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FEBRUARY 2012

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RIGATONI WITH PORK  
TOMATO SAUCE  
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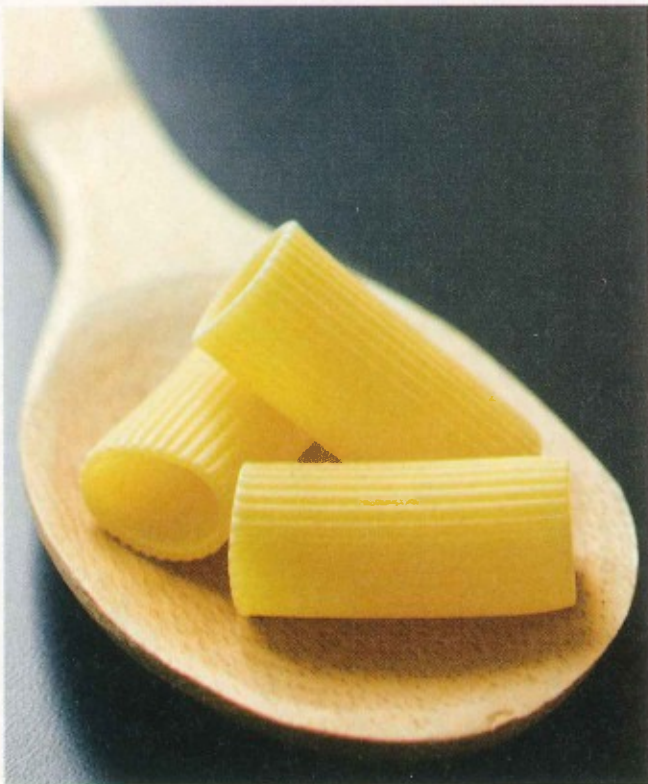
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## THE ROMAN KITCHEN

# Love Story

This Roman native feels the passion of his Italian heritage in the kitchen

By Susan Van Allen

**I** remember my grandmother standing me on a chair next to the stove when I was four years old so I could stir the tomato sauce. That's when the passion for cooking hit me," Chef Stefano Cirillo, a Roman native, says.

Taking a class with Stefano, in the kitchen of his villa on the Appian Way, is a chance to get swept up by that passion. It's a love of cooking that's expanded greatly over the years. Since he first stirred that sauce, Stefano's gone on to become not only an expert chef, but also an extraordinary gastronomic researcher.

His book, *Belle, Tipiche, e Famose*, (Beautiful, Traditional, and Famous), is a brilliant dictionary of 240 pasta shapes, including his photographs of each. In the introduction, Stefano chronicles the history of pasta in lively detail, sharing what he's learned from sources ranging from centuries-old texts to country housewives. For example, in the nineteenth century, when maccherone began to be mass produced during the Industrial Revolution, its surface became too smooth for sauces to cling to it. Italians came up with the idea to "rule" (rigare in Italian) the outside of the pasta, so it could catch the sauce, and rigatoni, a staple of every Roman kitchen, was born.

As dedicated as Stefano is to learning all about the history of Italian food, he's equally focused on experimenting to discover cooking methods that intensify Rome's classic flavors and drastically cut down on the fat. This combo is what made his class such a delicious eye opener.

It started out the traditional way, at Rome's Arco di Travertino market, a scene that bursts with vibrant colors, enticing smells, and native hustle-bustle. As a teacher, Stefano exudes an Old World gentlemanly charm, along with a sharp enthusiasm to show me the differences between such things as Sicilian and Roman zucchini. We bought a round, thick-crust bread, made in the Castelli-Romani, a hilly area right outside of Rome. "It's baked in chestnut wood," Stefano tells me, which explains the bread's provocative, woody flavor.

The home villa setting for the class is grand and cozy: Stefano's kitchen opens up to a library/dining room—bookshelves bursting with volumes about food, the table elegantly set. French doors open to a patio with pots of herbs, including laurel, which we pick to make a Roman favorite, Rigatoni all'Amatriciana.

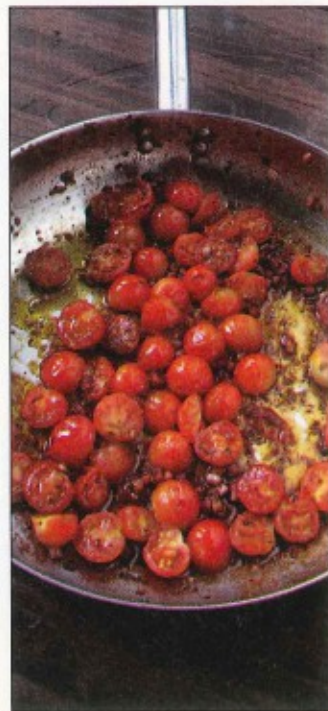
All'Amatriciana's origins go back to a sauce called Gricia, created by shepherds living in the hills surrounding Rome. They'd build a fire and mix sheep's cheese (pecorino), onion, and guanciale (cured pig's cheek) with their pasta. Tomato was added to the recipe in the early eighteenth century, by the people of Amatrice, which was then part of the nearby Abruzzo region. When borders changed in the early twentieth century, Amatrice became part of Lazio, and today Romans claim all'Amatriciana to be one of their most beloved specialties.

Stefano's way of preparing all'Amatriciana is where his non-traditional side shines. He

puts no oil in the pan to cook the onion, the tomato, or the guanciale. Instead of sautéing the ingredients, he treats his non-stick pan more like an outdoor grill, roasting one ingredient at a time over high heat and then mixing everything together at the end of the process. Each ingredient exudes liquid as it's cooked, and the aromas that fill the kitchen are sublime. The sauce comes together quickly and when we sit down together, clink our glasses of wine, and dig in, I find the flavors distinctly rich—from the base note of the smoky guanciale to the burst of fresh tomato, tang of pecorino, up to the spice of hot pepper.

Tasting is believing. So when Stefano tells me that next we'll make Zabaglione without milk or cream, I'm not shocked. It turns out to be also *delizioso*. With Stefano's recipes, I don't skip dessert. I can still look good in my jeans and bathing suit, and enjoy those rich, delicious Roman flavors.

To take a class with Stefano in Rome, visit The International Kitchen online at their website: [www.internationalkitchen.com](http://www.internationalkitchen.com)





## Chef Cirillo's Rigatoni all'Amatriciana

Guançiale is unsmoked Italian bacon prepared with pig's jowls or cheek. You may use pancetta if it's easier to find.

- 30** cherry tomatoes
- 3** tablespoons tomato vinegar (available in specialty food stores)
- Pinch of salt
- 6** ounces Guançiale or pancetta
- 1** medium red onion, coarsely chopped
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup water
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup tomato paste
- 4** fresh red hot chili peppers, divided
- 7** fresh bay leaves
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup dry white table wine
- 4** tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
- 3** tablespoons grated Pecorino Romano cheese, plus extra for the table
- 1** pound rigatoni

Cut tomatoes in half. Marinate tomatoes for at least 15 minutes in a bowl with the tomato vinegar and a pinch of salt. Mix them from time to time. Cut guanciale into thin

( $\frac{1}{4}$  inch) slices and set aside.

Heat a large non-stick skillet to maximum and add the onion, roasting it for two minutes. Add the liquid of the tomato vinegar marinade.

Lower the heat and cook until the liquid evaporates. Put the cooked onion aside in a bowl.

In the same skillet, at maximum heat, roast the tomatoes for 2 to 3 minutes. Add water and tomato paste with two red hot chili peppers. Do not break the peppers in the skillet. After 3 to 4 minutes, put everything aside in another bowl.

Wipe the skillet with a paper towel. At maximum heat, roast the guanciale and bay leaves. Press the bay leaves against the bottom of the pan with a spatula—they will release some liquid. Discard the excess grease released from the guanciale.

Add the wine, and cook until it has evaporated. Add the onions and tomatoes. Lower the heat to medium-low and cook for 3 to 4 minutes.

Turn off the heat and add oil, salt, pepper, and 3 tablespoons grated Romano cheese. Discard bay leaves and red pepper.

Cook the rigatoni until al dente, in salted boiling water with two red hot chili peppers. Drain the pasta, discard the red peppers, and add the pasta to the skillet. Turn the heat to medium and mix the pasta with the sauce for one minute.

Serve immediately, adding a few drops of olive oil to each bowl, a sprinkle of black pepper, and grated Romano cheese to taste. Decorate bowls with fresh bay leaves, if desired.

Makes 4 servings.



## Orange Zabaglione Cream

Here is a delicious orange-flavored version of this traditional dessert, which can be served with figs or other fruit.

- Zest of 3 large oranges, cut into short, thin strips**
- Juice of 2 large oranges**
- Pinch of salt
- 4** tablespoons sugar
- 4** egg yolks
- 3** tablespoons orange liqueur (such as Cointreau, though Stefano uses Acqua Santa Maria from Abruzzo)

With a peeler, zest the oranges into julienne strips, making sure to get no white pith.

In a non-stick skillet at medium high heat, roast the orange zest, making sure not to burn them. Turn off the heat, add the liqueur and stir until the liqueur evaporates, turning up the heat if necessary.

In a bowl, blend the orange zest with the orange juice and a pinch of salt.

In a round-bottomed metal bowl, beat the egg yolks with sugar until the mixture becomes almost white.

Add the orange zest and juice to the egg yolk mixture and blend together.

Place the bowl over a saucepan of simmering water or transfer the mixture to the top of a double boiler. Whisk until the mixture thickens. Remove the bowl from the heat and allow it to cool.

Transfer the mixture into 4 individual serving bowls and refrigerate for 30 minutes.

Makes 4 servings.