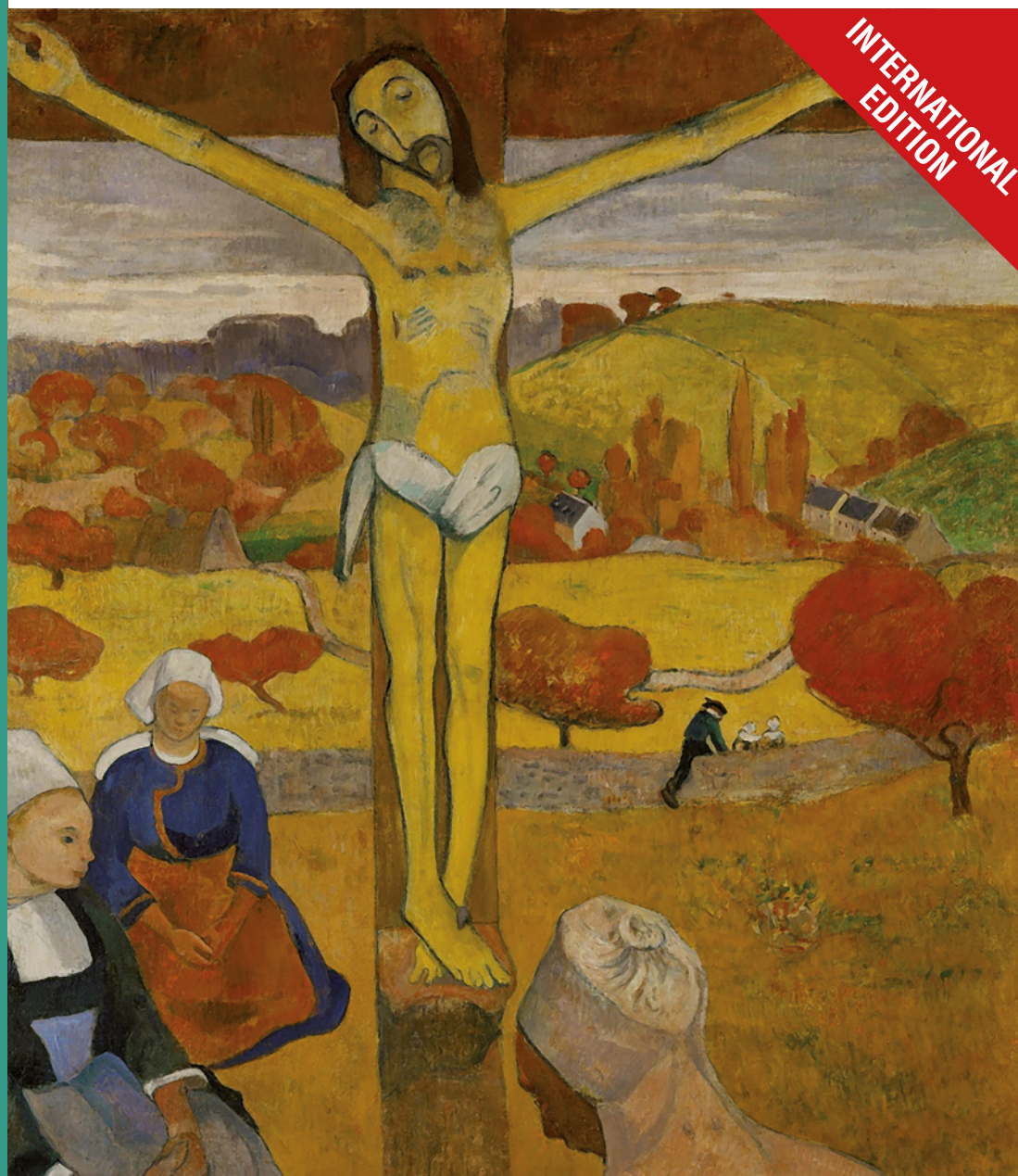


# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



**On the cover:** *Graphic elaboration of The Yellow Christ (1889), by Paul Gauguin; Buffalo, Albright-Knox Art Gallery*

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# Problems on several fronts

by Paolo Petroni

President of the Accademia

*Alongside the horrors of war, prices increase and we risk entering a new crisis in many fields, including the restaurant sector.*

The Russian-Ukrainian *blitzkrieg* has fallen through: what was meant as a lightning-fast conflict seems fated to be a lingering one. There is no more talk of negotiations through various intermediaries, but this in itself means little: the more secretive negotiations are, the better, since nobody wants to lose face. Meanwhile, **Covid has nearly vanished from televisions and newspapers** (but many catch it silently, almost always mildly, less seriously than a 'flu) and the omnipresent virologists have been readily replaced by invariably retired generals and admirals who know as much as your average Joe about what is happening on the battlefield. Formerly floundering talk shows are revitalised: make way for the next problem! The virus is out; war is in.

*Substantial economic effects on imports and exports*

While unleashing the human horrors which we are witnessing, this war, like every war, is heavily affecting both imports and exports. **We know that we are dependent on almost everything:** from gas, coal and petroleum to grain and vegetable oil; and we also know that prices are destined to rise, though shrieking headlines about a 10-cent increase in the price of a cup of coffee or a packet of pasta serve only, perhaps, to sell a few more newspapers. Real difficulties are to be found elsewhere. **Regarding restaurants,** we had already pointed out that their situation was less than splendid. Nowadays, due to rising energy and raw material costs, restaurants **truly risk facing another crisis,** being

unable to increase their own prices further. For a variety of reasons, there is **an increasingly dire front-of-house and kitchen personnel shortage.** The means-based 'citizens' income', allowing certain categories of people to receive a few euros without working, may be partially responsible, but there are two more important factors.

*Italians are increasingly unwilling to work in restaurants*

**Available work is often too time-limited** (weekends, various holidays, winter and summer high seasons) and **underpaid.** There is also a generational problem. Young people feel detached from life. Working on Saturdays and Sundays, during lunch or dinner, when all their friends are having fun, becomes a huge existential sacrifice. Italians are increasingly unwilling to undertake such work; thus, as has become common for years in other western countries, **basic dining-room and kitchen services are ever more frequently entrusted to foreign and in any case unqualified personnel,** though hotel schools boast high attendance. Under such circumstances, **it is indispensable that the Academy painstakingly and accurately monitor restaurants in Italy and abroad.** Not only Delegates but all Academicians, each according to their inclinations and capacities, should contribute through suggestions or by inviting the more deserving among restaurateurs to **avoid low ingredient quality and bland, homogeneous menus.** No less is expected of us by the Ministries that, through the Memoranda of Understanding signed with the Academy, have expressed their trust in our institution.





# It's time to start *preparing rumtopf*

by **Roberto Zottar**  
*Gorizia Delegate*

*Not just  
liquor-preserved fruit,  
but a delicacy prepared  
with a once-customary  
slowness.*

**W**ith spring, market stalls begin overflowing with cherries and strawberries: now is the moment to **rediscover a delicious method of preserving fruit** throughout the year, namely *rumtopf*.

According to this ancient tradition, various fruits, month by month, are placed in **an earthenware crock, the titular *topf***, with sugar and high-proof rum.

This tradition, particularly common in

Germany and Austria, was adopted by several families in the Tarvisio area, and is **found in valleys near Trent. Valsugana even has a 'Rumtopf fraternity' in Pergine.**

This preparation may indeed be related to Italian spirit-preserved fruit, and in 1891, **Pellegrino Artusi** included its recipe in his cookbook, calling it "***frutta in guazzo***" ("fruit in liquor") but using *acquavite* instead of rum.



*The process is lengthy  
but simple: a different fruit  
is added each month*

The northern *rumtopf* tradition requires a **watertight rounded varnished earthenware jar**, but a wide-mouthed glass jar with a 4 - or 5-litre capacity will also work: what matters is to keep it in the dark or cover it in tin foil.

The recipe calls for **rum with 55% alcohol**, which, however, is not easily found in Italy: the ideal substrate would be the Austrian Stroh, produced in Klagenfurt, Austria, since 1832 and famed throughout the Austro-Hungarian empire; but any good 40-42% rum will do, supplemented by pure alcohol in the proportions of  $\frac{3}{4}$  rum and  $\frac{1}{4}$  alcohol. **The high alcohol content, besides preserving the fruit better, also maintains its colour.**

The process is long but simple: each month, a new fruit is added into the crock, after being marinated for an hour covered in rum and half its weight in sugar. **Traditionally, one starts in spring with the first strawberries**, continuing, whenever they ripen, with cherries, peaches, apricots, plums (all pitted), raspberries, bilberries,



pears, grapes, figs, and, if a pinch of exoticism is desired, diced pineapple and a vanilla pod.

**Fruits to avoid are apples**, which acquire a strange texture; **rhubarb**, which sours the mixture; **bananas**, which make it soggy; and **melon or watermelon**, poor choices because they water down the preserving fluid.

*It is important to abide  
by seasonality and use fresh,  
ripe and unblemished fruit*

It is important to abide by seasonality, use fresh, ripe and unblemished fruit, keep it covered in rum and **always leave the jar hermetically closed in a cool,**

**dark place.** After its long, slow maturation, *rumtopf* is ready to enjoy on the first Sunday of Advent.

It is **excellent accompanied by ice cream or dry cakes** but also alone at the end of a meal, or heated **as a crêpe filling**. Some appreciate it as a game sauce. **Its liquor is used as a digestive**, or mixed with sparkling wine for a decadent cocktail. Making *rumtopf* is a **pleasant duty from Easter to Christmas**: all this patience yields a unique result and a flavour of days gone by.

*Rumtopf* is not simply liquor-preserved fruit; it is the paradigm of waiting, a delicacy prepared with a slowness reminiscent of the past, over a span of months, perpetuating an ancient method of preserving fruit.

**Roberto Zottar**





# Choosing a menu

by **Alberto Tibaldi**

*Honorary Delegate for Budapest*

*Arranging flavours  
in a crescendo  
of intensity; selecting  
dishes according  
to a logical itinerary  
while also respecting  
seasonality.*

**I**nattentive menu choice is a frequent cause of lacklustre convivial gatherings, especially abroad, in restaurants that are less than first-rate, given the manifestly shrinking panorama of surviving Italian restaurants.

As a highly representative example, I shall use a dinner in an important restaurant which alas turned out to be one of the worst experiences in which I have happened to participate. The courses, taken individually, were good; but **their implausible sequence and infelicitous flavour combinations** were enough to ruin that meal irremediably. The starter (brace yourselves): **herring fillets with seasonal greens**, meaning smoked herring on a bed of lettuce and warm boiled

potatoes seasoned with oil, vinegar and fine raw onion rings. A very common dish in northern Europe, and excellent eaten alone or as a second course, but **preposterous as a starter: with its potent salty and smoky flavour**, that herring can overwhelm anyone's taste buds for twelve hours. While tasting this appetiser, I silently wondered what could follow this as a first course: "Either an atomic goulash, or simply a bonfire". Instead, what arrived was an innocent, snow-white seafood risotto, as flavourful (after those herrings) as a glass of mineral water. The faux pas continued with exquisitely delicate soles meunière (that is, simply pan-fried in butter) surrounded by Brussels sprouts as tiny as they were domineering. A high-





bass *au gratin*, but will be overwhelmed by, say, tripe.

*Uninterrupted availability of any fruit or vegetable has destroyed meal seasonality*

The uninterrupted availability, year-round, of any fruit or vegetable has regrettably destroyed meal seasonality. Talk of *trenette* with pesto in December causes immediate cravings for a hearty polenta with Amarone braised beef, just as a side dish of buttered spinach in high summer triggers the irrepresible desire for a beef tomato salad under the August sunshine. One also appreciates reduced red meat consumption, with greater emphasis on the less overwhelming, perhaps more popular white meats. Fizzy drinks should also be banished, as should those horribly polluting plastic bottles for mineral water; but **drinks are another topic entirely**.

I shall end with a suggestion, offered for example to the Symposiarchs presiding over the Academy's convivial gatherings: try to persuade chefs to follow these simple recommendations, and success will be guaranteed - barring unforeseen accidents.

**Alberto Tibaldi**

ly alcoholic lemon and vodka sorbet attempted, in vain, to make me forget that meal. A real pity, since those dishes would have been fine in another order, with different side dishes.

*Possible criteria for a rational, thoughtful menu selection*

**Combining flavours** is a crucial, fundamental and generally overlooked operation. If not served alone, **a dish is never an isolated oeuvre**, but just one movement in the unique and harmonious composition that is the meal. **Flavours should always be delicate initially, gaining intensity** as we approach the finale, **respecting the rule of the flavour crescendo wherever possible**. The criterion of increasing flavour intensity may be the most important when arranging a meal, but it is by no means the only one. **The occasion determines the dishes to be chosen**. For instance, "beans with bacon" would hardly bring to mind an Embassy dinner, or cheese soufflé a no-frills eatery. Ideally, the courses should all collaboratively create a unified atmosphere, **a coherent message fitting the occasion** and the experience intended for the diners beyond the food itself, **following a logical sequence**. If we opt for **humble fare**, may it be humble from beginning to end. No peasant chickpea soup preceded by Iranian caviar and fol-

lowed by duck à l'orange. A perfect appetiser, in this case, would be a hearty bruschetta with oil (the fantastic oil that we're all sure we've discovered). The chickpea soup can be followed by a second course of 'poor' fish (sardine, smoothhound, mackerel, mullet, cod) or second-tier cuts of meat known in Italian as the 'fifth quarter' (offal, spareribs, shanks) in a light recipe, especially if the soup was heavy. If, instead, the first course was a light vegetable *minestrone*, we can let fly with baked shanks and roast potatoes. The same applies if we choose **classic dishes**: a consommé or cream of asparagus will graciously accompany a fillet or





# Protecting 'Made in Italy' *in food and agriculture*

by **Veronica Giorgianni**  
*Kore University, Enna*

*Institutional resistance to counterfeit and 'Italian-sounding' foods is crucial.*

In recent years, businesses and legislators alike have agreed on the fundamental need for **guaranteed food safety** in European markets, especially considering the increasingly frequent **food contamination** cases discovered by more stringent, reliable checks enforced in the EU. The topic of food safety controls covering both prevention and compensation should be approached while bearing in mind Italian regulations and their constant and inevitable interplay with analogous European rules. Familiarity with foods and **correct label interpretation, indeed, has the positive effect of acknowledging consumers' ever greater role in making conscious food choices.** Producers must

reconcile their business priorities with transparency and traceability which favour consumers, who will find a veritable **food product identikit** in each **label**. In 1997, the European Commission published a **Green Paper** which, inter alia, tackled the topic of *public health guarantees*, anchoring it to the need for rational, science-based food laws valid in all community territories. The EU recently approved Italy's recommendation regarding *food labels for health-conscious food choices*, as described in the Inter-Ministerial Decree of 27 October 2020: the **Nutrinform Battery**, an educational food label as a counter-proposal to the introduction throughout Europe of **traffic light labels** known as







**Nutri-score**, already discussed in this magazine. Such labelling aims to differentiate healthy from harmful foods on the basis of **exclusively nutritional parameters**, thereby making consumers even more central to their choices and nutrition.

*'Italian-sounding' products seriously hinder a reliable 'Made in Italy' designation*

When striving to understand whether, in this globalised world, **protecting 'Made in Italy' products** is effective and sufficient on the civil, administrative and penal fronts, we may consider that Italy's food and agriculture sector could be a victim of its own success. Indeed, economically, **Italy's agrifood sector ranks first in terms of GDP** (Gross Domestic Product), but asserting the 'Made in Italy' designation is seriously hampered by the 'Italian-sounding' phenomenon, characterised by the **proliferation of imitation Italian products** whose labels use ambiguous descriptions or images to evoke Italian origins or qualities which are in fact absent. Indeed, **collective marks, guaranteeing**



**the origin and quality** of products from multiple enterprises, are particularly relevant in the agrifood sector. The two main laws protecting 'Made in Italy' are decrees 350/2003, expanding penal enforcement, and 166/2009, forbidding national origin labels for goods produced offshore without a geographical origin indication. In a sense, the legal protection afforded by IGT (*Indicazione Geografica Tipica*, or 'Typical Geographical Indication') status appears equivalent to that conveyed by collective marks or certifications, provided that a given territory's traditional production methods imply certain quality standards. **It is thus in the agrifood sector that such indications of geographical origin matter most**, and at the European level they are governed by EU Regulation 1151/2012, which allows them to be bolstered through **PDO** or **PGI** registration. To these, **TSG** (Traditional Speciality Guaranteed) has recently been added, **protecting traditional recipes** which may be reproduced anywhere, but are connected with traditional processing of a given product, such as for example **mozzarella** or **pizza**. Of crucial importance in combating food fraud are intelligence and the suppression of counterfeits, aided in part by national and international cooperation. **The 'Italian-sounding' phenomenon has become so widespread that according to the most reliable estimates, it causes annual export losses of approximately 60 billion euros.** Hence not only is the worldwide image of Italian products at stake, but also the protection of consum-

ers within Italy from the introduction of products whose only Italian link is their point of sale.

*Italy boasts the highest number of registered products in Europe*

**Quality control** has therefore been **one of Italy's principal agrifood policy goals** since the early 1990s, when it was highlighted in the context of the **Common Agricultural Policy**, especially to **counteract erroneous price policy mechanisms**, given that Italy boasts the largest number of registered products in Europe, attracting numerous and sophisticated fraud attempts: consider the case of durum wheat pasta presented as Italian, but of Turkish origin, routed through Africa by an enterprise headquartered in Mali, which purchased it from a French company. In this case, the **Supreme Court of Cassation** ruled that by article 4, paragraph 49, of decree 350/2003, the indication provided on that pasta's packaging was misleading, as it could convey the impression that the product originated in Italy rather than Turkey. A well-received recent **EU ruling took a stand against misleading labels**, which often use images, including landscapes, associated with a PDO food product's geographical origin. It is therefore crucial for both courts and law enforcement authorities to combat such phenomena. Furthermore, the effectiveness of the 'Made in Italy' cachet should be unambiguously defended at the European and worldwide level by **strengthening protections for designations of origin and geographical indications** on a par with extant EU and international copyright and patent protections. Finally, this should be supplemented by well-informed consumer choices, now facilitated by labelling regulations. Transparency and adequate information have therefore become fundamental necessities for the exercise of individual autonomy, and labels guaranteeing **food safety** serve as identity documents for agrifood products.

**Veronica Giorgianni**