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ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

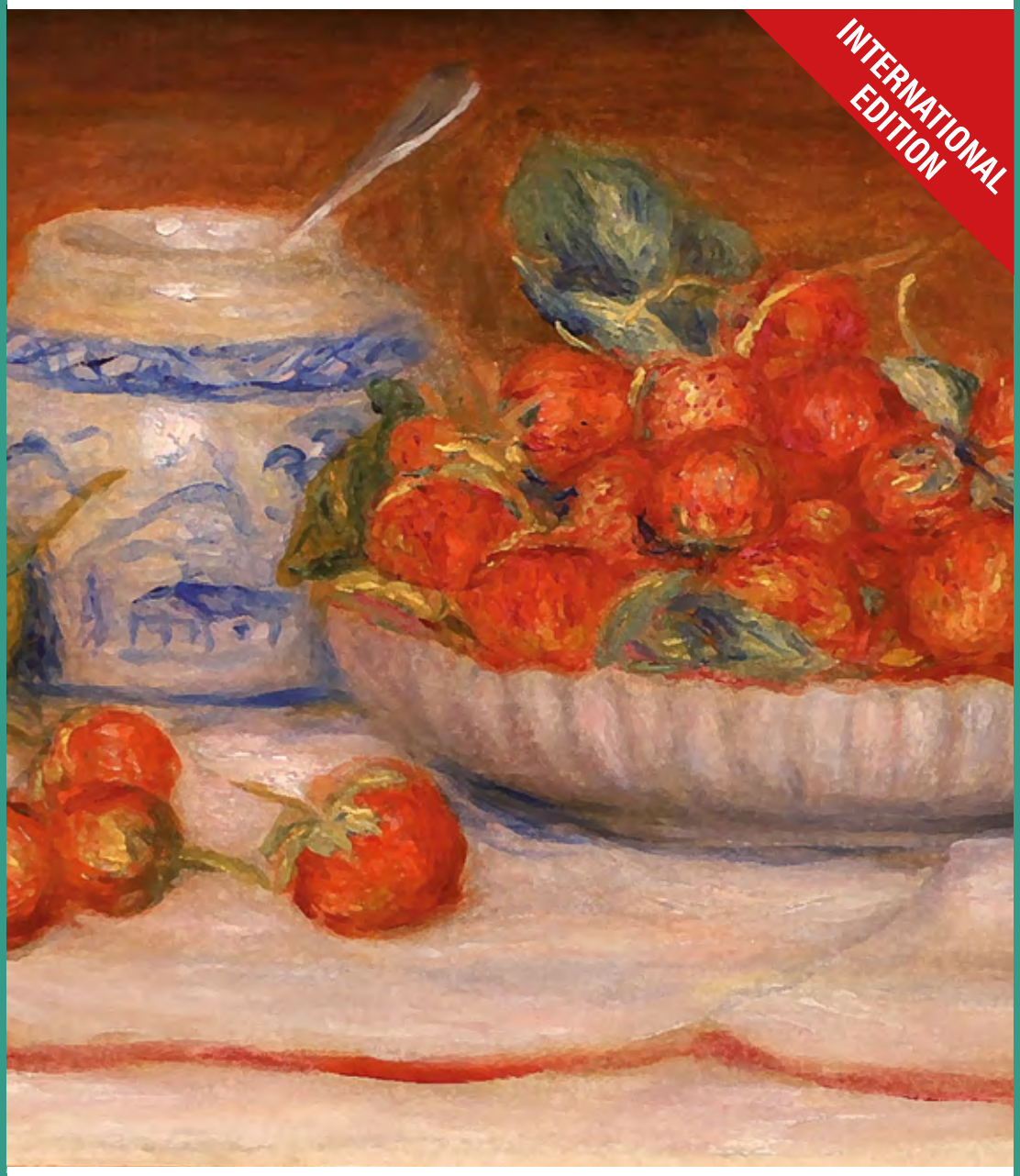

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Table of contents

L'ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
È STATA FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI
E DA LUIGI BERTETT, DINO BUZZATI TRAVERSO, CESARE CHIODI, GIANNINO CITTERIO, ERNESTO DONÀ DALLE ROSE, MICHELE GUIDO FRANCI, GIANNI MAZZOCCHI BASTONI, ARNOLDO MONDADORI, ATTILIO NAVA, ARTURO ORVIETO, SEVERINO PAGANI, ALDO PASSANTE, GIAN LUIGI PONTI, GIÒ PONTI, DINO VILLANI, EDOARDO VISCONTI DI MODRONE, CON MASSIMO ALBERINI E VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

On the cover: *graphic elaboration of* Strawberries *(1908) by Pierre-Auguste Renoir, Musée des Beaux-Arts, Bordeaux*

Focus of the President

Traditions • History

Cuisine • Products • Food Technology

Restaurants and Cooks

Vaccine chaos and uncertain regulations delay rebirth

But there are positive signs: we confidently await the return of normality.

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia

"Roll up! Roll up! Ladies and gentlemen: the circus is here!". Finally they've awoken, have understood that tourism is important, indeed vital, for our economy, and invite foreign tourists to visit our *Belpaese*, our 'Beautiful Country', without hindrance. But in making their omelette, the authorities have broken many eggs. The stubborn, entirely political and scientifically unjustified insistence on continuing to enforce curfews at 10 PM, the incredible closure of restaurants (which can only operate outdoors), and the continuation of colour coding are and will be de facto discouraging tourists, who will instead choose Greece, Croatia, Spain and other suitable destinations without such random, improvised rules. When you read this Focus, the curfew will almost certainly have been shifted by an hour or two, and perhaps restaurants will be permitted indoor lunches, but it will be too late. Pettiness has **ruined an entire tourist season and the resurgence of restaurants**. Even a few days' pro forma delay is enough to wreak havoc. And what if travellers from abroad arrive in areas which turn red or orange overnight? Will they be barricaded in their hotels? Extreme caution is justified: this virus is no joke and remains lethal. Yet **uncertainty doesn't solve the problem, but suffocates the economy and stokes social unrest**.

Verbs are all in the future tense: we will do, will open, will remove…

Verbs are all in the future tense: we will do, will open, will remove, will pay, will vaccinate. Speaking of vaccination, we can only marvel at what is happening. The Extraordinary Commissioner for the COVID emergency, the Alpine Brigades medal-studded three-star general **Francesco Paolo Figliuolo**, travels widely, inaugurates, invites, suggests, recommends, applies pressure, indicates roadmaps and is undoubtedly a capable person, but has almost negligible powers. **He has no authority over vaccine supplies**: types and quantities are determined elsewhere, and **his hands are tied over distribution**, overseen by regional governments and health districts which do as they please. Indeed, some regions' responses to his requests bring to mind **Rhett Butler**'s parting volley to **Scarlett O'Hara** in ***Gone with the Wind***: "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn!" So the **vaccination campaign** on which we pin our hopes **is a real disaster**. Thus far, Italy, with a population of 50 million adults, has slightly over 7 million vaccine recipients: barely 14%. Herd immunity is a long way away!

The Academy wants a calendar based on reliable scientific data

The Italian Academy of Cuisine vehemently, explicitly demands a calendar based on reliable, scientifically proven data rather than political posturing. Curfews unacceptably limit freedom and must be eliminated; restaurants must be opened for lunch and dinner, at any hour, indoors and outdoors, with legally prescribed precautions and rigorous checks. The predicted reopening in July, including indoor dining but only for lunch, is absurd and groundless. Grotesque scenes of restaurants and their customers being fined because a sudden squall forced everyone to finish their meals indoors (with social distancing) and of people banned from the lavatory "except where strictly necessary" are unacceptable. Citizens cannot be punished through complicated safe-conduct permits (known as 'green passes') whose validity is compromised by the system's inefficiencies. Two simple figures: currently, around 4 million have recovered, and approximately 7 million have been vaccinated, for a total of 11 million. What of the other 49 million Italians? All must be swabbed, including children, to get a 'pass'. The authorities fail to vaccinate, and the unvaccinated are blamed. Finally, **it's time to give up the useless regional colour game** which could bring the entire painstakingly assembled house of cards crashing down. **But let us dare prophesise**: all regions will soon turn yellow (it would be unthinkable for Sicily, Sardinia and Valle d'Aosta to stay orange all summer), rendering the 'passes' theoretical and useless. We optimistically await this: Italy, like the rest of the world, is itching to be reborn.

P.S. This month of May is important for the Academy: at the **General Assembly of Delegates**, to be held virtually on the 22nd, all central and territorial posts will expire and be up for renewal. Warmest and sincerest thanks go to the members of the President's Council, Academic Council, Board of Auditors, Arbitration Board and Franco Marenghi Study Centre, the Regional Coordinators, the Directors and members of the Regional Study Centres, and especially the Delegates and Legates who have kept Academicians united through these terribly difficult months. The event will be amply covered in the next issue of *Civiltà della Tavola*.

Charles Baudelaire's
ode to wine

by Giuseppe Benelli
Lunigiana Academician

The poet's 200th birthday provides the opportunity to remember that "wine speaks with its soul, in the spirit voice heard only by spirits".

The 200th birthday of the poet **Charles Baudelaire** (1821-1867) provides an occasion to recall the encomium of wine penned by the author of *The Flowers of Evil*. Baudelaire is the greatest modern poet to celebrate wine's virtues in counteracting 'spleen', meaning anguish, melancholia, boredom, inability to accept life. His difficulty conforming to 19th-century society simply indicated awareness of the depravity and mediocrity concealed under prim artifice. This context forms the backdrop for the conflict, or arguably, **the continuous metamorphosis between the spiritual and human visions of wine**.

Wine, absorbed into our innermost depths, has healing powers

The French poet dedicated an ode, in particular, to wine as a means of escapism and, at the same time, inspiration. Indignant about **Jean-Anthelme Brillat-Savarin**' definition of wine, in his *Physiology of Taste*, as "no more than a liquor derived from the fruit of the vine", Baudelaire affirmed that "If wine were to disappear from human production, I believe it would cause an absence, a failure in health and intellect, a void much more terrifying than all the recesses and the deviations for which wine is regarded as responsible". Wine, indeed, is absorbed into our innermost depths and has a curative, healing function; in any case **it can calm the worries and anxieties of a melancholic, solitary heart such as that of a poet** who frequently feels misplaced in his own time and in time itself. He adds: "The profound joys of wine, who amongst you has not known them? How true and burning is that second youth that man draws from it!". Hence Baudelaire's comprehensible suspicion of teetotallers: **"A man who will only drink water has a secret to hide from his fellow beings"**.
Inspired by the recommendations of the "divine **Hoffmann**", who went so far as to advocate changing wines according to the music to be composed, Baudelaire suggested that conscientious musicians drink Champagne when composing comic operas ("He will find there the frothy, light gaiety that the genre de-

mands"); Rhine or Jurançon wines for religious music ("As at the bottom of deep ideas, they hide an intoxicating bitterness"); and Burgundy wine for heroic music ("It has the serious passion and drive of patriotism"). He not only invokes wine as **"the mysterious god hidden in the fibres of the vine"**, but even claims to have heard its words, through its prisons of bottle and barrel, because wine speaks "…with its soul, in the spirit voice heard only by spirits".

All is tinged with fire and gold, heroism and cheer

So in *The Flowers of Evil* we find Baudelaire enveloped by the crowd, immersed in "a debauch of vitality", surrounded by newsboys, knife grinders and ragmen, where the magic of wine tinges everything with fire and gold, heroism and cheer. Particularly celebrated is the section of *Les Fleurs du Mal* entitled "Le Vin" ('Wine'), wherein the eternal conflict between love of life and the desire for annihilation finds its purest metaphor in the inebriation brought by wine. **In the poem *The Soul of Wine*, the wine announces its function of divine inspiration from within the bottle**: "Vegetal ambrosia, precious grain scattered / by the eternal Sower, I shall descend in you / so that from our love there will be born poetry, / which will spring up towards God like a rare flower!". Wine is the only means of escape from a sad and desolate life, but above all, **for Baudelaire it inspires art and creativity**. In *The Wine of Lovers*, the poet euphorically invites his paramour to "ride away on the wine" in the marvellous dream world: "Gently balanced upon the wings / of the intelligent whirlwind / in parallel ecstasy, / My sister, floating side by side, / We'll flee without ever stopping / To the paradise of my dreams!". Wine thus becomes a metaphor for the beauty of the woman, who is a flask of wine from which to drink, and a cupboard full of liqueurs, perfumes and wines. Upon seeing her, the poet has the same sensation as one who drinks a bitter and victorious wine of Bohemia.

In the essay *On Wine and Hashish*, Baudelaire credits wine with sharpening the will, the artist's "most precious organ", while hashish, by blunting it, is deemed "useless and damaging" to the creative individual. **The poet favours wine to celebrate personality, revive hope and elevate us towards infinity**. "Wine exalts the will; hashish destroys it. Wine is physically beneficial; hashish is a suicidal weapon. Wine makes us jovial and sociable; hashish isolates us. One, so to speak, is industrious; the other is essentially lazy.... Hashish belongs to the class of solitary pleasures; it is made for the miserable and the idle. Wine is useful and produces fruitful results. Hashish is useless and dangerous".

Wine is blood pulsing through our veins, invigorating the will, strengthening us; it has a 'personality' of its own; it is **a friend of humanity, struggling alongside us**. Whoever "drinks only milk" is, generally, mediocre, superficial, perhaps even evil. The effects of wine bind with the drinker's personality; wine runs in the depths of the soul, shedding light, allowing us to perceive the shadows. "The profound joys of wine, who amongst you has not known them? Whosoever has had a remorse to appease, a memory to evoke, a pain to drown, a chateau in Spain to build, you have all finally invoked it, mysterious hidden god in the fibres of the vine. How great are the spectacles of wine, illuminated by the inner sun! How true and burning is that second youth that man draws from it!".

"A god we shall create together, and we shall soar heavenwards"

One of Baudelaire's prose poems says: "So as not to feel the horrible burden of time that breaks your back and bends you to the earth, you have to be continually drunk. But on what? Wine, poetry or virtue, as you wish. But be drunk." **This union with wine is intimate enough to create a poem which elevates us to a superior state of being**: "A god we shall create together, and we shall soar heavenwards like birds, butterflies, spiderwebs, perfumes, and all winged things". For Baudelaire **"being drunk" does not mean physical "drunkenness"**, something which makes us lose control of reality and awareness of time, **but on the contrary is what allows us to seize reality**, rescuing us from feeling like "the martyred slaves of Time". Wine is the manifestation of the divine within the human, the essence of social interaction, always infused with positive connotations. "'Nothing equals the joy of the drinking man, if not the joy of the wine upon being drunk'. Wine plays an intimate part in human life - so intimate, indeed, that I would not be at all surprised if some enlightened soul, attracted by the pantheistic concept, were to attribute a kind of personality to it. Wine and man appear to me as two friendly wrestling-mates, forever in combat, and ever reconciled. The vanquished always embraces the victor".

Charles Baudelaire

Giuseppe Benelli

Throw some flowers in the pot!

by Roberto Zottar
Gorizia Delegate

Edible flowers are a feast not only for the eyes, but also for the palate.

Tired of washed-out, colourless food? It is spring, and we can benefit from **the flowers that have always played an important role in various cuisines**. A dish decorated with a pansy assumes another air, another colour, perfume and significance. We can also garnish dishes with nasturtium or velvety rose petals: edible flowers provide a feast not only for the eyes, but also for the palate. Borage tastes of watermelon; marigold (calendula) adds a subtle tang; the beautiful flowers of rocket add a peppery bite.
Cooking with flowers may seem a novelty, but it has a long history: the Chinese have used them for millennia; the Old Testament and the Qur'an recount some of the 'gastronomic' properties of certain flowers; and various traditions have not forgotten their presumed aphrodisiacal properties, exploited through jams, desserts and liqueurs. **The Romans used rose petals or violets to flavour food** or add aroma to wine, and Apicius, in his *De re coquinaria*, explained how to prepare a dish of 'roses with brains and eggs". While **Charlemagne infused his wine with delicate carnations**, in **Elizabethan England** primroses were appreciated in fruit salads, and the Victorians used roses in a wide variety of dishes; **in America, the Pilgrims used yellow marigolds to flavour meat broths**.

Many foods that we consider vegetables are in fact flowers: artichoke, broccoli, cabbage

Eating flowers may seem rather odd, but we have all eaten them, perhaps without being aware of it. Several foods that we consider vegetables are in fact flowers, including artichokes, broccoli and cabbage, while **capers are flower buds** and that plant's real fruits, also edible, are caperberries (*cucunci*). Salted dandelion buds are similar to capers.
Fresh, dried, salted or in infusion: there are many ways of using flowers in food and we are now witnessing a renaissance of this idea, such that some supermarkets sell pre-packed edible flowers. However, be careful before going into the garden to pick flowers! **Some flowers of common plants are**

poisonous, including tomato, aubergine, oleander, cyclamen, poinsettia and belladonna (deadly nightshade), which is also a hallucinogenic. Safe to eat, instead, are the flowers of acacia, yarrow, wild garlic, orange, borage, calendula (marigold), chamomile, honeysuckle, centaurea, chrysanthemum, dahlia, cornflower, carnation, jasmine, geranium, sunflower, wistaria, hibiscus (whence karkadè tea is also made), iris, lavender, lilac, magnolia, mallow, daisy, nasturtium, poppy, passiflora, peach, primrose, black locust, rose, elder, linden, clover, tulip, and pansy.

In risotto or fruit salad; fried or in salad

Gianfranco Vissani covers his risotto with 'pink flowers, peach blossoms' (quoting a famous Italian song by Lucio Battisti), while chef **Igles Corelli** prepares a lobster and elderflower salad and a dish of chicken with acacia flowers.
Fried courgette flowers, a recipe of Italian-Spanish origin, are a decadent finger food, crunchy on the outside and with a soft heart if stuffed with mozzarella and anchovies. They must simply be dipped in a batter of flour and icy water before being fried in oil.
Elderflowers or black locust flowers can also be fried, but are sweet: dipped in a batter of flour (ideally rice flour) and water, or flour and beer, they are fried in oil, sprinkled with sugar and eaten.
Pansies, fragrant and beautiful, can be used fresh or dried. They are versatile in the kitchen, whether in **seasonal salads** or **battered and fried**. They can also be candied and used as flavouring for ice cream.
Among the many floral cookery books, let us recall the whimsical tomes of **Italo Calvino**'s gardener, **Libereso Guglielmi**, who wrote *Mangiare il giardino* (*Eating the Garden*) and *Cucinare il giardino* (*Cooking the Garden*).
To paraphrase a well-known pacifist sentiment from the hippie 'flower children' of the 1960s, we could end by saying "Throw some flowers in the pot!": an appeal to cheerfulness and imagination which, these days, we certainly all need.

Roberto Zottar

PRIMROSE

Its name, from Latin 'first rose' (also *primula*, 'little first'), reveals that this is among the first flowers to appear in spring. Foodwise, it is the flowers that are mainly used in salads and soups, with meat or in omelettes; but its roots, rhizomes and leaves are also edible. Primrose flowers can yield an excellent jam and lend flavour to several sweets and vinegar. In some regional cuisines, the primrose-lettuce combination is a classic, as a salad which, eaten in the evening, facilitates restful and pleasant sleep. Indeed, primroses and their relatives, cowslips, also have many health benefits: root and rhizome are very rich in triterpene saponins, and have expectorant and mucolytic properties. Substances related to salicylic acid, primeverin and primulaverin, have analgesic, anti-inflammatory and anti-rheumatic properties. A decoction of the leaves exerts anti-spasmodic and sedative action and is therefore helpful against migraines.

DAISY

Also known as 'lawn daisy', this common flower can be harvested between March and June and may be dried and kept in glass jars. Flowering earlier than the marguerite or ox-eye daisy which blooms in May, the lawn daisy can be used in salads, but also complements risotto and soup. Its flowers are faintly bitter and stimulate diuresis and sweating, with a detoxifying effect: this action is best exploited by mixing daisies with other wild plants having the same property, such as dandelion, chicory or nettle.

Ginger and its many names

by Maurizia Debiaggi, *Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician*
and Anna Lanzani, *Buenos Aires Academician*

Ginger's millenarian history and culinary uses, present and future.

Ginger: is it love at first sight? Unlikely. But what an intriguing ingredient! We know the dense and spiced cake known as *pan pepato* ('pepper bread') and the medicinal properties of ginger infusions, but how much do we know about ginger, which occupies the humble end, in contrast with prized saffron, in the ranking of spices vying for a place at the table? Let us explore its history and culinary potential, present and future.

The West rediscovered the salutary properties of *zingiber officinale* some time ago, confirming what was already known for millennia farther east: its root, or more specifically rhizome, whether fresh or powdered, has **anti-inflammatory and digestive properties**. It has now been scientifically demonstrated that it **also has anti-oxidant and anti-coagulant properties**, and that it is 'heart-healthy', fights 'flu-like symptoms and contributes to lowering blood cholesterol.

Perusing ancient manuscripts, we realise that, having been appreciated in the west for its nutritional characteristics, **ginger then joined sugar and cinnamon in the riot of Renaissance flavours**.

But first things first.

Its first recorded reference is in the Analects attributed to Confucius

Known for at least seven millennia in what is now called south and south-east Asia, ginger made its first written appearance in the *Lun-yu*, the *Analects* attributed to **Confucius** (6th century BC) and gathered in the Warring States period. The text recommends eating it at every meal, but in moderation, to avoid raising the body's internal temperature excessively.

It was a relative latecomer, as spices go, in the Mediterranean, but it seems to have been known to the Romans by the 1st century BC. It was clearly known to **Pliny the Elder** (24-79 AD) and **Dioscorides** (40-90 AD), whose *De Materia Medica* describes its digestive, thermogenic and antidotal (anti-venom) properties.

In *De re coquinaria* (4th century AD), **Apicius** mentions ginger 14 times. It is not only an ingredient in meatballs, chicken and pork fillings, dressings for salad or peas, cold meats, roasts, pork belly or goat, but is also a protagonist of "seasoned salts

aiding digestion", able to "fight every ill", demonstrating how the ancient Romans already considered it a panacea for health.

It appears under multiple names in mediaeval cookbooks

Ginger reappears **at the dawn of the Middle Ages** in the splendid (and sadly, little-known) *De Observatione Ciborum* by the Byzantine physician **Anthimus**: a dietary treatise addressed to the Frankish king **Theodoric the Great** to convince him to adopt healthier food habits and a more varied, less bland cuisine: "Hare, ideally young, combats diarrhoea with a sauce of sweet pepper, cloves, lavender and ***gingiber***".

Under the name ***zinzebre***, 'our hero' reappears in the *Liber de Coquina*, the fountainhead of all mediaeval European cookbooks, probably composed at the court of **Frederick II**. It is only mentioned once (though the manuscript that has survived to our day is a later copy of the presumed original, and has parts missing), in a memorable recipe for **sweets filled with fried apples, walnuts, raisins and figs**.

Shortly thereafter, the anonymous Tuscan author of the *Libro della cocina* (*Book of Cookery*) suggests ***zenzovo*** in 4 recipes: **chicken broth, *savori*** (flavourings) **for roasts, fried chicken, and even blancmange**, the 'flagship dessert' of mediaeval cuisine. The anonymous Venetian author of the *Libro per cuoco* (*Cook's Book*) mentions it 34 times, calling it ***zenzevro***, in **sauces to accompany meats**, "*nel brodo de polasto, nel pastero de carne de porcho e nelle 'Specie fine a tute cosse'*" ('in chicken broth, in pork meatloaf and in 'fine spices for all things' - a sort of mediaeval curry powder).

In 1431, the German cook **Johannes de Buckenheim**, in the service of **Pope Martin V**, described in his kitchen notebook, the *Registrum Coquine* (another little-known 'pearl' which is a joy to read), a "*polastro pro italicis*" (chicken for Italians), a chicken and pigeon timbale flavoured with cinnamon, 'good green spices', raw eggs and ***zinsibere***.

Barely a generation later, the innovator **Maestro Martino da Como** (*De arte coquinaria*) mentioned ***zenzevero*** forty-five times in cakes, sauces and soups. Worth trying are his **mixed meat and cheese ravioli with ground spices and ginger**, "no larger than a chestnut". In the same period, **Bartolomeo Sacchi**, known as Platina, included ginger, which "aids the liver and those with an ache or fatigue of the heart", in "yellow fare", a sort of thick and greasy chicken broth flavoured with sugar and cinnamon.

At the height of the Renaissance, Cristoforo da Messisbugo, in service to the house of Este, mentioned ***gengevro*** 13 times, not only as a **filling of "medium or small dumplings"** perfumed with rosewater, but also in **sweet cakes of chicken, fava beans or artichokes**, cinnamon-flavoured meatballs and *savori* (seasonings), and with mushrooms, fish dumplings, broths, soups and *potaggi* (potages).

Artusi finally called it by its current name

The centuries passed, and while food was reorganised along a duality of 'sweet vs savoury', little space remained for the pungent notes of ginger, which did not fit well into this dichotomy. In 1773 **Vincenzo Corrado**, a gentleman-in-waiting to the king of the Two Sicilies and a paladin and great compiler of Neapolitan cuisine, **included only one *zenzaro* recipe in his wide-ranging opus**: "*salsiccioni di Bologna*" ('large Bologna sausages'), a very aromatic, air-cured and smoked preparation. Slightly over a century later, **Artusi** referred to ***zenzero*** (finally using the modern Italian word for it) only once: in a *caciucco* (fish soup), "that I learned in Viareggio… far less flavoursome than the previous recipe, but lighter and more digestible".

We would have to wait until the 1970s before ginger became mainstream again, as new gastronomic paradigms arose, including ***nouvelle cuisine*** and **healthy-eating models, cognisant of nutritional science and beneficial ingredients**.

Ginger made a comeback in Italy through the creativity of great chefs

Ginger thus managed to 'reconquer' Italian cuisine amid a creative rediscovery by great chefs. Examples that cannot be overlooked include **Carlo Cracco's rice with Szechuan pepper, ginger and pink pepper**, **or his creamy ginger and cocoa risotto** with offal ragout and peas; and we can only applaud the flair of **Massimiliano Alajmo** who created **ginger essential oil** to spray over prawns with pistachio and orange. Among many other examples, we end with the unforgettable **Gualtiero Marchesi**, who used ginger in his **scallop salad** and in the stuffing of the acclaimed and revolutionary **open raviolo**. It's a long road from here to taking ginger into the pantries of average Italians alongside their traditional aromatic herbs and saffron, but we hope that, as in other European cuisines, ginger will gain popularity: perhaps even the ginger grown in Ragusa!

Maurizia Debiaggi, Anna Lanzani

Cioppino in San Francisco

by Claudio Tarchi
San Francisco Delegate

A recipe inspired by the Sicilian mother of the famous restaurateur Al Scoma.

2020 marked the hundredth birthday of the **legendary San Francisco restaurateur Al Scoma**, who passed away in 2007.
Born in Oakland, a city in the San Francisco Bay Area, he had a vocation for work from a young age: he sold newspapers and flowers in San Francisco's Little Italy and later was a municipal health inspector, an occupation which gave him a chance to become acquainted with many restaurants and bars in the city.
In 1965, he and his brother Joe began operating a small bar with six stools at Pier 47 of the famous Fisherman Wharf, initially serving breakfast to fishermen returning from night fishing. Next he transformed the bar into a restaurant with a capacity exceeding 300, **eventually a historic reference point in the city and nationwide**. For decades, Scoma's has been among the major independent restaurants in the USA, with over 400,000 meals served and a revenue surpassing 10 million dollars!

Scoma's may well have been the first restaurant in the USA with a 'pier-to-table' menu

In the 1990s, Scoma's may well have been the first restaurant in the USA to establish a 'pier-to-table' menu. With its own boat, the restaurant still fishes in the Bay and along the coast, returning to the pier with the day's catch. **Customers can view the catch being unloaded and directly delivered to the cooks in the kitchen**.
The restaurant, frequented by locals, tourists and many celebrities, prepares a dish which seems to have been inspired by Scoma's mother, who had Sicilian roots: he chose to call it "**Lazy Man's Cioppino**".
Little remains of the *cacciucco* from Livorno and Viareggio and the *ciupin* from Genoa, but while Thanksgiving is celebrated in the USA with gargantuan turkeys, in San Francisco the cioppino is boss.

THE RECIPE

Ingredients: ***sliced cod, clams, mussels, squid (those of nearby Monterey are famous), prawns (with heads and shells), scallops, steamed crab meat (the SF Bay is famed for it) salt, Sicilian origano (Al said it made all the difference), tomato purée, clam broth.***

Preparation: ***pour the tomato purée into a hot saucepan; after 5 minutes add the clam broth. Cook for another 5 minutes or until it starts boiling. Add the cod, scallops, clams, mussels, squid and finally prawns. Cook no more than another 10 minutes. Taste for salt; add generous origano. Serve in a terrine with a heap of fresh crabmeat and 2 slices of toasted sourdough (the naturally leavened bread of the old-time gold prospectors).***