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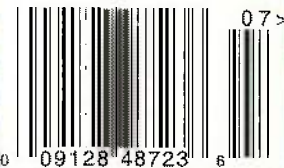
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# Taste of Liguria

# The Rose Of San Francisco

Ligurian cuisine in San Francisco's Little Italy

By Susan Van Allen

**A** basket of warm focaccia. A dish of glistening marinated olives. A steaming bowl of fragrant fish stew. A Ligurian feast. No, this isn't the Italian Riviera, but rather San Francisco's North Beach neighborhood at Rose Pistola restaurant. Chef Reed Hearon opened Rose Pistola in 1996, as a homage to the Ligurian immigrants who laid the groundwork for North Beach to become a destination for anyone looking for a great Italian meal. The Ligurians came in the 19th century with hopes of striking it rich in the Gold Rush, leaving behind the poverty of the northern port city of Genoa and its surrounding villages. They brought with them an elegant culinary tradition that is showcased in the award-winning Rose Pistola menu and the *Rose Pistola Cookbook*, which Hearon wrote in collaboration with Peggy Knickerbocker.

Fresh fish enhanced by vegetables and herbs, rich Genovese pesto sauce and flavorful focaccia flatbreads are some of the most well known trademarks of Ligurian cuisine. As Hearon explains in his cookbook, these Old World recipes were developed despite the challenges of cultivating the rugged Italian coastline. The Ligurians always had a reputation for being frugal. They artfully transformed the harvest from their small terraced gardens and the meager catch from the Bay of Genoa into complex and vibrant meals. When the immigrants arrived in San Francisco and found the land more fertile and the California bay catch more plentiful than their homeland, they adapted their recipes accordingly. The most famous of these adaptations resulted in cioppino, a San Francisco classic which was created when Dungeness crab and other shellfish were added to the simple whole fish Genovese stew *ciuppin*.

Cioppino is always on the Rose Pistola menu, along with a range of vegetarian and fish appe-

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF ROSE PISTOLA RESTAURANT



◆◆◆ LIGURIAN SPECIAL: Rose Pistola's Cioppino

tizers, pizzas and flatbreads cooked in the wood-burning oven, fresh pastas, grilled meats, and fantastic fruit desserts. True to the Ligurian practice of using only what is fresh and locally produced, the menu changes seasonally, using high quality ingredients supplied by nearby independent farmers and fisherman. In the 140 easy-to-follow cookbook recipes, Hearon gives suggestions for seasonal substitutions, so even the home chef can make meals in the Ligurian tradition.

The Rose Pistola restaurant and cookbook celebrate not only the cuisine of the Italian Riviera, but also the North Beach neighborhood Italian immigrants helped create. The restaurant is named after one of its most beloved characters — a legendary fun-loving saloon owner and cook. A black-and-white photo of Rose from the 1950's, sitting at her bar, flashing a smile and a garter, graces the entrance of the restaurant. Another photo in the back of the dining room pictures Rose with that same smile, celebrating her 90<sup>th</sup> birthday there.

These images, combined with the homey warm aroma from the wood-burning hearth in the open kitchen, the soulful sounds of the jazz trio who serenade sophisticated diners in the softly lit room, and the elegant presentations of Ligurian dishes, create a seamless blend: age old Italian tradition meets 21<sup>st</sup> century California style. It creates a vibrantly earthy, evocative, and delicious experience.

## Roast Fish with POTATOES AND OLIVES

1 pound of fish  
Salt and pepper to taste  
1/4 cup olive oil  
12 black olives  
1/2 cup cooked, sliced potatoes  
Pinch of garlic  
1 bay leaf  
1/4 cup white wine

1/4 cup water  
1 ounce extra virgin olive oil

Season fish with salt and pepper. In a bowl, combine the oil, olives, potatoes, garlic, bay leaf, wine and water. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

Put fish in an oval baking dish. Pour the potato mixture over the top, tucking some of the potatoes under the fish.

Bake in a 500°F oven (or in a pizza oven) until brown. Fish should be cooked through, about 10 minutes. Serve out of the baking dish.

Makes 2 servings.

## Rose Pistola CIOPPINO

1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling  
1 white onion, finely chopped  
1/2 cup thinly sliced leeks (white part only)  
2 garlic cloves, crushed  
4 sprigs marjoram  
6 anchovy fillets or 2 tablespoons anchovy paste  
1 Dungeness crab, cut into serving pieces, keeping the juice and fat (you may also use lobster or Alaskan King Crab)  
1/3 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley  
1 teaspoon harissa or 1/4 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes  
1/2 pound lingcod or other white fish fillets, cut in small pieces  
1 cup dry Italian white wine  
1 cup water  
1 3/4 cups tomato purée  
1/2 pound mussels, scrubbed and debearded  
1/2 pound prawns or large shrimp, peeled and deveined  
1/2 pound calamari, cleaned and cut into rings

Kosher or sea salt to taste

Warm the olive oil in a large heavy non-reactive pot over medium-high heat. Add the onion, leeks and garlic and sauté until the garlic is golden. Add the marjoram, anchovies, parsley and harissa and stir to mix. If using anchovy fillets, smash them with a fork. Add the crab and fish and cook until the fish begins to fall apart, 7 to 10 minutes. Add the white wine and reduce by one-third.

Mix the reserved crab fat and juice, water and tomato purée in a small bowl. Add to the pot, raise the heat to high and bring to a boil. Add the mussels and shrimp and continue to boil until the mussel shells begin to open and the shrimp turns pink, about 3 minutes. Add the calamari and cook until stiffened, about 1 minute. Season to taste with salt. Stir well.

Ladle into a warm soup tureen and drizzle olive oil over the top. Serve at once with grilled bread.

Makes 4 servings.

## Marinated OLIVES

1 pound assorted green and black olives, such as Nicoise, Gaeta, San Remo, Bella di Cerignola or Picholine  
1/4 pound sun-dried tomatoes, thinly sliced  
1/4 cup extra virgin olive oil  
Grated zest of 1 lemon  
1 garlic clove, bruised  
1/4 cup torn basil leaves

Drain the olives and toss in a bowl with the sun-dried tomatoes, olive oil, lemon zest, garlic and basil. Cover and marinate overnight or up to two weeks in the refrigerator. Serve at room temperature.

Makes 8 to 12 servings.



