

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
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E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO,
CESARE CHIODI, GIANNINO CITTERIO, ERNESTO DONÀ
DALLE ROSE, MICHELE GUIDO FRANCI, GIANNI MAZZOCCHI
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ARTURO ORVIETO, SEVERINO PAGANI, ALDO PASSANTE,
GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI,
EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE,
CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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On the cover: Graphic elaboration of *Madonna of the Grapes* (17th century) by Pierre Mignard, Louvre Museum, Paris.

The victories and defeats of our cuisine

Though loved worldwide, it is under pressure from other Nations and multinational corporate interests.

BY PAOLO PETRONI
President of the Academy

During this past month of November, events associated with the third edition of International Italian Food Week occurred in many countries. This wonderful project was initiated by the Italian Foreign Ministry in concert with the Ministry of Agriculture and Tourism and in particular by Vincenzo De Luca, Director-General for Cultural and Economic Promotion and Innovation. This year too, the Academy was a first-tier partner, its Delegations and Legations contributing for the third time to the success of the initiative “Extraordinary Italian Taste”. This collaboration with Embassies, Consulates and Italian Cultural Institutes was truly impressive and we are proud of having contributed to the dissemination and representation of Italian cuisine abroad. However, amid all this we must note that the enemies of our most iconic products are on the war path again. We had already denounced the threats to our cured meats, cheeses, olive oil and so on: that is, our food heritage. The danger was apparently averted, but a group of seven

countries, led by Brazil and sadly including France, has again presented a statement to the UN regarding the resolution on Foreign Policy and Global Health, which in short requires the introduction of the infamous “traffic light labels” (apparently invented in France) and various taxes for so-called ‘risky foods’, namely those with high fat or salt content. Red light, then, for *prosciutto*, *salame*, parmesan and olive oil, allegedly harmful to health. Food multinationals use their lobbies to prioritise protection of laboratory products; the USA has even relaxed regulations on lab-cultured meat from stem cells.

With all this talk of Made in Italy, Mediterranean Diet, PDO and PGI recognition, and counterfeit or ‘Italian-sounding’ foods, in the end the world’s governing bodies debate traffic-light labelling because... they care deeply about a healthy populace. The fact is that success (that is, market demand) bothers people.

Our cuisine is loved around the world and we hope that the powers that be will work together to protect our great heritage.





Entrepreneur cooks now emerge in Italy

The Michelin Guide for 2019 awards multiple stars to several restaurants owned by the same chefs.

BY GIGI PADOVANI

"Franco Marengi" Study Centre

The young Michelin-starred chefs of 2019



Punctual as always, the Michelin guide's judgement on restaurants has arrived with the first mists of November. This is the only restaurant guide which can truly change a chef's life, by creating curiosity and expectations which can raise a restaurant's earnings. Feared, loved, sometimes criticised, the 'Red Guide' appeared in Italy in 1956, and only the following year did it offer a repertoire of addresses from all over the country, including the islands, as the first edition was entitled merely *From the Alps to Siena*. This year, in Parma where its launch took place, the news was the consecration of a new three-starred restaurant, that of Mauro Uliassi in Senigallia (Ancona): a fitting award for a cook who is both creative and firmly grounded in traditional Italian cuisine of land and sea, and who raises to ten the number of Italian cooks inhabiting the Olympus of Michelin's highest recognition.

Uliassi joins Crippa in Alba, Bottura in Modena, the Santini family in Canneto sull'Oglio, Cerea in Brusaporto, the Alajmo family in Padova, Niederkofler in Alta

Badia, Heinz Beck in Roma, Féolde in Florence and Niko Romito in Castel di Sangro. Ultimately Gwendal Poullennec, who now oversees the 32 international editions of the world's most famous restaurant guide, doesn't seem to have made substantial changes to his inspection squad's overall philosophy, which continues to favour French cuisine. Indeed, France retains a solid first place in the worldwide ranking, with 28 three-starred chefs and a total of 621 *macarons*, as the French playfully call Michelin stars. Italy, however, is not far behind, in third place (after Japan), with 367 stars, even though Spain and Germany (yes, the land of Sauerkraut and Frankfurters, if culinary stereotypes are to be believed) have more three-starred restaurants than Italy: an impressive eleven each.

The Red Guide's reckoning for 2019 adds 29 new Italian stars, many awarded to young cooks who have recently opened their own restaurants after gaining experience on some celebrated kitchen crew. This is a positive development for Italian cuisine, demonstrating continued pro-

gress and auguring hope for the future. The single-starred restaurants are 'fine dining' venues which however do not intimidate an 'ordinary' clientele, who might eat there more than once a year. Three-star prices, generally superior to 200 Euros per person for a tasting menu, though lower in Italy than across the Alps, firmly deter the cooking enthusiasts such as the viewers of MasterChef or admirers of other televised culinary talents. Even the wealthiest gourmets don't frequent them more than once or twice a year. Two-star venues, instead, should represent Italian excellence. These are approximately 40 establishments offering the most innovative and modern haute cuisine. However - and this is not a good sign - Michelin has deemed no new chefs worthy of such recognition, even through reinstatement of a lost star: this applies to Carlo Cracco and his new restaurant in the Galleria in Milano, Davide Scabin at Combalzero in Rivoli, Matteo Baronetto of tDel Cambio in Turin, and Riccardo Camanini of Lido 84 in Gardone Riviera, to cite only four famous chefs, for whom the rumours pro-



Chef Mauro Uliassi with Gwendal Poullennec, International Director of the Michelin Guides



ceding the launch in Parma had insistently predicted a surge in rank.

There were some complaints about the failure to assign stars to some recently popular pizza restaurants which have creatively revisited the most venerable Neapolitan dish, flag-bearer of Italian popular cuisine, as the Neapolitan pizza expert Luciano Pignataro bewailed in his blog. Furthermore, as noted by Marco Bolasco, director of the 'Miscellaneous and Illustrated' section of the Giunti publishing house and for years chief editor of Slow Food's restaurant and hotel guide, Michelin almost entirely ignores the mainstay of Italian traditional cuisine, that is, modern *trattorie* (rustic restaurants), which have experienced a strong resurgence in recent years.

I must, however, point out a positive development reported by Michelin 2019. Enrico Bartolini has become Italy's most 'starred' chef, with an impressive six 'macarons'. The 38-year-old Tuscan chef won his latest star for the Locanda del Sant'Uffizio in Cioccaro di Penango (Asti), now added to the two stars of Al Mudec in Milan and one star each for Casual in Bergamo, Andana in Castiglione della Pescaia (Grosseto) and Glam in Venice. Likewise, the most televised cook in Italy, Antonino Cannavacciuolo, has reached four stars, comprising his earlier two stars for Villa Crespi on Lake Orta

and the two new stars earned by his bistros recently opened in Novara and Turin. Great chefs, then, metamorphose into entrepreneurs, distributing themselves over multiple restaurants bearing their names. Even the three-starred Niko Romito has obtained a *macaron* for his new restaurant in Shanghai.

Years ago, a frequent complaint was: "that cook spends more time on television than in the kitchen". Now these chefs have evidently developed the power of omnipresence, entrusting the physical production of their signature dishes to kitchen crews. On the other

hand, the Frenchmen Alain Ducasse and Joel Robuchon - who recently passed away - vied for years to accumulate the greatest number of total stars in their venues worldwide. Ducasse alone has three three-starred restaurants and 1,400 employees, while at the time of Robuchon's death his empire was paramount, boasting 32 stars. However, nobody has ever criticised the figure of the restaurateur-entrepreneur. Au contraire, Italians have always envied them somewhat. Now they are a reality in our country too, and the Red Guide rewards them.

STARRED CHEFS BY COUNTRY

COUNTRY	***	**	*	TOTAL
France	28	85	508	621
Belgique	2	23	119	144
Luxembourg				0
Espagne	11	25	159	195
Portugal	0	5	18	23
Allemagne	11	39	250	300
Grande-Bretagne	5	20	155	180
Irlande				0
Italie	10	39	318	367
Suisse	3	19	96	118
Pays-Bas	3	16	89	108
Croatie (édition digitale)	0	0	3	3
Islande (Nordics)	0	0	1	1
Danemark (Nordics + MCE)	1	3	22	26
Finlande (Nordics + MCE)	0	0	5	5
Suède (Nordics + MCE)	1	4	21	26
Norvège (Nordics + MCE)	1	0	5	6
Grèce (MCE)	0	2	3	5
République Tchèque (MCE)	0	0	2	2
Hongrie (MCE)	0	1	3	4
Pologne (MCE)	0	0	2	2
Autriche (MCE)	0	7	12	19
Japon	24	97	307	428
Chine	10	26	107	143
Singapour	0	5	34	39
Corée	2	4	18	24
Thaïlande	0	3	14	17
Etats-Unis	14	23	128	165
Brésil	0	3	16	19
TOTAL	126	449	2415	2990

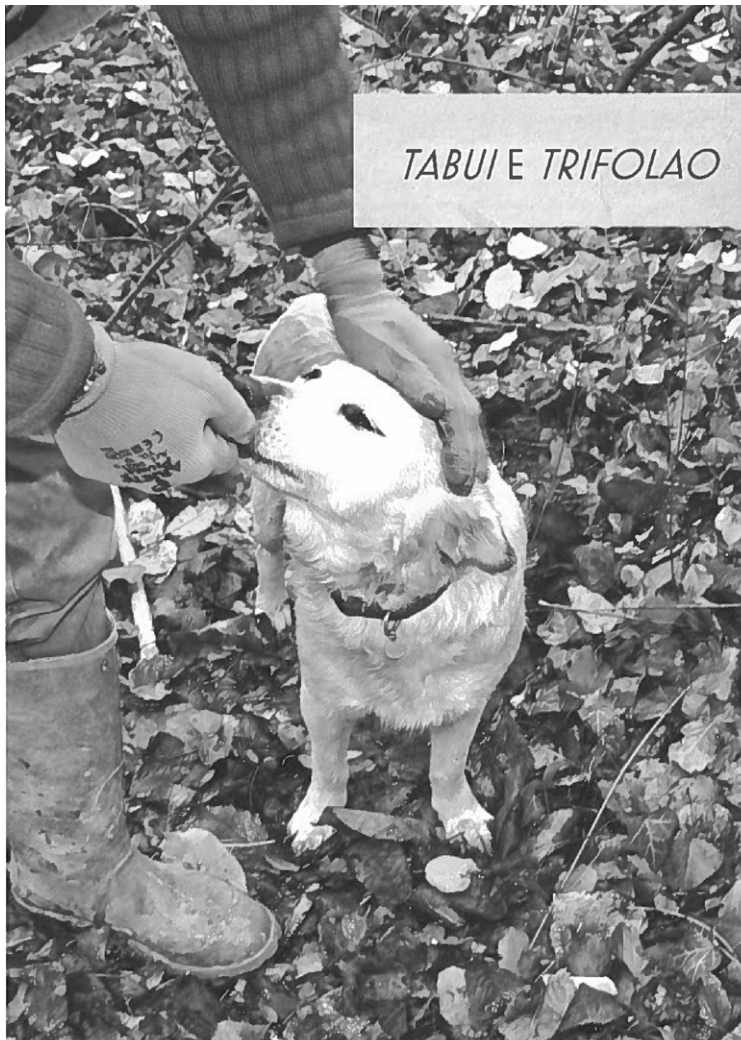


The white truffle of Alba

A precious tuber (weighing slightly under 1 kg) auctioned off in the Castle of Grinzane Cavour this November sold for 85,000 Euros.

BY LUCIO PIOMBI
Bergamo Delegate

We are all convinced that a 'fragrance' lasts for a few moments and then dissipates, and that it eludes definition if not associated with some fruit or flower. Yet one fragrance possesses a concreteness which we might consider magical: that exuded by the white truffle of Alba.



It is a concrete fragrance, because it is immediately recognisable no matter what food it accompanies; because it inhabits an enormously rich and fascinating world starting from the many-hued hills where it grows, laced with splendid and colourful vineyards and castles; and because it has bestowed such a bounty upon the Piedmontese territories of the Langhe, Roero and Monferrato that it even appears on the UNESCO heritage list.

This is the sovereign of that realm to which wine, tourism, hazelnuts, cardoons, *bagnacauda* and the locals' kindness attract visitors from all over the world. This eminent figure is the centrepiece of an economy whose wealth is only comparable to that surrounding pepper and other spices which, to satisfy the craving for profit and luxury, were transported on ships which left Coptos, on the Red Sea, bound for Kerala; but, before the Romans, even the Sumerians knew truffles, which have always left humans impressed and even awed.

Today, the white truffle of Alba can add refinement to a butter-fried egg, a plate of handmade *tajerin* pasta, a steak tartare of raw Piedmontese *fassona* beef or a perfect *bagnacauda*. And this without even having to risk wrecking any swift sailboats, but simply through a covenant between dog and human - and what's more, the human is but a simple farmer, and the dog is no haughty thoroughbred but a little female mongrel.

Our mushroom is ugly, covered in dirt and carbuncles; it doesn't last long and, depending on the year, can have exorbitant costs - but it represents luxury. Let us begin with some history. After the



Roman cookbook *Apicius*, the early Renaissance chef Bartolomeo Sacchi, known as Plàtina, describes this rare mushroom's characteristics and offers recipes for enjoying it, suggesting that after being carefully cleaned and washed, the truffles should be cooked in hot ash and then, still ash-covered, served hot, the preserve of particularly wealthy and refined men wishing to be better prepared for the pleasures of Venus.

We cannot cite all those who have mentioned and offered recipes for truffles over the centuries; what is known is that there are black, red, ash-grey and grey-green truffles, but the white truffle of Alba is undoubtedly paramount. The tuber which attracted the highest price on the 11th of November this year, during the auction at the Castle of Grinzane Cavour (as witnessed by the author), was a small, wrinkled irregular pyramid weighing just under 1 kg, sold for 85,000 Euros and sent on its way to Hong Kong. Until the era of the Savoy court, white truffles from Alba were served cooked, and only later were its extraordinary qualities discovered when served raw and thinly sliced. In this regard, we refer the reader to recipe number 314 (Bolo-

gna-style truffles) by Pellegrino Artusi: it is a tract which I suggest everyone read in his classic of Italian cuisine, *The Science of the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*. Let us conclude with some interesting truffle facts and with two words which encompass the partnership which makes this luxury possible: *tabui* and *trifolao*.

There are 60 species of truffle in the world, of which 25 are found in Italy, only nine of those being edible. The most frequently sold are *Tuber magnatum pico* (the prized white truffle such as those from Alba), *Tuber melanosporum* (the prized black truffle of Norcia and Spoleto), *Tuber aestivum* (summer truffle), *Tuber albidum pico* (*bianchetto* or *marzuolo*), *Tuber brumale* (black muscat or winter truffle) and finally *Tuber macrosporum* (smooth black truffle).

These all grow wild, and the area of greatest 'bounty' is, as we know, Alba and environs. Truffles are symbiotic, depending on a plant's roots to develop; oak yields the highest quality, but poplar, willow, linden and hazelnut may also harbour truffles.

The peak season for perfect maturity of white Alba truffles is from the first week of November to late December, and the

most commercially viable weight varies from 100 to 300 grammes, but occasional specimens weigh over a kilogramme. Let us briefly discuss the bond between *tabui* and *trifolao*, that is, dog and human. The first, the dog, is usually a long-haired pointed-faced medium-sized female mongrel, often, though not invariably, trained by the Truffle Dog University, founded in 1880 in Roddi Castle by one Antonio Monchiero known as "Barot", meaning 'truffle-digging stick'. The second is the *trifolao*, the human who, aided by the *tabui*, searches for this rare fungus, usually at dawn or dusk. All depends on this bond. One must never punish or shout at the *tabui*, who must be trained as a puppy and rewarded with delicious morsels and especially cuddles and caresses; the *tabui* must not be shoved or called excessively loudly, but with gentle tones and reliably uniform though generic commands (go, seek, bring, drop): the search must be a game for the *tabui*, who must not be overexerted. Correctly trained, the *tabui* will consign the truffle, intact, into the hands of the *trifolao*; and most crucially, only the dog can identify the mature truffle, which exudes the characteristic fascinating fragrance.



*President Paolo Petroni, the President's Council,
the Secretariat in Milan and the Editorial Office of the Magazine
offer all Academicians in Italy and abroad
their warmest wishes for*

***a Merry Christmas
and a Happy New Year***

The Secretariat in Milan and the Editorial Office in Rome
will remain closed from the 24th of December to the 4th of January.



Christmas cooking - but whose?

A major supermarket chain in northern Italy has rewarded its clientele with a substantial booklet of Christmas recipes - but mostly foreign ones!

BY ANDREA CESARI DE MARIA
Milano Duomo Honorary Delegate

Christmas onigiri

Our country is increasingly colonised by observances and celebrations which are not part of our past and do not represent us. All Saints' Day (*Ognissanti*) has been ousted by Hallowe'en with its incongruous pumpkins, and further shunted aside by the acquisitive stampede of Black Friday, when multitudes indulge in the fleeting illusion of being what they are not. Christmas held out, though under siege: we continue to witness the progressive abandonment of our traditional nativity scene in favour of the Nordic Christmas tree, beautiful and cruel if we consider the fate of those poor trees, and sanitised by using synthetic trees instead.

The very word 'Christmas' has been replaced in a Milanese school by *Festa delle buone Feste* ('Holiday of Happy Holidays'), almost as if the term 'Christmas' might chafe against someone's delicate sensibilities!

The kitchen had resisted encroachment, harbouring national traditions, first and foremost *panettone*, *pandoro* and *torrone*, flanked by a host of regional customs which were dusted off each year for the occasion, maintaining alive habits and memories of celebrations in which the family was still the focal point.

What better circumstance, then, than Christmas to share such traditions, that they might not only remain part of local heritage but also be enjoyed in every corner of the nation?

This is the task that a major supermarket chain 'laudably' undertook by publishing a plump recipe booklet for its clientele. But upon perusing it one finds words far removed from Italy: maca-

rons, cupcakes, ganache, quiche, cous cous, cheesecake, bisque, wasabi, onigiri, edamame, guacamole, smorgastarte, scones, crumble, apple pie, boules, filange... something is amiss.

That supermarket chain, primarily serving northern Italy, would have had an immense domestic territory from which to find recipes: not only northern Italy but the centre and south of the country, so rich in traditions. Why, therefore, ignore everything that is ours, roaming in search of recipes which don't belong to us, with ingredients not grown in our lands, to create foods which have no history of lived experience here? Why the constant love of the other, as if only abroad could we find what in reality we have in abundance? A missed opportunity, alas. Let us not forget that our cuisine is considered among the best in the world, simpler and more essential than French cooking, which frequently errs on the side of excessive elaboration. The French, however, in their grandeur, are masters of self-promotion, while the opposite obtains for us, as if we were badly concealing an inferiority complex. This is immediately obvious when we consider the French food guide which annually strikes fear into our cooks' hearts by dispensing condemnations and absolutions based on criteria which are irrelevant, or merely marginal, to us. As for the Anglophone world, always elevated as an example however unne-



cessarily, I hardly think it can serve as a culinary beacon to us, especially since, in an era of extreme health consciousness, we should entertain justifiable doubts regarding a fair proportion of the victuals offered by that cultural sphere's cuisine.

The grass may indeed be greener on the other side, but it is our task to demonstrate that we have no reason to envy anyone else, least of all gastronomically; and that our traditions, whose vitality is maintained in great part thanks to our Academy's meritorious efforts, can hold their own against other traditions which often pale in comparison. As the French politician Jean Jaures wrote, tradition doesn't mean protecting ashes but keeping a flame alive.

I believe that we should therefore never fatalistically accept the abandonment of values received from our forebears, whose loss would constitute a tangible disservice to future generations, defrauded of their history and collective memory.