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Tastes of Italia

THE BEST IN ITALIAN COOKING

JUNE 2012

Discover Venice

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BACKYARD FEASTS

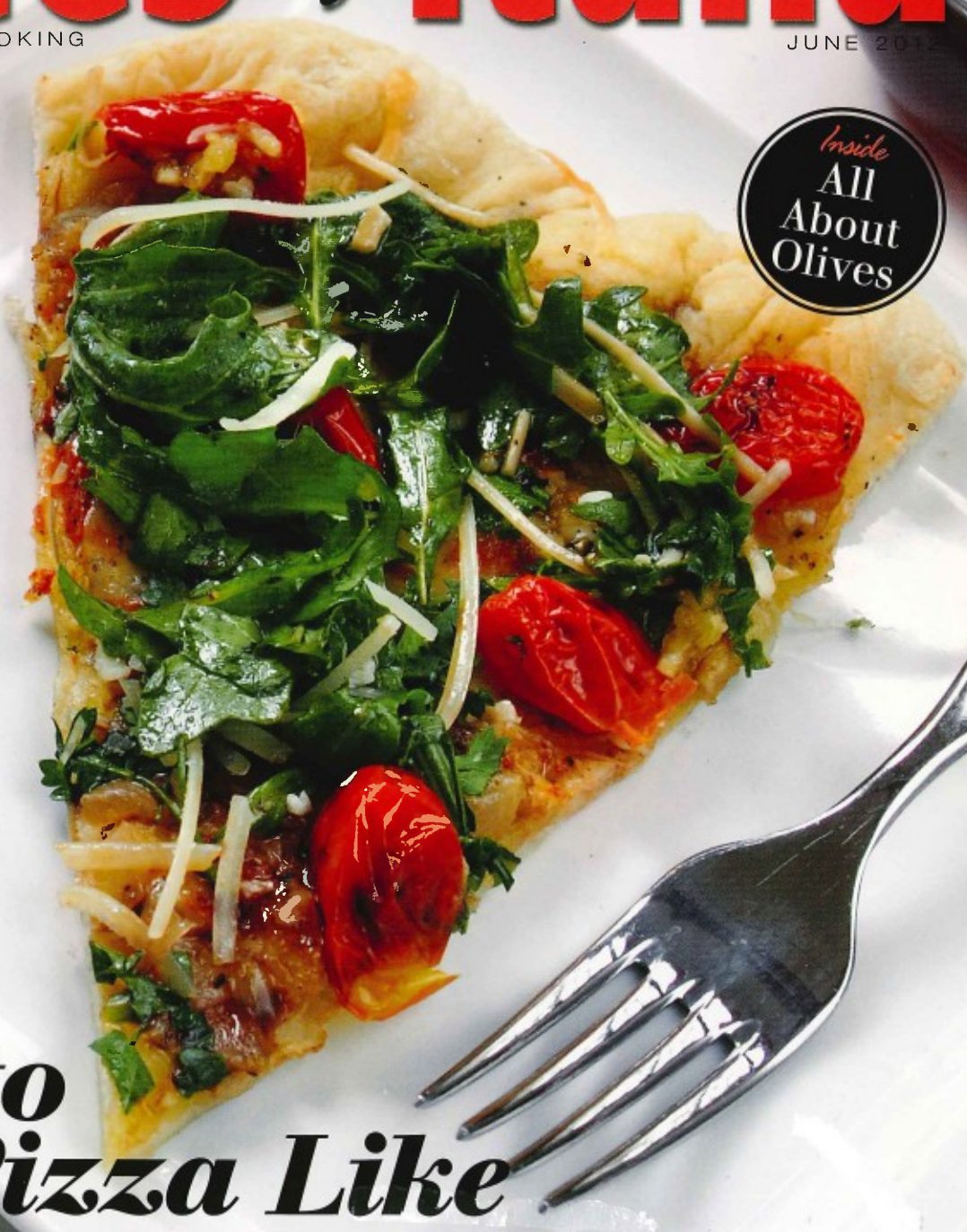
Pan Roasted Salmon, Grilled Flank Steak and Light and Healthy Dessert

PLUS

Learn to Make Pizza Like The Romans

All Roads Lead to Rome, and Many of the Roads in Rome Have Lines of People Waiting to Order Pizza. Discover the Best Places for Pizza and Learn to Make Yours the Roman Way

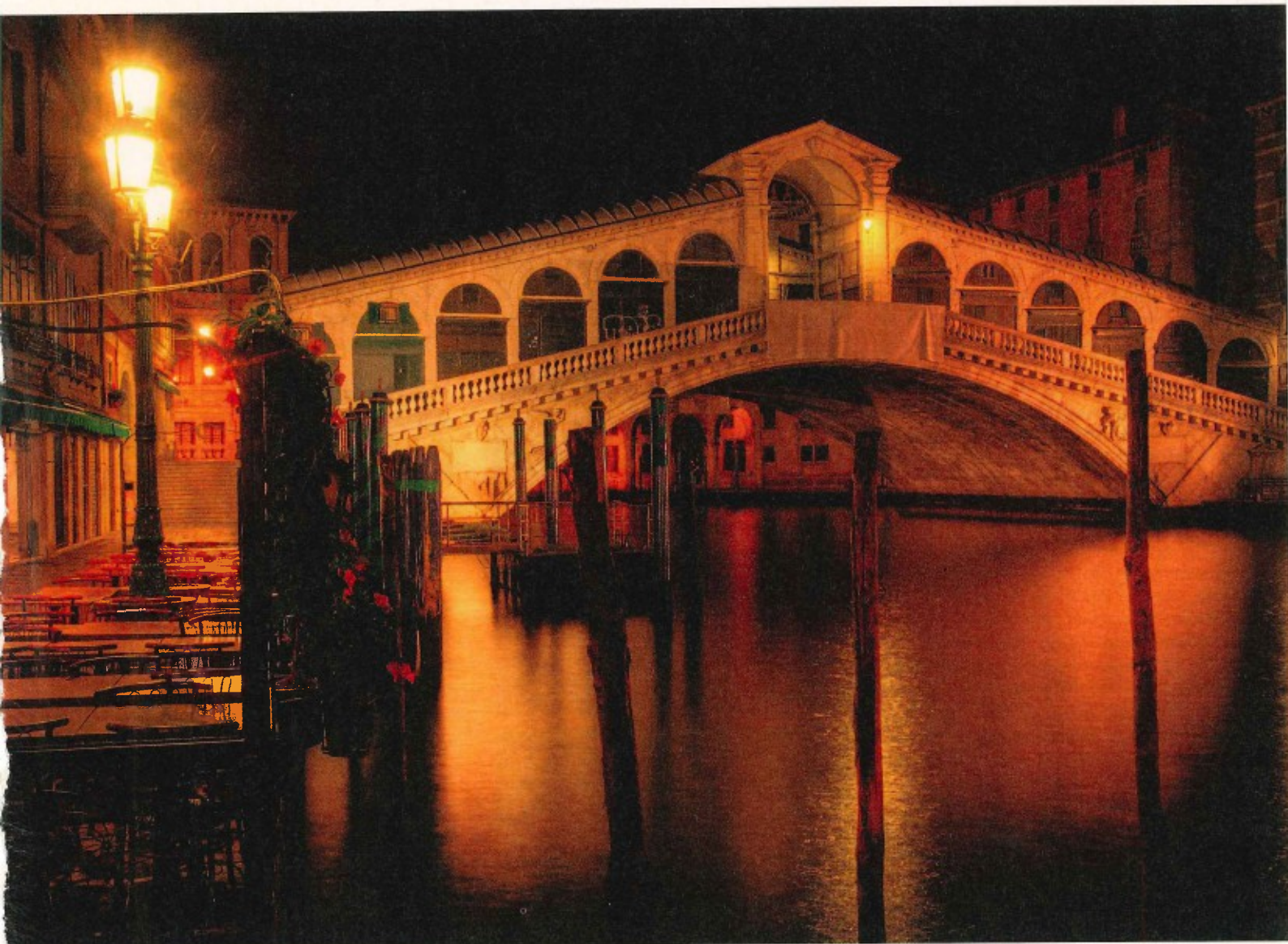
Inside All About Olives



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Tastes of Venice

Shop the markets of this famed city for seafood specialties, persimmons and purple cabbage.

BY SUSAN VAN ALLEN

I'll make you a spritz!," says Chef Patrizia, the moment I enter her apartment in Venice. I barely have my coat off when this darling signora hands me a sparkling glass of Campari, mixed with prosecco, garnished with an orange slice. Chef Patrizia, her assistant Silvia, and Lisa, another student, toast: "Cin cin!" It's a perfect beginning to Patrizia's party/cooking class.

Actually, the class began with Silvia, whom I met at the Rialto market earlier that morning. This bustling spot by the famous bridge has been a Venetian market since 1097. It's amazing to stroll

through the fish stalls, glistening with the bounty from the lagoon and beyond—from squirming live crabs, to shrimp, octopus, and sea bream. Surrounding the fish market are vibrant stands of fruits and vegetables, overflowing with goodies such as bright purple Treviso cabbage and ripe orange Kaki—a variety of persimmon that's a popular dessert fruit around here. With our bags full, Silvia, Lisa, and I walked from the Rialto—through narrow streets, along canals, over little bridges, past the curvy Santa Maria Formosa church, then up a zig-zag of stairs to reach Chef Patrizia's apartment.

Patrizia is in her 60s, but has the energy of an eight-year-old girl,

fitting around the polished wood floors of her airy apartment that's decorated with folksy touches: marionettes, embroidered pillows, and a wood burning stove. Right off the kitchen is a terrace where students dine in warmer months, enjoying a lovely view with the steeple of San Marco in the background.

The spritz is a welcome refreshment. I've been drinking these daily during my stay in Venice. They are "what to order" at the many bacari (wine bars) I find all over town and are perfect to accompany cicchetti—typical Venetian snacks that are served at these places—baccala mantecato (creamed baccala), fried olives, delicate sandwiches filled with cured meats or vegetables, and eggs stuffed with anchovies.

Of all the cicchetti offerings, I've become obsessed with a truly Venetian specialty: Sarde in Saor. It's a traditional dish of fried sardines marinated in onions, vinegar, and sugar, resulting in an intense, savory flavor.

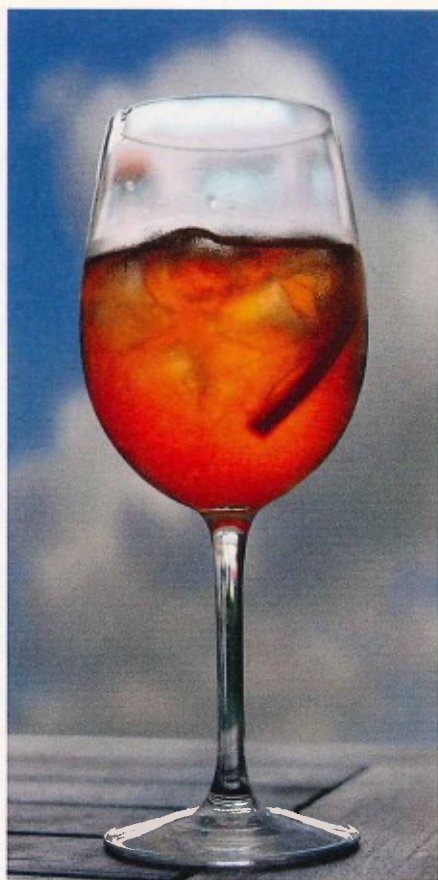
"It's not something most tourists like or even know about," Giovanni, who sits at the desk of my hotel, the luxurious Ca Pisani in Dorsoduro, tells me. The recipe is in the *cucina povera* (poor or peasant home cooking) category, coming from bygone days when fishermen would be out at sea for weeks at a time. Since there was no refrigeration, fishermen's wives invented this way of preserving fish so it would last for their husband's time away from home.

In the Renaissance, pine nuts and raisins were added to the recipe to aid digestion and sweeten the breath. These days the dish has been refined, and I've even tasted it made with shrimp at the wonderful Antiche Carampane restaurant in Venice.

I've always thought of fish as something that needs to be prepared and eaten right away, but when it comes to Sarde in Saor, it's best to leave it marinating for at least three days so flavors meld and intensify. Chef Patrizia has kindly made a dish for me days earlier than this class so I can taste her rendition, but still stands by instructing me how to put sarde in saor together. We laugh as my eyes tear when I slice the onions, then the kitchen fills with the homey aroma of them slowly cooking in oil. Next we clean up the sardines—taking off the heads and slipping my thumb in the cavity to clear out the entrails.

"Use this," Patrizia says, squeezing toothpaste on my hands to wash them after the sardine work, to take away the fishy smell.

Soon we're all seated at Patrizia's pretty



Spritz

- 1/3 cup Prosecco
- 1/3 cup Campari or Aperol
- 1/3 cup sparkling water
- 1 orange slice

Pour liquids into a glass half filled with ice. Stir, garnish with an orange slice and serve.

Makes 1 serving.

table, clinking our glasses and tasting my freshly made sarde in saor and Patrizia's pre-prepared version, which is so much richer and more satisfying. I think about the fishermen I've seen in the bacari, lining up at the counters, drinking spritz and ordering sarde in saor, centuries after it was invented. Necessity became the mother of a delicious tradition here.

It's easy to bring Venetian flavors to your springtime tables with these simple cicchetti recipes that you can enjoy with a spritz. Buon Appetito! More information about cooking classes in Venice: www.theinternationalkitchen.com.

Sarde in Saor

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 1/2 pounds yellow onions, thinly sliced
- 1 1/2 pounds sardines
- 1/2 cup all-purpose flour
- Vegetable oil for deep frying
- Sea salt, to taste
- 1 cup vinegar
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1/4 cup pine nuts
- 1/4 cup raisins
- 2 bay leaves

Put olive oil in a heavy skillet and cook sliced onions on medium low heat for about 30 minutes, until softened, not browned.

Clean the sardines by snapping off the heads and using your thumb to remove the entrails from the cavity. Alternatively, you can ask your fish seller to clean the sardines.

Dredge the sardines in the flour to lightly coat. Fill another skillet with about an inch of vegetable oil and turn the heat to high, heating the oil until it reaches 350°F or a cube of bread can be browned in the oil in 30 seconds.

Deep fry the sardines in small batches, turning, until the sardines are golden brown. Drain on paper towels and sprinkle each with sea salt, to taste.

When the onions have softened, add the vinegar and stir, then add the sugar and stir. Raise the heat to medium and cook until the vinegar has evaporated. Turn off the heat.

Assemble the Sarde in Saor in an earthenware or casserole dish, approximately 8 inches by 8 inches in size. First, cover the bottom of the dish with a layer of onions, then arrange a layer of sardines over the onions. Continue layering until the dish is topped with onions, including the liquid that remains in the onion skillet. Sprinkle the raisins and pine nuts evenly over the dish. Top with the bay leaves. Cover tightly and let marinate in the refrigerator for at least 3 days. Serve at room temperature.

Makes 6 servings.