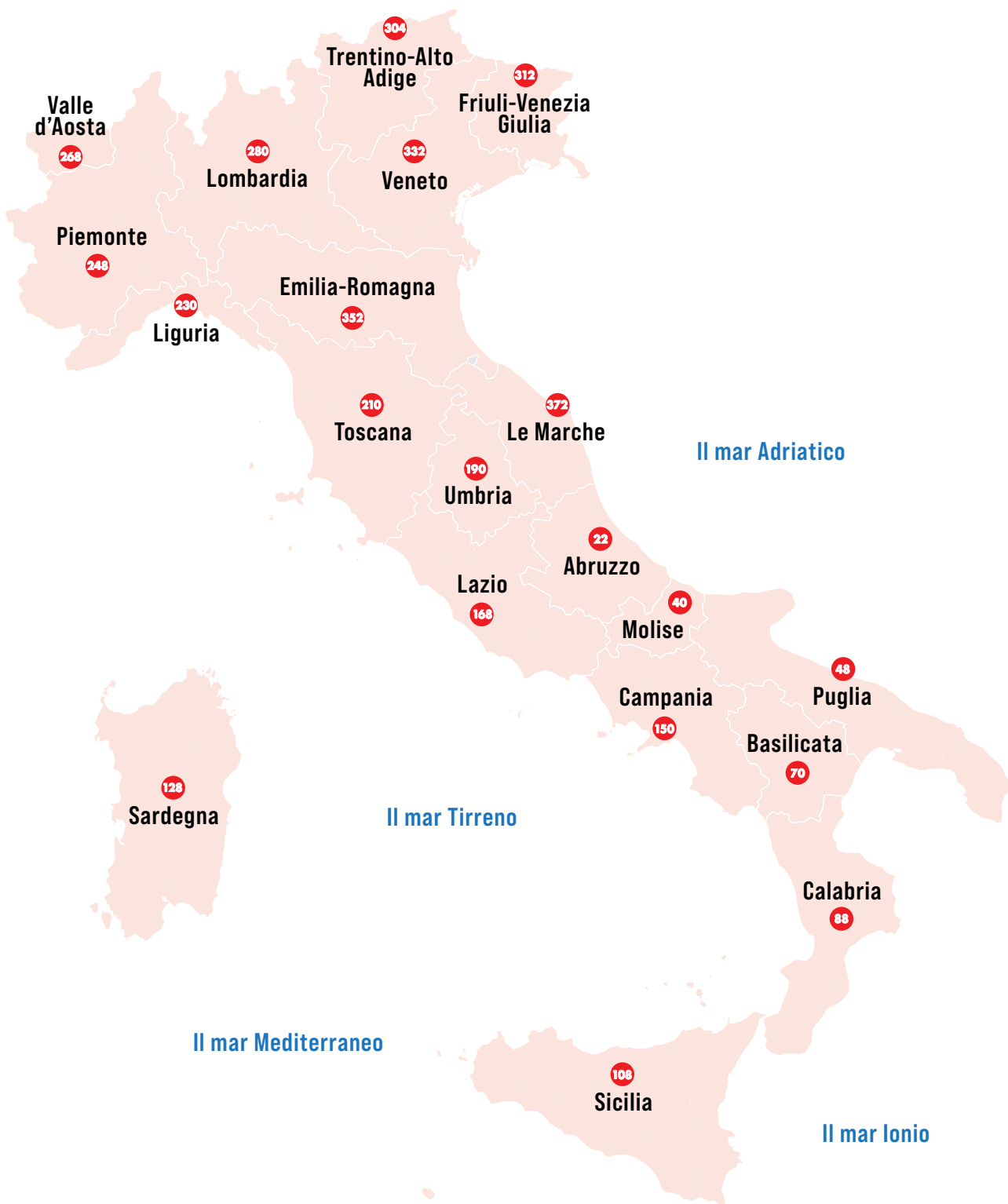


**ITALIA  
CON GUSTO  
E AMORE**

**A road trip to the roots of Italian cuisine**

**Annette Canini-Daems**

**Lannoo**



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## TOURING A COUNTRY WHERE FOOD AND DRINK ARE A WAY OF LIFE

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Why did I decide to venture out on this odyssey? Because I'm curious by nature. Because I wanted to draw up a map of culinary Italy. Because I wanted to venture off the beaten path, taste all those amazing products, and immerse myself in their wondrous world and the stories behind them. *Italia con gusto e amore* is an account of my travels through twenty regions and encounters with people obsessed by their culinary heritage. Over the course of seven months, I travelled 23,000 kilometres in search of authentic, underappreciated local fare that you find on the streets and in homes around the country. Along the way, I recorded the countless stories of passionate Italians whose lives revolve around honest, delicious food!

Breathtaking coastlines, sun-drenched countryside, UNESCO World Heritage sites and cities serve as a stunning backdrop for my encounters. What a country! I was blown away by the rich mosaic of remote hillside towns, winding mountain roads, castles, cliffs, seas, and beaches. A different landscape awaited me every hundred kilometres. The journey from region to region was a joy in itself. The soil, the climate and the people changed, as did the panoramic views. Italy really does have it all! Or almost, because the Italians themselves think their politicians are corrupt, their democracy is vulnerable, and their economy and football team is constantly yo-yoing... But their cuisine is first-rate, and nothing can change that!

### Food as an art form

There is no other place in the world where food gets taken this seriously. The Italians elevate food and drink to an art form; they are masters at creating irresistible gourmet feasts. Whether it's in family circles, in the local village or town, or during a celebration; there is always an occasion for enjoying traditional cuisine. What used to be considered *cucina povera*, or peasant cooking, is now a celebrated form of cultural heritage. The street food delicacies I sampled taught me much about a city or region's character and history. The recipes and the craftsmanship have been preserved and handed down from generation to generation. 'Con gusto e tanto amore!' or 'with flavour and lots of love!', the many heroes and heroines I met along the way would say with conviction.

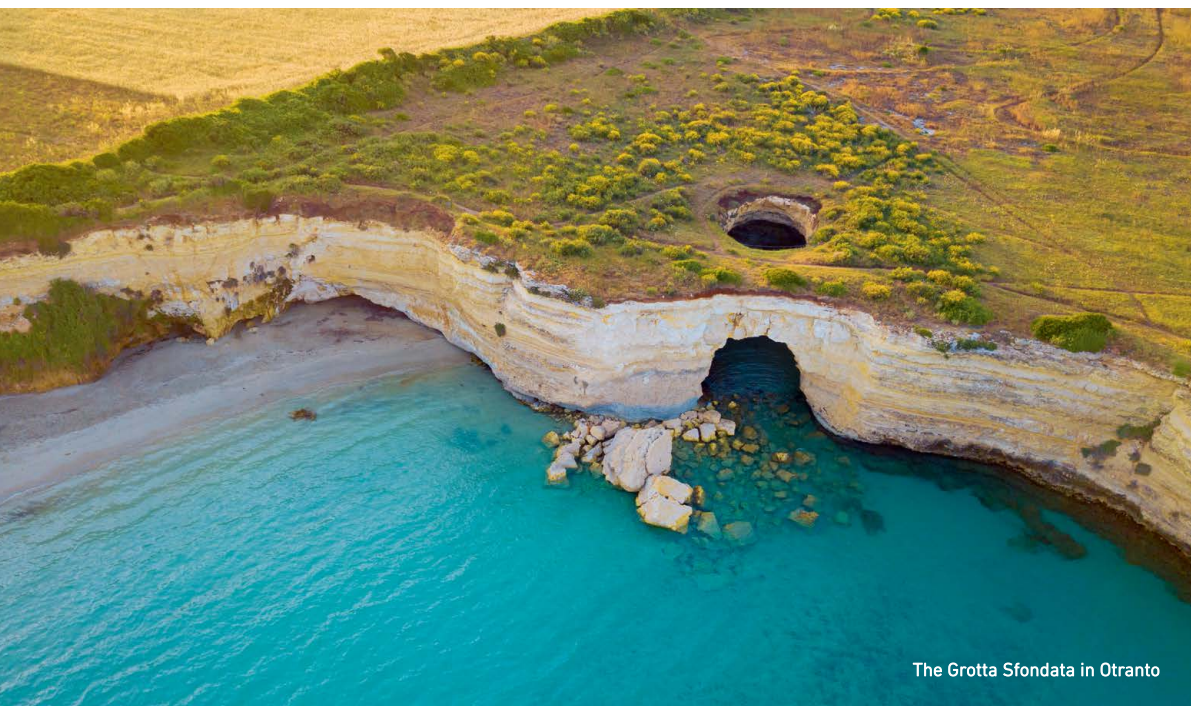
Each region has its own history. Italian cuisine has been influenced by the many cultures that have passed through or ruled the regions over the centuries. The Greeks, Romans, Arabs, Byzantines, and Spaniards are only a few of the many cultures that contributed to a gastronomy that has held fast for centuries. Italy as a country didn't exist until the second half of the nineteenth century. Before unification, Italy was one giant puppet show of city-states, constantly at each other's throats. This diver-

# PUGLIA



Apulia – Puglia to the Italians – in southeastern Italy forms the heel of Italy's 'boot', with the Salento peninsula at its southernmost tip. Apulia borders the Adriatic Sea to the east, while the inside of the heel looks out over the Ionian Sea to the west. Its neighbours are Campania, Basilicata and Molise. Bari is the region's capital. I am staying in Baia Sangiorgio, just 10 kilometres from Bari, where owner Veneziani proudly tells me about his little slice of heaven. 'We live in a beautiful country that reveals new fascinations every day. The Apulian landscape is unique. The beautiful coastal cities are enchanting with their Roman and Baroque cathedrals, impressive castles and regal palaces. A visit to towns such as Lecce, Bari, Brindisi, Ostuni and Trani are just a few of the many joys the region offers.'

The more than 800-kilometre Apulian coastline is high and jagged at the northernmost Gargano promontory. Further south, the lower-lying sandy shore runs straight down to Brindisi. The coast from Salento onwards is rugged and varied. The Tremiti archipelago, with its three islands, including San Domino, is also part of the region. Pristine landscapes riddled with gorges and caves heighten the islands' magic. The seawater there is crystal clear.



The Grotta Sfondata in Otranto





N'Dèrre a la lanze: Bari's old port



## Food is sacred

Basilicata's inhabitants, also known as Lucanians, enjoy a fresh supply of first-class vegetables year-round and make optimal use of delicious ingredients such as tomatoes, artichokes and leafy vegetables. Their food culture is founded on traditional principles. Lamb and mutton take centre stage. Fish is relegated to a supporting role because of the region's limited coastline. The fabled Matera bread lays the foundation. This durum wheat bread has been a favourite of townspeople and farmers alike for thousands of years. The *Caciocavallo Podolico* is a cheese variety also found in Calabria and Apulia. Another winner on the cheese front is *Canestrato* from Moliterno. The region also has its own brand of Lucanica pork sausages seasoned with fennel seeds.



## CITTÀ DEI SASSI

My culinary roots journey through Basilicata starts in Matera. I park the car on the city's outskirts and stroll through the old part of town along the main street, Via del Corso, to my destination: a small inner courtyard on the right. Here I find the La Fedda Rossa restaurant, where I have arranged to meet the owner, Annalisa de Bellis. I sit at a table under the watchful eye of Saint Eligius, whose statue guards the square. The seventeenth-century church next to the square also bears

his name. Dusk is settling in, and the tables on the patio gradually start to fill up. I have come just in time for Annalisa to tell me about Matera's characteristic dishes before all the tables are occupied. We go through the menu, and I settle on the *bruschette* and *zuppa crapiata*.

### RESTAURANT La Fedda Rossa

Annalisa: '*Fedda rossa*, or "red slice", is dialect for bruschetta topped with fresh red tomatoes. This typical peasant's dish reflects our restaurant's philosophy: simplicity and quality.' Meanwhile, I sip the glass of *vino della nostra zona*, or local wine, Annalisa has recommended. It's a red Anglianico, of course.

I ask Annalisa what makes the bruschette here so popular. 'The bread for the bruschette is made from the durum wheat that has been grown here for centuries,' she replies. 'This bread used to be baked just once a week, but it would keep for the entire week. People would eat this in the morning, afternoon, and evenings. The bread slices were grilled over a coal or wood fire and then seasoned. It was the perfect accompaniment to grilled meat or other delicacies. Bruschette grilled on top of the wood-burning stove were often eaten as the evening meal. Families would gather around the fire in the evenings to warm themselves and catch up on their day. This ritual survived until the 1950s.'

Matera





Today, bruschette are incredibly popular among the tourists in Matera. It is a very simple dish that highlights our delicious Matera bread and the tomatoes that grow and flourish in the sun. A peasant (*contadina*) version of the bruschetta is topped with caciocavallo cheese, followed by bacon or pancetta and grilled potatoes. We use a large piece of bread for the bruschetta, and the toppings are usually hearty. It's a meal in itself.



Contadina bruschetta



#### ANNALISA'S RECIPE

## *Contadina bruschetta from Matera*

#### MAKES 4 BRUSCHETTE

- 4 large, thick slices of (Matera) bread**
- 1 clove garlic**
- 4 slices caciocavallo cheese**
- 12 slices round pancetta**
- extra-virgin olive oil**
- dried oregano**
- 12 slices cooked potato**

Take a thick slice of bread and coat it with extra-virgin olive oil. Place a slice of caciocavallo cheese (or *caciotta*, *scamorza* or semi-soft pecorino cheese) over the top so it covers the entire slice. Arrange the pancetta slices over the cheese and sprinkle oregano over the bruschetta. Garnish with three slices of cooked potato. Bake the slices of bread in an oven at 200 °C for six to ten minutes. Serve warm.

#### ANNALISA'S RECIPE

## *Fedda rossa bruschetta*

#### MAKES 4 BRUSCHETTE

- 4 large, thick slices of (Matera) bread**
- 1 clove garlic**
- 12 g cherry or other small sweet tomatoes**
- extra-virgin olive oil**
- dried oregano**
- salt**
- basil (optional)**

Toast the bread however you wish: on the grill, in an oven or using a toaster (oven). Peel the clove of garlic and rub the clove over the bread, preferably while the bread is still warm. Wash and halve the cherry tomatoes. Take one of the tomato halves and place it cut side down on top of the bread. Rub the tomato over the bread until you're left with just the skin. The coarse bread will soak up the tomato pulp and juices and turn red. Repeat this until the entire surface of the bread is covered in red tomato pulp. Some people leave the crushed tomato on top because they love the tomato skins and texture. Others remove the tomato skins and simply eat the soaked bread. It's entirely up to you which you prefer. Season to taste with salt and lots of extra-virgin olive oil. For a real fedda rossa, your bread should be drenched in oil. Sprinkle a pinch of dried oregano and finely chopped basil, if desired, over the top.

# CATANIA 4

The distances between cities in Sicily are not something to be taken lightly. Catania is a 300-kilometre drive from Marsala. The second-largest Sicilian city lies on the shores of the Ionian Sea, overshadowed by the Mount Etna volcano. Mount Etna determined how the city developed. Various volcanic eruptions, particularly those in the 17th century, destroyed the city. In 1669, Catania was flooded with lava, and no fewer than 24 years later, in 1693, the city was struck by an earthquake. The aftermath of this disaster is still visible today. The old part of the city was completely rebuilt. The impressive baroque buildings are made from volcanic stone. The grey city is unique in the world.

## *Pasta alla Norma*

If Sicilian fish dishes are not your style, try the *pasta alla Norma*, Catania's culinary pride and joy. According to insiders, this was Vincenzo Bellini's favourite dish, hence the name. Bellini wrote the opera *Norma*, which premiered in the Massimo Bellini theatre in 1890. This exquisite dish is traditionally prepared with macaroni (or another type of pasta), diced and sautéed aubergine, tomato sauce, fresh basil and a dollop of freshly grated *ricotta salata*, or salted ricotta.

Pasta alla Norma





# ACIREALE 5

The Sicilian *granita* is a light and refreshing dessert. Granita with brioche is a daily morning ritual for many Sicilians. This world-renowned crushed-ice dish is the next stop on my culinary odyssey. I drive to Aci Castello, about 10 kilometres north of Catania, at the foot of Mount Etna. I savour the fantastic panorama of the Ionian Sea and the volcano from this town in the hills. But, I'm here because Mount Etna and granita are inextricably linked. Peppe Caudullo from Pupi Catania B&B is my guide in my search for granita's origins.

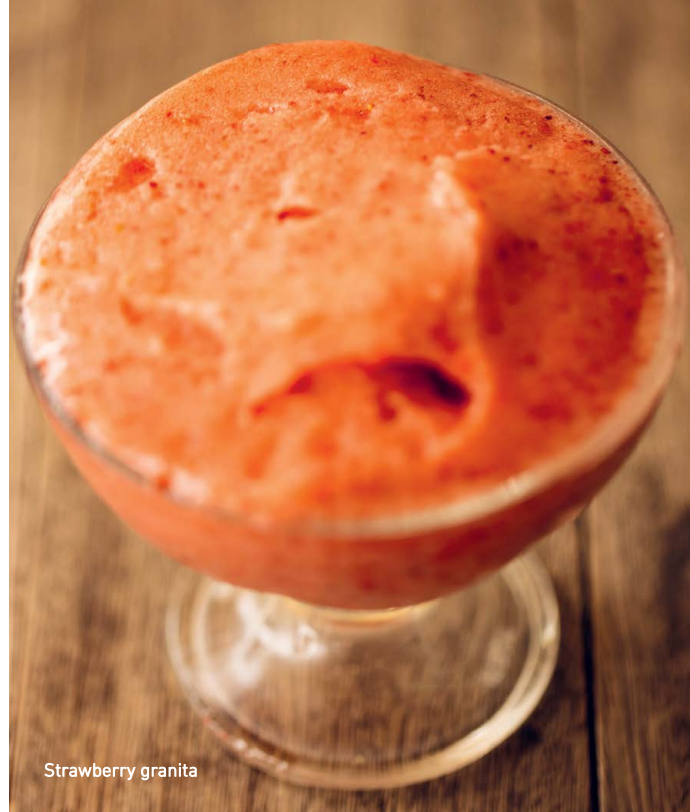
[www.pupicatania.com](http://www.pupicatania.com)

## Origins of the Sicilian granita

Peppe: 'In Sicily, the trade of *nivaroli* has been around since the Middle Ages. These men collected snow on the flanks of Etna, Peloritani, Iblei and Nebrodi. They stored the snow for the remainder of the year in *neviere*. These subterranean pits in mountains and gorges protected the white gold from the summer heat. In the summer, the *nivaroli*, or ice carriers, transported the stored snow to the coast, and that's how the sorbet originated. In the 16th century, sea salt was mixed into the snow to keep it cold. You will still find the pits in the mountains where snow and ice were once stored. They were ingenious constructions. The pit was filled with a mixture of salt and snow and sealed with a burlap bag. The churning motion of the paddles within prevented large ice crystals from forming. The *nivaroli* hauled the snow out of the pit with zinc buckets. The snow was then grated and used to prepare popular sorbets. People would add lemon juice to the grated snow for the flavour. From the 19th century onwards, different types of refreshing Etna ice started to appear. Sicilian almonds proved to be an excellent accompaniment. The *rattata* – grating – technique was popular until the beginning of the last century.

## Magic and craftsmanship

According to Peppe, the recipe for granita hasn't changed much over the years. 'The snow has been replaced by water, the honey is now sugar, and the storage pit is now an ice machine,' he explains. 'You will find the best granita on the shores from Messina to



Strawberry granita

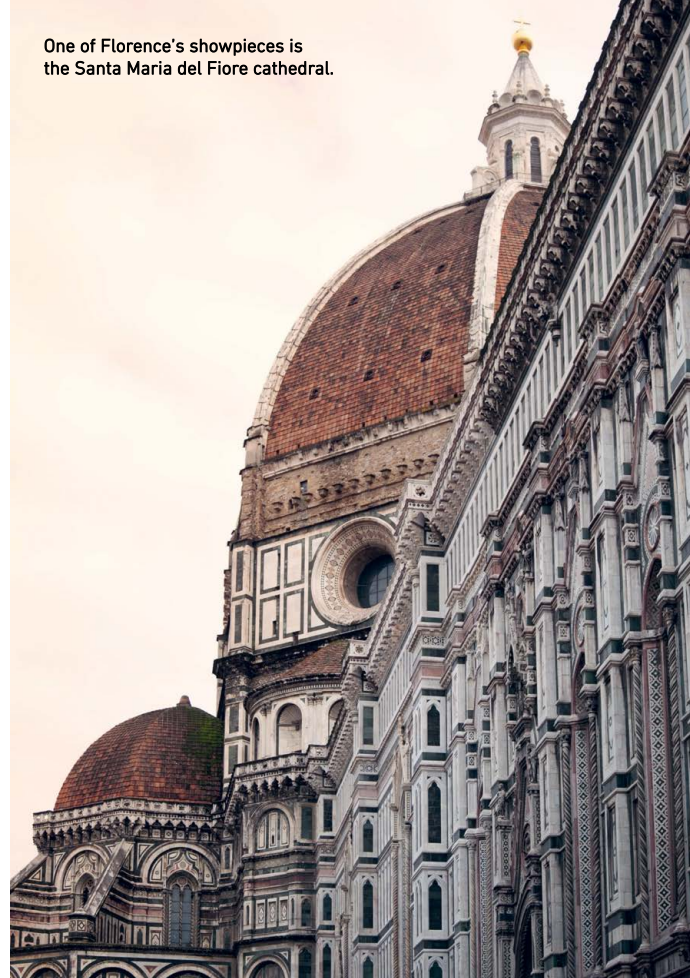
Catania; nothing can beat that. You need to experience the granita ritual here. The colours of the Tyrrhenian Sea blend with the hues in the sky. This celebration of colours, delicious smells and the local ingredients and masterful flavours make a real granita a joy to the senses.

In Acireale, I try a strawberry granita at Nunzio Napoli's Très Noir. Nunzio: 'Granita indeed requires craftsmanship, but also a respect for tradition and the patience to develop the right consistency without using preservatives, colouring agents or other additives. We offer the classic flavours of pistachio, lemon, coffee, almond, and chocolate year-round. In the summer, you will also find mulberry, strawberry and roasted almonds on the menu. A little further down the road at Loredana Aloisi's ice cream parlour, Rococo, I try a granita with almonds and chocolate. Loredana explains that they first prepare a paste from the raw ingredient (almonds, for example) and then add the ice. You do not make granita with milk or cream. But you can top your granita with whipped cream.

**Très Noir**  
**Piazza Inirizzo 12,13,14, Acireale**

**Rococo**  
**Corso Umberto, 109-111, Acireale**

One of Florence's showpieces is the Santa Maria del Fiore cathedral.



## Artusi

Pellegrino Artusi is no longer around to emphasise the influential role of Tuscany in Italian cuisine, but he did in the past. This literary critic, writer and gastronomic connoisseur lived in Florence from 1861 onwards. In 1891, he wrote the first edition of *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well* (*La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene*). His recipes form the basis for contemporary Italian cuisine. Artusi is instrumental in the development and dissemination of Italian gastronomy.

Salsa verde is a traditional dish linked to an important piece of Florence's gastronomic heritage, the *lampredotto*. Artusi's historic cookbook includes the recipe below:

### ARTUSI'S RECIPE

## Salsa verde

### SERVES 4 PEOPLE

120 g mild olive oil

10 g capers

1 anchovy

1 clove garlic

10 g fresh parsley

10 g fresh basil leaves

10 g fresh mint

juice of ½ lemon

salt and pepper to taste

Blend all the ingredients together to form a smooth paste.



## FIRENZE 1

I park my car near Florence's central train station and travel to San Lorenzo, the 'Medici District,' on foot. This is where streetside vendors sell their wares. The stalls on the Piazza San Lorenzo open at the crack of dawn, and the streets instantly come alive. It's a maze riddled with history, art and *trippa*.

The Mercato Centrale forms the district's heart. The architect Mengoni constructed this market building in the 19th century. He was inspired by *Les Halles* in Paris, a revolutionary building at the time, also made from iron and glass. Mengoni wanted the ironwork to contrast with the city's old stone palaces and arches. The market opened in 1874 and soon became a popular attraction. Today, the regional farmers' stalls filled with high-quality Florentine products still draw people in droves. This indoor market is a must for lovers of delicious, authentic Tuscan cuisine. And the *trippa* and *lampredotto* are an essential part of that cuisine...





## QUINTO QUARTO, THE FIFTH QUARTER

Enrico, proprietor of the La Toraia, a Chianina hamburger stand, bears witness to the market's success: 'Every day, we welcome about 1000 people in the Mercato Centrale.' On the first floor, some twenty-odd small bars serve street food dishes. On the ground floor, you will find mostly meat, fish, vegetables, fresh pasta, wines, dry foods, and a couple of *trippai*. They sell raw and prepared products from what they call the *quinto quarto*; the fifth quarter of the animal, as it were. Italians refer to the innards, heads, hooves, and tails of animals as *quinto*. The meat here is usually cut up into four quarters, and 'the fifth quarter' is the proverbial cherry on the cake.

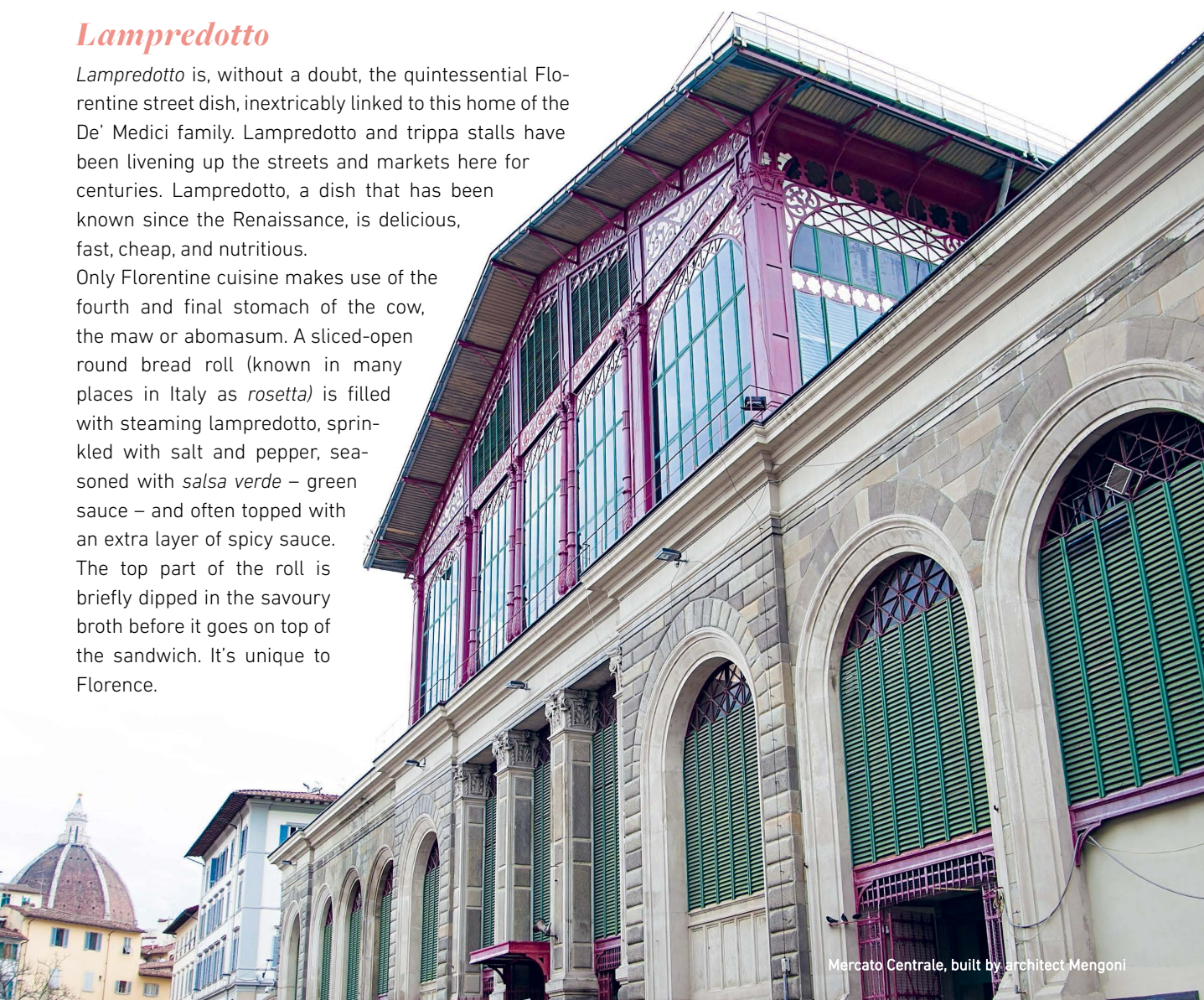
**Mercato Centrale, Piazza del Mercato Centrale,  
Via dell'Ariento, Florence**

### Lampredotto

*Lampredotto* is, without a doubt, the quintessential Florentine street dish, inextricably linked to this home of the De' Medici family. *Lampredotto* and *trippa* stalls have been livening up the streets and markets here for centuries. *Lampredotto*, a dish that has been known since the Renaissance, is delicious, fast, cheap, and nutritious. Only Florentine cuisine makes use of the fourth and final stomach of the cow, the maw or abomasum. A sliced-open round bread roll (known in many places in Italy as *rosetta*) is filled with steaming *lampredotto*, sprinkled with salt and pepper, seasoned with *salsa verde* – green sauce – and often topped with an extra layer of spicy sauce. The top part of the roll is briefly dipped in the savoury broth before it goes on top of the sandwich. It's unique to Florence.

### MARKET STALL Bambi

Right next to the Mercato Centrale entrance is the market stall owned by the Bambi Trippa & Lampredotto family business. They have been here since 1890. I travel back in time to the days of *cucina povera*, or 'poor people's' cuisine. The *lampredotto* and *trippa* are favourites. Giacomo Trapani carries on the family tradition established by his grandmother Grazia Bambi. He developed a love for the traditional Florentine cuisine at his *nonna's* knee. Giacomo belongs to an entire generation of *trippai*, *trippa* makers. He brings the dishes from Florence's collective memory to life every day. *Bambi* is his grandmother's surname. She was cooking *al trippa*, bovine stomachs, for people as far back as the end of the 19th century.





# PIEMONTE



Piedmont, situated 'at the foot of the mountains', is a paradise for epicureans. The snow-capped peaks of the Alps form a spectacular setting. Piedmont lies nestled between Switzerland, Valle d'Aosta, France, Liguria, Lombardy, and Emilia-Romagna. It has been the gate to Europe since Roman times. The region fell under the rule of the House of Savoy (Italian: Casa Savoia) after Lombard and French rule. The Savoy nobles followed in the marquis of Ivrea and Turin's footsteps and reigned over the Alps, the French Savoy region, and Sardinia. Grand baroque palaces and fortresses remind us of their glory days. Piedmont led attempts to unify Italy. Victor Emmanuel II, King of Piedmont and Sardinia, assumed the Italian throne in 1861. The Alps, the hills, and the plains are Piedmont's strengths. Both industry and gastronomy found fertile soil here.

However, in this chapter, you will look for wine, *spumante*, truffles, rice, cheese, nuts or chocolate in vain. Other authors have already written extensively about these divine fruits of Piedmont's soil. I discovered a relatively unknown piece of Piedmontese culinary heritage with inspiring dishes from the tradition of 'cucina povera' – peasant cuisine. They thrive in the shadows of the gastronomic greats. Currently, this rich heritage is experiencing a revival thanks to initiatives by the Piedmontese and their organisations.



Turin, Piedmont's unconventional capital





## Cicchètti as art

I step inside the bar and am immediately impressed by the display of exquisite *cicchètti*. Each and every one of them is a tiny work of art. Countless bottles of wine await thirsty customers on shelves lining the wall. But the display counter, with Alessandra standing behind it, is the central showpiece. Alessandra beams with pride as I stare in wonder at the display. But what are all those ingredients so artfully displayed on the baguette slices? Alessandra sums up: 'Shrimp and sweet and sour cabbage, gorgonzola and walnuts, ricotta and caviar, truffle eggs and mushrooms, cream cheese and pesto, pumpkin cream and Parmesan cheese, *primo sale* cheese and radicchio, brie and nettle sauce...'

## Mio giardino segreto – my secret garden

What a rich and gastronomic selection of mini dishes! I try several of them and realise it's hard to pick a favourite. The mini slices of bread are crispy yet soft, savoury yet sweet, earthy yet briny. And every single one of them is perfectly balanced. A seamless combination of modern and classic. I award Alessandra three stars in my non-existent Michelin guide for *cicchètti*. 'I'm constantly thinking up new creations such as this



A *cicchètto* with gorgonzola and walnuts

*cicchètto* di castagna with chestnut puree and creamy robiola cheese,' Alessandra confirms.

I tell her how much I enjoyed the *cicchètto* with tuna tartare and the one with the egg and the flowers. The rose, daisy, violet, lemon verbena and marigold all come from her personal garden. 'Mio giardino segreto. I have a private garden in Venice where I go to relax and unwind,' she explains.

The tuna tartare is a story in its own right: 'My customers will rebel if I stop serving the tuna tartare. It's a combination of tuna, capers, egg yolk, parsley and mayonnaise, dusted with unsweetened cocoa powder. With this combination, I won second prize in a culinary competition in Mexico City,' she declares proudly.

## Cicchèttario

In 2020, Alessandra introduced a 'Cicchèttario' in memory of her husband. This cookbook contains the most fantastic *cicchètti* recipes. Each recipe comes with a wine suggestion recommended by her son, oenologist Piero. 'This book is the product of my brave, dedicated mother's creativity and innovative drive. This is the story of her life, her family and this place,' Piero adds.

Alessandra points out that she puts a lot of love and passion into these refined recipes. Alessandra: 'The bread is just as important. We use freshly baked baguettes. The bread must be fresh and crispy and sliced into slices measuring about a centimetre and a half thick.

## Wine by the glass

Every day, Già Schiavi serves about 25 different wines, mostly from Veneto, which you can order by the glass. Piero: 'You eat, drink and pay at the counter.' This is an important detail because this is not a restaurant. He continues with a slogan from the book: '*Un cicchètto non ha senso senza un'ombra e un'ombra non ha senso senza un cicchètto!*' In other words, you always drink a glass of wine with a *cicchètto*, and you always have a *cicchètto* with a glass of wine!

**Cantine del Vino già Schiavi**  
**Dorsoduro 992, Fondamenta Nani, Venice**





**CICCHETTO RECIPES  
FROM ALESSANDRA'S BOOK**

## ***Cream of asparagus with courgette and sundried tomatoes***

**WINE TIP: VESPAIOLLO**

Put about twenty green asparagus tips (pre-cooked for 10 minutes in salted water) in a blender together with a spoonful of extra-virgin olive oil, salt and pepper. Blend to a smooth paste. Slice one courgette lengthways into thin slices, salt them and let them rest for 15 minutes. Then, grill the courgettes for a couple of minutes.

Spread the asparagus cream on a baguette slice measuring 1 1/2 cm thick, place a grilled courgette slice on top and garnish with a piece of sundried tomato.

## ***Melon mousse with ham and pistachio***

**WINE TIP: GRILLO**

Blend a quarter of honeydew melon and combine with 125 g ricotta. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Blend to a smooth cream. Place a slice of *prosciutto crudo* (Parma ham, San Daniele ham or another Italian cured ham of your choice) on a baguette slice measuring 1 1/2 cm thick. Spread the melon cream over the top and garnish with chopped pistachios.

## ***Cauliflower florets in a spicy sauce***

**WINE TIP: SAUVIGNON**

Blend a grilled sweet pepper with a clove of garlic, extra-virgin olive oil, pepper, salt and spicy spices such as *peperoncino* or cayenne pepper. Blend to a cream. Spread a layer of this spicy pepper cream on a 1 1/2 cm-thick baguette slice, top with raw cauliflower florets and finish with a couple of dollops of extra pepper cream. Garnish with a lettuce leaf.

## ***Tuna tartare with cocoa powder***

**WINE TIP: PROSECCO BRUT**

Take two cooked egg yolks, 100 g tuna in oil, half a spoonful of capers, a pinch of parsley and two spoonfuls of mayonnaise. Combine everything into a homogenous whole. Place a lettuce leaf on a baguette slice measuring 1 1/2 cm thick, spread the tuna tartare over the top and lightly dust cocoa powder over the tartare.

## ***Brie with a nettle cream***

**WINE TIP: VERDISO**

Braise 250 g nettle leaves and blend with 50 g grated Parmesan cheese, 50 g pine nuts, salt and a spoonful of extra-virgin olive oil. Top a baguette slice 1 1/2 cm thick with a slice of brie covered with the nettle cream, followed by another slice of brie and another layer of nettle cream. And the cicchetti is ready!



The city of Bologna





# BOLOGNA 3

I leave Ferrara and travel to Bologna, 50 kilometres further southwest. Il Chiosco is located in Villanova di Castenaso, seven kilometres from Bologna. I want to learn more about the *crescentina di Bologna*. Dania Morelli once started a piadina stall here; today, it's a lunch & dine situated in the middle of a quiet park. Here, you will find snacks such as piadine, crescentine and *tigelle* with the finest quality cured meats along with different types of cheese and vegetables.

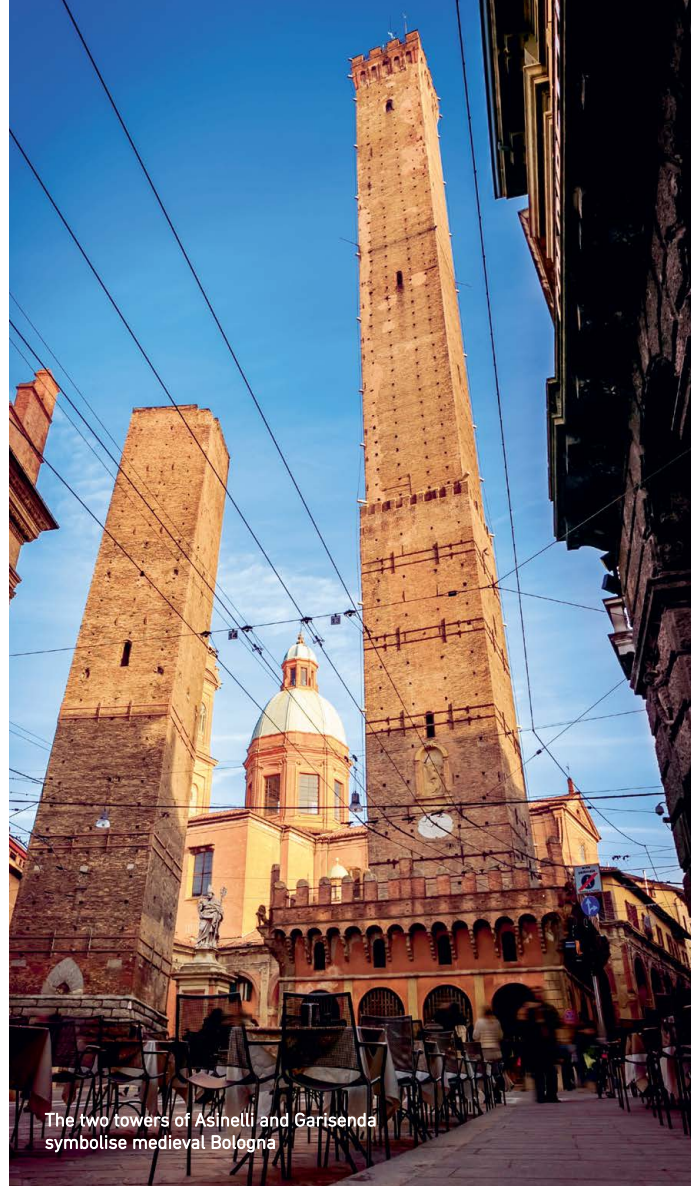
## Crescentina

'Crescentina is a puffed bread made from flour, lard, salt, milk and a leavening agent. The dough differs from piadina because it needs to rise,' Diana explains. 'When you bake the dough in oil, it puffs up; the dough is much lighter than what you would use for piadina. People used to bake the crescentine in a round, copper cooking pot suspended from the fireplace with chains. The pot would tilt, and the leftover liquid lard was collected in a smaller pan for the next dish. Nothing went to waste!'

Dania treats me to a crescentina. I take a seat at a table outside with a view of the park. I enjoy the sunshine and savour the refreshing Lambrusco wine. This crescentina tastes very light, and the cooked ham in the filling goes extremely well with the fried onion and soft cheese. I can hear myself think: this is close to paradise on earth. I have a *tigella* with Nutella for dessert. Because the proof of the pudding is always in the eating!



A typical puffed-up crescentina



The two towers of Asinelli and Garisenda symbolise medieval Bologna



## LA GRASSA AND LA ROSSA

From Villanova di Castenaso, I drive on to Bologna's historical centre. The city is a surprising contrast between contemporary elegance and medieval grandeur. I discover a hard-working, high-tech city on the ultra-rich Po Plain with grand theatres and some of the best restaurants in the country. Here, politics is the talk of the town, and the graffiti-clad squares are works of street art.

Bologna has a whole range of historical nicknames. La Grassa, or 'the fat one', refers to its rich culinary tradition. This is where *ragù* or bolognese sauce was born. La Rossa, 'the red one', is reminiscent of the medieval terra cotta buildings with their long galleries and their love for left-wing politics.

## ABOUT ANNET

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I got married in a small, picturesque village in *bella Italia* and temporarily moved to Tuscany for my work with the Thomas More College as a guide for exchange students from the Journalism department. And so, in 2006, I became an honorary citizen of Sinalunga. My children, Ramona, Vittorio, and Lorena went to school with the 'suore', the sisters. I made a lot of friends in Tuscany. The 'amici della chianina' (Society of Friends of the Chianina cattle breed), my neighbour, who was an olive grower, and a few local chefs drew me into their culture and fascinating stories. After Thomas More, I took a post as a researcher at the Vrije Universiteit Brussels' SMIT (Studies in Media, Innovation and Technology) department. My curious nature drove me to keep searching for new challenges. I moved to Antwerp, where I dedicated my heart and soul to running Sette Piatti, an Italian catering and delicatessen shop that caters to Italophiles everywhere. All these experiences have come together in this book. Which goes to show, destiny always finds its way!

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