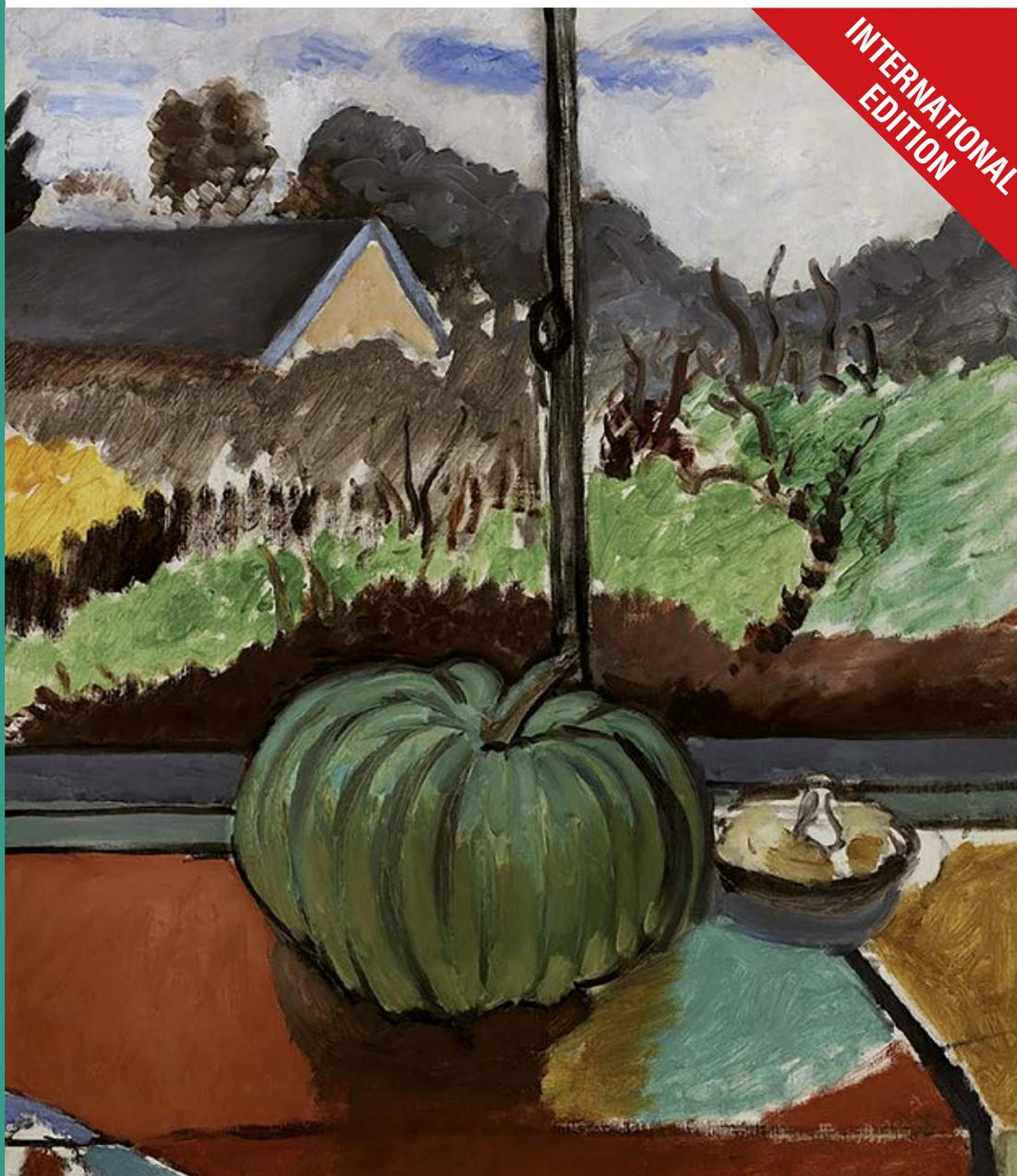


# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



**ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA**  
ISTITUZIONE CULTURALE DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA  
FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI

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

**INTERNATIONAL EDITION**

NOVEMBER 2022 / N. 353

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MONTHLY MAGAZINE  
REG. N. 4049 - 29-5-1956  
TRIBUNALE DI MILANO

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Periodica Italiana



**L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA**  
È STATA FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI  
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EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,  
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



**On the cover:** *Graphic elaboration of The Green Pumpkin (ca. 1916) by Henri Matisse; Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) Museum, Providence*

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# The mysterious allure of 'food sovereignty'

*What does the Agriculture Ministry's new moniker mean in practice?*



Italy's former Ministry of Agricultural, Food and Forestry Policies (MIPAAF) has created a stir by renaming itself "Ministry of Agriculture and Food Sovereignty".

This is not unprecedented; France has had a *Ministère de l'Agriculture et de la Souveraineté Alimentaire* for a while, and the definition of 'food sovereignty' was established in 1996 by the self-styled "International Peasants' Movement" **La Via Campesina**, founded in Mons, Belgium, in 1993. Now consisting of 182 organisations in 81 countries, it describes itself as "an international movement which coordinates peasant organisations of small and middle-scale producers [and] agricultural workers". It was created, in essence, to counteract the overwhelming power of multinationals which control seeds, fertilisers and large-scale distribution. Its original core principles are, therefore, the right of peoples and countries to define their own agricultural and food policies; prioritising local produce; undertaking agricultural reforms against GMO foods and favouring free access to seeds; and the right to protection against imported foods and agricultural products with excessively low prices. Fair enough; but what does this mean in practical terms?

## *Our government's plan centres on four main points*

According to our government's plan, four main points **determine food sovereignty**.

- A growing plan: increasing cropland by resisting European limits on uncultivated land.
- Supply chain contracts: guaranteeing equitable prices for producers, rather than buying cheaply and then reselling at sky-high retail prices.

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



- Resisting **Nutriscore**, whose traffic-light labels penalise Italian products at the core of the Mediterranean diet.
  - Combating false 'Made in Italy' products.
- Beyond this, it is noteworthy that the European Commission has published a "**Farm to Fork**" strategy for sustainable, equitable, healthy and ecologically respectful food production. As wish lists, these are all beautiful. We can't possibly fail to agree! And yet, it will take years to change our agricultural system, increasingly burdened by **climate change**; furthermore, **we are not self-sufficient** in many sectors, including olive oil, wheat, oil-bearing seeds, tomatoes, dried fruit and preserved fish; whereas in others our products' high prices are uncompetitive. Therefore imports exist and always will.

*The concept of 'zero food miles' can also be misleading*

Of course, though food sovereignty might initially seem to imply some form of self-sufficiency, that's not what it means! Nor does it mean 'zero food miles': a good idea, but only where it is possible. It may be unfeasible, or available but of low quality or **inconvenient**.

**The Italian Academy of Cuisine**, which recently signed a solid cooperation protocol with the Agriculture Ministry and works closely with the Foreign Ministry, is and **will always be on the front line against counterfeit Italian products** as a protector, at home and abroad, of the true Italian cuisine which has conquered palates worldwide.



# Dino Villani: an eclectic genius

by Giancarlo Saran

Treviso Academician

*The revolutionary king of Italian advertising and communication was among the Founders of our Academy.*

**F**ew people will immediately recognise the name **Dino Villani**. For members of our Academy, the name is deservedly associated with a prize named after him, which rewards the artisanal skill and excellent local ingredients necessary for creating our peninsula's delicious foods. Not everyone remembers him as one of the Academy's **founding fathers** in the distant **July of 1953** alongside **Orio Vergani, Dino Buzzati** and some others. But reaching into ever older memories, we uncover **a volcano of surprises**. He figures in collective memory far more than we realise, as demonstrated by these three icons alone: **panettone** by **Motta**, the Easter **colomba** cake, and the **Miss Italia** pageant.

*Starting from the roots: a precocious talent*

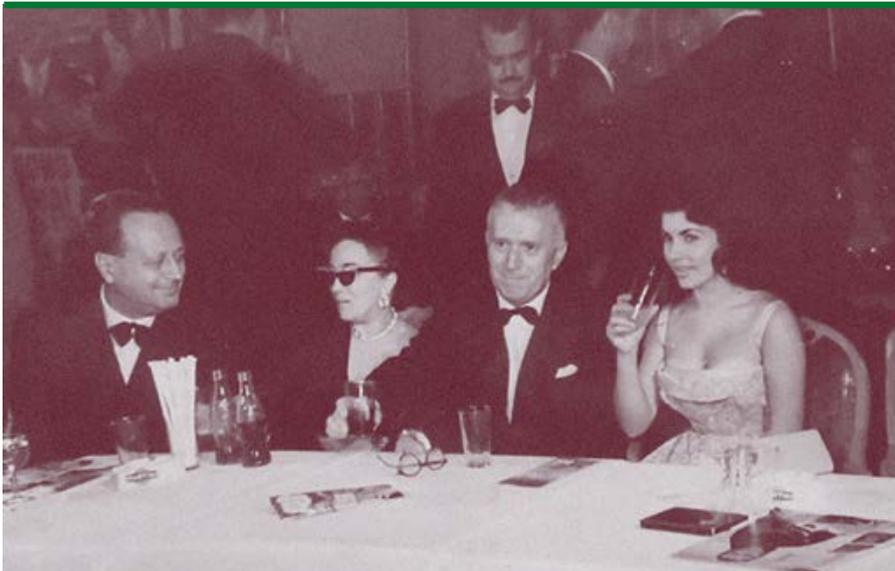
Let's begin at the roots. His father, whose family originated in Mantua, was a

stationmaster born in Nogara, near Verona. He returned to Suzzara, in the province of Mantua, in 1906, after a brief transfer working for the railways near L'Aquila. Precociously talented and belonging to a generation unburdened by mobiles and social media, **young Dino roamed the countryside sketching what he saw** through those curious eyes, **earning the nickname 'Giotto' at home**, no less! His life then took a series of **unique twists and turns**. Unable to complete his technical studies due to health problems and **ineligible for the draft, in 1916 he began working at a local train station** to replace those who, unlike him, had been sent off to war. Early on he met his lifelong companion, **Roberta Caliumi**, who already gave him a child in 1922. Before his baby son's first birthday candle was blown out, Dino the young father was out of a job. What could have been a tragedy would instead be his fortune. **"I should thank those who had me sacked: cast out, I was able to accomplish what I could never have done as a railroad man"**.

The little Giotto, now an adult with a family in tow, found the first incubator of his talents thanks to the **Bertazzoni family**: eclectic local entrepreneurs active in tourism and show business. This placed him near the budding world of billboards: a new paradigm associating advertisements ever more closely with production and culture.

**In 1930 he made the leap to Milan**, without ever forgetting his roots "transplanted among the Milanese cobblestones and living symbiotically with the people he met, who would be fascinated": beginning with **Angelo Motta**, a baker on the verge of massive expansion. **Villani engineered this change of pace.**





Dino Villani, first on the left, in the Miss Italia jury; 1960

### He combined entrepreneurship with generosity

He was able to combine entrepreneurship with generosity: an innate gift whose pulse he felt in many sectors of a society which simply needed someone to foster that capacity outside the domestic sphere. He invented the **Premio Notte di Natale** (Christmas Night Prize) in 1934, coinciding, as if by chance, with the opening of the new Motta shop in Piazza Duomo. Its mission was to **reward ordinary people with hearts of gold**, who would otherwise never have gained the recognition they deserved. Enthu-

siastic nominations poured in from all over Italy, thoughtfully evaluated by a jury which included **Orio Vergani**, the “master of sports journalism” (his pupils included Gianni Brera and Bruno Raschi); **Paolo Monelli**, a respected journalist writing in that era’s main dailies; and **Cesare Zavattini**, later one of the founders of neorealism in Italian cinema. That was just the beginning. A publicity campaign and manifesto by **SePo** (nom d’art of **Severo Pozzati**) definitively elevated the Milanese *panettone* as the national cake to celebrate Father Christmas until the New Year. However, each success leaves a trail of consequences which cannot be ignored. More *panettoni* require more machinery and staff. What,

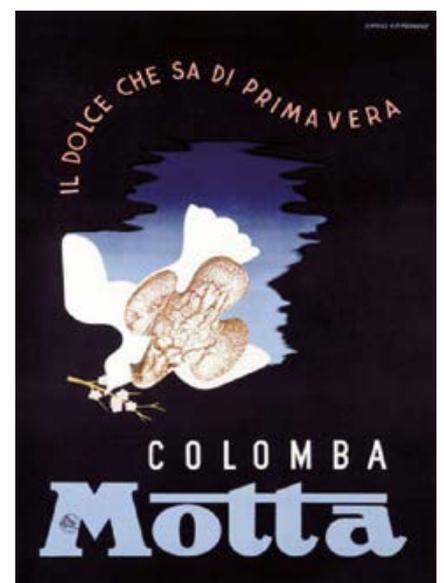


Dino Villani

then, to do during the rest of the year? Elementary, my dear Villani.

### The Easter colomba cake was his brainchild

At Easter, why not have a dove taking flight over the chocolate eggs? **The same ingredients as the panettone, but with a different shape**, inspired by the *colombina* (little dove) cake, an old Emilian tradition he’d known since childhood. This time, the graphics were entrusted to a Ukrainian-born Frenchman who used the pseudonym **Cassandre**. The campaign declared: **“Colomba pasquale Motta, il dolce che sa di Primavera”** (“Motta Easter Dove: the cake which tastes of



springtime'). The Dove has kept flying ever since, a pastry chef's dream gliding tirelessly into the present. By **1939**, Motta was an established pastry giant, so **Dino Villani began his next mission** with the pharmaceutical company **Carlo Erba**. Through the associated company **Gi.Vi.Emme**, better smiles were promised thanks to a miraculous toothpaste. This gave rise to the contest "**5000 lire per un sorriso**" ('5000 Lire for a smile'), encouraging ordinary girls to live their dreams by sending photos of their dazzling smiles and sparkling eyes. **Three thousand candidates just in the first week!** The insight of "**transferring feminine seduction from the stars to the smile of one of the many beautiful women living ordinary lives**" was a stroke of genius. Because of the Second World War, that contest only lasted three years, but the intuition was spot-on and so, in **1946**, "**Miss Italia**" was born. The jury, which included **Luchino Visconti**, **Vittorio De Sica** and **Totò**, were given the following suggestion for selecting a winner by **President Dino Villani: "Choose the one you'd like as a fiancée for your son"**. He directed the pageant until 1959, when he passed the reins to **Enzo Mirigliani**.

### *The sumptuous Renaissance dinner in honour of Mantegna*

The revolutionary king of Italian advertising and communication, rubbing shoulders with the élite of the incipient economic boom, nonetheless **never forgot his roots, frequently visiting Suzzara** and his childhood home, and also giving practical demonstrations in his Milanese 'embassy' thanks to the culinary mastery of his wife, and mother of his progeny, **Roberta**. One day they hosted **Angelo Berti**, a restaurateur from the same area as **Villani**; the two organised various events culminating in a majestic Renaissance dinner honouring Mantegna in the Palazzo Te in Mantua. A sine qua non were **cappelletti**, painstakingly wrought by hand using the long rolling pin called **la canèla**, with which country housewives



traditionally rolled out "a sheet of dough so large and round that it seems drawn by a compass". Then, the mixed boiled meat called **lesso**, and its attendant sauces: the **green** one with green peppers, parsley and anchovies, and the **red** one with tomato, vegetables, vinegar, sugar and pepper. Other delicacies followed, but when offered seconds, the veteran restaurateur Angelo Berti shyly whispered "**more red sauce please: I've never had one so good**". This was recorded by **Villani** in his wonderful memoir, one of many, with accompanying illustrations: *All'ombra della quercia (In the Shadow of the Oak)*. "Roberta, blushing with emotion, diligently and immediately wrote down the recipe requested by Berti". Her consort, brimming with pride following this battlefield promotion, even offered a sample to the **Carlo Erba Laboratories**, which were making inroads into industrial food production. "Delicious, but its vegetables make it challenging to preserve".

### *"Pumpkin tortelli seeded the birth of the Academy"*

His **sister Dina** had taken over a historic *trattoria* in Suzzara, **Il Cavallino Bianco** (The Little White Horse), where Dino frequently visited her, perhaps also helping to fold the *cappelletti*. Unmissable were its **pumpkin tortelli**, once made exclusively for Christmas festivities, complemented by evocative *amaretti* biscuits that send a flood of emotions coursing

from the palate. These timeless little sweets, which the young Dino in his 'Giotto' days had immortalised in drawings on which he still sometimes gazed nostalgically, had a madeleine-like effect, quickening memories of a youth which would always remain in his heart. Pumpkins were once grown among the wheat, like beans. They sometimes didn't all fully as required for filling *tortelli*. The green pumpkins were good for soups called **zarbùn**. Little rascals would steal them from the family pantry, carve eyes, a nose and a mouth into them, and light a candle inside, for the sole purpose of "raising that ghost from behind a bush, frightening youngsters that were stupider than us and amusing the rest". It was perhaps by telling these tales that **Villani triggered something in Orio Vergani**: enough to write that "**pumpkin tortelli seeded the Italian Academy of Cuisine**". In essence, here's what happened. The Milanese Vergani, only aware of simple herbed ricotta *tortelli*, **knew nothing about pumpkin tortelli**. He was won over by those offered him by the Villani brothers in Suzzara. This confirmed **how many treasures Italian cuisine contained**, concealed in territories far from cities, in the traditional rural areas resistant to mounting industrial expansion. **The must be defended for posterity**. It was from these principles, on **29 July 1953**, that the **Italian Academy of Cuisine took its first flight from the Hotel Diana in Milan. Hence its offshoot, the Dino Villani Prize, in his memory.**

**Giancarlo Saran**



# Hidden in cheese and crossing the seas

by **Giancarlo Burri**  
Padua Academician

*The niche delicacy  
created by cleverly  
circumventing  
American  
customs checks.*

**T**here is abundant evidence of Italian gastronomic ingenuity, but this instance, though less acclaimed, nevertheless deserves a mention. Between 1880 and 1915, out of approximately 9 million emigrants who crossed the seas towards a new American home, 4 million were Italian, of whom about 70% were from the south. Social backwardness, precarious economic circumstances and illiteracy spurred many to dream of the New World, the land of opportunity, salaried work and emancipation. Alongside hopes and dreams, emigrants carried mementoes of their families and homelands that could mitigate the pangs of homesickness and nostalgia; and what could provide all this better than food? A bag of pasta, a wheel of cheese, a litre of oil, a bottle of wine, a *salame*, a *soppressata*, a clump of dried sausages.

*American customs proscribed  
passenger pork imports*

**Edmondo De Amicis**, describing the moments preceding the disembarkation of so many poor souls in his book *Sull'Oceano*, recounts their frantic requests for information about customs

checks: must they pay to bring food, and if so, how much? Indeed, the first port of call for new arrivals was the small but infamous **Ellis Island**, where the Hudson River meets New York Bay. There they **underwent stringent checks** regarding identity, health, profession, and... luggage.

And here, a bitter surprise awaited! No salami, no sausages, no *soppressate*. Nothing. In hygiene-obsessed America, bringing pork products on passenger ships was forbidden **to avert the risk of contamination**. After the shock of the first wave of immigrants, numerous letters to Italy described this unacceptable imposition: "*Stateve accorte à a nnuje in namericha ce iettane savicicce e sopressate*" ('Take care, because in America they throw away our sausages and *soppressate*').

*Why not hide cured meats  
within easily malleable cheese?*

**Thus a workaround matured in the motherland**: since checks were perfunctory and **cheese was allowed**, why not hide cured meats inside cheese: particularly, easily shaped stretched-curd cheese, like provolone (and the cheese would also reliably preserve the meat within). **We do not know whose brainchild this culinary contraband was**; Basilicata, Campania, Calabria and Molise each claim paternity and have their own versions. **Today, few companies** in southern Italy still create such sneaky cheeses, and the foremost ones are in the Cilento National Park, especially in the Vallo di Diano area.



*Nowadays it is also sold  
as **cacio salame** or  
**soppressata ammucciata***

Sold, inter alia, as *cacio salame* ('salami cheese') or *soppressata ammucciata* ('piled-up *soppressata*'), the emigrant's *caciocavallo* is a straw-yellow, **semi-firm stretched-curd cow's milk cheese** with a thin, smooth crust, normally cylindrical (approximately 20cm long and 8cm wide), with rounded ends, in 800-1200g weights. **Made using the same techniques as ordinary *caciocavallo* cheese, it entirely envelops local cured meats: *capocollo*, sweet or spicy *salame*, and especially *soppressata***. It is aged from 60 days to 12 months, depending on the flavour intensity desired.

**It should be enjoyed as a starter**, sliced rather thinly, and alone, to appreciate its unique taste resulting from the **pleasant fusion of sweetness from the *caciocavallo* and the tang of the cured meat**. A cheese workshop in Sala Consilina (Salerno), wishing to rescue tradition and offer something innovative, created a unique egg for Easter 2022: a *caciocavallo* in the traditional oval sack shape, filled with the typical *soppressata* (made of pork hand-processed with a knife and seasoned), elegantly wrapped. The result? Sold out, and bookings for next year!



# Toque blanche: the chef's hat

by **Attilio Borda Bossana**  
*Messina Academician*

*Carême was an influencer avant la lettre: the hat he adopted rapidly spread to other courts and kitchens throughout Europe.*

**A** decree here, a circular there: food hygiene regulations for kitchens and restaurants aims to guarantee healthy cooking environments, food preservation and hygiene among workers. Among its many requirements is **the obligatory hair covering for kitchen staff** and anyone working close to food. However, one piece of iconic headgear has risen head and shoulders above the rest, representing the sovereign of the kitchen over the centuries: the *toque blanche*, the chef's hat, symbol of the culinary profession which sets cooks apart worldwide.

From the five-starred kitchen to the rustic *trattoria*, this symbol of belonging, which often inflates the ego of its wearers, **became common around the early 19<sup>th</sup> century**, though older engravings

depict cooks wearing various flattened caps.

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### *Tales and legends on the use of a cook's hat*

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Some literature also refers to the head covering already used **in the first millennium BC in the kitchens of Assyrian kings**, who, **fearful of being poisoned**, required their cooks to wear tall crown-like hats which made them easy to see and monitor. **A grimmer story** recounts headgear adoption at the court of **Henry VII**, King of England and Lord of Ireland from 22 August 1485, who, finding a hair in his plate, ordered the decapitation of the cook who had prepared the food and **the imposition of head coverings for all kitchen staff**. A Balkan account has the high hat being invented in the 14<sup>th</sup> century when **cooks escaping the persecution** of artisans fled to monasteries donning high hats for camouflage among Orthodox priests wearing similar, but black, headgear. A transalpine legend, also hygienically motivated, attributes the headwear's creation in 1795 to **Maurice Boucher**, court cook to the French diplomat **Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Périgord**. The drawings of **Annibale Carracci** depicting the protagonists of eighty arts and professions, rendered as copperplate engravings by **Simone Guilino Parigino** (Simon Guillain) in a book published in Rome on 8 June 1646, display images of cooks with headgear very unlike the modern high, starched cylinder.

The chef's hat





Gualtiero Marchesi surrounded by his collaborators in toques blanches



Two cooks in the early nineteenth century

### Parameters for a proper chef's hat

The rules for a proper chef's hat require **a very light, washable fabric** to avoid stains and bad smells; it must be **breathable and moisture-dispersing**, preventing too much sweating as the chef works at the stove; it must in any case be **the highest hat in the kitchen**, immediately identifying the person in charge. Interestingly, the **chef's hat's 100 folds** are said to represent the **100 ways to cook eggs** that chefs must know.

It was **Alfred Suzanne** (1839-1916), a French chef who wrote books and articles on cooking and gastronomy and worked in aristocratic homes in Ireland and Britain for 40 years, **who first disseminated the use of the toque blanche**, despite noting in his numerous monographs that his colleagues weren't eager to use the term 'toque', also used for the headgear of judges and university professors, for their hat, symbol of the cooks' fraternity. Suzanne maintained that it would be better to call it *couvre-chef*, thanks to the semantic ambiguity of the word 'chef', which means 'head' both literally and figuratively but also denotes, more specifically, the 'head' of the kitchen. Again according to Suzanne, **the codified use of the toque blanche** was initiated by the cook **Marie-Antoine Carême**, who saw a similar hat on a train-

ee lawyer around 1820 while serving at the court of **George IV** of Great Britain; his aesthetic sense and love of hygiene induced him to adopt a white version for himself and his collaborators. He was convinced that replacing the common cotton cap then widely used by cooks would give them **a more prestigious and authoritative air**; and Carême, known and respected throughout Europe, became an 'influencer' *avant la lettre*, so that the hat he adopted rapidly became standard in that continent's other courts and kitchens.

### The manner of wearing the toque became expressive of the chef's character

From that moment, even the manner of wearing the toque became expressive of the chef's character: **puffy and inclined backwards for the authoritarian**, aggressive, choleric chef; **tilted over one ear, for the swashbuckler**. **Starched, and with an imposingly high pleated crown**, was how **cooks of modest physical height** preferred it, in pursuit of increased stature to project authority among the kitchen brigade.

**Today the toque, reduced to 30-35cm in height and 25 for pastry chefs, has a mainly symbolic value**, since contemporary chefs, despite following a strict kitchen hierarchy, prefer more practical headgear such as berets or

bandannas, often cheerfully coloured. **In the kitchen hierarchy, the toque blanche assigns the highest rank to chefs**, with subcategories including the executive chef, in elaborately structured establishments or top-level restaurants; the *chef de cuisine*, better known as the head chef, who oversees daily kitchen management; and the *sous-chef*, the second-in-command who takes charge in the chef's absence, assists the chef, tastes dishes and experiments with new ones. The *sous-chef* in turn directs the *chefs de partie*, specialised in various types of preparation. For the *commis*, the assistants, only bandannas, as in 14<sup>th</sup>-century European depictions where the cooks themselves wore berets similar to toques, often with an added feather to distinguish the *maître de salle* from kitchen staff.

**Exemplifying the modern style of visual communication**, 'tasteful shots' portraying today's great chefs, such as **Ferran Adrià, Gualtiero Marchesi and Alain Ducasse, capture them without a toque**, which instead is choreographically present on the heads of those working for them, unlike what we see in images from the 1930s and 1940s. This current fashion differs from the depictions in **Claude Monet's Portrait of Père Paul** or the iconic *Le Chef de l'Hôtel Chatham* by Sir **William Orpen** (1878-1931), which, for the first time, ennobled the chef with an aristocratic bearing as well as a *toque blanche*.

**Attilio Borda Bossana**