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Ten years after the quake: *something may be moving*

*Remembering
the terrible event of 2016
and the Academy's donation.*

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia

This past 24 August marked 10 years after the powerful earthquake which destroyed the centres of Amatrice, Accumoli and Arquata del Tronto with 299 casualties. The usual catwalk of politicians, newspaper articles and television broadcasts ensued, amid the usual good intentions and promises for the future. In reality, after 5 Extraordinary Commissioners and the first 6 years wasted by inefficiency and bureaucracy, something is moving; but, as clearly acknowledged, the recovery has recently been hindered by Covid, the 110% building repair Superbonus, and war-induced inflation, so construction companies would earn more working elsewhere.

*There is now talk of another ten years
before achieving near-normality*

There is now talk of another ten years before achieving a near-normal situation. Meanwhile, reports from Amatrice and the other affected areas are dramatic: stasis, while 2000 fami-

lies are still in prefabricated shacks. **Immediately after the quake, the Italian Academy of Cuisine took action** to provide concrete assistance to the stricken area's restaurants and agrifood businesses. Amatrice is the only place which has given its name to one of the world's most celebrated recipes. Though *amatriciana* was most probably created in Rome (where it is often called *matriciana*) by migrant workers from Amatrice, its name certainly evokes the town in the province of Rieti. The Academy wished to support one of our traditional cuisine's flagship dishes.

*With support from Delegates and Academicians,
nearly 100,000 euros were gathered*

Thanks to support from our Delegates worldwide and the generosity of Academicians, we gathered almost 100,000 euros which, in February 2017, were **donated personally to 20 businesses in the provinces of Rieti and Macerata** identified by the area's two Delegates. We also awarded the **10,000-euro Orio Vergani Prize to the Amatrice Hotel Institute**,

which had moved to Rieti awaiting reconstruction (we are still waiting). In the past few days, our Secreteriat has contacted our donations' beneficiaries: **all remember the Academy and bewail the depopulation and abandonment.** Things are slightly better in rural areas and for livestock, cheese and charcuterie businesses. In historic centres, the desolation is total. **On the next page we reproduce our Focus published two and a half years after the quake** because it mostly represents the current situation. **The photo published here shows a moment when a restaurant owner received her cheque:** still a vivid, emotional memory and a credit to the Academy and all it has done.





The forgotten amatriciana

by Paolo Petroni

President of the Academy

*Something has moved,
thanks to the
Academy's help.*

Two and a half years after the earthquake which struck central Italy, conditions in the worst-affected areas appear in limbo: the usual rubble, almost no reconstruction, only prefabricated yellow emergency shelters in bad repair. After the parading politicians (of all stripes), the solemn promises, and the generous contributions by many citizens, little or nothing has been done to tidy up, rebuild and return some dignity to those who have most keenly suffered the deaths of loved ones and the destruction of homes and businesses.



“Almost nothing has been done to return some dignity to those worst affected,,

The budgeted 15 billion Euros have not been spent, having been stalled by a devilish morass of inefficient coordination, pared-down offices whose approval is necessary for projects to proceed, the asphyxiating bureaucracy of project competitions, and the fear of being investigated on procedural technicalities. The Italian Academy of Cuisine, with considerable tact and generosity, gathered approximately 100,000 Euros to be distributed among twenty-odd restaurant, livestock and agricultural businesses. The funds were immediately delivered directly to these beneficiaries.

The Academy then awarded the Orio Vergani Prize (a machine worth 10,000 Euros) to the devastated Amatrice Hotel Institute



which had been “temporarily” transferred to Rieti. Speaking of the Hotel Institute, let us be honest: who knows if it will ever be rebuilt in Amatrice, and even if so, who would wish to study, work and live in a depopulated ghost town, by now inhabited only by the elderly, bereft of any social and economic fabric? Nowadays, in the words of an Academician living in Amatrice, the atmosphere there is sombre and saturated with resentment and anger. People are stuck, passive, embittered. They keenly feel that there is no overarching plan for getting things done, no coordination of reconstruction efforts, no resurgence of productive activity.

“The Academy directly delivered the 100,000 Euros gathered through the solidarity of Academicians,,

Occasionally buses arrive, emblazoned with the slogan “Lunch in Amatrice”: tourists eat in the (donated) ‘Food’ area, purchase “amatriciana kits” and immediately depart. We are proud of what the Academy has achieved, within its limitations. We are comforted by the thanks of those receiving our contributions. Among many, I cite the touching words of two beneficiaries: a restaurant and a cheese-making establishment.

“I whole-heartedly wish to thank you again, on behalf of the entire staff, for your kindness and responsiveness in aiding those who, like ourselves, resolve to continue investing in this quake-ravaged land, maintaining the daily struggle against innumerable difficulties. Your contributions were invested for purchasing furnishings and equipment for the bar that we opened in March 2017 to serve everyone who remained here even in the direst months, while waiting to reopen our restaurant in the ‘Food’ area. Thanks, with all our hearts”.

Giovannino Hotel and Restaurant

“We remain grateful for your concrete and substantial assistance. With your help, we managed to improve our production process and acquire new equipment for our cheese workshop. Following the quake which struck us, we rolled up our sleeves to the point of increasing production, which might appear foolhardy considering the undiminished emergency that surrounds us. Thanks again for your wonderful help”.

Antonio and Paola Aureli



When food meets automatic dispensers

by Attilio Borda Bossana
Messina Delegate

Options run the gamut from full breakfasts to dishes reheated in under a minute.

Vending machines for food are being radically transformed, moving from classic snacks to full meals. In Italy, which leads Europe with over 800 thousand machines installed, options run the gamut from full breakfasts to dishes reheated in less than a minute. Modern machines use new tech-

nologies to offer **hot food** including pizza, pasta and soup heated in just 45-90 seconds; refrigerated machines offer **fresh salads, yoghurt, sliced fruit** and freshly prepared smoothies. More recently, 'smart fridges' and 'micromarkets' have appeared: these open dispensers allow food handling before purchase and are ideal for offices and shared working spaces. There are also **automatic fruit juicers, very widespread in Sicily**, which produce 100% natural orange or apple juice, and clean and sanitise themselves.

Automated food dispensation is a very old idea

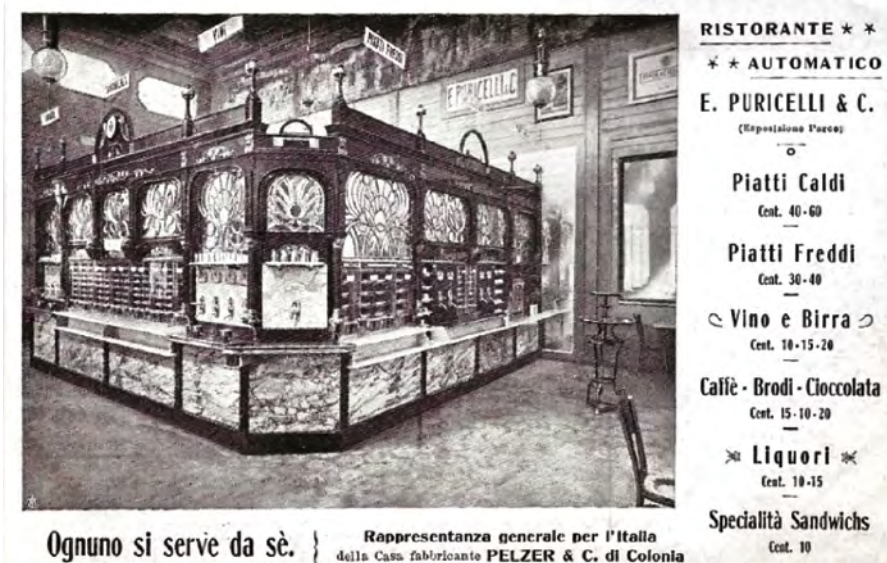
Automated food dispensation is a very old idea, attributed to **Hero of Alexandria**, a first-century mathematician and inventor who created a **coin-operated**

ablution water vending machine for Egyptian and Roman temples. A deposited coin fell on a plate attached to a lever which opened a valve, dispensing a set amount of water. After centuries of oblivion, **the concept resurfaced in the seventeenth century** for tobacco, while **the first real modern coin-operated vending machine was patented in 1883 by the Briton Percival Everitt**, and was initially used for postcards and postage stamps.

In 1884, **William Henry Fruen** patented a similar machine which sold chocolate and chewing gum; **in the 1920s vending machines for snacks, fruit and tinned meat became common in London**.

Around the 1930s, **Horn & Hardart Automats, self-service waiterless restaurants**, were successful in the USA. Their customers could buy sandwiches, pies or desserts by inserting coins into glass-fronted compartments. At their peak, their two locations in New York and Philadelphia distributed high-quality, affordable food to half a million people daily, including their famous nickel coffee poured from iconic dolphin-shaped spigots. In the 1950s, the first sandwich and soft-drink vending machines became widespread, and Japan in the 1960s already had machines distributing warm drinks and *ramen*, the typical noodles in broth, often flavoured with soya sauce.

In Italy, 'automatic restaurants' have their origins in food counters such as those found in Pompeii and Herculaneum, functioning as snack bars *avant la lettre*. Modern versions **debuted at the International Expo Milan in 1906** with a 'Ristorante Automat' managed by **Ercole Puricelli and Pietro Bellani**. This





Romeo ice cream and Florio pavilions, 1906

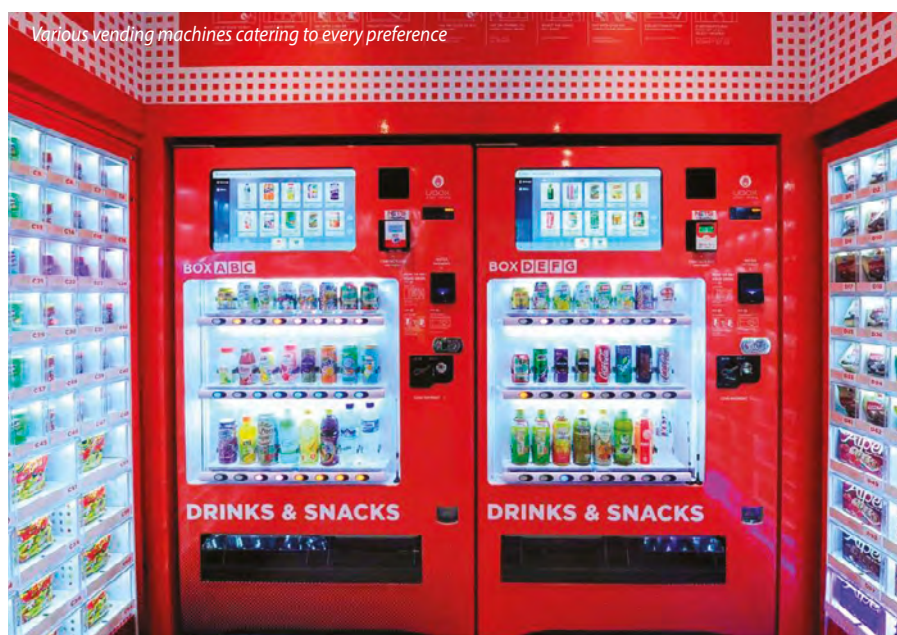


Horn & Hardart Automat, Broadway, New York, early 20th century.

internal element of the Expo's food pavilions, explains architect **Giusi Lo Tennero** in *Storia della Città* (*History of the City*), published in 2014 by Kappa within the series *Storia dell'urbanistica* (*History of Urban Planning*).

The Expo's array of refreshment stands, kiosks and small and large Liberty-style pavilions allowed attendees to explore the culinary sphere from the perspectives of both production and consumption, both tradition and innovation. It was entrusted to some of Italy's foremost modernist contemporary designers and offered, inter alia, some of the best Sicilian delicacies including Palermo ice cream by **Rosario Romeo** and products by the **Florio** family, purveyors of Marsala wine and oil-preserved tuna.

The sector's true transformation occurred between the 1980s and 1990s



example of **avant-garde technology**, featuring **innovative self-service**, was Italy's first, with automatic dispensers and crystal tanks in refrigerated enclosures.

Its 'engineered' feel, expressed through its 'modern' appearance, aligned with the contemporary Art Nouveau aesthetics of the 'distribution bloc' forming the main

A snack and beverage specialisation soon evolved: the first hot beverage distributor appeared in 1930, and the **first automatic coffee machines** arrived in 1963, when Faema patented the E 61, capable of grinding and pouring out coffee. The sector's true transformation occurred

Early twentieth-century vending machine



between the 1980s and 1990s, when **more sophisticated machines began appearing in Europe**, able to keep food fresh; meanwhile Japan experimented with vending machines for a wide array of foods from *onigiri* rice balls (with various fillings and generally wrapped in *nori*) to pasta.

Choosing vending machines, due to convenience, practicality and accessibility, also has **psychological implications**, claim analysts: indeed, these machines do not judge those who buy a midnight sandwich or an extra sweet after the gym. There's also **something magic about pressing a button and seeing a hot meal appear**: a snack, a piping-hot pizza, a rice, fish or vegetable bowl, or vegetarian or vegan fare with grains, vegetables and plant-based proteins. For many, food vending machines have merely been silent companions dispensing packaged snacks or sugary drinks in school corridors, offices or train stations. Today they transcend snack sales, becoming **intersections of technology, gastronomy, design and new consumption paradigms**. **The past decade has brought a 'revolution' featuring gourmet vending machines** with premium, often organic or hyper-local products, and niche diversification catering to any demographic from air travellers to university students



craving quick snacks. **Globally, the sector exceeds 30 billion dollars** and keeps growing thanks to technology, demand for quick service and the expansion of emerging markets. It is expected to exceed 50 billion dollars by 2030. The Asia-Pacific area has the swiftest growth: the USA and Japan have more developed markets, while health foods and 'food tech' are expanding in Europe, combining digital innovation with an increasing demand for healthy, personalised and sustainable nutrition.

Projects for distributing healthy food

Between 2006 and 2008, **Italy's Health Ministry** even cooked up an inter-sector strategy called **"Guadagnare Salute"** ('Earning Health') for the automatic distribution of foods to **promote healthy eating and prevent obesity**. Its aim was to redirect consumption by reaching large concentrations of people in such populated areas as schools, workplaces, train stations and medical facilities. **American universities** have recently presented a study to investigate whether introducing 'health-conscious' vending machines into university campuses would improve food habits by **indicating nutritional value through traffic light colours**. A year later, the results indicated an increasing preference for healthy foods. **Forward-thinkers envision experiments with drones transporting self-heating packages** maintaining ideal temperatures



during flight before landing on balconies to deliver perfectly warm pizza or other dishes.

Even such futuristic scenarios cannot erase an important element of food service: **time management**. Various perspectives converge in the food business: those of the customer, the staff and real time; the time involved in welcoming diners, reading the menu, transporting food and beverages, preparing the food, and finally **eating the food which nourishes both body and soul, representing a moment of conviviality**, sharing and leisure: a break from our hectic lifestyles.

Attilio Borda Bossana



Cooking with... the sea

by **Giancarlo Burri**
Padua Academician

An ancient culinary tradition revived.

After a long period of oblivion, an ancient popular tradition, typical of coastal populations, has returned exuberantly to win over the most sensitive palates: using seawater in food preparation. For example the rusks called **friselle in Apulia** and **frese all'acquasale in Calabria**: their hardness increases their shelf life during long fishing expeditions, and they were traditionally soaked in seawater (*acquasale* meaning 'salt water') to soften and salt them to perfection, and then simply seasoned with a drizzle of olive oil and ripe tomato pieces.

Neapolitan fisherfolk prepared **pesce all'acqua pazza** ('crazy-water fish') on their boats by boiling freshly caught small fry in a light sauce made of seawater and whatever long-lasting ingredients were available aboard: olive oil, garlic, *piennolo* cherry tomatoes from the foothills of Vesuvius, and a few aromatic herbs, perhaps with some white wine. For the poor inhabiting the 'belly of Naples', masterfully described by **Matilde Serao**, pasta mostly meant the *monnezzaglia* ('rubbish') cobbled together from assorted remnants that pasta makers cheaply sold after making 'proper' pasta.





It was the most common **pasta** used in the **vongole fujute** ('escaped clams') recipe: cooking it in seawater gave it the savoury intensity of unaffordable seafood. Before boiling, some garlic and parsley stems were often pan-fried with some pebbles (encrusted with seaweed and small molluscs) gathered on the beach.

Cooking with stones is an ancient custom. Yangtze fishermen in Hunan province, for instance, developed *suodiu* ('suck and discard'), using smooth, cleaned pebbles from the river's brackish delta to flavour soups during famines. They were pan-fried in oil or fat, garlic, chillies and other spices, producing fish, oyster or clam flavours, and then sucked for their intense and spicy taste and finally discarded as the recipe's name suggests.

Rigorous techniques to guarantee food safety

Cooking with seawater has been rediscovered by haute cuisine, which fortunately uses **microfiltered and purified**, not directly gathered, seawater, for hygiene and safety reasons. "The sea is the habitat of many organisms including bacteria and viruses, and their toxins could even be heat-resistant and thus not neutralised by boiling. Seawater in improvised cooking carries very high risks of potentially serious infection." So says **Alessandro Di Flaviano** in *La scienza del cibo* (*The Science of Food*; Rizzoli, 2023).

Industrial treatment of seawater for culinary purposes follows a set of rigorous techniques to guarantee safety, eliminating microplastics, pathogens and organic contaminants while preserving natural salinity (3.5%) and the accompanying organoleptic properties. Seawater contains

nearly all the 92 naturally occurring chemical elements, but its saltiness is almost entirely caused by chlorine, sodium, magnesium, sulphur, calcium, potassium, bromine and iodine. Their compounds produce the distinctive **aromatic profile known as 'sea flavour'**, characterised by intense umami elements, notes of iodine, seaweed overtones, and sometimes a faint bitter or ferrous aftertaste.

How chefs and bakers use it

Food-grade seawater, **bottled or in sterilised containers**, is nowadays used by chefs to **marinate meat, parboil vegetables and herbs, spray over salads**, or flavour fish in soups, but especially **in bread or pizza dough** and for cooking pasta.

Diluted 1:1 in fresh water, it reduces stickiness, making pasta firmer while eliminating the metallic and excessively 'chemical' taste often produced by the industrial salt normally dissolved (1%) in cooking water. Such starred chefs as **Gennaro Esposito** and **Peppe Guida** have been experiment-

ing with **pan-fishing spaghetti in purified seawater**, even adding a few sea pebbles into the pan.

After some investigations, the chef **Chiara Murra** of the restaurant "A Casa Tu Martinu", in Taviano, Puglia (Apulia), now offers a rich menu **replacing table salt with seawater** in everything from bread to pasta, fish to meat, including a home-made liqueur with seawater and olive leaves.

In Campania, in the footsteps of the pioneer **Rodolfo Molettieri**, various bakers have begun producing an innovative '**marine bread**', characterised by a pleasantly distinctive taste and aroma, with a salt content of 1.1% (significantly lower than the national average hovering around 2-2.5%), which stays **fragrant and mould-free for up to 12 days**.

The pizza master (*pizzaiuolo*) **Guglielmo Vuolo** has begun using purified seawater in his Neapolitan pizza doughs, eliminating traditional added salt. This technique, developed in collaboration with the University of Naples Federico II, creates a **lighter, more digestible pizza with 50% lower sodium**.

Giancarlo Burri





Vacuum packing: an ally for preserving food

by **Beppe Roccia**
Turin Academician

We can actively reduce waste by adopting new habits in the kitchen.

tional Observatory, in collaboration with the University of Bologna's Department of Agricultural and Food Sciences and Technologies, each Italian wastes an average of 683.3 grammes of food per week, for a total of approximately 35.5 kg yearly. This problem not only weighs on family budgets but also strongly affects the environment, contributing to climate change through imprudent consumption of resources. In this context of nutritional ignorance, vacuum packing stands out as **an accessible, extraordinarily effective waste reduction solution** which improves food storage, favouring a more sustainable lifestyle.

How vacuum food packing works

As already noted several times in this magazine, food waste is one of our era's most urgent issues. According to the Waste Watcher Interna-

Vacuum packing involves eliminating air, hence oxygen, from an airtight bag or

other container, sealing any air out. **Oxygen removal slows oxidation**, which degrades food colour, fragrance and nutritional value, and inhibits the growth of aerobic micro-organisms: those that multiply in the presence of oxygen. The result is increased shelf life compared with refrigeration alone. This method, in parallel with Modified Atmosphere Packaging (MAP), has been used for decades by the food industry to preserve cooked, fresh or semi-processed foods. Nowadays, **thanks to the diffusion of domestic equipment, families can also use it every day**, obtaining longer-lasting food and thereby significantly reducing food waste.

Foods most and least suitable for vacuum storage

Among the most suitable foods for vacuum storage, **meat and fish** have the longest shelf life and best structural integrity; **fruit and vegetables** retain crunch and freshness; **cheese** resists mould; **legumes, rice, muesli and sugar**, compactly stored in bags, are protected from humidity, while **tea and coffee** retain their aroma particularly well over time. Vacuum storage also allows ready availability of cooked and portioned food. **Some foods are less amenable** to vacuum packing because they lose their texture or deteriorate more swiftly. These include **soft cheeses**, whose consistency and ageing process could be altered; **mushrooms and garlic**; **fresh bread**, which loses its crustiness and becomes gummy; **fresh pasta**, which tends to become compacted into a solid block; **leafy greens**, which wilt; and **very watery foods**, such as tomatoes or watermelons.





A sustainable practice available to all

There are **two main types of vacuum-packing machines**: chamber sealers and edge sealers. **With chamber sealers**, the food is placed in a special vacuum-packing bag positioned within the machine, whose door is hermetically closed; the air is removed from the entire chamber, including around the food, and the bag is then sealed. **With edge sealers**, the food is placed in a special pouch outside the machine, which sucks the air out of the pouch and seals it. Though this is also a good method, **it cannot create a perfect vacuum**, unlike chamber sealers, which can produce an even longer shelf life than edge sealers. **Reducing food waste is not only an economic but also an ecological issue. Each kilogramme of wasted food represents useless carbon dioxide emissions and consumption of water, energy and land, which are precious resources.** Vacuum packing is therefore an intelligent, sustainable practice. A modest investment in a vacuum-packing machine and vacuum pouches, and especially the adoption of new culinary habits, can mean actively contributing to food waste reduction.

Beppe Roccia

Shelf life lengths

As already noted, the main advantages of vacuum food storage include extended shelf life. **Among the riskiest misunderstandings regarding vacuum packing is that the absence of oxygen, by itself, guarantees food safety even at room temperature.** This is false. Vacuum packing **extends shelf life only when combined with correct refrigeration or freezing.** A perishable food, vacuum-packed and left at room temperature,

is not safer than the same food in the same conditions without vacuum packing; indeed, it can be even more dangerous due to the type of bacteria favoured. **The combination of vacuum packing and correct cooling optimises shelf life and prevents freezer burn**, which happens when air reaches frozen food, dehydrating its surface: it cannot occur with sealed airtight vacuum-packed food. The tables below demonstrate how vacuum packing extends shelf life, permitting gradual consumption, thereby **preventing deterioration and thus food waste.**

Refrigerated food (5±2°C)	Traditional storage	Vacuum packing
Red meat	3-4 days	8-9 days
White meat	2-3 days	6-9 days
Fresh fish	1-3 days	4-5 days
Aged cheese	10-15 days	25-60 days
Fruit	5-7 days	15-20 days
Cured meats	7-15 days	25-40 days
Frozen food	Traditional storage	Vacuum packing
Meat	6 months	24-36 months
Fish	6 months	24-36 months
Vegetables	8-10 months	24-36 months

(Indicative values; results depend on original food characteristics)