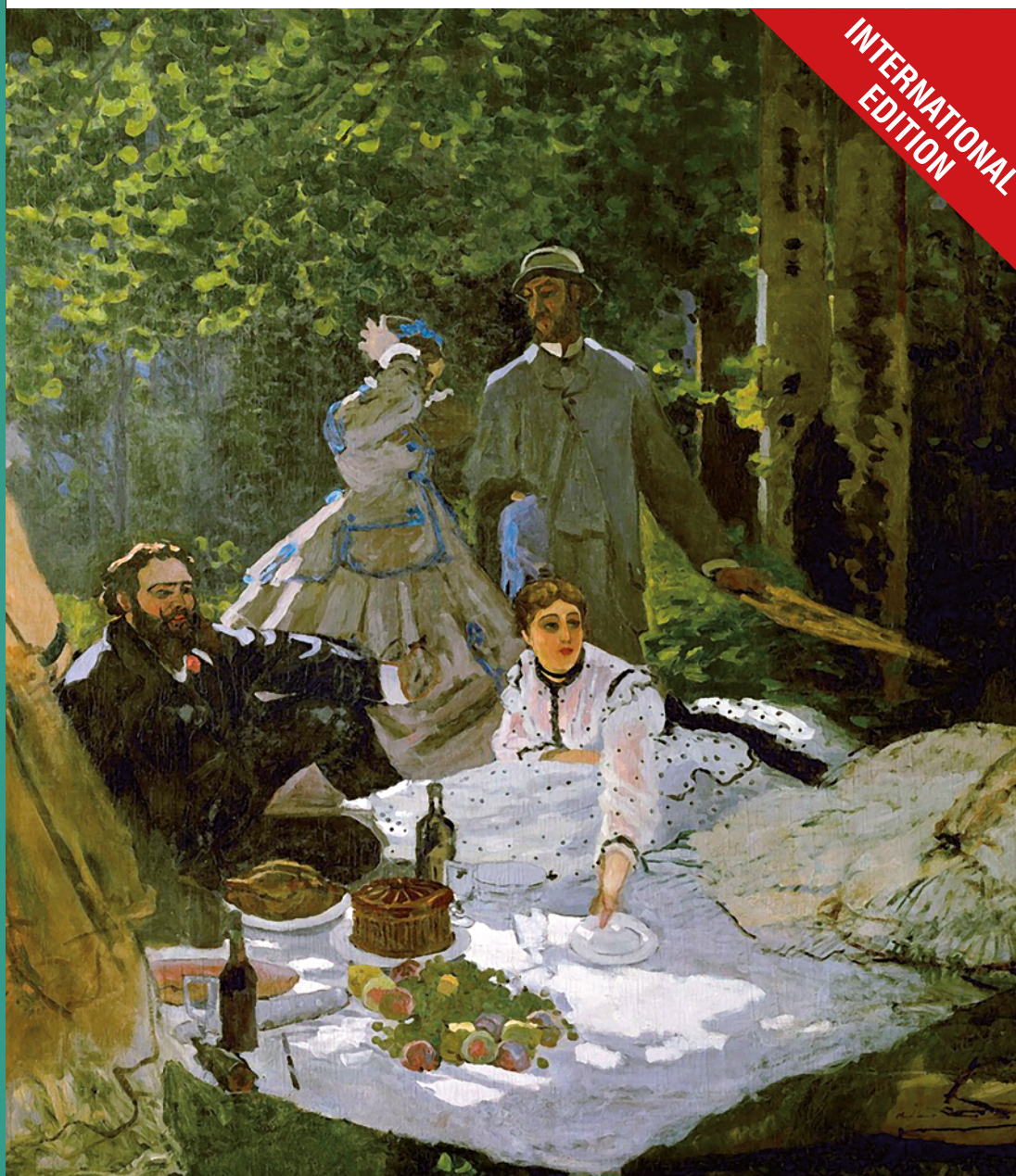


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INTERNATIONAL  
EDITION



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CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



**On the cover:** *Graphic elaboration of Luncheon on the Grass (1865-1866) by Claude Monet; Musée d'Orsay, Paris*

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# Alas, the light at the end of the tunnel is the flashing of war machines

by **Paolo Petroni**

President of the Accademia

*Let us hope for a respite, a ceasefire,  
a decorous compromise.*

**O**ur editorial, bearing the title FOCUS, always tackles current events, and is therefore always the last thing to be written and is formatted the day before the magazine is printed. Despite this, since *Civiltà della Tavola* is a monthly magazine, its contents may already have been superseded by swiftly developing events by the time they reach the reader's eyes. Unfortunately, this happened with last month's Focus, which, with hope and satisfaction, announced not only 'the light at the end of the tunnel' but even an 'exit' from that long, terrible tunnel. We may indeed have emerged from the darkness in which the pandemic enveloped us for two years, but the light that we behold is the flashing of war machines: the terrible glare of missiles and bombs which we never imagined would be seen again in our old Europe, with deaths, destruction, devastation, and economic and financial crisis. These unthinkable, unimaginable facts plunge us into despair. Once more, we are glued to televisions and mobiles to hear and read bad news developing by the hour.

*The neologism 'doomscrolling' describes  
our new addiction to the constant flow of news*

The English language, always quick to create neologisms, already speaks of 'doomscrolling': **scrolling down ghastly**



**news items as if addicted to them.** Alongside the problem of refugees, we should prepare for more expensive raw materials (no more wheat, maize or oil-producing seeds from the Ukraine and Russia) and paper, bringing increased printing costs. Let us hope for a respite, a ceasefire, a decorous compromise.

We have no Delegation in Kiev - luckily, as we might now say - but we have an Ambassador there: **Pier Francesco Zazo** (now relocated to Lviv), who was a passionate Academician when he resided in Canberra. We are proud of this former Academician who welcomed over 100 Italians, including 20 minors, into his home and took them out of Kiev. At the time of writing, our Academicians in the Moscow Legation are fine, as are our friends in the Bucharest and Warsaw Delegations.

*Three pieces of good news*

We would like to end this editorial with three pieces of good news: the signing of a very important Memorandum of Understanding with the **Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies**, discussed on the inside cover; the confirmation of our three-year cooperation agreement with the prestigious **Georgofili Academy**, led by our Delegate **Massimo Vincenzini**; and finally, our warm welcome to the conductor **Maestro Riccardo Muti**, who, sharing its goals, has joined our large family as an Honorary Academician.



# Climate and food

by Marco Leporati  
Shanghai Delegate

*With rising temperatures, tropical crops are being cultivated in the Mediterranean basin: an irreversible process, or is there still some hope?*

It's becoming increasingly difficult to reconcile the ecosystem and climate change with the intransigent defence of anthropocentrism (a central concept of the anthropocene), and environmental equilibrium with intensive production, whether agricultural or industrial. By way of explanation, though without claiming to be exhaustive, let us begin with a proposition from an article published a few months ago, by an author apparently of Italian origin, in the Hong Kong English-language daily *South China Morning Post*.

The thesis propounded by this journal-

*Is it possible to benefit from rising temperatures?*

ist - who is not alone in this - is that the Mediterranean basin can benefit from rising temperatures by **cultivating crops originating in the northern and southern tropics**, additionally spurred by modern consumers' pervasive penchant for exoticism.

If this is the future scenario, will it remain possible, on Italian territory, to find even unremarkable restaurants, inns and rustic *trattorie* where we can enjoy traditional Italian fare prepared 'as God intended'? I, an Italian expatriate, have sometimes returned to Italy for work-related reasons on the cusp of summer and stayed for a month or so in Tuscany, where, in both Florence and Prato, I was able to dine on quintessentially traditional dishes which were not particularly innovative but were, for someone residing in foreign parts, rich in flavour, simplicity and warmth, made from locally grown ingredients.

We return, then, to the initial *vexata quaestio*: **how to reconcile the survival of tradition**, which for us means history and cultural identity, **with climate change which could**, if it isn't already doing so, **distort current agricultural production** with substitutions that, while gastronomically innovative, would also 'cancel' our previous culinary customs? Italy especially, but other European countries too, have evolved in large part through individual and collective suffering, yielding recipes which still represent and confirm the progress





made in centuries past. Admittedly, such ingredients as potatoes, tomatoes, beans and more recently kiwi fruits have arrived from distant shores and adapted well to their new home; but it is worth remembering that continued climate upheavals as we are witnessing nowadays had not occurred since the mature days of the Roman empire, when, around 150 AD, pathogens appeared which then caused the Antonine plague, and an apogee around 450 AD when devastation was caused by falling temperatures, sustained volcanic activity and increased flooding. This led to ecological degradation and reduced soil fertility.

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*We may define what is happening as a 'geographical agricultural asymmetry'*

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What is happening today, instead, might be defined as a 'geographical agricultural asymmetry', with increasing **crop substitution** encouraged, and this is phenomenologically important, by **consumers' desire for certain products which encroaching globalisation has rendered more widespread**, making us forget seasonality: such is the **appeal of avocados and other sub-tropical fruits**.

The market is an important ally of climate change, since **territories in many agricultural and wooded areas have had their original functions disrupted**, being commandeered for uses decoupled from their geological contexts. Particularly egregious examples include the conversion (somewhat foreshadowed by **Roman Polanski's** 1974 film *Chinatown*) of former citrus orchards in California, whose crops were symbiotic with the activities of bees, to almond milk production, which is more remunerative but causes ecological distortion; similarly, Mexican avocado plantations' vast water absorption penalises adjacent agricultural production.

Humans bear a double responsibility for current climate change, as compared to that of past centuries: **first, pollution**



**has raised temperatures**, thereby shifting the latitudes at which given crops will grow; secondly, globalisation of 'consumer staples' in accordance with recent production models, such as 'food mile' reduction, has depleted ground-water.

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*Sicily has become a producer of papaya, mango and avocado rather than oranges*

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The slopes of Etna exemplify this: Sicily has become a producer of papaya, mango, Far Eastern fruits, avocado and banana, as its native orange groves vanish before our eyes due to the meagre profits provided by citrus cultivation.

**Thus we witness the disappearance of our territory**, which, particularly in Italy, was in the past perfectly symbiot-

ic with the humanism of the local population, as noted by **Stendhal** and **Goethe** in their travel diaries.

In a recent interview with the daily *Corriere della Sera*, the actor **Diego Abatantuono** recalled Milan as a city of "inns, bowling clubs, and the taverns known as *trani*, called *piole* in Turin. Of ivy-draped *trattorie*, with pergolas and vast wobbly tables under chequered tablecloths. Of humble eateries on the outskirts of town whose counters displayed salami, boiled eggs, and butter and anchovy canapés, where one might realise that some distinguished gentleman has nonchalantly lunched every day for twenty years" (13 August 2021).

Cherishing the good old days is not mere nostalgia; it means **preserving our identity so that we might continue to enjoy it**, including those of us, I somewhat selfishly add, who, like myself, live abroad.

**Marco Leporati**





# Voghera relish

by **Maurizia Debiaggi**

*Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician*

*The history of a product and a company which are guardians of the ancient relish-making tradition of Voghera.*

**W**e are in the Oltrepò Pavese area near Pavia. A riot of shiny, expertly candied, sweetly piquant fruit accompanies boiled meats, roasts and cheeses. **This is the *mostarda* - mustard-infused relish - of Voghera, typically composed of whole fruits**

including cherries, pears, apricots, peaches, figs, clementines, lemons, oranges, citrons and chestnuts, but sometimes also sliced melons and white gourds. Delectable!

**Less famous than its cousin from Cremona**, anointed as the standard bearer of the Italian relish-making tradition thanks to its flourishing industrial production following the Second World War, Voghera relish boasts ancient and noble origins which are still evident in what remains **a strictly artisanal product**.

It is indeed in a letter dated 1397, kept in the *Liber Litterarum* (Book of Letters) of the Voghera Municipal Archive, that the ducal chancellor to **Gian Galeazzo**

**Visconti**, then Lord of Pavia, wrote to the governor of Voghera to order “*uno zebro grande de mostarda de fructa cum la senavra*” (a large tub of fruit and mustard relish) prepared by the apothecary **Pietro de Murri**, whose workshop was in the city’s market square.

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## *A history exceeding 700 years*

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Voghera relish has a history spanning over 700 years, which, from the apothecary’s workshop to the food-preservation traditions of grocers and small-scale artisans, has allowed current production to expand, transcending the borders of its province and nation. **This ‘journey’s’ most recent years are now recounted by Marco Barbieri**, son of **Bruno**, who in 1977 took over the Pianetta company, the last producer of candied fruit and mustard-infused relish remaining in Voghera at the time.

But let us proceed in the correct order, since in this history, the artisanal production of Voghera relish, the vitality of the Barbieris’ Pianetta company, and the fortitude of that family, with its intergenerational success, are so strongly intertwined as to be one and the same thing. **“Voghera was an important centre of candied fruit and artisanal relish production at least since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century”**, Marco tells me, showing me a sales receipt dated 17 November 1896 issued by **Andrea Stringa**, a confectioner and purveyor of spirits with the *Fabbrica Speciale di Mostarda e Frutti Canditi* (Specialist Relish and Candied Fruit Manufacturers) in Voghera. It hangs





on his office wall, also adorned with large images of perfectly formed fruits enrobed in a glistening, faintly amber-hued syrup. The document bristles with certifications and attestations of gold medals dating the company to at least 1887, and gives the price of a kilo of relish as a whopping 2.10 Lire!

"For some years, the only industrial producer in Voghera", continues Marco Barbieri, "was Ligure Lombarda, which, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, produced jams and other preserves including the celebrated 'lightly spiced fruit'". He then proudly emphasises **the artisanal nature of local *mostarda* production**, kept alive until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century by at least a dozen small companies, now vanished for lack of intergenerational continuity.

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*Excellent raw materials; enough time for proper crystallisation; artisanal processing*

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"My father took over one of these very companies, which I now run with my family, including my son, Bruno, just as his grandfather did: three generations in this business! We've kept going for over forty years using **a recipe which has remained unchanged over time, aided only by improving technology**, striving to satisfy market demand and innovate while respecting tradition. If we speak of fruit variety, for example, the fresh fruit market is paramount; and



some fruits, such as 'Queen Claudia' plums or figs, are ever harder to find. Yet we remain **very attentive to consumers' requirements**, and until a few years ago, we would never have imagined using Amarena cherries, which are in high demand, or chestnuts, which are now our pride and joy!"

The secret is never to stray from quality criteria, beginning with choosing superlative raw materials, respecting the times necessary for proper fruit crystallisation, and maintaining strict processing standards, because, adds Barbieri, "we artisans, as everybody knows, adore cooking in *a pot!*" - evidence that the quality of which he speaks requires **painstaking care still reliant on extensive, precise hands-on work**.

"Also", he continues, "I've always been incredibly fascinated by accounts of family businesses and especially my father's descriptions of how this company allowed him to fulfil his dreams and ambitions. All told, my work involves something beyond economic considerations:

there's a history, a past, which have led me to what I am today, and this includes the creation of new products", he declares without concealing the satisfaction of having managed to further his father's dream of familial tradition and lead the only company which produces *mostarda* relish and candied fruit in Voghera.

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*The example of a company which produces a variety of relishes, also popular abroad*

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"And it was indeed in our home kitchen, about twenty years ago, that our pear sauce was born one evening, followed by many other *mostarda* variants, **popular abroad both because some cultures appreciate spicy sauces such as ours, and because of our sauces' versatility**. We've been exporting our products since the early '90s, and today about 8% of our product goes abroad; sauces and whole fruit relish hence reach northern and central Europe, Australia, and in Asia, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Korea and Japan, where they are mostly sold in gourmet shops".

"**The most important country for our exports is assuredly Germany**, where our **pear, lemon and cherry sauces** are particularly appreciated since their strong flavour pleasantly complements meat". Pianetta di Barbieri's *mostarda* relish **has now even reached Singapore**: a long voyage which brings credit not only to Italian products but to a family which is the last steward of the ancient relish-making tradition of Voghera.

**Maurizia Debiaggi**





# The skate also deserves *a place at the table!*

by **Giancarlo Burri**  
*Padua Academician*

*An affordable,  
delicately flavoured,  
but sadly  
overlooked fish*

**F**ishmongers' shops and supermarket fish counters, well stocked with sea bream, sea bass and the 'usual' tuna, swordfish and porbeagle steaks, alas allow but little space for other flavoursome, healthy and conveniently available Italian fish, such as diplodus, pandora, European horse mackerel, leerfish and **skate**. Among its **innumerable varieties** (the Mediterranean alone has nearly twenty species), the best-known in Italy is ***Raia clavata L.***, the thornback ray or thornback skate, called *baracola*

in the Veneto, *arzilla* in Latium, *rascia petrosa* in Campania, *picara petrusa* in Sicily and *rasciuna de funnu* in Sardinia. A cartilaginous fish (like manta rays, stingrays and sharks) of the *Rajidae* family, it has a dorsoventrally **flattened body**, with its head, trunk and pectoral fins (known as 'wings') joined into a **rhomboid form ending in a long, thin, very flexible tail** entirely covered by sharp, curved spines and bearing a **central spike**, known in Italian as *ferro* ('iron') for its resemblance to a harpoon.







*Samurai sword handles are traditionally wrapped in ray skin to improve grip*

The rough and resilient dorsal skin, which is greyish or brownish with intermittent darker spots, has callus-like bumps surmounted by small spikes; it should be pointed out, however, that males and females, juveniles and adults, even of the same species, may differ greatly in shape and colour. Japanese samurai sword handles are traditionally wrapped in ray skin to improve grip. In 19<sup>th</sup>-century France, ray or skate skin was used as paper; today, it is cured and made into bags, wallets and high-end watch straps.

**Normally between 30 and 80cm long, it sometimes reaches 130.** It can be fished year-round, but **its best fishing season is between March and June.** It is a very lean fish and a **good source of vitamin A and minerals** including potassium and phosphorus. It is a light food providing approximately 68 kcal per 100g of edible



flesh, highly beneficial to children and elders and those following a low-calorie diet or afflicted by high cholesterol.

*In the kitchen, it is versatile and may be used with flair*

Besides being **steamed or boiled (Arche-stratus** recommended preparing it with silphium, a highly aromatic, now extinct plant with large umbels), the skate lends itself well to **frying or stewing** (it is chiefly its pectoral fins that are used).

Delectably whimsical are the creations by **Andrea Berton** of the eponymous starred restaurant in Milan (skate with roasted escarole in green olive broth), by **Ruben Guidi** of the Alex restaurant in Marina di Pietrasanta (*pappa al pomodoro* [tomato bread soup], skate wings and scampi), and by **Anna Rita Simoncini** of the Sette Consoli restaurant in Orvieto (cauliflower cream, skate wings and taggiasca olives). Among traditional regional gastronomic interpretations, besides **Adriatic fish stews (brodetti)**, the Ligurian **skate with aromatic herbs**, the **razza in agliata** (skate in garlic-tomato sauce) from Oristano (Sardinia), and the Sicilian **a'raia a stimpirata** (sweet and sour skate), the **Roman broccoli e arzilla** (broccoli and skate) **soup** deserves special praise.

We can almost hear the voice of the great **Aldo Fabrizi** reciting one of his famous 'rhyming recipes' published in the collection *Nonna minestra (Grandmother Soup)*, dedicated precisely to that ancient and

humble preparation: "Bracing balsamic broth of wholesome fish - / and if that fish be skate, what joy ensues! / With but a drop, in rapture I enthuse: / o belly, grow tumescent if you wish! / What sorcery does thus intoxicate / my palate? - Though its charm I fain would spurn, / yet, chastened, every Friday I return / to worship at the altar of the skate!"

**A Lenten food par excellence** (such as to be almost mandatory at least on Good Friday), it was concocted by the resourceful housewives of yore, who, restricted both by rigid religious prescriptions and the pecuniary limits of their humble station, resorted to **seafood sold in the market a dù sordi** ('for tuppence') due to its slim pickings.

*Arzilla* (ray or skate), once gutted, was stewed with celery, onion, carrot and a little oil, and then its cartilage was carefully removed. **The cooking broth was flavoured by adding rosettes of the typical Romanesco broccoli** (the sweet, chartreuse, fractal-patterned variety), lightly sautéed in minced garlic and anchovies and chopped tomatoes.

The pieces of skate flesh were then added, alongside **pasta mista** (literally 'mixed pasta': the leftovers of pasta production, sold by weight to the poor who couldn't afford the pricier 'proper' pasta) or broken spaghetti until cooked through. Very popular a few decades ago in the no-frills *trattorie* of Trastevere and Testaccio, it has now fortunately been rediscovered and reinstated thanks to the dedication of several conscientious chefs.

**Giancarlo Burri**



# Planetary mixers: *muscles of steel in the kitchen*

by **Roberto Zottar**  
*Gorizia Delegate*

*What it is, how it works,  
and what it's for.*

**T**he planetary mixer, popularised in part by the (too numerous) television programmes for aspiring chefs and now **commonly found among home kitchen appliances**, is particularly appreciated by those who, pragmatically, love excellent food and would like their home cooking to be a cut above.  
**A planetary mixer is a kneader/mixer**

**capable of tackling liquids, semi-solids and solids:** thus, able to **deal with a wide variety of food consistencies**, from heavy bread doughs to meringues or fluffy sponge cake batters. It is indispensable for high-hydration doughs (even 80% or more), as with *ciabatta* or French baguettes; or **for home-baking high, fluffy panettone or colomba sponges:** making them by hand is near-impossible.







*A bowl, preferably of steel, with a motor-operated beater arm*

Essentially, a planetary mixer consists of a bowl, preferably of steel, and beaters attached to a motor arm. Unlike many other small appliances - blenders, grinders, multi-function food processors - which merely mince or mix without much power, this appliance can be considered a bona fide kneading machine similar, but for size, to those used in bakeries.

**A planetary mixer differs from ordinary mixers due to the dual movement of its mechanical arm, which imitates planetary orbits (hence its name)** in that each beater spins on its own axis (like the earth, which completes a rotation every 24 hours) but also revolves around the centre of the bowl itself (as the earth does around the sun every 365 days). This distinctive double motion **allows the beaters to reach every part of the bowl efficiently** while also optimising the formation, in the case of flour doughs, of the famous 'gluten mesh' which is crucial for bread to rise properly.

**The bowl is undoubtedly of utmost importance to a planetary mixer: it should be capacious enough**, much larger than that of an ordinary mixer. Bread dough requires a bowl capacity of at least 4.5 to 5 litres, even though this size will accommodate less than a kilogramme of flour. **Commercially availa-**

**ble planetary mixers differ in motor power**, determining the time necessary to process various ingredients. Some can operate continuously for a quarter of an hour, while others cannot go over 5 minutes at a stretch.

*The motor is one of the most important components*

The motor is one of a planetary mixer's most important elements: **the greater its power, the less it must strain**. If the machine is misused and burdened out of proportion to its power, its functionality will often be compromised. **The motors used in these appliances are of two kinds: gear-driven and belt-driven.**

Planetary mixers have a lever which turns them on and off and regulates processing speed, and a mechanism for lifting the arm. Different mixtures will require different speeds. The arm is lifted to insert various types of beater. Gear-driven machines also have a frontal area where additional accessories can be attached.

**In gear-driven planetary mixers, which are the most common in the medium/high-quality and professional ranges** and are **preferable** in my opinion if one's goal is to knead heavy doughs, the motor is positioned on the machine's arm.

Gear and belt motors also differ in energy use: the former dissipate far less energy. **Belt-driven motors are more common in lower-priced mixers**, and

require 1,200 Watts to knead a kilogramme of bread dough, while with a gear-driven motor, a planetary mixer would accomplish the same thing with 300 Watts. It is therefore fundamental, **when purchasing a mixer, to know its motor's power (find the wattage!)** and type, and **note its bowl's capacity**. Belt-driven motor mixers, though generally provided with a greater variety of accessories, wear down more often.

*Three kinds of beater according to mixture*

All mixers come with three kinds of beater, whose use depends on mixture type.

**Dough hooks** are used for **tougher, heavier doughs** that require considerable energy. The hook is generally hefty, since this beater must perforce be large and solid. Hook beaters are used for mixtures containing a large amount of flour or harder doughs, such as **bread or egg pasta dough, permitting them to remain compact and elastic.** Hooks are necessary for making **pizza dough**, but also for other mixtures, such as **panettone** or bread, wherein gluten development and the formation of the gluten mesh are crucial.

**Flat beaters**, also called 'leaf beaters' or 'K beaters', are used **for dense but soft mixtures**, which need not become fluffy or incorporate air, as with **choux pastry, muffins or cupcakes**. K beaters are excellent for thoroughly amalgamating meatball mixtures, mashed potato and various fillings. Their shape varies by producer, but they must be large enough to grab all the mixture sticking to the edges of the bowl. Recently, leaf beaters with metal bodies but silicone edges are commercially available: similarly to a *maryse* or spatula, they are especially useful for airy, whipped mixtures, which they 'scrape' off the sides of the bowl with every turn.

Finally, **balloon whisks** are used **for mixtures in which air must be incorporated (sponge cake being the epitome of this, as the incorporated air has a leavening effect), for whipping cream or egg whites into peaks**, or more generally to



mix liquid batters. The whisk operates by grazing the bowl's inner surface, thereby moving through the entire mixture. To make sponge cake, our grandparents' cookbooks recommended hand-whisking yolks with sugar separately from egg whites with sugar, and then delicately folding the two together. Planetary mixers, instead, allow sugar to be whisked into whole eggs, even for 20 minutes at a stretch, **producing an incredibly airy and stable mixture with reliably successful baking results.** Here too, the beater must be of a sufficient size to reach the bottom of the bowl, so as to whisk even small amounts of mixture.

*Choose high-quality, sufficiently heavy machines made of steel*

Planetary mixers work hard, and it is therefore advisable to choose high-quality ones. Steel is the best material for them, and their **inner workings cannot be made of teflon because it wears down easily under pressure.** Mixers must also be heavy enough to **avoid vibrating or even 'travelling' across surfaces during use.**

Some models even incorporate **an induction heater** in their base, to combine mixing with either **gentle warming of the bowl** (egg whites or sponge cake, for instance, become fluffier at 48°C) or full cooking of the mixture at 100°C.

Another layer of sophistication, **useful for creating ice creams or frozen desserts,** is the **insulated cooling bowl,** capable of maintaining temperatures as low as -10°C.

The first piece of advice for anyone planning to buy a planetary mixer is **not to stop searching after the first model they see for sale:** it is vital to compare, perusing the **technical specifications of appliances** available for purchase. Two brands undoubtedly control the lion's share of the market: Kitchenaid and Ken-

wood, each sporting its own distinctive look and style.

Planetary mixers may also have **numerous accessories,** which 'leaven' their prices but can transform them into blenders, grinders, dried fruit mincers or pasta makers for those wishing to dedicate themselves to preparing lasagne, tagliatelle and pappardelle. For a high-quality product even without accessories, prepare to spend at least 500 euros!

**Roberto Zottar**

