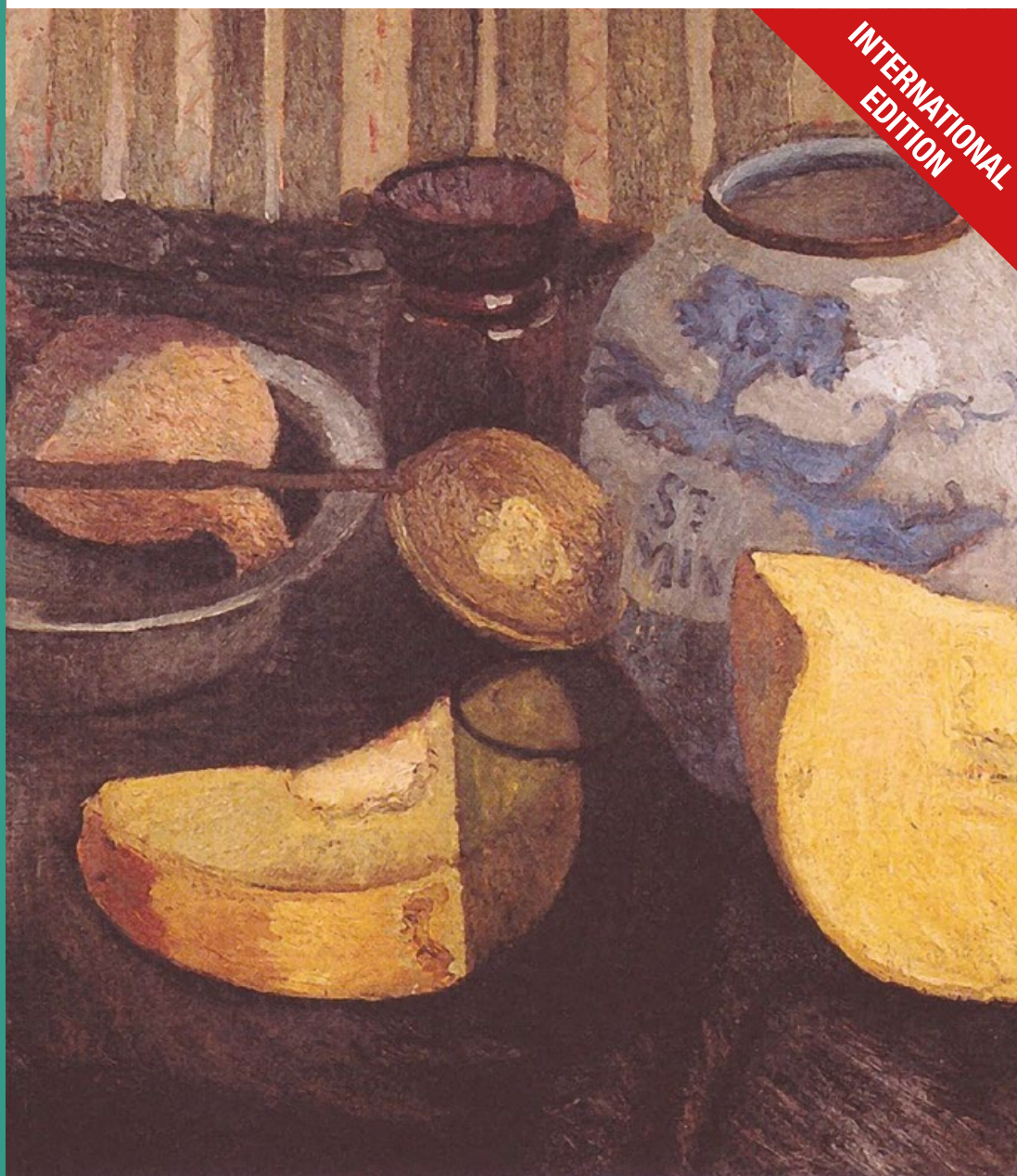


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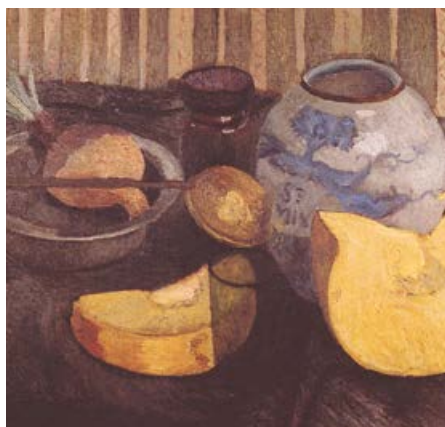
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DALLE ROSE, MICHELE GUIDO FRANCI, GIANNI MAZZOCCHI
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CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.



On the cover: graphic elaboration of *Still Life with Pumpkin and Ginger Jar* (1905) by Paula Modersohn-Becker; Von der Heydt Museum, Wuppertal, Germany.

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Plating: a necessity, but also an obsession

Mid-tier restaurants often skimp on appearance, while swanky ones prioritise it over substance.

One of Italian cuisine's problems has always been **food presentation in restaurants: inadequate crockery, excessive or meagre portions**, little attention to appearance. For example, if we order a seabass, baked or poached in *acqua pazza* ('crazy water': tomato garlic wine broth), it is generally presented alone, without side dishes; furthermore it may be offered whole, or already split and boned, with or without skin and/or head: surprises all round! One must therefore peruse the menu and choose the most suitable side dish, hoping that it arrives alongside the lonesome fish. In countries much less famous for their cuisine, such as Britain, Germany or the USA, restaurant dishes are often far more invitingly presented, with whatever trimmings the chef considers appropriate. This happens in mid-tier restaurants; but high-end or 'starred' establishments inhabit another, diametrically opposed world.

In 'starred' restaurants, appearance is paramount

Plating mania! Plating is considered so important that it supersedes substance. Appearance, amazing the diner, is paramount. In a historic moment in which great chefs focus on the liquid, ingredients float serenely in little ponds of sauce, broth, reduction. Recently in a very well-known fine-dining restaurant, each of the five tasting menu courses appeared in a separate vessel (chosen with noteworthy originality and painstaking research), and each dish, every single one, was

by **Paolo Petroni**
President of the Accademia



completed at the table by a waiter wielding a dainty jug and pouring out the requisite fluid with which to form the obligatory puddle. At other times, plating (this is especially clear if the kitchen is visible) requires so much time and effort from several people that the food arrives visually flawless but cold. All in all, **a viable, healthy middle way** would benefit all, especially mid-range restaurants which are those that count when a nation's overall restaurant cuisine is assessed.



UNESCO has expressed a preliminary positive opinion regarding Italian cuisine's inclusion on the Intangible Cultural Heritage list. The final decision is up to the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee which is to meet in New Delhi in December. In case of approval, Italian cuisine would be **the first in the world** to receive this recognition for an entire national food culture. This historic milestone would confirm the cultural and social importance of Italian cuisine in the world, and the **Italian Academy of Cuisine's fundamental role** in presenting the proposal and its dossier.



Spritz: sunshine in a glass

by Roberto Mirandola

Padua Academician

An entirely Italian cocktail that cheers up the whole world.

When Prosecco meets bitters and sparkling water, we have a Spritz: the original Italian apéritif, **as colourful as it is fizzy**, as delicious as it is unifying. Because the true power of this cocktail, which has become a symbol of Italian identity, is **its capacity to bring people together for a shared moment in good company**, a break among friends, a relaxing pause garnished with crisps and olives, bidding the sun farewell as it sets into the sea or vanishes behind the city skyline. When offices empty, ties come

loose, shirt collars are opened and uncomfortable high heels clatter towards the nearest bar, there's no need to check our watches: everybody knows that Spritz time is here!

This quintessentially Italian mixed drink has also seduced palates overseas, where praise abounds daily as those unmistakeably orange glasses are raised towards the sky. Season after season, Spritz is confirmed as New York's chosen apéritif. In bars round the world, the drinks menu includes the entry 'Italian Spritz'.





Its roots are in the Veneto

The **cradle of Spritz** lies in the Veneto region, **or more precisely, what was known as the Kingdom of Lombardy-Venetia in the early 19th century**. The Austrian soldiers guarding the territory gallivanted with abandon when off duty, and, between wanderings, they began sipping a delicious but strong Tokaj wine (now known as Friulano). Due to its excessive alcohol content, they chose to dilute it with water: hence the first version of Spritz. That custom, swiftly spreading among the locals and preserved virtually unaltered in both Austria and Trentino-Alto Adige, **remained prevalent throughout Friuli-Venezia Giulia, where the classic Spritz still consists of wine, sparkling water and a slice of lemon**. Its next evolutionary step occurred **through the dissemination of soda syphons** for obtaining extra-bubbly seltzer water. In the inter-war years, the Twenties and Thirties, the apéritif habit developed. One of many variants, which became widespread **in Venice, is even today considered the original Spritz recipe, using a bitter liqueur called Select[®], invented in the**

Lagoon City in 1920 by the Pilla brothers. The previous year, instead, the **Barbieri** brothers had created Aperol in Padua.

In the 1950s, the new apéritif habit was firmly established in the Veneto; with new bitters and the economic boom, **the Spritz that we know today** soon became popular, first in Venice, then Padua, and from the Seventies, throughout the Veneto, later spreading to all northern Italy, then to the whole country, and recently, the world.

Flawless preparation

It was the IBA, the **International Bartenders' Association**, that assumed the task of codifying Italy's most widespread cocktail. Flawless preparation of the original Spritz **firstly requires an old-fashioned short tumbler glass** containing 3-4 ice cubes. **Then one must add three parts of DOC-certified Prosecco, two parts of Aperol** (this order ensures perfect mixing and a more brilliant orange colour) and **one part of sparkling or seltzer water**. Finally, **half a slice of blonde orange** as a garnish. **Spritz exists in many variants:** some

use bitters other than Aperol, such as Campari or Cynar, to cite the two most common ones. It matters not if one ingredient changes, or a name or a flavour: surely what never changes is its refreshing quality, its lightness and ability to transmit instant cheer. Tables fill up, friends laugh and the evening can begin amidst chatter and snacks. It may be the infectious fizz, the quintessentially Italian brand, the vivid colour, the immediately energising taste, or the ability to transform every season into summer: for whatever reason, nobody seems able to give up their Spritz, which the Americans have adroitly dubbed 'sunshine in a glass'.

Some curious facts

* **Spritz**. Deriving from the **German verb spritzen**, 'to spray': the water used for diluting Tokaj wine was indeed sprayed.

* **Aperol**. This name was conceived by **Silvio Barbieri**, an entrepreneur from Padua with ancestry from Este, inspired by the French *apéro*, an abbreviation of *apéritif*, encountered in a bar on the Champs-Élysées Avenue during a long visit to Paris in the 1910s. The final 'l' forever marked the name of that newly invented concoction. It has 11% alcohol by volume (ABV); interestingly, and not by chance, its label is tilted by 11°.

* **Prosecco**. The name denotes **its original production area**: the village of Prosecco near Trieste. The name was applied from the early 16th century to distinguish the then more prestigious Ribolla di Trieste from similar, cheaper wines of the Gorizia and Istria areas.

* **Seltz**. The term derives from the town of Selters in the **central German** Taunus mountain range, where a spring produces naturally fizzy water particularly rich in carbon dioxide. In German this is called *Selsterwasser*, meaning 'the water of Selters'.

* **Price**. In the Veneto, a Spritz fetches 3.50 euros on average at the bar (or a mere 2.50 euros in some areas in Friuli-Venezia Giulia) and 4-5 euros at the table.

Roberto Mirandola



Precious, ancient saffron

by **Andrea Giacometti**
Gubbio Academician

*A pluripotent spice
used in cuisine
and pharmacopoeia.*

Saffron has distant roots. Its origins are clearly eastern, linked particularly to the Persian plateau. It was almost certainly introduced to Europe and the Mediterranean by the Phoenicians around 2000 BC. **The first evidence of edible saffron (*Crocus sativus*) in Europe is on a wall fresco in Crete dating from the 17th century BC.**

*The properties of the world's
most precious spice*

Since records began, saffron has been the world's most precious spice. Three

were **the ancients' principal uses** for saffron threads: **in sacrifices, as food for the gods; as a dye** for the robes of priests and kings, with its distinctive red-gold hue; and finally **in herbal medicine**. For the past 4000 years, it has been used in Europe as a medicine, a food supplement and a natural remedy. Only occasionally, mostly **from the 17th century, has it been used culinarily in Europe**. What are the properties of the world's most prized spice? The ancients (Egyptians, Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans) used saffron **as a remedy against all abdominal ailments**. Indeed, saffron balances diuresis and digestion because it is **anti-inflammatory and disinfects** the





urinary and intestinal passages; it **promotes relaxation, calm and weight loss**. The ancients (most famously **Cleopatra**) used it cosmetically to combat wrinkles and whiten skin, and even today it is considered **the world's most powerful anti-wrinkle agent**.

Pharmaceutically, saffron is a component, inter alia, of anti-tumour medicines, thanks to its antioxidant properties; it is used in ophthalmology against maculopathy, and as a dietary supplement.

Saffron has **all its properties concentrated in the three red stigmas** (threads) harvested from each saffron crocus flower and dried to fix their crocin, picrocrocin and safranal. **Rehydration is necessary** to extract its beneficial properties. The stigmas, 10 per person or portion, must be left for at least three hours in hot water or milk (generally 250/300 ml at 60/70°C are suggested); the soaking water (or milk), which will have assumed the typical amber or golden hue, is then used. For example, drinking a glass of saffron water **an hour before meals reduces appetite**, balances diuresis and digestion, cures amenorrhoea or dysmenorrhoea and soothes heartburn and intestinal irritation. So, **by eating saffron-infused food we enrich our meals while improving our health**.

*Its quality is guaranteed
only in thread form*

Nowadays, most saffron **imported into Italy comes from Iran** and is chiefly sold as powder. However, only in thread form is its quality guaranteed. Indeed, if we do not know the identity and integrity of its supplier, it is clear that they might pulverise and combine the white, yellow and red parts of the stigma, while **its properties are concentrated only in its red portion**. This is why it is better to buy saffron directly in thread form, of any provenance but better if Italian, and then grind it if desired. Italy produces a few hundredweights of saffron, especially from Abruzzo, Sardinia and Umbria, but it is grown throughout the country, and certified by the Italian Saffron Association. **Quality protocols for Italian saffron require sale only in three-thread stigma form, and never as powder**.

Culinary uses

Saffron is a pluripotent spice, and thanks to its delicate flavour, **it suits both sweet and savoury dishes**, and can be com-

bined with a vast series of other ingredients. We all know saffron risotto. In fact this dish is quite recent, in comparison to the spice's 4000-year history, and is just one of the many preparations that can include saffron.

Saffron can be used in **risotti, pasta, meat dishes** (chicken, pork or veal stew), dishes with fish, crustaceans or molluscs (prawns, lobsters, tuna, seabass, mussels, clams or octopus), **desserts** (custard, crème Chantilly, ice cream, chocolate), tisanes, **jams, liqueurs**, cheeses or charcuterie: the world is our oyster! And we Italians, always champions of culinary creativity, need only learn about and try out **its manifold possible uses**. Unfortunately, saffron is burdened with the reputation of being the world's most expensive spice. **In Italy, 'Certified First-Category' saffron threads cost tens of thousands of euros per kilo**, up to 45,000 euros, because so much time and meticulous labour are necessary to obtain it and there are high daily risks of losing the harvest. However, few people realise that **one gramme is enough for 40 to 60 portions**: thus each portion costs mere pennies. If we also consider its properties and unique flavour, we must admit that it costs us almost nothing. Curing ourselves through food is wonderful!

Andrea Giacometti



Food addiction: *is it possible?*

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

*Junk food addiction
is among the hardest
to eradicate.*

In daily life, we increasingly encounter the term 'addiction'; its dictionary definition is 'a behavioural change characterised by abnormal and excessive pursuit of substances or activities despite evidence that they are harmful'. Our thoughts then automatically turn to the so-called 'addictive substances', which we're told are ever more widespread, irrespective of socioeconomic status, age or other demographic param-

eters. **Stanton Peele**, a lawyer and social psychologist, is **one of the foremost addiction experts**, to whom we owe the classification of the seven most common addictions that are hardest to quit. In descending order, the easiest one to eradicate is addiction to cocaine, followed by alcohol, valium and other sedatives, heroin and smoking; while **the stubbornest are addictions to junk food**, in other words ultra-processed food, and love.

*Most alarming is its incidence
among children*

At first glance, after overcoming their surprise about food addiction existing

and being one of the most stubborn addictions, Italian gourmets are likely to feel impregnably protected by the righteous fortress of the Mediterranean diet and lifestyle, and thus impervious to the siren charms of junk food and the barges of advertising, affordability and sinful scrumptiousness encouraging its consumption. This is a dangerous position, because, though junk food consumption is rather low in several Mediterranean countries, it's also true that **in Italy under 40% of survey respondents have declared high or medium observance of the Mediterranean Diet's principles**. We must not, therefore, let our guards down, but should be alert, because the menace of junk food addiction lurks round the corner. **Data from 36 countries** have shown that junk food





addiction affects 14% of adults, a proportion echoing those for alcohol (14%) and tobacco (18%) addiction; most alarming is its incidence among children: 12%.

The perverse mechanism leading to food addiction

What perverse mechanism underlies junk food addiction? **When we consume sugars or refined fats** (or sweet substances), the brain releases **dopamine**, a neurotransmitter that produces pleasure and gratification, thereby earning the moniker 'The Happy Hormone'. Thus begins **a reward mechanism which links these foods with fulfilment**, leading us to crave more: hence the addiction. Even zero-calorie sweeteners can trigger that mechanism, causing us to ingest more food. This is why, however paradoxical it seems, those claiming that artificial sweeteners and the 'light' beverages containing them are fattening despite having few or no calories are right. The effects of junk food on the brain and its reward systems are similar to those of other substances that produce pleasure, unleashing dopamine and creating the addictions found on Stanton Peele's list.

Junk food addiction can yield psychological problems, sleep disturbances, obesity and metabolic syndrome, as well as promoting cardiovascular diseases and type 2 diabetes, whose consequent morbidities and potential mortality cannot be overlooked. It has also been ascertained that substances deriving from food processing alter the composition and function of the intestinal microbiota, whose importance to health is amply recognised and has also been recently reiterated in this very publication.

To avert this danger, we must understand it in detail

To avert the danger of addiction, we must first and foremost understand it in detail: the most frequently consumed **hyperprocessed foods** are sweet or savoury snacks, breakfast cereals, sugary drinks, sweets and certain sauces. Also in the dock are pre-packaged foods, though recently some companies are virtuously bucking the insalubrious trend by offering far healthier versions. The pleasure produced by junk food, and the consequent risk of addiction, generally derives from a **clever** (from the seller's perspective) **combination**

of saturated and hydrogenated fats, sugars and salt with some of the 250 (!) food additives permitted by European law. **Another lure is crunch**, the hallmark of certain junk foods and a direct consequence of ultra-processing. Now forewarned, how can we stay away? Firstly, by taking stock of the fact that natural ingredients generally don't contain the combination of aforementioned components that we've just learnt about, and that with some exceptions, including fresh vegetables, dried fruit and seeds or simple cooking techniques, crunch is the result of processing. Then we must peruse the nutritional information that must accompany all packaged foods, and be alarmed when we perceive a total fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt content exceeding, respectively, 17.5, 5, 22.5 and 1.5 grammes per hundred grammes of product.

"But", some of the usual 24 readers might object, "we are mere humans - **how can we resist temptation?**" Simple, my friends: by sticking to the fundamental rule of Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, whom history remembers more simply as **Paracelsus**: "**the dose makes the poison**"; all the more, adds the present author, if the dose is low and diluted over time.

Aldo E. Tàmmaro