

Special Issue: Enjoying the Italian Christmas

THE HOLIDAY ISSUE

Tastes of Italia

BASICS OF THE ITALIAN KITCHEN

DECEMBER 2017

Make
Great Ravioli
for your
Christmas
Eve Feast

WINTER
TREATS

*Tastes of
Lombardy*

Perfect Desserts

Panna Cotta with Strawberry Sauce,
Mascarpone Desserts, Classic Cannoli,
and Fabulous, Creamy Tiramisu



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HOLIDAY FAVORITES

Tuscany's capital city shines especially bright during the holidays when traditional recipes take center stage at the table.

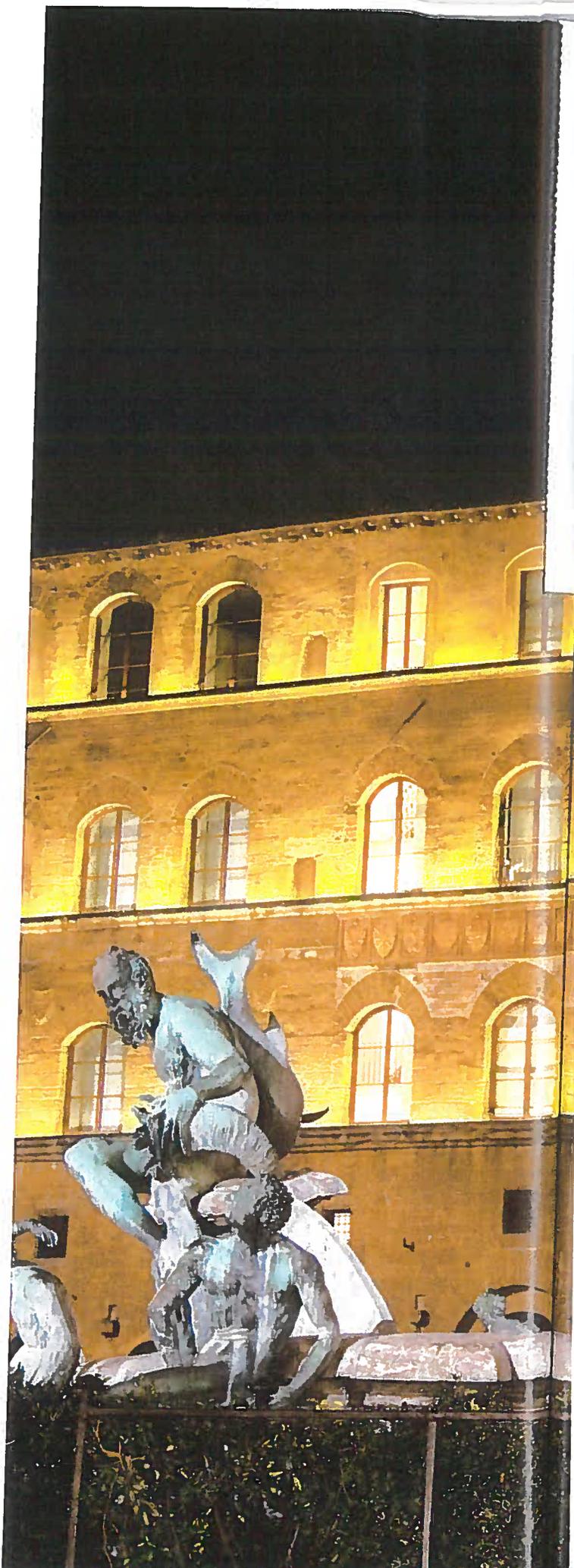
By Susan Van Allen

I am in Florence in the kitchen of the Palazzo Aldobrandini, an elegant spot from the 16th century. What's not elegant are my clumsy moves, attempting to make ridges in gnocchi by rolling them along a little wooden board. Then teacher-chef Laura Franceschetti sidles up to me, gently slides my failed attempts aside, and gives me a quick, easy adjustment...Ta-da! I've got it. Suddenly I'm rolling like an expert, filled with "I've learned something" pride. It's a buzz that's filling this kitchen—a happy group of women travelers who've come along with me to Florence for a week of immersing ourselves in its treasures, starting with the city's fabulous culinary culture.

Laura is our inspiring teacher. She's an energetic, charming Florentine, who seamlessly brings together fun, teaching, and a great passion for her city's cooking traditions to create delicious, memorable experiences for travelers. We began the day with her at the San Lorenzo market, gathering up seasonal ingredients and stopping for a cappuccino break at the top floor food court. In the nearby gem-of-a-palazzo classroom, we got to hear Laura's family stories as we cooked, so by the time we were seated in the frescoed dining room for lunch, Laura was like a *sorella* (sister).

"I grew up around great family cooks and many of my relatives ran restaurants, so it all came naturally to me. I've been cooking since I could stand up!" Laura tells us. Her strongest influence was Nonna Adrianna, from Parma, who taught her how to make pasta and delicious dolce. In recent years, she's created her own company, giving cooking classes and serving as a personal chef.

I'd love to be with Laura in Florence at holiday time. That's when the already beautiful city is transformed with twinkling lights strung along the vias. At Piazza Duomo, there's a giant Christmas tree and life-sized nativity scene. Concerts fill the churches. And close to Laura's apartment, in the Piazza Santa Croce, there's a lively Christmas market, set up with stands





The Basilica di Santa Croce
was built for the Franciscan order
in 1294 by Arnolfo di Cambio.

selling handicrafts and tasty holiday treats.

Laura has fond family holiday memories. “My mother had four sisters, so every year there was a rotation, with dinner at a different house, and every sister would make a different course.” She remembers the traditions: “There was always fish for Christmas Eve, handmade pasta and wild game at our big Christmas dinner. And when dessert came, we’d say we were too full to eat another bite, but then out came something like pears cooked in wine...and we sat at the table for hours.”

New Year’s Eve, on the other hand, has always been with friends. “We are sure to have lentils, which are traditional to bring soldi = money, prosperity and plenty of Prosecco to ring in the New Year!” Laura says.

Enjoy these recipes so wherever you are, you can have happy holidays, *alla Fiorentina*. More info: www.italyfoodandwinetours.com

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Shrimp with Wine and Tomatoes

- 1 to 1½ pounds large shrimp
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ cup shallots, minced
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons of fresh parsley, chopped, divided
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 1 cup fresh tomato chunks, seeds removed
- 4 slices thick, crusty bread

Peel and devein the shrimp.

Warm the olive oil in a skillet over low heat, then add the shallots and sauté until translucent. Add the salt and stir in 2 tablespoons of the parsley. Add the white wine and turn up the heat, cooking until the wine is reduced by half. Add the tomato chunks, lower the heat and cook for about 10 minutes, until the sauce thickens.

Stir in the shrimp and cover the pan, cooking for about 5 minutes, turning once, until the shrimp are cooked through. Stir in the rest of the parsley, and add salt and freshly ground pepper to taste.

Toast the bread in a broiler. Spoon the shrimp over the toasts, or serve in shallow bowls with the toasts broken up on top.

Makes 4 servings.

Pears Cooked in Chianti

- 4 Bosc pears
- 1 bottle of Chianti
- 4 tablespoons of sugar

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Peel the pears, cut in half horizontally and core them, removing the stems. Place the pears, cut sides up, in a large pan with high sides. Stir the wine and the sugar together. Pour the wine mixture over the pears. Cook for about an hour, basting and turning occasionally, until the pears are softened. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Makes 4 servings.

Lentils with Sausage

This recipe calls for fresh Cotichino sausage, which is made from pork, fatback, and pork rind and comes from Modena. You can find it in most gourmet or specialty markets. If you can’t find it, substitute it with a good quality fresh pork sausage.

- 1 pound Cotichino sausage
- 8 ounces dried lentils
- 2 garlic cloves, peeled
- 1 sprig of fresh rosemary
- 1 medium onion
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste

Poke holes in the sausage with a pin or fork. Fill a large pot with cold water, put in the sausage and bring to a boil. Lower the heat, cover the pot, and simmer the sausage for 2 hours.

Rinse the lentils in cold water. Boil 6 cups of water, then add the lentils, garlic, and rosemary. Lower the heat to a simmer and cook until the lentils are slightly tender, about 20 minutes.

Finely dice the onion. In a large skillet, sauté the onion in the olive oil until it is translucent.

When the lentils are slightly tender, drain them, add salt to taste, remove the garlic and rosemary, and mix the lentils into the pan of onions over low heat for a few minutes. Then add a ladleful of the liquid from the cooking sausage, stir and cook until the lentils are tender and the flavors are absorbed. Add salt and freshly ground pepper to taste.

When the sausage is done, remove it from the pot and cut it into half-inch slices. To serve, place the lentils in a shallow bowl and arrange the sausage slices on top. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Makes 4 servings.