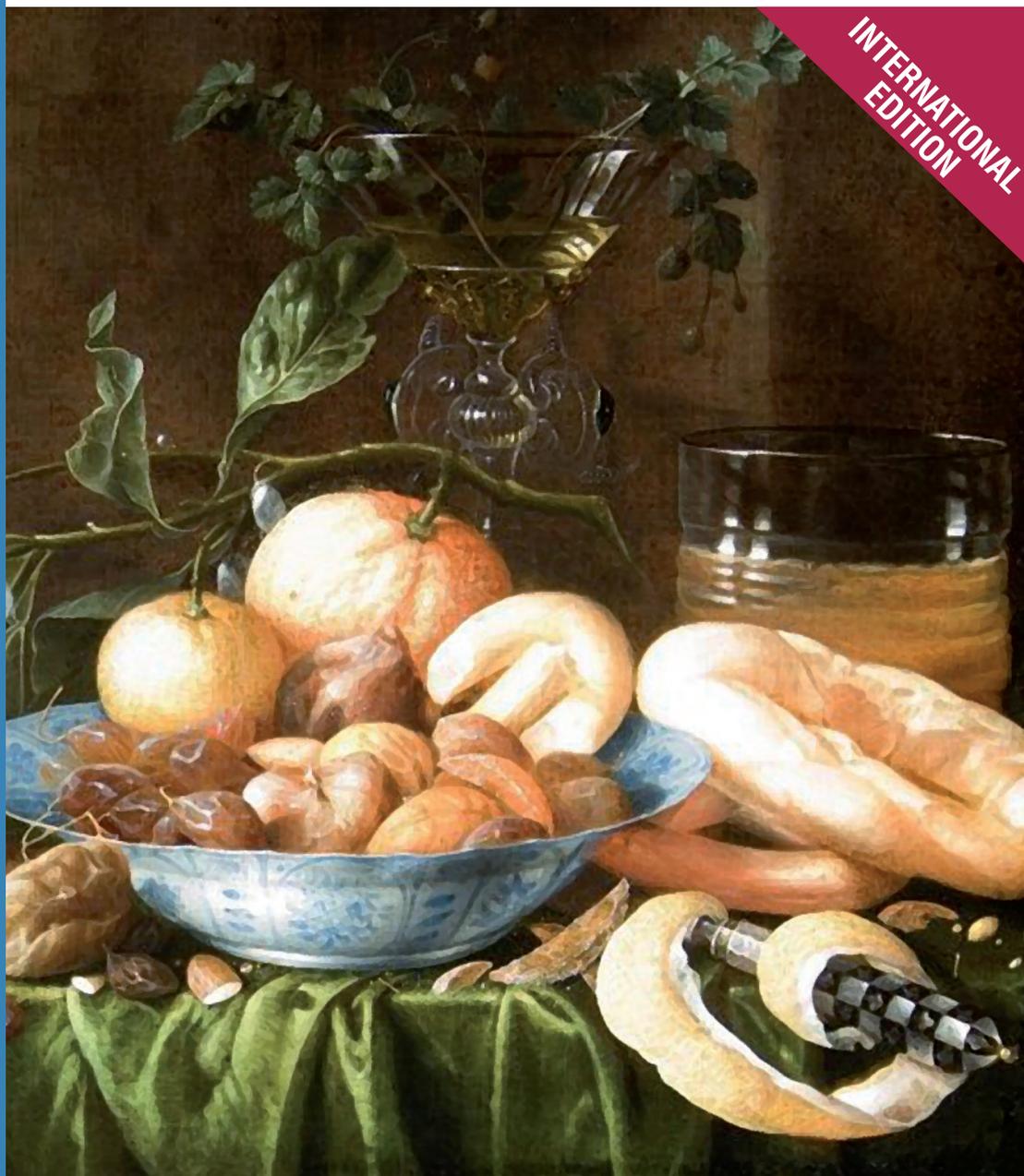


# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL  
EDITION



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**On the cover:** Graphic reproduction of a detail  
from *Still Life with Fruit in a Wanli Bowl* by the  
artist Jan Davidsz. de Heem (1606-1684).



# The beautiful cuisine of consumerized seduction

*Good cuisine must not be the playing field for the seduction of appearances that target the consumerism of a globalized market.*

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI  
*President of the Academy*

Dear Academicians, esthetic cuisine is not a new phenomenon. In the ostensive haute cuisine of the Renaissance the quest for beauty sometimes superseded the quest for goodness, sometimes crossing over into incurring risk and danger: serving a splendid roast pheasant at the table in its glorious plumage is certainly neither healthy nor safe. Bourgeois cuisine was much more prudent. Beauty was combined with goodness in magnificent timbales, and especially in the art of pastry making, which the great Marie-Antoine Carême considered to be a branch of architectural art. As an elite phenomenon of high level cuisine, beauty has always been a constant artistic motif in every historical and cultural era. Even in popular cuisine, here and there and from time to time we can find traces of a quest for

functional beauty in food and its culinary transformation.

In these times of rampant consumerism and globalization everything has changed. The esthetic aspect of food is no longer reserved for the “haute cuisine” of the chefs. The globalization of markets, the frenetic push for a continued increase in consumption and nutritional industrialization are bringing about a democratization of beauty in food and culinary esthetics that deserves some brief reflection. In cuisine today art no longer merely seeks beauty, but also seeks new seductive sensations that are developing new perceptions in terms of food. Appearance is one of the instruments for the expansion of the market and it is transforming society and the very perception of art and beauty. The prevailing notion seems to be that a food or dish that is not attractive will not sell! Similarly one would not patronize a restaurant that doesn't have some minimal element of seduction!

These affirmations are supported by a good deal of evidence. One needs only examine how food is displayed in supermarkets, the presentation of ready-to-eat meals, and the dishes served by the more talked-about chefs. The most attractive products, even if they are odorless and tasteless, are preferable to the less attractive ones, even if the latter have better taste and more flavor. The cherry on top of the cake has become more important than the cake itself. Homo aestheticus has caught up with and is overtaking *Homo oeconomicus*. According to Gilles

Lipovetsky (Lipovetsky G. - *L'esthétisation du monde* - Gallimard, 2013) industrial capitalism is focusing increasing attention on style and beauty, appealing to the tastes and sensibilities of the individual. The industry of consumption, including the food industry, systematically and democratically (in the popular sense) incorporates the once elite parameter of esthetics as style and art. The designer bag, or its knock-off, must be available to everyone, even the much cited Voghera homemaker, just like the once elite but largely copied culatello salami of Zibello, or a dish prepared by a famous chef that the food industry has reproduced in an endless series of frozen foods for the enjoyment of all.

In the world of food consumption, appearance has entered the realm of globalization and profit, because the artistic stimulus is a human characteristic even in terms of nutrition. It is certainly no accident that the origins of cuisine are related to artistic activity, just as they are in the instance of prehistoric rock painting or primitive musical instruments.

Along these same lines today we are seeing the emphasis placed on a new phenomenon. The esthetic quest for beauty has been transformed into a quest, in constant transformation, for new sensations, emotions and seductions because art has become something that must be experienced by everyone, even in terms of nutrition. The food industry has one of the highest levels of innovation (about 10% annually) and therefore its continuous



renewal has benefited from the emotional and seductive presentation of its new products. In our times, the traditional opposition of art and the market has been overcome, even in terms of cuisine.

A great cook must consider how his creation will be produced in his absence or when it is reproduced in even a small chain of restaurants. For its part, the food industry turns to a well known chef to help diffuse its products or services. One example concerns the celebrity chef dishes that are now served by some airlines.

Producers of consumer goods use esthetic seduction to impose their products on us. They modify not only how

we see them but also how we behave. There is an eloquent link between how a supermarket displays its wares and their acquisition and consumption. Unbeknownst to us, today we have become consumers of appearance.

The artistic exploitation that today even includes food and cuisine has been democratized, giving rise to a widespread hedonism that even the current economic crisis cannot dampen, only reshape. The diffusion, even in cuisine, of an esthetic feeling and quest for emotions and their associated seductions has made us more critical and demanding, but it has not improved our cuisine or nutrition. The increase in eating disorders and other nutrition

problems in our society today is all too evident!

It may not be evident to all, but we need to be aware that the esthetic dimension cannot be dictated solely by the market. We must respond, without underestimating the esthetic value of a good dish or cuisine, and we must refer back to the traditions of perennial cuisine in which the goodness of a food, dish, recipe or meal does not depend so much on its appearance as on an harmonious balance between security, nutrition, sensory impressions, sense of wellbeing and last but not least, the memory of our traditions.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI



## GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Contributions to the magazine by Academicians are not only welcome, they are indispensable. However Academicians need to keep in mind some essential guidelines, so that their effort and passion are rewarded by rapid and thorough publication.

● **Articles:** It is essential that **articles be sent electronically**, in Word format (not pdf) to the following email address: [redazione@accademia1953.it](mailto:redazione@accademia1953.it)

● **Article Length:** To avoid cuts that are irritating for both the writer and editor, articles should be between **4,000 and 6,000 characters** (including spaces). Your computer provides character counts.

● **“From the Delegations” Column:** For ease of reading, **maximum length is limited to 2,500 characters including spaces.**

● **Convivial Dinner forms:** it is equally important that the “notes and comments” section of the rating sheets **respect the 800 character limit** (Maximum 1,000 characters) include spaces, in order to avoid cuts and errors. Rating sheets that arrive at Headquarters more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

● **Please do not send reports on convivial dinners held outside the territory of your Delegation, or on those held in the homes of Academicians or places other than restaurants and public settings, as they will not be published.**

● **By observing these simple guidelines Academicians can be reasonably assured of rapid and accurate publication, thereby avoiding painful cuts.**

● **Obviously, the Editors reserve the right to edit all articles and publish them according to available space.**



# The Hotel Restaurant's Search for a New Identity

*Bet on tradition or amaze with a famous chef?*

BY PAOLO PETRONI

*Secretary General of the Academy*

The race to hire famous cooks, known as “star chefs” is underway. In fact, it is getting more intense with luxury obsessed hotel chains leading the charge. Even in Italy, the race is moving along. With the exception of Rome, which boasts a long and well established tradition of hotel restaurants, by and large the hotel restaurant finds it difficult to prosper outside of the circle of hotel guests. If it has gotten late, and the guest is tired, or does not wish to end up in a touristy place, does not know the town, or more simply is not interested in local gastronomy, he stays in the hotel. The cuisine is passable and sometimes it may even be good. To solve the problem, some hotels have resorted to outsourcing, entrusting the restaurant to an external chef, but such attempts generally do not last long. This is one of the major problems: the management changes all too frequently.

In reality, the outstanding hotels have other needs. They feel obligated to show off, they do not mind the expense, and spend resources on the chef as if he were an investment in interior decorating, similar to a trademark. What does he cook? How does he cook? Is the restaurant empty? It does not matter. Even the cash return is not essential, at least in the short run. A well known chain of luxury hotels has entrusted

its restaurant, quite lackluster up to recent times, to a famous chef who is - as they say - a star. The chef thinks up a menu and passes it on to the resident chef. At the beginning, he may even help him and from time to time he will appear on the scene to check up on things and to justify the high fee that he pockets. And yet the courses on the menu may appear quirky, to the point of astonishing the guests. Are we sure that the well heeled clients in the expensive hotels will appreciate such the offerings? Are we sure that they will like prawns with sherbet? Or tortellini stuffed with almost paste? Or lobster with peaches? Or sea urchins with ox marrow and citrus fruit? Or the inevitable licorice over beef filet? Or an incredible cucumber carpaccio? Perhaps the clients would appreciate good traditional cuisine; a real cuisine featuring local ingredients of absolute quality, served with appropriate tableware and superb professionalism? This is an external matter of good appearance and complete trust in the “brand”. However, the clients of the hotel are just passing through and they stay a short time; attracting external clients requires more than just a virtual cook. By paraphrasing the poet Giovan Battista Marino one could say: “The purpose of the cook is to amaze... he who does not, should curry the horses”.





# A vermouth, please!

*The classic aperitif that coined the definition is again becoming fashionable, thanks to the search for new aromas and tastes and innovative packaging designs.*

BY ELISABETTA COCITO

Academician, Turin Delegation



In the beginning, it was done sottovoce, then with more assertiveness and finally with the self-assuredness of being “trendy”. Once again we are asking the barman, not just in Turin but all over Italy, to serve us a vermouth to sip with renewed pleasure. The first mention of this wine is by C. Villafranchi in his *Tuscan Oenology* (1773). In fact, its reputation springs from Piedmont from the “speziale” (pharmacist) Antonio Benedetto Carpano who was the first to produce it and publicize it in Turin under the name of “vermut” (later popularized by the French as “vermouth”), a name chosen by adapting the German term “*wermut*” that denotes absinthe (*artemisia absinthium*), the most important among the aromatic plants utilized for its preparation, conferring its aroma and special bitter taste. The novelty was so well received that the Turin

public started coming to the modest “bouvette” in Piazza Castello that quickly became, and remained for almost 140 years, one of the most frequented establishments of the city. A basket of the product was sent to the reigning monarch Vittorio Amedeo III who pronounced it so exquisite that he ordered a stop to the production of the *rosolio* liqueur produced by the court. The news vastly increased the success of the new drink that with the passing of time became the definitive “aperitif”, consecrating Turin as its birthplace and binding its fame to the city.

The birth of vermouth fits right into the historical scenario that came about after the Spanish War of Succession when Europe was opened to the wide distribution of strong sweet wines by English merchants who had lost their French purveyors. Such wines came from Portugal and quickly gathered acceptance and met with great success. The new situation opened the doors to locally produced products, starting with Marsala, produced in Sicily with methods of vinification and aging similar to those used in Portugal, and to new experimental beverages such as vermouth. This wine product brought the added benefit of allowing for the utilization of new wines, replacing the typical flavor associated with aging with that of the added mixture of aromatic herbs. The mixture scored wide success due both to its pleasant taste

and to the lower cost of production, which led to its rapid adoption in a large part of Europe.

The preparation of vermouth is the result of years of care and experience in measuring the right dosage to reach the perfect balance of taste and aroma (it should be neither too bitter nor too scented). The starting base is white wine (at least 75 percent, with at least one fourth Moscato in the best mixture). The mixture is enriched and aromatized by adding a selection of herbs and spices based on specific secret recipes that are jealously guarded in the laboratories of the various producers. The alcohol content and the sugar content vary according to the type of product: no less than 14.5 alcohol content (once it was 16) and 14 percent sugar for normal vermouth (red and/or white), no less than 18 and no more than 12 percent sugar for dry vermouth.

Noteworthy recipes of the time offer suggestions for the production of ver-

mouth. The recipe by Vialardi, the cook of the court, eventually reported in his *Treatise of Cuisine* of 1854, was implemented by an artisan of the Langhe region and christened “Carlo Alberto Reserve” in honor of the King of Piedmont.

The birth of “Punt e Mes”, Vermouth’s bitter version, dates back to 1870, once again on the premises of Carpano. The bizarre denomination is due to a curious habit of the frequent clients





who used a gesture that was common to the behavior of stock exchange employees: thumb raised (*punt*) followed by the horizontal extension of the hand (*mes*) to order a vermouth corrected by half dose of *china* liqueur. This variant of the classical vermouth scored a high rate of favor to the point that it made the Carpano firm famous around the world.

Many other producers of Piedmont (Cora, Cinzano, Martini & Rossi, Calissano and so on) have built their success upon the production of vermouth and contributed to its popularity in South America, United States and all of Europe. The aromatized wine was at its zenith in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the new century. At that point in time, vermouth became the aperitif *par excellence*, recommended for activating gastric juices and favoring digestion, drunk all over the Piedmontese Kingdom in wine establishments, coffee houses, restaurants and living rooms.

Vermouth became a true social phenomenon, a rite not to be missed, celebrated almost everywhere including the home of Romilda, a character in *Il Fu Mattia Pascal* by Pirandello. The writer De Amicis told about Turin and “the hour of vermouth, the hour when the face lights up and the premises of the liquor vendors become crowded”. In the second half of the twentieth century the consumption of vermouth began a slow and progressive decline until it almost vanished from the contemporary bar. Deep changes altered the social scene: spreading urbanization was responsible for a cleavage between home and work, the work day with a only a short break for lunch applied to practically all activities - the earlier closing of the work day before dinner had allowed more time

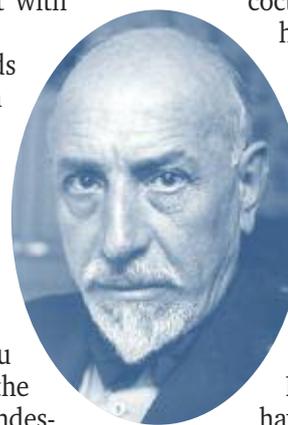
for other activities, relaxation and family togetherness. People now go to bars for a hasty cup of coffee or to eat a sandwich. There is no longer time for a vermouth or for an aperitif.

As we suggested, today the aromatic wine of long Piedmontese tradition, for many years bypassed and almost forgotten, is being rediscovered and is coming back to the historical establishments as well as to the modern wine bars, in the wake of the great success of cocktails. Vermouth can be tasted as a standalone drink or as a refined long drink; it is also the foundation for fancy cocktails and is the companion of *hors d'oeuvres* and *finger food* as an aperitif, although it also goes well with something sweet (perfect with chocolate) after dinner.

Besides the classic brands that are being offered again by the main producers and exported around the world, it is interesting to take note of the rise of new and innovative establishments such as “speakeasies” (places that are a sort of cult where you can enter if you produce the password, just like the clandestine establishments in America during prohibition). In these places, the artisanal vermouth has been resurrected through the work of the barmen (a better term is now *mixologist*). Small artisanal distilleries are producing it, replacing the herbs that were utilized in the past, difficult to find in our times, with other components with the same properties. It takes patience to find the right balance. The search for new aromas and tastes as well for innovative models of production is fully underway. Just one example: the

dry version of a vermouth recently come to the fore is now offered in small spray jar. All that the lovers of extra dry have to do is to spray a small quantity on the surface of their drink; alcohol will cause the perfume to rise but the taste will remain hard dry.

The tradition of vermouth goes back to its cradle with the opening in a trendy borough of Turin of a place devoted to experimentation and pouring just like the past tradition. The starting point was the recovery of the antique recipe of an historic brand in Turin based upon thirty herbs that is being revisited in a “modernized” version conceived to attract young people. The result is promising: the excellent red vermouth concocted by expert barmen goes



hand in hand with the variant, worthy of meditation, of herbs that are being hand-picked in the communities of valleys close to Cuneo. Again, in Turin the historic restaurant Del Cambio has recently reopened its doors after a careful job of restoration. The old room on the ground floor, where Prime Minister Cavour would have lunch at his favorite table,

has a new complement in the minimalist wine bar on the first floor. Here it is normal to see people chat and sip a vermouth or an aperitif with vermouth as a base. It is a symbol of how past and present cross each other on different floors, as a metaphor for the ties that bind one epoch to another, joined by a beverage of the eighteenth century that has returned to claim its fame, proving that happy intuitions, even though they faded for a while, come back as winners and reclaim their status.

ELISABETTA COCITO

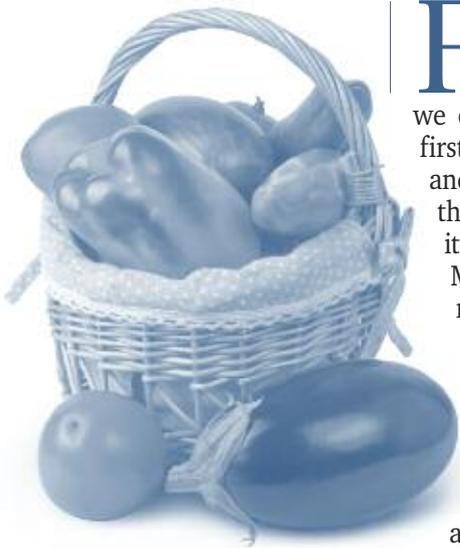


# Vegetarian and vegan cuisine

*We have become a people composed of alimentary tribes, each with its own idols, myths and rites.*

BY ALFREDO PELLE

*Academician, Apuano Delegation  
"F. Marengi" Study Center*



**F** As an introduction, I would like to say that we Academicians have a duty to regard that which we consider "the cuisine of others" first and foremost by acknowledging and understanding the motivations that underlie it, and then evaluating it in accordance with our own tastes. Many factors have determined this new way of approaching how and what we eat: agricultural industrialization, globalization and a greater awareness of where our food comes from.

We commit a grave error when we conceive of food only as "fuel" and ignore how important it is for our health and lives. Hippocrates wrote "Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food". I would like to add a small qualification: I am personally allergic to definitive judgments about taste and I believe that

the philosopher Immanuel Kant had the best notion about our freedom to enjoy food: "Regarding taste, each individual has an original idea in his own mind".

Thus human beings have welcomed all foods and cultures to the table, without preconception or prejudice. Many of us enjoy eating moeche (soft shell crabs from the Venice lagoon that are eaten fried during their molting season), but we refuse to try fried grasshoppers (I am told they are crispy and delicious), and we are (justifiably) horrified by the fact that each year 18 million dogs are eaten in China.

As early as two thousand years ago Titus Lucretius Caro wrote of food: "Why should certain foods be revolting for some people and delicious for others?" From this point of view all of the innumerable nutrition trends that have arisen have a right to exist and





be disseminated. The explosion of ethical, raw, wild, vegetarian, vegan, and fruit-only diets are just the latest indication that nutrition is becoming a political and social factor in today's world. Some of these alimentary trends arise and disappear quickly, others endure and become permanent lifestyles and behaviors. One well known gastronomic group organizes workshops, seminars and meal demonstrations - events that have become (or are trying to become) places of worship.

The most widespread vegetarian diets are based on grains, legumes, vegetables and fruit (both fresh and dried) and to a lesser extent they can include dairy products and eggs for those who enjoy them. Many products that are commonly used in vegetarian diets are widely available around the world: pasta, bread, rice, beans, and peas.



Other products that are not essential to a balanced diet but are often used in vegetarian meals quite often are not common in typical western diets but belong to other culinary traditions such as those of the Asian, Arab, Central and South American and Mediterranean countries. Thus vegetarian diets are often perceived as multi-ethnic and free of national barriers. For example, we find grains such as kamut, millet and quinoa, dishes made with bulgar, couscous and seitan, soy and soy products (tofu, tempeh and reconstructed vegetable proteins), edible algae and a variety of seeds (that also come in pastes like tahini), condiments such as shoyu, miso and tamari and sweeteners such as malt.

This type of nutritional trend began to spread during the early 20th century and followers embraced various "religions" that CENSIS defines as "nutritional polytheism". In this paradigm food becomes, for many people, a dominant theme that borders on obsession.

Every gastronomic trend assumes a totally new importance. Veganism, which was once a "niche" phenomenon, has taken on a whole new dimension. In Italy alone over 600,000 people practice

this new lifestyle and philosophy that is associated with the ethical treatment of animals. Medical science is increasingly taking notice of this phenomenon and even the restaurant industry, which was initially hostile to this type of cuisine, is slowly coming around to a more natural approach that does not sacrifice taste. In addition, the ADA maintains that when well planned this type of vegetarian diet is appropriate for all stages of the human life cycle.

Born in England in 1944, veganism is a philosophy and practice based on the opposition (when possible and practicable) to any type of animal exploitation (whether for food, clothing, display etc.). This rigid philosophical version of veganism is known as "ethical veganism" as opposed to "dietary veganism", a nutritional practice that excludes the consumption of any food of animal origin.

In conclusion, we have become a people made up of alimentary tribes, each with its own idols, myths and rites. All this in a western society characterized by abundance, which seems to be seen as the true enemy. In places where there is hunger, and where feeding one's family is a daily challenge seldom associated with taste preferences, there are very few food and nutritional fads. So we must gracefully accept the fact that there are millions of people in the world who intentionally ignore the fact that humans are omnivorous simply because "What comes out of our mouths is more important than what goes in". However we do not and should not accept these trends as "religions" wherein those who choose not to adhere to their practices are considered "infidels". Recent nutritional trends - arising just a few decades ago - cannot negate or deem erroneous almost three thousand years of gastronomy that are associated with our history, our anthropology and our ethics.

Evidently in terms of health and wellbeing, our gastronomic choices are filtered through society and reveal our hidden tastes.

**ALFREDO PELLE**



# Finocchiona sausage

*A delicate and delicious salami from Chianti made with wild fennel seeds. It is a close relative of “sbriciolona”, a large-grained sausage that crumbles when sliced.*

BY RUGGERO LARCO  
*Florence Valdarno Delegate*

In the Arno valley near Florence there are towns that have achieved worldwide fame for some of their high quality products: Greve, in the pulsating heart of Chianti, is known for the excellence of its classic wine; Reggello is not only famous for its outstanding olive oil, but also for its salamis and sausages. The most typical of them is finocchiona (which is actually produced in the area surrounding southern Florence). Thanks to the sbriciolona version this salami this year it was awarded the Dino Villani Prize. It is a unique salami whose motto could be “non lasciamoci infinocchiare!” - an Italian play on words that loosely translates as “don’t be fooled by imitations”. This is relevant because fennel seed (finocchiella) is the main ingredient and where the salami gets its name. These seeds have a peculiar characteristic: they actually “anesthetize” the taste buds, especially in the presence

of alcoholic products such as wine. In fact, fennel seeds are rich in anethole, which is nothing more than an aromatic unsaturated ether, and as such, it possesses anesthetic properties. Thus the proverb is based more on history than on legend. As a way to get rid of lesser or leftover wines, even those turned to vinegar, unscrupulous wine growers in and around Chianti, including the Valdarno area, were known to offer potential clients a hearty sample of finocchiona before sampling the wine. After having enjoyed the salami, even the worst wine became, if not excellent, at least palatable. It is a trick that nowadays is well known to many, but some people still fall for it, so be careful!

What is the origin of this delicious and unique salami? It was most likely “invented” during the Renaissance, or even the late Middle Ages, which were fairly lean times. In fact, some literary





passages describe how Niccolò Machiavelli was particularly fond of finocchiona. It was also widely known at the time that large portions of salt and pepper were required to preserve sausage. But trying to save money owing to the cost of spices, especially pepper, could result in spoiled meat. And thus the ingenious Tuscan pork butchers, well acquainted with the unusual characteristic of wild fennel seed, which grew abundantly in the countryside, began to add the free spice to their sausage recipes. Since fennel seeds do not possess any preservative properties, we know that the spice was introduced not for conservation but to mask the taste of meat that may have gone bad from being allowed to ripen too long. But the fact remains that the salami was and is a great success. While today we no longer have the problem of trying to mask unpleasant tastes, the addition of fennel seeds to the pork produces a delicate and delicious salami.

Now let us turn to the preparation, taking into account the obvious differences from one producer to another, of this excellent sausage product. Cuts of both fat and lean pork from the cheek, jowl, stomach, and shoulder are coarsely ground together and seasoned with salt, pepper, red wine and of course wild fennel seeds (*Foeniculum vulgare* Miller). The mixture is then stuffed into a natural casing and allowed to mature for 5 or 6 days in a well ventilated but not overly cold room, and then left to ripen in a cellar or similar environment for at least five months. The size varies from producer to producer, from a little over a kilo (2.2 lbs), about the size of a medium Tuscan salami with a diameter of 5 cm (2 in) to a little over 3 kilos (6.5 lbs) with a diameter of 10 to 12 cm (4-5 in). Non-Florentines wishing to buy a finocchiona may find themselves asked if they prefer it to be "sbriciolona" or not. Sbriciolona is still a fennel seed salami, but it has very large grains, is seasoned a month at most, and crumbles when sliced. Therefore while finocchiona can be



thinly sliced like salami, sbriciolona is served in larger chunks that tend to crumble and is eaten with a fork and knife, which is used to collect any remaining crumbs. They are two very similar products, but they are organoleptically slightly different. Only your

own taste and palate will determine if you prefer one or the other - or one and the other. It is worth noting that both salamis should be consumed with plenty of wine - while not necessarily of the highest quality!

**RUGGERO LARCO**

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# The fragrance of potato croquettes

*“You can eat a hundred, like a breath of wind!”*

*This is how vendors advertised a typical street food in Naples.*

BY CLAUDIO NOVELLI

Academician, Naples-Capri Delegation



**C**rocchè, supplì, gattò, sartù, bignè, babà, ragù, brioscia, grattè (gratin): these are all terms imported by our language from French gastronomy that dictated the rules of cuisine in Europe since the times of the Angioines. However, even though the term *crocchè*, or *crucchè*, derives from the more refined croquette, the contemporary French lack the joy, fast and passing, of a “potato *crocchè*” devoured on foot as an economical tidbit until the evening meal. And yet, the potato, the daughter of the New World, looked at with suspicion and initially destined to feed the animals, saved the Irish people from the famine of 1663. Later on, Antoine Augustin Parmentier came to the defense of potato

and proposed it to King Luis XVI as alternative food during the famine of 1785, even hoping to make bread from it. The results were disappointing.

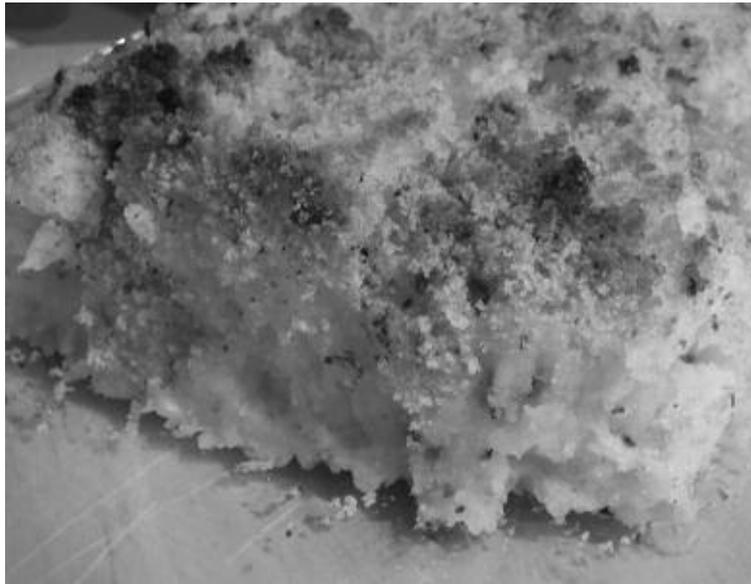
“Monsieur Parmentier asserts that potatoes are the best product of those faraway places, particularly the German Loren and America, for the nourishment of men as well as the pasture of animals”. This acknowledgement came from our own Vincenzo Corrado, chief of eateries for Don Michele Imperiali, Prince of Francavilla and Moltena, Grande First Class of Spain, Chamber Gentleman of His Majesty the King of Two Sicilies, Chevalier of the Distinguished Order of Saint Genaro etc. etc. In his *Treatise on Potatoes for Use as Food* (1798) he praises Par-





mentier but right after that tells him, with his habitual gracefulness, that “in spite of the fact of that he labored, and with him men of the Chemical Faculty skilled in making bread, it was not possible to remove the tenacity of the potato dough and to induce its fermentation causing it to rise”. In fact, no matter how he strove, the unlucky Parmentier never succeeded in producing bread that was somewhat acceptable. Corrado destroys him with good sense and the typical Neapolitan empirism by telling him that “good bread, quite excellent, can be obtained by mixing half wheat dough, and in the manner that is called for”. He then added the recipe, a model of absolute simplicity. It must be noted that at the time potato was widely used, as Corrado himself points out: “In order to follow the prescription of fashion, I undertake to speak of potatoes, and by the present booklet to introduce a new Pythagoric food”.

It is useless to point out that all cooking manuals codify only the existing material that has been well tested and accepted by the tastes of the time. Among the fifty-five recipes, two are worth mentioning since we can state, with absolute certainty, that they are the ancestors of the typical Neapolitan



street food, the “potato *crocchè*”, even though we do not know exactly when they left the table and entered the streets. During that time even the name was a bit more elegant: potatoes in *bigné*. ‘Boil the potatoes in water and peel them, mix them with a little grated parmesan and some fat from ox marrow. Mash them and add salt and pepper, mix them with one or two beaten eggs to bind the whole. This mixture should be cut into morsels, covered with wheat and beaten eggs, and then fried”.

In another booklet, *Daily Meals Varied and Served with 672 courses according to Seasonal Products* (1809), Corrado enriches their taste and gives exact indications about the shape they must take. Of course, he altered their name and transformed it into “Potato

clumps”. “The potatoes should be of the right size, pick ten of them, and let them boil in water with salt and a laurel leaf. Peel them, mash them with a fourth of veal fat, and another fourth of white cheese. Season them with spices, two beaten eggs and make a mixture. Divide the mixture into a number of portions that are the length of a finger, cover with wheat and fry them, serving with sage that is also fried”. The *crocchè*, once it arrives in the street,

that is to say in the frying stands that made happy the people crowding the squares and the streets, were advertised by the vendors and the itinerant sellers with the colorful cry: “*Make marennna, make marennna!* You will eat a hundred in a breath of wind!”. *Marennna* is Neapolitan for “*merenda*” or snack. The cry went on: “I have the *patanella* (fritters) and *o’sciore*, eat my fried mix, *crocchè* and *o’sciore!*” For the record, “*o’sciore*” was another delightful food item, the flower of the zucchini plant, just dipped in light batter and fried. As Mario Stefanile wrote, if Brillat Savarin had tasted them hot, light and fragrant, just taken out of boiling oil, with a light sprinkling of pulverized salt, he would not have ceased to voice his passionate praise.

CLAUDIO NOVELLI

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# White wine or red?

*Red wine with meat, white wine with fish:  
in cuisine, as in life, every rule is made to be broken.*

BY SANDRO BELLEI

*Academician, Modena Delegation*



Everyone is probably familiar with this maxim, but many people are not aware of the many possibilities and variables that combining food and beverages create. Fortunately, in this case as well, a pinch of creativity and a good amount of intuition can keep this maxim from becoming a rigid formula to be consigned to restaurant guides and sophisticated computer apps. What is more, not everyone has the means or the vast oenological knowledge of Pope Paul III (Alessandro Farnese, who lived from 1468 to 1549). He was such a wine enthusiast that his well supplied Lateran cellars contained wines suitable for the morning, for lunch, for afternoon, to quench one's thirst, to drink "before retiring", and even to drink "during a magnificent sunset" or "between the new and old season" and finally even wines "for times of great heat or great cold", to "rinse one's

mouth", "to wash one's eyes" and even "to wash one's virile parts". One can only attribute so much to his wine drinking habits but it is worth pointing out that Pope Paul III died at age 81 after a long and healthy life.

Different meats have very specific tastes: no matter how they are prepared their provenance is immediately identifiable. There is a very precise "original taste" that defines their characteristics. The innumerable recipes for preparing meat, from the simplest to the most sophisticated can vary with the addition of a condiment, a sauce or a spice, but the meat's original taste can only slightly be modified. It would seem to be a hard and fast rule that no matter how it is prepared, red meat must always be paired with a red wine, or maybe a rosé, but never with a white. I would say, given oenological factors that are today obsolete, that in cuisine as in life, every rule is made to be broken. But seriously, I mean to say that rules should not be taken literally and that sometimes it is fun to discover the few exceptions that confirm the rule. Just one more example before we get into specifics. If the "golden rule" that red or rosé wines should only be drunk with meat and white wines only with fish must be obeyed absolutely, we would have never discovered the pleasure of pairing stewed eel with the very red Ferrarese wine from the forests of Mesola; or been able to enjoy a fresh water fish fry with any of the three bubbly red Lambruscos from Modena. As we shall see there are clearly some very contradictory exceptions. Which just confirms that the subject may not be quite as "scientific" as we might hope

but that allowing room for opinion makes the process more "human".

The many varieties of red meat prepared in very different ways have very dissimilar flavors and tastes. Similarly, the wines that should be paired with these dishes also have extremely different bouquets, flavors, structure and vintages. A general rule that is fairly intuitive calls for pairing simple, delicate dishes with light young wines, including rosés. And as one moves toward more complicated and substantial dishes it is wise to pair them with wines that have characteristics with more bite. Of all meats, for example, beef has the simplest, "cleanest" flavor. The choice of whether to serve an ordinary wine or one with more complete structure should be determined by the cook and the recipe he or she chooses. The options range from a claret or a red from the Colli Euganei to a Caldaro or a Carmignano.

Ovine meat instead has a totally different original taste, and it is not to everyone's liking. The characteristic flavor of lamb marries well with a good dry red wine that is full bodied and vinous, with moderate alcohol content and strong bouquet. For example a San Giovese from the Pesaro hills, a San Severo, an Aglianico del Vulture, a Cannonau or a Cervereri.

It goes without saying that pork is the most flavorful meat of all. And certain recipes can really enhance its flavor. As a result, pork absolutely must be paired with dry red wines that are robust and have great character, are well aged and have a generous flavor and bouquet that emphasize their high notes. And once again, it is essential to select the



wine in accordance with the nature of the recipe. One could easily choose from a Cabernet or a Cerasuolo d'Abruzzo, a Freisa d'Asti or the incomparable bubbly red that is the Lambrusco di Sorbara. The latter is the only acceptable wine to be served with a piping hot *zampone* (pig foot).

Horsemeat also has a particularly strong taste that is not appreciated by everyone. As such, there are few wines that pair well with dishes made with it. Therefore they must be vigorous dry red wines that are slightly fruity, have a full bouquet, complete structure and are well aged. Therefore one might select from the cellar a Cirò, a Ramandolo, an Arcugnano or - if the recipe is an elaborate one (such as a strongly flavored stew with many herbs and spices) why not a Barolo that is not too mature? Sweetbreads and other organ meats have very particular flavors that require soft dry rosé or red wines, preferably with a well rounded body and delicate taste and only a few years of aging. One may choose from among wines of the Riviera del Garda, a Rosatello, a Bardolino or a Traminer from the hills around Gorizia.

For simple and delicately flavored light meat poultry (chicken, turkey etc.) one should opt for a cherry flavored or a dry red wine that is appropriately full

bodied and has a harmoniously but fairly high alcohol content. For example, a Carema, or a Lagrein rosé from Alto Adige, an Aglianico from Matera or a Santa Maddalena. Dark meat poultry such as farm raised duck, pheasant, goose etc. are a different story. The flavor of this meat is more complex and marked; a slightly bitter taste is also characteristic of it. One can choose from among the wines that pair with lighter poultry provided that they have a bitterish or almond aftertaste and a higher level of tannin. Some possibilities: Ghemme, reds from the hills around Lake Trasimeno, Corvo, or Valtellina Superiore.

Wild game deserves a chapter all its own as their wine pairing differ from what has been described up to now. In fact we should explain why one wine or another is a better accompaniment for a certain recipe, or why a given wine goes better with duck than pheasant. The differences are minimal, subtle and often depend on one's taste. Experience is the best teacher. Only after having sampled hundreds of pairings can a sommelier or even a simple "amateur" gourmet be in a position to offer useful advice. This is why it does not pay to overindulge in technical details which are not only complicated but also

boring. We must rely on our oeno-gastronomic "intelligence" to provide suggestions about good pairings and maybe even to tempt us to try new ones.

Let us return to the question of game. The meat of skylark, woodcock, partridge, quail, dove, pheasant etc. have markedly different tastes. Therefore it is difficult to provide suggestions. One could even say with the utmost oeno-gastronomic snobbism that each type of game requires a specific wine. Nevertheless, they all require red wines whose structure is more important than their overtones. A few recommendations: Gattinara, Nobile di Montepulciano, Gutturmo Colli Piacentini, Cesanese del Piglio, Barbaresco, Buttafuoco, and Teroldego Rotaliano. As far as waterfowl are concerned (teal duck, wild duck, curlew, water crow, etc.) the specific wild taste and odor that they derive from their habitat must be taken into consideration. They should still be paired with red wines that are markedly aromatic and vinous, produced if possible in the same area where the game was caught. Finally, wild game with "black meat" (venison, wild boar, hare, etc.) are prized for their refined and complex flavor. "Typical" wines are a must, high quality, austere and even aristocratic. Using the same criteria for other game, I would personally recommend a Nasco di Cagliari, a Tiferno, an Inferno Valtellina or a Bonarda Oltrepò Pavese.

So much discussion of wine leads me to conclude with an Arab legend that would seem to be at odds with St. Thomas who believed himself to be an expert in earthly things and found it impossible to decide which was the greatest virtue: women or wine. According to the legend, one day the devil appeared to a man and demanded that he choose between doing three things: beating his wife, killing his servant or getting drunk on wine. The poor fellow opted for what he thought was the lesser of the three evils, but the devil won his due: While under the influence of the alcohol, first the man beat his wife and then killed his servant.

**SANDRO BELLEI**