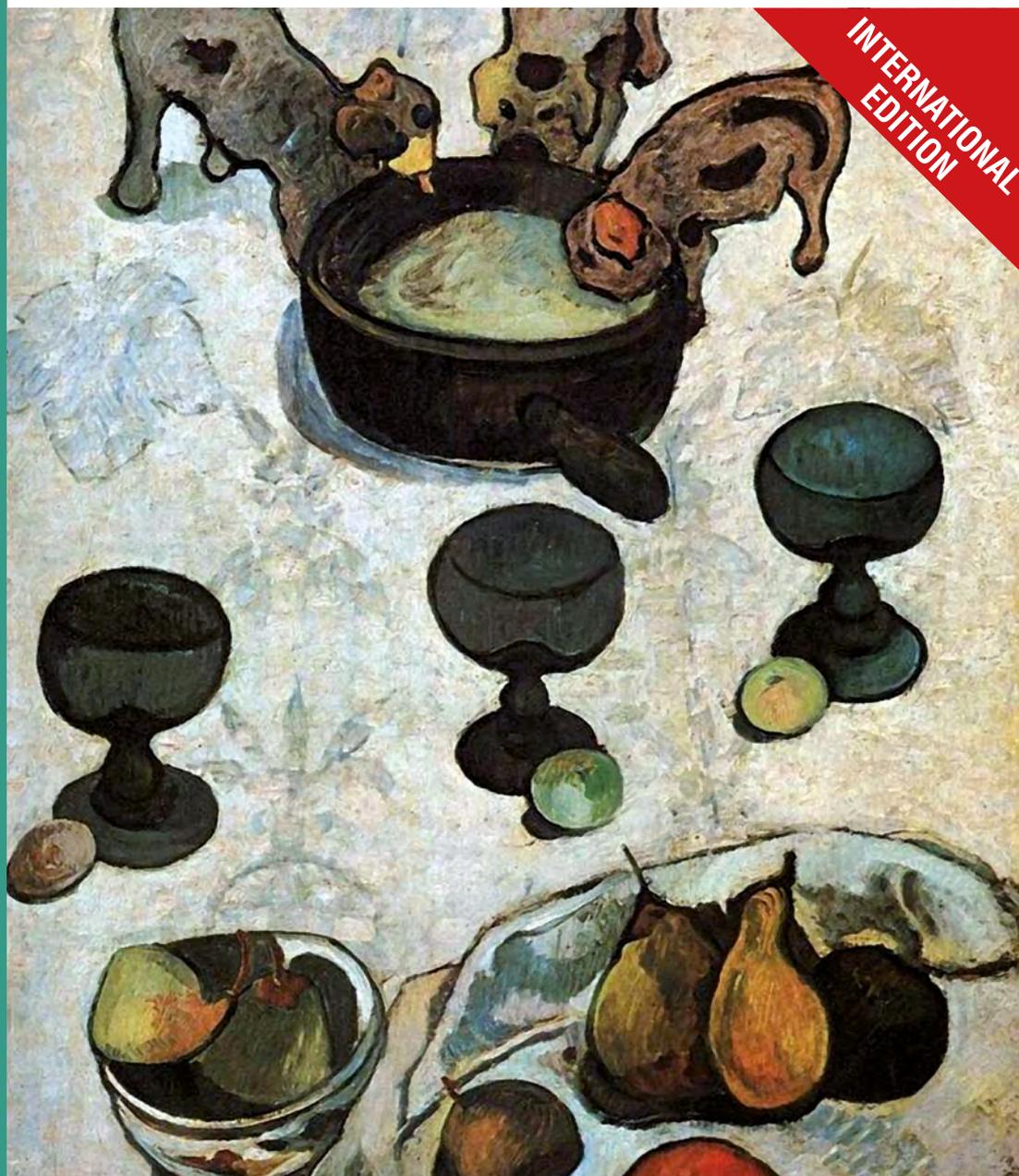


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EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: *Graphic elaboration of a detail of Still Life with Three Puppies (1888) by Paul Gauguin, Museum of Modern Art, New York*

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The new App brings the Academy's world to all enthusiasts of our great cuisine

*See page 9 for all the necessary details
to start this interesting exploration.*

The entire Italian Academy of Cuisine is for everyone, always available, always with us, always ready to inform us regarding any news, regulations and activities pertaining to the gastronomic universe. When you read this Focus, the work of months, following extensive testing, will finally be available on your smart phones or tablets, for both iOS and Android, **in both Italian and English.**

*This innovation will allow the larger public
to learn about the Academy too*

This innovation will even allow the general public to enter the Academy's world; we will therefore become increasingly able to pursue our institutional goals, namely protecting and making the most of Italian cooking traditions and informing the public about the best restaurants. The inside cover is the **advertising page** which, for the first time, **will be published in many national media outlets.** The invitation to download the new App is not, therefore, aimed only at Academicians, but at all Italian cuisine lovers. The new App is described in detail on page 9 of this issue, but in brief, it permits exploration of our institutional brochure which is rich in basic information and contains all Academic regulations, offers updated food news, and allows access to the magazine and the Academy's recipes.

*An area reserved exclusively for Academicians
with the Members' Handbook, regularly updated*

Academicians will also find a **members' area**, accessible with one's currently valid membership card number. This section contains the regularly updated and easily navigable **Members' Handbook.** This is one of the aspects which most intensely involved the Academy's various departments, considering the complexity of harmonising the Secretariat's and the App's software; furthermore we asked the developers to create a swift, intuitive and efficient search function.

This is arguably the App's 'jewel in the crown', which slashes printing and shipping costs and frees the Delegates from having to deliver booklets personally to all Academicians,

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia

who don't all regularly attend functions. For all this I thank the staff of the Secretariat and also the software development company which has by now been collaborating with us for some time, having also managed the **Restaurant Guide App** which remains valid and active. So now all that's left is to download the App with our best wishes for an interesting journey through the Academy's world.





Myths and curiosities *about spices*

by **Roberto Zottar**
Gorizia Delegate

Mediaeval European food was perfumed with a wide variety of spices, whose principal function was to differentiate the food of commoners from that of the wealthy classes.

The culinary use of spices is thousands of years old, but the Middle Ages witnessed an explosion of spice-madness in the most varied fields from cuisine to medicine to religious rituals, and this infatuation was also an important motor for the development of commerce, conquests and economic growth. The term 'spices' **derives from the Latin *species*, indicating special, valuable merchandise**; and in the Middle Ages the term was first used in the sense of 'goods' and later 'drugs' (perhaps partially because of its narcotic effects caused by alkaloids) applied to what we call spices, meaning chiefly vegetable substances of oriental origin used especially in cooking and pharmacopoeia. The ancients maintained that smells are minute particles which rise to the sky from the earth, and indeed spices **have long been known, used and loved not**

only to flavour foods, but also to render medicines more pleasant and efficacious, perfume cosmetics and honour the gods. Mainly these were barks, roots, flowers, buds, stigmata, seeds, fruits or berries derived from aromatic plants mostly from the east or the tropics.

In Europe, spices were present in all manner of dishes between the 13th and 15th centuries

Spices appear in three quarters of the recipes in 13th- to 15th-century European cookbooks, featured in all types of dishes, **from broths and soups to sauces, véloutés and condiments, not to mention meat, fish and sweets.** Mediaeval European food, at least that which the



wealthier classes could afford, was therefore seasoned with a wide variety of spices, whose breadth is particularly striking: indeed, **twenty-odd spices were used**, against the four or five that the Romans knew and used.

Perhaps the most common, misleading old wives' tale, and the hardest to debunk, about the food culture of the "dark ages" is that **spices in the Middle Ages were used for preserving food and masking the stench of putrefaction**, especially in meat. We can counter this by credibly arguing that generally **spices cannot extend the lifespan of foods**. Only one substance is useful for such purposes, namely salt, so well-known since antiquity and easily obtained that there was no need for voyages to find replacements. We also know that **in the Middle Ages, foods were preserved in oil, honey or animal fat as well as brine**, and there was no reason to change these proven, effective methods. In reality, spices' principal function was, at the time, to differentiate commoners' food from that reserved for the wealthy, as illustrated by the motto associated with many recipes of the era: *Spice your food and give to the Lord*. **Spices were indeed mainly used ostentatiously, as were French-style banquets**. It is documented, for instance,

that the wedding banquet for George the Rich, duke of Bavaria, and the Polish princess Jadwiga in 1476 involved 174 kg of pepper, 129 of ginger, 93 of saffron, 92 of cinnamon, 47 of cloves and only 38 of nutmeg! Hence the theories concerning the role (and equally unsupported abuse) of spices in cooking are implausible: they were not used to preserve food (of the above, only pepper can do that), nor to cover the smell of putrefaction.

Mediaeval texts include lists of spices and advice about assessing their quality

The clearest idea of what the term 'spice' may have signified for mediaeval merchants is provided by manuals of the time, which explain techniques and regulations for conducting business. These were compendia not only of weights and measurements, but also of curious facts about the various local markets, supplemented by lists of spices and advice on assessing their quality reliably. **The text *La Pratica della Mercatura* (The Merchant's Handbook) by Francesco Pegolotti, from 1340, lists an impressive 288 spices (spezierie),**

corresponding to 193 distinct substances (as many spices occurred in multiple forms, e.g. three types of ginger and two grades of cinnamon). Among these, **the most important of the 'new' spices was sugar**, which, though not an essence, was categorised among drugs of high value and credited with miraculous properties. Pegolotti enumerates 13 varieties of sugar, including rock sugar, sugar from Damascus, Babylon and Qift, in Egypt (*zucchero di Caffa*), and sugar infused with roses or violets.

Curious facts about certain spices and flavours

Among the strangest spices, we find *mumma* or *mumia*. The pharmaceutical manual *Circa Instans* from 1160, attributed to Matteo Plateario, lists it among 270 medicinal substances, defining *mumma* as "**a spice gathered in the tombs of the dead**" - not of just any dead person, but only those whose corpses had undergone specific embalming procedures. Besides being ingested, it was also considered a blood coagulant for wounds. Another odd custom, reserved for the wealthiest tables, was the use, albeit rare, of **gold in certain foods, a perfect panacea** - according to the culture of the times - against a wide variety of diseases. Indeed, mediaeval folk wisdom taught that **every edible spice had an inherent medicinal use**.

This almost obsessive search for spices waned **from the late 16th century, when a slow process of spice reduction in cuisine began** and spices were **increasingly replaced by local aromatic herbs**. The strong, spiced and contrived flavours of the Middle Ages were gradually abandoned; fresh ingredients were rediscovered and preparations with distinctive flavour palettes began to find favour. **If used well, herbs, unlike spices, can bring out flavours** without altering them, and can add refinement even to rustic recipes.

Roberto Zottar





Pungent pleasures

by **Giancarlo Burri**
Padua Academician

*Finding one's way
among the vast
vinegar family.*

With its hallmark sourness and sharpness mitigated somewhat, vinegar is now commercially available **in a vast assortment of distinctive varieties**, greatly appreciated on the modern international gastronomic scene. A concise guide to these vinegars can therefore prove useful, starting from those obtained exclusively by acetic fermentation of agriculturally derived alcoholic or sugary liquids.

The **Traditional Balsamic Vinegar** (*Aceto Balsamico Tradizionale*) varieties of **Modena and Reggio Emilia**, ennobled through PDO status, proudly hold the position of **most prized** (and, alas, most imitated) vinegars. Beginning from the delicate processes of maturation and ageing (at least 12 months) of cooked grape must in vinegar cellars, each vinegar workshop creates unique products which elude comparison, but balsamic vinegar's overall characteristics are, in a nutshell, **a dark brown colour, syrupy consistency, fragrant, persistent bouquet, rich and enveloping flavour, and harmoniously balanced acidity**.

Though the traditional, canonical use of balsamic vinegar is as a condiment, used for example on salads, vegetables or

meats, the flair of chefs has now extended its domain from sweet to savoury, from appetisers to desserts.

Aceto Balsamico di Modena Igp (PGI-rated Modena Balsamic Vinegar) is another product entirely. **Usually industrially produced**, it has different proportions of wine vinegar and cooked must and fewer organoleptic properties, and is far more affordable.

Known and used since antiquity both gastronomically and medicinally, **apple cider vinegar** is produced by **fermenting cider**; its **moderate acidity, delicate fragrance and harmonious flavour** recall the fruit whence it came. If pasteurised (generally when it is derived from peels and cores), it is transparent, while vinegar obtained from entire apples is slightly cloudy but indubitably superior. **Ideal for flavouring meat dishes or delicate sauces**, it brings out the aromas of salads and vegetables, whether cooked or raw, and makes fruits salads more refreshing.

*Rice vinegar encompasses many
nuances in flavour and colour*

Rice vinegar, long used in many Asian cuisines, particularly Japanese, Chinese, Vietnamese and Korean cooking, is produced by **fermenting rice without preservatives or other additives**.

Though widely associated with a delicate, faintly sweet flavour, in fact it encompasses a variety of nuances in taste and colour, with **three main categories**: **traditional rice vinegar**, which is white and sharp-tasting; **black rice vinegar**,





which is dark and slightly bitter; and **red rice vinegar**, with its amber hue, greatly appreciated for its sweet-and-sour flavour.

Another diversifying factor is the **concentration of acetic acid**, which varies according to geographical provenance. Chinese rice vinegar, for example, has more acetic acid than Japanese, causing a clear difference in taste: the Chinese variant has a sharper sourness, while the Japanese is gentler and sweeter.

Commonly used for flavouring and binding sushi rice, rice vinegar is also used as a condiment and seasoning for many dishes and sauces, on which it confers a distinctive note of delicate acidity. **Rice wine vinegar** is rather similar.

Characteristic of south-east Asian cuisine and also liberally employed in some regions of India, **coconut vinegar** can be

obtained in two ways: by fermenting the sap of coconut palm flowers, or by fermenting the liquid extracted from coconuts. The first method yields a dark brown vinegar, and the second, a vinegar tending towards milky whiteness. It has a **delicate sweet-and-sour flavour and an exotic fragrance** recalling the white pulp of the coconut itself. It is excellent for **adding subtle sweetness to salad dressings, marinades and soups** and many dishes both hot and cold.

Malt vinegar, obtained by fermenting malted barley, is **delicate and rounded in flavour and highly aromatic**. It can be used for **dressing salads or cooking meat or fish**. It is perfect in its traditional use on **fish and chips** in Britain.

Probably the **world's oldest vinegar**, **honey vinegar** is made through acetic

fermentation of mead (an alcoholic beverage also dubbed 'the drink of the gods'). Low in acidity, with a **golden hue and characteristic aroma**, it admirably seasons **vegetables, meats, sauces and sweet-and-sour dishes**. Diluted in water and served cold, it is an excellent thirst-quencher.

The flavoured vinegar family is a treasure trove of seductive aromas

Decidedly copious and rich in seductive aromas is the family of flavoured vinegars, produced by judiciously **infusing high-quality vinegar with plants and spices**.

Starting from the ancient **seven thieves' vinegar** (infused with garlic, rue, sage, rosemary, wormwood, mace, nutmeg, cinnamon, cloves and camphor), we now find vinegars flavoured with raspberries, pomegranate, cherry, peach, fig, prickly pear, Isabella grape (known in Italy as *uva fragola*: 'strawberry grape'), sage, tarragon, garlic, lavender... and even coffee!

To delight adventurous chefs and cooking enthusiasts, there is now an **innovative solid vinegar for grating**, with an **intense black hue and a fragrant, refreshing perfume**: Parpaccio, from the Mengazzoli vinegar works, whose main ingredient is Modena Balsamic Vinegar. It won the Italian Food Award for 2019 and was **selected among the 3 best food inventions of the year!**

The curious novelties of the summer which has just passed include the new, sophisticated **vinegar cocktails**, with a distinctive sweet-and-sour taste, alcoholic or not, and wonderfully refreshing and thirst-quenching. The most internationally successful is the **switchel**, based on **apple cider vinegar, freshly grated ginger, honey and lemon juice**, diluted in half a litre of water, best enjoyed after steeping for 24 hours in the bottle.

Giancarlo Burri





The fairytale of Lee Yum Hwa: *from fintech to egg pasta*

by Elena Simmen

Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician

*Interview with
a pasta chef in love
with Italian cuisine.*

It must be wonderful to feel Italian!" My friend Lee Yum Hwa often tells me this with a wide smile as laughter lights up his face. We're in Singapore, the finance capital of south-east Asia, where Yum Hwa decided years ago to leave his financial consulting post and become a pasta chef. This passion led him to **open Ben Fatto 95, an artisanal fresh pasta workshop with annexed kitchen**, where his creations can be enjoyed straight "from kneading board to table", for those without the patience to wait until they get home before sampling the first forkful. This is a home-made pasta startup, and it could not be called otherwise in this financial capital! But let us explain the facts properly.

Yum Hwa is 36 years old, is determined

and energetic, and opened Ben Fatto 95 in his home garage in 2018. **Each week he produces between 20 and 25 kg of pasta** using soft wheat flour and durum wheat semolina made by the Molini Pivetti (Pivetti Mills) in Renazzo, near Ferrara. Alongside pasta, **he also sells gravies and sauces** made with original ingredients (where possible) using traditional recipes, such as Ligurian pesto, tomato sauce with and without meat, and so forth.

*Diners who sit in his small,
delightful garden
can "taste Italy"*

His customers are 80% Singaporean (Chinese, Malay and Indian) and 20% European. Among these, the 12 lucky diners who secure a place under the pergola in the small but delightful garden annexed to his kitchen and workshop can "taste Italy" where they sit, **enjoying piping hot bucatini or spaghetti straight off their bronze dies, agnolotti alla canavese, pappardelle, tortellini and much more.**

Lately, Yum Hwa has been using the machines in his workshop less and less, increasingly relying on his beautiful and frankly **gigantic rolling pin, a beloved possession which he brought from Italy.**

This likable Singaporean pasta maker, enamoured of Italy and its food, **recounted his story** at his long work table, the very same where he kneads, rolls out and works flour with eggs or water. "I came closer to the world of pasta during a holiday in Italy in 2016" - says Yum

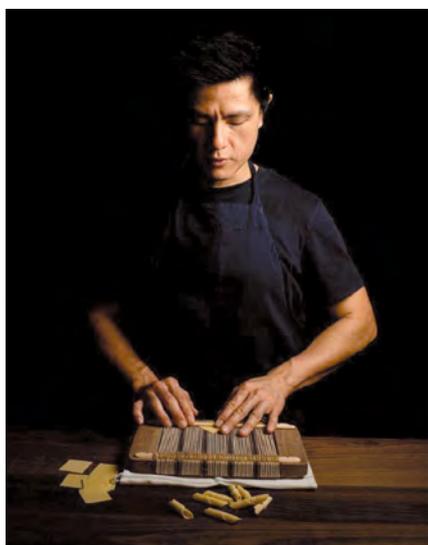
Lee Yum Hwa and his giant rolling pin



Hwa - "when I went in search of the cradle of the world, **Italy**, a country that has always fascinated me because **it is capable of offering extraordinary gastronomic products made with simple and authentic ingredients**. I visited Milan, Tuscany, Bologna and other cities in Emilia Romagna. And it was precisely in Emilia Romagna that I discovered my affinity for hand-worked pastas. How? By tasting the innumerable specialities in that region's wonderful *trattorie*". He continues: "Returning from this trip, I went back to my desk job; however, in my thoughts I remained at the table, in Italy".

First experience in the kitchen

"Transported by that absorbing Italian experience, I began cooking pasta for friends non-stop. Their appreciation encouraged me to refine the craft and embark on some work experience in a dear friend's restaurant. **It was love at first bite!** So I decided to leave my desk and computer in favour of a more enticing artisanal table, where I began delighting in making pasta by hand, also using social networks to learn more about this world of art and cuisine". "During another trip to Italy, visiting Puglia and then again Emilia Romagna, I attended ad hoc seminars and met **Antonio Amadoni, who makes small**



tools for working the various types of pasta by hand, and Rina Poletti, aka 'the most famous Emilian dough roller in Italy', who taught me to make thin pasta dough using only a rolling pin". As Yum Hwa talks, he reveals a **staggeringly profound knowledge of our food culture, bringing out the best in ingredients as true protagonists of any dish**. 'It's all in the details', some wise soul once observed. And so this affable *pastaio* continues his fascinating story describing how he was 'floored' by artistic images of Sardinian pasta which he found on some Japanese websites during his painstaking research.

Today, Sardinian pasta is his crowning achievement

"I felt that I absolutely must personally meet the author of what I perceived as pure culinary art - or culinary gold - so I left for Tokyo where I met the person I consider as **my mentor, Claudia Casu, a true-blue Sardinian** now happily transplanted in Japan. This was one of my most precious experiences, as it enriched me professionally and allowed me to understand and enter into a perfect symbiosis with my dough. I learned how to make traditional *culurgiones* and even the famous *filindeu*. Today, artisanal Sardinian pasta is truly my crowning achievement!"

Yum Hwa recounts a later trip to Sardinia and a curious episode: "Another amazing teacher of mine was a **fascinating Sardinian nonagenarian, grandma Gilda**, who was able to infuse me with the enchantment of pasta.

Despite not sharing a language, we understood each other as if by magic thanks to a dialogue of gestures and expressions and our common passion for cooking and hand-made pasta. That is how *lorighittas* took shape in my hands thanks to her inestimable teachings. Simply extraordinary!"

The dream of Yum Hwa, a romantic pasta maker

"What is my dream? To open a pasta workshop with a large-scale distribution. I would like to concentrate on products excelling in both quality and quantity, which can give me the satisfaction of being recognised on the artisanal pasta scene for what I truly love and am: a romantic pasta maker".

Before I leave Ben Fatto 95, a question spontaneously arises - trite, perhaps, but justifiable. "Yum Hwa, why this passion for pasta and not noodles?" No hesitation from him: "Because at the table, Asia is represented by rice. Italy, instead, means pasta, in its infinite and stupendous variety". Not a noodle in sight.

Elena Simmen



The new App of the Italian Academy of Cuisine

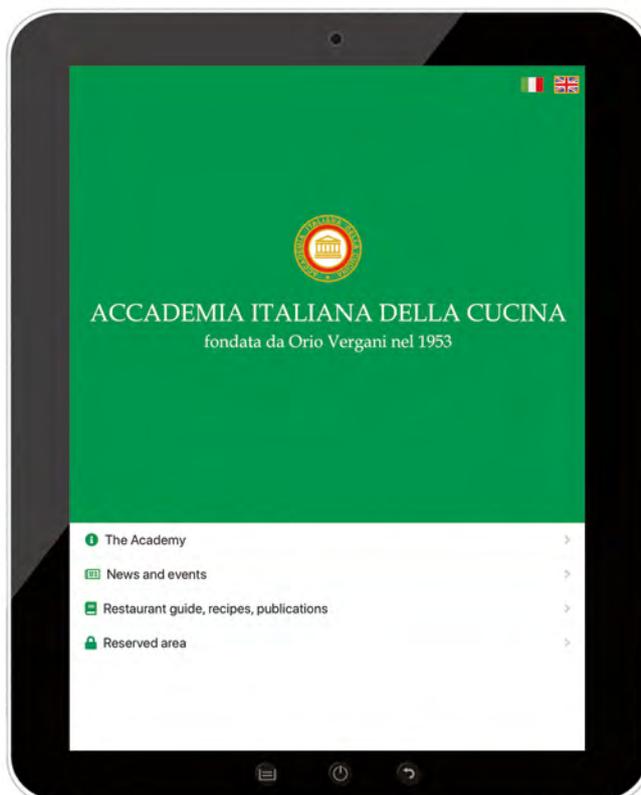
*What it contains and
how to use it.*

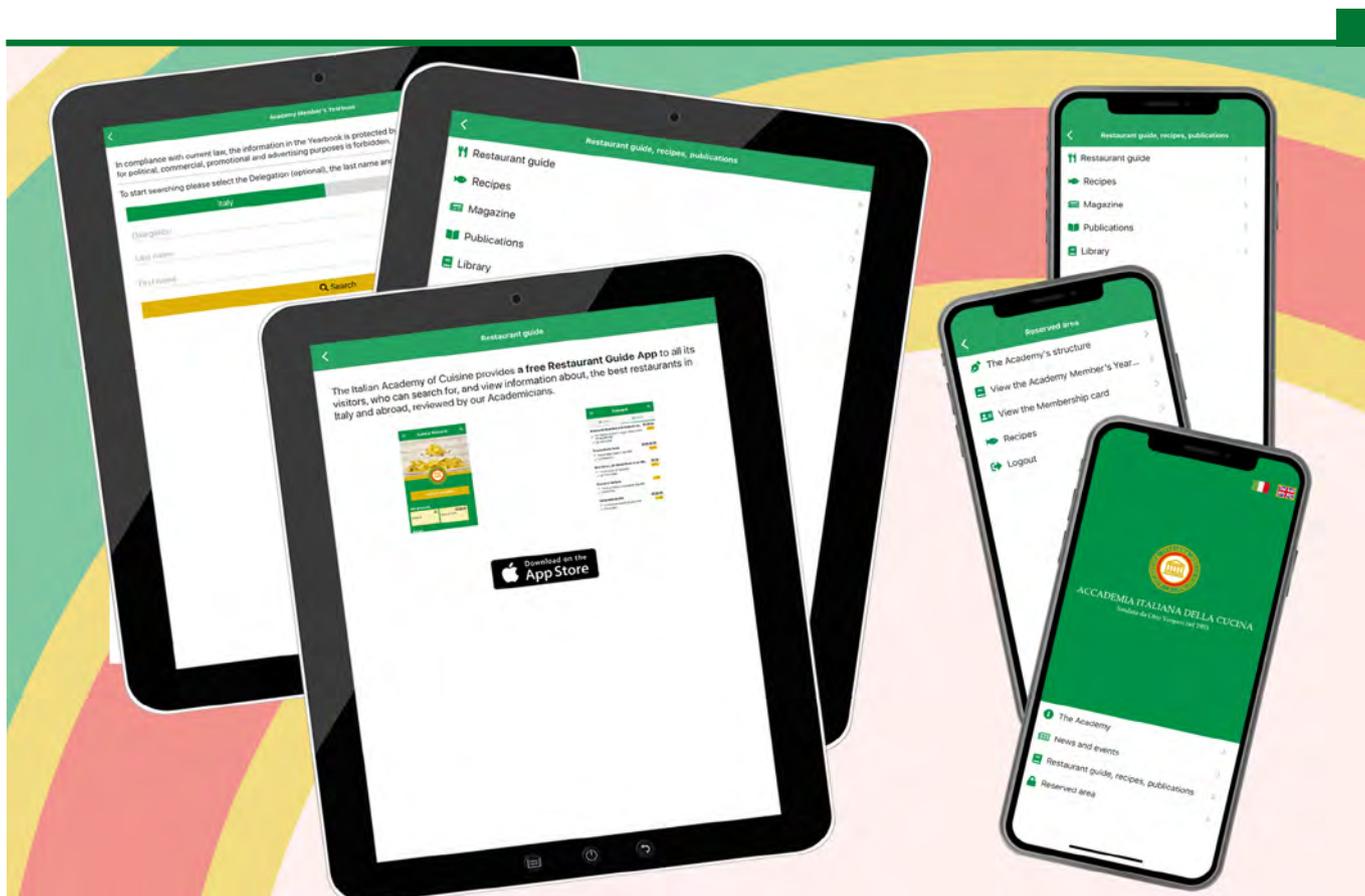
The Academy's new App, available in Italian and English, is intended for Academicians and the public at large. This agile and comprehensive tool gives users entry into the Academy's world at any moment with a smart phone or tablet. Fundamentally important for Academicians is the **Members' Area** which allows password-protected access to two special sections: **the Members' Handbook and the recipe collection**.

Once the App is downloaded **for free** from the **Apple Store** or **Google Play**, depending on which device is used, the homepage will appear, divided into **four main sections**.

The **first**, named **'The Academy'**, displays the Academy's Institutional Brochure, Statute, By-laws and Code of Ethics - all frequently updated.

The **second**, entitled **News**, is useful for staying informed of new developments regarding the Academy, restaurants and the food and wine world, and to read a preview of the President's **FOCUS**, the editorial published in the monthly magazine **Civiltà della Tavola**.





The **third** section contains important material: **the Restaurant Guide, the Recipes, the Magazine, the Publications and the Library.**

Our current **Restaurant Guide App** remains unchanged, and need therefore not be uninstalled from devices which already have it. However, users can also install it through this new App. This makes it easy for everyone to search and learn about the best restaurants in Italy and abroad, reviewed and assessed by our Academicians. The section dedicated to **Traditional Recipes at the Table** is aimed at the general public: all users, after registering, will be able to view a maximum of 20 recipes. **We recommend that Academicians consult the Recipes in the Members' Area.** That section also allows readers to 'leaf through' the **Magazine *Civiltà della Tavola***, with valuable contributions from the members of the Franco Marengi Study Centre and our esteemed Academicians.

The **Publications** page keeps users up to date about the Academy's publishing activity and provides public previews of the Academy's published volumes currently available in bookshops. And we could hardly omit the **Library**, encompassing over 5000 works donated by

Academicians and publishers: users may view information about our library foundation, the locations of books, and instructions for consulting them.

The fourth section, indispensable for Academicians, is the **reserved Members' Area.** By entering the number or code found on their membership cards, members can follow a simple procedure to view content reserved for Academicians. **Delegates**, as usual, will enter the credentials provided to them by the Secretariat.

In recent years, as the Academy has digitised some activities and contents, it has become necessary to facilitate more dynamic access to the **Members' Handbook**, distributed in printed form until 2019. It was normally issued at the beginning of each year, but frequent changes meant that it became outdated soon after publication. Furthermore, some Academicians did not own a copy because they rarely attended convivial gatherings. Instead, the handbook is now frequently **updated**, and can be consulted at any moment on various devices to find Academician friends through a quick search for surnames and names (optional), or to search Delegations' databases in Italy and abroad by

selecting them from the menu. Having found the right individual, **members can then contact them directly by phone or email using the contact information provided.**

This section also lists the **administrative posts** relevant to the Academy's governing bodies, the Franco Marengi Study Centre, the Regional Coordinators and the Regional Study Centre Directors. Another valuable tool is the **new membership card**, emailed to Academicians and registered in each member's reserved area. We remind members that they can also load their membership cards to their smart phones or tablets through the **free App Stocard.**

To view a **local recipe**, Academicians can consult the entire *Traditions of the Table* collection within the Recipes section. Happy surfing!

