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**On the cover:** *Graphic elaboration of Still Life with Drawing Board, Pipe, Onions and Sealing Wax (1889) by Vincent van Gogh; Kröller-Müller Museum, Otterlo*

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# Booking a restaurant is tricky in Italy, but in New York it's an expensive nightmare

*There are now websites and apps which book tables and resell those bookings at exorbitant prices.*

Last month's Focus shed light on the difficulties encountered when booking the most fashionable or popular restaurants: a veritable odyssey. This phenomenon, however, is not restricted to Italy. In America, particularly New York, the situation has become unconscionable. There are now apps and websites that book tables and then resell those bookings at exorbitant prices to those wishing to choose when to dine. Such booking piracy has become so widespread that the State of New York has approved a law called the **Restaurant Reservation Anti-Piracy Act** aiming to combat such predatory software.

*Black-market bookings had become a thriving business in New York*

Black-market bookings had become a thriving business in New York, with people booking blocks of meals in the most fashionable restaurants intending to resell them to prospective diners. Apparently a student earned \$100,000 over 19 months by selling restaurant bookings.

**A law now forbids third-party services to list, publicise, promote or sell bookings** without a written agreement from the restaurant. That black market may vanish, but the customer's problem will remain unchanged. Let's hope that this phenomenon, at least, won't arise in Italy.



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



What attracts crowds to a specific restaurant? Once there were the so-called regulars, who didn't like surprises, appreciated being recognised and coddled, and loved the particular atmosphere and cuisine of their habitual haunts. Exploring new restaurants? Infrequent: they may disappoint. Nowadays, the desire to eat something new, visit new restaurants, try the creations of some chef that everyone talks about, has greatly increased, though the basic factors are unchanged.

*Being welcomed remains the crucial element*

In particular, feeling welcomed remains the determining factor, and **a human presence is crucial**. **Sirio Maccioni**, the late, great owner of the restaurant **Le Cirque** in New York, was not a cook; few knew who worked in the kitchen. **He was the restaurant**. Same for **Lorenzo** in Forte dei Marmi, who passed away only days ago. He, not the chef, was the soul of the restaurant. We could also recall **Arrigo Cipriani** of Harry's Bar in Venice, but many other restaurateurs have made customers feel at home, welcomed, with attention paid to their preferences. The food, of course, must be good, but it's a secondary consideration. That's the difference between chain restaurants, or the side projects of celebrity chefs, and our beloved regular haunts.



# Jubilee 2025 and the 'value of food'

by **Attilio Borda Bossana**  
*Messina Delegate*

*The event, expected to draw 35 million tourists and pilgrims, also offers a chance to recall the association between Jesus and food.*

for "the first sign of hope", is leading the resurgence of tourism in Italy's capital, instilling new optimism in restaurateurs, hoteliers and tour operators **in Rome with a predicted influx of 35 million pilgrims and tourists.**

*Agreements to offer an array of affordable food options*

**Pellegrino** (Pilgrim's Friends), which offers a vast array of affordable food options accessible through **pilgrims' digital food coupons**. This network has been created precisely to satisfy the needs of pilgrims in their hundreds of thousands, providing **a high-quality culinary experience at accessible prices** with dedicated menus and special offers thanks to the collaboration of Roman businesses.

**The initiative also aims to promote local food specialities** and sustain the area's economy during the Jubilee, while some restaurateurs have created special menus for the pilgrims visiting the Eternal City, inspired by the meeting of spirituality and culinary art.

*The Gospels depict Jesus as a culinary expert*

**2**025 is a Jubilee Year, occurring a hundred years after the papal bull *Infinita Dei Misericordia*, wherein Pope **Pius XI** declared the commitment of the Church and all Christians to a better society on 29 May 1924. The Jubilee Year 2025, which opened with **Pope Francis** expressing his wish

However, the Jubilee is also causing **indiscriminate price hikes in restaurants**, as already evident from the average cost of a carbonara, surging in Rome to twice what it was a few years ago. A timely **agreement between the Dicastery for Evangelisation and the food service organisation Fipe Confcommercio promotes the public network Gli Amici del**

The Jubilee's food theme was already tackled in summer 2024 by the special pilgrimage *In Cammino* ('Walking the Path'), during an event at the Cistercian Abbey of Chiaravalle della Colomba in Alseno, province of Piacenza. During the talk "Il Cibo, nutrimento del corpo e dell'anima" ("Food: nourishment for body and soul"), **Monsignor Franco Maria Giuseppe Agnesi, Auxiliary Bishop of Milan**, noted that the Gospels depict Jesus as a culinary expert. Consider the fish he grilled for the apostles by the Sea of Galilee, and evidence of his culinary knowledge including how to leaven dough, the right quantity of salt for flavouring food, and the distinction between good and bad fish in the Parable of the Dragnet: all come from the Gospels and suggest that Jesus was familiar with cooking. The Nazarene's



*Pilgrims during the 1300 Jubilee from a miniature in Giovanni Sercambi's Cronica; State Archives, Lucca*



San Domenico. The table kept in the church of Santa Maria della Mascarella in Bologna, attesting to the history of the Order of Preachers

knowledge of culinary traditions and secrets is also the thesis of a book by the Lombard theologian **Giovanni Cesare Pagazzi**, who teaches at the Theological Faculty of Northern Italy in Milan: *La cucina del Risorto. Gesù cuoco per l'umanità affamata (The Cooking of the Risen One: Jesus as cook for the hungry)*; Emi, 2014, Bologna). Jesus as cook, a concept apparently seldom considered by Christologists, is an aspect of his divinity, embodying the **theological and anthropological significance of cooking, especially for others**. Not only a preacher and miracle worker, then, but also a food expert, ac-

ording to Pagazzi: the Master loved sitting at table with people but could also make the food himself. Jesus described himself as 'the good shepherd': namely, one who also feeds his flock, argues Pagazzi, noting that a shepherd is a 'pastor' who provides 'pasture', both deriving from the Latin *pascere* (feed, nourish, graze). In his analysis of evangelical sources, this original interpretation brings to light a less-known angle of the Son of God, who was apparently at ease with yeast and flour, vegetables and lamb, grilled fish and salt. This aligns with Christian values: **cooking does not**

**merely mean giving food, but above all, caring for others** according to their needs. "The Gospel texts display the Nazarene's relationship with food and the table with stupendous breadth", says the author, citing parables in which "the references are clear": the wedding banquet for the king's son; the master serving the servants and the faithful; the wise administrator who feeds his underlings; what position to occupy when invited to a banquet; or the welcome prepared for the 'prodigal son'.

**The gospels refer not only to food but also to conviviality**, depicted as "one of the most empathetic traits in the Lord's conduct": he often sat at the table, participating in the meals of positive characters (the bridal pair at Cana, the sisters in Bethany) and negative ones (publicans, sinners, Simon the suspicious Pharisee). From his prodigious multiplication of the loaves, an episode showing Jesus in the act of nourishing the hungry, and the words that he used for teaching, we can deduce his knowledge of raw materials and their production and use, as in the Parable of Yeast: "The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened" (Matthew 13:33).

Yet more significantly, at the end of the Fourth Gospel (John), the Risen Jesus is depicted in his last appearance, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, unrecognised by his apostles after their miraculous fishing expedition, tinkering with "a fire of coals there, and fish laid thereon, and bread." Jesus has gathered wood, procured food and cooked. Without leaving the fire, he asks that some of the freshly caught fish be brought to him, evident-



Monks eating. Scene from the life of St Benedict. Fresco from the Territorial Abbey of Monte Oliveto Maggiore

Leonardo da Vinci's 'Last Supper'



ly intending to grill those as well. Clearly, writes Pagazzi, "Jesus is not content with nourishing or merely receiving food, but cooks, transforms, with all that this very human gesture requires in terms of attention to people and materials".

### The food of the Last Supper

Eating may be our most symbolic activity: a sacral act, a social moment, an expression of culture but also imagination, emotion, memory. To speak of nourishment is thus, in some way, to study humans through their inner world, their history, religiosity and ethico-social identity.

Such observations are condensed into a single image by the painting *The Last Supper*, one of the most iconic masterpieces by **Leonardo da Vinci**, which has long attracted the interest of art historians and literary scholars hunting for

hidden details and cryptic messages potentially unlocking one of the most important moments in the life of Jesus Christ. The latest restoration effort, undertaken by **Pinin Brambilla Barcilon** and lasting over twenty years from 1977, strove to rescue the portions covered by earlier restorations, allowing viewers to behold a work as close as possible to its original form. After the work, **the restorers maintained that the menu was fish-based; John Varriano**, Professor of Art History at Mount Holyoke College, further opined that the painting depicts the disciples, prior to the eucharist of bread and wine on the night before Christ's sacrifice, dining on **grilled eels garnished with citrus fruit**, probably orange slices: a menu that fits Leonardo's time better than the food habits of two thousand years ago.

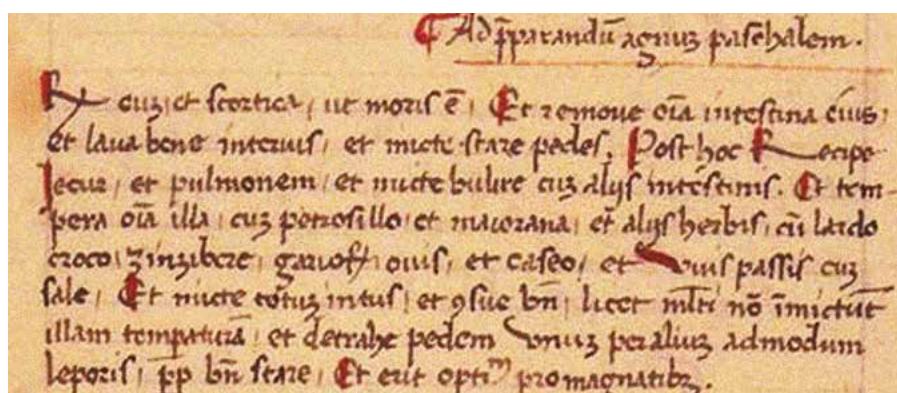
The gastronaut **Stefan Gates**, in Milan for a BBC broadcast, closely observed Leonardo's work in Santa Maria delle Grazie and noticed that nobody is touch-

ing the food: the moment immortalised is that of Jesus revealing his imminent betrayal to his disciples. According to experts, the dishes appear to contain fish prepared in small steaks, and the absence of lamb, a food always biblically associated with Christ's figure, is surprising.

### Recipe from a cook serving the communal table at the court of Pope Martin V

This Holy Year, which will end on Christmas Eve 2025, will be the 25<sup>th</sup> Universal Ordinary Jubilee Year in the history of the Catholic Church, and will have a less pious facet, as evinced from past religious events: **it will offer extraordinary opportunities to restaurants**, with millions of pilgrims expected in Rome and **an average personal expense of 20-30 euros a day**, allowing restaurateurs to earn between 1.2 and 2.7 billion euros. A suggestion to chefs: take note of the earliest known written account of a recipe for pilgrims, recorded on 11 December 1417 by a cook serving the communal table at the court of Pope **Martin V**: "Take the fava beans, wash them well in hot water and leave them to soak overnight. Then boil them in fresh water, mince them well and add white wine. Season with onion, olive oil or butter, and some saffron." This dish "will be suitable for wandering clerics or pilgrims."

**Attilio Borda Bossana**



Johannes Bockenheim, Registrum Coquine. Recipe n. 28: "Ad praeparandum agnum paschalem" ("Preparing the Easter Lamb")



# The 'Mediterranean Way' turns 50

by **Aldo E. Tàmmaro**  
*Milano Brera Academician*

*We know the creature better than its creator: who was Ancel Keys?*

about three decades the health implications of the Mediterranean Diet (MD) have aroused increasing interest from the scientific world and the public at large, as demonstrated by the many publications about it worldwide and the attention lavished upon it by the press (including this magazine).

At this point we must inevitably admit that the creature is far better known than its creator, who, however, deserves a moment of our notice, if only to contemplate the soil in which a phenomenon that has now grown to planetary proportions initially took root. Ancel Benjamin Keys, who contravened North American conventions by never mentioning his middle name, was born in Colorado Springs on 20 November 1904 to very young parents: 21-year-old **Benjamin Pious**, a bookbinder, and 19-year-old **Carolyn Emma Chaney**, a

housewife and sister of the famous **Lon**, a silent movie star. When he was two years old, the family moved to San Francisco just in time to witness and survive the disastrous earthquake of 1906.

*The restless, versatile Ancel had finally found his path*

**Ancel demonstrated exceptional intellectual gifts from childhood**, so much so that he was among the 1,528 gifted children selected for a study by the psychologist **Lewis Terman**, revisor of the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Scales. Due to a certain intolerance of rules, **he eventually abandoned high school, dedicating himself to disparate activities**: shovelling bat guano in a cave in Arizona, being a powder monkey in a

In 1975, bookshops welcomed a volume destined to open a new chapter in the link between lifestyle and health: ***Eat Well and Stay Well the Mediterranean Way***, by **Ancel and Margaret Keys**, an American married couple. For





Colorado coal mine, and being a lumberjack and finally a sailor on a route between the USA and China. **He resumed studying in 1922**, was admitted to Berkeley, the famous Californian university, and gained a degree in economics and political science three years later, followed by two doctorates: one in biology and oceanography from the Scripps Institute in San Diego (1930) and the other in physiology from King's College, Cambridge (1938). The restless, versatile Ancel had finally found his path: **Associate Professor at the prestigious**

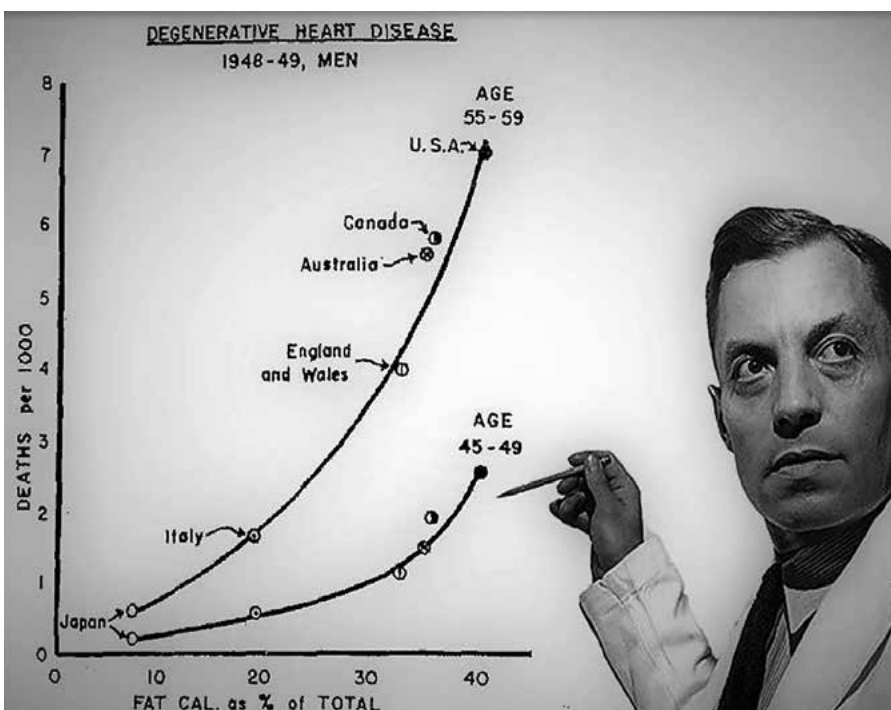
**Harvard University and, from 1937, at the University of Minnesota**, where in 1939 he founded the Laboratory of Physiological Hygiene, which he directed until retirement. That same year he married Margaret Haney, whom he had hired as a medical technician three years earlier and who remained an indispensable collaborator throughout his life, co-authoring works that were seminal in the history of lifestyle and its health effects. Margaret reached the age of 97, which, added to Ancel's almost 101, made them **elo-**

**quent living proof of the Mediterranean Way's efficacy.**

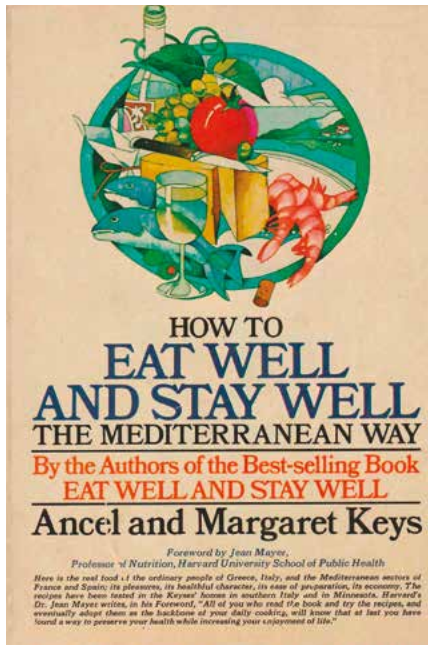
Ancel's competence in the nutritional field was consistently acknowledged by the US government, which, when the Second World War was in full swing, commissioned him to devise a subsistence diet for the troops, dubbed the **K-ration** from his surname's initial. But this was just the beginning: the idea of a link between food and health had begun making inroads into his mind, but without the necessary scientific underpinnings for transforming it into a way of life.

*In Italy he discovered a link between food habits and health*

He first visited Italy in 1951 as a participant and president of the first conference on the state of the world's nutrition, set up in Rome by the FAO. There he met **Gino Bergami**, a professor of physiology at the University of Naples, from whom he learned that in his territory, cardiovascular diseases, and especially myocardial infarctions, which mowed people down mercilessly in the USA, were not a notable health problem. And here was the flash of insight: could there be a lifestyle, first and foremost foodwise, at the root of this difference? He returned the following year to Naples with Margaret, and a few months were sufficient for them to ascertain that its population followed a diet low in fat, except the wealthy, who were practically the only ones to suffer heart attacks. Convincing the scientific world and public opinion required far more, however, than the vague confirmation of an impression: they must now flesh out their intuition about the link between lifestyle and cardiovascular health. Ancel and Margaret had already pointed out the importance of eating habits for health in their book, published for the first but not final time in 1959 (*Eat Well and Stay Well*), with a preface by **Paul Dudley White**, a cardiologist who pioneered methods later incorporated into standard therapeutic practice, who had acquired planetary fame in 1955 for ha-



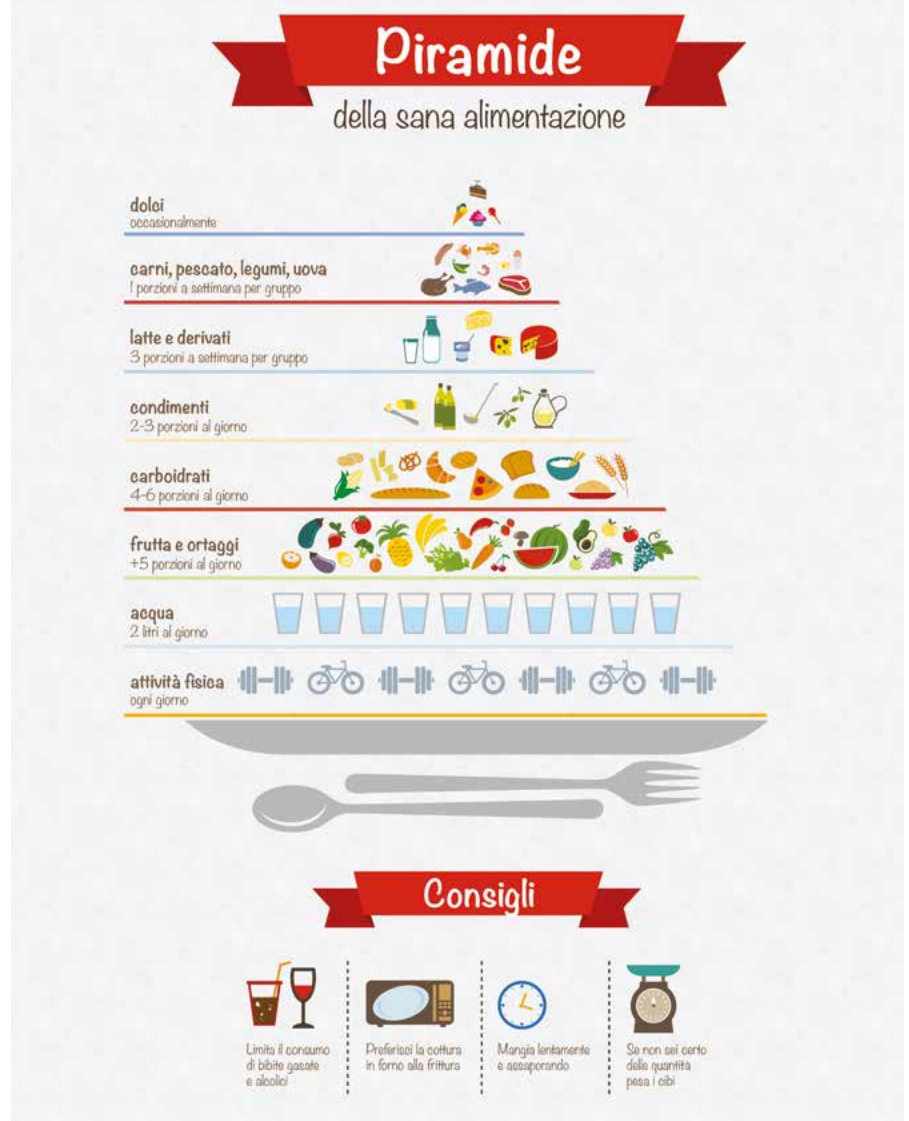




ving efficaciously healed then-President **Eisenhower** after his myocardial infarction.

*The concept of the MD's healthfulness takes root*

To verify the validity of his hypothesis, in 1959 Keys and his team initiated the **Seven Countries Study** (Yugoslavia, USA, Japan, Finland, the Netherlands, Italy and Greece), based on initial case studies of nearly 13,000 subjects monitored for over 50 years, demonstrating that the incidence of cardiovascular disease was markedly lower in the countries facing the Mediterranean, whose lifestyle was characterised, besides physical activity, time spent outdoors, active social relationships and conviviality, by a diet based on complex carbohydrates, legumes, cereals, fish, olive oil and moderate quantities of wine, but low in animal fats and red meat. In other words, the concept that the MD is healthy was born and soon became familiar to the public at large. From that point, Ancel and Margaret split their time between Minneapolis and their haven of Pioppi, in Cilento, where they named their house Minnelea (Minneapolis plus Elea, a nearby Greek colony and site of the Ele-



atic school to which Parmenides belonged). It became a sort of academy for scholars of the subject. In 1975 the pair published the aforementioned volume which is now turning 50 and which would have to wait 42 years to be translated into Italian, and then with a somewhat reductive title relative to the concept expressed in the original (*La Dieta Mediterranea. Come mangiare bene e stare bene: literally The Mediterranean Diet. How to eat well and live well*).

*Despite his longevity, he never witnessed UNESCO recognition*

After turning 100, Ancel returned to Minneapolis permanently, having received the honorary citizenship of Pollica and the **Medal of Merit for Public**

**Health, conferred upon him in 2004 by the Italian President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi.** He never witnessed the MD's inclusion in 2010 on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list, the reams of scientific studies which continue to document the benefits of his 'creature', the Living Museum of the Mediterranean Diet in Pioppi and the Ancel Keys Institute in Castelnuovo Cilento, nor yet the MD's rating as healthiest diet in the world for seven consecutive years (2019-25) by the *US News & World Report*, and its third-place ranking by two important American medical associations based on 10 suggested elements for preventing strokes. Ancel did his best, but his longevity wasn't enough; we're trying to figure out physical immortality, but for now, we must be content with going down in history.

**Aldo E. Tàmmaro**



# Cappuccino, the most popular variation on espresso

by Roberto Mirandola  
Padua Academician

*Its name - in Italian - remains the same everywhere*

If you've never been drawn to its sinuous nut-brown swirls, or seduced by the dense, velvety foam that caresses the palate and stays plump until the very bottom of the cup; if you haven't been subjugated by its caramel and vanilla fragrance or conquered by its dried fruit and chocolate overtones - then you've never tasted a real cappuccino!

An *espresso ristretto* (short), prepared flawlessly, combined with equal parts foamed and hot milk, forms one of the beverages most frequently ordered in cafés all over the world, whose Italian name remains unchanged everywhere: cappuccino. Yet that name is often misapplied to concoctions that have little to do with the famous drink.

## *No mean feat*

**Making the perfect cappuccino** is no mean feat, requiring **the right ingredients, the correct equipment and the 'feel' of an expert bartender.**

A true cappuccino consists of **four parts milk (100 ml) and one of espresso coffee (25 ml) surmounted by 1 cm of foam; it should have a ring of coffee around the edge 1 cm thick and be white in the centre.** A **blend of prized coffees** can release a variety of aromas and nuances ranging from floral notes to the fragrances of spices. The milk, with its fat and protein content, can facilitate



that aroma release, bringing out the most recondite characteristics of the coffee beans. Because this works for both good and bad aspects of the coffee, it is impossible to make a good cappuccino with a mediocre or, worse, poor-quality espresso.

Secondly there is the milk, which must be fresh and whole and start at a temperature of 3-4°C. It must be **foamed while cold** by the bartender's expert hands to increase its volume. The result must never be airy milk froth. The sacrosanct protocols of cappuccino require a **very fine-grained cream without bubbles**, which folds perfectly into the espresso, guaranteeing the characteristically silky-soft sensation that accompanies every last sip. **The temperature of the coffee machine must be regulated manually** to produce **the right vapour, dry and hot**, gently foaming the milk without ever causing the water to exceed 92°C, which would give the espresso a burnt flavour. A stainless steel **milk frothing jug** is essential; its particular shape - rounded at the bottom with a narrower mouth - **allows the ideal movement of the milk during**

**foaming.** Once the milk is heated, it must never be re-used for other cappuccini.

## *The cup also plays an important role*

The cup also plays an important role. Cappuccino must be served in a **porcelain** cup holding approximately 150-160 ml, **whose flared mouth and conical base** permit the foamed milk to envelop the coffee perfectly as it is poured, creating a shiny, dense, velvety, fine-grained cream which softly caresses the palate. Only in this way can a cappuccino produce its pleasantly **persistent flavour.** Finally, **the sugar.** To avoid smothering the flavour of the coffee, already somewhat sweetened by the cream, the ideal is no more than one or two coffee spoonfuls, or one packet, of sugar. If prepared correctly, a cappuccino requires nothing more. It is perfect as described above. So, no need for dustings of cocoa powder, cinnamon or anything else.