

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

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ALDO PASSANTE, GIANLUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI,
DINO VILLANI, EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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On the cover: Detail of the lithograph "Le Fruit"
(1897) by Alphonse Mucha, on view until
11 September 2016 at the Complesso del
Vittoriano in Rome.

High-quality Italian cuisine abroad

A crucial agreement between Italian government bodies and the Italian Academy of Cuisine.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
President of the Academy

Last March saw the finalisation of the interministerial programme for the promotion of high-quality Italian cuisine abroad. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAE-CI, Minister Paolo Gentiloni), the Ministry of Agricultural Policy (MIPAAF, Minister Maurizio Martina), and the Ministry of Education (MIUR, Minister Stefania Giannini) signed a memorandum of understanding in the presence of the Italian Academy of Cuisine, thereby initiating interesting plans of action with the additional collaboration of the Ministry of Economic Development, the Italian Trade Agency, the Italian National Olympic Committee, and the Italian Cultural Institutes. The coordinator and manager of this initiative is Vincenzo De Luca, Director General for Cultural and Economic Promotion and Innovation within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

This programme, which falls within the scope of the Food Act in support of Italian agricultural and food products, aims to develop high-quality Italian cuisine through combined economic, cultural, communication and educational promotion schemes.

The Italian Academy of Cuisine has been included as an active and crucial partner in the implementation of the initiatives which Italian Embassies, Consulates and Cultural Institutes plan to undertake, with special reference to “Italian Food Week”, to be held in the last ten days of November 2016. All the Delegates abroad and Legates have already been informed of this important agreement, which therefore provides for contact with diplomatic missions in order to agree upon the modalities of involvement of our Delegations and Legations.

In particular, the Academy will be responsible for organising conferences on the history of Italian cuisine and local traditions, conventions on typical Italian ingredients and high-quality DOP (Protected Designation of Origin) and IGP (Protected Geographical Indication) products, the-



med tastings and dinners, and educational activities about specific traditional dishes.

This is clearly a valuable opportunity for our Academy, which will have to demonstrate its potential and abilities in disseminating our culture throughout the world.

PS. Following the hideous French *carbonara* discussed at length in last month's Focus, we now witness the equally hideous 'deconstructed' revisitation by eminent home-grown chef Davide Oldani, tiresomely christened “Carbonara 3.0”. Oddly, here too, as in the French version, the name ‘Barilla’ pops up, since this creation was devised in Parma during the Barilla World Pasta Championship. The ingredients are correct: *spaghetti*, eggs, *guanciale* (pork jowl bacon) and *pecorino*. But here the *guanciale* is not sautéed but dehydrated and sprinkled on top, the eggs are transformed into a salty custard, and the *pasta* is cooked as a *risotto* and then chilled and fried. All this is served not, of course, on a prosaic plate, but in a glass of some sort. It is defined as a “snack”, not a main course. Even Ferran Adrià once tried to deconstruct the *carbonara*. A cheeky dish that pokes fun at deconstructionist revisitors.



An important and encouraging year

Concrete projects affirming the Academy's influential role among government bodies; new Delegations and new Academicians; a positive final balance.

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO

"The subtle scent of *origano* pervades the air...".

These are the opening words of Paolo Petroni's welcome speech at the Council's spring meeting. The President immediately considers the advisability of the decisions and the importance of the various facets of Academic activity in this first year since his election. A "swift" year, as he defines it, but an intense one. A focal point of his programme has been the recognition of the Academy's role and authority, first and foremost among government bodies, because only in this way can important and concrete, and therefore visible, projects be completed. This year, he emphasises, a substantial proportion of his activity has

had this aim: a constant effort to 'break into' the 'closed ranks' of the Ministries, whence emanate those initiatives which tangibly involve the defenders and advocates of high-quality gastronomy worldwide. This effort has now borne fruit: during various meetings with the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Agricultural Policy and Education, the Academy was recognised as an active partner in the wide-ranging project of promoting our high-quality cuisine abroad and organising the programme of events for next November's 'Italian Food Week'. The road is long, but we're on the right path.

On the home front, continues Petroni, there are important developments: from the establishment of twelve new





Delegations in Italy and abroad to the admission of 411 new Academicians, who also receive a certificate to convey a sense of belonging to the Academy. On the editorial front, the President points out that the Newsletter has also had its first birthday: a tool for disseminating last-minute news about the Academy's activities, distributed monthly to over 8000 people.

The atmosphere is cordial, friendly and relaxed, facilitated by the setting: the first-floor room of the 'Filippo La Mantia - Oste e Cuoco' restaurant, where different areas are interconnected without obtrusive boundaries and where a system of wall panels evokes the typical Sicilian woven reed mats which provide shade without completely shutting out the light.

Next is the unanimous approval of two appointed Academic Council members: Secretary General Roberto Ariani and the Delegate for Roma Nomentana, Alessandro Di Giovanni, replacing Maurizio Moreno who recently passed away.

Replying to Paolo Basili, Petroni dwells upon the composition of the Council (15 elected and 15 appointed members) and on potentially having Delegates vote on making all Council offices elective. The current arrangement allows not only a degree of continuity but also the presence of Council members not directly appointed by the incumbent President, encouraging diverse opinions. Petroni confirms that Council meetings will continue to occur twice yearly, but that, in order to limit costs, one will include only Council members, while the other will allow broader participation over several days.

Next, the proposed amendments to ar-



ticles 4/4-5, 9/2 and 29/3 of the Bylaws are unanimously approved with minor changes (the new Bylaws are already available online). Following reports by Treasurer Roberto Ariani and Gianni Limberti, President of the Board of Auditors, and a reading of the independent auditing agency's report, the final balance to 31 December 2015 is unanimously approved.

Paolo Petroni ends with a farewell until the next meeting of the Council in October, and also announces the meeting of the Delegates' Forum in the spring of next year.

A subtle scent of *origano* pervades the air... The convivial portion of the mee-

ting begins as the fragrances of Sicily intensify. Indeed, Filippo La Mantia's cooking reflects the familiar traditions of his homeland, but with a distinctive element: the cook (as he prefers to define himself) has always avoided garlic, onion, shallots and leeks, which he replaces with *pesto* presented in several variations using different ingredients. So the classic 'busiate' (long handmade pasta tubes) served as the first course are adorned with a *pesto* made of pistachio, ginger, candied tomatoes and tuna roe. The meal opens, however, with one of his signature dishes, aubergine caponata, "from where everything began", he says: from his family. The flavours are well differentiated, including that of the crunchy but not overpowering celery. Filippo comes to greet the guests, and President Petroni highlights his presence in both dining hall and kitchen, reiterating that the Academy opposes 'virtual cooks': the enriching dialogue with the cook permits a deeper and more technical understanding of the dishes' preparation. La Mantia declares him-

self honoured to host the Academy and is not reticent: he explains the advantages of low-temperature vacuum cooking for the piglet served as a second course, with mustard greens, liquorice sauce and wild fennel, as it preserves the juices and maintains tenderness, followed by a final roasting for crispiness. A traditional cuisine which is renewed, like the Academy itself, as Paolo Petroni recalls while awarding the outwardly gruff yet amiable self-styled 'innkeeper and cook' with the Orio Vergani medal amid the diners' applause.

To finish, *cassata* and Sicilian *cannolo*.

SILVIA DE LORENZO



Tiptoeing around the cuisine of reuse (and of waste)

Industrial production, the basis of our 'open society', also causes a food surplus.

BY ROBERTO DOTTARELLI
Roma Castelli Academician



This year, the “Franco Marengi” Study Centre has chosen a ‘politically correct’ annual theme of which I think everyone can approve: the cuisine of reuse to counter food waste by resorting to old family traditions. However, reuse of leftovers is unfortunately only the last link in a socioeconomic chain based on waste. Let us begin with the family. Which conditions favour waste? Above all, the availability of appliances (fridge and freezer) which allow more food to be stored for longer. Paraphrasing Gabriele Salvatores’ film *Siberian Education*: “one should not own more than one can consume”. In the past, various techniques were used (jam, preserves) to store food, produce was seasonal, and leftovers were used fully (either fed to animals or composted). Even more importantly,

when people needed a specific ingredient they went to the local communal pantry known as ‘*dispensa*’, returning there whenever they needed that ingredient again.

Today these facilities are rare (a few survive in the countryside), and in the city they’ve turned into boutiques showcasing decadent delicacies.

I don’t know if the fridge triggered the development of supermarkets or vice versa. It’s clear, however, that the model for acquiring ingredients no longer involves visiting a ‘*dispensa*’ whenever the need arises. Today, partly because of adults’ work schedules, purchases are concentrated in the weekends, in supermarkets or megastores where shopping trolleys are piled with twice or thrice the nuclear family’s food needs.

Here, therefore, we have identified a

first alternative to the cuisine of reuse, whose ultimate goal is to eliminate waste. If we lack the expertise or the time to become proficient at reusing leftovers, we could intervene upstream and buy fewer products, filling fridges and freezers less.

Let us try to expand our horizons and understand the environment in which our families live. Anthropologists have long been pointing out the different structures of productive (agricultural and pastoral) and acquisitive (hunter-gatherer) societies. The first form strong family bonds, because the agricultural production cycle requires a stable kin group which grows proportionately to the availability of land and production capacity, leading to a complex society. The second, instead, live off the resources of their territory; being consequently mobile, they form



weak bonds (rarely expanding beyond the couple) and small groups ('bands') which live together only for part of the year (Claude Meillassoux, *Maidens, Meal and Money: Capitalism and the Domestic Community*. Cambridge University Press, 1981). Our society evolved from the first type of social organisation (the productive society). Beginning around 1800, the Industrial Revolution introduced machines to aid human activity, with two results: increased primary (meaning food) production, and the liberation of significant numbers of people from food-producing activities. The second mechanism introduced into our society's evolution a food acquisition model analogous to that of hunter-gatherers, the only difference being that now we don't acquire food



from the forest or the countryside, but 'gather' it more comfortably in a supermarket. This new acquisition model has caused an inevitable structural weakening of social bonds, decreasing the centrality of the family in primary production. However, if it is true that social bonds have weakened, that the family has lost its central role and industrial food production causes waste (partially

through the push to maintain, or even increase, a certain consumption level, which, let us not forget, often creates jobs), we must not ignore the fact that humanity has never been freer than in this 'open society', as Karl Popper calls it, where holders of different values and viewpoints can coexist.

In closing, therefore, I would observe that it is crucial to sensitise the least attentive among us to be more conscientious about curbing food waste, but we must not fail to emphasise that industrial production, the bedrock of our 'open society', also causes a food surplus, and until we alter our production and distribution models, there will not be true alternatives to waste.

ROBERTO DOTTARELLI

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Academics' contributions to the magazine are not only welcome, but essential. However Academics should keep in mind some important guidelines so that their contributions, which are the fruit of their passion and dedication, are expeditiously published.

- **Articles:** it is essential that the **text of articles be sent via email**, in MS Word format (not pdf) to the following address: redazione@accademia1953.it

- **Article length:** it is important that articles are **between 3,500 and 7,000 characters** (including spaces); this is the best way to avoid cuts that are bothersome for both the editors and those submitting the texts. All computers should be able to provide character counts..

- Each issue of the magazine is printed one month ahead of the cover date so that it can be delivered to the Academics by that date. Those submissions that are time sensitive should be sent in ample time.

- **"From the Delegations" Section:** In order to facilitate reading, please **limit articles to a maximum of 2,500 characters including spaces**.

- Please remember that in the "From the Delegations" section as well as elsewhere, **descriptions of meetings held outside the territory of the Delegation or in the homes of Academics, unless they are associated with an important event, will not be published**. Also, **please do not include a list of dishes and wines**. Such listing should appear on the appropriate rating form regarding convivial meetings.

- **Rating forms for convivial meetings:** should be sent to the Secretariat (segreteria@accademia1953.it). It is also important to limit remarks in the "notes and comments" section of the form to **800 characters** (maximum 1,000) spaces included in order to avoid cuts. Rating forms that reach the Secretariat more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

- We also request that you not submit reports on convivial meetings held **outside the territory of the Delegation**, or that take place in the **homes of Academics**, or are otherwise not held in restaurants or public venues, as they will not be published.



Award ceremony in the Gherardesca garden

Four Italian professionals receive prizes from the International Academy of Gastronomy (AIG).



In the March issue we announced the Italian recipients of AIG prizes, but the award ceremony is far more than just prizes: participation, emotions, satisfaction and sharing. And if the setting is the fascinating Gherardesca garden in which the Four Seasons Florence Hotel is immersed, there is also the pleasure of finding oneself in an oasis of leafy trees, green lawns and colourful flowers, where the awardees can meet, chat and network.

The ceremony was presented by AIG President Jacques Mallard, who briefly recounted the structure of the AIG, founded in Paris in 1983 (Italy was among the founding nations), which today brings together 22 Gastronomy Academies operating worldwide to preserve and develop regional and national culinary cultures and heritages while also encouraging modern creative cooking. He also delineated the nature of the prizes: each year the AIG General Assembly (of which Paolo Petroni is Vice President) assigns four international Grand Prizes and numerous national prizes to individuals who have distinguished themselves in the food and wine world. Mallard expressed his pride in delivering the Grand

Prize for Gastronomic Culture to his friend Giovanni Ballarini.

The award procedure, Mallard pointed out, is similar to that of the Oscars: the Administrative Council nominates individuals who excel in their fields, and a commission selects the recipients. In this regard, President Petroni set out the selection criteria which determined the nominations he submitted to the Council: democracy and transparency. Indeed, he asked the Italian Delegates to identify those who had distinguished themselves the most for their professional abilities in each award category. Many names were suggested, and among those the winner was chosen. Through those very criteria, explained Petroni, the Sommelier of the Year prize was awarded to Attilia Giovanna Medda (official taster for the Italian Association of Sommeliers in Olbia), who expressed her pride in the recognition gained both for Sardinia and for the female category. Mallard and Petroni continued with the awards. Next was the young Enrico Panero (Corporate Executive Chef at Eataly), who won the 'Chef de l'Avenir' (Chef of the Future) prize: he is 26 years old, but certainly does not consider this the end of his path towards future accom-

plishments. In order to excel, as well as professional ability one must have personality. This quality is not lacking in Domenico di Clemente (Executive Pastry Chef at the Four Seasons Florence), winner of the 'Chef Pâtissier' (Pastry Chef) prize. Chocolate is chiefly responsible for his fame, but he also received plaudits for the dessert served at the end of the meal: a revisited Peach Melba created to familiarise young people with the flavours of the past. Before the group photo with the prize winners, Paolo Petroni addressed Giovanni Ballarini with genuine friendship, recounting how joyfully and gratefully he submitted his name to the French Council. Next came the convivial portion of the event, in a most striking setting: under the shade of the ancient 'drooping beech', a rare specimen broader than it is tall, whose branches touch the ground. Here chef Vito Mollica, with his characteristic skill, set out a luncheon of traditionally inspired modern recipes, including a flawless pea risotto, seared red mullet and *cacciucco* sauce with well-balanced flavours, and an excellent deboned 'Valdarnese Bianca' chicken (a variety which almost went extinct) prepared 'alla cacciatora' (hunter's stew style). (S.D.L.)



Reflections on gender-based food preferences

Taste preference is not dependent on gender.

BY ANNA MARIA BIANCHI AND BRUNELLO ROMANELLI
Arezzo Academicians

They say that “the way to a man’s heart is through his stomach”. Why not a woman’s heart, then? This consideration gave rise to contemplation and research on how gender and age could influence food and drink preferences. To complete the enquiry, changes in food habits over time were also examined. Sense organs begin developing in the first weeks of an embryo’s life, controlled by the central nervous system, through which they interact with each other and with the various higher nerve centres, for example those governing emotion. The delicate taste buds, whose number and sensitivity are genetically determined, enable the foetus to discern flavours through the amniotic fluid as early as the third month of life within the womb: sweet, bitter, salty and sour, with varying effects on swallowing. The mother’s diet

determines many of the flavours which pass into the milk and begin to influence the nursling’s taste preferences, which will be moulded until puberty, without gender differences, by virtue of the ‘exposure effect’ (which foods are offered) and sensorial satiety (satiation with one food which favours the search for food variety). There are no data demonstrating gender differences in taste after reproductive maturity. There may be small differences caused by metabolism, work or sporting activities, or even type of education: males tend to eat more flavoursome and crunchy foods and red meat, the subject of myths regarding virility. Females gravitate towards lighter foods such as fruit, vegetables, eggs and yoghurt, motivated by myths about beauty. However, no genes which could influence flavour preference have been found on the X chromosome which both genders have. In adulthood, our food preferences are shaped inter alia by social, economic, physical and psychological expectations. One must also bear in mind the link between food and emotion, especially for males, who associate flavours with maternal affection and family caregiving. Seizing a man’s heart through his stomach was, and remains, a recognition of the social role of the male, who, often coddled and pampered, is frequently offered fanciful foods sometimes prepared especially for him. Today, with gender equality and the recognition of different gender identities, roles are reversible or equal. Genetics, evolution, migration, communication, and chance have influen-

ced the modification of our diet. Habits have changed to adapt to new family rhythms, which have involved both genders.

Our frantic lifestyle causes us to use ready-made foods; most of the active population consumes at least one daily meal outside the home, often losing control over the quality and freshness of the basic ingredients and over preparation and storage procedures. By now, dinner is the most important meal; traditional cuisine and neighbourhood shops have been partly replaced by large-scale distribution of ready-made sauces and pre-cooked or frozen foods. People have now developed a notable food culture and expertise that was unavailable in the past: for instance, balancing nutrients correctly and varying ingredients; eating more fruit, vegetables and fibre-rich whole grains, which help to modify both total and LDL cholesterol and reduce the glycaemic response after a carbohydrate-rich meal; and consuming fish at least twice a week due to its heart-healthy omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids.

In conclusion, alongside the negative effects of today’s lifestyle, such as the decline of ‘home cooking’ and the proliferation of junk food, processed foods, cream, overly rich sauces, and so on, there are some advantages, including the enormous variety of foods available, a better understanding of ingredients, and greater awareness in food choices.

We can therefore affirm the concept that ‘self-love also means self-cure through food’, irrespective of gender.