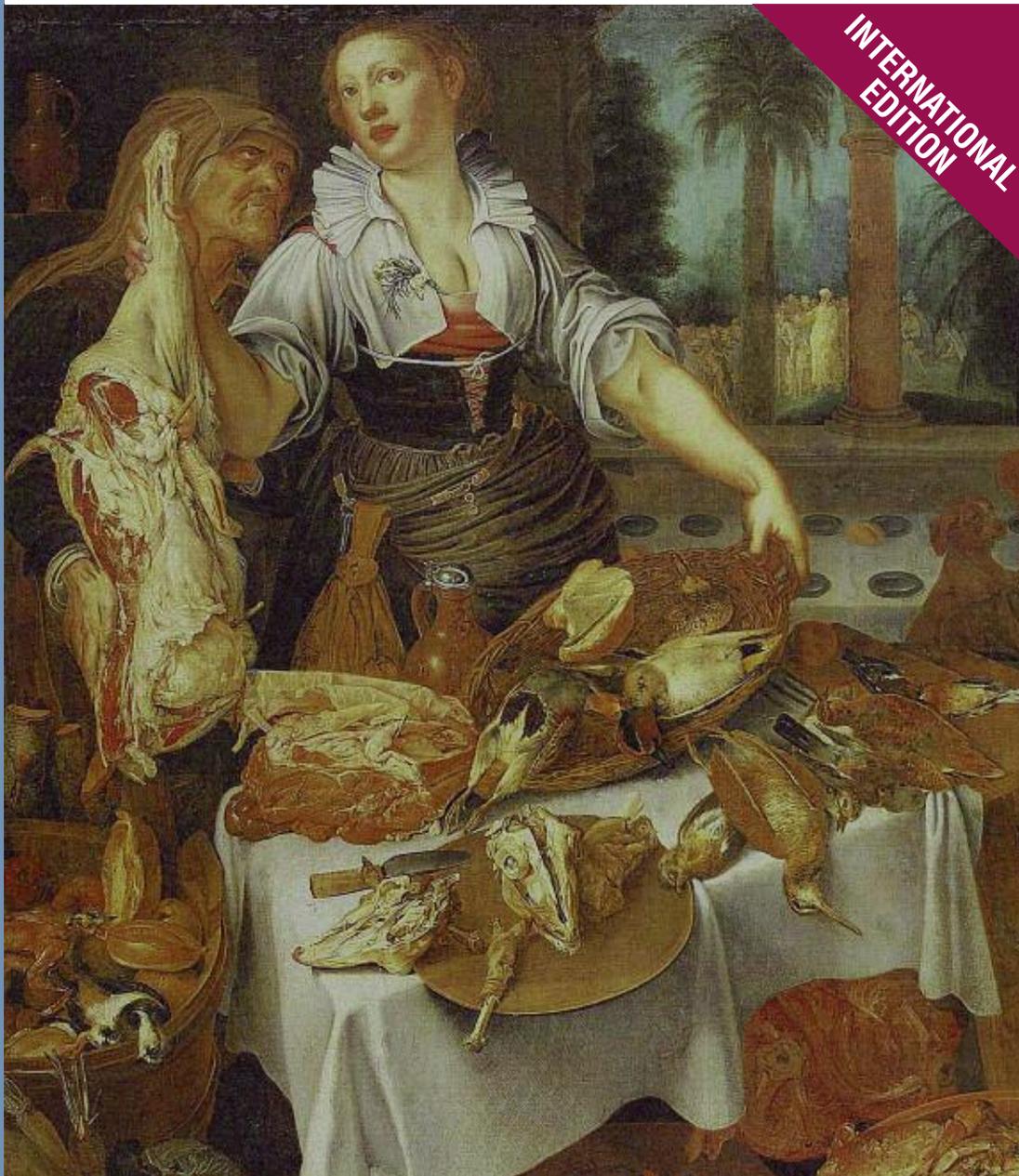


CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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EDITOR IN CHIEF
GIOVANNI BALLARINI

COPY EDITOR
SILVIA DE LORENZO

EDITORIAL SECRETARY
TILDE MATTIELLO

LAYOUT
SIMONA MONGIU

TRASLATORS
NICOLA LEA FURLAN
DONALD J. CLARK

THIS ISSUE INCLUDES ARTICLES BY
Giovanni Ballarini, Elisabetta Cocito,
Alessandro Fenu, Renzo Pellati,
Alfredo Pelle, Paolo Petroni,
Teresa Perissinotto, Roberto Robazza.



PUBLISHER
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
VIA NAPO TORRIANI 31 - 20124 MILANO
TEL. 02 66987018 - FAX 02 66987008
presidente@accademia1953.it
segreteria@accademia1953.it
redazione@accademia1953.it
www.accademia1953.it



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On the cover: "Kitchen Scene"
Pieter Cornelisz van Ryck (1604)
Herzog Anton-Ulrich-Museum - Braunschweig



Cuisine and the foodblogger network

A growing number of food lovers - foodbloggers - are invading the World Wide Web, the modern equivalent of the market square, and are creating a new cuisine.

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dear Academicians, much has been said and written about the hundreds, even thousands of regional cuisines in Italy. But far less research has been done on the how, when and why of a complex phenomenon that obviously cannot be completely addressed in this brief essay. Therefore I will only address one aspect, perhaps unusual but definitely current: that of the “where”.

The great variety of cuisines that characterize Italy can possibly - and I emphasize “possibly” - be attributed to the classic European institution of the piazza - the market square. From ancient times, every human settlement has contained a place where streets converge and inhabitants gather to discuss and exchange ideas and merchandize. It is a space that faces both inward and outward. A space that, especially in Italy from the beginning

of the Common Era through the Renaissance, has also served as the marketplace. The piazza originally housed the hut of the shaman or medicine man, then the temple, bell tower, synagogue or minaret as well as the seat of power. The shadows cast by these buildings influenced people’s behavior as well as the exchange of wares. It was in the piazza that local cuisine was born, developed and evolved through the merchants’ display of both local and exotic foods, but especially through the constant conversation and exchange of ideas among strangers who subsequently became acquaintances. This phenomenon contradistinguished every true market where in which specialized stalls were erected.

Today the market square no longer exists. The essence of modern supermarkets (super only in terms of their size) has changed how we shop: today there is no more dialogue between the food purveyor and consumer (even the most complete label does not provide enough information) or among the shoppers themselves, who in the past used this time to discuss food and its preparation, and therefore cuisine. It is no accident that the supermarket has been defined as a “non-place”. The old style marketplace I have described is dead, but the desire - or anthropological need - to discuss food in a common space is alive and well. This is amply demonstrated by the astonishing expansion of food discussions in the new “common space” that is the World Wide Web. In this new “market-

place of ideas” and new “piazza” of global discourse “food bloggers”, as they define themselves on the Internet, are creating veritable discussion groups, almost always accompanied by their own self-generated photographs. In the jargon of the Internet, a blog is a type of website in which content is presented chronologically. This new word is shorthand for “web log”. Usually a blog is managed by one or more bloggers who publish, more or less regularly, multimedia content in text form or as a post, sometimes with pictures. It is not unlike a newspaper article.

The phenomenon came to be known as food blogs, and in Italy alone there are 3,500 of them. They utilize the Web to discuss, sample, and critique food. The phenomenon was immediately noticed by professional marketing companies, who used the new medium to renew the proclamations of sellers flooding the marketplace with their products. Even today, under a new guise, companies are trying to seduce consumers with expert testimonials, just like snake oil vendors did in the past. But the desire and even need to discuss food has not been satisfied by the “foodies”. The number of food enthusiasts - the so-called foodies or gastro-fanatics - now tops four and a half million! It is a veritable army that is growing at the rate of 250,000 each year. They not only love to eat, but also to discover new foods, and study them in depth, also through visual images. Foodies are “a little more” motivated and interested in all things re-



garding food and drink than other consumers. They want to be protagonists, showing off their own abilities, often through pictures of dishes they have prepared. They share information through the Internet, using Facebook and other platforms that constitute the modern “piazza” of a new and specialized market.

The complicated experimental cuisine of some celebrated chefs and the large restaurant industry are no longer able to satisfy the good food enthusiasts, whose hunger for culinary knowledge is no longer slaked by increasingly theatrical television cooking shows or the avalanche of cookbooks that focus primarily on image rather than substance. This is why we are witnessing an almost convulsive search for personal contact, even if only virtual, across which people can express their abili-

ties and potential. It is a situation that in some aspects is analogous with what happened a century or more ago in good bourgeois families. Not only did they discuss cuisine, but the woman of the house was always happy to demonstrate her culinary skills to her guests. The situation was similar in peasant families where the head of household was the guardian of culinary wisdom. Today this experience is spread and shared on the Web, where cuisine - or discussing cuisine - represents a new (or maybe old) opportunity to establish personal contacts and make new acquaintances.

Could a new cuisine be born out of food blogging? Even if they are not creating new cuisines (which is likely) the growing number of these food enthusiasts who are invading the information highway, the modern equivalent

of an informal and intangible market square, is nonetheless having an effect on the evolution of taste. They are carrying out a revolution, protesting against the industrialization of cuisine that is destroying regional traditions.

There is an enormous difference between an Academician and a modern gastro-fanatic Web surfer, just as it was with a consumer in the market square. Research and an expansion of Academic culture is also substantially different from a verbal exchange at the market, no matter how interesting it may be. Still, the new aspects of the increased interest in cuisine is a development that our Academy cannot ignore and that deserves our attention as a social phenomenon that involves the world of Italian cuisine and the eating habits of the Italian people.

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

● **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.**

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Talking Heads on TV vs. Reality in the Kitchen

The restaurant business is in distress, especially the middle range restaurants. In the meantime the media continue to discuss food in an increasingly theatrical but uncreative way.

BY PAOLO PETRONI

Secretary General of the Academy

"Dum Romae consulitur, Saguntum expugnatur". While Rome debates, Sagunto is expunged. As I contemplate what is happening in the restaurant world Titus Livius' words come to mind. We could adapt his famous sentence this way: "While television hosts debate cuisine, restaurants are closing". The good old days of restaurants filled to capacity are over, and their management is becoming increasingly difficult. After taking advantage of the introduction of the Euro that immediately made restaurant checks jump from 30,000 lire to 30 Euro, today we are hearing loud complaints from chefs and restaurateurs. Some high end as well as low cost establishments are managing to hang on, but the middle range restaurants are truly in distress. To save themselves from extinction one group has invented the "Restaura-saurus", an original prehistoric pizzeria/restaurant. They serve huge portions of pizza and meat but primarily cater to children and their fascination with dinosaurs and games. Pizzerias, "spaghetterias", kebab houses, Chinese and sushi carry-outs and many well known hamburger chains continue to sprout up. For them there is no crisis. But even fast food restaurants must adapt to the new reality; they have to find new formulas and offer new menu ideas. Hamburgers alone are no longer enough. They have added local and "zero kilometer" products, with smaller portions at reasonable prices. It is a

combination of tradition and modernity in a youthful context - practical and efficient but still healthy and tasty. So-called culinary experts and their ad hoc programs dominate television with their bombastic and uncreative shows. In addition to *Clerici, Parodi, Laurito, Masterchef, Fat and Superfat, Chefs on Fire, Cooking with Ale*, and *Ace of Cakes*, we now also have the series *The Chef* with Palermo's Filippo La Mantia (who left the kitchens of the Majestic Hotel in Rome) and the very popular skinny youth Davide Oldani, owner of the restaurant D'O in Cornaredo and creator of "Pop" cuisine. We have already mentioned our "Star Chefs" media obsession - all that was missing was the latest novelty: The "ghost written menu". In theory a famous cook could open and manage more than one restaurant, but when he or she lacks the money or the sponsors, then what? They ghost write the menu of another less famous chef whose restaurant is not well known and is geographically distant. They visit the locale, and we assume that they teach, stimulate, and educate the lesser chef, and then they leave, having left their "gospel" behind. Maybe they hear from the restaurant from time to time, maybe they actually run it from elsewhere - who really knows? Besides their "imprint" and label, what matters is that the chef creates good food. That way, soon enough the menu will have its own label, which is as it should be.

IMPORTANT INTERNATIONAL PRIZES FOR ITALIAN EXPERTS



The University of Parma hosted a ceremony for the delivery of the international prizes awarded each year by the Académie Internationale de la Gastronomie. In 2013, three of the important awards went to Italian research specialists and experts, a recognition of the high scientific and cultural level attained by Italian cuisine on the international scene: Grand Prix de la Science de l'Alimentation was awarded to

Prof. Davide Cassi of the University of Parma; Prix de a Littérature Gastronomique was awarded to Prof. Massimo Montanari of the University of Bologna; Prix du Sommelier was awarded to Dr. Andrea Grignaffini of Parma. In the course of the ceremony, a symposium was held on the subject "Cuisine as Science and Culture", Organized by the Academy with the presence of the President of AIG Dr. Jacques Mallard, Academy's President Giovanni Ballarini in his role as Vice President of the Académie Internationale, and members of the Faculty of the University of Parma.



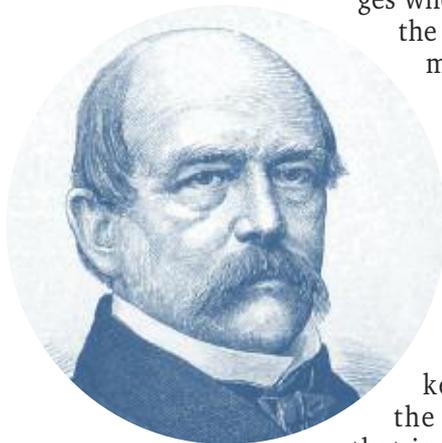
History through menus

From Henry IV's boiled chicken to Bismarck's steak, many historical personages have left their mark on gastronomy.

BY RENZO PELLATI

Academician, Torino Delegation

Gastronomy is replete with famous names tied to history, literature and music, all of them testifying to the cultural excellence of food. Menus often feature names that do not belong to celebrated chefs, experts of food technology, or students of nutritional sciences but to personages who left their mark on the history of gastronomy in a bewildering fashion.



The Henry the 4 IV's renowned boiled chicken, for example, was born out of a conversation between the King of France and the Duke of Savoy, when the King said: "I wish that in my kingdom every worker were able to put a chicken in the pot." The threat of such a revolution stirred from above did contribute to arming the hand of Ravallac, as some feared, but in reality the recipe of the *poule-au-pot* was codified in the last century. It calls for a chicken filled with eggs, ham and meat put to boil in pot with fresh vegetables. Another celebrated fowl is chicken Marengo, a small town near Alessandria, where Napoleon fought a famous battle in June 1800. At one point the battle was going badly for the French and Bonaparte seemed duntrodden. When Gen. Desaix, doomed to die later in the day, sug-

gested launching a last desperate charge with the remnants of the French cavalry, Napoleon responded: "Do it your way. I am going to eat." The problem was that the Austrians had seized the French provisions, and the superintendent of cuisine had to make do with whatever he found among the farmers. An hour later, Gen. Desaix was about to snatch victory and the Marengo chicken, sautéed in pan with olive oil and white wine, was about to be brought to the table, or rather to a drum that served as a table, thus entering with all honors into the annals of cuisine.

The celebrated writer of the nineteenth century François René de Chateaubriand gave his name to a meat dish that is a classic of today's menus. At the Larue restaurant in Paris, the maître would send this order to the kitchen: "a loin, rather thick on the grill, slightly cooked, for monsieur the Viscount of Chateaubriand." This was such a long specification for the kitchen staff that after receiving more of such "commande" (orders), the chef passed it on to his staff by shouting: "A Chateaubriand!" The name stuck, shaping a relationship between the writer and the common man. In France the cut of loin in question is served rare on the inside but browned outside, with a *béarnaise* sauce, or a traditional sauce prepared with white wine, minced scallions, mushrooms, laurel leaves and thyme, and then reduced and filtered with the addition of butter and tarragon.



The gastronomic preparations bearing the name Bismarck (steaks, asparagus, hamburger covered with Fried eggs) do not belong to traditional German cuisine.

The term originated at the end of the nineteenth century at the time of the Triple Alliance, the pact that associated Italy and France in opposition to France and Russia, when the Chancellor of the Second Reich, Otto von Bismarck-Schonhausen, became a symbol of German power. Thus, the name Bismarck was deemed appropriate to christen a plate that blended the nutritional power of meat and that similarly nourishing eggs fried in butter. In other words, the food named after Bismarck gave great energy thanks to the noble proteins that it contained.

One of the favorite dishes of the Italian opera composer Gioacchino Rossini was "tournedos" sautéed in butter, lying on a slice of bread dipped in cognac flambé and covered with foie gras. The term itself - tournedos - has an uncommon origin: it consists of large pieces of loin, cooked rapidly over a high flame. The fashion at the time was to cook it in the dining room in a silver pan over a flame produced by alcohol. However, the maître d'hotel considered it uncouth to cook in front of the customer. Accordingly, after placing the cooking implements on a small table, he prepared the food "tournant le dos", that is, turning his back to the guests. This is how the term "tornado" was adopted to describe the dish.

The history of gastronomy includes names that are not noteworthy in history but still present in today's Menu, such as Louis de Béchamel,

marquis of Nointel, who lived in Paris to exercise the function of maître d'hotel for the Sun King. Nobody knows much of him as a financial expert or aide to the King, but as the inventor of the Béchamel sauce is name is known around the world.

The most famous sauce is unquestionably the mayonnaise that was created for the first time by the military chef of the Duke of Richelieu, the cousin of the great cardinal, who gave it that name after the conquest of Port Mahon, on the island of Minorca. Richelieu's chef had to cook dinner with a few ingredients, oil, eggs and lemons. This is how Mahon went down in history because of mayonnaise. A school of gossipers,

however, claim that the duke of Richelieu was frequenting a lady of the island, a "mahonesa", and it was this lady who aimed to help the duke recuperate his energy after their passionate meetings by serving him the nourishing sauce that contained eggs. The Duke of Richelieu was a well known "tombeur de femme" (waster of women), married three times, the last time at age 84.

In my book *The History of What We Eat* I cite many dishes named after illustrious personages that left an indelible mark on gastronomy, such as the Regina Claudia prunes (she was the wife of the French King Francois I), the thin sandwiches of Count Camillo Benso of Cavour, the babá with rum of the Polish King Stanislav Leszcynski, the pizza dedicated to Queen Margherita, the wife of King Umberto I, and many more.

RENZO PELLATI

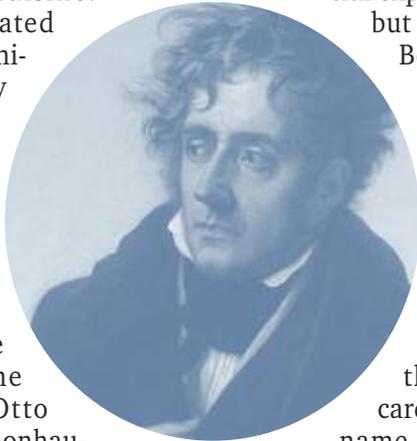




Image and the imaginary

The language of images tends to prevail over the written text, to communicate and persuade about the goodness and reliability of a product, often resorting to “operation nostalgia”.

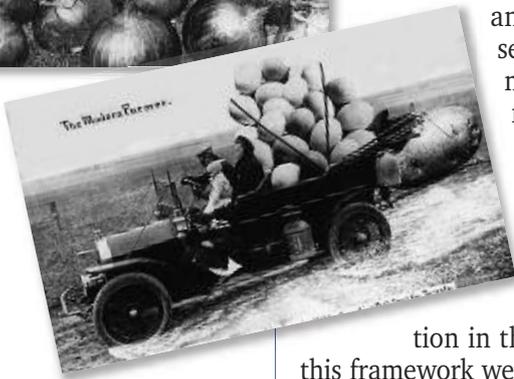
BY ELISABETTA COCITO
Academician, Torino Delegation

The troubled times of our society compels us to think hard about our lifestyles and our consumption. The ethical turn and the appeal of responsible spending that is the target of many social campaigns show the progress of initiatives by local institutions and environmental associations and agencies aimed at educating the public against waste and junk food, and in favor of preserving the environment. Several different approaches are indicated: from responsible purchasing to the “zero kilometer”, all the way to education in the schools. Within this framework we should include an invitation to buy products in bulk, not ready made, originating in a fair and solid market that is making inroads even in the large distribution networks.

Will that be the end of branding? Personally I believe that we have a long road ahead. The evocative and suggestive power of a product’s captivating image has the power to steer the consumer and promote sales. The power of an image can be overwhelming in any field and time frame: I wish to relate the curious example coming from America at the beginning of last century. Sometime between 1908 and 1912, William H. Martin, a pioneer of photo editing, produced post cards

with images of fruit, vegetables, fish and animals that were the background of other small objects (houses, people, country views) in a rural setting. These peculiar post cards, naïf in character and featuring subjects out of proportion, can be found in Seymour, a small town in Wisconsin. They were produced at a time when the evolution of transportation revolutionized the American postal system by allowing fast communications over long distances. These cards spread rapidly and extensively in rural areas, thus feeding the myth of the abundance and fertility of the American soil. The enormous fruit in the foreground, associated with a clever comment in the back of the card (hence the tell-tale name of post card) evoked the image of frontier America as a fertile rural paradise where everything grew in abnormal size and with ease, thus impressing upon the collective imagination the creation of a landscape and its soil, no matter that often times they did not reflect reality.

It was a marketing operation, removed in time and perhaps simple minded, but captivating at that time, structured upon the strength of an image. Much time has gone by; however, the myth of nature, in different shapes and contexts, remains as the first reference of choices made by the creators of advertising for the food market. At a time of crisis, particularly due to the present day uncertainty, it is important to put to work stable and comforting values in order to arouse a sense of trust and familiari-



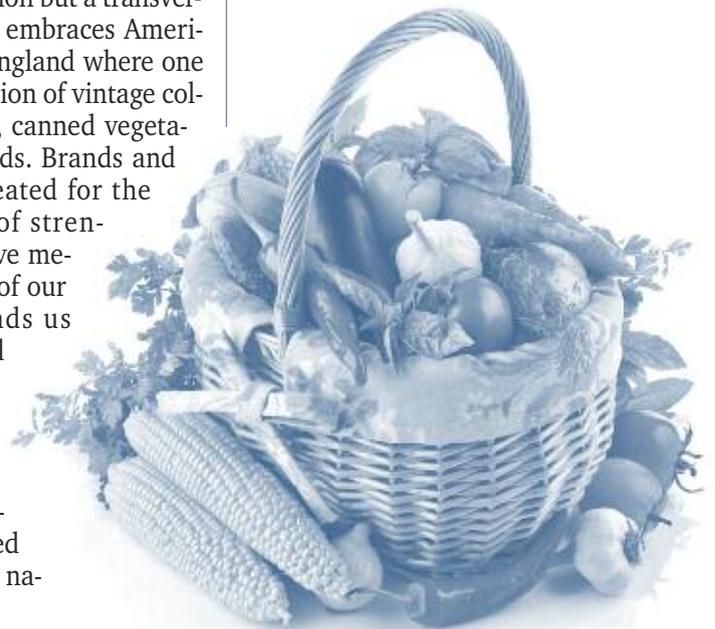


ty. A good nature, generous and most of all “clean”, is probably the most adaptable and productive instrument in the hands of the operators as it brings forth an idea of genuineness, quality and freshness that are reassuring elements in an environment devastated by food counterfeiting and by the prevalence of chemistry and surrogates. The packaging and media spots recreate old time distinctive characters such as the look of a thrashing floor with free ranging chickens, fields tilled by human labor, bucolic and poetic images of a time gone by. Some of us will see them as a revival of our experiences while younger people will look at them as an idea of what a better future could or should have in store. After all, we are not far from the American post cards of the beginning of the nineteenth century. In short, the language of those images tends to prevail over the written text, in order to communicate and persuade us about the goodness and reliability of a product.

Image and imaginary underlie another significant commercial operation that is underway: the so called “retro marketing” that consists in utilizing the “retrobrand” and olden days graphics as they are recovered and re-utilized by a firm in introducing or bringing a product back to the market. The technique of reassuring, stirring emotions and reminding us of the past - possibly or almost certainly idealized - where everything was better and more genuine, is widely used by the agro-alimentary industry. The visual impact and the associated sensorial activities of touching, tasting and smelling impact our feelings and prod us to become children once again and to enjoy the good things of the good old days. Operation Nostalgia is not a peculiarly Italian phenomenon but a transversal happening that embraces America, Germany and England where one witnesses an explosion of vintage collections of biscuits, canned vegetables and snack foods. Brands and products are recreated for the express purpose of strengthening a collective memory, a core piece of our minds that reminds us that in a fluid and disorienting time deeply ingrained values still exist: the value of tradition, of the experiences that we lived through, and of our national history.

Surely, the recollection of our identity and memory, essentially the cult of our nostalgia, is a well thought out operation that has been riding the present need for reassurances and certainties and is also capable of transmitting a further message. Through backward looking images, the emphasis is put not so much on innovative and technological progress but on the improvement and evolution of an historical product bound with tradition. This should remind us once more that our collective patrimony comprises firms that generation after generation were able to grow, innovate, compete and sell Italy’s Brand, characterized by a mix of quality, creativity and tradition, successfully throughout the world.

ELISABETTA COCITO



INTERNET, BLOGS, FACEBOOK AND THE ACCADEMIA WEBSITE

Recently some Delegations have expressed an interest in opening their own websites. In order to avoid content conflicts with the Accademia's official website, the Office of the President has expressly stated that this is not possible. The Office of the President would like to stipulate that online conversations among Academicians and/or Delegations in blogs and on platforms such as Facebook are permitted. However, in these cases the use of Accademia logo is not allowed, and content should not discuss or involve the Academy's organizational activities.



Laying the table

The art of setting the table encompasses various kinds of service, the norms for the setting of the table, the choice of crockery, and behavior. Simplicity, consistency and refinement identify modern taste.

BY ALESSANDRO FENU

Academician, Modena Delegation



From the time man stopped taking in food just to sustain himself and started to develop a taste for the food he was eating, an evolution started that over many centuries and the history of numerous civilizations has contributed to identifying behavioral methods that in large measure have influenced the cultures of various countries.

In our time, the term *mise en place* encompasses all those elements that come together when food is presented as food should always be - the real protagonist at the table. If we compare what the Romans ate with what was eaten in the Middle Ages and what is eaten today, we realize that the difference is indeed enormous. The practices and the customs that shape how meals are consumed have gone through a great evolution. In the past centuries, a large part of the populations on Earth had subsistence problems, and the privilege of choosing what and how to eat was reserved to a few people, the very people whom we cite when we discuss food habits and the presentation of food and beverages. Up to the Middle Ages, all courses were brought to the table at the same time and each person was free to help himself to any of the foods that he desired. There were no food pairings and no pre-ordained order of the courses. The dishes were already proportioned in order to be freely eaten with the hands. They were cut by the “scalco” or master of the table, later called “carver”, in

front of the table companions. The introduction of the fork at the table goes back to the second half of the eighteenth century (it was known earlier but mainly used a kitchen implement). The glass was not placed on the table but was handed to the participants by the bottle servant, the antecedent of the *sommelier*, and immediately withdrawn.

During the Renaissance, meals started having several courses: an initial service of sideboard food, one or more kitchen products and finally another service from the sideboard; each course comprised up to fifty dishes. The sideboard service was composed by cold dishes, sweet and salty, that were prepared ahead of time by the sideboard master. The kitchen service was brought to the table between the sideboard services at the beginning and the end. They were warm dishes, their number and complexity dependant on the importance of the household.

Greeks used to eat their meals on wooden tablets that were served with adequate portions. This system, known today as the “Italian style”, is the one adopted by the majority of restaurants as it consists of a prepared dish coming from the kitchen. “Russian style” or “al gueridon” service calls instead for the food to be prepared near the client, with the *chef de rang* of the dining hall in charge, to please the client. “French style” service takes place at the left of the client when the platter is offered allowing him to help himself (in direct French fashion) or

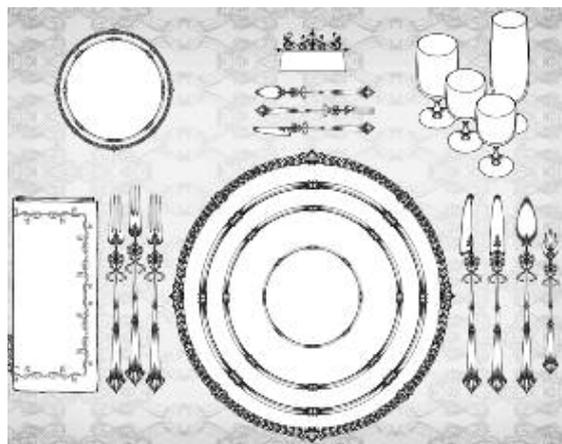


by placing the platter at the center of the table (indirect French fashion). In “English service” the *chef de rang* approaches the client from the left and places the food on his plate. Let us now examine the fundamental rules for setting the table and the behavior to be followed. Simplicity, consistency and refinement identify the modern taste. As far as the setting of the table is concerned, it must be laid down in simple fashion, with white tablecloth to enhance its luminosity, with precious porcelain, crystal glasses and no ashtrays or tooth pick holders. The glass is surely the most important object for enjoying wine as it must be regarded as a container and exhibitor whose function is to contain the wine and bring it directly in contact with the senses. It enriches the table together with the dishes, the silverware and the offerings of our lunches and dinners. Its forms and dimensions may vary, just as its indications, for wines that may be white, red, rosè or bubbling in relation to their alcohol content. The glass where wine is poured must be a container in good style, of glass or crystal, that is to say a neutral body relative to the wine and its acidic components, obviously transparent because colors, decorations and facets

hamper the sight of the color and clearness of the wine. The glass must be thin, especially the brim that comes into contact with the lips. As a last requirement, the stem of the glass must be narrow and long enough to make it easy to handle. An important caution is for the chalice to be held at the bottom and never in the goblet because the warmth of the hand may alter the temperature. For an important and well structured wine the preference should go to a bellied and capacious glass, possibly narrowing toward the top in order to keep the wine from venting its aroma and to allow the drinker to enjoy to the utmost the intensity of its smell. For a white wine, the glass should not be bellied but shaped rather like a tulip. This type of glass for tasting is of medium height and shape and can be termed “elongated egg”. For a white sparkling wine the shape of the glass should be of the “flute” type, that is rounded and slender to exalt its *perlage*. The *noveau* wine must be served fresh; consequently, the required glass is a long

stemmed chalice. Finally, a dessert should be accompanied by preferred wines such as Moscato and Passito. The recommended glass should be smaller than the other ones in order to magnify their taste. Special care must be taken while cleaning glasses. They must be washed carefully with a neutral detergent that should leave no odors. They must be washed in warm water free of chlorine and hung to dry. Lastly, they should be stowed upside down in closed cabinets without perfume. Finally, a few curious observations. The decorations at the center of the table should be of such dimensions allowing the guests to see each other’s face. The center decorations can be made up with fresh but not fragrant flowers (avoid placing them in a transparent vessel as the water is bound to discolor), or with fruit, ceramics, or any other natural material. The wine chart and the menu should be brought out upon request and are indispensable in those venues where a *sommelier* is present. Salt, pepper and cheese are not put on the table but should be carried to the table upon request. The same rule applies to oil and vinegar. Bread must be served on designated small plates to the left of the main plate.

ALESSANDRO FENU





The state of the restaurant business

New places, new dishes, at any time of day: this is how our appetite transforms itself.

DI ALFREDO PELLE

*Academician, Apuano Delegation
and "F. Marenghi Study Center"*



If once upon a time I was asked: where can we go eat? I would have mentioned possible venues such as pubs, trattorias or restaurants. There were few pizzerias then and they did not carry enough weight to induce us to leave home to eat. Now the problem has become more difficult to solve for the simple reason that one finds food in an unending series of places: kebab joints, *panini* stands, bed and breakfast inns, *piadine* eateries, fast food galleries, bars and many places that sell just one product such as steak houses, prosciutto vendors, pasta premises or just one specialty like McDonald's does. Indeed, the food variety is getting narrower: from the steak house we have moved to just hamburgers, and from *panini* to only *baguettes*. However, there is an opposite trend that leads to a fusion of traditional Italian specialties to a generational influence. Thus we find the "wedding soup", the penne Genoa style (forget the Neapolitan origin of the dish), the sirloin special cut, the Piedmontese *fasona*, muffins, tiramisù and 24 month-old parmesan. One can find a table from 11 pm to 3 am, in a conglomeration of food stuffs that combines street food, *trattorias* and living rooms. Furthermore, a slice of pizza can be had anywhere at any time.

And this is not all: food has taken over places that at first we could hardly imagine. Who would have ever thought that by going to a library one would find a corner where a good meal could be had? Who would have imagined that in a food store - such as

Roscioli in Rome or Peck in Milan - a small restaurant would be open on the premises allowing customers to taste not just salami and other products sold by the store, but also dishes prepared with competence and skill? Years ago we accepted that one could eat along a turnpike (self service display at first and now self service prepared on the spot). At the beach, in the summer, we can eat at the establishment that has set aside some its space for a restaurant: at midday, one can have a nice salad or fried fish or mozzarella and prosciutto, while in the evening the restaurant changes menu and becomes a small *trattoria* where the food offering can be good, or at least decent, becoming the mainstay of dinner. A few bottles come out of the fridge, including some good wine purchased on the spot, and the end game is pleasurable.

This happens at any time of the day: one can go to a bar at 9 am and ask for pasta dish. No problem: they place the prepared plate in the oven or microwave and in five minutes the pasta comes out hot and fragrant. It is no longer the social status that regulates such readiness: Barack Obama took Medvedev to Ray's Hell Burger in Alexandria across the river from the White House, a place well known for its fried food and hamburgers.

There is no end to the offerings: fish markets are now starting to feature red snapper or clams ready for take-out (and soon, one surmises, eaten in the fish market itself). This vast panorama has some striking novelties: in just a few years, foreign restaurants



have spread in our cities with their sushi or tacos while restaurants serving food from Japan, Lebanon and China are transforming our eating habits, especially among the young. Even the great chefs have begun to draw inspiration from ethnic customs and gastronomy. There is some resistance to this idea but there is little doubt that sooner or later it will collapse, due to the fact that over five million immigrants live in Italy and buy products from their world. They represent 7 percent of our population and are an integral part of the social and economic fabric, contributing 11 percent of the gross national product.

It is logical to expect that this slice of the population, an organic force within our society, should be producing and raising interest in the area of alimentation and in the restaurant business. It is calculated that fifty percent of Italians have eaten, at least once, in an ethnic restaurant.

This commingling of tastes can generate some confusion and most of all, a culinary *melting pot* that will lead us to eat risi bisì and sushi or-not far away-cutlets and *cous cous*.

The traditional restaurant mode is besieged on all sides. It is not just the crisis that changes the format of our appetite. Surely, spending less is important but it also happens that people eat less. The four pillars of the

Italian menu - antipasto, first course, second course and dessert - are being reduced to the point that it is almost common to eat only two courses of the traditional full lunch while it is possible to regulate the speed of eating according to our needs. In five minutes one can eat a ready-made dish but one can also enjoy a three-hour dinner. To the owner of a restaurant, it becomes problematic to establish the price of a two course dinner: there are fixed expenditures - personnel, rent, power and gas - that absorb over 70 percent of the cost of the dinner.

Consequently, savings can be realized on the raw material by utilizing industrial products for the kitchen: powdered ingredients and frozen sauce ingredients (minced celery, carrot and onion).

Searching for genuine products of the soil is becoming more and more difficult and costly. Gualtiero Marchese quips: "If the customer were to enter certain restaurants by passing through the kitchen, he would head straight for the exit. What is the ideal solution? Go back to the country to gather products of the soil. However, not everyone can do that. The result is processed ravioli".

The restaurant business has lost its ability to spread the joy that once touched the customer, by offering dishes

that could only be prepared a few times each year in the family. Nowadays, there is no such problem: an endless series of ready made dishes is strewn across the supermarket. No wonder that the restaurant business is suffering. Thus it looking for new frontiers of taste, becoming more refined and enhancing more transcendental values, with a more technical approach, increasingly devised in a laboratory.

Unquestionably, this cuisine is technically a step above as it modifies the raw material, structurally transforming it into something different from the primary taste of the original product.

The search for good food cannot but go through great events that are by nature places of worship with sacred texts that must be consulted. Because of this the chefs are quickly becoming actors. "The profession of chef has become a profession that can impart a planetary success through television," says Bruno Barbieri, a great protagonist of Italian cuisine, who recently moved to his new restaurant *Cotidie* in London, where he offers contemporary Italian cuisine imbued with great culture.

Years ago, a trade food magazine carried an article about two great chefs: Massimo Bottura and Mauro Uliassi: between art and cuisine, research and tradition, material and inspiration. It dealt with a sort of "trans-vanguard" in the kitchen, as if painters or sculptors were the subjects.

We have reached a point where chefs are considered artists, dedicated to their public, constantly striving to search for a path made of remembrances, rediscovered tastes and irrepresible commitment to overcoming the boundaries of taste. These chefs, christened the "chevaliers of Italian cuisine", are working to reach that goal by frequently appearing as "living cooks" in front of renowned journalists and gastronomists.

Is it cuisine or spectacle?

ALFREDO PELLE



The origin of a phenomenon

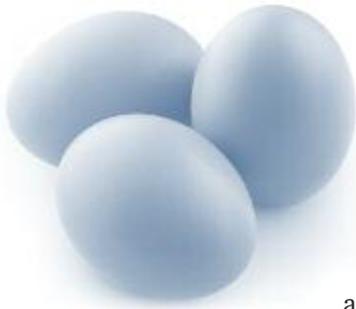
The phenomenon in question is tiramisù - one of the best known words in both the real and online worlds.

BY TERESA PERISSINOTTO VENDRAMEL

Treviso Delegate

AND ROBERTO ROBAZZA

Academician, Treviso Delegation



When in 2009 the Dante Alighieri Society summarized the data of its research on 100 “Italian matrixes” with the purpose of identifying the ten most recognized Italian words in the world, a surprise sprang up, something that nobody could foresee at the time. Right after *pizza*, *cappuccino*, *spaghetti* and *espresso*, the word *tiramisù* landed on the same rung as *mozzarella*. In a little more than forty years, the dessert from Treviso conquered not only the palate of the entire world, but the collective imagination, at the same time becoming a word that is a symbol of Italian style and the most popular dessert.

Within this context, it is appropriate to recall an investigation by “Assolatte” - the milk producers association - that discovered how in 2011 Chinese

websites produced 14 million mentions of the word *tiramisù* followed by 7.8 million in Japan, 3.4 million in Germany, 3.1 million in France. To boot, there were 18.6 million citations on English language sites stemming from the demand to learn how to make *tiramisù*. Sticking to the world of the Internet, Facebook records 480 results in the world in every language, with fan pages, groups of *tiramisù* lovers and myriad recipes for the dessert. And many more, such as restaurants and pastry shops, nicknames, clothing stores, communities, clubs and associations. It is still the entry with the largest number of “likes”: 1,073,327!

What is more, there are legions of restaurants named *Tiramisù* from Miami to Taipei, almost exclusively managed by Italians, but still something significant by virtue of their strong attraction among the local population. And that’s only the beginning! Setting aside the many Italian locales





that claim paternity of the dessert (and chefs as well) there a story according to which Canada, and with it the United States and Japan, claim to be the birth place of such extraordinary "favorite son".

What was most surprising to the researcher that investigated the "enogastronomic excellence of Treviso's hinterland" was the fact that a specific meaning has been attributed to *tiramisù* in a number of countries. In Taiwan, for example, it is considered a well wishing sweet that wives and fiancées give to soldiers when they leave to augur their safe return.

Needless to say, even in Italy the name of the dessert has evoked fantasies surrounding it. One of the most suggestive interpretations of *tiramisù* is that it was created in "houses of pleasure" to reinvigorate the guests weakened by sexual exertions by "picking" them up so that they could resume performing. Quite a marketing operation! A more serious interpretation (?) is that *tiramisù* was invented to sustain the Count of Cavour in his struggle to bring about Italian unification.

The authentic explanation is much simpler, and anything but banal. It is the story of a dessert created by combining, with a touch of genius and

luck, a number of ingredients, many of them used by a legion of pastry chefs to concoct desserts that are very similar. In truth, *tiramisù* is essentially an "English trifle with coffee", as Giuseppe Maffioli pronounced it in a 1981 review, with many progenitors in various restaurants of the Treviso area. In the past, it was common to blend, in various forms and combinations, coffee, mascarpone cheese, *savoirdi* (ladyfingers), liqueur, whipped cream, eggs, sponge cake, cocoa and sugar.

In various circumstances, one could find an "imperial cup" where, departing from the original recipe, the *savoirdi* were replaced by sponge cake, and cocoa by grated chocolate. In addition, the *savoirdi* could be soaked in rum and the mascarpone worked with boiled eggs and Campari cordial. The whole thing was topped by whipped cream and various decorations or presented as an elaborate "bavarian au coffee", or something else to be improvised.

This all changed when in 1970 a cook and pastry chef, Loli (Roberto) Linguanotto, found a job in a restaurant in Treviso after working in Germany for a time. He chose several of the ingredients, prepared them in an original way, assembled them in a parallelogram shape (the original preparation was round) and called the creation "tiresesù". He scored an immediate success. The fortune of the dessert can be attributed not just to its extraordinary quality but also to the absence of liqueur that made it accessible to people of all ages (with the exception of intolerance or allergy). The simplicity of the preparation dovetailed with the ease of packing the ingredients together without resorting to cooking. Lastly, it was possible to create an unlimited number of variations, all of them replicating the original, unleashing the fantasy of the chef who availed himself of the best raw ingredients. As a result, the diffusion of the dessert throughout the world was ensured.



Here is the "legitimate" recipe as filed by the Delegation of Treviso in 2010 and notarized, based upon the authentic testimony of the protagonists and supported by an ample written documentation of the time, according to which the *Tiramesù* (the original name in the local dialect) is described as follows: "It is an imperceptible dusty feeling that disappears as the lips close, turning into an amalgam and releasing a consistent creamy sweetness. The spoon works into it slowly at the beginning and then at a rapid rhythm in a fit of desire leaving little concave excavations in a construction that does not lose its shape but invites us to dig even more".

TERESA PERISSINOTTO VENDRAMEL
AND ROBERTO ROBAZZA

