

THE
SICILY
COOKBOOK

Authentic Recipes from
a Mediterranean Island

CETTINA VICENZINO





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INTRODUCTION

Our island has three corners. It has three oceans—the Tyrrhenian, Ionian, and Mediterranean—and a coat of arms with three legs (the Trinacria; see below). We have three tribes of ancestors (the Sicani, Elymians, and Sicels) and three mountain ranges (Monti Peloritani, Nebrodi, and Madonie) that are a continuation of the Apennines. The Italian mainland is just 2 miles (3 km) away, across the narrowest point of the strait of Messina. Our volcano is roughly 11,000 ft (3,330 m) high and our cuisine has three main influences: *cucina povera*, *cibo di strada*, and *cucina dei Monsù* (more on those later). Our *fava larga*, the longest beans in Italy, are traditionally harvested with a three-tined fork. And there are three products that no Sicilian cook can do without: olive oil, salt, and wheat. My mother, who embodies Sicily for me, was born on the third. All good things about our island come in threes. Between black and white, there is a third realm of amazing and magical color—and that’s where you’ll find Sicily.



Just a decade ago, it wasn't easy to publish a cookbook about Sicily. Back then, Italy was widely regarded overseas as consisting primarily of Tuscany plus a few of the larger, more glamorous cities, such as Venice, Milan, and Rome. When I presented my Sicilian cookbook to publishers, the consensus was that I should simply make it about Italian food. Nobody would be interested in Sicily, I was told, and it didn't really matter whether the recipes were Italian or Sicilian. I was not to be persuaded and wrote and published my first book on Sicily regardless. Italy and Sicily are worlds apart, separated by almost 4,000 years of history. One of my favorite Sicilian chefs loves to tell his Italian colleagues that the islanders were already drinking from glasses, eating from plates, and going to the theater while the Italians were still clambering about in the trees. Unsurprisingly, the Italians themselves tell exactly the same story, but with the roles reversed

What is indisputable is that Sicily has always been a trading center and a melting pot for lots of different cultures, thanks largely to its strategic position in the Mediterranean. Sicily gathered new foods, knowledge, and architecture from visitors and invaders alike—and, inevitably, suffered a certain amount of destruction, too. The island has undergone relentless transformations and, from the ruin caused by each new regime, something new emerged. In this way, one of the most diverse cultural environments in Europe developed.

This process continued unabated until the 19th century, then stopped at a time more or less coinciding with the unification of Italy. From then on, a weakened Sicily was afflicted by a serious disease: the Mafia. But this should not be confused with Sicilian culture. "Our identity is not the Mafia. The Mafia has just perverted it," says Leoluca Orlando, the mayor of Palermo, the island's capital city.

A lot has changed in the decade since I published my first Sicilian cookbook, and not just in the recipe book business—in which Sicilian food and culture is now considered a worthy subject for close study—but on the island itself.





Much of this can be credited to the mayor of Palermo, who has successfully persuaded islanders that they can reclaim their country through a renewed appreciation of its true culture. People are increasingly rediscovering their roots, thereby liberating themselves from the Hollywood folklore that is obsessed with the Mafia and threatens to infect the world's view of the island.

A true scholar of Sicily knows that the island's culture—the history of its chefs, food producers, culinary innovators, and restaurant owners—goes back much further than the 160 years that has captivated Hollywood. Now that their history and true origins are being properly researched, we often find links back to the Sicani, the Elymians, and the Sicels, the original inhabitants of Sicily who lived here even before the first Greek colonization in the 8th century BCE. The Sicani, who are thought to be Iberian in origin, inhabited central Sicily. The Elymians lived in the western region and are believed to have come from Troy, which is probably in present-day Turkey. The east of the island was settled by the Sicels, who historians think migrated from the Italian mainland, and after whom Sicily was ultimately named. (I deliberately describe this migrant status as hypothetical, because the Sicani refer to themselves in ancient texts as an indigenous people.)

In the meantime, there are certainly plenty of native foods that are being rediscovered and cherished once more in Sicily. Ancient strains of grain are being used again to make pasta, bread, and traditionally brewed beers. Sicilian pulses that were dying out have been resurrected and grown on a large scale once more, and there is a push to protect the island's sesame from commercial genetic modification. Indigenous vines are being revived, rare ancient breeds of livestock are being farmed, and forgotten varieties of cheese—such as Tuma Persa, made by Salvatore Passalacqua from Castronovo di Sicilia—are enjoying a resurgence. Not to mention the renewed appreciation of *manna*, the medicinal white juice of the ash tree, which is being extracted and used as a sweetener in Sicilian *pasticceria*.

Idealists and artisans are driving this new Sicilian love of its original culture, and ever-increasing numbers of the island's inhabitants are joining them. There is street art all over the place, with murals and installations springing up everywhere. But this reacquaintance with the past does not reveal a desire to escape the vicissitudes of the present day, or of the future. On the contrary, modern Sicilians have a clear vision for themselves and their future, as articulated so beautifully by the Amore family (see p. 130).



The recipes in this book are a blend of the three ancient Sicilian cuisines: *cucina dei Monsù*, *cibo di strada*, and *cucina povera*. (For more details, see p.86, p.112, and p.130.) Sicilian cooking also combines the best aspects of Italian and North African cuisines and takes advantage of other food influences from its many conquerors. This book contains reworkings of typical Sicilian dishes, as well as traditional recipes, such as the renowned *pasta alla Norma*, which is sadly seldom made authentically despite its global popularity (see p.23).

Italian cookbooks usually begin with antipasti. But Sicilian cuisine doesn't really include this course. Everything that is served as antipasto in Sicily today was originally a side dish or—during the harsher times of the island's history—the only food served. That is why the largest chapter is *Piatto unico* (see pp.84–139). Anything that could be a side dish or a snack, and thus is also suitable as an antipasto, can be found in the *Intermezzi* chapter (see pp.140–177). Many of the products mentioned in the book are now available in supermarkets, such as Sicilian

pecorino, *scamorza affumicata*, Sicilian artichokes, and whole rabbits. Others, such as wild fennel, require a bit of luck to track down, but at least this ingredient can be replaced by a combination of fresh dill and soaked fennel seeds. But that's fine, because a cookbook is not supposed to be a substitute for a country and its flavors. What it can do is evoke a cooking culture and stimulate a curiosity to learn more about it. And that is my aim.

So if you are looking for a Sicilian cookbook that only contains lots of recipes, this isn't the book for you. However, if you want to find out more about Sicilian culture and are curious about the people who live there, then this is the perfect choice.

I hope you really enjoy reading my book, which has become as much a part of me as Sicily.

Yours,

Cettina Vicenzino

SICILY: A CULTURAL GUIDE

Sicily is the largest island in the Mediterranean. It covers an area of 9,974 sq miles (25,832 sq km), making it almost as big as Belgium. More than 5 million people live in Sicily. The capital, Palermo, has more than 1.25 million inhabitants, while the second-largest city, Catania, is home to more than 1.1 million people.

Constant invasions: the rulers of Sicily

During ancient times, the sophisticated Sicani, Elymian, and Sicel tribes lived peacefully in different parts of the island. The first trading posts were established by the Phoenicians in the west of the island. In the 8th century BCE, the first Greek colony was established and, while the Greeks enriched the island with a new culture and economy, they also sought to oust the indigenous people.

In 210 BCE, the Romans arrived, making Sicily the breadbasket of Rome—and destroying almost all of its forests in the process. In the 5th century CE, the Vandals and Ostrogoths plundered the island; then, from 535, Sicily became part of Byzantium for 300 years.

The Arabs conquered Sicily in 827, rebuilt it, and let it flourish. Their tolerance toward all the other religions on the island made them popular with the people.

In 1061, the Normans conquered Sicily and, in 1194, they were followed by the Hohenstaufen dynasty, originally from Germany. The French Anjou kings and the Spanish House of Aragon that followed them were oppressive regimes that neglected the island.

A devastating volcanic eruption occurred at Mount Etna in 1669, and an equally destructive earthquake brought further anguish in 1693. (Many areas that were destroyed in the southeast region of the island were rebuilt in Sicilian Baroque style and were declared a world heritage site by UNESCO in 2002.)

From 1713 to 1720, the island was ruled by the dukes of Savoy and Piedmont; from 1720 to 1735, the Austrian Habsburgs took over; and from 1735 to 1860, it was under the control of the Spanish Bourbons. These three were not popular with the people of the island. In 1816, Sicily was united with Naples to form the Kingdom of Sicily. Unification with Italy came in 1861 and, sadly, Sicily was once again allowed to fall into a state of neglect. Up until the 20th century, there was a massive wave of emigration.

In 1946, Sicily became an autonomous region with its own parliament. In 1986, the largest trial against organized crime took place and, in 2018, Italy chose Palermo as the country's Capital of Culture.

Sicilian generosity

Despite their long history of exploitation, most Sicilians are exceptionally generous and will give even when they have nothing. If you visit Sicily, please don't take advantage of this trait; all too often over the course of history, strangers have taken from the islanders without giving back. Even if someone absolutely refuses to accept money, Sicilians will still find a charming way of paying recompense, returning a favor in some other manner. Try to do the same.

Getting around

Being carless, I tested out buses, ferries, and trains all over the island. Even without a car, as a woman traveling alone, there is lots of great public transportation, as well as private bus companies, that are affordable and punctual.





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WELCOME
TO ISLAND

SIMPLI





Primi



LA MELANZANA

If you ask a Sicilian for their favorite dishes containing eggplants, you'll be there for some time listening to the reply. Eggplants feature in many of the island's most famous recipes, from *caponata di melanzane* (the sweet-and-sour salad) to succulent stuffed *melanzane ripiene*. Perhaps you'll prefer luscious *melanzane alla parmigiana* layered with melting cheese or a comforting *pasta alla Norma*. From including in casseroles to being pickled under oil, the eggplant is king in Sicily.

A Sicilian kitchen without an eggplant is unthinkable. You might almost believe the vegetable was a native of Sicily, given how often it is used in the island's recipes.

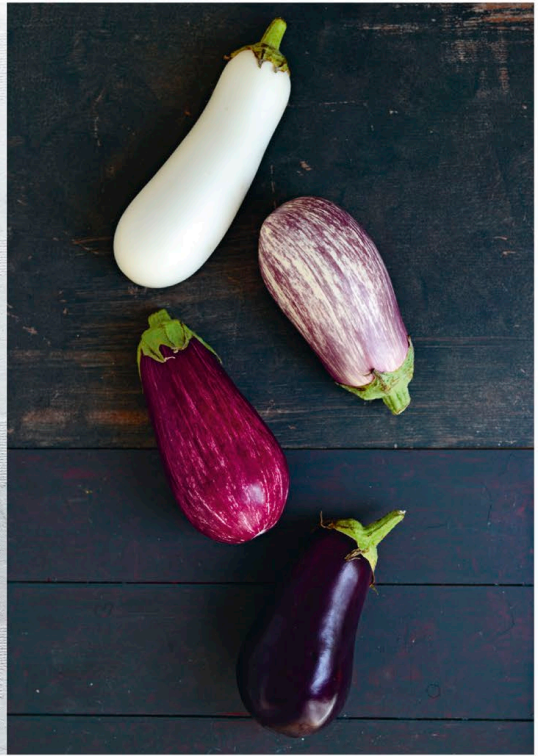
The most widespread technique for preparing eggplants around the world is probably as stuffed eggplant halves, or perhaps served as a smoky puréed eggplant dip (*baba ganoush*). You might find it sliced, griddled, and served in a salad. But that's about it. The Sicilians, meanwhile, have more than 80 recipes for this vegetable.

The eggplant is a master of versatility, with a fabulous savory yet sweet flavor. It can be used as a soft purée or as a firm meat substitute cooked in the same way as a pork chop (*alla cotoletta*). Contemporary Sicilian cooks experiment with it in all sorts of ways. Alongside risotto balls *arancini alla Norma* (inspired by the famous *pasta alla Norma*), you will also find more idiosyncratic creations, especially among the island's restaurant menus. In his restaurant La Madia in Licata, for instance, the two-Michelin-starred chef Pino Cuttaia creates tubes made from perlina eggplants (see p.21) that are wrapped in crispy pasta and filled with cherry tomatoes and Ragusano cheese. Head chef Roberto Toro from the Belmond Grand Hotel Timeo in Taormina offers an interesting gnocchi made from eggplants rather than the traditional potatoes, served in a tomato sauce.



And yet the eggplant doesn't even come from Sicily, originating instead in southeast Asia, India, and China. It was the Arabs who introduced it to Europe and, in the late 14th century, it caught the attention of the Sicilians for the first time. The eggplant was grown around the island and referred to by one of Sicily's Carmelite orders of monks in their medicinal botanical survey.

However, the eggplant was initially a failure on the island due to the fact that the people were prone to dying after eating it raw! That is how it acquired its vernacular name *mela non sana*, or "unhealthy apple," which over the years has become *melanzana*. Along with other members of the nightshade family, such as potatoes, eggplant contains the toxin solanine, which is why it must not be eaten raw.





What has changed over time is the vegetable's bitterness, which is barely, if at all, perceptible in newer varieties. In old cookbooks, readers were always instructed to sprinkle eggplants with salt before cooking to extract their bitter juices by osmosis. Nowadays, this process is only necessary if you want to keep the vegetable from soaking up too much oil when you fry it. (Otherwise, eggplants are notorious for soaking up oil like sponges.) However, through osmosis, eggplants not only lose water, but also some minerals. There are varieties that naturally absorb less oil and so are better for any dishes that require the eggplant to be fried. For these recipes, look around for the *nera di Palermo* or the *sciacchitana* (see right), both older varieties.

There is an eggplant best suited to every recipe. The different varieties can be categorized into three basic shapes: round, oval, and cylindrical. Because eggplants turn brown when ripe—and the flesh inside becomes fibrous, too—you might be surprised to learn that they are harvested and eaten while still unripe.

Here is a summary of the types available in Sicily, the first five of which are traditional Sicilian varieties:

-01- Melanzana ovale nera

Very versatile. Try it cubed in sauces or baked dishes, fried, stuffed, for *involtini*, or preserved in oil.

-02- Melanzana nera di Palermo

This absorbs little oil, so it is ideal for frying, and is firm with few seeds. Good in *parmigiana*, stuffed, or cubed.

-03- Melanzana Baffa "Black Beauty"

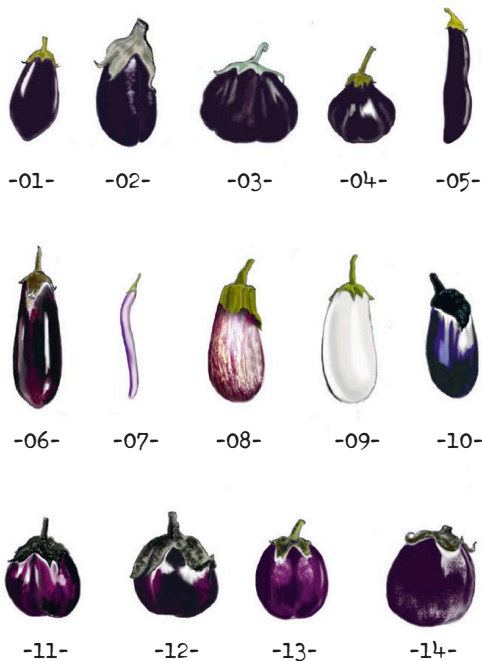
An eggplant with few seeds and firm flesh, it is best for frying or baking, roasting, or preserving in oil.

-04- Melanzana sciacchitana nera

Widely available, this absorbs little oil, so it is ideal for sautéing, deep-frying, or use in stuffed eggplant recipes.

-05- Melanzana nera mezza lunga

Excellent for frying, to be preserved in oil, for *involtini*, or cubed in eggplant sauces.



-06- Melanzana violetta seta

Delicate and very sweet. Best for frying, *parmigiana*, *pasta alla Norma*, baked dishes, or preserving in oil.

-07- Melanzana mini perlina

This widely available variety is compact, with flesh that contains little water, so it does not absorb much oil. It is excellent cooked whole or fried in cubes and for baked dishes, *involtini*, or *caponata*.

-08- Melanzana zebrina viola

A fine flavor and very sweet, with striped skin. For *parmigiana*, *caponata*, or baked dishes, stuffed or fried.

-09- Melanzana bianca

With few seeds and an edible white skin, this is good for frying, baking, and for typical recipes such as *parmigiana*, *caponata*, *involtini*, and stuffed dishes.

-10- Melanzana violetta Messinese

A widely available variety, delicate and very sweet. Excellent for frying and for *pasta alla Norma* and *parmigiana*.

-11- Melanzana tonda violetta prosperosa

A subtle and rounded flavor for baked dishes or frying.

-12- Melanzana violetta Palermitana

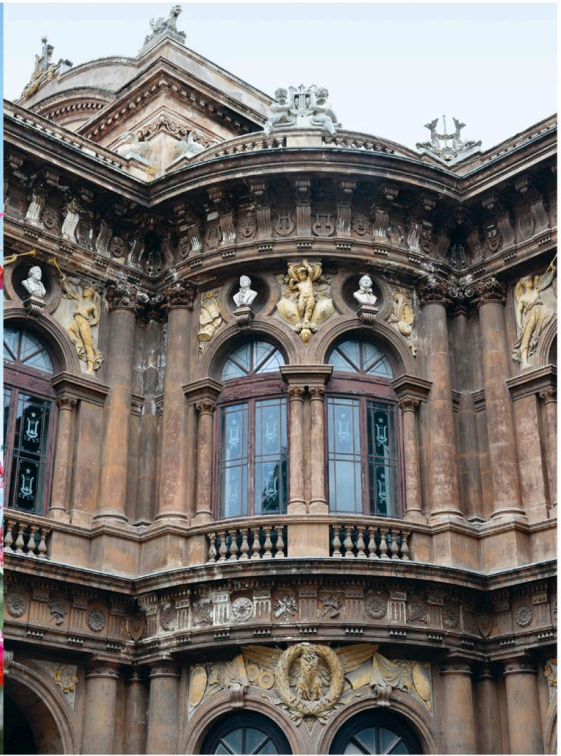
Like its cousins above, delicate and sweet. Suitable for frying and roasting and excellent for *parmigiana*, *pasta alla Norma*, or preserving in oil.

-13- Melanzana violetta zuccherina

A fine flavor and, as the name suggests, full of natural sugars. Try it chopped into eggplant sauces, in succulent baked dishes, fried, stuffed, or in the classics *involtini* and *parmigiana*.

-14- Melanzana tonda violetta bella Vittoria

Last but not least, this eggplant is delicate and very sweet. Good cubed for pasta sauce, baked, fried, roasted, or stuffed and for *involtini* or *parmigiana*.



PASTA ALLA NORMA

If there is a pasta dish that best represents Sicily, it is surely *pasta alla Norma* (see pp.24–25). This vegetarian summer recipe, originally from Catania, owes its appeal to just a few ingredients, which have to be of the finest quality. Most importantly, the way in which it is assembled is vital to its success.

The comparison of an eggplant pasta dish with Bellini's opera *Norma* was supposedly first made by Nino Martoglio, a poet, playwright, and gourmet from Catania, the home of the recipe. He is said to have exclaimed, "*Chista è 'na vera Norma!*" ("That is a real *Norma*!") after eating his first forkful.

If you have eaten *pasta alla Norma* outside Italy, you may well wonder what a rather ordinary dish made with short macaroni and bite-sized pieces of eggplant—chopped as though the cook was in a hurry—has to do with such an esteemed opera. The answer is nothing, because a dish made with macaroni and chopped eggplant is no *Norma*, but simply the household staple *pasta con le melanzane*. Though even in that humble dish, the eggplant shouldn't be chopped. And, if we are being especially strict, macaroni with chopped eggplant should always be made with homemade macaroni.

You may have come across a more elaborate dish made with homemade cavatelli pasta, mozzarella, tomatoes, eggplants, *caciocavallo* or *ricotta salata* cheese, and basil. However, this is no *Norma* either, but a *cavatelli al cartoccio* from the region around Agrigento.

A genuine *Norma* must be composed like an opera in three acts. What is lacking from the widely available fast-food version with its macaroni and chopped eggplant is this process of arrangement—the careful assembly and compilation. And this can only be achieved if you serve it on not one plate, but three.

An authentic *Norma* has one plate with spaghetti, tomato sauce, and eggplant strips torn by hand. A second plate holds fried slices of eggplant. The last plate contains grated *ricotta salata* (salted ricotta).

Each person grabs one of the plates from the table before passing it on. You take sliced eggplant, place as many pieces as you want on your pasta, then sprinkle with ricotta cheese. Because short pasta pieces don't go well with large disks of eggplant or even eggplant strips, it is essential to use spaghetti. (This is also far more elegant and befitting a dish named after an opera, as you can twirl them around your fork rather than having to stab them as you do with macaroni.) It is a mystery to me why the inauthentic version with its macaroni and chopped pieces of eggplant has become so widespread around the world.

Luckily, I have never yet been served *pasta alla Norma* with macaroni and chopped eggplant in the province of Catania. Which is not to say that this inferior version cannot be found in Catania, too. More's the pity



Casta Diva
Norma
Vincenzo Bellini 1801-1835

Andante

3 2 4 2 1 3 2 4 2 3

Serves 4
Prep 50 mins

Pasta with tomato, eggplants, and ricotta salata

Pasta alla Norma e ricotta salata

1 lb 9 oz (700 g) eggplants,
ideally *nera di Palermo*
(see p.20), though regular
eggplants are fine
coarse sea salt
2¹/₄ lb (1 kg) sweet, ripe
cherry tomatoes
extra-virgin olive oil
(I use Tonda Iblea)
2 garlic cloves, ideally pink
garlic, finely sliced
sea salt
2 handfuls of basil leaves,
half roughly shredded
chili flakes
11 oz (320 g) uncooked
spaghetti
2³/₄ oz (80 g) *ricotta salata*
cheese, or pecorino cheese,
finely grated

Remove the stems from the eggplants, cut them lengthwise into ¼-in (5–7-mm) thick slices, sprinkle on both sides with coarse sea salt, and place in a strainer over the kitchen sink. Set aside for 30 minutes to draw out the water.

Meanwhile, remove and discard the stalks from the tomatoes and place in a large bowl. Pour over boiling water to just cover and leave for 30 seconds, then drain. The skins should slip off. Remove the skins and finely chop the flesh.

Brush the salt off the eggplant slices and pat them dry, pressing firmly. Heat 5–6 tbsp olive oil in a large, deep saucepan and cook the garlic until it gets a bit of color, but don't let it burn. Stir in the tomatoes, add some sea salt, stir in the shredded basil, and season with chili flakes. Let simmer gently until the sauce has thickened slightly.

Heat about ½ in (1 cm) of olive oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Fry the eggplant slices—in batches so as not to crowd the pan—in the hot oil until golden. Drain on paper towel. Tear 4 slices into strips by hand and set everything aside to keep warm.

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the spaghetti until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package). Drain the pasta, return it to the pan, and mix well with the tomato sauce and the torn strips of eggplant.

Arrange the pasta on a serving plate and scatter with the remaining basil leaves. Put the sautéed whole eggplant slices on a second serving plate and the grated cheese on a third, then serve.

Drawing out the water:

Today's eggplant varieties don't usually need to have their juices extracted to remove bitterness (see p.20). The reason we do it here is to avoid the slices soaking up too much oil. If you would prefer to skip this step, you need to use more oil when frying, but this can mostly be removed by laying the slices on paper towel. In any case, to prepare a genuine *Norma*, you should be generous with the olive oil.

Makes 4
Prep 1 hr 20 mins

Pasta towers with meat sauce and eggplants

Sformatini di anelletti

For the meat sauce

1 long, narrow eggplant,
ideally *mezza lunga* (see
p.20), though regular
eggplants are fine
coarse sea salt
extra-virgin olive oil
(I use Tonda Iblea)
4¹/₂ oz (130 g) Sicilian
sausages, or coarsely
minced pork
1 garlic clove, ideally pink
garlic, finely chopped
3/4 oz (20 g) pancetta, finely
chopped
5¹/₂ oz (150 g) tomato sauce
1/2 tbsp tomato paste, or
strattù (see p.40)
sea salt
chili flakes
basil leaves, roughly
shredded, plus small
leaves, to serve

For the pasta towers

5³/₄ oz (160 g) anelletti, or
other short pasta
4 tbsp finely grated
pecorino cheese
2³/₄ oz (80 g) provolone
cheese, sliced into rounds
2 medium hard-boiled eggs,
peeled and sliced
2 cherry tomatoes
2 tbsp dried breadcrumbs, or
mollica secca (see p.30)
extra-virgin olive oil
2 tbsp finely grated *ricotta*
salata cheese

Usually, Sicilian anelletti pasta hoops are used for this recipe, but rigatoni, macaroni, or other small pasta shapes work just as well (see p.53). You can double the quantities for this recipe and make a large tower in a round cake pan, if you prefer. If you do this, line the pan with the fried slices of eggplant and fill with the pasta. After cooking, carefully turn the dish out of the pan.

Remove the stem of the eggplant, slice horizontally into 12 slices roughly 1/2 in (1 cm) thick, place in a strainer, sprinkle with coarse sea salt, and set aside for 30 minutes. Heat about 1/2 in (1 cm) of olive oil in a frying pan over medium heat, then sauté the slices—in batches so as not to crowd the pan—until golden. Drain on paper towel.

Meanwhile, heat 1 tbsp olive oil in another pan. Squeeze the sausage meat out of its skin, if using. Gently fry the garlic, pancetta, and sausage meat or ground pork. Pour in the sauce. Mix the tomato paste or *strattù* with 4 tbsp of water and stir this in, too. Season to taste with salt and chili flakes, scatter over the shredded basil, and simmer until the meat is cooked.

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the anelletti until almost *al dente* (1–2 minutes less than the time stated on the package). Drain. Add the pasta to the meat sauce, then stir in the grated pecorino.

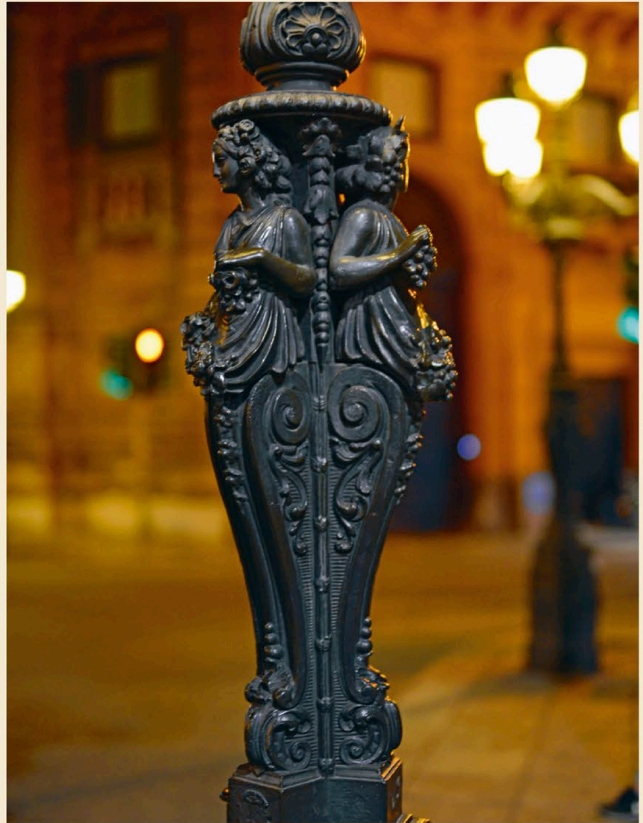
Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and place in 4 metal ring molds, each 2 1/2 in (6 cm) high and 3 in (7–8 cm) in diameter.

In each ring mold, place a slice of eggplant and spoon some of the pasta on top. Add a slice of provolone and one-quarter of the egg slices and cover with a second slice of eggplant. Scoop in some more pasta and finish off with a final slice of eggplant.

Remove the stalks from the cherry tomatoes, chop finely, and mix with the breadcrumbs. Scatter over the prepared ring molds. Drizzle lightly with olive oil and bake in the center of the oven for about 20 minutes.

Remove the cooked towers from the oven, leave to cool slightly, then carefully release from their molds and serve immediately with *ricotta salata*, the small basil leaves, and a few drops of olive oil.





Serves 4
Prep 50 mins

Pasta with sardines (rich & poor)

Pasta con le sarde (ricchi & poveri)

3½ oz (100 g) wild fennel, or
the same amount of dill
with 1 tbsp fennel seeds,
soaked in water for
20 minutes, then drained
coarse sea salt
extra-virgin olive oil
10 fresh sardines, filleted
(see p.64), or ask your
fishmonger to do this
1 onion, finely chopped
1 garlic clove, ideally pink
garlic, finely chopped
4 anchovies in oil, drained
5 tbsp (70 ml) dry white wine
4 tsp (20 g) tomato paste, or
strattù (see p.40)
2 tbsp (30 g) golden raisins,
soaked in warm water for
20 minutes, then drained
2 tbsp plus 1 tsp (20 g) pine
nuts, toasted
2 tbsp (20 g) blanched
almonds, toasted and
roughly chopped
1/8 oz (4–6 g) saffron
threads, plus a small
pinch extra
sea salt
chili flakes
10 oz (300 g) bucatini, or
uncooked spaghetti
3/4 cup (80 g) dried
breadcrumbs, or
mollica secca (see p.30)

Poor islanders would often try to mimic the recipes served to Sicilian nobility. There's a dish called *pasta chi sàrdi a mári* ("pasta with sardines that are still in the sea"—in other words, without any fish). And in *pasta chi sàrdi russi*, the saffron is replaced by *strattù*: tomato paste. The original *pasta con le sarde* doesn't contain any tomatoes at all, but my version is a combination of both the rich and poor recipes.

Set aside 5 sprigs of wild fennel, if using. Cook the rest for 5–8 minutes in a large saucepan of generously salted water. Drain and set aside the liquid. Pat the fennel dry and chop.

Meanwhile, heat some olive oil in a frying pan. Sauté 12 sardine fillets in the oil, flipping to cook both sides. They should not become too dark. Set aside to keep warm.

Heat 5–6 tbsp more olive oil in a large saucepan. Sauté the onion and garlic, then add the drained anchovies. As soon as they begin to disintegrate, deglaze the pan with the white wine. Let the alcohol evaporate slightly. Mix the tomato paste or *strattù* with 1/3 cup (100 ml) of the fennel cooking water—or warm water, if you didn't use wild fennel—and stir this into the pan. Put the remaining 8 sardine fillets in the pan, then carefully mix in the golden raisins, pine nuts, almonds, precooked wild fennel or dill and drained fennel seeds, and 1/8 oz

(4–6 g) saffron. Season everything to taste with salt and chili flakes. Simmer for a further 10–12 minutes.

Meanwhile, return the remaining fennel water to a boil, if using; otherwise, fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and the remaining small pinch of saffron threads and cook the bucatini until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package).

Drain the pasta and combine with the sauce. Divide between 4 plates, arrange 3 of the reserved sardine fillets on each portion, sprinkle with breadcrumbs, and garnish with a sprig of wild fennel, if using, or dill. Drizzle with olive oil and serve.

This dish actually consists of one *primo* (the pasta) and one *secondo* (the fish), so it could also be served as a *piatto unico* (from p.84).

Serves 2 hungry people
Prep 35 mins

The mayor of Palermo's favorite pasta

Pasta alla Leoluca

2 oz (50 g) anchovies
preserved in oil
1 cup (100 g) dried
breadcrumbs, or *mollica*
secca (see right)
granulated sugar
sea salt
6 tbsp extra-virgin olive
oil, plus extra for cooking
the breadcrumbs
coarse sea salt
9 oz (250 g) bucatini, or
uncooked spaghetti
1 garlic clove, finely
chopped
3 tbsp (25 g) pine nuts
1/3 cup (50 g) golden raisins,
soaked in warm water for
20 minutes, then drained
3 tbsp tomato paste, or
strattù (see p.40)

More than a decade ago, mayor Leoluca Orlando prepared this dish on television, a quick version of *pasta con le sarde* (see p.29). The expensive saffron in that recipe is replaced in this version by the island's homemade tomato paste, *strattù* (see p.40). There are no sardines or wild fennel in this dish.

Drain the anchovies and slice each in half lengthwise.

Mix the breadcrumbs with a little sugar and a pinch of salt.

Heat some olive oil in a frying pan over medium heat and toast the breadcrumbs in the oil. Scrape the crumbs into a bowl.

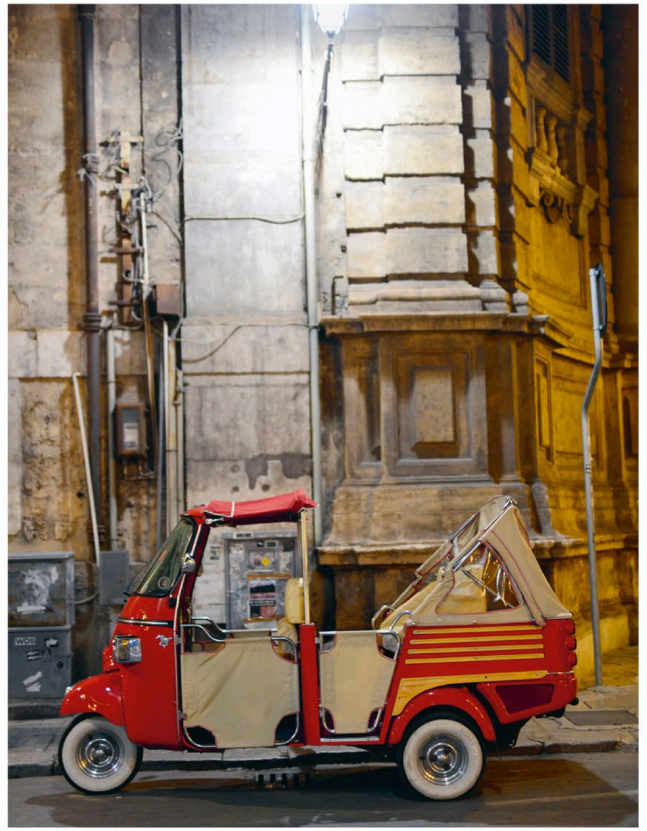
Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the bucatini until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package).

Meanwhile, heat the 6 tbsp of olive oil in the frying pan and sauté the anchovies and garlic until the fish starts to melt and the garlic begins to color. (Don't let it burn.) Add the pine nuts and drained golden raisins and continue to cook briefly. Stir 2 tbsp of water into the tomato paste or *strattù*, mix this into the sauce, and let everything simmer gently.

Drain the bucatini and combine with the sauce, season to taste with salt if desired, and serve scattered with the fried breadcrumbs.

Mollica:

The poor in Sicily traditionally cooked with *mollica* (the ground crumbs from stale bread). Sometimes this was mixed with olive oil and toasted—as in this recipe—as a substitute for expensive pecorino cheese. There's a difference between *mollica fresca*, in which only the crumb of the loaf is used, and *mollica secca*, which includes the crust.





Serves 4
Prep 30 mins

Pasta carriage-style

Pasta alla carrettiera

1 lb 2 oz (500 g) cherry tomatoes
2 large garlic cloves
2 handfuls of basil leaves
extra-virgin olive oil
(I use Tonda Iblea)
sea salt
chili flakes
coarse sea salt
11 oz (320 g) ruote,
or uncooked spaghetti
2³/₄ oz (80 g) pecorino
cheese, finely grated

There are as many variations of this dish as there are mysteries about it. The story goes that it was created by the carriage drivers who used to travel the island and didn't want to be deprived of their pasta, and thus used just a few ingredients that keep well. So the fact that fresh tomatoes seem to have been used in the original recipe is rather puzzling. Having said this, there are popular versions of this dish in Sicily that have the same name but don't contain any fresh ingredients at all. You will also come across recipes with the same ingredients, but in which they are cooked rather than used raw. Originally, *pasta alla carrettiera* was made with raw ingredients; only the pasta was cooked. As a rule, spaghetti is used but, in my opinion, wagon wheel-shaped ruote pasta works beautifully, especially given the name of the recipe.

Remove and discard the stalks from the tomatoes and place in a large bowl. Pour over boiling water to just cover and leave for 30 seconds, then drain. The skins should slip off. Remove the skins, finely chop the flesh, and place in a bowl.

Smash one of the garlic cloves (leaving it intact) and slice the other into slivers. Mix both with the tomatoes. Roughly tear the basil and mix into the tomatoes with a generous 2 tbsp olive oil. Season to taste with salt and chili flakes and leave to infuse for 15 minutes.

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the ruote until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package).

Drain the pasta. Remove the smashed garlic clove from the sauce, discard, then add the pasta to the sauce. Sprinkle over half the cheese and mix thoroughly. Divide between plates, sprinkle over the remaining cheese, drizzle with a dash of oil, and serve.





Serves 4
Prep 1 hr

Pasta with spring vegetables, sun-dried tomatoes, and ricotta

Pasta u pitaggiu

4 small artichokes, ideally
from Sicily
1 organic lemon
coarse sea salt
11 oz (320 g) short pasta,
such as cataneselle,
sedani, or short macaroni
(see p.53)
extra-virgin olive oil
4 scallions with large bulbs
(around 3½ oz/100 g in
total), white parts only,
sliced
2 lb 4 oz (1 kg) fava beans,
podded, blanched, and
removed from their skins
14 oz (400 g) fresh peas,
podded
16 sun-dried cherry
tomatoes, or 12 regular
sun-dried tomatoes, in oil
1–2 tbsp finely chopped mint
leaves, plus whole leaves,
to serve
4 tbsp white wine vinegar
1 tbsp granulated sugar
sea salt
chili flakes
4 tbsp ricotta cheese

This vegetable stew originates from Castrolibero in the province of Agrigento. It is often made as a side dish for Sicilian sausages or combined with rice, and it also works beautifully in a fritatta. My version is a pasta sauce that includes tomatoes, ricotta, and short pasta *all'agrodolce* (sweet-and-sour). In Sicily, they would use a spiny variety of artichokes from Menfi (*carciofi spinosi*).

Prepare the artichokes (see right).

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the pasta until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package). Retain some of the cooking water when you drain the pasta.

Meanwhile, heat some olive oil in a sauté pan over medium-low heat. Sauté the scallions. Gently fry the artichokes in the pan, then add the beans and peas and cook briefly. Next, stir in the tomatoes and mint and braise for 3–5 minutes. Now stir together ⅓ cup (80 ml) of water, the vinegar, and sugar. Pour this in and season with salt and chili flakes. Cover and leave to braise for 5 minutes.

Mix the vegetables with the pasta and some of the cooking water. Add a couple dollops of ricotta to the pasta on each plate, drizzle with a bit of olive oil, and scatter over the mint leaves.

Preparing the artichokes:

Squeeze the lemon, then mix the juice with water in a large bowl.

For large artichokes, trim the stalk down to 1¼ in (3 cm), peeling several layers off the very woody section. For young artichokes, trim the stalk by one-third and peel in a similar manner. Remove plenty of the outermost leaves until almost all that is left is the base. Use a knife to expose the outer edge of the artichoke base, cutting off any remaining leaf sections around the base as you do so.

Slice the artichokes in half lengthwise and scrape out the stringy fibers in the center with the tip of the knife or a teaspoon. (Young artichokes don't have these and can be used whole.)

Put the prepared artichokes into the bowl with the lemon water until ready to use to prevent them from turning brown.



ELVIRA

If you glance up from the Valley of the Temples toward the center of Agrigento, the view is not especially inviting. But if you knew what is concealed behind the box-shaped new buildings, you could imagine these apartment blocks as powerful guardians, protecting the magnificent heart of the old town by keeping it secret so it doesn't suffer a fresh assault.

This has been a recurring theme in the history of Agrigento, which was constantly being renamed depending on who ruled it at the time. The Greeks gave the town the name Akragas, the Romans called it Agrigentum, the Arabs coined the name Kerkent, and the Normans referred to the place as Girgenti. From 1927 onward, during the fascist regime, the Italian name Agrigento was adopted and continues to be used today.

Visitors who aren't put off by the new buildings and who approach the high ground on which the town is situated find a stunning and vibrant historical center. There are few hotels (virtually none), but the old town is brimming with smaller bed-and-breakfast options.



Visitors to Agrigento are spoiled for choice: an amazing number of guest houses are crammed into this little town. In every pretty, winding alleyway and passage, you will find at least one equally attractive place to stay. And sometimes you have good luck and make exactly the right choice—in which case, you may end up at Elvira's place: *Camere a Sud*.

Elvira opened her bed-and-breakfast in 2004, and it was quite a rarity at the time. She had studied law and communications and, after college, lived and worked for 2 years in Rome. But, along with her husband, she decided to return home. "We Sicilians, if we all leave the island, nothing will grow here anymore. So I thought—even if it's just a small contribution—I could do my bit to help. I wanted to come back."

Before she opened *Camere a Sud*, there were absolutely no guest houses in Agrigento. Now the place is full of them, and that's fantastic, because this is how a town can gain new life. But when Elvira started her business, it was unusual for a college graduate to take tourists into their own home. It was even regarded as slightly shocking, as the bed-and-breakfast is not an Italian concept. It was pretty much unknown, and people did not know what to make of it.

Over time, Elvira began to write, inspired by all the exceptional guests she had gotten to know as a host. Her attitude to life also changed. Instead of believing that the universe revolved around herself, she began to realize that it revolves around other people. "We are all different, and these differences result in something that really fascinates me," she explains.





“So that’s why I’m so interested in people and what it means to be human. My writing is almost like a kind of anthropological study, just for me. I started to document genuine stories, without using real names, about things that actually happened here in my bed-and-breakfast between check-in and check-out.” Initially, she published these stories on Facebook and, when she stopped posting them online, there was an immediate flood of complaints from her readers, who were already hooked on reading the tales.

There’s always a positive twist to her accounts. No matter how tragic a situation might be, she will find something good. Some stories are ironic; others move you to tears.

Elvira told me, “I have to write down everything I know about an amazing person or situation straight away; otherwise, the moment is lost and I forget the scintillating details. The whole world happens here.” And I am suddenly reminded that one of the most important 20th-century playwrights, Luigi Pirandello, who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1934, was born in Agrigento.

Before I leave, Elvira hands me another jar of the particularly fine pistachio cream that is always on offer at the breakfast buffet, and also a jar of her mother’s tomato sauce—a typically generous gesture from this fabulous Agrigento host.

Makes 6 x 9 fl oz
(250 ml) jars
Prep 40 mins, plus
draining time

4½ lb (2 kg) very ripe
tomatoes, ideally San
Marzano (you can also
use sweet, ripe cherry
tomatoes)
sea salt
basil leaves (optional)

Elvira's mama's homemade raw tomato passata

Conserva di pomodori a crudo

Elvira just cannot eat any tomato sauce, or *passata*, other than her mother's. Even as a child, she adored it. First, her mother would let the tomatoes dry in the sun so their water evaporated. (Even the shape of the tomatoes had to be right.) Elvira's mama would then strain the tomatoes by hand. In late summer, she would make enough to keep them supplied with sauce throughout the winter. One of Elvira's mom's ingredients can't be bought: sunshine. So the tomatoes for this recipe have to be *really* ripe.

Discard the stalks from the tomatoes, chop into large chunks, and place in a strainer. Sprinkle with salt and leave to drain for about 1 hour. Strain the tomatoes to produce a purée using a vegetable mill. If the sauce is too thin, place a fine strainer over a bowl, line it with a clean cotton or muslin cloth, and pour in the sauce. Leave to drain until the sauce has achieved the desired consistency.

Rinse 6 screw-top jars in boiling-hot water. Fill with sauce up to about ¾ in (2 cm) below the rim. Place a large basil leaf on top of each, if using, and seal the jar tight.

Place a clean kitchen towel in a large pan, then put in the jars. Place a second towel in between the jars to stop them from rattling during the boiling process. Fill the pan two-thirds full with boiling water. Cover and return the water to a boil, then continue boiling for 20 minutes. Turn off the heat and leave the jars to cool

in the pan. Store the sauce in a cool, dark place. If kept sealed, it will keep for 1 year. Once opened, store in the refrigerator and use within 5 days.

Strattù: Another laborious task undertaken in summer by the village women was the production of Sicilian tomato paste, or *strattù*. During this period, a wonderful aroma would waft through the streets.

To make *strattù*, first the homemade sauce would be spread over lots of white plates, salted, and left for several days in the hot sun. The warmth of the sun caused the liquid to evaporate. As the days passed, a firmer paste would develop, which had to be repeatedly stirred. Every day, the number of plates would decrease as the increasingly concentrated paste could be spread out on fewer plates (for 3½ oz/100 g *strattù*, you need about 2¼ lb/1 kg tomatoes). You can still buy *strattù* on plates today in little Sicilian stores.







Serves 2 hungry people
Prep 35 mins

Pasta with tender squash leaves

Pasta con i tenerumi

extra-virgin olive oil
2 garlic cloves, ideally pink
garlic, finely chopped
3½ oz (100 g) pancetta, cut
into little pieces, or
Italian sausage meat
¼ tbsp (60 g) tomato paste,
or *strattù* (see p.40)
chili flakes or freshly
ground black pepper
sea salt
handful of basil leaves,
roughly torn
coarse sea salt
7 oz (200 g) mixture of short
pasta shapes (ruote,
ditalini, zitelli, or small
pieces of broken linguine)
9 oz (250 g) tender squash or
zucchini leaves, torn
15–20 squash or zucchini
flowers, torn
1¾ oz (50 g) young pecorino
cheese, finely chopped,
plus 2 heaped tbsp finely
grated pecorino cheese

The snake gourd (*zucca serpente di Sicilia*) is a quick-growing climbing plant with corkscrew tendrils and beautiful white flowers. The long, narrow squash is harvested from June to September, but its delicate leaves can be consumed as early as May. This pasta dish uses the young, whole, tender leaves (*teneri*). Everything on this wonderful plant is edible: leaves; fruits; and exceptionally delicate flowers, although these wilt quickly. You can use zucchini leaves and flowers, too.

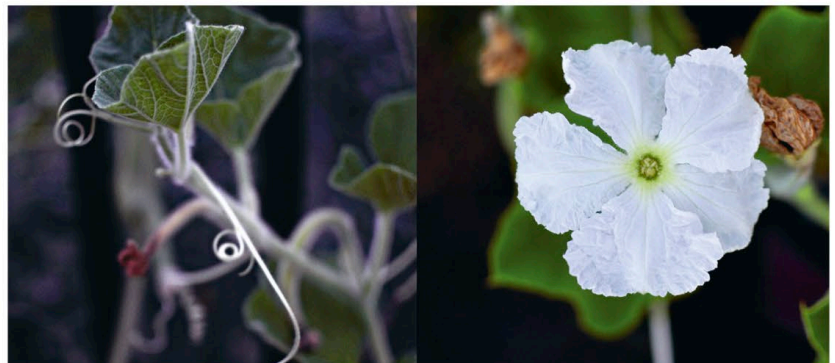
Heat 2–3 tbsp olive oil in a sauté pan over medium heat and lightly sauté the garlic and pancetta. Add the tomato paste or *strattù* and continue frying gently. Pour in 2 cups (500 ml) of boiling water. Season to taste with chili flakes and salt, scatter in the basil, and simmer everything for 10–15 minutes.

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the pasta until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package). During the final minute, carefully stir

in the squash leaves and flowers. Drain the pasta, retaining some of the water.

Stir the pasta into the sauce along with the leaves, flowers, and chopped cheese. Simmer everything for another minute, then season again with salt and chili flakes. Depending on the consistency, stir in ½–¾ cup (100–200 ml) of the cooking water. It should be slightly liquid, but not a soup.

Arrange on 2 plates, sprinkle with the grated pecorino, and drizzle with a dash of olive oil to serve.



Serves 4
Prep 20 mins

Black pasta with squid

Pasta al nero

14 oz (400 g) small cuttlefish or squid
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil (I like Nocellara del Belice for this), plus extra to serve
3 garlic cloves, ideally pink garlic, sliced
4 sun-dried tomatoes in oil, finely chopped
sea salt
½ cup (120 ml) dry white wine
coarse sea salt
11 oz (320 g) squid ink pasta
chili flakes
handful of flat-leaf parsley leaves, chopped
4 tbsp finely grated *ricotta salata*, or pecorino cheese

This black pasta dish is common in the province of Syracuse. However, it's also often cooked in the Messina and Catania areas, so it's hard to say exactly which region this pasta belongs to now (although Syracuse has plenty of advocates). In Catania, the dish is often modeled on Mount Etna, with some tomato sauce on top for the “fire” and grated *ricotta salata* for the “snow.” The black color of the pasta comes from the squid ink (*sepia*) that is added to the dough. Because squid ink is rather hard to find, I have used precooked pasta here, which is fairly easy to buy. The original recipe made with fresh ink does have a more intense flavor, so if you want to try that, you can get ink sachets at good fishmongers.

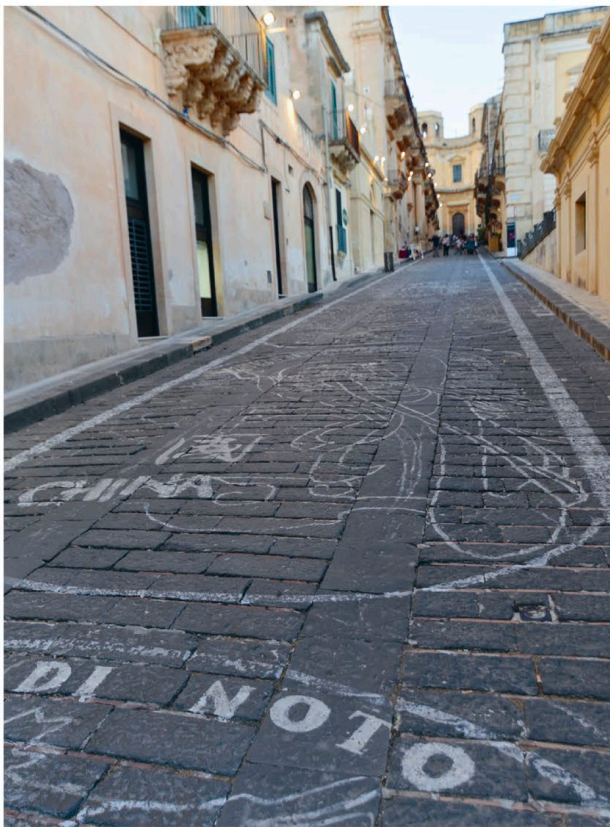
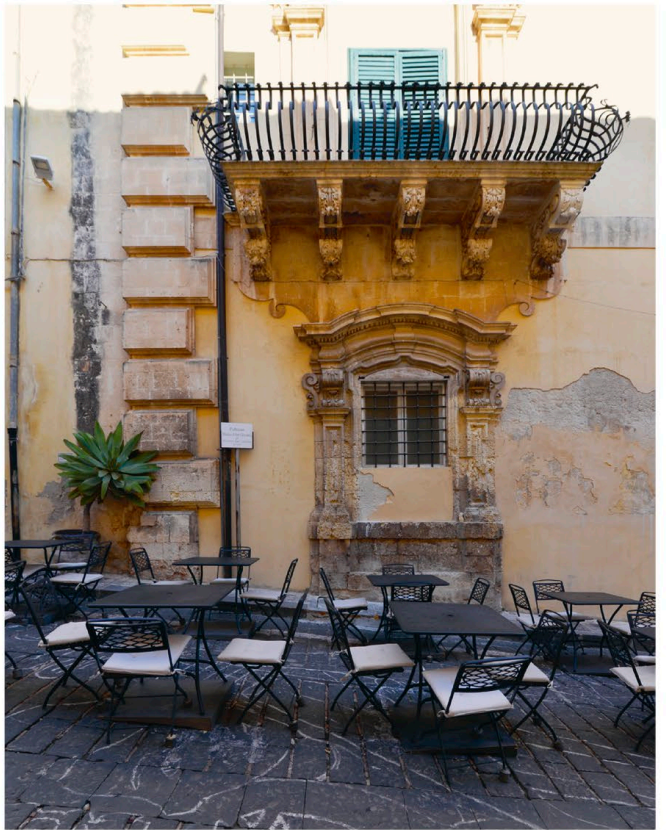
Wash the cuttlefish or squid under running water, pulling off the black outer skin as you do this. Pat dry with paper towel. Separate the body and tentacles above and below the eyes. Turn the tentacles inside out, press out the innards, and discard. Press out the cuttlebone or cartilage and discard. Reserve 8 cuttlefish or squid, then slice the remaining into rings.

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the squid ink pasta until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package). Scoop it out with a slotted spoon and add it—still dripping wet—to the pan with the cuttlefish or squid. Combine well.

Heat the olive oil in a large pan and sauté the garlic along with the tomatoes. The garlic should not take on any color. Add the cuttlefish or squid, season with salt, and simmer for 5–7 minutes. Deglaze with the wine and let the alcohol evaporate slightly.

Arrange on 4 plates; scatter with chili flakes, parsley, and *ricotta salata*; and drizzle with a dash of olive oil to serve.





Serves 4
Prep 20 mins

Pasta with ricotta, kumquats, and tuna bottarga

*Pasta con ricotta, mandarino cinese,
e bottarga di tonno*

coarse sea salt
11 oz (320 g) bucatini or
long, thin macaroni
2 tbsp plus 1 tsp (20 g) pine
nuts
4–6 kumquats
1 tbsp honey
14 oz (400 g) ricotta cheese
2³/₄ oz (80 g) pecorino cheese,
finely grated
handful of flat-leaf
parsley leaves, chopped
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
4 tbsp grated tuna bottarga
(salted roe)
finely grated zest of
1 organic lemon
extra-virgin olive oil

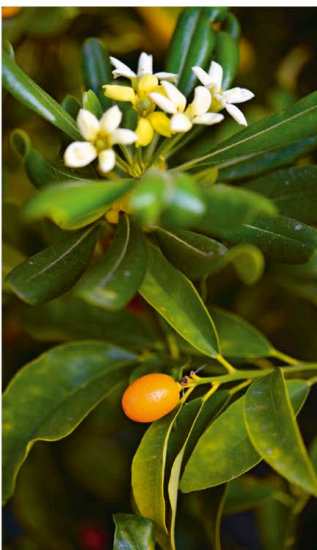
Kumquats come originally from southeast Asia. In Cantonese, they are known as “kam kwat” (gold-orange), while in Italy they are called “Chinese mandarins” and are mainly grown in Liguria and Sicily. The fruit is extremely tiny, as is the tree on which it grows. As a consequence, it is often completely overlooked. Such a small fruit obviously doesn’t have much flesh, but the little it does have offers both a sweetness and a certain acidity and can provide vast quantities of vitamins. In this recipe, I caramelize the flesh of the little citrus to mitigate its often overwhelming acidity. The residual tart flavor then blends beautifully with the salty, rich bottarga.

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the bucatini until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package).

Meanwhile, toast the pine nuts in a dry frying pan. Wash the kumquats, trim the ends, and slice the fruit. Bring the honey to a boil with 1 tbsp water in a small pan over medium heat and cook the kumquat slices in this liquid until caramelized. Remove the pan from heat.

Drain the pasta, reserving some of the cooking liquid. Return the pasta to its cooking pan while still wet. Mix in the ricotta, pecorino, and some of the pasta water, then fold in the toasted pine nuts, parsley, and caramelized kumquat slices. Season everything to taste with salt and pepper.

Divide the pasta and sauce between 4 plates. Sprinkle with bottarga and lemon zest and drizzle with a dash of olive oil to serve.





Serves 6
Prep 50 mins

Ravioli with radicchio, ricotta, and mortadella

Ravioli con radicchio, ricotta, e mortadella

For the pasta dough

1½ cups (200 g) fine “00” grade
durum wheat semolina flour
or all-purpose flour, plus
extra to dust
1 medium egg
sea salt
¼ cup (50 ml) beet juice

For the filling

4 oz (110 g) mortadella
(Italian sausage)
2¼ oz (70 g) radicchio (red
parts only)
freshly ground black pepper
1½ oz (40 g) pecorino cheese,
finely grated
7 oz (200 g) ricotta cheese,
plus 6 tbsp to serve
3 tbsp (20 g) dried breadcrumbs,
or *mollica secca* (see p.30)
freshly grated nutmeg

coarse sea salt
4 tbsp butter, softened
4 tbsp finely grated *ricotta
salata* cheese
2 heaped tbsp pine nuts
extra-virgin olive oil
handful of basil leaves

Ravioli is often linked to the food of the north of Italy, particularly Emilia-Romagna. But it is a popular pasta dish in Sicily, too, where you can even eat it as a dessert, known as *raviolo dolce di ricotta* or *cassatella dolce frita*. Most savory fillings in Sicily include ricotta or a combination of cheese and sausage meat. I’ve opted for a combination of both of these fillings: ricotta and mortadella. And for the first and last time in this cookbook, we are using butter in a savory dish and egg in the pasta dough.

To make the ravioli dough, knead together the flour and egg with a pinch of salt and the beet juice until you have a compact, firm dough. Cover with an inverted bowl and leave to rest at room temperature for at least 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, to make the filling, finely chop together the mortadella and radicchio. Sauté gently in a dry pan to allow some of the liquid to evaporate. Season with pepper and leave to cool slightly. Mix with the pecorino, ricotta, and breadcrumbs, and season with nutmeg. Taste and adjust the seasoning if desired.

Roll out the dough on a floured work surface until it is about ⅛ in (3 mm) thick and place 1-tbsp piles of the filling mixture at roughly 2 in (5 cm) intervals on half of the rolled-out pasta. Fold the other half of the pasta

dough over the filling and press it down firmly around each little pile, removing as much air as possible in the process. Using a circular ravioli cutter, stamp out the pasta parcels and press the edges down firmly so any remaining air is removed.

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the ravioli for 4–5 minutes. Meanwhile, melt the butter gently in a large saucepan.

Lift the ravioli out of the water with a slotted spoon and toss them carefully in the butter for about 1 minute.

Arrange the ravioli on 6 plates, add 1 tbsp ricotta to each serving, and scatter over the *ricotta salata* and pine nuts. Drizzle with a dash of olive oil and serve sprinkled with basil leaves.







Serves 4
Prep 40 mins

Pasta with Trapani pesto

Busiate con pesto Trapanese

For the pasta dough

3¹/₃ cups (400 g) whole-wheat durum wheat semolina flour; or 1 cup (140 g) fine durum wheat semolina flour (or 1 cup (140 g) all-purpose flour) and 2²/₃ cups (260 g) emmer flour; plus extra to dust sea salt

For the pesto

14 oz (400 g) cherry tomatoes
2 large garlic cloves, ideally pink garlic, roughly chopped
5 tbs (40 g) smoked almonds, roasted and salted
1³/₄ oz (50 g) basil leaves, ideally from basil with small intensely flavored leaves, plus extra to serve
2¹/₂ tbs (15 ml) extra-virgin olive oil (I use Nocellara del Belice for this), plus extra to serve
freshly ground black pepper

coarse sea salt

4 tbs (56 g) finely grated or finely chopped pecorino cheese

Busa is the name used to refer to the stalk of the diss grass, a variety of Mediterranean grass traditionally used to tie up sheaves of corn. These stalks were also used to roll up fresh pasta in spirals before they were left to dry. *Busiate* are a typical pasta of the Trapani province. As with many products that belong to a particular Sicilian region, it is virtually unknown and hard to track down at the other end of the island! For the pesto, I have added unblanched, smoked almonds; in the original, blanched almonds are used.

To make the pasta, combine the flour with a good pinch of salt on a work surface. Gradually knead in ³/₄–1 cup (200–250 ml) of lukewarm water to create a compact, homogeneous dough. Cover and leave to rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, remove and discard the stalks from the tomatoes and place in a large bowl. Pour over boiling water to just cover and leave for 30 seconds, then drain. The skins should slip off. Discard the skins, roughly chop the flesh, and put in a bowl. Roughly pound the garlic and almonds using a mortar and pestle. Combine two-thirds of this mixture with the tomatoes.

In a mortar and pestle, crush the basil leaves with a pinch of sea salt and the 2¹/₂ tbs olive oil, working it in gradually. Fold the basil paste into the tomato mixture. Season with pepper to taste, then leave to infuse for at least 30 minutes.

Roll out the dough on a floured work surface until about ¹/₄ in (5 mm) thick, then slice into 4–5-in (10–12-cm) long strips. Twist each one around a floured rod—for instance, a skewer—then pull it off and place it on a floured cloth. (See overleaf for a photograph of the process.)

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the pasta until *al dente*.

Drain the pasta and mix well with the pesto, then arrange on 4 plates. Crumble the remaining garlic and almonds over the pasta, drizzle with a dash of olive oil, and serve sprinkled with basil leaves. Offer the pecorino in a bowl on the table.





-Couscous-



-Ruote-



-Spaccatelle-



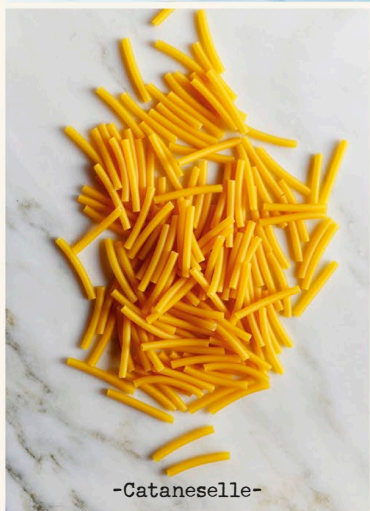
-Anelli-



-Busiate-



-Pasta col nero-



-Cataneselle-



-Mafaldine-



-Sedani-



Secondi



IL MARE

If you want to travel to Sicily, there is no avoiding the sea. And the oceans love Sicily so much that the island is embraced by three seas. To the north, there is the Tyrrhenian Sea; to the east lies the Ionian Sea; and to the south is the Mediterranean. Perhaps it was these three seas that lovingly molded Sicily into its triangular shape, giving the island its nickname *Trinacria* (“three-pointed”).

Salvatore likes to gesticulate while talking but, because he is driving today, his hands need to stay firmly on the wheel. His seawater production facilities and his home are both located in Graniti and, during the drive there, our conversation is about the sea. “The salt content in the Mediterranean is high, at about 1½ ounces (38 grams) of salt minerals per 3½ cups (1 liter) of seawater, while the average for the world’s oceans is only around 1¼ ounces (35 grams).”

Why do we need to know this? Because this relatively high level of salt makes a big difference: Mediterranean king prawns taste better than shrimp or prawns from anywhere else, precisely because their inherent salt content is higher, Salvatore tells me. Together with four other partners in his Aquamaris business, he makes the most of the Mediterranean’s salt levels by marketing seawater to the food industry. Top chefs know this ingredient well and have been using it for a long time, but have kept it secret. They know about the special flavor it imparts. Seawater does not just consist of water and sodium chloride (salt), it also contains more than 50 other minerals. It also has been discovered that this specific composition works as a flavor enhancer, making seawater an even more effective form of seasoning than salt itself. By cooking with seawater, you achieve more flavor, getting the most out of fish, tomatoes, and meat. The use of seawater in cooking can also reduce the amount of salt you need to add to any recipe by up to 30 percent.



As well as the health benefits and flavor potential, Salvatore and his business partners were also motivated by tradition. Salvatore tells me that people are always exclaiming, “‘What is it with you and your seawater obsession!’ Why? Because even as a child, I was always having to fetch seawater for cooking.” In Sicily, freshwater is a precious commodity, so why would you add salt to freshwater when you’ve already got such a large amount of saltwater all around? People in coastal areas would always have cooked with seawater in the past,





and fishermen would have prepared fish using seawater, though in those days, no one understood the mysterious properties of the minerals involved.

Provided seawater is not heated above 212–230°F (100–110°C), it retains a proportion of iodine, which in regular salt is removed during the refinement process along with all its other minerals. The only alternative to seawater is unrefined salt—not sea salt flakes, but pure salt crystals, the chunks that are left behind during salt production. These are so hard that you can only use them after grating with a sharp blade, and they are also almost impossible to find on sale.

This gave Bruno Patanè, now the managing director at Aquamaris, the idea of reviving the art of cooking with seawater. His original idea was focused entirely on health. Bruno’s father Leonardo, a well-known heart surgeon from Catania, was brought on board and, together with a nutritional adviser, they carried out some initial research and analysis. Other business partners

were sought, and that is how Salvatore and his family—the Testas—got involved. As one of Catania’s longest established fishing families, they were able to collect large quantities of seawater on their giant ships from depths of 33–44 yards (30–40 meters) and 14 nautical miles off the island’s coast. Salvatore was asked to work on product development and Beniamino Sciacca, a chemist, joined the team to work on the purification process. In 2018, the first seawater was sold.

However, before it can be sold, the seawater collected by the fishing boats undergoes a laborious purification process. The preliminary analyses are conducted onboard the boats. First, the water is tested for heavy metals. If any are found, the water is dumped. (Regardless of the kind of contamination found, if the levels are too high, the water is simply discarded.)

On land, the “harvested water” is conveyed to silos by tankers. Here, it is immediately subjected to UV irradiation, which is the first stage in the sterilization process.



Next, it is passed through a special resin filter to remove bromine. Even now, the water is not considered to be clean. It still has to pass through various other filters, the smallest of which is just 25 micrometers. Not only does any bacteria or sewage need to be removed, but microplastics are also an issue, and this poses a significant problem. It's even more serious out at sea but, nonetheless, the microplastic causes the filters to become contaminated more quickly and results in a need to change them more frequently.

Once the purification process is complete, the seawater is microbiologically pure and no longer contains any microplastic residues. Right at the end, the seawater undergoes additional sterilization treatment in a UV tunnel. Once it is packed into 1¾-pint (1-liter) bottles or 8¾-pint (5-liter) boxes, it undergoes a final sterilization process. Seawater is a precious commodity that humans would be able to use without processing and for free if we had not been so reckless in our conduct toward nature and the environment—actions which are now also having an impact on ourselves.

Professional chefs immediately became the company's first customers. One of these was the outstanding young Sicilian chef Giovanni Santoro from Linguaglossa. He uses the water for baking bread and also for cooking chicken breasts, which he marinates for 12 hours in seawater before cooking them in a sous-vide machine. The result is a delicacy reminiscent of *prosciutto crudo*. Drinks such as gin or beer can also be made using seawater. (The beer, in particular, goes down very well.)

Salvatore even preserves Datterini tomatoes in seawater; these simply need to be puréed and seasoned with a touch of pepper—perfect. He is also thinking about making a stock with seawater that would contain all those precious minerals. And he has plenty of other ideas, too

Serves 4
Prep 20 mins

Steamed scabbard fish with tomatoes

Spatola in umido

1³/₄ lb (800 g) gutted and
scaled scabbard fish,
or mackerel
9 oz (250 g) plum tomatoes
2 garlic cloves, sliced
handful of flat-leaf
parsley leaves,
roughly chopped
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
splash of lemon juice
2–3 tbsp extra-virgin
olive oil

The scabbard fish, also known as *pesce sciabola* or *pesce bandiera*, is a type of oily fish—like sardines, anchovies, mackerel, and herring—that has always been affordable for poorer people and therefore is found in the traditional cuisine of Sicily’s less well-off inhabitants. Its delicate white flesh is particularly appreciated in Messina, where it is also referred to as a *signurina du mari* (“the lady of the sea”). Scabbard fish is not often found in US fishmongers, but you can buy it online.

Rinse the fish under running water (don’t dry it) and cut it into large fillets. Discard the stalks from the tomatoes and quarter them.

salt and pepper, the splash of lemon juice, and the olive oil. Cover and cook over medium heat for no more than 10 minutes. It’s now ready!

Put the fish in a deep saucepan with the garlic, parsley, tomatoes, some







Serves 2

Prep 25 mins, plus extra
to clean the anchovies

Fried anchovies with mint

Masculini con la menta

20 fresh anchovies, or
frozen can also be used
about 5 tbsp (40 g) fine “00”
grade durum wheat
semolina flour, or
all-purpose flour
extra-virgin olive oil
2 garlic cloves, sliced
around 2 handfuls of mint
leaves, roughly torn, plus
mint leaves and flowers
to serve
¼ tbsp white wine vinegar
sea salt
chili flakes

This recipe can also be made using fresh sardines, if you prefer, or if they are easier to find. In Sicily, anchovies are called *masculini*, whereas in Italy, they are known as *alici* or *acciughe*; the Sicilian name translates literally as “little men.” In the Gulf of Catania, which stretches between Capo Mulini and Capo Santa Croce in Augusta, the quality of the anchovies is such that they have a Slow Food designation: *la masculina da magghia*. They are caught by just a few fishing families between April and July only using an old technique that has a positive impact on the flavor.

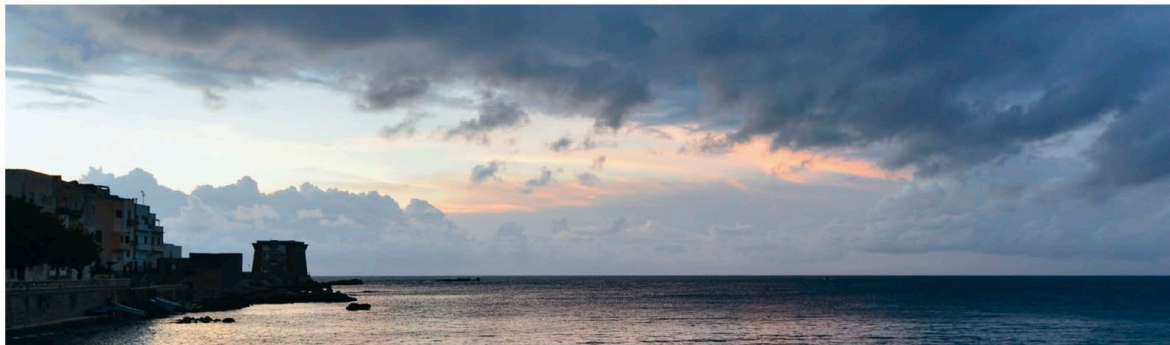
Prepare the anchovies in the same way as the sardines on p.64.

Rinse the gutted anchovies and pat dry thoroughly with paper towel. Fold the filleted fish closed and turn them in a plate of the flour to coat, then gently shake off any excess.

Heat a generous quantity of olive oil in a sauté pan over medium-high heat and sauté the anchovies until

golden brown. Remove the fish from the pan, reduce the heat, and gently fry the garlic in the same oil, adding more if necessary. Return the fish to the pan and scatter with mint. Pour in the vinegar, immediately cover the pan, and remove from heat.

Leave the fish to stand for about 1 minute, then season with salt and chili flakes. Sprinkle the anchovies with a few mint leaves and flowers to serve.



Serves 4
Prep 1 hr

Stuffed sardines on a skewer

Sarde a beccafico alla Palermitana

20 fresh sardines
2 cups (200 g) fresh
 breadcrumbs, or *mollica*
 fresca (see p.30), plus
 2 tbsp extra
4 tbsp flat-leaf
 parsley leaves
2 garlic cloves
2–3 tbsp orange juice
1/4 cup (40 g) raisins
1 1/2 oz (40 g) pecorino cheese,
 finely grated
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1 tbsp pine nuts
1 heaped tbsp pistachios
2 large organic oranges, zest
 removed with a zester
sea salt and freshly ground
 black pepper or chili
 flakes
extra-virgin olive oil
 (I use Tonda Iblea)
16 bay leaves

The original ingredient in this dish was the *beccafico*, a little bird (the garden warbler, to be precise) with a fondness for eating figs. In the 19th century, they would have been served to aristocratic families in Sicily by the *Monsù* (see p.86). This lower-budget version uses more affordable and easily obtainable sardines. There are lots of variations on this recipe. In Palermo, the fish are usually rolled up and prepared with oranges. In Catania, the orange is omitted and the fish are folded together, brushed with a filling, and fried one on top of another like a sandwich.

Remove the scales from the sardines under running water. Hold the fish with the stomach facing up. Bend the head of the sardine gently downward toward its back and simultaneously make a slit with your thumbnail along the stomach, toward the tail fin, to split the stomach. Pinch the lower end of the backbone and pull this out toward the head, pulling off the head with the innards. Rinse the sardines under running water, open them like a book, and pat them dry thoroughly with paper towel.

Blend the breadcrumbs with the parsley, garlic, and orange juice in a food processor or blender to create a purée. Mix in the raisins, pecorino, eggs, pine nuts, pistachios, and some of the orange zest. Add salt and season with pepper or chili flakes, if you prefer. If the consistency is too firm to spread, add some olive oil.

Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Slice the oranges and cut each round in half. Spread all the sardines with a generous 1 tbsp of the paste. Poke a skewer through a bay leaf, then fold the tail of one sardine upward and skewer the sardine, too. Next, slide an orange slice onto the skewer, followed by the head end of the sardine. Start again with a bay leaf and continue in this way until the first 10 sardines are on the skewer. Prepare the second skewer in exactly the same way.

Lay both skewers on the prepared sheet and sprinkle with the 2 tbsp of breadcrumbs. Drizzle with olive oil and bake for around 20 minutes.

Remove, and arrange 5 sardines per person on a plate, drizzling with a dash of olive oil to serve.





Serves 4
Prep 30 mins

Tuna in a pistachio and sesame crust with sweet pickled peppers

*Tonno in crosta di pistacchi e sesamo
con peperoni all'agrodolce*

For the peppers

1³/₄ lb (800 g) red peppers,
ideally Romano peppers
7 tbsp (100 ml) extra-virgin
olive oil, plus extra for
cooking
2³/₄ oz (80 g) capers in salt
3/₄ oz (20 g) mint leaves,
roughly torn, plus more
leaves to serve
2–3 tsp (15–20 g) honey
4 tbsp lemon juice
chili flakes
sea salt

For the fish

4 tuna steaks, each
9 oz (250 g) and roughly
3/₄ in (2 cm) thick
2/₃ cup (80 g) pistachios, plus
extra to serve
1 tbsp (10 g) black sesame
seeds
1/₄ cup (30 g) dried
breadcrumbs, or *mollica
secca* (see p.30), finely
ground
freshly ground black pepper
extra-virgin olive oil

Here, tuna is served with preserved peppers, which you might be more familiar with as antipasti, but I've discovered that they also work really well with this pistachio and sesame tuna. Of course, the preserved peppers can also simply be served as a starter. For a photograph of this recipe, see p.177.

Preheat the grill to 400°F (200°C).

Wash the peppers, prick them all over with a toothpick, coat lightly in oil, and place in a baking dish. Roast in the middle of the grill until the skin begins to blister and turn black in places, turning them every so often.

Remove the tuna from the refrigerator and leave at room temperature until ready to use.

Leave the peppers to cool in a sturdy, food-safe paper bag. Once they are cool enough to handle, pull off and discard the skins and seeds and tear them into strips.

Rinse the capers thoroughly and combine them in a bowl with the pepper strips, mint, honey, lemon juice, the 7 tbsp (100 ml) of olive oil,

and a pinch of chili flakes. Add salt sparingly, as the capers may already be salty enough. Mix well, cover, and leave to infuse for at least 30 minutes.

Crush the pistachios in a mortar and pestle, then mix with the sesame seeds and breadcrumbs in a deep bowl. Season with salt and pepper.

Rub the tuna liberally with olive oil. Turn the fish in the pistachio and sesame mixture to coat, pressing gently to help it stick.

Heat some more olive oil in a frying pan and fry the tuna steaks for 2–3 minutes on each side until pink.

Arrange the fish with the peppers on 4 plates, sprinkle with mint leaves and pistachios, and serve immediately.



EGADI SNORKELING 002 L



Serves 4

Prep 45 minutes, plus 2 days
soaking time

Salt cod with olives, capers, and pears

Stocco alla ghiotta con pere

1 lb 2 oz (500 g) salt cod
freshly ground black pepper
4 tbsp “00” pasta flour
extra-virgin olive oil
5½ oz (150 g) onions, sliced
into rings (about 1⅓ cups)
2 garlic cloves, chopped
1½ celery sticks, sliced
¾ cup (200 ml) dry white wine
1 lb 5 oz (600 g) tomato sauce
2 tbsp plus 1½ tsp (40 g) tomato
paste, or *strattù* (see p.40)
2 oz (60 g) capers in salt
1⅓ cup (60 g) raisins
2¾ oz (80 g) green olives,
pitted
2 tsp dried oregano
sea salt
chili flakes
1¼ oz (400 g) red potatoes, or
other waxy type, peeled
10 oz (300 g) pears (about 2),
unpeeled, finely sliced



This traditional dish with pears is no longer as widespread as it once was. There is incredible variety when it comes to pears in Sicily, including wild pears, some of which are tiny. For this recipe, I recommend a variety such as *pera spinella*, a medium-sized fruit with yellow skin and red patches. The flesh is firm, sweet, and not too juicy, which makes it ideal for cooking. After harvesting in the fall, the pears can be kept until April, while salt cod is mainly served during winter. So this recipe is a fabulous winter meal.

Cut the cod into large chunks and trim off the fins if necessary. Soak the fish for 2 days in cold water, changing the water several times each day.

After soaking, pat the pieces of fish dry with paper towel. Season lightly with pepper, then turn in the flour.

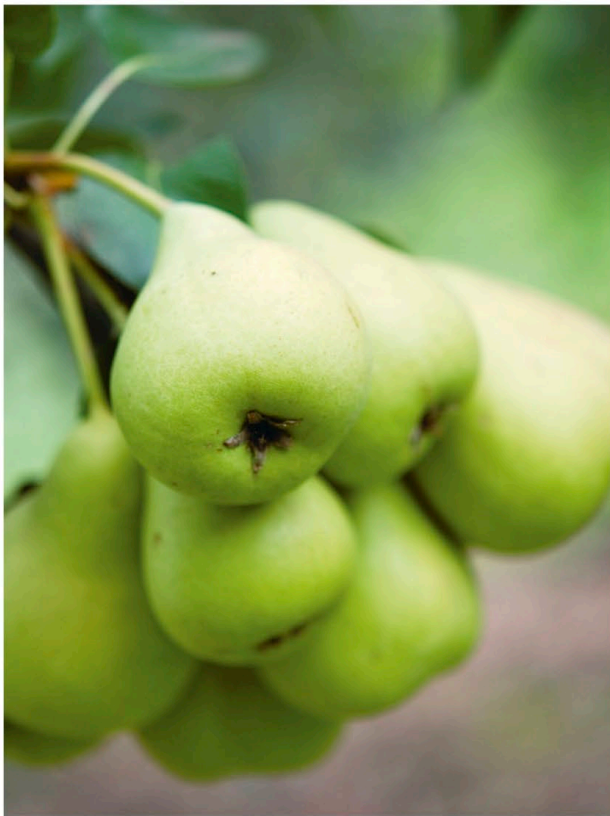
Heat some olive oil in a Dutch oven and sauté the pieces of fish briefly on both sides. Remove and set aside.

Sauté the onions, garlic, and celery in the same oil. Deglaze with white wine. Stir in the tomato sauce, tomato paste or *strattù*, and 3⅓–4 cups (800–900 ml) of water and simmer everything briefly. Put the capers into a strainer and rinse well. Stir them into the sauce along with the raisins, olives, and oregano. Season to taste with salt and chili flakes.

Slice the potatoes in half lengthwise, then cut each half into thirds lengthwise. Cook the potatoes in the tomato sauce over low heat until just tender, adding some boiling water if the sauce becomes too thick.

Add the pears and fish to the sauce. Continue cooking for 8–10 minutes, turning the fish only once in this time and not moving it around too much. Remove from heat and leave to stand for a few minutes.

Arrange on 4 plates and drizzle with a dash of olive oil to serve.



IL AGRODOLCE

In cooking, opposites are often paired together in order to create a third quality. Neither ingredient should be given more weight than the other; the goal is to achieve balance, because through this interplay, something quite new and different is created.

Sicily is an island that is full of opposites in its nature and history. Perhaps that is why a very specific culinary trend has prevailed in Sicily—namely the incorporation of sweet and sour flavors in savory dishes, a style of cooking known in Italian as *all'agrodolce*.

This approach to combining flavors is known throughout Italy, such as in the renowned Venetian dish of *sarde in saor* (sardines marinated in vinegar). But the trend is even more pronounced in Sicily. No doubt this is partially due to the island's numerous Arabic and Asian influences, and the Arabs do seem to have been the first to use and successfully master the *agrodolce* technique. Another factor in its popularity is surely the Sicilian heat. Acidity and sugar are both excellent preserving agents and, in the time before refrigeration was available, preserving food was even more important than its flavor. Acids, such

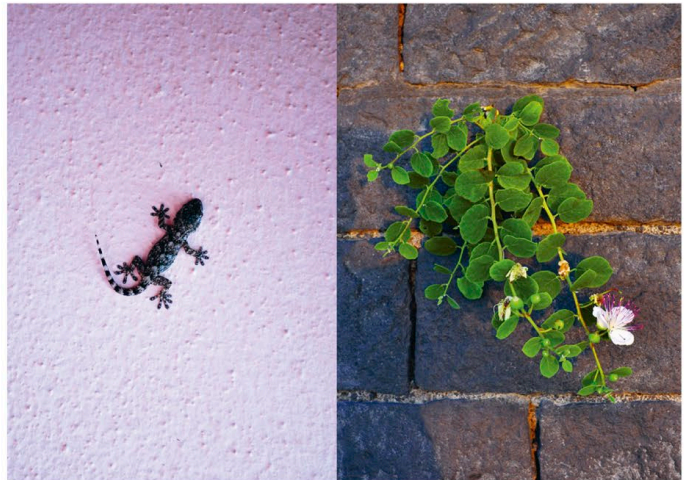
as vinegar, kill off bacteria (which is also why you should wash your chopping boards with vinegar), while sugar—just like salt—draws out water from food, thus inhibiting the formation of mold. A lucky by-product is the deliciousness that the combination creates.

So vinegar and sugar function as excellent substitutes for a refrigerator. Sugar was first introduced to Sicily by the Arabs, but honey and dried fruit can also be used as sweeteners, which is why raisins are so frequently included in Sicilian recipes. Vinegar, usually white wine vinegar, can be substituted by using Sicily's abundant citrus fruits. Oranges, mandarins, clementines, and even kumquats (see p.46)—not to mention pomegranates, apples, and in fact most fruits—naturally have a wonderful balance between sweetness and acidity. If this balance in the fruit is not right, the flavor suffers, so nature itself serves as a model for the *agrodolce* approach.

Sicilians just cannot resist this particular style of cooking and the way it encapsulates a natural phenomenon. The contrast between sweetness and acidity also works beautifully with game. One of the most popular meat dishes to showcase this culinary trick is the Sweet-sour Rabbit, *coniglio all'agrodolce* (see p.76). In days gone by, meat would have been a rarity for the poorer inhabitants of the island, but a welcome exception to this was most wild game and offal.

Probably the three most popular Sicilian *all'agrodolce* recipes are *Caponata* (see p.90); the aforementioned *coniglio all'agrodolce*; and *zucca all'agrodolce* (see p.111),









which is the most popular way to eat pumpkin on the island. The list of dishes in Sicily that are prepared *all'agrodolce* is never-ending.

In addition to sugar or honey, and vinegar or citrus juice, there is another typical Sicilian ingredient that is found in virtually all dishes prepared *all'agrodolce*: the caper, ideally from the islands of Pantelleria or Salina.

So I paid a visit to Gaetano Marchetta in Salina, who produces capers there, in addition to Malvasia wine. He explained that there are three types of capers sold: very small ones; medium-sized varieties; and very large capers, in which the internal flower is already highly developed. Capers are the unopened flower buds and, naturally, the larger the caper is, the more developed this bud will be (incidentally, the blossom is among the most

beautiful and fragile you will find; see above). Many people are under the impression that the smallest capers are the best quality, but in Salina, they don't agree. Here, large capers are the most popular precisely because you can also taste the flower. You will also find *i cucunci* available. These are caperberries that only develop if you allow the flower to blossom, then wilt.

Caper bushes grow in the unlikeliest of places, including cracks in walls and in between rocks. This is thanks to the lizards that are extremely fond of the plant and its fruit. The seeds get stuck to the lizards' bodies and they then distribute them all over the island, particularly in sheltered places in stonework, which they love to scurry along.

Serves 4
Prep 1³/₄ hrs

Sweet-and-sour rabbit

Coniglio all'agrodolce

extra-virgin olive oil
1 lb 5 oz (600 g) red potatoes,
or other waxy type, peeled
and roughly chopped
7 oz (200 g) onions, roughly
chopped (about 4 cups)
1³/₄ oz (50 g) celery, thickly
sliced (about 2 stalks)
2 oz (60 g) capers in salt
1³/₄ lb (800 g) rabbit,
chopped into large pieces
5 tbsp (70 ml) dry white wine
5 sage leaves, plus more
to serve
2 rosemary sprigs
3¹/₂ oz (100 g) green olives
1³/₄ oz (50 g) black olives
1/4 cup (35 g) raisins
1/3 cup (80 ml) white wine
vinegar
3 tbsp (40 g) granulated sugar
1 bay leaf
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
mint leaves and flowers,
to serve

This is one of the most traditional *all'agrodolce*-style meat dishes in Sicily. Nowadays, rabbit is available in supermarkets north of the Alps. Nevertheless, I was astonished when recently I came across a whole rabbit, including its head, at the meat counter in a large German supermarket. In Sicily, it's normal to display animals whole, because the philosophy is that you should know what you are eating. People in other countries can find that more challenging If you can't find rabbit where you like, this recipe also works well made with chicken.

Heat a generous amount of olive oil in a Dutch oven over medium heat and sauté the potatoes until they are partially cooked. Remove and set aside.

Heat some more olive oil in the Dutch oven and sauté the onions with the celery. Remove and set aside.

Put the capers into a strainer and rinse them very well.

Once again, heat some olive oil in the same Dutch oven and lightly fry the rabbit on all sides. Deglaze the pan with the wine and allow the alcohol to evaporate briefly. Stir in the onion and celery mixture with the sage, rosemary, olives, raisins, and capers. Pour in sufficient water to just cover, put a lid on, and braise over medium heat for about 40 minutes, turning the rabbit occasionally during this time.

Add the fried potatoes, plus enough water to just cover them. Combine the vinegar and sugar in a small bowl, pour this in, and add the bay leaf. Season with salt and pepper.

Increase the temperature and continue cooking, uncovered, until the sauce has thickened slightly and the potatoes are tender. You may need to add a little more boiling water, but only as much as needed to just about cover the ingredients. Stir occasionally.

Remove and discard the bay leaf. Serve on 4 plates with sage leaves and mint leaves and flowers.





Serves 2 hungry people
Prep 35 mins, plus 1 day
soaking time

Tripe with black chickpeas

Trippa con ceci neri

½ cup (120 g) black chickpeas
or regular chickpeas
1 lb 7 oz (700 g) prepared
tripe, chopped into
bite-sized pieces
1 heaped tbsp tomato paste, or
strattù (see p.40)
extra-virgin olive oil (I use
Tonda Iblea)
1 red onion, finely chopped
1 carrot, finely chopped
1 celery stick, finely chopped
1 lb (450 g) red potatoes, or
other waxy type, peeled and
chopped
2 tbsp roughly chopped
flat-leaf parsley leaves,
plus extra leaves to serve
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
chili flakes

Tripe, unfairly, has a bad reputation. After all, it is low in fat, delicate but with a firm texture, and packed with flavor. In the past, not a single part of a slaughtered animal would have been thrown away, a habit which sadly is far from the case now. It's such a shame, as, when combined with foods that are rich in carbohydrates (such as potatoes and pulses) and served with a sharp tomato sauce, tripe has a texture and flavor that surpasses any expensive piece of sirloin steak. Try it. You might be converted.

One day in advance, soak the chickpeas in water. When you are ready to cook, drain the chickpeas.

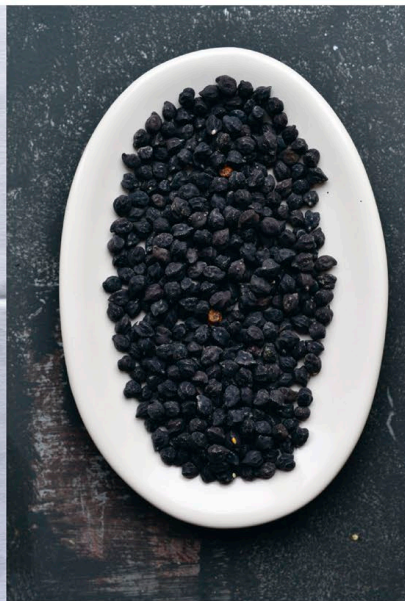
Put the tripe in a saucepan and cover with water. Bring to a boil and cook for 3 minutes. Drain and set aside.

Stir the tomato paste into some water in a small bowl to dissolve.

Heat some olive oil in a pan over medium heat and sauté the onion, carrot, and celery with the tomato paste mixture. Stir in the blanched tripe, potatoes, chickpeas, 1 tbsp olive oil, and the parsley. Pour in sufficient water to cover the ingredients by about ½ in (1 cm). Simmer over medium heat for about 1 hour, covered partially by the lid. Top up with boiling water occasionally so the ingredients remain covered by ½ in (1 cm), and stir frequently.

Shortly before the end of the cooking time, season the sauce with salt, pepper, and chili flakes.

Arrange on 4 plates, drizzle with a dash of olive oil, sprinkle with flat-leaf parsley, and serve immediately.



Serves 4
Prep 1½ hrs, plus
soaking time

Sweet meatballs with almonds and cinnamon

Polpette dolci

For the sauce

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 large onion, finely
chopped
1 large garlic clove, finely
chopped
1 heaped tbsp tomato paste,
or *strattù* (see p.40)
1½ lb (700 g) tomato sauce
1 cinnamon stick
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper

For the meatballs

8 tbsp (70 g) blanched almonds
5 tsp (20 g) granulated sugar
1 cup (100 g) fresh
breadcrumbs, or *mollica
fresca* (see p.30)
⅔ cup (140 ml) whole milk
1 lb 1 oz (480 g) ground beef
2¾ oz (80 g) pecorino
cheese, finely grated
2 tbsp (30 g) raisins
2 tbsp plus 1 tsp (20 g) pine
nuts, plus extra to serve
1½ tsp ground cinnamon
chili flakes
2 medium eggs
extra-virgin olive oil
oregano leaves, to serve

Polpette are hugely popular in Sicily and made with all kinds of different ingredients, such as eggplants (see p.176), ricotta (see p.107), or simply with flavored fresh breadcrumbs. These sweet *polpette* are inspired by a recipe from Maria Grammatico (see p.190) in her book *Bitter Almonds*. She describes that, in the postwar years, *polpette dolci* were the favorite festive treat served to children at the San Carlo abbey. The nuns certainly bulked out the meat in their *polpette* with quite a lot of breadcrumbs; Maria halved the quantity in her recipe. The raisins used here would have been those that weren't quite good enough for making dessert.

To make the tomato sauce, heat the olive oil in a pan over medium heat and fry the onion with the garlic without letting them take on any color. Stir in the tomato paste or *strattù* along with 1⅔ cups (400 ml) of hot water, bring to a boil, then simmer everything for 1 minute. Stir in the sauce and cinnamon stick, season with salt and pepper, and simmer for about 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, to make the meatballs, blend the almonds and sugar in a food processor or blender until the almonds are reduced to little chunks with just a bit of texture. Soak the breadcrumbs in the milk in a bowl for 20 minutes. Combine the almond mixture and breadcrumbs with the beef, cheese, raisins, pine nuts, and

ground cinnamon in a bowl. Season with salt, pepper, and chili flakes. Stir in the eggs one at a time. The mixture should not be too firm or too soft.

Heat some olive oil in a frying pan over medium heat. Use your hands to form 16 meatballs from the mixture. Fry them in the hot oil until golden brown on all sides, then transfer the meatballs to the tomato sauce and simmer gently for another 20 minutes. If the sauce becomes too thick, add some boiling water.

Take 4 deep plates and arrange 4 meatballs and some sauce on each. Scatter each with oregano leaves and pine nuts, grind over some black pepper, and serve drizzled with a dash of olive oil.





Serves 4
Prep 50 mins

Sicilian pork sausages baked with potatoes

Salsiccia al forno con patate

extra-virgin olive oil
1 lb 5 oz (600 g) red potatoes,
or other waxy type, peeled
1 red onion, finely sliced
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
8 Sicilian sausages with
fennel, or chunky
pork sausages
8–10 cherry tomatoes,
stalks removed, quartered
6 sage leaves, roughly torn
2 rosemary sprigs

Sicilians' favorite way to eat pork is in the form of *salsiccia*, preferably made traditionally using wild fennel seeds and meat from black pigs reared in the Nebrodi mountains. Don't confuse fennel sausages from Tuscany with the Sicilian variety. They are completely different when it comes to appearance, taste, and ingredients. Tuscan *salsiccia al finocchio* is often made using *bardiccio fiorentino*, a strongly spiced sausage made from beef and pork, which also includes fennel seeds.

Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Oil a baking sheet or line it with parchment paper.

Cut the potatoes in half lengthwise, then slice each half into thirds. Toss the potatoes and onion in a bowl with some salt and pepper and sufficient olive oil to coat everything well. Mix with your hands, then spread the vegetables out on the prepared sheet.

Prick the sausages all over with a toothpick and place these on the sheet, too. Drizzle the sausages with a

small amount of olive oil and slide the sheet into the middle of the oven. Toss the vegetables occasionally, and turn the sausages after 15–20 minutes of cooking. After about 30 minutes, stir in the tomatoes, sage, and rosemary; season sparingly with salt; and continue cooking for about another 10 minutes.

The potatoes and sausages are done when they have turned slightly golden. Remove from the oven and serve.





Piatto unico

IL MONSÙ

In his only novel, *The Leopard*, Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa tells the story of an aristocratic Sicilian family during a time of great upheaval on the island. The book begins with the Garibaldi uprising in 1860 and describes the transformation this brought, including the rise of the bourgeoisie. As the plot unfolds, there is frequent mention of the meals eaten in noble households at the time. It tells of lavish and flamboyant dishes served in unusual combinations, conjured up by chefs who toiled night after night over their creations.

These chefs, sweating away in their kitchens, were the superstars of the 18th and 19th centuries during the period of Bourbon rule on the island, which was 1734–1861, and during which Sicily and Naples were temporarily united as a single kingdom (“the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies”). The chefs working in the kitchens of aristocratic houses were referred to as *Monsieur*—at least, that’s what people attempted to call them, but Sicilians found the French word almost impossible to pronounce. And that’s how it ultimately became *Monsù*. The Neapolitans over on the Italian mainland had similar difficulties and ended up with their own *Monzù* class.

Cucina dei Monsù was characterized by French influences because, at that time, the French reigned supreme when it came to matters of the kitchen. Acquiring a renowned *Monsù* as their chef came to be a hugely important status symbol for aristocratic families. Sometimes duels were even fought over the services of the most prized cooks. Chefs were elaborately courted and treated with the utmost respect. Anyone who took pride in their culinary skills at the time was obliged to cook French food, but a *Monsù* did not necessarily have to be French.

It is said that the trend was started by Maria Carolina of Austria (Marie Antoinette’s sister) when she married King Ferdinand I, ruler of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, in

1768. She couldn’t stand the simple Neapolitan cuisine, so she asked her sister, who became Queen of France in 1774, to send over French chefs to produce more elegant fare. The less sophisticated Italian chefs she complained about were then trained to become *Monsieurs* by their French counterparts.

However, this did not result in a sudden replacement of all Sicilian and Neapolitan cooking with French cuisine. Instead, “French” food in the Two Sicilies became simpler and lighter, while the native southern Italian cuisine acquired a more sophisticated tone. It was this mingling of cultures that evolved into *cucina dei Monsù*, a completely new style of cooking combining the produce of the Two Sicilies with culinary techniques from France. And this food was not confined to aristocratic tables, but found its way to the plates of ordinary people as well. Over many years, *cucina dei Monsù* merged with the simple dishes of *cucina povera* (see p.130). In turn, *cucina povera* sought inspiration from *cucina dei Monsù* and tried to imitate this aristocratic cuisine, but with more humble ingredients.

This is why, in Sicily, we find traditional dishes such as *le melanzane a quaglia* (“eggplant in the style of quail”), in which eggplant is used as a substitute for expensive quail. Another island recipe again deploys the eggplant, this time coated in breadcrumbs in the guise of a cutlet.





A third example is *sarde a beccafico* (see p.64), where sardines are rolled or folded with tails aloft to resemble the pricey little birds on which the nobility would have dined. Or there is the renowned *falsomagro*, a giant rolled roast. In its *cucina dei Monsù* form, it contained peas, ham, provolone, hard-boiled eggs, and ground meat; in *falsomagro*, these were replaced among the lower orders by cheaper alternatives, and sometimes the meat itself became a *frittata*. Even molded savory *timballi* and cakes, as well as all kinds of *involtini*, originate from *cucina dei Monsù*.

So how did *cucina povera* come to be inspired by aristocratic cooking? Because it was ordinary people, of course, who were in service to the nobility. Domestic staff could see what was going on in the homes of the rich and what kind of food was being served. The exquisite aromas must have been incredibly enticing. No wonder there was a desire to devise versions of these dishes that could be enjoyed at home. This exchange of influences between the disparate social groups worked in the other direction, too. There's no doubt that the servant girls would have chatted with the *Monsù* about their own culinary skills.

Each *Monsù* in turn would have absorbed this knowledge, modifying it somewhat for use in his own creations. After all, a wise *Monsù* understood that his masters were ultimately still Sicilian and always would be. They loved the flavors of their homeland because that was what they had grown up with. No matter how refined French cuisine might be, it could never entirely replace the culinary memories of a Sicilian childhood.

When you look at things from this perspective, you cannot consider Sicilian cooking to be simply the cuisine of the poor. Italian cuisine in general is often pigeonholed as nothing more than the quick assembly of a few high-quality products, but this really isn't the case. Sicily was and still is a veritable melting pot in all regards. Foreign cuisines—such as Greek, Roman, Norman, Arabic, Spanish, and that of many other cultures—have mingled with Sicilian cooking. In addition, recipes favored by poor farmers and fishermen influenced the dining habits of the wealthy aristocrats. Ultimately, three significant styles can be distinguished in Sicilian cuisine: *cibo di strada* (see p.112), *cucina povera* (see p.130), and *cucina dei Monsù*.



Italian cooking, especially the cuisine of southern Italy, has developed into one of the most loved and imitated styles of food cooked and eaten around the world. French cuisine, on the other hand, has gradually diminished in significance and stature over time—at least when it comes to everyday cooking. Today’s Sicilian chefs are well aware of this and hope to avoid the same pitfalls. If you rest on your laurels and resist innovation, they think sooner or later you will suffer the same fate as the French.

But this is unlikely to happen anytime soon. The evolution of Sicilian cuisine has been promoted for several years by an exciting group of new chefs who have internalized lessons learned from the *Monsù*. These chefs are especially aware that the traditional cooking of the island should neither be devalued nor forgotten. There are numerous products of exceptional quality on the island crying out for new interpretations, while inspiration can often be found by examining the past, too.

The island’s latest culinary stars include, among others: Ciccio Sultano, Patrizia di Benedetto, Martina Caruso, Vincenzo Candiano, Accursio Craparo, Pino Cuttaia,

Massimo Mantarro, Natale Briguglio, Alberto Rizzo, Pietro D’Agostino, Vladimiro Farina, Domenico Colonna, Francesco Patti, Francesco Mineo, Alfio Visalli, and Giovanni Santoro.

The photographs on this page and on the previous pages depict dishes served by Ciccio Sultano at his two-Michelin-starred Duomo restaurant in Ragusa.

p.87, clockwise from top left: Sultano with a filleted red mullet; red mullet tails as part of a finished dish; the finished dish itself, Red mullet with garum and wild barbecued leeks (*Triglia maggiore di scoglio con salsa garum e porri selvatici al BBQ*).

p.88: Sultano filleting red mullet.

p.89: Mis-en-place for the finished dish; the finished dish itself, Spaghettone with North African sauce, tuna bottarga, and carrot juice (*Spaghettone in salsa moresca “Taratatà” con bottarga di tonno e succo di carote*).

Serves 4

Prep 1 hr 20 mins; start the previous day or a few hours in advance

Caponata with eggs and St. Bernardo sauce

Caponata con uova sode e sarsa di San Birnardu

1 portion St. Bernardo sauce (see p.93)
extra-virgin olive oil
2 eggplants, chopped into 2-in (4-5-cm) pieces
1 large red pepper, cut into 2-in (4-5-cm) pieces
1 large onion, finely chopped
2 tbsp small capers
handful of green olives, pitted
1 red chile, chopped
1 celery stick, chopped
1 1/4 oz (400 g) ripe tomatoes
1 tbsp chopped basil leaves
sea salt
2 tbsp (25-30 g) granulated sugar
1/2 cup (125 ml) white wine vinegar
8 medium eggs, hard-boiled and shells removed

The most famous of all dishes in Sicilian cuisine! In 1869, the Pensabene family began to produce *caponata* on an industrial scale. Sales were particularly successful in America, on account of the number of Sicilian immigrants there. Contrary to popular belief, the eggplant doesn't have to go it alone in this dish; there are plenty of other wonderful combinations. The aristocratic version would have been served with fish, but nowadays, the more frugal vegetarian version is the most widely found. I serve this *caponata* following an ancient—and now uncommon—recipe using St. Bernardo sauce and eggs.

Prepare the St. Bernardo sauce (see p.93).

Heat some olive oil in a pan over high heat. Sauté the eggplants first until partially cooked, then set aside. Add more oil if needed and sauté the pepper until partially cooked in the same way, then set aside.

Heat some olive oil in a large saucepan and sauté the onion with the capers, olives, chile, and celery.

Meanwhile, remove and discard the stalks from the tomatoes and place in a large bowl. Pour over boiling water to just cover and leave for 30 seconds, then drain. The skins should slip off. Remove the skins and chop the flesh finely. Add them to the pan with the onion mixture and let them simmer down slightly.

Add the partially cooked eggplant and pepper pieces with the basil, season with salt, and simmer until the vegetables are cooked. Combine the sugar and vinegar in a small bowl, stir this in, and let everything continue to simmer for another 5 minutes. Remove from heat and leave to cool until lukewarm.

Divide between 4 plates, add a couple of hard-boiled eggs to each, and serve with the St. Bernardo sauce.

Caponata:

The flavors will be even better if the dish is prepared a day in advance. Just reheat it slightly and serve lukewarm or even at room temperature. Do not serve cold from the refrigerator, as this will numb all of the flavors.





Serves 4
Prep 30 mins

St. Bernardo sauce

Sarsa di San Birnardu

1 cup (120 g) blanched almonds
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (50 g) dried
 breadcrumbs, or
 mollica secca (see p.30)
6 anchovies in oil
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (50 g) superfine sugar,
 or honey, plus extra to taste
3 tbsp extra-virgin olive
 oil, plus extra to taste
 (I use Tonda Iblea)
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (80 ml) freshly
 squeezed orange juice, plus
 extra to taste
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (60 ml) apple cider
 vinegar, plus extra to taste
 $2\frac{1}{4}$ oz (70 g) dark chocolate

This unusual sauce dating back to ancient times confirms the Sicilian passion for powerful contrasts. It is thought that it was invented by Benedictine monks from Catania. It is delicious and embodies a flavor we now know as umami. But today, the sauce is far less common on the island. During the *Monsù* period (see p.86), it would have been served alongside *caponata*, albeit a more lavish version of the dish than my own recipe (see p.90). The sauce also goes well with artichokes, eggs, and meat.

Lightly toast the almonds in a dry pan, leave until cool enough to handle, then chop very finely.

Meanwhile, lightly toast the breadcrumbs in a dry pan and mix these with the almonds in a bowl.

Finely chop the anchovies and combine with the sugar. Mix this with the olive oil and orange juice, then stir it into the almond mixture. Gradually stir in the vinegar.

Melt the chocolate over a water bath (in a heatproof bowl over a saucepan of simmering water, making sure the bowl does not touch the water), then stir this into the sauce. For my tastes,

the sauce is now ready. However, if desired, you can adjust the flavor with additional sugar, oil, orange juice, and vinegar. The sauce should have a consistency similar to pesto.

Store in the refrigerator for about 1 hour before serving to allow the flavors to develop. Serve lukewarm with vegetables or meat.

If covered with plastic wrap, the sauce will keep in the refrigerator for about 3 days. Ideally, warm it slightly over a water bath (see left) before serving.

Serves 6–8
Prep 1¾ hrs, plus
cooling time

Meat and vegetable pie with pasta and custard filling

Timballo del gattopardo

For the filling

¾ oz (20 g) dried porcini
mushrooms
⅔ cup (100 g) peas
coarse sea salt
2¾ oz (80 g) rigatoni pasta
¼ oz (120 g) cooked turkey
ham, finely chopped
1 medium egg
¼ tbsp (25 g) fresh breadcrumbs
1½ handfuls of flat-leaf
parsley leaves, chopped
⅓ cup (30 g) pecorino cheese,
finely grated
sea salt and black pepper
extra-virgin olive oil
1 shallot, finely chopped
7 oz (200 g) mixed ground meat
¼ cup (50 ml) Marsala wine
4 quail eggs, hard-boiled and
shells removed
1 black truffle

For the shortcrust pastry

2¾ cups (350 g) fine “00” grade
durum wheat semolina flour,
or all-purpose flour
pinch of salt
12 tbsp (175 g) chilled
unsalted butter, chopped
1 medium egg
½ cup (80 g) superfine sugar
½ tsp ground cinnamon

For the custard

2 cups (500 ml) whole milk
5 tbsp (40 g) cornstarch
2 medium egg yolks, plus 1 egg
seeds from 1 vanilla pod
¼ cup (50 g) granulated sugar
½ tsp ground cinnamon

Soak the porcini in hot water for 30 minutes, then squeeze out the liquid.

To make the pastry, combine the flour and salt and rub in the butter. Beat the egg with the sugar and cinnamon and work everything together until smooth. Wrap in plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator for 1 hour.

For the custard, mix ½ cup (100 ml) of the milk with the cornstarch, egg yolks, and egg. Use a balloon whisk to mix the vanilla seeds, sugar, and cinnamon into the remaining milk, then heat this in a saucepan. Remove from the stove and pour into the egg mixture in a thin stream, beating constantly. Return to the pan and place over medium heat, stirring, until it thickens. Place plastic wrap directly on the surface of the custard and leave to cool (but don't chill).

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Set aside one-third of the pastry. Roll out the remainder on a floured work surface to ¼ in (5mm) thick. Use this to line the base and sides of a 8 in (20 cm) springform cake pan (3½in/9 cm deep). Cover the pan with parchment paper, fill it with baking beans, and bake for 12 minutes. Remove the beans and paper and set the pastry shell aside.

Blanch the peas in boiling, salted water for about 5 minutes, submerge

them in ice water, then drain. Cook the pasta in boiling, salted water until *al dente*, then drain. Mix the turkey ham, egg, breadcrumbs, ½ handful of the parsley, and the pecorino until you have a firm mixture that can be molded. Season. Shape into walnut-sized balls, toss in flour, and sauté in plenty of olive oil for 3 minutes.

Heat some olive oil in another pan and sauté the shallot. Add the ground meat and continue frying. Deglaze the pan with Marsala and continue simmering for 1–2 minutes. Stir in the peas and porcini and simmer for another 1–2 minutes. Season to taste and remove from heat.

Set the oven to 375°F (190°C).

To make the layers: spread half the custard over the pastry base. Scatter over the pasta and cover everything with the ground meat sauce. Arrange the meatballs and quail eggs on top and grate over the truffle. Season with a touch of pepper. Cover everything with the remaining custard. Roll out a ¼-in (5-mm) thick lid from the remaining pastry and, if you like, create decorations from any leftovers.

Bake in the center of the oven for 30–35 minutes, then reduce the temperature to the oven's lowest setting and continue to bake for another 5 minutes until done.





Serves 4
Prep 1 hr 20 mins

Anchovy and potato tart

Timballo di alici e patate

1³/₄ lb (800 g) fresh anchovies
1⁴/₂ oz (400 g) red potatoes, or
other waxy type, peeled
and cut into ¹/₈-in (3-mm)
thick slices
coarse sea salt
1/2 cup (60 g) dried
breadcrumbs, or *mollica*
secca (see p.30)
1/3 cup (30 g) almonds,
roughly chopped
1 large garlic clove, ideally
pink garlic, finely chopped
1/2 oz (15 g) flat-leaf parsley
leaves, chopped, plus extra
sprigs to serve
7 oz (200 g) cherry tomatoes,
finely chopped
1³/₄ oz (50 g) pecorino cheese,
roughly chopped
1 tbspcandied lemon peel
finely grated zest of
1 organic lemon, plus lemon
wedge, to serve
1 tsp fennel seeds
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
extra-virgin olive oil
(I like Biancolilla here)

This *timballo* looks intricate and impressive, but the only thing that takes a bit of time is filleting and cleaning the little anchovies. You can also make this recipe with sardines, which are slightly larger, meaning there will be fewer to fillet.

Prepare the anchovies as described for sardines (see p.64).

Blanch the potatoes for about 5 minutes in salted, boiling water, then submerge in cold water.

Put the breadcrumbs, almonds, garlic, parsley, tomatoes, pecorino, candied lemon peel, lemon zest, and fennel seeds into a bowl and mix well. Season the mixture to taste.

Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C).

Oil a round baking pan 10 in (25 cm) in diameter and line it with parchment paper. Arrange half the anchovies on the base with their heads facing toward the

center. Make sure they are neat, as they will be on top once the *timballo* is turned out of the pan. Spread half the potato slices on top, season sparingly with salt and pepper, then scatter over half the breadcrumb mixture. Repeat these layers once more, finishing with the remaining breadcrumb mixture. Season generously with pepper and drizzle liberally with oil.

Bake for 25 minutes in the oven on a low shelf. Move the pan to the center shelf and continue baking for another 10 minutes.

Let the *timballo* cool down slightly before turning it out of the pan. Serve with a lemon wedge and parsley.



CICCIO

The Sicels founded the settlement of Hybla that today is known as Ragusa Ibla. It forms part of the city of Ragusa, rebuilt in the Sicilian Baroque style following an earthquake in 1693. For a long period, this was just an attractive, historic, Baroque old town. Then, in 2002, it was one of the late-Baroque towns of Val di Noto to be declared a UNESCO world heritage site. Two years earlier, in 2000, one of the first restaurants had opened up in the town's Palazzo la Rocca, which in 1961 served as a set for the film *Divorce Italian Style*, directed by Pietro Germi and starring Marcello Mastroianni.

The restaurant is called Duomo, and it currently holds two Michelin stars. It's in a beautiful location, with the Cathedral of San Giorgio just a stone's throw away.



Ciccio Sultano was born “by chance” in Turin in 1970, because his parents happened to be in Piedmont looking for work. It was not long, however, before they returned to Sicily. When Ciccio was 4 years old, his father died. At the age of 11, he began to work while simultaneously attending school and managed to keep this up until the age of 13, when, unsurprisingly, something had to give. He broke off his studies in order to work full time. He ended up with a job in a *pasticceria* with a bar and snack counter (*tavola calda*) in Vittoria. Here, he learned how to make *dolci* while peering over at the bar to keep an eye on how they put together American cocktails. He left home when he was 17, returned to school, and decided—at the age of 19—to pursue a career as a chef. At the same time, he bought a house. In order to pay for it, he had to put in double shifts. So

during the day, he worked at the *pasticceria*, and in the evening, he worked at a *spaghetteria*.

There was no time for sleep. His passion for cooking was becoming increasingly clear. He began teaching himself, reading books by the great chefs Gualtiero Marchesi, Gianfranco Vissani, Michel Troisgros, and Alain Ducasse. He collected issues of the magazine *Grand Gourmet*. And at the age of 29, he opened his own restaurant, Duomo. In 2004, he was awarded his first Michelin star, and in 2006, he received a second star. The logo of the restaurant incorporates a stylized depiction of what Ciccio believes are the three most important ingredients on the island—the three things essential to being a Sicilian and a chef: olive oil, salt, and wheat (*olio, sale, grano*). In his logo, these three components are artistically combined to create our globe.



Ciccio has never regarded Michelin stars as his overriding motivation; he has simply always wanted to do everything as well as possible. This aspiration comes in part from his upbringing, influenced by his grandparents, but it is also a fundamental characteristic of his very nature. “For me, it was just logical, natural, and honest to do everything as well as possible. That’s always been my approach, even when I was young. I have always tried to give my maximum effort. That’s how today’s results have come about,” Ciccio tells me.

In 2015, he launched the “multiconcept” bar I Banchi, managed by his former colleague Peppe Cannistrà. You can hang out here in a relaxed atmosphere from breakfast to apéritifs right through to dinner, or you can shop for high-quality products sold under the Ciccio Sultano name. This renowned chef is certainly a great networker who collaborates with other people in Sicilian food who are eager to make an impact on the world with their great products and high environmental and husbandry standards. This includes Raul and Jessica,

who cultivate an incredible variety of vegetables, plants, and flowers at the Villa Melina in Pedalino, and also possess detailed knowledge about ancient aspects of Sicilian horticulture that was very nearly lost. Ciccio also supports a project called L’Aia Gaia, run by Carmelo Cilia, an absolute expert in Sicilian cheese. He has even helped to create a paradise for chickens, in collaboration with Paolo Moltisanti. The birds do exactly as they please in a free-range environment. He also works with Nino Testa, who belongs to one of the longest established fishing families from Catania (see p.56), offering advice on design issues. That’s one of Ciccio Sultano’s other talents: he possesses a fine eye for the visual arts.

Ten years ago, he met Gabriella Cicero. She is multitalented, acting as the general manager and second-in-command for Ciccio’s little empire. What he has achieved with his team over a period of nearly two decades has reshaped the entire gastronomic landscape of this island.



“Our cuisine is a bit like that of the Phoenicians,” says Ciccio, explaining his food philosophy. “They came here, not as conquerors, but as traders; they would buy something at one port, then sail to the next port and sell it on there. Our cuisine is the expression of many great cultures that have met, traded, fought, and eaten on this island for more than 4,000 years. So Sicilian food is not just *caponata*, *cannolo*, and *cassata Siciliana*—there’s so much more, too.”

He gives an illustration: “Let’s take *biancomangiare*, for example. People were already crazy about it back in Norman times, and this dish was constantly relocating, from Persia to France to Sicily. *Biancomangiare* could be any number of different things. Sometimes it was a sweet dish with almond milk; or with almond and goat milk and added chicken, it could be transformed into a thick stew; on other occasions, it was served as an antipasto, sometimes as a mousse, or even as a soup.” Ciccio continues, “The one thing I want to make clear is that tradition can tempt you into standing still in order to

preserve authenticity, but human evolution depends on everything around it, and that includes food. Just as people develop over time, so there are changes in their conduct, their cuisine, and their beliefs. In one sense, culinary evolution can involve a ‘betrayal’ of tradition. Being ‘disloyal’ so that something new can be created, making innovation possible. That is what we are doing at *Duomo*.”

Sicily’s wonderfully diverse food culture is worth celebrating outside Italy, too. In 2018, Ciccio Sultano opened the *Pastamara—Bar con Cucina* at The Ritz-Carlton in Vienna.

IL
BAN
CHI

RISTORANTE

TAKE AWAY

LUNCH

PANINI

PEPPE
CANNISTRÀ





Serves 4
Prep 50 mins

Stuffed baked artichokes with St. Bernardo sauce

Carciofi ripieni al forno con sarsa di San Birnardu

For the artichokes

8 artichokes
1 organic lemon
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (150 ml) dry white wine
1 portion St. Bernardo Sauce
(see p.93)

For the stuffing

4 heaped tbsp coarse dried
breadcrumbs, or *mollica
secca* (see p.30)
2 garlic cloves
6 anchovy fillets in oil
2 heaped tbsp finely chopped
mint leaves
2 heaped tbsp finely chopped
flat-leaf parsley leaves
1 tbsp finely grated zest of
1 organic lemon
extra-virgin olive oil
2 heaped tbsp finely grated
pecorino cheese
sea salt flakes
chili flakes

To be honest, you could spend a whole day eating artichokes with St. Bernardo sauce, so it's always worth making extra while you are at it! A large serving platter is ideal for this dish. Put it in the center of the table, filled with the stuffed artichokes, along with a couple of little bowls of St. Bernardo sauce and some hard-boiled eggs in another bowl alongside. If you like, you can serve this with *caponata* (see p.90), plus some fine wine (both red or white work splendidly here). Invite your friends over and time will fly by.

Prepare the artichokes (see p.35), then slice them in half lengthwise and put them in a bowl of lemon water until ready to use.

Toast the breadcrumbs in a dry pan.

Finely chop the garlic together with the anchovies. Stir the mixture in a bowl with the herbs, lemon zest, toasted crumbs, 4 tbsp olive oil, and the pecorino until well combined. Season with salt and chili flakes.

Preheat the oven to 325°F (160°C).

Fill half the artichokes with the stuffing mixture. Place all the artichokes, cut surfaces up, in a Dutch oven or baking pan. Pour over the wine, add 1– $\frac{1}{4}$ cups

(250–300 ml) of water, and drizzle with plenty of olive oil. Cover with foil, pressing it down firmly around the edges of the pan to seal.

Bake the artichoke halves in the center of the oven for 30–40 minutes. The outer leaves should come away easily at the end of this time. If not, cook for a little longer until they do.

Remove the cooked artichokes, place all the artichoke halves on a serving plate, and sprinkle with sea salt. Serve the unstuffed artichokes with the St. Bernardo sauce.







Serves 4
Prep 1 hr 20 mins

Ricotta dumplings in an orange and tomato sauce

*Polpette di ricotta col sugo
al profumo d'arancia*

For the dumplings

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup (80 g) fresh
breadcrumbs, or *mollica
fresca* (see p.30)
7 oz (200 g) ricotta cheese,
well drained
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (25 g) Parmesan
cheese, finely grated
1 medium egg
1 tbsp finely chopped
flat-leaf parsley leaves
pinch of zest from 1 organic
orange, plus extra to serve
freshly grated nutmeg
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper

For the sauce

extra-virgin olive oil
(such as Tonda Iblea)
1 large garlic clove,
finely chopped
1 heaped tbsp tomato paste,
or *strattù* (see p.40)
2 x 14-oz (400-g) cans of
chopped tomatoes
pared zest of $\frac{1}{2}$ organic
orange, removed with a
vegetable peeler, without
the white pith
small handful of basil
leaves, plus more to serve
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (40 g) raisins

Orange and tomato is one of my favorite combinations. I have to rein myself in from automatically reaching for an orange every time a recipe involves tomatoes. In the period between October and May, there are oranges in Sicily that range in color from bright yellow to blood red. In addition to the *Arancia rossa di Sicilia* blood oranges, there are the pale “vanilla oranges” *Arancia di Ribera* and the almost-lost *Arancia ovale della Valle dell’Anapo*, which you will sometimes find as late as June; all of them hold protected origin status. And that’s not to mention navel oranges. Even outside the season, you find oranges in our gardens, some of which are edible.

To make the dumplings, mix the breadcrumbs, ricotta, Parmesan, egg, parsley, orange zest, and some nutmeg. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Let the ricotta mixture rest in the refrigerator for 15 minutes.

Meanwhile, to make the sauce, heat 2 tbsp olive oil in a saucepan and gently sauté the garlic. Stir the tomato paste or *strattù* in a small bowl with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (200 ml) of warm water, then pour this into the garlic pan and continue simmering for 1 minute.

Next, combine the tomatoes in a mixing bowl with $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (200 ml) of warm water, the pared orange zest, basil, and raisins and add to the pan. Season, then simmer for 20 minutes. Remove and discard the pared orange zest and set aside to keep warm.

Meanwhile, bring a large saucepan of salted water to a boil. Use your hands to shape 12 dumplings from the ricotta mixture and slide these into the boiling water. They need to have plenty of space, so, if necessary, cook them in batches. Once the dumplings have floated to the surface, cook for 8–10 minutes, then scoop them out of the water with a slotted spoon and transfer to the tomato sauce. Leave to stand for about 1 minute.

Arrange the ricotta dumplings with the orange and tomato sauce on 4 plates, scatter with basil leaves and orange zest, and drizzle everything with a dash of olive oil to serve.

Makes 10
Prep 45 mins

Angel hair pasta fritters with pecorino, spinach, date syrup, and cinnamon

Capelli d'angelo con pecorino, spinaci, sciropo di datteri, e cannella

2 lb 4 oz (1 kg) fresh spinach
coarse sea salt
7 oz (200 g) angel hair pasta
1/2 cup (80 g) raisins
3/4 cup (80 g) pecorino
cheese, finely grated
2 medium eggs, lightly
beaten
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
extra-virgin olive oil
date syrup, or honey
ground cinnamon

At first glance, this seems like a bewildering combination. Hearty pasta with spinach and sheep cheese ... and a sweet component ... plus cinnamon? But this is another ancient and authentic Sicilian recipe. Nowadays, alas, it is a little-known dish. In its original form, it would have been sweetened with honey and, curiously, it would traditionally have been made without any egg—although how on earth the whole thing held together without egg is a complete mystery to me.

Wash the spinach. Get a bowl filled with ice water ready. Put a large saucepan with plenty of water over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and blanch the spinach for 1–2 minutes. Remove with tongs or a slotted spoon, leaving the water in the pan, and submerge in your ice water. Drain, squeeze out any liquid, and put in a bowl.

Return the water to a boil (ensuring you have at least 7 cups/2 liters) and cook the angel hair pasta until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package). Drain and mix into the spinach in the bowl. Leave to cool slightly.

Meanwhile, cover the raisins with boiling water in a small bowl, leave to stand briefly, then drain and squeeze the raisins well. Combine the raisins with the pasta and spinach, then add the pecorino and eggs. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

Heat some olive oil in a pan and cook portions of pasta “nests” (twisting each with a fork before placing it into the pan). Fry the “nests” on both sides until crisp.

Arrange these pasta fritters on plates, drizzle with date syrup, and sprinkle with cinnamon to serve.





Serves 4
Prep 1 hr 10 mins

Mafaldine with lamb and minted sweet-and-sour squash

*Mafaldine con agnello e zucca
all'agrodolce alla menta*

For the lamb and pasta

11 oz (320 g) lamb, from the
leg or neck
extra-virgin olive oil
1/3 cup (70 ml) medium-dry
red wine
1 heaped tbsp (25 g) tomato
paste
8 oz (240 g) canned chopped
tomatoes
7 oz (200 g) potatoes, chopped
into 1/2-in (1-cm) cubes
1 shallot, chopped
2 garlic cloves, chopped
1 carrot, chopped
1 celery stick, chopped
3 parsley sprigs, chopped
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
coarse sea salt
11 oz (320 g) mafaldine
pasta, or tagliatelle pasta
4 heaped tbsp finely grated
pecorino cheese

For the squash

1 lb 5 oz (600 g) squash
extra-virgin olive oil
2 3/4 oz (80 g) black olives
(about 20)
2 garlic cloves, sliced
handful of mint leaves,
roughly chopped, plus
extra to serve
chili flakes
2 tbsp white wine or apple
cider vinegar
2 tbsp (10 g) superfine sugar

Usually, sweet-and-sour squash (*zucca all'agrodolce*) is eaten as a starter, side dish, *piatto unico*, or *intermezzo*. But this combination with lamb and pasta just floated into my head one day. The result is a really attractive, well-balanced dish. The mint in the squash also complements the lamb fabulously.

Remove the lamb from the refrigerator 1 hour before cooking and let it come to room temperature, then chop into 3/4-in (1.5–2-cm) chunks.

Heat some oil in a large saucepan and sear the meat on all sides, then deglaze the pan with the red wine, allowing the alcohol to evaporate slightly. Stir the tomato paste into 3/4 cup (200 ml) of water in a small bowl and add this to the meat with the chopped tomatoes. Stir, then add the potatoes, the remaining vegetables, and the parsley. Season with salt and pepper, cover, and simmer gently until the potatoes are cooked. Stir occasionally during this process and leave the lid off for the final 5 minutes. Adjust the seasoning once done.

For the squash, preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C) and line a deep baking sheet with parchment paper. Peel and seed the squash, then chop into 1/4-in (5-mm) thick slices. Coat with olive oil in a bowl and season with salt. Arrange on the baking sheet.

Press the olives with the flat side of a kitchen knife to help you remove the stones. Scatter the olives over the squash and bake for 10 minutes in the center of the oven. Sprinkle over the garlic, mint, and a pinch of chili flakes. Continue cooking for another 5 minutes. Stir the vinegar and sugar in a small bowl, pour over the squash, and return the sheet to the oven for another 5 minutes.

Fill a large saucepan with plenty of water and place over high heat. When it comes to a boil, sprinkle in coarse sea salt and cook the pasta until *al dente* (usually 1 minute less than the time stated on the package). Drain and mix with the sauce while still dripping wet.

Make nests of mafaldine and lamb on 4 plates. Arrange the sliced squash on top. Sprinkle with pecorino and mint leaves to serve.

LA STRADA

Il cibo di strada is street food from the Sicilian capital, Palermo. It originally came about as food for the poor, but it is different from the traditional cuisine that was cooked at home by women for their families. It was made only to be sold. Palermo's street food is distinctly *Palermitano*, and it exists in this form exclusively in Palermo. It is not a wider Italian tradition.

I met up with Giorgio Flaccavento out on the street in front of the entrance to the Teatro Massimo di Palermo. Before Giorgio became a street food guide in Palermo, he worked in marketing in the publishing industry for 14 years, specializing in art and Sicilian tourism. In this role, he traveled the length and breadth of Sicily and, while on the road, he developed a passion for local food specialties and products, and he found that there was always something new to discover.

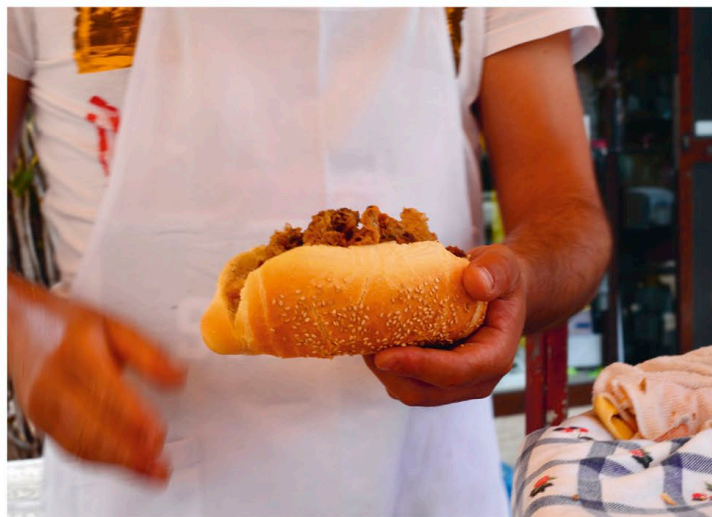
After his career in publishing, he decided he wanted to work in tourism, so he applied for a guide license and got in touch with the founders of Palermo Street Food.

Palermo Street Food was created by a young couple: Salvatore and Danielle. He is 100 percent born-and-bred in Palermo, while she is American through and through. As a foreigner, Danielle had a definite instinct for what was unusual about Palermo's food culture and an appreciation for those snacks that local residents take for granted. She knew how to identify exactly which aspects of the city's cuisine deserved more attention. "It's crazy that you have this street food culture that is completely ignored by the tourist industry," she says. And that's how Palermo's first street food tour came into being.

Locals in search of *il cibo di strada* usually head to one of the three largest markets in Palermo old town: the Mercato Ballarò, Mercato della Vucciria, and Mercato del Capo. Nothing unusual is offered there—just simple, everyday

food. This food has always existed in Palermo, long before "street food" was even a concept and well before it became so trendy. The only extraordinary thing for the food stall operators is the sudden attention they are now getting! But the recognition is great for business, because in the past, there were very few people who appreciated the value and the magic of these markets. One of those select few was the painter Renato Guttuso, who created his famous picture of a bustling market scene, *Vucciria di Palermo*, in 1974.

Many dishes contain offal, such as *la stigghiola* (lamb or kid goat intestine with onion and parsley, roasted on a spit) made by *stigghiularu*; *pani ca meusa* (bread with spleen and lung) made by *meusaru*; *budelle di vitello* (calf intestine); *musso e carcagnolo* (using meat from the cheek and heel); *lingua* (tongue); *mammelle della mucca* (cow's udder); and even *pene del vitello* (calf's penis).







All of these dishes use innards and offal that are eaten here (and only here) in Palermo. Another specialty from Palermo is the slightly less alarming *panelle e crocchè* (chickpea slices and croquettes), a dish without any offal, which tourists (unsurprisingly) usually prefer!

This recipe has now been copied elsewhere in Sicily, and you may find it offered as an *aperitivo*, but you will only find it served as street food in Palermo. Some books incorrectly claim that *panelle e crocchè* is the quintessential Sicilian street food. But before all the street food hype, you would barely have encountered anyone in Catania who had eaten or heard of this dish. The same is true of the following recipes: *la rascatura*, which is made using the leftover dough from *panelle e cazzilli*, “cobbling” the bits together to make something new, because nothing should be wasted or thrown away; *lo sfincione* (focaccia Palermo style); *la frittola* (veal scraps that are cooked, then browned in lard) made by the *frittularu*; *la quarume* (made from various bits of beef tripe); *il polpo* (octopus) served

as street food; and, of course, stuffed rice balls, which are well known in Catania but which take the feminine linguistic form here (*arancine*) and are round rather than cone-shaped (see p. 122).

As well as being the capital of Sicily, Palermo is also the capital of outdoor gastronomy. The city’s street food culture is incredibly diverse, and its traditions go back a long way. Many recipes have a history spanning centuries, as well as origins far beyond the capital city itself. For instance, the traditional dish *pani ca meusa* (bread with spleen and lung) is thought to go back to medieval times, when the Jews in Palermo worked as butchers, following Hebrew rituals. Their religion prohibited them from accepting money for meat that had been slaughtered in the kosher tradition. However, the same did not apply to offal, so this was turned into a dish to be sold to their customers. Following the expulsion of the Jews in the 15th century, the recipe was initially forgotten, but it has been resurrected by the residents of Palermo.



Another factor in the widespread consumption of offal was the level of meat consumption by the island's numerous aristocratic families. Even in the ancient days, slaughterhouse waste would have been discarded, so the poor took advantage of this out of sheer necessity.

Many visitors who book a street food tour with Giorgio are surprised at how varied the food in Palermo is. It exceeds their expectations. But it is easier to understand this variety if you remember that Sicily is the product of numerous different rulers. What we see in the island's food today is its multicultural inheritance from more than 10 different countries of provenance.

Sicily is a veritable melting pot, and not just in the kitchen. Each of its prevailing regimes has also left its own architectural traces. As a consequence, Giorgio tells me, food and architecture have a lot in common in Sicily. For a long time, Giorgio lived in London and Madrid. The supermarket shelves there looked similar to those in

Palermo; they reminded him of his home in Sicily. But a huge number of products were imported, whereas in Palermo, you get everything fresh and from regional suppliers, because such a wonderful and varied array of food is produced right here.

Nowadays, Giorgio is increasingly being booked as a classic city tour guide in addition to his role as a food guide. This is because more and more visitors want to explore local flavors while admiring the city's architectural attractions, both remnants of the city's multicultural past.

On these tours, you walk for up to 4 hours, sometimes in the blazing sun, through the tumultuous street markets. It is physically strenuous, particularly for the guide. But people absolutely love it, and when they finish, they are exhilarated by the diversity and wealth of information they've been given. It's been 5 years since Giorgio started offering these tours. He hopes to be able to do this job forever, or for as long as his legs will let him....

Serves 6–8
Prep 1 hr 20 mins, plus
resting time

White Sicilian focaccia

Lo sfincione bianco di Bagheria

¼ oz (6 g) fresh yeast, or
¾ tsp (3 g) active dry yeast
5 tsp (20 g) granulated sugar,
plus 1½ tbsp
3⅓ cups (400 g) flour
(ideally an ancient
Sicilian variety of wheat,
such as Maiorca, Russello,
Perciasacchi, or Tumminia
(see p.130); or emmer flour)
6 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil,
plus more for drizzling
1¾ lb (800 g) white onions,
sliced into rings
1 garlic clove, finely chopped
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
½ cup (120 ml) white wine
vinegar
½ cup (60 g) fresh
breadcrumbs, or *mollica
fresca* (see p.30)
½ cup (40 g) pecorino cheese,
finely grated
dried oregano
1 lb 2 oz (500 g) young sheep
cheese (for instance,
Tuma and / or ricotta),
or manouri, cut into
½-in (1-cm) thick slices

Supposedly it was the nuns at the Abbey of San Vito who invented this street food, the most famous dish from Palermo and the surrounding province. *Sfincione* is a cross between pizza and focaccia. Its appeal lies in a very soft, thick layer of dough that is normally topped with just a few ingredients. The classic version is made with tomato sauce, onions, oregano, and sometimes also anchovies and caciocavallo. This recipe comes from Bagheria. It is made without any tomatoes at all and is completely white.

Stir the yeast into 1 cup (220 ml) of lukewarm water with the 5 tsp (20 g) sugar and 1¼ cups (150 g) of the flour. Cover and leave to proof in a warm, sheltered place for 1 hour.

Mix the remaining flour with 2 tsp (10 g) salt. Use a food processor to knead this into your starter dough, along with 3 tbsp of olive oil, for about 6 minutes. Shape into a ball, cover, and leave to proof in a warm, sheltered place for 2 hours.

Next, heat another 3 tbsp of olive oil in a sauté pan. Gently sweat the onions and garlic for 20 minutes, seasoning with salt and pepper and stirring often. Mix the vinegar and the 1½ tbsp sugar in a small bowl, pour into the pan, and simmer gently for another 15 minutes. Remove from heat and allow to cool.

Place a sheet of parchment paper on a thin wooden board and place a metal ring mold 10 in (25 cm) in diameter

on top. Use your fingers to spread the dough out inside the ring, then cover and leave to proof for another hour.

Mix the breadcrumbs with the pecorino, some black pepper, and oregano.

Slide a baking sheet into the center of the oven and preheat it to 425°F (220°C).

First, spread the sheep cheese over the dough base, then cover with the cooled onion mixture, and finish with the crumb mix. Drizzle with olive oil. Carefully slide the *sfincione*—still in the ring mold and on its parchment paper—onto the baking sheet. At the same time, carefully pull out the wooden board from underneath.

Bake for 20–30 minutes until the crust is golden. Leave to cool briefly, then remove the ring mold. Drizzle with olive oil to serve.





Serves 4

Prep 1 hr, plus soaking time;
start the evening before

Grilled octopus with ricotta hummus, panelle, and lemon couscous

Polpo grigliato con crema di ceci, panelle, e couscous al limone

For the ricotta hummus

1 cup (250 g) yellow chickpeas
1/3 cup (80 g) black chickpeas
1 small carrot, chopped
2 pinches baking soda
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1 celery stick, finely chopped
1 bay leaf
sea salt and black pepper
1 level tsp curry powder
splash of lemon juice
3 1/2 oz (100 g) ricotta cheese

For the panelle

2/3 cup (60 g) chickpea flour
1/3 cup (40 g) “00” pasta flour,
or all-purpose flour
finely grated zest of
1 organic lemon
2 cups (500 ml) neutral-
flavored oil

For the couscous

3/4 cup (200 ml) vegetable stock
1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 cup (100 g) couscous

For the lemon sauce

1/2 cup (100 ml) freshly
squeezed lemon juice
2 garlic cloves, finely
chopped
handful each of mint and
parsley or oregano leaves,
roughly torn
finely grated zest of
1 organic lemon

1 lb 2 oz–1 lb 5 oz (500–600 g)
cooked octopus tentacles

Separately soak the yellow and black chickpeas overnight. Once you are ready to cook, drain and rinse the yellow chickpeas, then put in a saucepan with 3 1/2 cups (1 liter) of water, the carrot, a pinch of baking soda, 1 tbsp of the olive oil, and celery. Cook over medium heat for up to 2 hours, until soft. Top up the water if needed. Drain, reserving 1/4 cup (50 ml) liquid.

Drain the black chickpeas, then cook for 45 minutes in 2 cups (500 ml) of water with the bay leaf and a pinch of baking soda, then drain.

Put the yellow chickpeas in a food processor or blender, reserving a handful to use as a garnish. Add the carrot, salt, pepper, 1 tbsp of the olive oil, the curry powder, and the lemon juice to the processor and blend to a purée. If necessary, add a bit of cooking liquid. Stir this creamy mixture into the ricotta, adjust the seasoning and lemon juice, and keep warm.

To make the panelle, knead both types of flour with 3 tbsp of lukewarm water, some salt, and the lemon zest until you have a firm, homogeneous dough. Cover and leave to rest for 30 minutes.

Fill a small, high-sided saucepan around three-quarters full with neutral oil and heat to 350°F (180°C). Hold

a wooden skewer in the oil to test its temperature: when small bubbles form on it, the oil is hot enough.

Roll the dough out on a lightly floured work surface until it is about 1/4 in (7 mm) thick, stamp out shapes, and fry these in batches in the hot oil until golden. Remove them with a slotted spoon and drain on paper towel. Season sparingly with salt and pepper, then set aside to keep warm.

For the couscous, bring the vegetable stock to a boil in a pan with the olive oil, remove from heat, and stir in the couscous. Season with pepper and leave the grains to swell for around 20 minutes, until the stock has been absorbed.

To make the lemon sauce, mix all the ingredients together, season to taste, and fold half of it into the couscous. Fork it through to fluff up the grains.

Heat a griddle without any oil. Cook the octopus tentacles on both sides and immediately mix them with the remaining lemon sauce.

Arrange the couscous, hummus, panelle, and octopus along with the lemon sauce on 4 plates. Scatter over the black chickpeas, the reserved yellow chickpeas, and some sea salt flakes. Drizzle with a dash of olive oil to serve.





Makes about 12
Prep 1 hr 20 mins, plus
cooling time

Arancini with tuna and eggplant

Arancini con tonno e melanzane

For the rice coating

1 lb 2 oz (500 g) arborio rice
coarse sea salt
4 tbsp pecorino cheese, finely
grated
4 tbsp Parmesan cheese,
finely grated
2 tsp curry powder
3/4 cup (100 g) fine “00” grade
durum wheat semolina
flour, or all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cups (160 g) fine dried
breadcrumbs, or *mollica*
secca (see p.30)

For the filling

extra-virgin olive oil
8 oz (220 g) eggplants, in
3/4-in (1 1/2-cm) cubes
6 oz (180 g) tuna fillet, in
3/4-in (1 1/2-cm) cubes
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
2–2 1/2 tbsp (15–20 g) fine “00”
grade durum wheat semolina
flour, or all-purpose flour
1 onion, sliced into strips
12 oz (350 g) canned chopped
tomatoes
2 tbsp chopped basil leaves
2 tbsp chopped mint leaves
chili flakes
3 1/2–4 oz (100–120 g)
provolone cheese, chopped
into 3/4-in (1 1/2-cm) cubes,
or cooking mozzarella

neutral-flavored oil,
for deep-frying

For a long time, pretty much all you could get was *arancino al ragù* (with pieces of meat) in Catania. Traditionally, they would also have been stuffed with cheese, never with béchamel. *Arancino bianco*, which aren't really white at all, are stuffed with ham, peas, and a béchamel cheese sauce. Nowadays, it's hard to keep track of all the different versions of *arancini*. But in Sicily, it's important to order an “*arancino*” in Palermo and an “*arancina*” in Catania. You see, in Palermo, these little rice balls are feminine and round. The pointed male *arancini* come from Catania.

Cook the rice in 4 cups (1.2 liters) of salted water until *al dente*. While the rice is still warm (but ensuring there is no water remaining), mix it with the pecorino, Parmesan, and curry powder. Transfer to the refrigerator to chill for at least 1 hour.

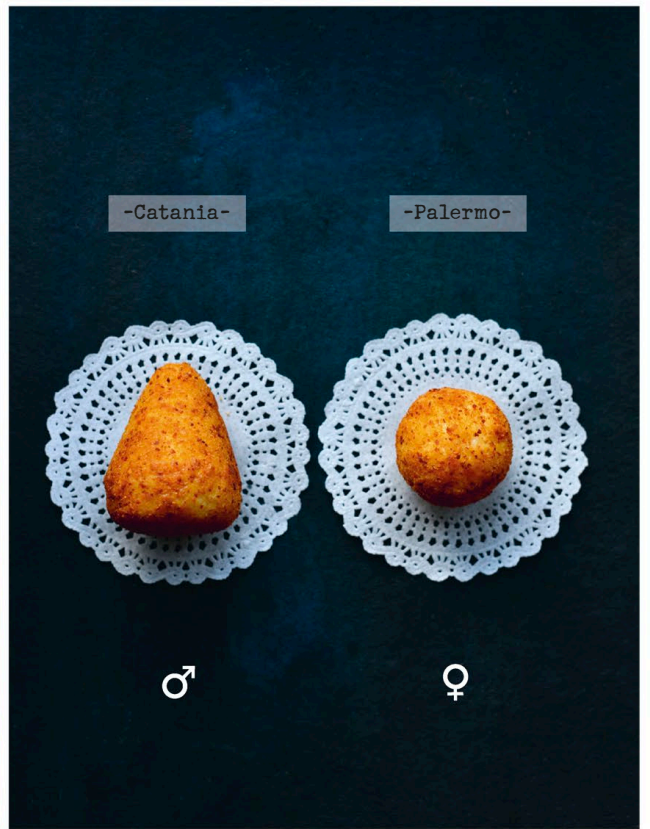
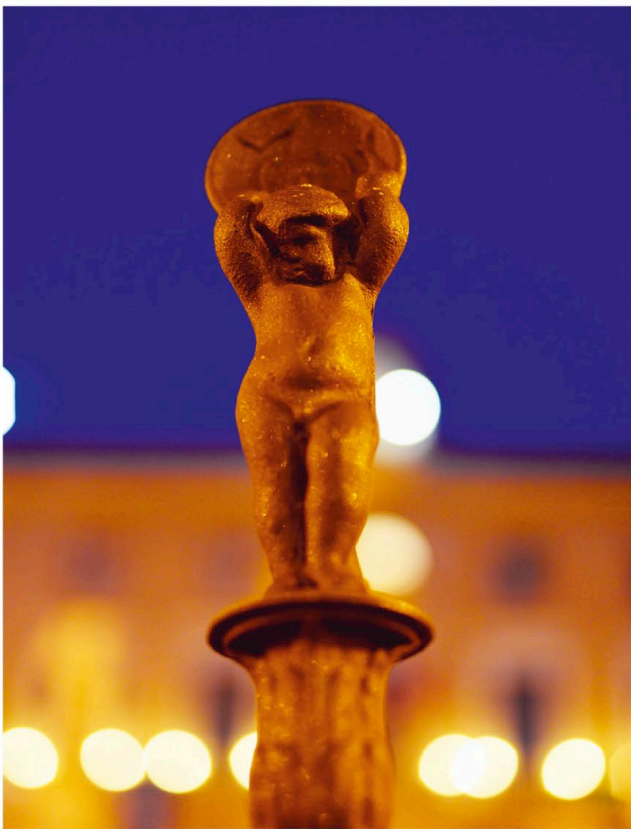
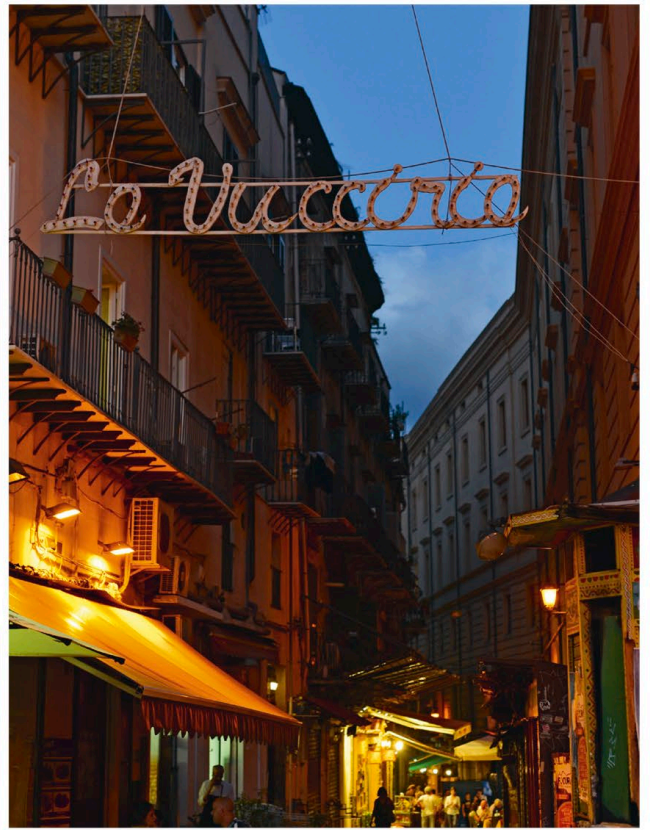
To make the filling, heat a generous amount of olive oil in a pan. Fry the eggplants over high heat, then set aside. Season the tuna sparingly with salt, toss the pieces in flour, and sauté for 1–2 minutes in olive oil.

Heat some olive oil in another pan. Sauté the onion until golden. Combine the tomatoes with 1/2 cup (100 ml) of water, then stir this into the pan with the basil and mint. Season to taste with salt and chili flakes. Allow the sauce to simmer down slightly. Spoon in the tuna and eggplant, remove from heat, cover, and leave to cool.

Shape 1 handful of chilled rice with your hands to make a ball. Then press it in the center to create a large cavity. Insert a good 1 tbsp of sauce and 1–2 cubes of provolone. Carefully spread the rice back over the filling and smooth it back into a ball. Make 12 little balls in the same way.

In a small bowl, stir together 3/4 cup (100 g) flour and 3/4 cup (200 ml) of water until smooth, then season with pepper. Toss the rice balls first in this mixture, then in the breadcrumbs.

In a pan, heat the neutral oil for frying to 350°F (180°C). Hold a wooden skewer in the oil to test: when little bubbles form on it, the oil is hot enough. Fry the little rice balls until golden brown. Drain on paper towel and serve warm.





Makes 6
Prep 2 hrs, plus 4 hrs
resting time

Sicilian brioche burgers

Sicilian burger col tuppo

For the filling

6 *polpette di melanzane con scamorza e menta* (see p.176)
 $\frac{1}{3}$ portion *broccoli affogati* (see p.176)
1 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
5 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz (150 g) ricotta cheese
some basil leaves

For the brioche buns

$\frac{1}{4}$ oz (6 g) fresh yeast, or
 $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp (3 g) active dry yeast
 $3\frac{1}{3}$ cups (420 g) “00” pasta flour, or all-purpose flour
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (200 ml) whole milk, plus 1 tbsp
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (50 ml) freshly squeezed orange juice
zest of $\frac{1}{2}$ small organic orange
a few drops of orange oil
1 medium egg, plus 1 small egg yolk
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (70 g) superfine sugar
 $3\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp (50 g) soft unsalted butter, chopped
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp sea salt
black sesame seeds

This brioche is a nice Sicilian creation, but not every region makes them with the little “head” on top. Tourists rave about brioche with ice cream, but many Sicilians prefer to eat it for breakfast with a bowl of granita, and these buns also make great burger holders. Just sprinkle some sesame seeds on the bun and add a savory filling.

Prepare the eggplant balls and broccoli (see p.176), then set aside to keep warm.

To make the buns, dissolve the yeast in 4 tsp (20 ml) of lukewarm water.

In a saucepan, stir 2 tbsp (20 g) of the flour with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (100 ml) of the milk over medium heat until you have a flexible mixture. Remove from heat and leave to cool.

Use a food processor to briefly knead this cooled mixture together with the remaining flour, the dissolved yeast and liquid, the remaining milk, the orange juice, zest, and orange oil. Add the whole egg and continue kneading briefly. Sprinkle in the sugar, add the butter piece by piece, and knead in the salt. Continue kneading the dough for 6–10 minutes until it is stretchy. Cover the bowl with a cloth and leave the dough to proof in a warm place for 2 hours.

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Lightly flour a work surface and split the dough into 12 pieces

(6 x 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ –4 oz/100–110g and 6 x $\frac{3}{4}$ –1 oz/20–30g). Shape each of the pieces into a ball. Place the larger balls generously spaced out on the baking sheet. Make an indentation in the center of each and place a smaller ball in each cavity. Now slide into the turned-off oven and leave the dough to proof for another 2 hours with the door closed.

Remove the sheet from the oven and preheat to 340°F (170°C).

Beat the egg yolk with the 1 tbsp milk and brush each bun with this glaze. Sprinkle with sesame seeds. Bake the buns for 25–30 minutes until golden. If the little “heads” start to become too dark, cover them with foil.

Leave the buns to cool before slicing them open. Stir 1 tbsp olive oil, salt, and pepper into the ricotta. Spread 2 tbsp of this mixture onto the base of each burger bun. Arrange the broccoli on each and top with 2 eggplant balls and some basil leaves.



Makes 1 loaf
Prep 1 hr 20 mins, plus
resting time; “mother”
dough (starter): 10 days

Sourdough bread with an Italian “mother”

Pane con lievito madre

For the “mother”

2½ lb (1.1 kg) organic flour
(ideally an old variety
such as Tumminia,
Perciasacchi, Russello,
or Maiorc (see p.130); or
emmer flour)
½ tsp honey

For the bread dough

1⅔ cups (200 g) fine durum
wheat semolina flour, or
all-purpose flour
1⅔ cups (200 g) organic
flour (ideally an old
variety such as Tumminia,
Perciasacchi, Russello,
or Maiorca, (see p.130); or
emmer flour), plus extra
for dusting
3½ oz (100 g) “mother”

For the emulsion

2 tsp (12 g) sea salt
4 tsp (20 g) mild, moderately
fruity olive oil (I use
Tonda Iblea), plus extra
to serve

To make the “mother,” knead ¾ cup (100 g) of the flour with the honey and ¼ cup (50 ml) of lukewarm water until you have a smooth dough. Shape into a ball and use a sharp knife to slice a cross on the top. (Don’t cut all the way through.) Transfer to a glass bowl, cover with a damp kitchen towel (not plastic wrap!), and leave to proof for 48 hours in a warm, sheltered place. Keep the kitchen towel damp.

Feed and replenish the dough for at least 10 days in total. To do this, knead 3½ oz (100 g) of the mother dough (use the innermost part) with ¾ cup (100 g) flour and ¼ cup (50 ml) of lukewarm water until you have a smooth dough. Shape this and leave to proof as described above. Repeat this process 3 more times until a total of 10 days have passed.

On the 10th day, feed the “mother” dough as usual and leave it covered to proof in a warm place for 3 hours, then transfer to the refrigerator for 12 hours.

On the 11th day (the day when you will bake the bread), take 3½ oz (100 g) of the “mother” dough from the refrigerator and leave it out to come to room temperature for 1 hour. Leave the rest of the “mother” in the refrigerator until the next baking day, remembering to feed it once a week as described above.

To make the bread, mix both types of flour with 1½ cups (350 ml) of lukewarm water in a bowl. Cover with a kitchen towel and leave to proof for 1 hour. Use a food processor to knead this together with the “mother” dough on a medium setting for 6–7 minutes.

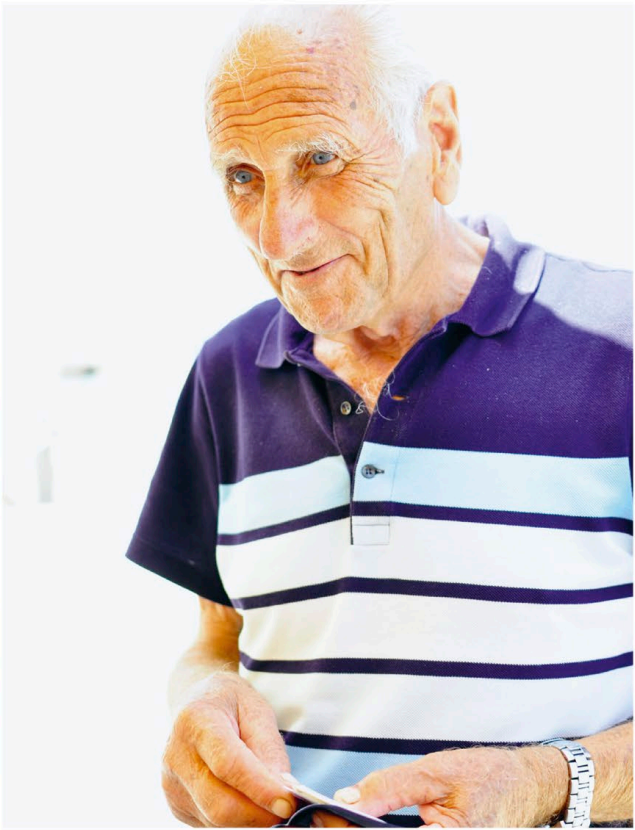
To make the emulsion, mix all the ingredients with 3 tbsp (40 ml) of lukewarm water. Knead this gradually into the dough, allowing it to absorb the liquid before pouring in more emulsion. Knead for 5 minutes.

Cover with a damp kitchen towel and leave to proof for 5 hours in a warm, sheltered place. Carefully knead the dough into a ball on a lightly floured work surface. Transfer this ball into a well-floured proofing basket, cover, and leave to rest for another 2 hours.

Place a cast-iron skillet with a lid on the lowest shelf in the oven and preheat to 475°F (240°C), or as high as it will go.

Place the loaf on a sheet of parchment paper and transfer the bread on this and into the cast-iron skillet. Close the lid. Reduce the temperature to 425°F (220°C) and bake for 45 minutes. Remove the lid and continue baking for 15 minutes. Leave to cool on a wire rack, then slice. Serve with olive oil and salt.





Serves 4
Prep 30 mins

Two kinds of sandwich, traditional and modern

*Pani cunsatu anticu e
pani cunsatu mudernu*

4 bread rolls or 1 large loaf,
such as focaccia or
cuccidatu Siciliano
extra-virgin olive oil
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
chili flakes

For a traditional sandwich

8 anchovies in salt, rinsed
16 sun-dried cherry tomatoes
in oil, or 8 regular
sun-dried tomatoes in oil
12 black olives, pitted
2³/₄–3¹/₂ oz (80–100 g)
pecorino cheese, finely
sliced
rosemary sprigs
dried oregano

For a modern sandwich

8 anchovies in oil
20 sun-dried cherry tomatoes
in oil, or 8–10 regular
sun-dried tomatoes in oil
20 black olives, pitted
2³/₄–3¹/₂ oz (80–100 g)
provolone cheese, sliced
2³/₄–3¹/₂ oz (80–100 g)
mozzarella, torn
8 eggplant slices, fried
4 cherry tomatoes, quartered
20 large capers
1/2 red chile, chopped
basil leaves
dried oregano

Pani cunsatu is a sandwich, which sounds rather unexciting, but is a real phenomenon that has taken hold on the island. *Pani cunsatu* has become a cult dish in Sicily, even though it's essentially a very simple thing that has poverty to thank for its existence. In the past, having toppings on your bread would have been considered a luxury. So if all you had was olive oil and salt, you would have just eaten your bread with those. Nowadays, modern *pani cunsati* are laden with so many toppings you can hardly see the bread underneath. Someone who has really mastered the art and has made a real name for himself for it is Alfredo from the island of Salina. His pub is always absolutely crammed, and his *pani cunsati* are best-sellers, along with the granita he serves.

Slice open the bread rolls or the loaf, drizzle generously with olive oil, and arrange your chosen topping ingredients as desired. Sprinkle with sea salt and herbs, then season with pepper or chili flakes, or both. Put the other half of the rolls or loaf on top.

If you used a single large loaf, slice it into 4 equal portions to serve.

You can also heat the bread, if you like. To do this, either heat it in the oven before filling or toast the halved bread in a pan. Or preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C), bake the filled rolls for 10–12 minutes, and serve warm.

LA TERRA

Sicilians are surrounded by the sea but also connected with the earth. Liquid and solid elements come together on this island. This understanding of nature makes Sicilians excellent farmers, or *terroni*, literally “connected with the earth.” You would be right to think that this is a quality to be proud of.

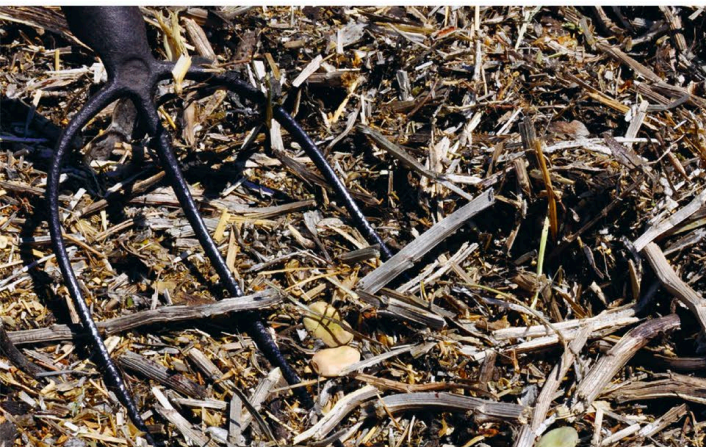
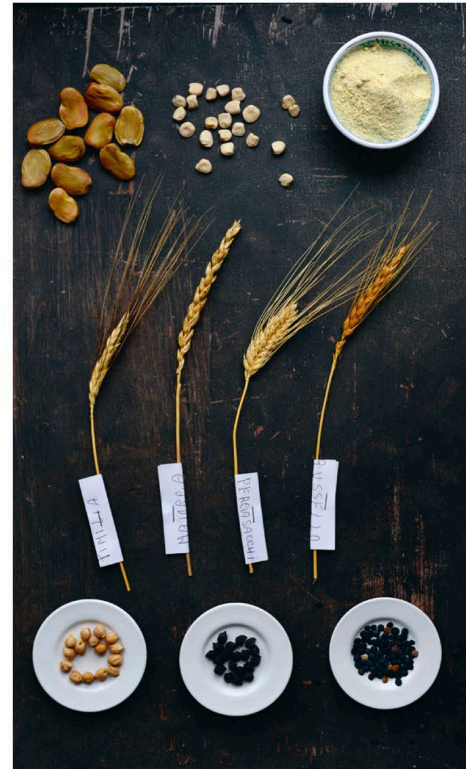
But *terroni* is also an insult, a slur, a denigration hurled in the face of southern Italians by their northern countrymen. Sicilians have gotten used to being considered second-class Italian citizens. In the (materially) rich north, they struggle to comprehend the paradoxical laws of nature, and that’s why many northerners cannot understand why Sicilians are so proud to be *terroni*. And their pride in the land is driving a return to the old ways; to a simpler time; and to *cucina povera*, literally “food of the poor.”

In Barrafranca, in the heart of the Sicilian hinterland, 24 miles (39 km) south west of Enna, you will find the home and workplace of the Amore family. They work with the earth and for the earth. They have gone back to the past in order to take a step forward toward Sicily’s future. And although this family farming business has existed for almost 60 years, they have formed a new, forward-looking company. Its name is SeMiniAmo.



Three years ago, the business was taken over by Davide, the youngest member of the family, who is now 29. With his degree in economics, marketing, and commercial strategy, he has changed the company’s direction. He has opted for the cultivation of ancient Sicilian grain varieties (*grani antichi Siciliani*), which are becoming increasingly popular on the island. It all began with a desire to respect the land, and this led to the cultivation of varieties of wheat that are traditional to this area—types that existed before the economic boom and which were forced to give way to other cultivars with the advent of intensive farming. The old Sicilian grain varieties being harvested by this young company have wonderful names: Tumminia, Perciasacchi, Russello, and Maiorca. They also contain high-quality nutrients.

Why would you take what seems to be a step backward, choosing a path that involves more work and less money? Davide’s motivations are wide-ranging, as he explains: “The cultivation of old grains is not just a crucial factor for biodiversity, it’s also a question of quality. We know about this fabulous, healthy raw material, one of only very few. It has escaped genetic modification by humans, it is in harmony with natural cycles, and it thrives without the use of chemical fertilizers. Our grain has exceptional nutritional properties; the gluten is less tough and elastic, so it is easier for our digestive system to handle.” That all makes sense, but this grain is nowhere near as profitable as the other (over)cultivated varieties the western world has grown used to.

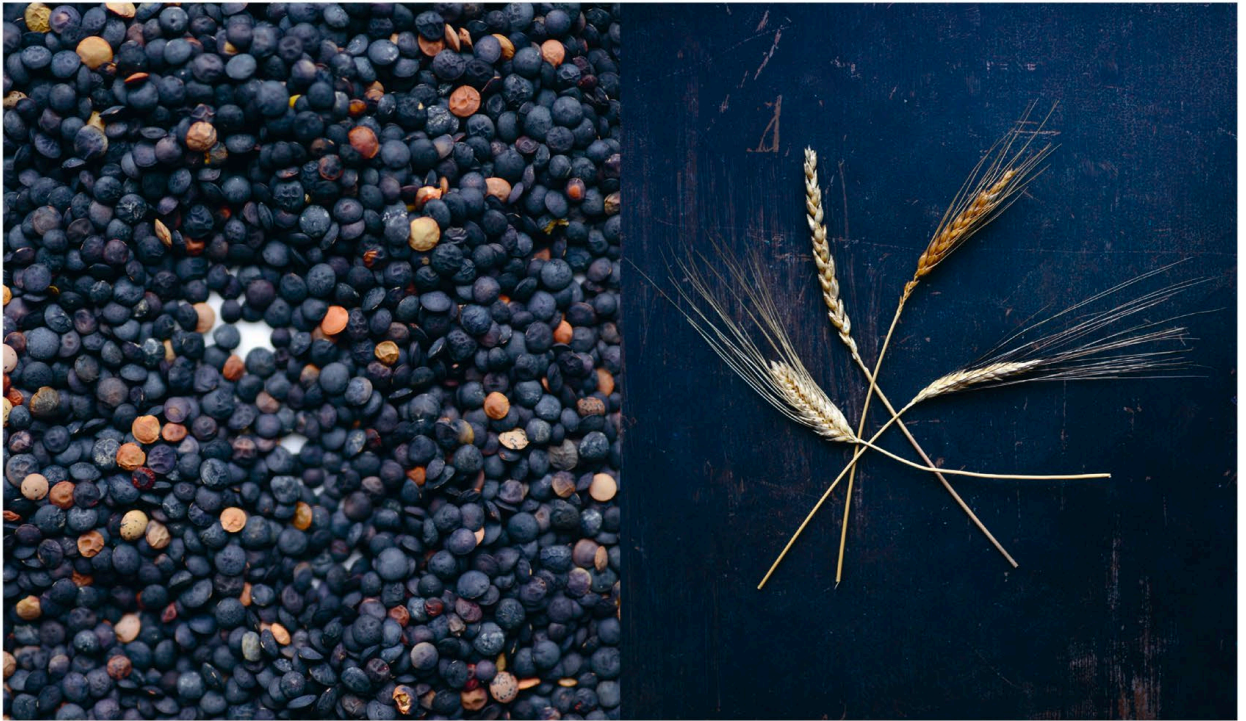




Davide explains, “We made a choice to grow ancient grains. For us, this was an ethical decision rather than a commercial one. It means we can respect nature and its biodiversity, plus it’s beneficial for human health. We use our ancient grains to produce pasta, which is extruded using bronze dies and dried slowly at low temperatures. Our flour is ground on natural stone. To retain the quality and authenticity of the ancient grains, the production process must preserve all the exceptional properties of this wheat, creating healthy products with an unmistakable flavor. It is gratifying to know that we are introducing families to genuine, healthy products which evoke the flavors of the past. And it’s even more pleasing that these products are being created with the greatest respect for the planet on which we live. Our entire approach is based on sustainable farming, an ethical business model, and high-quality products. And we believe this is the only possible choice if we want to face the future with a clear conscience. As we are fond of saying: there can be no future without the past.”

In addition to the four ancient wheat varieties that are used to make flour and pasta (*penne*, *busiate*, *maccheroni*, *fusilli*, and *ditalini*), the family also produces almonds, almond butter, and two kinds of chickpeas: black *ceci neri* and white *ceci pascià*. These are chickpeas with an intense flavor and a high proportion of minerals, best enjoyed with just some sea salt and fine olive oil (like all high-quality products, to be honest). The family also produces black lentils from Leonforte. That’s where I head to find out more about the town’s renowned fava beans.

The town of Leonforte was founded in 1610 by Prince Nicolo Placido Branciforte and is located 11 miles (18 km) northeast of Enna. It is famous for the Granfonte (better known as the Fontana dei 24 Cannoli; see photograph, p.135), a wonderful cattle trough built in the Sicilian Baroque style. But the town is also known for its very large, flat fava beans. The *fava larga di Leonforte* have been included in the Slow Food movement’s Ark of Taste.



In the past, fava beans were cultivated in alternating cycles with wheat, and they have always been a traditional ingredient in kitchens in Leonforte.

The fresh beans are harvested in late March or early April and are served raw, scattered with pecorino cheese, or cooked into *frittedda* or *pitaggu* (see p.35). Dried fava beans are available from mid-July, and these are used for the popular dish *maccu* (see p.134). In contrast to other varieties, they do not require extensive soaking and they cook more quickly.

The *fava larga di Leonforte*, also referred to by the town's inhabitants as *fava turca* (Turkish bean), is the largest bean in Italy and, in the past, it would have been served alongside grains as "the poor person's meat." The high protein content in these fava beans can compensate for the lack of protein in a person's diet from animal products. The beans also keep well as a dried product and travel well.

Almost all of the products that featured in *cucina povera* were fundamentally healthier than those found in the cuisine of the rich. This just wasn't appreciated in the past, when people always aspired to mimic the culinary habits of the wealthy. Nowadays, we have a better understanding and are looking back to the past to reevaluate these valuable food treasures.

Serves 4
Prep 1½ hrs

Fava bean purée with black olives, chicory, and toast

Maccu con olive nere, cicoria, e pane brustolito

For the purée

2–3 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil (I use Nocellara Etnea or Verdello for this)
1 onion, finely chopped
1 large garlic clove, finely chopped
3½ oz (100 g) carrot, finely chopped
a few wild fennel sprigs, or dill with fennel seeds
1 celery stick, finely chopped
2⅔ cups (400 g) podded, dried fava beans
9 oz (250 g) russet potatoes, or other floury type, peeled and finely chopped
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper

For the chicory

2 lb 4 oz (1 kg) chicory, endive, dandelion, or Swiss chard
coarse sea salt
2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra to serve
1 large garlic clove, sliced
16–20 black olives, pitted
1 red chile, finely chopped

4 large slices of white bread, toasted

This purée is really popular all over the south of Italy, with just minor variations in the recipe from place to place. Here, I use *fava larga* from Leonforte (see p.132). Other varieties can also be used, of course! *Maccu* can also be fried: let it go completely cold until it solidifies, then slice and cook, as you would polenta. Transform this bean purée into a classic *aperitivo Siciliano* by spreading it on bread, then topping things off with fresh figs and pistachios, grapes and basil, or eggplant and *ricotta salata* (see photo, bottom right).

Put the olive oil in a large pan over medium heat. Sauté the onion, garlic, carrot, wild fennel, and celery.

Add the fava beans and potatoes, then pour in enough water to cover everything by about 1½ in (4 cm). With the lid half on, cook until the beans and potatoes are very soft, stirring often and topping up with boiling water as soon as it has been absorbed. After about 45 minutes, season well. The beans should be soft like a purée. If you like, you can press this bean purée through a coarse strainer to make it smoother. Set aside and keep warm.

Trim the woody ends from the stalks of chicory and make a wedge-shaped incision in the base of the leaves. Split the leaves and stalks separately into large pieces. Get a bowl filled with ice water ready.

Blanch the stalks in a generous quantity of boiling, salted water for about 5 minutes, then add the leaves and continue cooking for another 4 minutes. Submerge the chicory in the ice water at the end of this cooking time. Drain and squeeze any remaining liquid out by hand.

Gently heat the olive oil in a large pan and sauté the garlic and olives until golden, then briefly toss in the chicory. Season to taste with salt and chile.

Arrange the bean purée on 4 plates, top with chicory and olives, drizzle with plenty of oil, and serve with toast.





Serves 4
Prep 35 mins

Fava beans with tomatoes and fried egg

Fave con pomodori e uovo fritto

2²/₃ cups (400 g) fresh or
frozen fava beans, podded
coarse sea salt
4 tbsp extra-virgin olive
oil, plus extra for frying
and drizzling
2 scallions with large bulbs,
white sections only, sliced
1 large garlic clove,
finely chopped
2 lb 4 oz (1 kg) tomatoes,
ideally datterini or
cherry tomatoes, fresh or
canned, stalks removed,
and quartered
1 tbsp vincotto (cooked
grape must), or 1 tbsp
syrup
2 handfuls of basil leaves
sea salt
chili flakes
8 eggs

These three ingredients came together by chance in our kitchen in Sicily, so there is no long Sicilian tradition involved here—even if there are Persian influences at play. I used frozen fava beans to cook this recipe because, sadly, fresh fava beans are only in season for a very short time, which makes the frozen variety a good option.

Blanch the fava beans for 1–2 minutes in plenty of boiling, salted water, then remove with a slotted spoon and submerge in ice water to prevent further cooking. Slip off the tough outer skins to reveal the bright green bean beneath.

Heat the olive oil in a large saucepan. Sauté the scallions and garlic, then add the tomatoes, vincotto, and half the basil. Season everything with salt and chili flakes and braise for about 5 minutes. Add the fava beans and continue cooking for 10 minutes. If the sauce becomes too thick, add a bit of hot water. Season with salt. Remove the pan from heat and set aside to keep warm.

If you are making half the quantity because there are fewer people (or if you are eating the dish as an intermediate course), you can fry the eggs in the same pan. To do this, push the vegetables to the side of the pan, pour in some extra olive oil, and fry the eggs. If you are making the full recipe quantity with 8 eggs, fry them separately in another pan.

Finally, scoop the bean and tomato mixture onto 4 plates, arrange 2 fried eggs in the center of each, and drizzle with olive oil. Scatter with the remaining basil leaves and some sea salt to serve.

Serves 4
Prep 2 hrs

Double Jerusalem artichoke with black lentils and crispy chicken feet

Topinambur con lenticchie nere e zampa di gallina

For the stock

4 chicken feet, ready to cook
1 celery stick, chopped
½ bunch parsley, chopped
1 carrot, chopped
1 white onion, chopped
2 garlic cloves, chopped
4 cloves
2 bay leaves
sea salt and freshly ground
red Kampot pepper or
black pepper

For the lentils

1 cup (200 g) black lentils,
or brown lentils
1 small organic orange, 1 strip
of pared zest, the remaining
zest finely grated
extra-virgin olive oil

For the Jerusalem artichokes

1¾ lb (800 g) organic
Jerusalem artichokes
14 oz (400 g) russet potatoes,
or other floury type,
peeled and chopped
1 large garlic clove, chopped
½ cup (100 ml) whole milk
⅓ cup (70 ml) dry white wine
freshly grated nutmeg

To finish the dish

all-purpose flour, for coating
extra-virgin olive oil
handful of pine nuts, toasted
herbs of your choice

Jerusalem artichoke has been around in Sicily for ages, and yet there are hardly any recipes for it. This dish boasts Jerusalem artichoke cooked in two different ways with contrasting textures. The stock for the Jerusalem artichoke purée is prepared with the chicken feet, which you then fry and serve alongside. This is another ancient ingredient that Sicilian cooks would previously have served as a matter of course and now is being rediscovered—albeit on a relatively small scale.

To make the stock, pour 5½ cups (1.5 liters) of water into a large saucepan, add all the ingredients, and season with salt. Simmer over medium heat for 45 minutes, then strain through a strainer. Set aside the stock and chicken feet separately. Discard the vegetables.

Meanwhile, rinse the lentils in a strainer. Cook them for 30 minutes in a saucepan with 3⅓ cups (800 ml) of water and the pared strip of orange zest until *al dente*. Drain and discard the orange zest, then season and toss in olive oil.

Meanwhile, clean the Jerusalem artichokes and finely slice 4¼ oz (120 g) of them, unpeeled. Peel the rest of the Jerusalem artichokes and cut into cubes. Put the cubed Jerusalem artichoke into a saucepan with the potatoes, garlic, milk, wine, and 3½ cups (1 liter) of the stock. Season with salt, pepper, and nutmeg and cook

over medium heat until the potatoes are tender. Mash them and adjust the seasoning, then press through a fine strainer. Set aside to keep warm.

Pat the chicken feet dry and toss in flour to coat. Heat a generous quantity of olive oil in a pan and fry the chicken feet until crisp. Next, fry the Jerusalem artichoke slices in the oil and transfer to paper towel to absorb the fat.

Segment the flesh of the orange between the membranes and chop into small pieces.

Serve the purée on 4 plates and arrange the lentils and Jerusalem artichoke slices on top. Finish with a chicken foot and some orange segments. Scatter with grated orange zest, season with red pepper, sprinkle over some salt, and drizzle with olive oil. If desired, scatter with toasted pine nuts and herbs of your choice.







Intermezzi



Serves 4

Prep 25–40 mins (depending on the type of bean), plus soaking and drying time; start the previous day

Fried fava beans

Fave fritte

2 cups (300 g) dried fava beans, ideally skinned
2 cups (500 ml) neutral-flavored oil, for frying
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper, or chili flakes
your choice of herbs, shredded, as desired
your choice of spices (see bottom right)

At Sicilian markets, you will find all kinds of dried pulses, including some you can eat right away as a snack or *aperitivo Siciliano* (see p.223). You might like to buy some *ciciri e favi caliatì* (chickpeas and fava beans cooked in the embers). These pulses are traditionally eaten at parties, although you need good teeth to cope with them! There are two ways to prepare softer fried fava beans: fried in their skins, which are called *fave fritte in camicia* (“fried fava beans in their shirts”), or peeled and fried in halves (as shown here), known simply as *fave fritte*. I strongly caution against attempting to make your own “beans in shirts” at home! The beans can literally explode in the hot oil if they are not absolutely 100 percent dry or if a bit of air is trapped inside the skin.

Cover the fava beans with plenty of water and leave to soak for 24 hours. Drain. If they are still in their skins, use a knife to pull these off and slice the beans in half or, if they are already peeled, dry the beans very carefully. Ideally, this should be done in a food dehydrator; otherwise, dry them very thoroughly, then leave them spread out in the air for at least 1 hour.

Fill a high-sided pan one-third full with the oil for frying and heat to at least 340°F (170°C) but no higher than 350°F (180°C). To test, hold a wooden skewer in the oil; you should barely see any little bubbles forming.

Fry the dried beans in very small portions until golden. Scoop them out with a slotted spoon and transfer to paper towel to drain. Season with salt, pepper, or chili flakes while they are still hot. Mix with herbs or spices as desired. Enjoy them as a snack or serve as an *aperitivo Siciliano* (see p.223).

My favorite spice mix:

Sea salt flakes, smoked paprika, sage, thyme, and freshly ground black pepper or chili flakes.

Serves 4
Prep 20 mins

Smoked tuna with grilled eggplant, figs, burrata, and a hint of orange

Tonno affumicato con melanzana grigliata, fichi, burrata, e profumo d'arancia

sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
2 medium eggplants, stalks removed, cut into $\frac{1}{4}$ -in (7-mm) thick slices
8–12 slices of smoked tuna
4 balls of burrata cheese, or mozzarella cheese
8 figs, quartered
red and green basil leaves
pinch of finely grated zest from 1 organic orange
extra-virgin olive oil

The inspiration for this dish was the hugely popular Italian antipasto *prosciutto crudo, fichi, e burrata*. I kept the burrata and figs but, for the Sicilian version, I replaced the *prosciutto crudo* with smoked tuna and eggplants. I also couldn't resist smuggling in my favorite ingredient: orange. It complements the eggplant and tuna beautifully.

Lightly salt the eggplants and cook on both sides in a hot griddle pan without any oil.

On 4 plates, arrange alternate slices of eggplant and tuna in a fan pattern, using 2 or 3 slices of each. Place a

ball of burrata alongside. Add the quartered figs.

Scatter over both types of basil and some sea salt, add a touch of orange zest, season with pepper, and drizzle lightly with olive oil to serve.







Makes about 24
Prep 35 mins, plus resting
and cooling time

Mini sesame panini with lemon marmalade and scamorza

*Panini al sesamo con marmellata
di limone e scamorza*

For the sesame rolls

1 portion Mafalda dough
(see p.148)
a little whole milk
3 tbsps sesame seeds

For the topping

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup (200 g) lemon
marmalade
12 mini balls of scamorza
cheese, or mozzarella
cheese
1 organic lemon, orange,
or lime, thinly sliced
and quartered

Sesame is a popular ingredient in Sicilian bread baking. It is also used to make one of the most traditional sweet treats: the *giuggiulena*. This is a type of *torrone* (similar to nougat) made from sesame and honey, and with clear Arabic influences. In Ispica, a town in the province of Ragusa, they cultivate dark, amber-colored sesame seeds, which are endorsed by Slow Food. Two older farmers have protected this variety against manipulation by the seed industry by repeatedly sowing the extremely ancient seeds. In terms of their nutritional properties, these seeds are far superior to those used in industrial farming.

To make the mini sesame panini, prepare the dough (see p.148). After the first 3 hours of proofing, make 24 little balls from the dough.

Brush the mini panini with milk and scatter with sesame seeds.

Line 1 or 2 baking sheets with parchment paper and leave the panini to proof for an hour on the sheets in a turned-off oven.

Remove from the oven and preheat to 425°F (220°C). Slide the sheet back into the center of the oven. Spray the walls of the oven with water, reduce the temperature to 400°F (200°C), and bake the panini for 10–15 minutes until they begin to color slightly.

Leave to cool completely under a kitchen towel. Cut each one open and fill with some lemon marmalade, a ball of scamorza, and a quarter of a citrus slice. Best served with an aperitivo (see p.223).

Makes 4
Prep 1 hr 10 mins, plus
resting and cooling time

Sicilian sesame rolls with mortadella

Mafalda con mortadella

For the dough

1/4 oz (6 g) fresh yeast
1 1/4 cups (150 g) fine “00”
grade durum wheat
semolina flour, or all-
purpose flour, plus extra
for dusting
pinch of granulated sugar
2 3/4 cups (350 g) fine durum
wheat semolina flour
(*semola di grano duro*
rimacinata), or all-
purpose flour
2 tbsp olive oil
2 tsp (10 g) sea salt
1–2 tbsp whole milk
3 tbsp black and/or white
sesame seeds

For the topping

8–12 wafer-thin slices
of Sicilian mortadella
with pistachios

Mortadella is famously associated with Bologna, but it used to be really popular in Sicily, too, thanks to being inexpensive and incredibly tasty. *Mafalda con mortadella* is a classic Sicilian dish. Mafalda is a type of bread that most Sicilians remember fondly from childhood, because it makes such a convenient snack. Although Mafalda is primarily linked to the province of Palermo, history tells us that it was a master baker from Catania who dedicated this bread to Princess Mafalda of Savoy in the early 20th century.

First, make the starter dough by kneading the yeast with 2 1/2 tbsp (20 g) of the “00” flour by hand to a crumbly consistency. Dissolve this mixture in 1/4 cup (50 ml) of lukewarm water and the pinch of sugar. Cover with a damp kitchen towel and leave to proof for 1 hour in a warm, sheltered place.

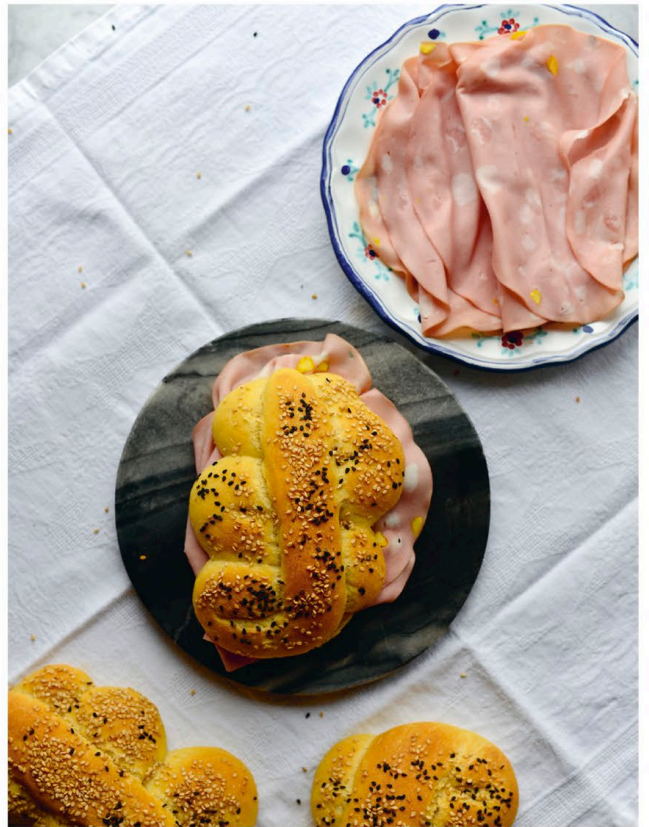
Meanwhile, for the water roux, put 2 1/2 tbsp (20 g) more of the “00” flour into a saucepan with 1/2 cup (100 ml) of water and heat, stirring constantly. Once the consistency is gelatinous, cook for 2 more minutes, continuing to stir. Leave to cool completely.

Knead both of these starter mixtures into the remaining “00” flour, the durum wheat semolina, 3/4 cup (200 ml) of lukewarm water, and the olive oil for 6–8 minutes until you have a smooth dough. Gradually add the salt as you work. Cover the dough with a damp kitchen towel and leave to proof in a warm, sheltered place for at least

3 hours. Divide the dough into quarters and roll each of these out on a floured work surface to create a strand measuring about 24 in (60 cm). Shape each of these like a snake, twisting the strands back and forth 3 times and placing the final strand on top (see photos, right). Brush lightly with milk and sprinkle with sesame seeds. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Leave the rolls to proof on the sheet for 1 hour in a turned-off oven.

Remove from the oven and preheat to 425°F (220°C). Slide the sheet into the lower part of the oven. Spray the walls of the oven with water, reduce the temperature to 400°F (200°C), and bake for 10–15 minutes. Continue cooking on the middle shelf for another 15–20 minutes until they get some color.

Leave to cool completely under a kitchen towel. Slice them open, fill with 2 or 3 slices of mortadella, and serve.





Makes 10
Prep 40 mins

Zucchini flowers stuffed with Italian sausages and mozzarella with a pistachio coating

*Fiori di zucchini ripieni con salsiccia,
mozzarella in crosta di pistacchi*

For the zucchini flowers

10 zucchini or squash
flowers
2 medium eggs
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
3 tbsp (15 g) pecorino cheese,
finely grated
2 tbsp (15 g) pistachios,
finely chopped
½ cup (50 g) fine dried
breadcrumbs, or *mollica
secca* (see p.30)

For the stuffing

3½ oz (100 g) Italian fennel
sausages (*salsiccia al
finocchietto*), or coarsely
ground pork mixed with
fennel seeds
3½ oz (100 g) mozzarella,
chopped into 10 cubes

extra-virgin olive oil

When I published my first recipes using zucchini or squash flowers, eating these wonderful blooms was a practice virtually unknown in the rest of Europe. Nowadays, you can find them online and in supermarkets. Of course, anyone with a garden can have access to their own fresh supply; if you harvest more than you know what to do with, they can be frozen.

Carefully clean the flowers. The inner flower pistil is edible, but some people find it too bitter. If you prefer without, you can remove the pistil with your fingernails. Trim the stalk at its base.

To make the coating, beat the eggs with some salt and pepper in a large bowl. In a separate large bowl, combine the pecorino, pistachios, and breadcrumbs, mixing them well.

Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

To make the stuffing, squeeze the sausage meat out of its skin and shape it into 10 equal-sized balls. Carefully open the flowers using your fingers and insert a ball of sausage and a mozzarella cube into each one. Gently press the ends of the petals together to close them.

Coat the stuffed flowers, first in the egg mixture and then in the pistachio mixture. Lay the coated flowers on the prepared sheet.

Drizzle the flowers with a dash of olive oil and bake in the center of the oven for 15–20 minutes. Serve warm.



SALVATORE

Graniti is a little village with just 1,500 inhabitants in the Alcantara valley. In the early 1960s, the village experienced a massive exodus. Young people had no work, so they headed north to the mainland. Some stayed in Milan; others went to Turin; others still headed to Switzerland, Germany, or even England in search of a better life. Nowadays, the younger generation have no desire to leave. They are looking for ways to build a future for themselves here in Sicily. They love their village.

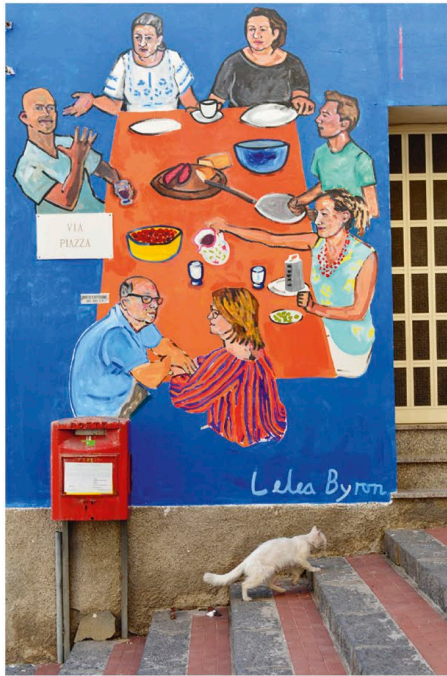
Graniti itself has always had artistic tendencies, and its people are receptive to culture. Sculptors such as Giuseppe Mazzullo and his godson Pippo Mannino were born here, spent some of their childhood in the village, and also worked here at various times. On the first weekend in August, there is a festival in honor of San Sebastiano, the village saint. The entire village is permeated by the aroma of macaroni with salsa, served by *le mamme*. Everyone gets together to have a great party, and the village comes to life.



Salvatore Romano's Sicilian parents had been living in Switzerland for a long time when his mother decided that Salvatore should be born on home soil rather than abroad. So she and her husband traveled to Sicily, to Graniti in the province of Messina, where she opted for a home birth to bring her son into the world. She then returned with him to Switzerland. When he was 9, his father died. And when his older brother moved out, he was left living alone with his mother. At the same time, aged 11, his love of cooking began to emerge. In part, this was because he was a typical latchkey kid who had to cook for himself. He embarked on all sorts of culinary experiments with his friend Rosario, some of which resulted in the odd saucepan having to be thrown away. Time with his mother was mostly limited to Saturdays and Sundays, and these hours would be spent cooking together. It was his mother who impressed on him the lesson that

quality was far more important than quantity in food, even though Italian ingredients were particularly expensive in Switzerland. As Salvatore recalls, "We only bought them once a month, but we were happier spending money on these items than on other things. Our Italian supplies had to be used pretty sparingly, but what little we had was at least extremely good."

However, he did not train as a chef (even though that was his greatest wish), because his cousin Francesco was already training as a chef in Germany, so he felt he couldn't do that, too. He considered his other options. Because he also loved technology, he decided to become an IT systems administrator. Then, in 2002, he met his future wife Karin from Switzerland. The two of them also discovered a mutual love of food, so in late 2003, he decided to have a complete career change. It was too late to train as a chef, but he wanted to work in some other way with food.



However, in 2004, a life-threatening virus tore through Switzerland, and Salvatore, who was already weakened by a cold, was struck by this illness. He was put into an artificial coma for 10 days. After that, everything changed. “Now I have to do what I’ve always wanted to do. Now it’s time to do something we are really passionate about,” he said to Karin afterward. So Salvatore and Karin opened a little bar near Basel. One year later, they added a delicatessen dedicated to Italian specialties. They traveled all over Italy researching their product range. In Sicily, they came to the conclusion that the raw produce on sale was by far the best they had found. So, in addition to the bar and delicatessen, they rented a factory. Here, they manufactured the first products of their own. They started with just three items: *crema di pomodoro* (tomato spread), *carciofata* (artichoke spread), and *crema di peperoncino* (chili spread). These homemade products always sold out immediately, so production grew and grew. Eventually, a restaurant serving Mediterranean food was added to the bar and delicatessen.

The decision to return to Sicily full time was made by Karin. After a strenuous Christmas trading season, they would wrap up a bottle of prosecco and a panettone and take the train down from Basel to Sicily. The entire January would be spent relaxing in Salvatore’s birth village, Graniti. These stays began gradually becoming longer and longer. The lifestyle in Sicily, the vegetation, the chaos, the people—Karin loved all of it. The yearning for Sicily steadily intensified, so they sold everything in Switzerland and moved to Sicily with just a couple of suitcases and a food processor. Karin renovated the house where Salvatore was born and refurbished everything. This is where they now live and work.

At first, they rented out vacation apartments and continued making homemade products under the brand name Tasting Sicily. Salvatore is now a creative in the food industry. His style is partially influenced by *cucina dei Monsù* (see p.86): elements from conquistador cuisine are combined with other components to create a new



interpretation of existing traditions. The idea that “this is the recipe and that’s the way it has to stay” is something he finds ridiculous. He is absolutely convinced that you can take a traditional cuisine like that of Sicily and continue to develop it into something new.

Since 2014, they have also added artistic projects, led by Karin as a kind of artist in residence. The couple provide artists with a place to both live and work. And the *Graniti Murales* street art project attracts artists from all over the world, who travel here to paint designated façades in the village. No doubt the future holds plenty of other projects for Karin and Salvatore. Before I leave Graniti, Salvatore puts me in touch with Gaetano Marchetta, who supplies him with capers from the Aeolian island of Salina for use in his culinary creations (see p.75).

Salvatore Romano’s recipes depend on the high quality of the products used, the principle he learned from cooking with his mother all those years ago. They are unfussy and

easy to make. That’s why I have transcribed the four recipes that follow pretty much in their original form, just as they would be familiar to Italians. The instructions consist of descriptive text, without precise quantities. If you use good-quality ingredients, you can’t go wrong with dishes as simple as these, even without kitchen scales. All that’s needed for success is a pinch of courage, a willingness to experiment, and some confidence.



Prep 45 mins

Potatoes cooked in seawater, by Salvatore Romano

Patate fritte all'acqua di mare

organic red potatoes, or
other waxy type
seawater, or highly salted
water
extra-virgin olive oil
rosemary sprigs
1 garlic clove, crushed

In all his recipes, Salvatore uses his own olive oil (Kore), which was awarded two gold stars in Britain's 2018 Great Taste Awards. This olive oil uses a blend of Moresca and Biancolilla olives.

Clean the potatoes and slice them first into roughly 1/4-in (5-mm) thick disks, then into batons. Cover with seawater in a bowl and leave to stand for 20 minutes.

Cook the potatoes in the seawater until *just* done.

Drain the seawater and gently finish cooking the potatoes in olive oil in

a large pan with some rosemary sprigs and crushed garlic until they are slightly crisp.

Sicilian olive oil varieties:

Tonda Iblea, Nocellara del Belice, Biancolilla, Cerasuola, Nocellara Etna, Verdello, and Moresca are among the best-known, though there are many more.



Serves 2
Prep 15 mins, plus chilling
and marinating time

Tuna tartare marinated in seawater and served with red shrimp, by Salvatore Romano

Tàrtara di tonno marinato all'acqua di mare con gambero rosso

7 oz (200 g) very fresh tuna
1/3 cup (80 ml) seawater, or
highly salted water
juice and some of the finely
grated zest from
1 1/2 organic lemons
1/2 small mild red chile,
finely chopped
some mint leaves, finely
shredded
1 garlic clove, finely
chopped
extra-virgin olive oil
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
2 fresh red shrimp
(*gamberi rossi*)

These shrimp are fished in late summer and can also be bought frozen. The fishermen place great importance on rapidly freezing the shrimp as soon as they are caught to preserve their taste, appearance, and texture. Salvatore makes this with swordfish (as shown), but tuna works equally well for this recipe.

Freeze the tuna until it is semifrozen. Chop finely with a large knife and gently mix with the seawater, some lemon juice and zest, chile, mint, garlic, and olive oil, plus some freshly ground black pepper. Cover with plastic wrap and leave to marinate in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes. (If you prefer, you can add the zest shortly before serving.)

Meanwhile, peel and devein the shrimp. Salvatore uses a toothpick to lift up the intestinal tract, then it is easy to pull out. Pat the shrimp dry and place them in a bowl with some freshly squeezed lemon juice (the shrimp should not be totally submerged) and a pinch of salt. Leave to marinate briefly, turning them 2–3 times during the marinating process.

Remove the fish tartare from the refrigerator and pour away any liquid that has been released. Place a metal ring on each serving plate, fill each with half the tartare, and press down gently. Remove the ring, arrange the shrimp on the tartare, and drizzle with olive oil.

Gamberi rossi:

In Mazara del Vallo in Trapani province, an exceptionally high-quality red shrimp is caught, which has achieved worldwide fame under the name Rosso di Mazara. These shrimp live at a depth of up to 2,300 ft (700 m). Due to evaporation levels in the Mediterranean, the shrimp are enriched with minerals. As a consequence, they also contain very high levels of iodine.



Serves 1
Prep 20 mins

Raw zucchini salad, by Salvatore Romano

Insalata di zucchine

large pale green zucchini
sea salt
juice of 1 lemon
a couple of mint leaves
extra-virgin olive oil

The pale green zucchini used by Salvatore for this dish are known in Italian as *Bianca di Trieste*. The Sicilian pale variety, on the other hand, are called *Lungo Bianco di Palermo*. They are almost white inside. Outside Sicily, pale varieties of zucchini can be found in Turkish or Greek grocers.

Cut the zucchini into wafer-thin slices, then transfer to a bowl. Season with plenty of salt, drizzle with lemon juice, and mix everything gently with your hands. Leave to stand for about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, chop the mint leaves into strips.

Arrange the zucchini slices in an overlapping pattern on a serving plate. Scatter over the strips of mint, drizzle with a dash of olive oil, and serve immediately.







Serves 2
Prep 5 mins

Catanian tomato salad, by Salvatore Romano

*Insalata di pomodori
alla Catanese*

plum or cherry tomatoes
red onion, ideally from
Tropea, sliced into rings
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
ricotta salata cheese, or
pecorino cheese
extra-virgin olive oil

For Salvatore, this recipe is the embodiment of mild summer evenings, preferably spent socializing with friends, getting together, and just enjoying life. The recipe doesn't need much—just some very ripe tomatoes, sweet red onions, grated *ricotta salata*, and the finest olive oil.

Remove the stalks from the tomatoes and discard. Halve them, then divide between 2 plates.

Scatter the onion rings over the tomatoes. Season with black pepper and grate over some *ricotta salata* (instead of salt).

If you are using pecorino instead, you may also need to sprinkle the salad with a bit of salt to ensure it is adequately seasoned.

Drizzle with olive oil to serve.



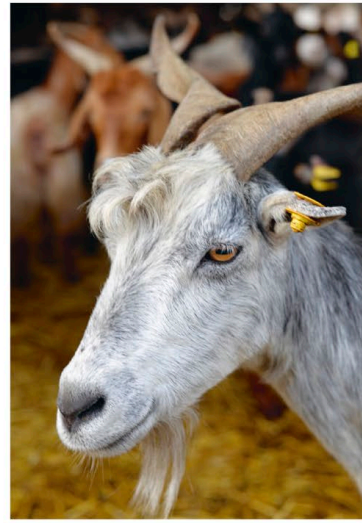
LA MONTAGNA

Mount Etna is always in the same place as yesterday yet always up to something new. Early morning offers a first glimpse of what today will hold. Sometimes it smokes and is good-natured enough to blow out really big smoke rings. Sometimes there's coughing and spluttering. This can be so loud it rattles the doors and windows. The coughing is black and covers everything. Sometimes the mountain sighs and we hear heavy, rasping breathing, as if sickness has taken hold of it. And sometimes things get so hot that there is an inevitable explosion, with burning fragments spiraling into the air in a form of artistic display. We love every aspect of this mountain, but one day it will abandon us and head into the ocean. Forever.



Etna, as it is known in Italian, is referred to in Sicilian dialect as a *mntagna* (the mountain) or *u mungibeddu*. The Arabs called Etna *Jabal al-burkân*. Later, she was renamed Mons Gibel, which literally translates as “mountain mountain,” as *mons* is Latin for mountain and *jebel* is the same word in Arabic. Sicilians turned this into *mungibeddu*. And *beddu* also means beautiful in Sicilian. Etna lies in the east of Sicily, roughly 19 miles (30 km) from Catania, and is the most active—and highest—volcano in Europe. At the moment, the mountain is around 11,000 ft (3,330 m) high. In June 2013, Etna was declared a world heritage site by UNESCO. There are 48 such sites throughout Italy, with Sicily alone boasting six of them.

But Etna is not just a UNESCO site; it is also a paradise for biodiversity, with a magical atmosphere that is impossible to resist. You will find melting snowflakes among the sharp lava rocks. Dense woodland alternates with desert areas packed with volcanic rocks, which are covered in snow in winter. Oak and chestnut forests are joined by beech and birch trees. Then there are vineyards, olive groves, orchards, and hazelnut trees, not to mention pistachio groves in the west. The volcanic deposits make the land around Etna extremely fertile, so it is ideal for all kinds of farming. Everything that grows here is of very high quality.



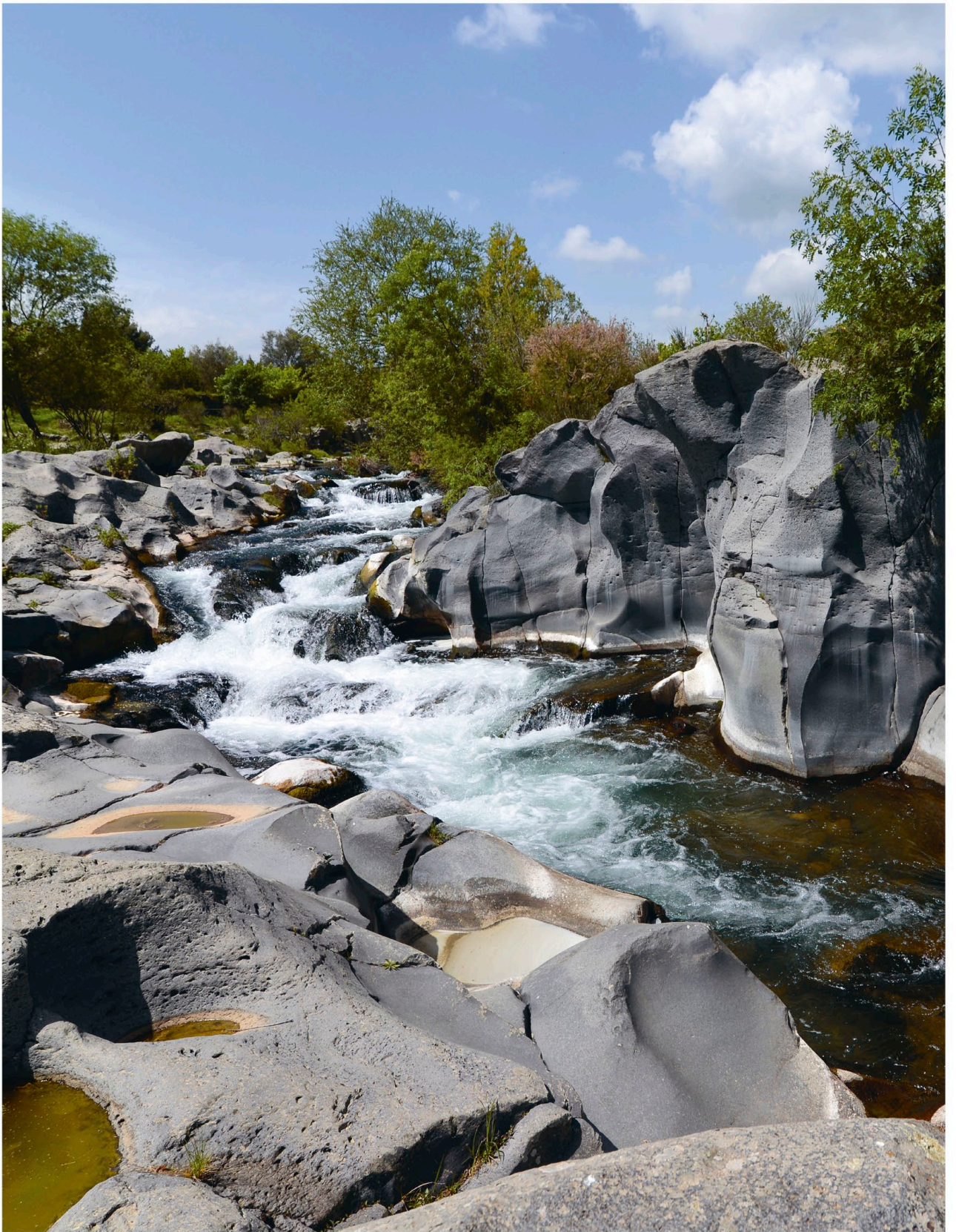


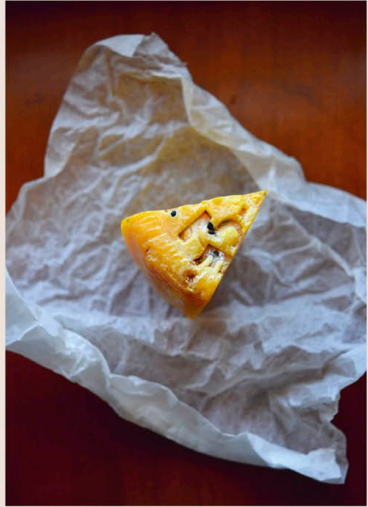
And there is quite an array of produce grown around Etna. It is known for its hazelnuts, walnuts, prickly pears, strawberries from Maletto, pistachios from Bronte, cherries, peaches (*pesca tabacchiera*), small aromatic yellow apples (*cola*, *gelato*, and *cola-gelato*), and fall pears such as *ucciardona* and *spinella*, which are ideal varieties for cooking.

This volcanic region is also home to an incredible number of animals, such as porcupines, wild cats, pine martens, foxes, rabbits, and hares, not to mention smaller creatures such as weasels, hedgehogs, and countless species of bats. There are lots of birds as well, especially birds of prey: sparrowhawks, buzzards, kestrels, peregrine falcons, golden eagles, and nocturnal birds such as barn owls and brown owls. At higher levels, you will also find partridges and wheatears. Scurrying around on the ground are various kinds of snakes, spiders, and lizards, while the air hums with a variety of insects: butterflies, crickets, grasshoppers, cicadas, and bees. Every single one of these is a vital contributor to the healthy ecosystem of the mountain.

The *Gatto selvatico dell'Etna* is a wild, striped species of cat from the Etna region. And the *Argentata dell'Etna* is another lovely animal: a very special species of goat with long hair, which gets its name from the gray-white-silver hues in its luxurious coat (see p.164). These goats look as though they are constantly laughing and have a worldly, wise expression.

Local cheeses are produced from their milk, which is particularly rich in protein. One of these cheesemakers is Giuseppe Camuglia, a young man from Castiglione di Sicilia. He works with his father Salvatore in the area close to the wonderful valley landscape around the Alcantara river, making traditional Sicilian cheeses at their dairy Azienda Alcantara. He produces a huge variety of cheeses, including *Caprino dei Nebrodi*, a mature cheese made from unpasteurized goat milk. Giuseppe makes this cheese using milk from the *Argentata* goats and also the black goats *Capra nere dei Nebrodi*. He gets his milk from Nunzio Caruso, who breeds all of these wonderful species of goat at the Azienda Acquavena, located in the remote mountain landscape around Bronte.







-lightly baked ricotta-
-ricotta al forno da tavola-



-aged, salted ricotta-
-ricotta salata-

-fresh ricotta-
-ricotta fresca-

-baked ricotta-
-ricotta al forna da grattugia-





Serves 4
Prep 50 mins

Prickly pear skins coated in breadcrumbs

Bucce di fichi d'India a cotoletta

8 prickly pears
sea salt and freshly ground
black pepper
2 large eggs
1½–2 cups (160–200 g) fine
dried breadcrumbs, or
mollica secca (see p.30),
plus extra if needed
olive oil that can be heated
to a high temperature,
or neutral-flavored oil,
for deep-frying
chili flakes (optional)

This recipe harks back to times of great poverty on the island and demonstrates the ingenious survival strategies devised by the Sicilian people. The prickly but cheerful-looking *Opuntia ficus-indica* was a plant cultivated by the Aztecs. Every single part of it is edible. The green shoots were not just used as animal fodder; they would have been cooked along with the fruit and its skin. The prickly pear, or *ficho d'India*, is a miraculous fruit that is also extremely healthy, and it propagates very quickly. It is increasingly attracting the attention of both health experts and food lovers.

Experienced Sicilians rarely wear gloves when handling prickly pears, but sturdy gloves are advisable for the rest of us, given the spikes.

Place the prickly pears in cold water for about 10 minutes, then strip or brush off the spikes under running water. Peel each fruit as shown on the left: trim the ends at top and bottom, and discard, then slice the skin lengthwise down the middle and fold it to the sides. Remove the interior and reserve.

Blanch the skins for about 5 minutes in generously salted, boiling water. Leave to drain, then pat dry.

In a bowl, beat the eggs with salt and pepper. Pour the breadcrumbs into a second bowl. Dip the prickly pear skins first into the egg and then the crumbs.

Fill a high-sided pan one-third full with oil and heat this to at least 340°F (170°C) but no higher than 350°F (180°C). Test the temperature by holding a wooden skewer in the oil; you should barely see any little bubbles forming around it. Fry the crumbed skins in batches.

Once they are ready, scoop the skins out using a slotted spoon and leave to drain on paper towel. Season with salt and pepper or scatter with chili flakes (if using) while they are hot. Serve alongside the flesh of the pears.

Serves 4
Prep 30 mins

Orange salad with pecorino and black olives

Insalata di arance con pecorino e olive nere

4 oranges, ideally a mix of blood oranges and regular oranges
1 large red onion, finely sliced into rings
1 $\frac{1}{4}$ oz (40 g) pecorino cheese, cut into small, fine slices
3 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz (100 g) black olives, pitted

For the dressing

1 small mandarin or clementine
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (80 ml) extra-virgin olive oil
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper or chili flakes
handful of oregano leaves

This salad is particularly good as a side dish with fried fish, such as Fried Anchovies with Mint (see p.63). You can vary it by using other citrus fruits and also serve it with pickled anchovies, if you like.

Peel the oranges, making sure you completely remove the white pith. Slice them into thin rounds, flicking out and discarding any seeds, and put them on a serving plate.

Add the onion rings, pecorino, and olives and gently mix with the orange slices using your hands.

To make the dressing, squeeze the mandarin or clementine and mix the juice with the oil. Season with salt and pepper or chili flakes, add the oregano, and mix thoroughly.

Pour the dressing over the orange salad and leave to infuse for a few minutes before serving.







Serves 4
Prep 45 mins

Potato salad with capers, tuna, and olive crumble

Insalata di patate con capperi, tonno, e crumble di olive

For the salad

1³/₄ lb (800 g) red potatoes, or other waxy type, cooked and peeled
1 fennel bulb, very finely sliced
10 oz (300 g) best-quality bluefin tuna, from a jar
7 oz (200 g) red grapes, halved
3¹/₂ oz (100 g) large capers
4 sun-dried tomatoes in oil, roughly chopped
1 red onion, finely sliced into rings
handful of mint leaves, roughly torn
handful of basil leaves, roughly torn
1 small red chile, finely sliced into rings
1 tsp dried marjoram
3 tbsp red wine vinegar, plus extra to taste
1/3 cup (80 ml) olive oil, plus extra to taste
sea salt

For the crumble

2 tbsp (15 g) fresh breadcrumbs, or *mollica fresca* (see p.30)
1 tbsp sesame seeds
1³/₄ oz (50 g) black olives, pitted

On the island of Salina, in addition to *pani cunsatu* (see p.129), there is another highly acclaimed specialty: potatoes with large capers. It couldn't be simpler! The island cuisine is down-to-earth and pared back to the basics. If you are lucky enough to get your hands on some of the excellent large capers from Salina or Pantelleria, you should enjoy them just with some potatoes and dressing, in as simple a form as possible. If you are not so fortunate, you can add a couple more ingredients and embellish things a bit, as in this salad recipe.

Chop the potatoes, mix them with all the other salad ingredients in a large bowl, season with salt, and leave to infuse for a few minutes.

Season the salad to taste with more red wine vinegar or olive oil and adjust the salt. Serve on 4 plates, scattered with the olive crumble.

Meanwhile, toast the breadcrumbs and sesame seeds in a dry frying pan. Leave to cool, then chop with the olives to a rough crumble consistency.



Serves 4
Prep 45 mins

2 lb (900 g) broccoli
extra-virgin olive oil
6 scallions with a large bulb,
white parts only, finely
chopped
3–4 sun-dried tomatoes in
oil, finely chopped
3–4 anchovy fillets in oil
handful of black olives
chili flakes
sea salt
1/3–1/2 cup (90–100 ml) dry red
wine
4 tbsp white wine vinegar
2 oz (60 g) pecorino cheese,
finely chopped

Makes 6
Prep 45 mins, plus
cooling time

1 eggplant (roughly
10 oz/300 g)
extra-virgin olive oil
1 garlic clove
3 1/4 oz (90 g) scamorza cheese,
or mozzarella cheese, finely
chopped
1/4 cup (30 g) fresh breadcrumbs,
or *mollica fresca* (see p.30)
2 tbsp shredded mint leaves
1 tbsp finely grated pecorino
cheese
1 tbsp ricotta cheese
1 large egg, lightly beaten
sea salt
chili flakes

Braised broccoli

Broccoli affogati

Split the broccoli into little florets. Peel a generous layer from the tough stalk and chop its interior into little pieces.

Gently heat some olive oil in a wide, shallow pan. Add the broccoli, scallions, tomatoes, anchovies, olives, chili flakes, and some salt. Cover and steam over medium heat, stirring occasionally as it cooks.

Once the broccoli is partially cooked, uncover, deglaze the pan with the wine and vinegar, increase the heat, and continue cooking until nearly all

the liquid has evaporated. About 5 minutes before the end of cooking time, stir in the pecorino. Serve.

This broccoli has an even more intense flavor when cold, so it makes an ideal salad. It is great with the Eggplant Rissoles with Scamorza and Mint served on a Sicilian burger bun (see p.125).

Eggplant rissoles with scamorza and mint

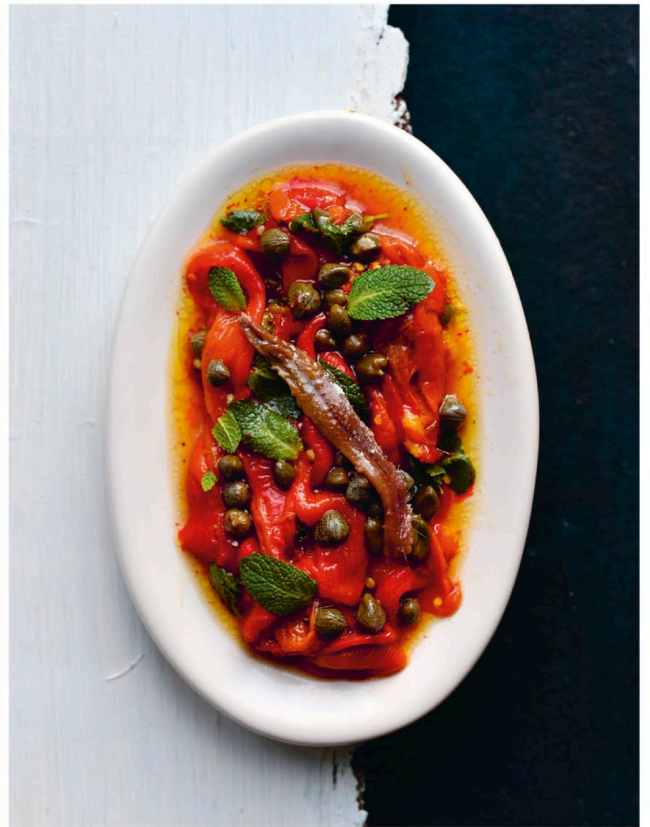
Polpette di melanzane con scamorza e menta

Peel the skin off the eggplant in long strips to create a striped effect, then halve and finely chop. Heat some olive oil in a pan and sauté the eggplant. Transfer onto paper towel to absorb some of the oil and leave to cool until lukewarm.

Purée the eggplant with the garlic and scamorza in a food processor or blender. Combine this purée with all the other ingredients in a bowl until you have a fairly firm mixture. Season with salt and chili flakes. Transfer the bowl to the refrigerator to chill for 30 minutes.

Heat plenty of olive oil in a pan, and use your hands to shape 6 flat rissoles from the mixture. Fry these in the hot oil until brown on all sides. Drain on paper towel and serve immediately.

These make wonderful veggie burgers (see p.125). Minted Sweet-and-Sour Squash (photo top left) is another great side (see p.111), while Sweet Pickled Peppers (photo bottom right) can be combined with tuna to create a wonderful main course (see p.67).



Tuppo



Tuppo





Dolci

LA MANDORLA

In 1872, in his compendium on the almond (*Manuale della coltivazione del mandorlo in Sicilia*), botanist Giuseppe Bianca listed 752 varieties of almond found in Sicily. The most common—*Fascione*, *Pizzuta d'Avola*, and *Romana*—are predominantly cultivated in the southeastern province of Syracuse.

To find out more about these three varieties of almond, I visited Concetto Scardaci, a 37-year-old agricultural scientist and almond producer who runs the family business with his wife Valentina on the slopes of Monte Finocchito. He is passionate about his farm, Azienda Agricola Scardaci, where he mainly grows almonds, lemons (*limone di Siracusa* IGP), and carob trees (*carrube*). Like his grandfather before him, who was also named Concetto, he rears sheep, too.

Concetto picks me up from Noto in his Jeep, which bears the marks of hard agricultural labor. We lurch with a jolt onto a side road. A sign bearing the name Concetto is attached to a large, stout tree, and I see the first glimpses of almond trees dotted here and there. "See this almond grove? It's like an entire population," he says. "You have 2-year-old plants, 30-year-olds, and 60-year-olds.

Just like people on a *piazza*. You'll find other species here, too, such as olive trees, just as you might find a person from another country in the town square. Nowadays, this kind of arrangement is rare. Here a *Fascione*, there a *Pizzuta*, and a bit farther on a *Romana*, all mixed up together. Admittedly, it makes harvesting a bit harder work, but the compensation is that you get this stunning view throughout the year," says Concetto enthusiastically of his orchard. He explains his devotion to this approach: "They're not standing there like soldiers in rank and file, all the same age, all the same variety, all compelled to be productive. If my plants are tired, they can simply be unproductive and are allowed to rest. But when they are inclined to produce, they do exactly that, and the quality is absolutely outstanding! Now I'll let you try an almond. You'll declare, 'That is an incredible almond!'"

This year's harvest has been excellent. The nuts here are collected from August until late September, still using the laborious manual approach where the trees are struck with very long canes. After harvesting, the almonds are removed from their green shells and laid out to dry in the sun. Concetto produces all three kinds of almonds, but the *Romana* is his favorite and the one he chooses to distribute himself in his own packaging. The other two varieties are sold on directly to distributors, still in their brown shells.

"If you remove an almond from its shell today and don't eat it for another 2 months, during that time, the nut absorbs flavors and scents from its surroundings.







Depending on the environment and storage, this may be suboptimal. You only get that original flavor if you crack them open to eat straight away,” says Concetto. So should you always buy almonds in their shells? “Ideally yes, but over time, the shell becomes so hard that it can’t be removed with standard domestic tools. You will need a hard stone and a really heavy-duty mallet.”

The *Romana* bears the name of a family from the town of Avola, which was supposedly involved in the nut variety’s cultivation and dissemination. This is the almond that bears the finest fruit when it comes to taste, appearance, and texture. It is the nut of choice for Sicilian *pasticceria* and—thanks to its slightly bitter flavor—it is also ideal for savory dishes. This is also the almond that was included in the Slow Food Ark of Taste around 20 years ago (under its alternative name, *Mandorla di Noto*; see right). This ancient, resistant almond has just one flaw: the shape of its kernel. Because the shell nearly always contains two almonds, they are irregular in shape. The rather crumpled kernels cannot be used for sugared almonds—or *confetti*,

as they are known here—which are popular for festivities. As a result, this variety has been rather neglected—maybe even discriminated against—in recent years. However, lately, it has been in demand again because it has such an excellent flavor. The *Pizzuta*, meanwhile, is considered the queen of almonds, largely thanks to its elegant shape. Consequently, this is the almond of choice for making *confetti*. The *Fascionello* lies somewhere between the two. Its shape is as regular and appealing as the *Pizzuta*, so it is also used for *confetti*, and it has a robust flavor similar to that of the *Romana*.

Every almond tree is derived from the bitter almond (*Prunus dulcis* var. *amara*). These seeds are sown in seedbeds for their first year, and that’s where they stay, safe and sound for the whole seasonal cycle. After that time, when they have learned to survive, the little bitter almond shoots are transferred to an orchard to join the other trees. After 2 years, once they have become well-established, the desired variety of almond—whether *Romana*, *Pizzuta*, or *Fascionello*—is grafted onto the tree.



In addition to the three best-known varieties of almond, Concetto also grows a large number of almost unknown, ancient species for himself—for instance, *Chiricupara* (which has a kernel similar to an apricot, except slightly larger), *Scacciunara* (a very flat almond), *Miuzza* (a very small nut), *Cuore* (a rare, heart-shaped variety), and *Rappiteddo* (which forms very small kernels that develop closely packed together). These varieties are still in danger of being lost—both the names and the plants—unless the younger generation can somehow keep them alive.

There is a certain amount of confusion between the *Mandorla di Noto* and the *Mandorla d'Avola*. Originally, just a single variety was designated as *Mandorla d'Avola*, namely the highly regarded *Pizzuta*, also known as *Pizzuta d'Avola*. In the past, this almond was marketed by traders from the town of Avola as being the best for *confetti*. (Unfortunately, almonds in Sicily have been routinely judged solely in terms of their suitability for *confetti*.) Even though most of the almonds were grown in Noto and the surrounding area, as they still are today, they

were sold as *Mandorla Pizzuta d'Avola*. So every almond variety in Avola was called a *Mandorla d'Avola*—hence the confusion. It means *Mandorla d'Avola* also refers to the *Romana* variety, even though this has had Slow Food protected status as *La Mandorla di Noto* for 20 years.

The added “Noto” designation only came about because, at the time when SlowFood first included the almond in its Ark, 70 percent of almond producers came from Noto and its surroundings. Before this, almonds from the region were simply referred to as *La Corrente d'Avola* and included any number of different varieties. To put it simply: both *Mandorla di Noto* and *Mandorla d'Avola* ultimately refer to the same three varieties of almond.



Serves 4
Prep 15 mins, plus
cooling time

Almond blancmange

Biancomangiare

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup (80 g) cornstarch
 $\frac{4}{4}$ cups (1 liter)
unsweetened almond milk
(for homemade, see p.220)
 $\frac{2}{3}$ – $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (120–140 g)
superfine sugar or honey
zest of 1 organic lemon,
without the white pith,
chopped into pieces
14 oz (400 g) cow milk
ricotta cheese (optional)
ground cinnamon, or chopped
pistachios and jasmine
flowers, to garnish

This recipe is a variant on my basic blancmange. I definitely prefer to use cornstarch rather than plain flour. If desired, I sometimes stir some melted chocolate into the mixture instead of ricotta or maybe fold in some pistachio cream made using pistachios from Bronte. If the blancmange is made without ricotta, the resulting pudding can be turned out of a mold (see photos) and decorated with edible flowers such as jasmine and chopped pistachios.

In a small bowl, stir the cornstarch into about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (200 ml) of the almond milk and mix well.

Remove the pan from heat and leave to cool until lukewarm.

In a saucepan, combine the remaining almond milk with the sugar and lemon zest, then stir in the cornstarch mixture. Place over medium heat and cook, stirring constantly with a whisk, until it comes to a boil. Cook for a few minutes, continuing to stir until the mixture thickens.

Strain the mixture to remove the lemon zest, then stir in the ricotta, if using. Divide the creamy mixture between 4 dessert glasses or small bowls and chill for at least 2 hours.

Dust with ground cinnamon to serve.



CORRADO

Someone who has made a significant contribution to the reappraisal of the *Romana* almond is Corrado Assenza, the world-famous Sicilian *pasticciere* who owns Caffè Sicilia in Noto. In his view, the *Romana* is the best (see p.180 for more on Sicilian almonds).



So my next stop is with Corrado in Noto, where I will get to know this nut a bit better. My order is initially all-white: *granita alla mandorla* and *biancomangiare*. Then Corrado serves me something black, a *gelato al gelso nero* (black mulberry gelato), to offer my stomach a contrast. Incidentally, he later tells me that *biancomangiare* was his mother's favorite dessert. The *Romana* is his preferred almond for making granita, mousse, blancmange, and almond milk because its fat content offers a more intense taste experience when compared to the other two common varieties of almond (*Pizzuta* and *Fascionello*).

Over 33 years ago, when Caffè Sicilia still belonged to his aunt, this simple yet sophisticated dessert wasn't even on the menu here. The wonderful thing about his version is that you taste the almonds rather than the cornstarch. There's no trick to this; it's all down to skill, says Corrado—finding the right producer for your cornstarch and also using the correct quantity. You can't just mix any old almond milk with any old cornstarch.

Corrado is an incredibly polite and fairly taciturn man. In his free time—if he gets any—he loves to read. He barely watches any television, but he did appear in the successful Netflix series *Chef's Table*. His first choice of career wasn't even to become a *pasticciere*. His aunt phoned him when he was studying entomology in Bologna and presented him with a choice: "Either you come back to Sicily and take over the café, or the café will have to close." He abandoned his dream of becoming a bee expert and instead became one of the most famous *pasticcieri* on the island.



Makes about 12
Prep 20 mins, plus
cooling time

Pistachio pastry

Paste di pistacchio

1 cup (120 g) powdered sugar,
plus extra for dusting
2³/₄ cups (340 g) pistachios,
ideally from Bronte,
1¹/₈ cups (140 g) finely
ground in a mortar and
pestle
1 medium egg white
1/2 cup (60 g) fine “00” grade
durum wheat semolina
flour, or all-purpose flour
finely grated zest of
1/4 organic lemon
5–7 drops of mandarin oil
5–7 drops of bitter almond oil

Sicilian pistachio production is located in Bronte, close to Mount Etna. The volcano supplies the soil with an abundance of nutrients (for more details, see p.164); that is the benefit of having a volcano as your immediate neighbor. The drawback is that Bronte has already been destroyed three times by cascading lava flows! However, this pistachio-growing town with its 19,000 residents, 31 miles (50 km) northwest of Catania, accepts its fate. One reason why pistachios (which are also referred to as “green gold”) are so expensive is because they can only be harvested every 2 years, in August, by hand. Understandably, this is a cause for celebration. In late September every year, Bronte holds the festival of the pistachio, *La sagra del pistacchio*.

Combine all the ingredients except the whole pistachios and knead until you have a firm dough. Leave to rest in the refrigerator for 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Put the whole pistachios on a plate.

Dust a work surface generously with powdered sugar and create 2 rolls (roughly 1 in/2.5 cm in diameter) from

the dough. Cut these into roughly 2¹/₂-in (6-cm) long pieces and gently press one long side of each into the whole pistachios. Round off the ends of each pastry slightly, arrange them spaced out on the prepared sheet, and bake in the center of the oven for 10 minutes.

Remove from the oven and use all your willpower to resist eating them until they have cooled down!





MARIA

On a 820-yard (750-meter) high mountain, in the very far west of the island, is perched a little medieval town that was originally inhabited by the Elymians before the 8th century BCE (see p.10). It was known as Eryx. It did not acquire its current name, Erice, until 1934.

The town boasts 60 churches, the Castle of Venus (*Castello di Venere*), and ancient town walls with three imposing gates. It has countless twisting, cobblestoned alleyways and offers magnificent panoramic views (depending on the visibility) over the west coast and as far as the Aegadian island archipelago. It is also home to its very own queen.

I am referring to Maria Grammatico, in her capacity as the uncrowned queen of Sicilian convent desserts. She gained renown thanks to the book, *Bitter Almonds*, published in 1994. It is a memoir of her girlhood in a convent, with recipes from the nuns, written by American Mary Taylor Simenti. Mary met Maria quite by chance on Sicily and, through the book's publication, Maria became a Sicilian celebrity.





Maria Grammatico's father died when she was 11 years old, leaving behind a destitute and newly pregnant wife who already had five other children. Her mother was faced with two options for the family: either her daughters would have to go into domestic service or they could enter a convent. Maria and her younger sister Angela were sent to the San Carlo convent in Erice. An uncle advised her mother to get the children there before Christmas so they would have something to eat during the festive season.

San Carlo was once a cloistered convent, but it was expropriated by Mussolini during World War II and transformed into a secular institution. Since then, it has been under the administration of the municipal

social services office, although life in the convent continued as usual. Maria stayed at the convent from 1952 to 1962, and there—hidden away from the world—she learned the art of making the convent's delicious sweets. Or, to be more accurate, Maria stole this expertise from the convent, because the nuns guarded their baking secrets warily. They were both suspicious and stingy. But little Maria watched their baking carefully and noted everything in her head.

Apart from alms and donations, the production of *dolci* was the only way for nuns to make money, and it ensured the livelihood of everyone who lived in the convent. All 18 children there were needed to help the 15 nuns with this strenuous physical work, even on holy Sundays.



At baking time, the children would have to get up in the cold at 1 a.m. to heat up the oven before the nuns arrived around 4 a.m. From 6 a.m., little delicacies such as *mostaccioli* and *biscotti* would be baked. Needless to say, none of the baked goods were wasted on the children unless they were burned and inedible, so effectively unsellable. Not surprisingly, then, it wasn't unheard of for the junior baking assistants to accidentally-on-purpose lose track of the baking times

Maria, who is now 79, recalls: "Food was scarce, and the nuns were always more concerned with their own livelihoods than with the welfare of the children. Anyone who had money could buy themselves extra food." But Maria and her sister Angela were among those children who had no money at all. There are lots of painful little episodes that have remained etched in Maria's memory—for instance, the time the two girls watched the nuns gleefully enjoying oranges and mandarins. Angela

meekly approached one of the nuns and politely asked if she might have a piece of orange, but the nun gave her nothing.

Maria subsequently left the convent and, in June 1964, after suffering an emotional breakdown, she decided to open up a little shop. Even then, the nuns showed no inclination to give her any baking pans or even to lend her a few items. She started with no money and just 6½ lb (3 kg) of almonds. And she had to make her own baking pans from plaster.

Ever since then, Maria has reflected a great deal on Christian values, such as charity. She still believes in God, but she no longer has faith in the church.

In 1975, Maria also opened her *pasticceria* in Via Vittorio Emanuele and, later on, the Pasticceria del Vecchio Convento, which is now run by her sister. For decades, her



life has followed the same annual rhythms, just like life back in the convent: Christmas hearts in December, *cannoli* for carnival season, and Easter lambs for Easter.

After her success, Maria wanted to reintroduce the tradition that lived on through her work to the place where she had learned her skills: the Convento San Carlo. The convent was closed in 1969, so she asked the municipality for a small site in the old walls where she would be able to continue this tradition. But they gave her nothing.

Maria's tale is the age-old story of so many Sicilians, somehow finding the most wonderful way to remain strong in the face of virtually intolerable circumstances. *Mandorle amare* translates as "bitter almonds." But the word *amare* in Italian also means "love."



Mary Taylor Simeti e Maria Grammatico

MANDORLE AMARE

Una storia siciliana
tra ricordi e ricette

Dario Faccavola Editore

Makes around 8
Prep 1 hr 10 mins, plus
resting time

Cream-filled shortcrust pastries—inspired by Maria Grammatico’s recipe

Genovesi

For the pastry

1 cup (125 g) “00” pasta flour,
or all-purpose flour, plus
extra to dust
1 cup (125 g) fine durum wheat
semolina flour, or all-
purpose flour
pinch of sea salt
1/3 cup (70 g) superfine sugar
2 large egg yolks
7 tbsp (100 g) chilled unsalted
butter, cubed
powdered sugar, to dust

For the crème pâtissière

1 large egg yolk
2 1/2 tbsp (30 g) superfine sugar
sea salt
2 1/2 tbsp (20 g) cornstarch
1 cup (250 ml) whole milk
zest of 1/4 organic lemon

You just *have* to order these at Maria Grammatico’s *pasticceria*. The origin of the name is a mystery to Maria: “Maybe I was in love with someone from Genoa once? I’m not sure myself anymore!” Maria’s *genovesi* are reminiscent of the *Minni di virgini* found in Palermo, but those are slightly more domed and have added candied fruits and little chunks of chocolate. Maria doesn’t make them following the original recipe from Sor Angelica in San Carlo, whose specialty this dish was, for the simple reason that she was never given it!

For the pastry, put the “00” flour and semolina in a food processor with the salt, sugar, egg yolks, butter, and 4 tbsp water and process to combine. Shape into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour.

Meanwhile, for the crème pâtissière, use a balloon whisk or electric hand whisk to beat the egg yolk with the sugar and a pinch of salt until foamy. Stir the cornstarch into roughly 1/4 cup (50 ml) of the milk, then combine this with the remaining milk in a saucepan. Stir the milk mixture into the egg yolk mixture, then place over medium heat, stirring constantly with a whisk, until the custard thickens. Pour it into a bowl and fold in the lemon zest. Put plastic wrap directly on the surface to prevent a skin from forming and leave to cool completely.

Preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C). Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.

Roll out the pastry on a lightly floured work surface until 1/4 in (4 mm) thick, then stamp out circles about 4 in (10 cm) in diameter. Spoon 1–1 1/2 tbsp crème pâtissière into the center of each pastry round. Place a second pastry round on top and press the edges down firmly with your fingers.

Transfer the *genovesi* to the prepared sheet. Bake in the center of the oven for 12–15 minutes until they begin to color slightly.

Remove from the oven, transfer to a wire rack, and sift over powdered sugar while they are still hot. *Genovesi* are best enjoyed lukewarm.



Serves 2
Prep 25 mins, plus
freezing time

Coffee ice cream sundae with hot chocolate sauce

Caldofreddo

1/2 cup (120 g) whipping
cream, plus 2 tbsp extra
1/2 pint (300 ml) coffee ice
cream (store-bought, or
follow the recipe below)
4 ladyfingers or 2 1/4 oz (70g)
sponge cake (see p.199)
2 tbsp Marsala or rum
3 1/2 oz (100 g) dark chocolate
2 tsp chopped hazelnuts

At Gelateria Liparoti, run by Maurizio Liparoti from Trapani, I sample unusual ice creams such as liquorice (*liquirizia DOP*) and carob seed (*carruba*). He also makes *caldofreddo*, for which the province of Trapani is famous. This is a classic homemade sundae served in Trapani's ice cream parlors and was first created back in 1950 in San Vito Lo Capo. It is traditionally served in a little glazed terracotta bowl known as a *lemmo*.

Whip the cream until stiff and put it in the freezer until solid.

Scoop coffee ice cream into 2 bowls (ideally *lemmi*), and make a hollow in each. Crumble in the ladyfingers, soak with Marsala, and smooth the ice cream back over. Add a scoop of frozen cream to each and return to the freezer for at least 5 minutes.

Meanwhile, melt the chocolate with 2 tbsp cream over a water bath and set aside to keep warm. The chocolate sauce must not be allowed to simmer!

Fetch the bowls of ice cream from the freezer, pour over the hot chocolate sauce, scatter with hazelnuts, and serve immediately.

Serves 2
Prep 30 mins, plus
freezing time

Coffee ice cream

Gelato al caffè

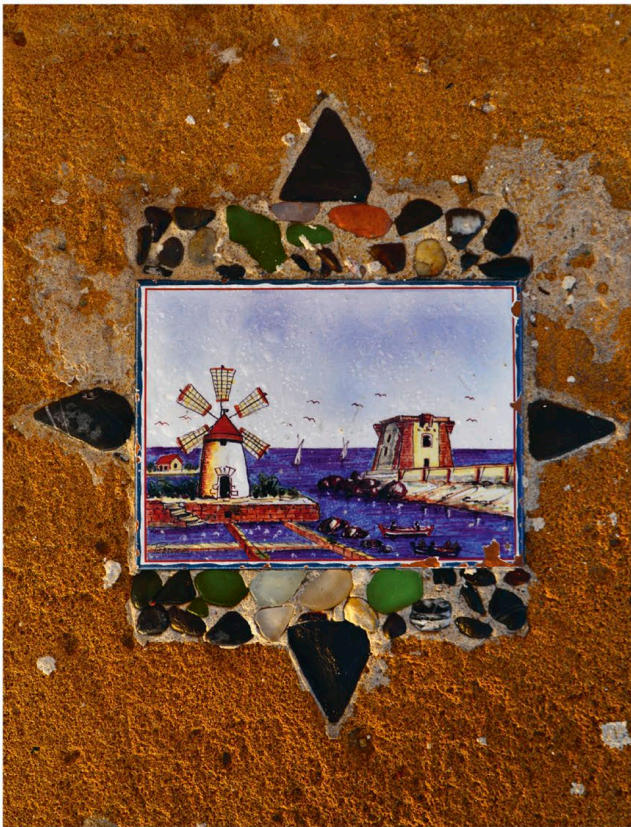
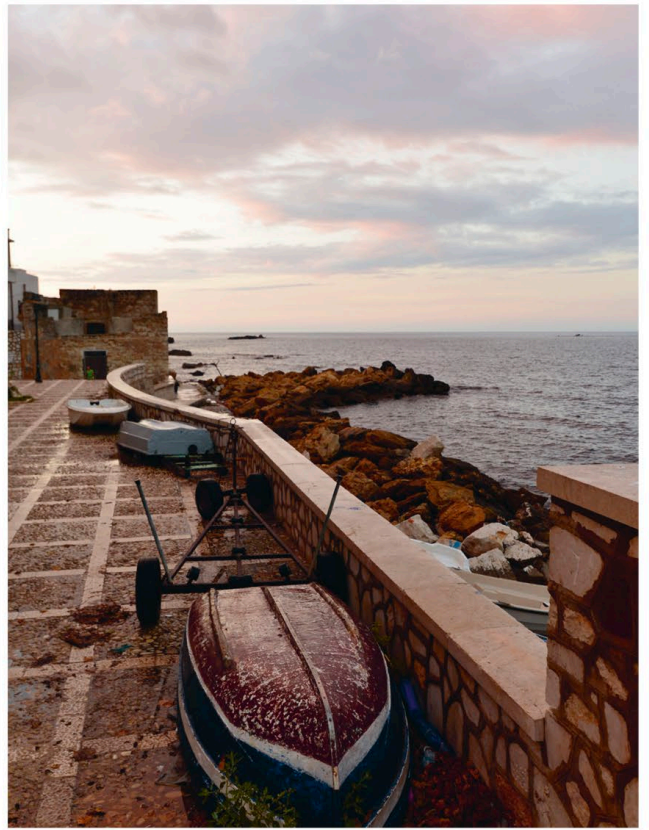
1/3 cup (75 ml) whole milk
1/3 cup (75 ml) espresso,
freshly made
2/3 cup (150 g) whipping cream
1/2 tsp instant coffee
seeds from 1 vanilla pod
4 medium egg yolks
2 1/2 tbsp (30 g) granulated
sugar

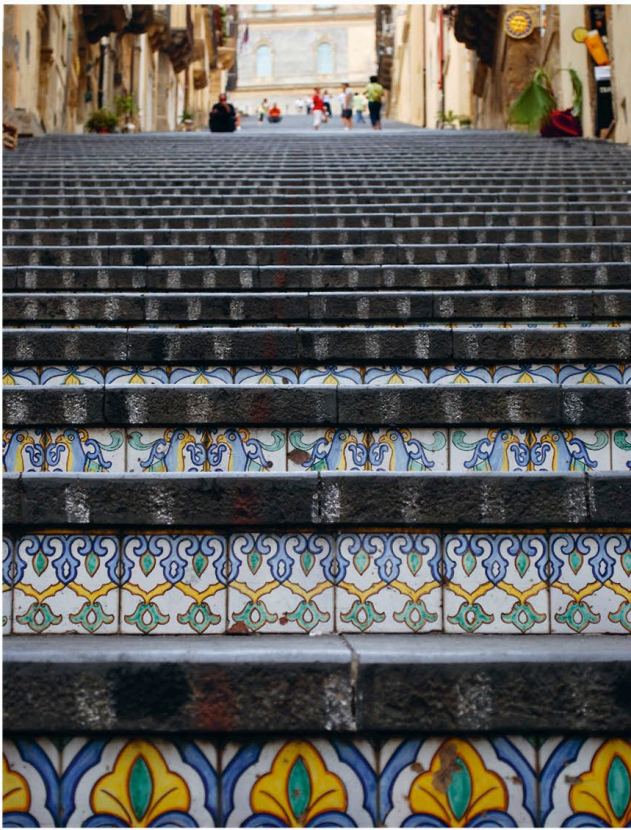
Stir the milk, espresso, cream, instant coffee, and vanilla in a saucepan, then briefly bring to a boil. Remove from heat and cool slightly.

In a steel bowl over a water bath at about 175°F (80°C), whisk the egg yolks and sugar, then pour in the coffee mixture in a thin stream, stirring

constantly until it thickens. Put the bowl into a bowl of ice cubes and stir until the cream cools down.

Transfer to an ice cream maker and churn according to the manufacturer's instructions. Freeze until serving.





Serves 4
Prep 50 mins, plus baking
and cooling time

Layered dessert with crème pâtissière and Marsala

Testa di Turco

For the sponge cake

2 medium eggs, separated
1/2 cup (80 g) superfine sugar
1 tsp finely grated zest of
1 organic lemon
1/4 tsp vanilla bean paste
pinch of fine sea salt
1/2 cup (50 g) “00” pasta
flour, or all-purpose
flour
2 tsp (8 g) baking powder
1/3 cup (40 g) cornstarch

For the crème pâtissière

4¹/₄ cups (1 liter) whole milk
3/4 cup (140 g) superfine
sugar
pared zest from 1 small
organic lemon, without
the white pith
2/3 cup (80 g) cornstarch

For finishing the dessert

1/4 cup (40 g) superfine sugar
4 tbsp sweet Marsala
(ideally *semisecco*)
1–2 heaped tsp ground
cinnamon
colorful sprinkles

For me, this dessert evokes the ancient aromas of Sicily, and, for many Sicilians, it is the taste of childhood. It can also be made with *savoardi* (Sicilian ladyfingers) instead of homemade sponge cake and goes by different names in different homes. *Testa di Turco* literally means “the head of the Turk” and harks back to the ancient battles to conquer Sicily. The recipe originates in Castelbuono, where fried pastry is used instead of sponge cake as a special carnival dish.

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a rectangular baking dish (roughly 10 x 7¹/₂ in/25x19 cm) with parchment paper.

Beat the egg yolks with 1/4 cup (50 g) of the sugar, the lemon zest, and vanilla until creamy. Whisk the egg whites with 2 tbsp cold water and the salt until stiff. Gradually whisk in the remaining sugar until well combined.

Gently but thoroughly fold the stiff egg whites into the egg yolk mixture. Combine the flour, baking powder, and cornstarch; sift them over the egg mixture; and fold in carefully. Transfer to the baking dish and bake for 25–30 minutes. Allow to cool, then slice the cake in half horizontally.

To make the crème pâtissière, mix 3¹/₃ cups (800 ml) of the milk with the sugar and pared lemon zest in a saucepan. Stir the remaining milk into the cornstarch in a bowl, mixing well,

then stir this into the milk and lemon mixture. Bring to a boil, stirring constantly with a balloon whisk, then continue to stir for a few minutes over medium heat until it thickens. Remove from heat and leave to cool slightly. Discard the lemon zest.

To finish, mix 2/3 cup (160 ml) water with the sugar in a small saucepan, simmer it down slightly, then leave to cool. Stir in the Marsala.

In the dish in which you baked the sponge cake, drizzle the first cake layer with half the Marsala mixture. Spread half the crème pâtissière on top and dust with half the cinnamon. Repeat the layers.

Chill the dessert for at least 1 hour. Sprinkle with colorful sprinkles shortly before serving.

Serves 8
Prep 1 hr 50 mins, plus
cooling time

Sicilian cassata torte

Cassata al forno

For the ricotta cream

1 lb 5 oz (600 g) ricotta cheese
1 tsp vanilla bean paste
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (120 g) superfine sugar
pinch of fine sea salt
zest of 1 small organic orange
zest of 1 small organic lemon
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (60 g) dark chocolate chips
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ tbsp chopped pistachios

For the pastry

$1\frac{2}{3}$ cups (200 g) “00” pasta
flour, or all-purpose
flour, plus more to dust
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (70 g) superfine sugar
7 tbsp (100 g) cold unsalted
butter, chopped, plus extra
for the pan
1 medium egg yolk
1 generous tbsp sweet Marsala
 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp vanilla bean paste
pinch of fine sea salt
zest of $\frac{1}{2}$ small organic
lemon

For the sponge cake

1 medium egg, separated, plus
1 medium egg white (from
the pastry)
pinch of fine sea salt
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (40 g) superfine sugar
1 tbsp zest of 1 organic orange
2 tbsp (15 g) fine “00” grade
durum wheat semolina flour,
or all-purpose flour
1 level tsp baking powder
1 tbsp (10 g) cornstarch
2 tbsp (10 g) cocoa powder
2 tbsp sweet Marsala

powdered sugar
ground cinnamon

Cassata used to be reserved for Easter in Sicily, but now it’s available all year round. The world-renowned *cassata Siciliana*, that is covered in marzipan, actually evolved from this original version. In the past, it consisted simply of shortcrust pastry with a sweet ricotta filling.

To make the ricotta cream, mix the ricotta with the vanilla, sugar, salt, and zests in a bowl. Place a strainer over another bowl and pour in the creamy mixture. Leave it to drip through the strainer for 2 hours in the refrigerator.

Meanwhile, quickly combine all the ingredients for the pastry, wrap in plastic wrap, and chill for 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C) and line the base of a 7 in (18 cm) cake pan with parchment paper.

For the sponge cake, whisk both egg whites with the salt until foamy. Pour in half the sugar, whisking until the egg whites are firm. Beat the egg yolk with the remaining sugar and orange zest until foamy. Carefully fold the whisked egg whites into the egg yolk mixture.

Combine the flour with the baking powder, cornstarch, and cocoa. Fold this into the egg mixture in small batches.

Spoon into the pan and bake in the center of the oven for 15–18 minutes. Test it is done by inserting a toothpick; it should emerge clean. The cake will

rise to a height of at least $\frac{3}{4}$ in (2 cm). Leave to cool, then release from the pan. Slice in half horizontally.

Butter another pan 8 in (20 cm) in diameter, and line the base and sides with parchment paper.

Set aside $4\frac{1}{4}$ – $5\frac{1}{2}$ oz (120–150 g) pastry for the top of the cake. Roll out the remaining pastry as thinly as possible on a floured work surface. Use this to line the pan. Now place a cake layer inside and drizzle with 1 tbsp Marsala. Fold the chocolate chips and pistachios into the ricotta cream and spread over the cake. Cover with the second cake layer. Drizzle with the remaining Marsala.

Roll out a lid from the remaining shortcrust and prick with a fork, then lay it over the torte and pinch to seal the edges all the way round. Bake in the center of the oven for 50 minutes. Test if it is done by inserting a toothpick.

Leave to cool, then dust with powdered sugar and cinnamon, in a decorative pattern if desired. This tastes even better the next day!



Serves 4
Prep 25 mins, plus
freezing time

Strawberry granita

Granita alla fragola

½ cup (80 g) granulated
sugar, plus extra if needed
½ cup (100 ml) freshly
squeezed orange juice
¼ tsp vanilla bean paste
1 lb 2 oz (500 g) ripe
strawberries
2 tbsp pomegranate liqueur
or rose liqueur
juice and finely grated
zest of 1 organic lemon
whipped cream, to serve
(optional)

The best granita, so it is said, can be found in Catania. Some people make a more specific claim for Noto, while others swear by the superiority of Taormina—to be precise, Saretto Bambara's Bam Bar. Traditionally, there were only three kinds of granita in Sicily: lemon (*granita al limone*), coffee (*granita al caffè*), and almond (*granita alla mandorla*). Another particular specialty these days is mulberry (*granita con gelsi*), available in both black and white (*gelsi neri*, *gelsi bianchi*). But strawberry granita has gradually gained in popularity alongside the many other varieties now available. Granita, with or without cream, served with a brioche is the trendiest summer breakfast in Sicily. People are getting creative, and there have been some radical innovations: how about a refreshing *granita al limone* in a glass of beer ...?

Chill a shallow container ahead of time in the freezer.

Put the sugar, orange juice, and vanilla in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Simmer this down slightly over medium heat for 3 minutes. Remove from heat and leave the syrup to cool completely.

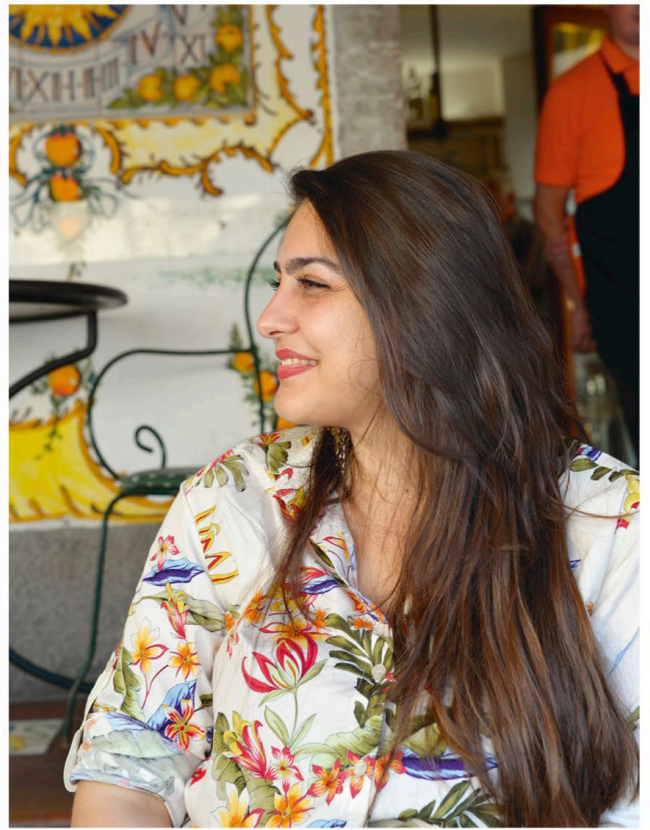
Clean the strawberries, chop roughly, and put them in a blender with the liqueur, a few splashes of lemon juice, and the lemon zest. Purée.

Mix the strawberry purée with the cooled syrup, then transfer to the prefrozen container and put this in the freezer for at least 6 hours.

After about 1 hour, stir the mixture with a fork. Repeat this process every hour to keep the ice crystals nice and small and trap air in the mixture.

After 5 hours, blend the granita with a hand-held blender to break down the ice crystals. Return it to the freezer for another hour.

Scoop the granita into glasses and serve with whipped cream, if you like, and a brioche bun (for homemade, see p.125).





Serves 8–10
Prep 1 hr 10 mins

Traditional Sicilian orange cake

Pan d'arancio

For the cake

1 small organic orange
(around 4¹/₄ oz/120 g)
3 medium eggs
seeds from 1/2 vanilla pod
1/2 cup (80 g) demerara sugar
1/4 cup (50 g) superfine sugar
1 generous tbsp almond or
orange liqueur
7 tbsp (100 g) unsalted
butter, melted and cooled,
plus extra for greasing
fine durum wheat semolina
flour, or all-purpose
flour, for the pan
3/4 cup (100 g) “00” pasta
flour, or all-purpose flour
1/2 cup (50 g) ground almonds
1 tsp baking powder
pinch of fine sea salt

For the icing and decoration

2 tsp orange juice or liqueur
2/3 cup (100 g) powdered sugar,
plus extra to dust
(optional)
finely grated zest of
1 organic orange
candied orange slices
(optional)

What an ingenious idea it was from the Sicilians to throw whole citrus fruits into this cake. After all, why bother peeling an orange when it's the skin that has most of the flavor? This cake can also be made with lemons, mandarins, or clementines. And instead of butter, which was not as widely available in Sicily in the past, you can substitute olive oil. The story goes that monks at the Benedictine monastery in Catania invented this cake; while we'll never know for sure, they certainly had a reputation as true food connoisseurs.

Wash the orange in hot water and chop into pieces, but do not peel! Remove any seeds. Purée the orange in a food processor or blender.

Use an electric whisk or free-standing mixer to beat the eggs with the vanilla, both types of sugar, and the almond or orange liqueur for about 5 minutes until the mixture is pale and creamy.

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Grease a large loaf pan (3¹/₃–3³/₄ cups/800–900 ml in volume) and dust with semolina flour.

Gradually stir the orange purée and butter into the egg mixture. Mix the “00” flour with the ground almonds, baking powder, and salt. Fold the dry ingredients in batches into the egg mixture. Spoon into the pan and bake in the bottom of the oven for 45–50 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the center emerges clean. Leave to cool, then turn out of the pan.

To make the icing, gradually stir drops of juice or liqueur into the powdered sugar until you have a viscous glaze. Pour this over the cooled cake. (If you like, you can dust the cake with powdered sugar beforehand.) Sprinkle with orange zest and decorate with candied orange slices, if you like.

For lemon and olive oil cake

(pan di limone):

Replace the butter with 1/3 cup (80 ml) olive oil, use lemon instead of orange, and use limoncello or amaretto instead of orange liqueur.

Serves 4

Prep 40 mins, plus
cooling time

Watermelon pudding

Gelo di anguria

1 watermelon (2¹/₄–2³/₄ lb/
1–1.2 kg)
1 cinnamon stick
handful of jasmine flowers,
plus extra to garnish
5 tbsp (40 g) cornstarch
1/3–1/2 cup (60–80 g)
granulated sugar,
depending on how sweet the
melon is
handful of pistachios,
roughly chopped
handful of dark chocolate,
chopped

A sun-ripened watermelon, with seeds, is perfect just as it is and requires no further tinkering. Nonetheless, this pudding is worth the effort. Palermo's inhabitants dedicated this dish to Santa Rosalia, their patron saint. At the *Festino di Santa Rosalia* on July 15, traditional dishes include *pasta con le sarde* (see p.29), *babbaluci* (snails cooked with garlic and parsley), and watermelon in every conceivable variation: served simply as it comes, made into pudding as an accompaniment to sweet pies (*crostata*; the recipe here is ideal for that purpose), as watermelon ice cream, or as granita. The fruit belongs to the family of cucurbits (*Cucurbitaceae*) along with cucumbers and comes originally from Africa, but now it is grown anywhere with nice, warm conditions.

Juice the melon; you will need 2 cups (500 ml) juice for this recipe. Cover and chill the juice overnight with the cinnamon stick and jasmine flowers. The next day, strain the juice.

Stir the cornstarch into 1/2 cup (100 ml) of the juice, then dissolve this in the remaining juice. Add sugar to taste and cook in a saucepan over medium heat, stirring constantly, until

the juice has thickened to a creamy consistency. Remove from heat and divide the mixture between 4 molds, which you have rinsed in cold water immediately beforehand. Chill for at least 5 hours.

Turn the watermelon puddings out onto dessert plates and decorate with pistachios, chocolate, and jasmine flowers to serve.







Makes 4

Prep 1½ hrs, plus soaking
and draining time

Ricotta and wheat berry cakes

Lucia e Agata

For the wheat berry cream

4¼ oz (120 g) wheat berries
1 large piece each of organic
orange and organic lemon
zest, white pith removed
1 bay leaf
pinch of sea salt
9 oz (250 g) ricotta cheese
3 tbsp (35 g) superfine sugar
¾ oz (20 g) dark chocolate,
roughly chopped
generous pinch of finely
grated zest from 1 organic
orange and 1 organic lemon
1 tsp ground cinnamon
1 tbsp maraschino liqueur
(cherry liqueur), plus
2 tbsp for soaking
½ oz (15 g) candied lemon
peel, chopped

For the sponge mixture

1 medium egg
¼ cup (40 g) superfine sugar,
plus 2 tbsp for soaking
3 tbsp (25 g) fine “00” grade
durum wheat semolina
flour, or all-purpose flour
1 tsp baking powder
pinch of fine sea salt
2½ tbsp (20 g) cornstarch

For the decoration

5¾ oz (160 g) pistachio
paste, or marzipan colored
with green food coloring
splash of lemon juice
⅔ cup (100 g) powdered sugar
4 glacé cherries

St. Lucia lived in Syracuse and St. Agata in Catania, both almost 2,000 years ago. They devoted themselves to the Christian faith and suffered as a consequence. Here, I have created a single dessert that combines *cuccia* (boiled wheat berries in a sweet ricotta cream), which is served in Syracuse for Santa Lucia on December 13, and *minne di Sant’Agata*, which are small cassata cakes.

Soak the wheat berries in 4¼ cups (1 liter) of water for 12 hours, then drain. Put them in a saucepan with 4¼ cups (1 liter) fresh water and the large pieces of citrus zests, bay leaf, and salt and cook for 1 hour until soft. Drain and leave to cool, discarding the zests and bay leaf.

Mix the ricotta with the sugar, chocolate, finely grated citrus zests, cinnamon, liqueur, candied lemon peel, and wheat berries. Spoon into a strainer over a bowl and leave to drain in the refrigerator for 3 hours.

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Line a 8 in (20 cm) square cake pan with parchment paper.

To make the sponge cake, beat the egg with the sugar until creamy. Mix the flour, baking powder, salt, and cornstarch; sift over the egg mixture; and fold it in.

Transfer to the prepared pan and bake for 15 minutes. Leave to cool on a wire rack, then stamp out 4 circles the same size as the molds you’ll use.

Divide the pistachio paste or marzipan into 4. Roll out each piece between 2 sheets of plastic wrap to create disks 5–5½ in (13–14 cm) in diameter and ⅛ in (2–3 mm) thick. These should each be able to line a hemisphere mold with a capacity of about ½ cup (100 ml). Remove the top layer of plastic wrap. Transfer each disk into one of the molds with the plastic wrap at the bottom. Fill with wheat berry cream almost to the rim.

Make the mixture for soaking the sponge cake by heating 4 tbsp water with the 2 tbsp sugar until it has dissolved. Leave to cool, then stir in the 2 tbsp liqueur. Drizzle the mixture over the sponge cake, position the sponge cake circles on top of the wheat berry cream, then turn the little cakes out of the molds. Pull off the plastic wrap and trim off any excess pistachio paste around the edges.

In a bowl, stir sufficient lemon juice into the powdered sugar to create a liquid but not excessively runny glaze. Pour over the little cakes to cover completely. Top each with a glacé cherry. Chill for at least 1 hour before serving.

Makes 10–12

Preparation time 2 hrs, plus
cooling time

Cannoli with artichoke cream

Cannoli con crema di carciofi

For the filling

5 artichokes
coarse sea salt
9 oz (250 g) ricotta cheese, ideally
sheep milk ricotta
 $\frac{1}{3}$ – $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (50–60 g) powdered
sugar, plus extra for decorating
1 oz (30 g) candied lemon peel,
finely chopped
 $1\frac{3}{4}$ oz (50 g) dark chocolate,
roughly chopped (optional)
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp vanilla bean paste
pinch of fine sea salt
chopped hazelnuts, to decorate

For the pastry tubes

1 small egg
pinch of sea salt
 $1\frac{1}{8}$ cups (140 g) “00” pasta flour,
or all-purpose flour, plus
extra for dusting
scant 1 oz (25 g) lard
2 tbsp (15 g) powdered sugar
2 tbsp Marsala
1 tbsp red wine vinegar
pinch of ground cinnamon
neutral-flavored oil, for
deep-frying

You can tell whether a *cannolo* was made in Palermo or Catania depending on how it is decorated. In Catania, they use chopped pistachios; in Palermo, they prefer candied orange zest. The municipality of Ramacca, 28 miles (45 km) from Catania, is famous for its purple artichokes (*carciofi violetti di Ramacca*) and here, during their artichoke festival, you will find a truly revolutionary approach to using this vegetable. The *cannolo* in question comes from the Pasticceria Ricca and consists of two pastry tubes: a smaller one filled with chocolate cream and a larger one filled with a ricotta and artichoke cream. I have simplified the recipe somewhat.

To make the filling, first discard the tough outer leaves of the artichokes. Trim about $\frac{1}{2}$ in (1.5 cm) from the stalks and pare off the hard outer, fibrous section. Put them in a saucepan, cover with water, season lightly with salt, cover, and cook over low heat for 25–30 minutes. Drain thoroughly, then pat dry.

Scrape the flesh off the artichoke leaves using the back of a knife. Purée the flesh with the artichoke hearts and stalk in a food processor, then press through a fine strainer. Stir in the remaining filling ingredients. Spoon into a strainer over a bowl and leave to drain in the refrigerator for 3 hours.

For the pastry, gently beat the egg with the salt and mix this with the other ingredients until they come together. Shape into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 1 hour.

In a pan, heat the oil for frying to 350°F (180°C). Hold a wooden skewer in the oil to test; when little bubbles form on it, the oil is hot enough.

Roll out the pastry as thinly as possible on a floured work surface and divide into 4 in (10 cm) squares. Place metal tubes to shape the cannoli diagonally on the pastry. Moisten a corner of each square, roll it up loosely around the tube, and press down the corner.

Cook each roll for 3–4 minutes in the hot oil until golden. They should have enough space to turn without touching, so you may have to cook them in batches. Drain on paper towel, leave to cool, then carefully pull out the metal tubes.

Spoon the cream into a piping bag and fill the tubes. Sift powdered sugar over, scatter nuts on each end, and serve.









Bevande

IL CHIOSCO

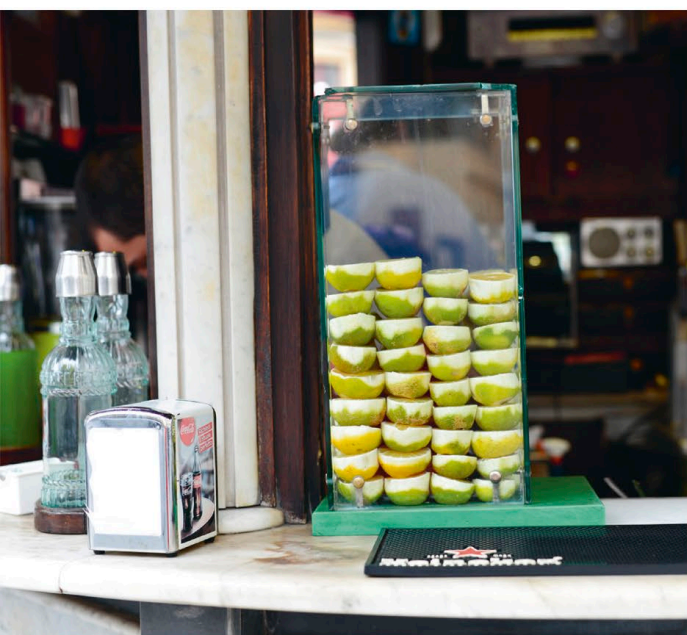
Green mandarin and lemon (*mandarino verde e limone*), or “Lemon lemon” (*limone limone*), or even tamarind and lemon (*tamarindo e limone*)—all of these drinks are sold on every corner by street vendors in Sicily. They are extremely colorful, very fruity syrups mixed with freshly squeezed citrus juice and topped up with sparkling water.

If Palermo is a byword for street food, then Catania can boast the same for beverages, or “street drinks.” At the heart of every *piazza principale*, unassuming and reserved but colorfully stocked and ready for action, they stand on the pavement and wait. In a matter of seconds, out of nowhere, a crowd of people forms. This throng can disperse as quickly as it assembled. People don’t linger for long, so everything needs to be done quickly. Fast service, dexterity, expertise, and great quality, all at incredibly low prices.

These institutions are originally from Catania. The name can seem a little unceremonious: *chiosco*. But these are far more than mere “kiosks.” These little buildings, with their protruding roofs, are in fact vibrant street bars. The finest *chioschi* were built in the Liberty Style (Catania is not just a Baroque town; it also offers plenty of Art Nouveau delights) and are designed with a rectangular or octagonal floor plan. You may not be able to buy a newspaper here, but you will find the healthiest drink in the world. It is also the best-selling drink in summer and consists of just three natural ingredients, mixed together in a few swift steps by the vendor to create the renowned *seltz limone e sale*.

A bit of sea salt, two lemons (the juice squeezed by hand using a wonderful brass press, which is still manufactured by true master craftsmen), mixed with highly carbonated water that shoots out of a tap—that’s all you need for this classic drink made in Catania, the queen of the *chioschi*. It is also nonalcoholic, like all the other popular drinks sold at *chioschi*, the ultimate outdoor meeting places for Catania’s residents. Gaudy-colored syrups catch the eye, often stored in ornate glass bottles next to piles of oranges and lemons.

As well as *seltz limone e sale*, you can order the south Italian favorite *frappè* (fruit mixed with milk), your favorite *caffè*, *misto frutto* (puréed fruits combined with the ubiquitous soda), and drinks mixed with your choice of syrup. These can be made from tart red or green







mandarins, sweet pineapples, refreshing watermelons and oranges, astringent green bananas, strawberries, mint, *orzata* (almond syrup), or even tamarind. Depending on the *chiosco*, there may even be granita on offer.

The kiosks, known slightly confusingly as *o ciospu* in the Catanian dialect, evolved from the ancient occupation of the water vendor, the *acquaio*. This street trader would sell drinking water on the street, which he had collected from a well or spring and transported in large terracotta containers to be offered to passersby on market day or at street festivals. Sometimes this would be flavored with a dash of lemon juice in Catania. In Palermo, on the other hand, the *acquaio* sold *acqua e zammù* (water with anise), which was a legacy of the Arab rulers.

Just as *seltz limone e sale* is quintessentially Catanian, the term “seltzer” is recognized around the world. The ancient Romans called sparkling, dancing water *aqua saltare*. The word *saltare* became *selters*, and now this term is used in many languages as the unofficial term for carbonated mineral water.



Some popular *chioschi* in Catania that are well worth a visit (particularly in the heat of summer):

Chiosco Sicilia Seltz
Corso Sicilia

Chiosco Giammona
Piazza Vittorio Emanuele III

Chiosco del Borgo
Piazza Cavour

Chiosco Stazione
Piazza Papa Giovanni XXIII

The last of these may not be the most fashionable *chiosco*, nor does it have the most elegant architecture. However, the drinks here taste just that little bit better, maybe because this *chiosco* is one of very few to serve them in a glass rather than a plastic beaker.

Serves 1
Prep 10 mins

Sparkling salted lemon drink, from Catania

Seltz limone e sale

1 cup (250 ml) chilled
sparkling water
pinch of sea salt or sea
salt flakes
4 tbsp freshly squeezed
lemon juice, ideally from
Sicilian *Verdelli* lemons
pinch of baking soda

This is the ideal summer drink! In summer, we naturally sweat more, and this cooling process also causes us to lose important minerals. These can be restored with a *seltz limone e sale*. You should use a 14 fl oz (400 ml) glass, as the baking soda creates froth. This recipe can also be made beautifully using 10–20 percent purified seawater; in that case, don't add any salt, just the baking soda for the froth effect.

Pour $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (200 ml) sparkling water with the remaining sparkling water, into a glass. Stir in the salt until it dissolves. Add the lemon juice. Top up with the remaining sparkling water, stir in the baking soda (careful, it froths up), and drink immediately.

Serves 1
Prep 10 mins

A Sicilian gin fizz

Gino fizz

2 tbsp (25 ml) dry gin
2 tsp sugar syrup
good pinch of sea salt or
sea salt flakes
4 tsp freshly squeezed lemon
juice, ideally from
Sicilian *Verdelli* lemons
4–6 ice cubes
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (100 ml) sparkling
water
broad strip of zest from
1 organic lemon

To be honest, it is odd that the original gin fizz lacks salt. That's why I've included the Sicilian version here, where sea salt is essential!

Vigorously shake the gin, sugar syrup, sea salt, and lemon juice in a cocktail shaker with 2–3 ice cubes. with the lemon zest, or place the zest in the cocktail itself. Cin-Gin!

Tip:

Pour through a fine strainer into a glass containing 2–3 ice cubes. Top up with sparkling water and garnish Why not use a couple long (and environmentally friendly) macaroni tubes as straws?



Makes about 4¹/₄ cups
(1 liter)
Prep 20 mins

Almond milk with a hint of green lemon

Latte di mandorla al limone verde

1 cup (100 g) almonds, roughly
ground (ideally *Romana* or
a blend of almonds from
Noto; see p.180)
granulated sugar, to taste
zest from 1 organic lemon,
ideally a Sicilian
Verdelli lemon, white
pith removed, or from
1 organic lime

The process for making almond milk can either be complicated or straightforward. Concetto Scardaci (see p.180) takes the simple approach. The almonds are processed with their brown skins included, because these contain important nutrients. In summer, his family drinks nothing but this almond milk, so Concetto is engaged in constant production to keep up with demand! His habit of adding green lemon zest is inherited from his mother, and he uses the skin from the *Verdelli* lemon, which is in season during the summer, to give the milk an additional freshness. If you prefer things less sweet, you don't need to add any sugar or other sweetener to this milk. In fact, reducing or avoiding sugar helps emphasize the flavor of the high-quality almonds. In the past, almond farmers would have made this drink from the nut scraps, the leftover bits that couldn't be sold. So an authentic version combines the flavors of several different varieties of almond.



Get 2 bowls ready. Pour into one of them 2 cups (500 ml) of water. Put half the almonds into the center of a muslin cloth and twist it firmly to make a compact ball.

Submerge this in the water, then remove and wring out over the second bowl until no more white almond liquid comes out. Put the cloth ball back in the water and repeat until the bowl with the water is empty.

Next, pour another 2 cups (500 ml) of water into the empty bowl. Discard the used almond paste and put the remaining almonds into the cloth. Repeat the process.

Now sweeten the "milk" to taste, or just leave it as it is, with the lemon zest. Pour into a sterilized bottle with a screw-top lid.

Leave the flavors to develop for about 1 hour in the refrigerator. Discard the lemon zest before drinking. The almond milk will keep for about 3 days in the refrigerator.





A Sicilian aperitif

Aperitivo Siciliano

The *aperitivo* is not actually a Sicilian tradition. Sicilians don't go to a bar to drink alcohol, but rather to enjoy a *caffè* and possibly to eat something sweet (which may in fact contain alcohol). But these days the fashion for *aperitivos* has extended from the Italian mainland into Sicily. With their newfound self-confidence, Sicilians take a different approach to their northern compatriots. *Aperitivos* are sometimes (more and more frequently, in fact) served with local specialties, often with little snacks inspired by the island's ancient history.

Serves 4
Prep 25-35 mins

Prickly pear and pomegranate cocktail

Cocktail al fico d'India e melagrana

2 prickly pears
1 large pomegranate
16-20 ice cubes
½ cup (120 ml) Amaro liqueur
⅔ cups (400 ml) spumante wine, for instance, Mon Pit Brut Rosé from Cantine Russo
zest from 1 organic lemon, divided into 4
4 large sage leaves
4 long rosemary sprigs

1-2 little bowls of *fave fritte* (see p.143)
Mini sesame panini with lemon marmalade and scamorza (see p.147)
1-2 little bowls of pickled lupini beans, or chips, or peanuts

Peel the prickly pears (see p.171) and purée them. Discard the skins or fry them (see p.171).

Halve the pomegranate and juice each section using a manual press. Alternatively, scoop out all the seeds, remove the white membrane, and process the seeds in a juicer.

Put 4-5 ice cubes into each of 4 balloon glasses, pour over the prickly pear purée, and stir in the pomegranate juice. Divide the Amaro between each glass, stir well, and top up with spumante. Put a piece of lemon zest and a sage leaf into each glass.

Finish with a sprig of rosemary shaped in an arch (see photo, bottom) or simply inserted lengthwise.

Serve with *fave fritte*, filled mini panini, and pickled lupini beans.



IL VINO

“Respect the earth and her equilibrium. Respect the vineyard by cultivating it wisely and farming sensitively. Respect the fermentation process by using indigenous yeasts. Respect the wine as if it was a person, bringing its own world, its own history, its own atmosphere.”

Arianna Occhipinti

A renewed appreciation of native vine varieties will not only prevent them from disappearing, it will also enrich the world of wine in numerous different ways. This has recently been demonstrated with great success in Sicily with the grape variety Nero d’Avola. But that was only the beginning in terms of painstakingly transforming the island’s vinicultural landscape.

Viniculture and wine making have left their mark on the regions around Mount Etna since ancient times. The vineyards benefit immensely from the special microclimate around Etna and have been developed on

small and medium terraces carved into the hillsides. Since 1968, the wines produced here—*bianco superiore*, *bianco*, *rosso*, and *rosato*—have been authorized to use the Etna DOC registered designation of origin. The Etna region encompasses 21 municipalities. The region’s indigenous vines are Nerello Mascalese and Nerello Cappuccio (both red wine varieties) and Carricante and Minnella (both white wine varieties).

In addition to these varieties from Etna, Sicily’s other important native grape varieties include Catarratto (white), Frappato (red), Grecanico (white), Grillo (white), Inzolia/Ansonica (white), Albanello (white), Alicante/Guarnaccia (red), Corinto (red), Damaschino (white), Malvasia di Lipari (white), Moscato bianco (white), Moscato d’Alessandria/Zibibbo (white), Nocera (red), and Perricone (red). There are also countless ancient varieties of vine, making up a seemingly endless list which has not yet been fully defined.

Over the last couple of years, a new and very welcome trend has emerged in the world of wine. Previously, global wine stocks consisted almost entirely of just a few varieties of vine, namely the “classic” French varieties such as Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, and Merlot. These are varieties that have gradually spread from France for use in wine production globally. But many regions have long since cultivated other, equally excellent grapes for wine. These include a number of native Italian varieties, especially from the south of the country.







A special find from the time of the ancient Greeks shows just how far back Sicilian viniculture goes. The discovery was made at the archaeological site of Kamarina, located in the present-day province of Ragusa, and includes the depiction of a landscape full of vines. In fact, interestingly, it shows a woman running a wine business. Just 10 miles (16 km) from Kamarina lies Vittoria. This is where Cerasuolo di Vittoria is produced, the only Sicilian wine to bear the DOCG seal (issued since 2005). And it is also home to the most successful vintner in the new generation of Sicilian winemakers. And like her ancient ancestor nearby, she, too, is a woman.

Arianna Occhipinti was born in Trapani in 1982. Later, the family moved to Vittoria, where her father worked as an architect. Her uncle, Giusto Occhipinti, founded Azienda Agricola COS in 1980, along with Giambattista Cilia and Cirino Strano. At that time, he already had extensive experience as a wine producer, and today he manages one of the best wineries in Sicily.

Arianna's philosophy regarding wine and life goes even further: "My wine understands the land from which it comes. The wine I like to produce is not just an organic wine; it goes beyond merely complying with the countless EU regulations governing organic produce. Its most important characteristic is that it is a natural wine, and I like to see a similar natural essence in myself. My wine is inspired by my instinct for authenticity and by the importance I place on love. This is a wine that offers harmony and strength, that speaks volumes about its wonderful country of origin, and about me. That's why I'm absolutely convinced that natural wine is not just a good-quality wine, but also a humane wine."

At a young age, Arianna developed a strong and close relationship with her successful uncle and a particular affinity with his chosen profession. When she was 16, she accompanied him to Verona to the VinItaly wine fair, where she saw all the different wines on show and began to understand their cultural context and the many exceptional



people involved in this business. Her future path was immediately clear. She studied viniculture and oenology in Milan before returning to Sicily where, in 2004, she kicked off her career with a 2.5-acre (1-hectare) vineyard, introducing her very first wine to the market at the age of just 22.

Today, Arianna owns almost 30 times this quantity of land, all of which is farmed organically, predominantly for the cultivation of two traditional grape varieties from Vittoria: Frappato and Nero d'Avola. These are used to produce the well-known Cerasuolo di Vittoria DOC, which consists of equal proportions of Nero d'Avola and Frappato. Arianna named the wine *Grotte Alte*.

Cerasuolo di Vittoria is a blend that has always been produced in Vittoria and was previously known as Rosso di Vittoria. The town of Vittoria was founded on April 24, 1607, by the eponymous Countess Vittoria Colonna Henriquez-Cabrera. She entrusted the first 75 settlers with a hectare

of land each, as long as they grew vines. So viniculture was in Vittoria's blood from the moment of its birth.

Before I leave Vittoria, I ask Arianna what her favorite dishes are. She has three: pasta with *bottarga di tonno*; pasta with garlic and wild fennel; and (top of the list) her mama's incredible *caponata*, which uses eggplants, almonds, some carrots, and celery. She can't give me the recipe, because even her mother hasn't been able to explain it in detail to her! But she can recommend a wine to go with it: SP68 Rosso. This involves a blend of 70 percent Frappato and 30 percent Nero d'Avola. But the name also evokes the Strada Provinciale 68, the main road that runs past Arianna's *azienda*!





Addresses

PROVINCE OF AGRIGENTO

Produce

Antichi Sapori
Amante Maria Antonia
Via Cesare Battisti 20
92100 Agrigento
(with product tastings)

Accommodations

Camere a Sud
Elvira Mangione
Via Ficani 6
92100 Agrigento
www.camereasud.it

Eating out

Siculò
Via Pirandello 21
92100 Agrigento

Ninin Osteria
Via Ficani 32
92100 Agrigento

Ristorante La Madia
Pino Cuttaia
Corso F. Re Capriata 22
92027 Licata
(2 Michelin stars)
www.ristorantelamadia.it

PROVINCE OF CALTANISSETTA

Ice cream

Maestri gelatieri
Il Bigné
Nicola Antonio Salerno
Via Calabria 66
93100 Caltanissetta

PROVINCE OF CATANIA

Produce

Giuseppe Camuglia
Azienda Casearia Camuglia S.r.l.
Via Federico II 105
95012 Castiglione di Sicilia
(cheese)
www.alcantaraformaggi.it

Nunzio Caruso
Azienda Acquavena
Contrada Acquavena
95034 Bronte

(Capra Argentata dell'Etna)
www.sicilianroots.com/eng/produitori/
azienda-acquavena

Nino Testa
Testa Conserve
Via Testa 23
95126 Catania
(canned fish)
www.testaconserve.it

Cantine Russo S.r.l.
Via Corvo (SP64) Solicchiata
95012 Castiglione di Sicilia
(wine)
www.cantinerusso.eu

Eating out

Me Cumpari Turiddu
Piazza Turi Ferro 36/38
95131 Catania
www.mecumparituriddu.it

Bar Pasticceria Savia
Via Etna
95100 Catania
www.savia.it

Bar Pasticceria Spinella
Via Etna 292
95131 Catania
www.pasticceriaspinella.it

Pasticceria Ricca
Via Risorgimento 35
95040 Ramacca
(you must try: cannoli with
artichoke cream)

Via Santa Filomena
95129 Catania
(street packed with youthful,
new eateries)

Chioschi di Catania

Chiosco Sicilia Seltz
Corso Sicilia

Chiosco Giammona
Piazza V. Emanuele III

Chiosco del Borgo
Piazza Cavour

Chiosco Stazione
Piazza Papa Giovanni XXIII

Information

Chiara La Spina
City Guide Catania
www.instagram.com/chiaralosp

PROVINCE OF ENNA

Produce

Dott. Angelo Cali Contrada Rossi
94013 Leonforte
(fava larga, black pulses)
www.leonforteagricola.it

Mitèra—Azienda agricola Prestifilippo
Alex Prestifilippo
Via Bellini 16
94013 Leonforte
(fava larga, black pulses)
www.mitera.it

SeminiAmo
Famiglia Amore
Viale Signore Ritrovato
94012 Barrafranca
(ancient grain varieties and
bronze-die pasta)
www.seminiamo.com

PROVINCE OF MESSINA

Produce

Salvatore Romano and Karin Meier
Tasting Sicily
Via Vittorio Veneto 10
98056 Graniti
www.vitasicula.com

Azienda Agricola Marchetta Malvasia
delle Lipari
Via Umberto I 9
98050 Malfa
(capers and wine from Salina)
www.vinidisalina.it

Cantine Colosi
Via Nazionale 80
98050 Malfa
(wine)
www.cantinecolosi.it

Accommodations

Hotel & Ristorante Signum
Via Scalo 15
98050 Malfa
www.hotelsignum.it
(The restaurant is run by
Italy's latest star chef,
Martina Caruso.)

Case Vacanza Cafarella
Via Scalo 10
98050 Malfa
www.casecafarella.it

Eating out

Da Alfredo Via Marina Garibaldi
98050 Lingua
(pane cunzato)

Trattoria A Quadara
Via Roma 88
98050 Malfa
www.aquadaratrattoria.it

Gastronomia Rundo
Via Risorgimento 150
98050 Santa Marina Salina
(cannoli with capers)

Bars

In Sé Natura
Via Nuova Indipendenza 7
98050 Malfa

Saretto Bambara
Bam Bar
Via di Giovanni 43
98039 Taormina

Bar Malvasia
Via Roma 33
98050 Malfa

PA. PE. RO'
Strada Provinciale 182
98050 Rinella

Information

Valeria La Spina
City Guide Taormina
www.instagram.com/valeria_laspina

PROVINCE OF PALERMO

Produce

G. Formaggi
Corso C. Finocchiaro Aprile 129
90138 Palermo

Bar

Ideal Caffè Stagnitta
Discesa dei Giudici 42
90133 Palermo
www.idealcaffè.it
(traditional coffee roasting house
and bar)

Street food

Giorgio Flaccavento
www.palermostreetfood.com

Vucciria
Piazza Caracciolo
90133 Palermo

Mercato di Ballarò
Via Ballarò, 1
90134 Palermo

Mayor

Leoluca Orlando
Palazzo delle Aquile
Piazza Pretoria 1
90133 Palermo
(mayor of Palermo,
the capital of Sicily)

PROVINCE OF RAGUSA

Produce

Frantoi Cutrera
Maria, Giusy, Salvatore Cutrera
Contrada Piano D'Acqua 71
97012 Chiaramonte Gulfi
(olive oil)
www.frantoicutrera.it

Azienda Agricola Arianna
Occhipinti
Arianna Occhipinti
SP68 Vittoria-Pedalino KM 3.3
97019 Vittoria
(wine)
www.agricolaoocchipinti.it

Accommodations

Neropece suites
Signora Rita
Via Capitano Bocchieri 52
97100 Ragusa

Eating out

Duomo
Ciccio Sultano
Via Capitano Bocchieri 31
97100 Ragusa
(2 Michelin stars)
www.cicciosultano.it

I Banchi

Peppe Cannistrà, Ciccio Sultano
Via Orfanotrofo 39
97100 Ragusa
www.ibanchiragusa.it

PROVINCE OF SYRACUSE

Produce

Concetto Scardaci
Via Littara 11
96017 Noto
(almonds)

Cantine Gulino
Via Daniele Impellizzeri 29
96100 Fanusa
(wine)
www.cantinegulino.it

Eating out

Ristorante Crocifisso
Via Principe Umberto 46
96017 Noto
www.ristorantecrocifisso.it

Caffè Sicilia

Corrado Assenza
Corso Vittorio Emanuele 125
96017 Noto

I Rizzari

Via Libertà 63
96011 Augusta

Osteria Sveva

Piazza Federico di Svevia 1
96100 Siracusa

PROVINCE OF TRAPANI

Produce

Molini del Ponte
Via G. Parini 29
91022 Castelvetro
(ancient grain varieties and olive oil)
www.molinidelponte.com

Eating out

Pasticceria Maria Grammatico
Via Vittorio Emanuele 14
91100 Erice
www.mariagrammatico.it

Maestri gelatieri

Gelateria Liparoti
Maurizio Liparoti
Viale delle Sirene 21
91100 Trapani

Euro Bar Dattilo

Via Giuseppe Garibaldi 11-13
91027 Dattilo
(the best cannoli in the world)

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