

NATIVE SOIL: THE MAGIC OF MODENA

Tastes of Italia

THE BEST IN ITALIAN COOKING

APRIL 2015



Pasta to the Rescue

5 EASY RECIPES FOR WEEKNIGHT DINNERS

APRIL 2015

PLUS SPRING LAMB
IS READY FOR
YOUR TABLE

WHAT'S
BREWING
IN ROME

SECRETS
A CHEF
SORRENTO



U.S. and CANADA \$5.95

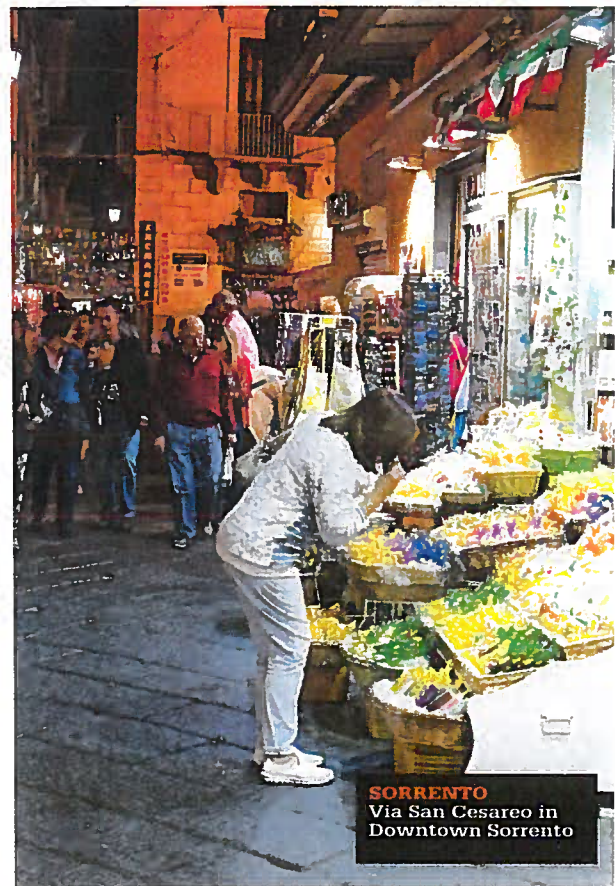
Secrets of the Trade

An Italian chef offers a glimpse of her culinary magic at a cooking class along the idyllic Sorrento Peninsula.

BY SUSAN VAN ALLEN



SORRENTO
Amalfi Harbor



SORRENTO
Via San Cesareo in
Downtown Sorrento

Volare”, that exuberant Italian tune, blasts into the cooking school kitchen. My classmates and I stop our gnocchi rolling, raise our hands, and sway along with the music. It’s one of many joyful moments of Cooking with Chef Carmen at Oasi Olimpia—a marvelous 19th century villa turned luxury hotel in Sant’ Agata sue dui Golfi, on the Sorrento Peninsula.

I’ve come here with a group of women to begin a golden week in Southern Italy, and this is a perfect start. As Chef Carmen Mazzola says, “We are doing what Italians do every Sunday, making a big meal and relaxing with friends.” The setting is idyllic: bordered by rolling green hills, olive trees, and views out to two coasts: on one side the Bay of Naples, on the other the Gulf of Salerno. The majestic Oasi Olimpia was built in 1892 and transformed into a boutique hotel in 2001. Travelers come here to immerse themselves in the beautiful Campania countryside, bliss out by the pool, and take off for excursions south to the magical Amalfi Coast.

Carmen heads the hotel’s dining room and school. She learned cooking from her Neapolitan mother, then went on to study management and languages at university. Her classes take place in a large kitchen, are expertly organized but at the same time a lot of fun.

Today we are learning to make Gnocchi Sorrentina. “The secret,” Carmen tells us, “is to use an old potato. Fresh ones are too moist, and you end up having to use too much flour.” With Carmen’s method, flour is added gradually to the potato-egg mix. We get the true learning experience of feeling the right consistency that’s needed to easily create the most flavorful, light gnocchi.

We move on to braciolo, sprinkling flank steaks with raisins, pine nuts, parsley, and parmesan and rolling them up to cook in fresh tomato sauce. At this point, Carmen’s advice is “Piano-piano”—slowly. The best braciolo is cooked under low heat, simmering for a couple of hours so the meat tenderizes and blends with the filling’s flavors.

We learn the variations of the Campania region’s product as we make eggplant roll-ups, filling them with mozzarella. “Our mozzarella comes from our cows’ milk, and it is a completely different flavor.” Also unique are the prized lemons of Massa Lubrense. “Ours are called Femminiello Massese. They have a thick, textured skin and are the best to make limoncello, while Amalfi lemons, found further south, have thinner skin and are juicier and sweeter, good for pastry creams.” She grates the peel, not using any pith, then immerses the skin in alcohol, where its flavors are infused to create the delicious liqueur.

We settle in to lunch on the shaded patio, where each ingredient we’ve had our hands on bursts with vibrant flavors. Limoncello is the perfect ending to the rich meal. Inspired, we wander up the villa’s stairs to the rooftop, where views of the sparkling sea take our breath away. Delicious paradise! For more info: www.amalficoastcookingvacations.com.

Susan Van Allen is the author of *100 Places in Italy 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.

The Recipes



Gnocchi Sorrentina

For the Gnocchi:

- 1 medium sized brown potato (older, drier ones are best)
- 1 cup white flour (to be used gradually, you may not need all of it)
- 1 pinch of salt
- 1 egg yolk
- 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil and additional for casserole dish

For Sorrentina:

- ½ cup tomato sauce
- Gnocchi, as prepared above
- 2 ounces mozzarella, cubed
- 2 basil leaves, torn
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese, divided

Wash the potato. Boil it in salted water until cooked through, about 40 minutes. Peel the potato, mash or rice it, then leave it to cool in a mound on a work surface.

Make a well in the center of the mashed potato mound. Sprinkle some flour on the outside edge. Put the egg yolk in the well, with salt and olive oil. Mix lightly with your hand to obtain a dough that is uniform in color. Roll it into a smooth ball, gradually adding just enough flour so that the

mixture is not sticky.

Roll the ball in flour. Then slice it into 4 or 5 equal sized pieces. Roll each piece into "snakes"—long thin rolls about the diameter of a finger, using minimal flour on the work surface. Dust with flour. Then cut into small ½-inch pieces. Toss and gently shake the pieces in a sieve to remove excess flour.

Cook the gnocchi in boiling salted water for about 1 minute, or until they rise to the surface. Drain and then transfer them to a bowl and set that bowl into a larger bowl filled with ice. After the gnocchi have cooled, place them in an oven-proof dish with enough olive oil (about 1 tablespoon) to prevent them from sticking together.

From this point you can keep the gnocchi for 5 to 7 days and each time you want to use them, you can sauté them in tomato sauce.

Preheat oven to 350°F.

In a fry pan, on low heat, put tomato sauce and add the gnocchi. Mix in the mozzarella until it is melted. Then add the basil and half of the Parmesan cheese. Transfer the mixture to an oven proof dish, sprinkle the rest of the Parmesan on top of it, and bake for about 15 minutes. Serve immediately.

Makes 2 servings.

Braciolo

- 2 thin slices of steak (flank steak is preferred)
- 1 teaspoon finely chopped parsley
- 1 clove of minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon pine nuts
- 1 teaspoon raisins, chopped
- 1 teaspoon of grated Parmesan
- Salt and a few grindings of fresh pepper, to taste
- String to tie up the braciolo
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ cup chopped onion
- ¼ cup of white wine
- 3 cups of pureed tomatoes
- 3 basil leaves, torn

Stretch the steaks until they are thin, into a rectangle. Spread the parsley, garlic, pine nuts, raisins, grated Parmesan and salt and pepper evenly onto the steaks. Roll up the steaks and tie each together with string, securing both ends tightly so that the stuffing doesn't come out during cooking. Brown the rolled meat in a saucepan with olive oil and onion, then add the white wine. Cook until the wine reduces and then add the pureed tomatoes and basil. Cook slowly on low heat for at least two hours.

Makes 2 servings.

