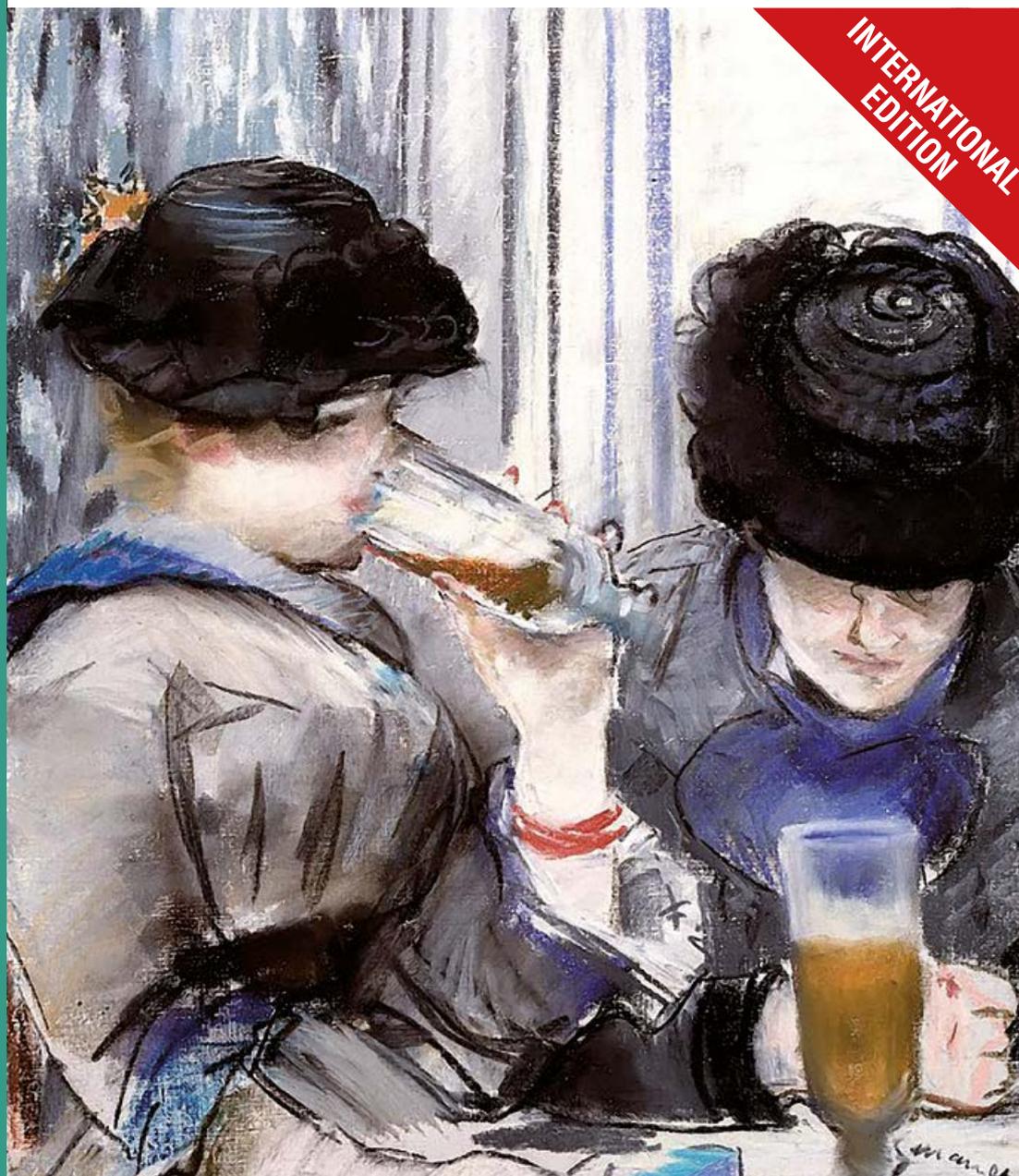


# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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



**On the cover:** *Graphic elaboration of Women Drinking Beer (1878) by Édouard Manet; The Burrell Collection, Glasgow.*

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# “Carmencita, turn off the gas and let’s go!”

*Times are hard for our economy, but Academic activity continues in exemplary fashion.*



**D**ue to their age and nationality, the Nord Stream gas pipeline operators are probably unfamiliar with a famous Italian coffee TV commercial of the 1960s where in a *caballero* exhorts his beloved: “Carmencita, turn off the gas and let’s go!”. This is not our field of expertise, but as simple householders we know that if there’s a gas leak, the first thing to do is to turn it off at the mains. We don’t understand - alongside many other things, in truth - why a leak, however serious, could make the sea boil for days on end without anyone operating a valve, a tap, a bulkhead, a crank to shut off the flow upstream of it. Certain Italian sayings might even have to change. Someone at the end of their tether is said to be *alla canna del gas* - ‘at the gas pipe’: so desperate as to contemplate suicide by gas; the poor dear has probably had their gas turned off already for failure to pay, considering its current price! Even the less violent alternative *siamo alla frutta* - we’ve reached the fruit, meaning, the end (because it’s the last course of a meal) - may be at risk, as fruit may soon become unaffordable.

## *Ballooning bills may jeopardise economic activity*

Jokes aside, conditions are grim in terms of both continuing war and ballooning bills that jeopardise post-pandemic economic recovery, though Covid, no longer headline news, may make a winter comeback. **Misgivings are partially caused**

**by Paolo Petroni**  
*President of the Accademia*

**by the reasons behind rising costs**, largely incomprehensible and certainly **produced by fierce, contemptible speculation**. Yet **Academic activity**, thanks to all our Delegates, Legates and Academicians, **proceeds in an exemplary fashion**, with **over 450 new Academicians** just in this year’s first 9 months.



*Thanks to the Academy’s vitality, our initiatives are multiplying worldwide*

Excellent news from the Ukraine: thanks to our Ambassador **Pierfrancesco Zazo**, there will soon be **a new Legation in Kiev**, where our cuisine is appreciated and there are many good Italian restaurants. Life goes on, despite the difficulties. We will soon be major participants in the upcoming edition of **International Italian Food Week**, from 14 to 20 November, whose theme is “Conviviality, sustainability and innovation: Italian ingredients for healthy people on a healthy planet”. All Delegations and Legations abroad are joining forces with our diplomatic network to promote Italian culture and restaurants. It’s time to verify the information in our **Good Traditional Table Guide**. Apart from cost-induced closures, the situation, marred by Covid, should have settled by now; so we should not wait any longer. We shall patiently and meticulously follow up on all the reviewed restaurants to issue a new edition in the early months of next year. For now, we wish all our Academicians a **joyfully convivial ecumenical dinner!**



# Stilt-house bread

by **Marta Villa**  
*Trent Academician*

*In these mountains,  
the baker's art has  
flourished  
since prehistory.*



*The Bronze-Age loaf. Courtesy of MUSE, Trent*

**T**he Academy's Regional Study Centre has collaborated in an interesting food history **research project** in the province of Trent (Trento). In the first half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the first digs undertaken since the 1929 discovery of the Ledro pile-dwelling site **uncovered a particularly valuable archaeological find: a bog-preserved loaf of bread** produced by the prehistoric lakeshore inhabitants. Since its invention, bread has been common to almost all human populations on Earth. Most cultures today serve foods made from flours or whole grains, leavened or not, cooked using various methods. Bread assumes different shapes and colours, may include additional ingredients which contribute nutritional and energetic value, and is as-

sociated with various forms of intangible heritage and traditional technologies; it is the most vivid example of constant innovation to improve its characteristics, including digestibility and palatability. It is no coincidence that numerous religions and beliefs have bread as a central element of rituals or celebrations, and that crucial milestones in life are often marked by the incorporation of bread (at birth, for weddings, for the dead). **Bread was also a daily staple in the past:** it was produced collectively or individually and various ways of preserving it were devised.

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*A study in multiple phases  
has recreated this prehistoric  
bread's taste and fragrance*

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Some Italian and European archaeological sites have preserved food items from remote antiquity, and one was found at Ledro, in the Trentino region. Studies shedding light on **the nature of this prehistoric bread** were **carried out by scholars at the University of Trent, Mauro Rottoli, Annalisa Pedrotti and Fabio Santaniello**, using advanced equipment at the university's Bagolini Archaeology, Archaeometry and Photography Laboratory (LaBAAF), in close collaboration with MUSE Director **Michele Lanzinger** and **Alessandro Fedrigotti** from the Ledro Lake Pile-Dwelling Museum, where the loaf is kept. Based on their results and analysis, the Trent Provincial Chamber of Commerce and the Trentino Bakers' Association, which financed the study entirely, **have commissioned lo-**



*Stilt houses in Ledro*

On the left, finds from the *Fiavé stilt houses*; on the right, the recreated *Stilt-house Bread*

**cal artisanal bakers** and the Bakery School at the Rovereto Hotel Institute to recreate those ancient fragrances and flavours. **The result was an intensely aromatic loaf** made of whole and ground *farro* (a term encompassing three ancient wheat varieties: emmer, einkorn and spelt), containing both whole-grain flour and entire grains cooked into the dough. Despite the absence of added yeast, its firm crust encloses a **fluffy, highly digestible interior** thanks to baking techniques exploiting natural fermentation. Cereals from that era contained less gluten than those commonly used now, and using those ancient grains in the recreated recipe yields a highly nutritious food suitable for everyone.

*The dough is irregular, coarse and crescent-shaped*

The stilt-house loaf is irregular and coarse, containing many external parts of the ear which would never be included nowadays: perhaps whoever milled the grain was inattentive, or, as hypothesised by the scholars conducting the study, wanted to make the bread larger or more filling. The loaf has reached us in an intriguing, possibly symbolic half-moon shape; **however, it is unclear how it was cooked**, and whether parts of it



were charred accidentally or for ritual purposes, nor do we know why it was not eaten and where it was kept before ending up in a bog. **We do know that it is from the Bronze Age**, dating from between 2000 and 1350 BC. An important comparison was also undertaken between it and other finds from pile-dwelling sites around Lake Garda and other northern Italian areas, revealing **differences between the Ledro loaf and coeval breads**, although they had similar doughs including grains which are now less common, particularly the three types of wheat known as *farro*.

The research was approved by **Franco**

**Marzatico**, Cultural Heritage Superintendent, lecturer at the University of Trent and the Italian Ministry of Culture's representative for the **Prehistoric Pile Dwellings Around the Alps UNESCO site**. Visitors to the Ledro and Fiavé sites can immerse themselves in prehistory thanks to the reconstructed villages and the impressive experimental archaeology laboratories including those dedicated to food archaeology.

*Making a historically important product commercially viable*



Pile dwellings in Fiavé

After the project was presented at a scientific conference during the food and wine event *Autumnus* in Trent, **the bakers plan to recreate and commercialise this ancient product** of indisputable historical, touristic and cultural value: **tasting this bread will educate people about how old our culinary traditions are** and how they continuously interact with their environment.

If we are what we eat, then we also carry within ourselves **the accumulated knowledge of our ancestors**, whose constant experiments and investigations have given us food **for both body and soul**.

**Marta Villa**



# The sublime *culatello* from Zibello

by **Morello Pecchioli**

Honorary Academician for Verona

*A curvaceous  
culinary legend.*

**A**n Parma, home town of **Giuseppe Verdi** and of PDO Parma ham, the people have passed a ruling more authoritative than that of any court: “*La musica ad Verdi l’è cmé el gozén, an gh’é nient da butar via*”. That is, “Of Verdi’s music and the pig (the *gozén*), nothing is to be thrown away”. And there is no shame in the association between the two, coming from citizens of Parma, who idolise both Verdi and the *gozén*. Verdi would be the first to approve. He is known as the Swan of Busseto, but if there’s one animal that looms large in his letters to friends, it’s precisely the pig. These are epistles redolent of raw ham from Langhirano, cooked shoulder ham (*spalla cotta*) from San Secondo, *salame* from Felino and *culatello* from Zibello, made from the rear haunch muscle of locally raised pigs. The composer’s biographers recount how he sent his friends gifts of the delicious *culatelli* (the plural) from the farmland around his home, Villa Sant’Agata.

In Emilia, especially **on the south bank of a wide curve in the Po river** between Polesine Parmense and Zibello, among fat clods of black earth and foamy red spurts of Lambrusco, **the pig is Culture with a capital ‘C’**. Let the citizens of Parma not become irate, but the truth must be said: both in Verdi’s music and in the *gozén* there is the acceptable, the enjoyable, the excellent and the sublime. It’s all fine and good, but between *salame* and *prosciutto*, between *cotechino* and *fiocchetto*, between *coppa* and *culatello*, there’s a difference analogous to that in



*Aida* between the chorus of the priestesses in Vulcan’s temple and the triumph of Radames; in *Rigoletto*, between “Ella mi fu rapita” and “Bella figlia dell’amore”; in *La Forza del Destino*, between the Tarrantella in the third act and “La Vergine degli angeli”. There are arias and arias, symphonies and symphonies, choruses and choruses. There is the good and the sublime. *Culatello di Zibello* is sublime. It is the “*Va pensiero*” of cured meats: **a Verdian symphony lovingly wrapped into a delicious package.**

*Until the 1980s,  
this masterpiece of charcuterie  
was almost unknown*

Incredibly, until a few decades ago this regal masterpiece, produced by charcuterie techniques refined over centuries, was unknown not only to the general public but even the rarefied Versailles of élite foodies. **Until the 1980s, *culatello* was**

**a Cinderella figure only appreciated by a few gourmets in Zibello and neighbouring villages.** It became so rare that only 600-odd *culatelli* were made each year. *Prosciutto*, its sibling, ruled the dining halls. Then the fairytale began when some blessed gastronaut discovered, tasted, was enchanted and wrote that **within this compact pear-shaped package lurked a supreme delight inherited through the ages.** *Culatello* shot to fame. The starred restaurants and VIP fridges of Italy and the world were flung open to welcome it.

**In 1996 it was anointed by the European authorities as PDO:** Protected Designation of Origin, which rigidly determines a product’s manufacturing process and geographical area. Eight townships can officially produce it: Zibello, Polesine Parmense, Busseto, Soragna, Roccabianca, San Secondo, Sissa and Colorno. **Zibello is the capital of this delectable kingdom. To make an excellent *culatello di Zibello*, the experts decree five indispensable ingredients:**

**the tenderest rear haunch muscle of a high-quality adult pig**, traditionally raised in Emilia Romagna or Lombardy; **salt; winter fog; spring breeze; and summer sunshine**. In short, it requires the microclimate of Bassa Parmense, the generous territory between the Po river and the ancient Via Aemilia. Equally crucial are the **charcuterie arts** (*arte norcina* in Italian) inherited through the generations, the **ancient knowledge and the local artisans' deft hands**, which can make a knife dance as gracefully as **Roberto Bolle** over the tenderest, most prized part of a pig's thigh. The *culatello* masters debone the muscle and remove its less valuable portions, destined for *fiocchetto*, a first cousin of *culatello* but still a collateral cured meat, like the Carignano cadet branch of the former Italian royal family: still part of the House of Savoy, but not immediately in line for the throne, should it be reinstated.

**After the trimming process, the norcini salt and energetically massage** the soft and precious flesh. Once the salt has been well absorbed into the body of the *culatello*, it's time, as with sovereigns, for investiture. This very term, *investitura*, describes the process of inserting the cured meat into the pig's bladder. Then

the knotting experts weave string around the parcel just as **Valentino** moulds an haute couture dress to a top model's body: in this way the classic 'pear shape' of the *culatello* is created. And with its distinctive, sensational silhouette, *culatello di Zibello* enters the realm of culinary legend.

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*Following these preparatory procedures, the culatelli are hung up to rest*

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Following all these preparatory procedures, the *culatelli* are hung up to rest: sometimes from the barrels of age-old wine cellars, or from the ceilings of cellars in ancient villas and castles or the archaic archways of centuries-old farmhouses. There the plump, firm beauties repose peacefully, as in a nursery, as they mature. Every so often, the master *norcino* comes to make them 'sing'. At Villa Gambarà di Zibello (Negrone) we saw such an 'orchestra conductor' sounding them out by **tapping them one by one to make sure they were maturing well**. During these 'rehearsals', **the good performers produce a wholesome, full sound**, indicating a healthy and robust constitution. The tuneless (fortunately few) are disqualified.

This cured meat from Zibello boasts a luminous, well-documented history. Several scholars of Italian cuisine seek to certify its noble pedigree by tracing its lineage to the Middle Ages, during the **wedding of Andrea, from the family of the Rossi counts, and Giovanna of the Sanvitale comital family** (1332). It is recounted that the gifts received by the noble bridal pair included several *culatelli*. **The first indisputable document attesting to the official existence of the culatello dates from 1735**: not quite mediaeval but still a respectable three centuries old. It is a price list from Parma, indicating the importation of

cured pork products. It is the first official document containing the word *culatello*, previously only used orally, as if it were too embarrassing to write because, recalling a term for the buttocks, it was considered overly vulgar.

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*Writers, artists and journalists have fuelled the fame of this regal delicacy*

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Writers, artists and journalists have fuelled the fame of this regal delicacy. **Gabriele D'Annunzio**, in a letter dated 30 June 1931 to his sculptor friend **Renato Brozzi** who had sent him a *culatello*, declared himself "a most covetous enthusiast of the *culatello* from Parma", confessing that he would rather dream of two *culatelli* than of his buxom serving maid's burgeoning bosom. Renato's grandson **Fausto Brozzi**, a world-famous photographer, promoter of cultural and food events and small-scale producer of excellent *culatelli*, organises the exclusive annual event *Extraordinary Food and Wine* in the luxurious Hotel Monaco & Grand Canal, and is inspired by the similarities between *culatello* and other parts - the 'B sides', as it were - of the female body. Just like D'Annunzio, Brozzi declares his voracious love of *culatello*.

The curvaceous *culatello* was likewise prodigiously praised by the 'Po poets' **Riccardo Bacchelli** and **Cesare Zavattini**. It was glorified by the writer **Alberto Bevilacqua**, who shared its homeland. **Gianni Brera compared the colour of culatello to that of the prized red Verona marble**. This king of charcuterie also has blue-blooded champions, including Prince **Albert of Monaco** and the new British sovereign **Charles III**. **Both keep a personal supply of culatelli** suspended from the mediaeval vaulted ceilings of the cellars in the Antica Corte Pallavicina: an acclaimed farmstay and restaurant where the brothers **Luciano and Massimo Spigaroli** (Michelin-starred chef and president of the *Culatello di Zibello Consortium*) guard them and thousands of their succulent siblings.

**Morello Pecchioli**





# Counterfeit Italian food in Budapest

by **Alberto Tibaldi**

*Honorary Delegate for Budapest*

*Observations on recipes  
and ingredients from  
Italian, or allegedly  
Italian, restaurants.*

**T**he topic is fraught or downright uncomfortable to discuss: namely, the origin and authenticity of foods which we regularly purchase and serve on our tables; or rather, what we think we are buying and/or tasting, which may not be what it seems! The subject is, indeed, counterfeit Italian food; in this case, particularly in Budapest. Before we continue, we should precisely define what we mean, and its various features.

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*False ingredients  
and false cuisine*

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By **false ingredients** (especially found outside Italy) we mean **non-Italian products that allege an Italian identity through various invented names** (*cambozola, parmezan, reggianito, par-*

*mai sonka* etc), or **seemingly Italian fakes** which use **colours and labels** to trigger Italian associations. By **false cuisine** we mean **how food is prepared, transformed and presented**; this culminates in **altered recipes** that misrepresent our culinary art. **This is a more subtle, dangerous fakery**, as it is chiefly perpetrated abroad to the detriment of **uninformed customers who then become used to dishes which differ vastly from the originals**, developed to indulge the clientele's existing tastes and fill restaurants effortlessly, rather than to educate and broaden gastronomic horizons.

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*Ingredients and recipes  
are festooned with imaginary  
Italian names*

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Let us delve into the **commonest counterfeit "Italian cuisine"**, which uses Italian names but little else that is truly Italian - such as inauthentic ingredients: pasta made from soft and/or mixed wheat; vaguely Italian sauces over '**Neapolitan' tomato pasta** or '**Bolognese' meat pasta**; many types of **pizza with atypical ingredients**, e.g. ketchup instead of tomatoes; **knock-off cured meats** including 'Bologna' (*mortadella*); and any **raw ham**, wherever it comes from, sold as *parmai sonka* (Parma ham). **Misleading or invented cheese names** such as *parmezan*, almost always made in disparate countries e.g. Poland, Czechia, Germany, or the improbable **parmesean-pecorino**; German gorgonzola (*cambozola*); **olive oil** from anywhere, which





may even be *sansa* (the lowest grade of olive oil); or pre-packed sorbets, ice creams or **tiramisù** made with cream emulsion, egg white, gelatine and local ersatz *savoirdi* (lady fingers) called *piskota*.

### Upended Magyar versions of recipes

Here are some examples of Magyarised recipes.

**Spaghetti alla carbonara:** always with cream, garlic and onion. *Guanciale* is replaced by smoked *pancetta*, and courgettes and/or peas are sometimes added. **Amatriciana** with added frankfurter pieces and paprika.

**Spaghetti alla bolognese** with additional dried marjoram, origano and basil (according to the customer's preference they may be supplemented with sour cream called *tejföl*).

**Lasagne alla bolognese** with frankfurters and *tejföl* instead of béchamel.

**Seafood spaghetti** with added *parmezan* and/or *pecorino*.

**'Milano spaghetti'** with a sweetish tomato and meat sauce, flanked by a breaded cutlet.

**'Italian penne'**, with a tomato and mixed vegetable sauce as well as origano, parsley and marjoram, topped with sour cream upon request, and presented as lasagne.

**Risotto:** long-grained rice, boiled, then mixed with cream and mushrooms, ham, and/or various vegetables as desired.

**Rice and pasta are often side dishes to**

**meat**, alongside vegetables, even if those meat dishes are Italian (for example, **escalopes and cooked ham with a side of risi bisì**).

### Facing food globalisation in an active, critical and responsible manner

These recipes come only from the menus of Italian or Italian-named restaurants. When we told the chefs there (who were sometimes Italian!) that these recipes are not very orthodox, the answer was always that customers desire the modified recipes!

This **false, internationalised "Italian cuisine"** is pervasive abroad, where, alongside the increasingly common pizza restaurants, there are also 'spaghetti houses', which now even offer spaghetti in a paper cone, and establishments called 'bistro' that are neither restaurants nor *trattorie* and offer pseudo-Italian food which is almost always abysmal. Luckily, alongside the aforementioned disasters, Budapest still has **a few authentic, traditional Italian restaurants**, which are alas **relatively expensive**.

Sadly, food insecurity has gone in step with the decline, and then the disappearance, of culinary traditions which selected and incorporated positive innovations and ensured a double sense of security: nutritional and psychological.

To some extent we can pick and choose which effects of food globalisation to accept; however, by and large, the best and in some ways necessary response to it is to face it in an active, critical, and above all, responsible manner.

In conclusion: cooking is technique; gastronomy is art. An essential aspect of food culture is **the search for culinary and gastronomic truth, which cannot occur without a solid critique of cooking and gastronomy:** the first mostly concerns its traditional component, while the second is also open to innovation, fostering development and maturity to resist Italian falsification abroad.

**Alberto Tibaldi**

