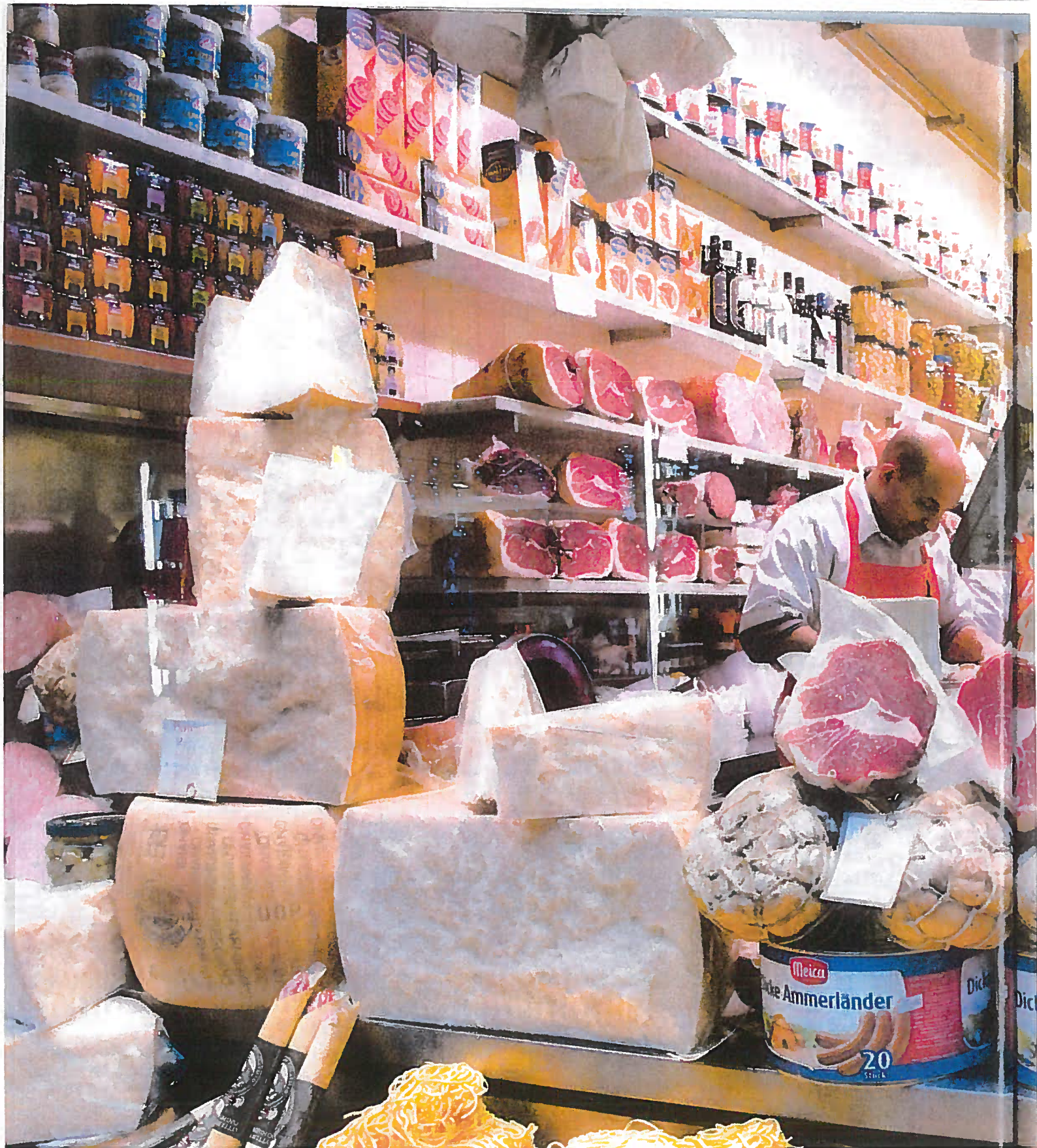


Tastes of Italia

THE BEST IN ITALIAN COOKING

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Tastes of Bologna:

The Real Thing

by Susan Van Allen

I am immersed in a barrage of enticing smells: nose-tingling parmigiano, salt-cured salami, and the comforting scent of ragu—the beloved sauce that makes Bologna a top destination for foodies. Here in the city's historic center, I've entered Tamburini, a temple of deliciousness that's been around and family run since 1932. I was lured in by window displays of humongous hanging prosciutto, rounds of mortadella (the Grandpapa of America's baloney), and a cafeteria counter where I spotted local school kids and businessmen lining up.

I grab a plastic tray and follow along to order what everybody else is having: "Tortellini, per favore"—a heaping plate of cap-shaped, meat-filled pasta, delicately sauced. With a tumbler of vino rosso, I score a seat at a wooden table and lean in for a warm, fragrant inhale. Certainly I won't finish all this pasta, I'm thinking. After one bite that notion disappears. For the natives surrounding me, it's just an ordinary lunch day. For me, it's a revelation. Particularly the sauce.

I had always taken pride in my Pasta Bolognese made from a decades-old Marcella Hazan recipe that has impressed many guests. But now I'm humbled by what the locals simply call ragu. This is the real thing: simple, richly flavored, and all about the meat.

"It's not a red sauce; real Bolognese is brown!" says Lucia, my cooking teacher at the Culinary Institute of Bologna where I signed up for a Pasta Making morning to discover the secrets of Bolognese. As I hover around the stove with an American couple, I watch Lucia stir in just two tablespoons

of tomato into the big pot, equivalent to a whisper of vermouth in a fine martini. This is how ragu has been made in her family for generations. The Italian-American version we call Bolognese has evolved into a "heavier on the tomato" sauce.

The ragu simmers as we launch into the delightful process of rolling pasta dough with a giant wooden mattarello. Lucia expertly oversees our work, directing us to roll with our hands in the middle, applying just the right pressure and turns, till the dough becomes thin enough to slice into light strands of tagliatelle.

It's a bit of a workout, but such fun that the time slips by, and when we're done, we feel we've earned lunch. The pasta cooks in a few minutes, we stir in the fragrant ragu that's been cooking on the stove for hours, fill our bowls, and sigh as we take our first tastes of the wonderful real thing.

For more information, visit www.cookingclassesinbologna.com.

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Veal Scallopini in Balsamic Sauce

- 1 small onion
- 4 tablespoons butter, divided
- 4 thin slices veal
- 4 tablespoons flour
- 4 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Mince the onion until it is almost a paste. In a pan that can contain all the veal slices, melt half the butter, add the onion, and sauté over low heat. Put flour on a plate and dredge the veal slices through it until they are coated on both sides. Add the veal to the pan with the butter and onion, and cook, turning, for no more than 5 minutes. Add the balsamic vinegar to the pan and cook until the liquid has evaporated, about 5 minutes. Transfer the scallopini to a platter. Whisk the remaining butter into the pan, to make a sauce. Strain the sauce through a sieve as you pour it over the platter of scallopini. Serve immediately.

Makes 4 servings.

Ragù

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2½ tablespoons butter

- 2 tablespoons minced onion
- 1 tablespoon minced carrot
- 1 tablespoon minced celery
- ⅓ cup minced pancetta or non-smoked pork belly
- ¾ pound ground beef (sirloin is best, but cheaper cuts, such as from the shoulder, are okay)
- ½ cup dry white wine (optional)
- 2 heaping tablespoons tomato paste
- 2 cups meat stock, divided
- 1 chicken or rabbit liver, minced (optional)

Put the olive oil and butter into a large saucepan over medium-low heat. When the butter has melted, add the onion, carrot, and celery. After 1 minute add the pancetta or pork belly. The vegetables and fat should caramelize, not burn; it should take about 10 minutes. Then add the ground beef, stirring and cooking for about 10 minutes.

When the liquid from the meat has evaporated, stir in the wine (if using) until it has evaporated. Stir the tomato paste into 1 cup of meat stock. Add the mixture to the pot and stir (the color will be brown, not red). Partially cover the pot and simmer the sauce. When the sauce dries, add the remaining cup of stock and continue to simmer for at least an hour.

If using the liver, add it toward the end of the cooking time, for 30 minutes.

This ragu is traditionally served with handmade tagliatelle, but any good quality pasta is okay. This recipe makes enough ragu for one pound of pasta.

Makes 4 servings.

Friggione

- 4 medium tomatoes
- 2 cups white onion, peeled and thinly sliced (about 2 medium onions)
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- Salt and pepper, to taste

Place the fresh tomatoes in boiling water for about 5 minutes. Remove them from the pot with a strainer and allow them to cool, then peel and discard the skins. Cut the tomatoes into quarters.

Pour the olive oil into a large saucepan, add the onion and tomatoes. Cover and cook over medium-low heat for about 45 minutes. When the juice from the tomatoes and onions has evaporated, add the salt and pepper and serve.

Variation: You can add two cups of quartered potatoes, sliced red and green peppers, and/or sausage to the tomato-onion mixture, either in combination or just one or two of the extra ingredients.

Makes 4 servings.

