lineage, descendant of a Napoleonic soldier who survived the massacre at the Battle of Berezina, has been curing Cimbro cheese from the Lessinia mountain



pastures, made of cow's milk and goat rennet, in the grape skins from Amarone production. "In February to March, after the skins are strained out of the wine", he explains, "I cover the Cimbri cheeses with the skins from the Amarone grapes: Corvina, Corvinone, Rondinella. I let them soak for a month and then leave them in an ageing room for another six. This idea was born from a desire to combine two of our area's finest distinctive products".

*Vinappeso is a cured meat treated with Amarone and Recioto wines*

The intuition of Walter Ceradini, a butcher from Arbizzano di Negrar in the area producing classic Valpolicella wines, gave rise to Vinappeso, a *culatello* ham treated

with 50% Amarone and 50% Recioto, its sweeter sibling. **Less than two years after its creation, Vinappeso has reached the highest peaks of Italian restaurant cuisine.** Ceradini's business partner Eddy Marchi explains: "A giant of Italian cured meats, when fully aged, is married to Valpolicella wines: Amarone and Recioto, at 50% each, if seasoned for 16-18 months; at 80% Recioto and 20% Amarone if seasoned for 12-13 months. **The great Valpolicella wines generously give their fragrance and flavour**".

Amarone is a thoroughbred whose reins can be loosened in the kitchen. This is clear to Stefano Miozzo, a pizza master in Cerea (Al Borgo 1964) who has created **a gourmet pizza with Amarone dough.** Its ingredients include Baldo black truffle, Lessini *robiola* cheese, and *culatello* ham treated with Valpolicella wine and its grape skins. Those expecting a marriage between an oiled, muscle-bound wrestler

reeking of camphor and a dainty nun exuding the fragrance of incense and prayer are off the mark. Amarone opens its heart and becomes a gentleman poet: **its aroma does not overpower the delicate robiola nor drown out the truffle.** More than a pizza, we find ourselves eating a poem. Amarone can guide us through an entire meal, from starters to cheese. And dessert? That too. Indeed there are many, including ice creams. A student at the Orio Vergani Hotel Institute in Ferrara, Dario Zerbinati, won first prize at the cooking competition "Il piatto estense" ('Este on a plate' - Este being the dynasty that once ruled the area) a few years ago with Amarone caramelised pears and cinnamon ice cream.

**Morello Pecchioli**

## AMARONE RISOTTO

**Ingredients:** 300 g of Vialone nano rice, 320 ml of Amarone wine from Valpolicella, 50 g of Monte Veronese grating cheese (or Grana), 1 shallot, 50 g of butter, 50 g of beef marrow (or substitute butter), meat broth, salt.

**Preparation:** melt half the butter with the marrow in a pan; add the finely chopped shallot and soften it with some of the broth. Add the rice until toasted; then gradually add the Amarone, mixing it in with a wooden spoon until it is absorbed. Continue cooking the rice by adding a ladleful of broth whenever it dries out. Turn off the heat when the rice is *al dente*; stir in the remaining butter and grated cheese until creamy.





# Snail eggs

by **Giancarlo Saran**  
Treviso Academician

*An intriguing alternative to the more feted sturgeon eggs.*

Since time immemorial they have silently lived alongside humans. Their shells in Neolithic caves testify to this. **Apicius** dedicated several passages to them in his *De Re Coquinaria*, extolling them among other luxurious delicacies of the time. Then came the dark ages, the Middle Ages, and they were slow-moving prey; partial rehabilitation

came with the **Renaissance**, thanks to pope **Pius V**, a closet gourmet who reclassified them as permitted foods during meatless Lenten and fasting days, though they were by no means fish, declaring: “*estote pisces in aeternum*” (‘be ye forever fish’). The definitive big break arrived in **1814**, thanks to Prince **Charles de Talleyrand** who presented them as a fabulous delicacy to **Tsar Alexander I** on his transalpine travels. Yet, notwithstanding these illustrious precedents, they are also well established in **popular medicine**, for example in Sicily, where they were mashed and mixed with yeast as a poultice for conjunctivitis, or their cooking water was used against ailments of throats or stomachs. They have witnessed **centuries of tradition** throughout the Italian peninsula. In

Palermo, they are known as **babbaluci di Santa Rosalia** (St Rosalia’s snails), and the devotees of the secular ceremony of the *sucata* (‘sucking’) pull these innocent molluscs, now smothered in garlic and parsley, out of their little mobile homes. In Rome there are the **lumache di San Giovanni** (Snails of St John) on the evening of 23 June, while the ancient **fiere dei Bogoni** (Snail Festival), rooted in the 13th century, takes place in Badia Calavena in the hills near Verona. Times and technologies change, but snails are always pressed into service by humans. Someone even casually noticed that the hands of snail farmers were unusually soft and free of the roughness otherwise associated with working the land from dawn to dusk. Hence the discovery of a secret - namely, snail slime - which could



be helpful in **modern cosmesis**. It hydrates, reconstitutes and lends elasticity. This is one reason for the recent boom in the snail market, also reflected in the culinary world and the discovery of new horizons.

*The snail market is booming, and this is also felt in the gourmet world*

**The first inkling came twenty years ago**, when two farmers in northern France realised that **snail eggs could be an intriguing alternative to the more feted sturgeon eggs**, more commonly and colloquially known as caviar. One thing led to another and in **2006**, three enterprising youths from Palermo, **Davide Merino** and **Giuseppe** and **Michelangelo Sansone**, began suspecting that this innovation could open new frontiers. After various peregrinations to understand the rules of the game, they launched the new adventure which is today an example of enlightened entrepreneurship: **Madonie snails**, with headquarters in **Campofelice di Rocella**. A brief introduction is in order. Though snails were once a rural subsistence food, it is also true that they naturally resist external toxins and pathogens - and not just parasites and bacteria: in Chernobyl, for example, only snails were unharmed by the radioactivity. With modern agricultural techniques, they could therefore become 'time bombs' by absorbing dangerous substances and becoming toxic to humans. Therefore the new Madonie snail breeders have created a protected snail farm in a natural environment which is ideal to them (sun and clay-poor earth) rich in the most suitable plants (clover, green chard, rapeseed), unlike intensive breeding operations abroad which use processed feeds. After overcoming indubitable early difficulties, they succeeded in creating a product with superb organoleptic properties which, most importantly, has allowed increasing progress in a previously unexplored niche, namely snail eggs, which, partially thanks to their



nacreous appearance, have colloquially assumed the name 'caviar'.

*These eggs, hand-washed and salted, can last approximately 6 months in glass jars*

**The protocol is exacting.** The best specimens are selected - and they have their needs. Indeed, snails are incomplete hermaphrodites: they each have both sets of reproductive organs, but must mate in order to breed, in a ritual which lasts for several hours. Thereafter, both partners produce eggs. This is a laborious process also spanning several hours of 'à la carte production', since the shell cannot contain all the eggs. These eggs are then **painstakingly washed and salted** to interrupt incubation and sterilise them. This is all **strictly done by hand**. Subsequently the eggs are packed into glass jars averaging 50 grammes each, and can keep for approximately 6 months. This is the birth of **Madonie pearls**, a.k.a. snail eggs. **Madonie Snails**, by now, has become a guaranteed brand, and the three business owners are ready to train and then oversee those who would follow them in this unusual adventure. Around 1,500 small businesses have undertaken this activity in recent years, mostly abroad. In Italy, **in addition to the Madonie snails, there are also good sources in the Torino and Crema areas, as well as 'pearls' of Etruria (Tuscany) and Sardinia**. This is an example of highly specialised agriculture, **which received the**

**Coldiretti 'Green Oscar' for technological innovation in 2013**. 90% of production is destined for international markets, especially in France and Spain.

This innovation, which has opened new paths of snail exploration, could not fail to have culinary corollaries. Snail eggs are visually striking, and are also intriguing to taste: popping in our mouths, they **release a blend of herbaceous and mineral aromas, accompanied by a velvety, creamy texture**. **Serving temperature is important:** it should not exceed 2°. They should be served with porcelain cutlery, in a glass dish placed on a small tray of crushed ice. **Their first ambassador has been Carlo Cracco, who offers pàche (a variety of paccheri - large tube pasta - from the Trento area) with veal tongue and snail caviar**. But, though the simplest serving method is on a crouton drizzled with oil, with optional raw fish, several chefs have tackled this innovative delicacy, an alternative to the classic and better-known caviar. For instance, the Sicilian **Giovanni Guarnieri** offers a cream of aubergine with Pachino cherry tomato. **Pietro d'Agostino**, in the shadow of Etna, offers several variants: with raw fish, with Salina capers, citrus marmalade and Mothia salt, but also with black rice and squid. Since these delicious 'pearls' are associated with **Aphrodite**, inevitably some would offer them for Valentine's Day, such as **Giuseppe Calvaruso**, who prepared them with cardoon bourguignonne and smoked mackerel. Does it work? We can only taste and find out!

**Giancarlo Saran**