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APRIL 2016

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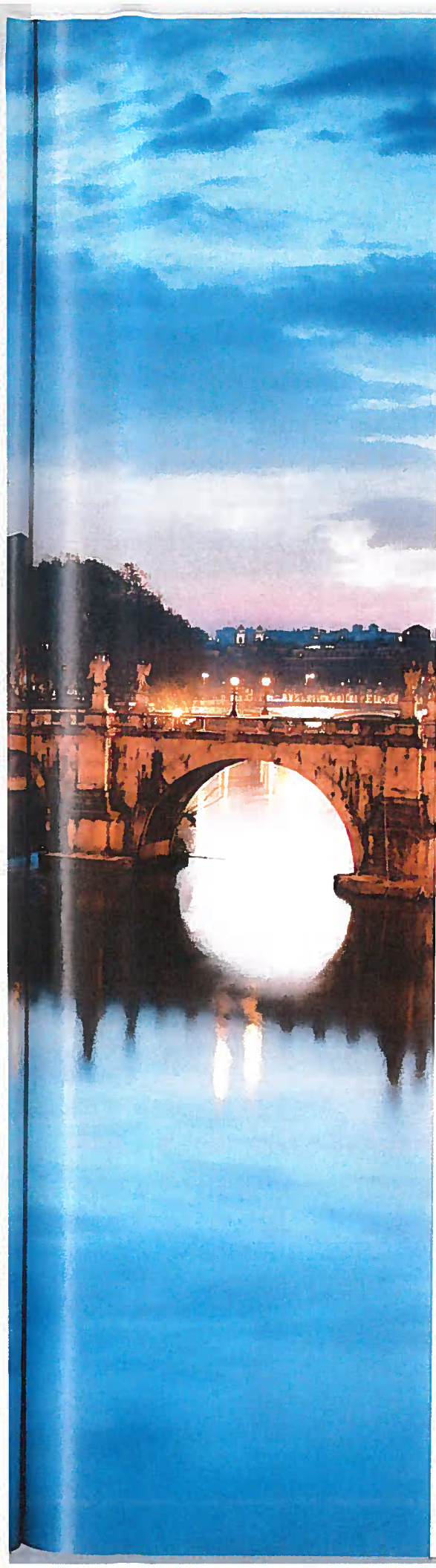
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ROMAN TWILIGHT TREATS

Immerse yourself in the culinary passions of this ancient city.

Story by Susan Van Allen

It's sunset in Rome. My plane just landed a few hours ago and I'm psyched for a welcoming adventure: Eating Italy's Twilight in Trastevere Food Walk. The Trastevere neighborhood is my favorite in Rome—across the Tiber River, where cobblestoned streets bordered by ivy-covered stone buildings have enchanted me ever since my first visit, decades ago. I've had many memorable eating and drinking times here with friends, but I know, in this city of infinite layers, there are always new things to be discovered. Kenny Dunn, a native of Philadelphia, created Eating Italy in 2011. He'd moved to Rome four years prior, when his wife got a job here, and tells me, "Soon our apartment became full of visitors. It was great to show them the sights of the city, but what was really special was bringing them to our local coffee bar, favorite pizzeria, and the daily market. These are the places where you get to meet the locals, and experience Roman traditions at shops and market stalls that have been run by families for generations." Eating Italy has expanded to a highly-praised Roman experience, with 20 guides who run a dozen tours a day—from food walks, to wine tastings, and cooking classes. "Our guides come from a variety of backgrounds," Kenny tells me. "Some are sommeliers, we have a Nonna who teaches our cooking class, and a mix of locals and ex-pats who are married to Italians." What binds them all is a passionate connection to Rome's culinary culture. My walk begins on La Isola Tiberina—a gateway to Trastevere, where remains of bridges from ancient times still stand. Eric Senn, our Roman native guide (whose father is Swiss), exudes a welcoming, relaxed vibe with his dazzling hazel eyes, that sets the tone for the evening. There are 12 of us, most first time visitors to Rome, (from Australia, America, and Britain), who follow him over the Ponte Cestio to begin sampling tastes at 7 different restaurants and shops. Fresh from the plane ride, I'm still wobbly, so it's a joy to be led and fed at some places I've adored for years and others I'm discovering for the first time. A treasure is the dimly lit wine cellar of Ristorante Spirito Di Vino, where brick walls and arches from Roman times remain, when this was a street level home. Thousands

of wine bottles on wooden racks surround us, and we settle in with glasses of a rich red, accompanied by small portions of tasty beef stew and pureed cauliflower mixed with parmesan cheese. We stop at a Trastevere favorite, Antica Norcineria, where the beaming, broad-faced owner proudly slices samples of porchetta for us to savor, then we move on to get freshly fried, steaming hot suppli (Roman rice balls) from a hole-in-the-wall place that's teeming with locals. The evening takes an elegant turn at Enoteca Ferrara, where platters of steaming pasta are graciously delivered to our table, including my favorite Eternal City specialty: cacio e pepe—spaghetti mixed with pecorino cheese and black pepper.

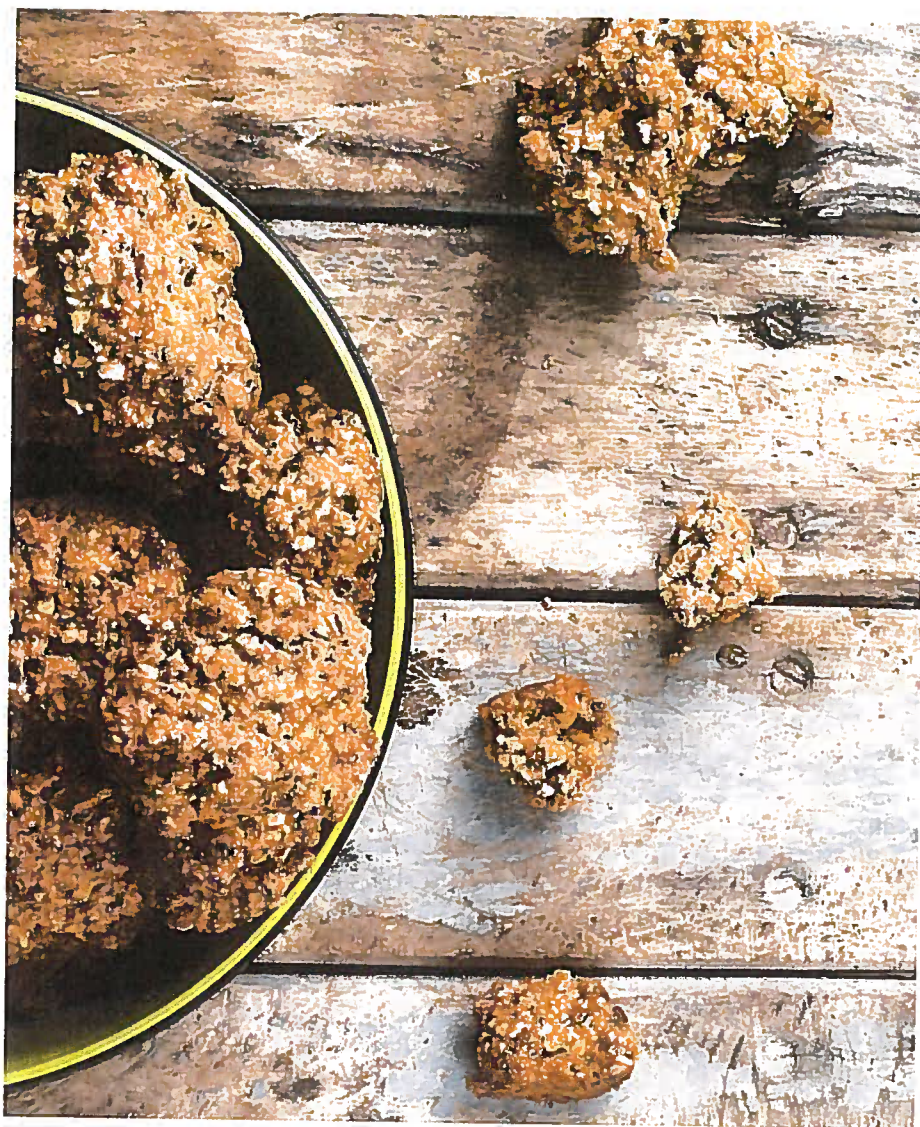
The sweetest surprise comes at Biscottificio Artigiano Innocenti, a shoe-box sized bakery I must have passed by many times but never entered. It's been run by the same family for three generations, and the moment I set eyes on owner-matriarch Stefania, surrounded by counters overflowing with trays of freshly baked cookies, I'm charmed. "If you ate our cookies 50 years ago, they would taste the same now as they did then," she says, passing out a tray of delicious samples—delicately flavored almond disks, jam filled butter cookies, and crunchy brutti ma buoni.

I've slipped into Roman time. When we get to our last stop, Fatamorgana, a top artisan gelateria, I realize four hours have gone by, as the way time flows in this city of slow, easy pleasures. Indulging in a pistachio cone topped with crema, I say my arrivederci to the group that's become like a cozy family over the course of the evening.

I wander slowly back to my hotel, with a bag of Stefania's cookies tucked into my purse, stopping at the Santa Maria in Trastevere piazza, the heart of the neighborhood. A concertina player serenades the locals and tourists around the fountain with "Besame Mucho," and crowds spill out of cafes and bars. Above it all is the church frieze: a glittering Byzantine mosaic of Mary surrounded by 10 lamp-holding virgins. I'm completely filled up, body and soul, grateful for Rome and all its delicious flavors.

An Eating Italy cookbook is in the works, but in the meantime, they've shared these recipes with us, so we can enjoy authentic, traditional tastes from the Eternal City. For more, see www.eatingitalyfoodtours.com

Susan Van Allen is the author of *100 Places in Italy Every Woman Should Go*, *Letters from Italy: Confessions, Adventures, and Advice*, *50 Places in Rome, Florence, and Venice Every Woman Should Go*, and the *Golden Days in Italy* blog. She travels frequently to Italy, the native land of her grandparents, and lives in Los Angeles. susanvanallen.com.



Brutti ma Buoni

Roughly translating as "ugly but good," Brutti ma Buoni cookies are similar to a meringue cookie except that coarsely chopped nuts are folded in before baking. These cookies have a wonderfully crisp exterior with an interior that is soft and chewy.

- 1 cup almonds
- 1 cup hazelnuts
- 6 egg whites
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon unsweetened cocoa powder
- 1 tablespoon all purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Preheat oven to 350°F.
Lightly toast the almonds until they just begin to take on color.
Toast the hazelnuts until their skins begin to

split and they begin to color.

Remove the nuts from the oven and place in a kitchen towel. Rub the nuts until their skins fall off. Coarsely chop almonds and hazelnuts together.

Reduce the oven temperature to 325°F and lightly grease two baking sheets.

Let the egg whites stand until at room temperature, and then beat them until light and foamy. Add the sugar, cocoa, flour, and vanilla, gradually as you continue to beat, and beat until soft peaks are formed. Gently fold in the nuts.

Spoon the cookies onto greased baking sheets by the teaspoonful, about 1 to 1½ inches apart.

Bake about 25 to 30 minutes, or until dry and firm to the touch. Remove and place on a wire rack to cool.

Makes 24 cookies.