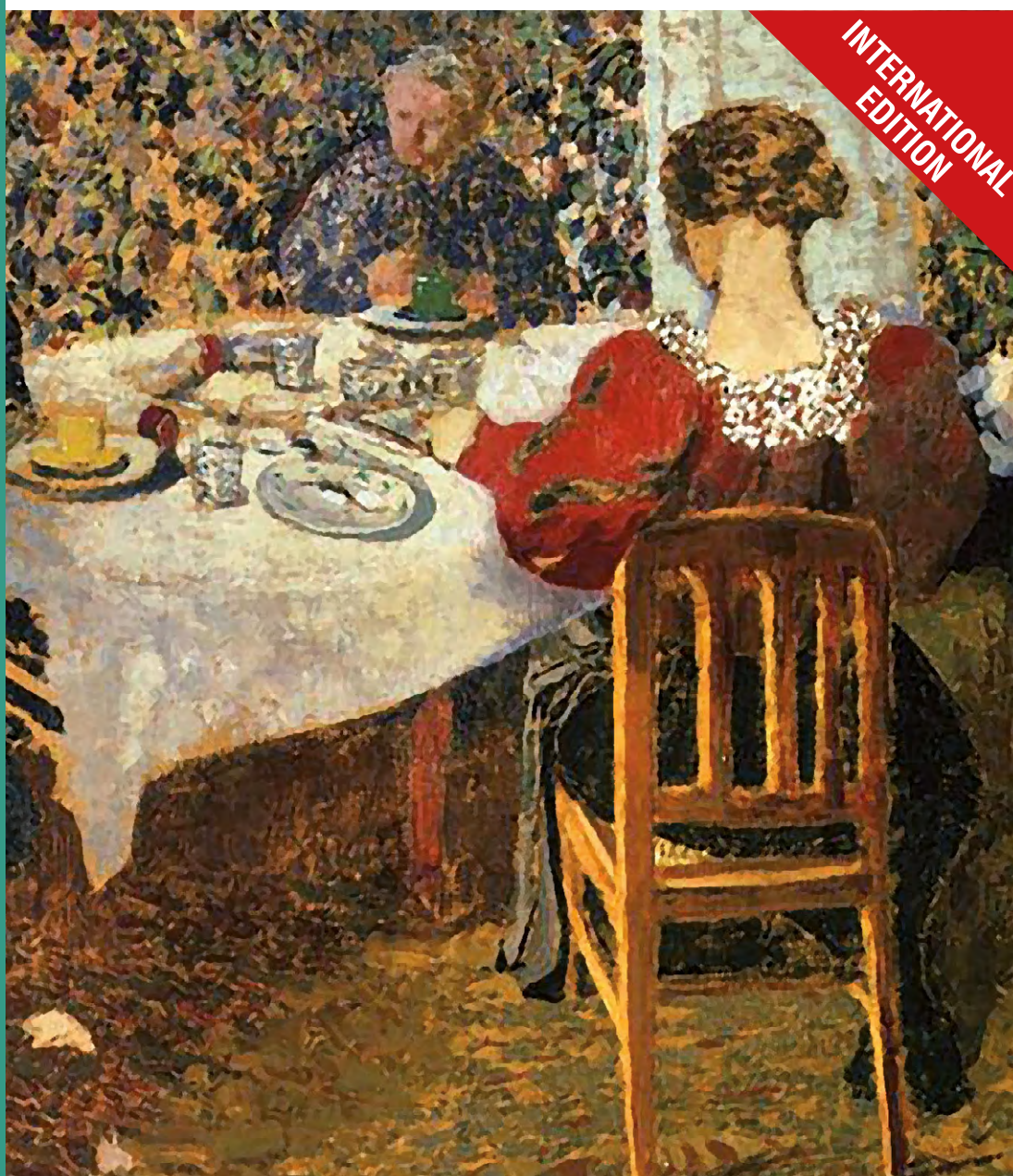


# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

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# America tariffs harm *some of our exports*

by Paolo Petroni

President of the Accademia

*The wailing, however,  
appears excessive.*

**T**he imposition of tariffs is never good news, being a symptom of protectionistic trade wars. However, tariffs make domestic producers happy when they operate on imports (for instance those on low-cost rice imported from Asia), while inducing melancholia in exporters to countries that have installed them. They were once a common weapon deployed by states, but over time, with globalisation, this implement lost its edge and tariffs were lifted or much reduced. From the 18<sup>th</sup> of October, **tariffs were heavily increased**, in the order of 25%, by the United States on certain agricultural and food products from the European Community, including, therefore, Italy. This threat, which has now sadly materialised, was already discussed in the July Focus, and we are hardly pleased by it, even though France, the UK and Germany are faring even worse. To be clear, this imposition required by the USA was approved by the **WTO** (World Trade Organisation) as punishment for public financing of Airbus, and we now await the WTO's verdict - expected by next summer - on subsidies to the American Boeing; but for now, we're the ones who pay.

*The main products affected are cheeses,  
cured meats, digestives and liqueurs*

The main products affected are **parmigiano reggiano**, **grana padano**, provolone, soft pecorino sheep's cheese (as opposed to aged and firm, for grating), mozzarella (fiordilatte, meaning from cow, not water buffalo, milk), gorgonzola, salami, mortadella, digestives and liqueurs. **Hams, wines** (no small thing, considering exports of Prosecco and similar products), **olive oil and pasta** are safe. The news



has raised an enormous outcry and even fears of exports being "nullified, or nearly so", with "dramatic commercial and social repercussions". There have even been threats of popular demonstrations in front of American military bases in Italy. Good heavens! Price increases up to 50% for consumers, and national losses in the order of 500-700 million Euros, are predicted.

**This benefits domestic American products** and 'Italian-sounding' foods, namely counterfeit foods which harm our exports, which, however, double annually. As above, this imposition is unwelcome for us, but it seems excessive to tear one's hair and shriek 'all is lost' while babbling random numbers and predictions (20% consumption decrease!), unless this is aimed at soliciting state subsidies. In the USA, **consumption of these niche products is ultimately stable**, so a price increase from \$8 to \$9.60 for a 200-gramme piece of cheese will not greatly contract the market. Nor can we exclude that the mechanism will act as an international leveller for some products such as wine (penalised in France) and oil (penalised in Spain), **providing advantages for us**.

*We hope that our exporters will not pass  
all costs to consumers*

We hope that our exporters will not, as usual, pass all additional costs to end consumers: considering prices in Italy, especially those imposed on international exporters, it seems to us that there are sufficient margins to accommodate these increases. Our products' high quality, and our American consumers who love Italian cooking, deserve special treatment without raising alarms and imploring the assistance of the government and the European Community. In this trade war, we are punished through no fault of our own. For now these taxes are projected for four months; thereafter, we shall see. States are more temperamental than people.

While we wait, some have solved the problem. **Eataly**, in New York, proudly offers Varzi and Felino salame produced in Utah and finocchiona made in New Jersey. Well played!



# How the cooking environment has changed

by Elisabetta Cocito  
Turin Academician

*The cooking area, surrounding a hearth, was often the only focal point for family life.*

**W**e always talk - sometimes rather pervasively - about food, its importance in a society's cultural development, the succession of rituals which have surrounded it over time, and the associated fashions; but **we rarely mention the environment where it is produced: the kitchen.** The area in the home dedicated to cooking has gradually but progressively evolved over the centuries and may be viewed from various perspectives: heart of the family, place of drudgery or experimental and creative laboratory.

*Social changes have brought a re-organisation of spaces assigned to food preparation*

Since fire was domesticated, with radical consequences for human evolution, the

focus of social life has for an immensely long time been the hearth: a fixed point round which epochal changes have occurred and still do. In different historical periods, how and what we ate was affected by norms and prohibitions, rigid social and religious rules, and evolving customs, which also caused food preparation and cooking spaces to be adapted and reorganised. **Among the most significant examples is the preparation of bread.** Until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, bread was prepared at home, requiring a *madia* (baker's cupboard), flour drawers and kneading troughs, which vanished alongside the spread of ready-made bread bought from bakeries. Instead, **the refrigerator and freezer have become integral** and indispensable to modern kitchens, and therein we also store (frozen!) bread. In antiquity, the cooking area, surrounding a hearth, was often the only focal point for families, and people sometimes even slept there. Such overlaps were eliminated in aristocratic homes and thereafter among the bourgeoisie, with the rise of not only physical but also hierarchical distinctions between masters and servants.

*Different eras and their customs also affected the history of cooking*

Before achieving modern technological levels, we underwent various phases in history and customs which also affected the development of cooking. **The 14<sup>th</sup> century** saw the first evident urban social stratification: alongside the patrician class



there existed a world of manual labour, and in their **humble homes** artisans and their workers shared space, **working, cooking and eating in the same area**. In wealthier homes, chiefly belonging to rich merchants and businessmen, the area for living and receiving guests was instead separated from the servants' quarters, which were often on a higher floor. In particular, the space for entertaining guests must be far from the kitchen to avoid the proximity of smoke and odours. **The separation of work spaces became more marked in the 16<sup>th</sup> century**, clearly for functional but especially symbolic reasons: the genteel areas of the home should be far from the filthy and sooty work spaces, from which the masters' eyes must be shielded. Kitchens, pantries and servants' quarters, however indispensable, were 'secret' places, and food was presented on the dining table in a striking arrangement, with tables and settings which respected a precise hierarchical and symbolic order. This veritable theatrical spectacle required a perfectly organised, yet hidden, kitchen. The wealthiest homes even had two kitchens: a 'visible kitchen' for preparing official banquets, and a 'secret kitchen' for the householder's informal family meals. **The Enlightenment**, in line with its fundamental principles, brought an inevitable change in attitudes even in culinary matters: excesses and overabundant spices and sugar gave way to healthier, simpler and more natural nourishment. To retain coherence, the environment also adapted: **in wealthy homes kitchens adopted a more subdued aesthetic**, with lighter colours typical of the times, and became more functional. This was facilitated by the introduction of brick ovens, permitting easier and more varied cooking.

### *The 19<sup>th</sup>-century introduction of 'Russian-style service' was decisive*

A decisive change occurred with the 19<sup>th</sup>-century introduction of 'Russian-style service', with each guest receiving successive courses on separate plates, replacing



the cumbersome and complex 'French service' whereby numerous courses were presented ostentatiously and simultaneously on large dishes whence diners must serve themselves.

We surely owe the systematisation of a new style of cooking, soon to transcend the confines of France, to the great Carême. **He conceived and created the cooking environment as a laboratory** for experiments using efficient and modern techniques and equipment. His laboratory, with perfectly rationalised spaces and furnished with all types of pans and instruments, would leave its mark on future kitchen design. Indeed, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, thanks to the development and spread of new domestic implements and a more rational arrangement of spaces, kitchens became more functional and ergonomic.

Later, in interbellum Italy, **the role of woman as 'lady of the house' was emphasised**; she was tasked with managing finances and family life according to rules of order and efficiency. To this end, there even appeared courses and publications aimed at educating proper housewives. The kitchen, too, should be rationally reorganised, and especially, due to the compact spaces available, reduced and pared down to the essentials. Magazines of the time always show scales in kitchens, for following recipes precisely without waste, as well as a clock, generally on the wall, to mark the time spent working: a particularly significant and prescient element, given today's frantic pace which

dominates our lives while the food industry tempts us with ready-made meals.

Then came **Marinetti's visionary interpretation**: a futurist cuisine mindful of aesthetics, touch and smell, rich in provocations and daring combinations. He conceived a kitchen furnished with lamps, distilling equipment, and apparatuses using ozone, which from today's perspective inevitably bring to mind the **kitchens** of the great creative chefs, often similar to forges or alchemists' laboratories.

### *Today's kitchens are hi-tech*

From the Fifties onwards, kitchens gradually assumed the function of social gathering places, eventually becoming what they are now: high-tech spaces where much is entrusted to previously planned timings and methods, facilitating standardised timetables and preparation modalities leaving minimal margins of error, sparing us - no mean achievement - much time-consuming labour: kitchens reminiscent of space stations, but clean and elegant, **where we may receive guests without apprehension**.

I shall conclude with a possibly banal question: who can really afford the vast, hyper-technological, super-accessorised and prohibitively expensive kitchens publicised in specialised magazines? Probably, I would venture, many who do not set foot in their kitchens to cook.

**Elisabetta Cocito**





# Bagna cauda and “baña cauda”

by Anna Lanzani

Buenos Aires Academician

*The fujot dishes  
of ‘Argentine Piedmont’  
nourish an altered  
but highly necessary  
identity.*

In Argentina, 100 kilometres from Rafaela, 300 from Santa Fe, 600 from Buenos Aires and 10,000 from Turin, there is a little piece of Italy. It’s called **Humberto Primo**, but it could be called Marengo Monferrati, Alta Italia (‘High Italy’), Nuevo Torino (‘New Turin’), Comuna Piamonte (‘Piedmont Township’). In the vast north-eastern plains known as the **‘Pampa Gringa’**, approximately 400,000 Piedmontese arrived between 1876 and 1925 in a migratory wave later described as a ‘flood’. They extended the agricultural frontier of what was then still an almost unpopulated zone, contributing to its transformation, at least for several decades, into the **‘World’s Granary’**.

Besides work, language and knowledge of seeds, the Piedmontese brought their ancient culinary culture to the New World, starting with *bagna cauda*. In

1884, **Edmondo de Amicis**, visiting the colonies of the pampa, commented: **“I find myself in Piedmont, though two thousand leagues from Italy”**.

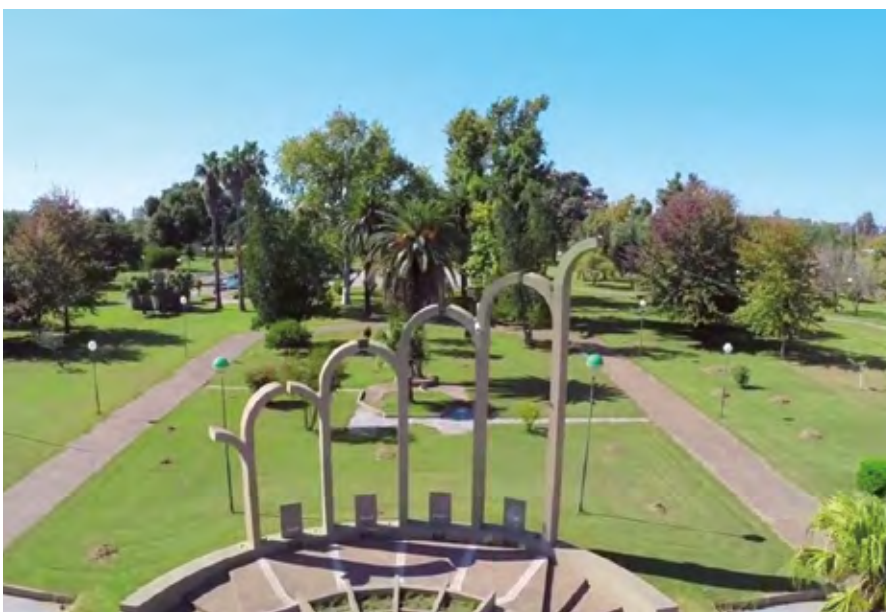
*The Piedmontese brought  
their ancient culinary culture  
to the New World*

This environment gave rise to the **‘nostalgic cuisine’** transmitted through the generations, becoming entrenched as family heritage: in its own way, an authentic, though frequently neglected, manifestation of Italian cooking. This is where, to this day, tradition and history transcend geographical distance.

With heavy hearts and meagre baggage, these migrants crossed the Atlantic leaving behind their rural homeland, which they had never left before and would almost certainly never see again. Third-class passengers, after a voyage of dread and pain in a steamer, they found themselves sharing dorms of 3,000 beds with other Italians and Europeans in the imposing ‘Hotel de Inmigrantes’ (Immigrants’ Hotel) which can still be visited on the banks of the Rio de la Plata. Fleeing hunger, they came so they might “always have something to eat”. **Here they found such abundance that veal fillets were discarded after being used for stock** and stale bread was not recycled the following day.

In the overpopulated Buenos Aires of the early tango era, a time of knife-fights and of devastating epidemics, they remained barely long enough to find their bearings and get started. With no idea

The town of Humberto Primo, in Santa Fe province



what awaited them, they departed for the small parcels of land they'd bought by correspondence, or to take up uncertain employment obtained long-distance through migrants' networks. The first 300 kilometres by train were easy, apart from the **disconcertingly vast landscape: "it was like entering nothingness"**, recount contemporary testimonies. When the railroad ended, there were still hundreds of kilometres to travel by foot or cart, on barely etched or, very often, still unmarked paths. Originally farmers, the Piedmontese migrants could adapt readily to frugality, so much so that they found their new colonist's lifestyle almost prosperous. Despite their homes of mud and straw, the recurring locust infestations and the menacing natives, they wrote to distant relatives: **"meat, here, is abundant as polenta"**.

Nostalgia was far harder to bear. It was, and remains, the migrant's woe. So the autumnal celebratory **bagna cauda gatherings** immediately became these agricultural communities' method of **keeping alive an altered but highly necessary identity**.

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*Finding the ingredients for the first fujot required willpower and determination*

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Finding the ingredients for the first *fujot* (the distinctive earthenware containers used for *bagna cauda*) required willpower and determination. **Anchovies were unavailable in the midst of the pampa**, and acquiring them meant an exhausting yearly round trip to Buenos Aires. They were expensive, imported from the Mediterranean or tinned by the rudimentary fish industry of Mar de Plata, bordering on Patagonia. **Olive oil, equally rare**, was considered 'liquid gold'. Never scarce, instead, was cream, since the earliest Piedmontese colonists settled in what eventually became one of South America's main milk-producing areas. **Thus was "baña cauda" reborn in the Pampa Gringa, with few ancho-**



**vies, no oil and abundant cream.** When vast sacrifices and strenuous work brought a modicum of well-being, generous helpings of anchovies and oil were reinstated in the recipe (garlic had always been available). However, cream, now a habit, was not relinquished, and it remained in the recipe, rounding out its flavour and testifying that in American cuisine "abundance is abundant in all things".

Today, **the descendants of those first Piedmontese colonists in Argentina number approximately two million:** Turin almost three times over. Pillars of the new-world society in which they were born, they also unhesitatingly feel Italian, and indeed between July and September (the southern winter) their area boasts ninety-odd regional, provincial or village fairs centred on *bagna cauda*. Recalling the late nineteenth-century *fujot*, they remain an emblematic ritual, preserved and promoted by approximately sixty Piedmontese associations gathered within a federation (FAPA).

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*The use of cream in the Argentine recipe is controversial today*

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The use of cream in the Argentine recipe is controversial today. **The very promoters of local fairs argue over it.** Nonetheless, *bagna cauda* is a dish of popular

origin which has evolved **by adapting to the ingredients available.** Piedmont itself has attested variants using lard, walnut oil, butter, or indeed cream as their fat source: and this is indeed why the prevalent view in Argentina chooses to respect the first agricultural colonists' recipe for annual commemorative fairs. Notable among the most representative celebrations is the **Fiesta Provincial de la Bagna Cauda** in **Humberto Primo**, in the province of Santa Fe, gathering around 1,300 people annually. **The event was recently granted the Giovanni Nuvoletti prize**, particularly for having inspired a 'twin fair' in Faule (Cuneo): an initiative which constitutes an excellent example of cultural traditions 'returning' from the Americas.

Likewise worthy of notice are the **three annual events of the Unione Ossolana di Buenos Aires** (an association of those with roots in the Ossola area of Piedmont), which among other things promotes, alongside the FAPA of which it is a founding member, **UNESCO recognition of bagna cauda as part of the Intangible Heritage of Piedmontese Worldwide.** The guests at the Ossolana society have included **Jorge Maria Bergoglio, now Pope Francis**: when he was a cardinal, 'father Jorge' (whose family originates in Portacomaro, in the province of Asti) celebrated his roots by joining many other Piedmontese in Argentina gathered around a *fujot*.

**Anna Lanzani**



# The cornerstones of the new cuisine

by **Giorgia Fieni**

*PhD in agricultural and food economics*

*How molecular  
gastronomy has  
changed ingredients  
and recipes.*

**I**t all began with fire. Fire, over which humans chose to roast meat or boil vegetables. That moment marked the first transition from raw material to recipe, and therefore the de facto invention of cooking.

Progress followed this trajectory over the centuries, with continuous developments, until a precise moment in history wrought **a clean break between past and future:** the moment in which **we began speaking of molecular cuisine.** Raw materials, in their complete state, ceased to be basic ingredients and became **intermediate products:** now **everything began with their constituent molecules.** This meant expanding the repertoire of food preparation techniques and creating tools to

implement them. Syringes, vacuum chambers, microwave ovens, roasters, extractors, evaporators and blast chillers have become as common as ovens, cookers and fridges; liquid nitrogen, carbon dioxide and maltodextrin are the new flour, eggs and milk.

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*Chemistry and physics can  
be bent to our will in the kitchen*

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By knowing these elements, we can obtain **a vast array of new ingredients** which, combined amongst themselves or with traditional ingredients, throw open the gates of a world wherein chem-







istry and physics can be manipulated for our pleasure. Since then, innumerable experiments have therefore been undertaken: different ingredients and combinations, increasingly innovative techniques, and **no limits on our imagination** so that 21<sup>st</sup>-century cooking is visually striking and ever more delicious.

Let us therefore examine some of these **cornerstones of the new cuisine**.

**Gel** is the simplest and most common, obtained from vegetable agar agar or animal gelatine, which, over time, lend solidity to soft substances: prima facie, nothing new, since Renaissance aspics followed the same principle. However, in reality the new cuisine exploits the possibility of thereby **creating new shapes**.

**Foam**. Once recalling meringues or fizzy drinks emulating cola, it is now **extruded from a liquid nitrogen siphon** and deposited on solid surfaces, just like shaving foam, but this time its targets are sandwiches, chocolate veneers, seasoned pasta, crushed ice, purées and cream soups.

**Air**: a substance which permits life on earth. It is fundamental (and still is) for ageing cured meats, drying out vegetables and inflating soufflés. Very similar to foam and snow, it now needs an immersion mixer and soya lecithin to be

created. The result is **an aromatic decoration which reinforces the original flavour** (which could otherwise be lost in the cooking process) without making it overpowering.

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*In the 1950s, Unilever created a technique to transform liquids into solids*

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**Spheres**. In the 1950s, Unilever created a technique to transform liquids into solids (using sodium alginate, calcium chloride and a syringe) that chefs employ in presentations which they call 'caviar'. You must have heard of these little gelatinous globules which pop in your mouth, producing a unique sensation.

**Osmosis**. The word is difficult to pronounce, but it denotes what normally happens in marinades, namely the passage of saline solutions and liquids through a membrane. Let us therefore note that in this case, using the term 'osmosis' in recipes means giving a new name to a classic technique.

**Infusion**. Have you ever made tea by dropping a teabag in water and waiting until its active solid contents pass into the liquid? If, as I strongly suspect, the

answer is yes, then you have performed infusion. This summer, a technique for cold infusion was perfected, allowing refrigerators to harbour tisanes, aromatised waters and teas prepared shortly beforehand using basic ingredients rather than industrially processed products.

**As a final treat, let us mention cappuccino**: the classic breakfast drink, with a coffee base, a foam cap and perhaps a dusting of cocoa powder - but now, retaining the same structure with different ingredients. **The base is a cream soup or savoury purée**, the cap is **a foam or 'air'**, and the **dusting consists of herbs or spices**. Cappuccino is the simplest example of how the various elements presented so far, combined with classic preparation techniques, can coexist, creating a recipe which surprises both eye and palate.

A minor point worth noting: molecular gastronomy, though invented in the late 1960s, began establishing itself only two decades later. Since then, another thirty years have elapsed, in which technology assumed increasing pre-eminence not only in communications but in every facet of life and art, including cooking. We are therefore witnessing the dawn of a new revolution...

**Giorgia Fieni**



# When the chef is an entrepreneur

by Gigi Padovani

Honorary Academician for Torino Lingotto

*Interview with Marco Sacco, resuming work in Turin with Piano35, and launching projects in Verbania and Hong Kong.*

**T**he worldwide success of Italian cuisine is established by now, thanks partly to those cooks who were able to transform their work into **prosperous companies with branches in many major cities**, from New York to Singapore, Manila, Hong Kong and Shanghai. At the vanguard was the Tuscan **Enrico Bartolini**, followed by **Niko Romito** from the Abruzzo region, with his Spazio restaurant and his partnership with Bulgari. A couple of years ago, **Da-vide Oldani** and his latest brainchild, Foo'd, arrived in Manila and Singapore. In Italy, haute cuisine restaurants have difficulty providing sufficient profits to their owners: they are generally over-staffed and sparsely frequented, with a profit margin of 10% at the most, if everything goes well.

*Many chefs have become entrepreneurs*

Chefs have therefore become entrepreneurs - as the Frenchmen Alain Ducasse and Daniel Boulud (in New York) and the late Joël Robuchon already did years ago

- **opening new venues, multiplying and replicating their best-known dishes abroad**, or creating more affordable 'bistro' offerings, as Enrico Crippa, Moreno Cedroni, Carlo Cracco, Tonino Cannavacciuolo, the Alajmo brothers, and others have done.

Yet it is not always easy to control food costs, choose personnel, and find the right location. **We discussed this with chef Marco Sacco**, born in 1965, president of the 'Chic, Charming Italian Chef' association and **founder of the 'Gente di fiume e di lago' ('Lake and river folk') format in Verbania**, dedicated to cooking freshwater fish. "A change in outlook is necessary", says Sacco - who from the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September is managing the Piano 35 restaurant in Turin - "and one must follow precise guidelines in overseeing restaurants. I hold firm to two fundamen-

tal principles: knowing how to delegate to collaborators, choosing the right ones and teaching them; and having precise managerial control over the restaurant's activity. Every evening, the employee who monitors finances reports on the day's earnings from all the venues and compares them with previous periods. Today I have a company with sixty employees and five locations which I manage directly with my wife Raffaella, including a collaboration in Hong Kong with the Castellana restaurant, opened in March this year". In the Intesa Sanpaolo **sky-scraper in Turin**, designed by Renzo Piano, **Sacco heads three venues**: Italy's highest urban restaurant, the event space on the floor above it, and the lounge bar at the building's very top, with cocktails by the bartender Cinzia Ferro.

**It all began on Lake Mergozzo, in Ver-**







**bania**, where in 2000 Sacco took the reins of his family's restaurant, founding the Piccolo Lago: in 2004 he gained his first Michelin star, and a second three years later. In the Piedmontese capital, **he presents an haute-cuisine dinner menu** featuring his most famous signature dishes, including 'Lingotto di Mergozzo', 'Carbonara au Coque' and 'Flan di Bettelmatt'. **For lunch he offers an agile and convenient bistro formula**, with simpler but carefully made dishes, inspired by Piedmontese cuisine: one can mix and match by selecting dishes from four categories, with prices between 10 and 26 Euros.

*"I'm in the kitchen every day; I delegate finances to the right people, but I oversee everything"*

The chef is eager to point out that he's not one of those cooks who are never at the stove and who mostly deal with consultancies, television appearances and conferences. "I'm in the kitchen every day, my wife Raffaella is in the adjoining dining hall, and then I delegate financial matters to the right people, through a very able general manager, but I oversee everything. It's true: today, haute cuisine chefs must not only create good food, but also grapple with business. I come from a family of restaurateurs, but for several years of my life, on the lake, I dedicated myself to sports, competing professionally in windsurfing. At fourteen I was already a little entrepreneur: I sold surf boards to friends and had even started a surfing school. Then one day I told my father: 'I want to become a Michelin-starred chef'. He gave me the chance to travel, gathering experiences with great chefs in France and exploring new raw materials in Asia". Things didn't always go smoothly, however. In 2009 he opened a restaurant in

Beijing with local partners, but was forced to close the following year. Last year he suddenly broke off his collaboration with Intesa Sanpaolo and the company that managed the restaurants in the Turin skyscraper at the time. **Today he has resumed work with a new enterprise paradigm and restructured kitchens.** Sacco explains: "I have no hesitation in declaring that experiencing failure is fundamental for understanding how to work. If you let it get you down, you're finished. **If you have determination and you know your worth, this can help you in the future.** In the past six years we have increased our revenue fivefold. I'm sometimes summoned to lecture entrepreneurs, even outside the food and beverage field, and I tell them: 'compare experiences, including your mistakes, because these shared stories can save someone else's business'. But not everyone wants to take risks: in Piedmont, about 80% of starred chefs are salaried employees, not owner-operators ... there must be a reason for this!"

*"I take a month each year to think and create"*

Auditing accounts, managing personnel, purchasing raw materials: but **what has become of the chef's creativity? And how can we find it?** "I take a month each year to think and create: in February my crew and I cloister ourselves to experiment with new recipes in the Verbania

restaurant. **We start with Piedmontese food**, with our land and culture, which however **must not form barriers to innovation. Dishes must not remain static**".

Abroad, his clientele's interest in Italian food steadily increases. Marco Sacco has travelled the world and **has been one of the first cooks to export Italian traditions.** He continues: "In Hong Kong the French have come to a halt: now they only open Italian restaurants. The Spaniards too, with their 'light entertainment' menus, are no longer at the cutting edge. **Italian style is going strong**, but luckily the clientele's attitude has changed. Once it was enough to provide caprese, chewing-gum-textured pizzas with processed cheese, and spaghetti Alfredo... but no longer: by now, the Chinese travel and know Italy. When I go to work there, I find a different, more attentive clientele that has understood our products' value. So I can introduce them to a different kind of Italian food, namely Piedmontese cuisine, whose flagship foods are truffles and Barolo. **I import our raw materials into China by air:** for instance, I would rather avoid the New Zealand lamb that is ubiquitous in Asia... all those products that make each meal identical to the others. Today, competition is global, but globalisation must not be triumphant. **I introduce people to the specialties of small-scale artisans, always recounting their story** and their origins. Only in this way can we make sure that Italian food continues to be a winner worldwide".

**Gigi Padovani**

