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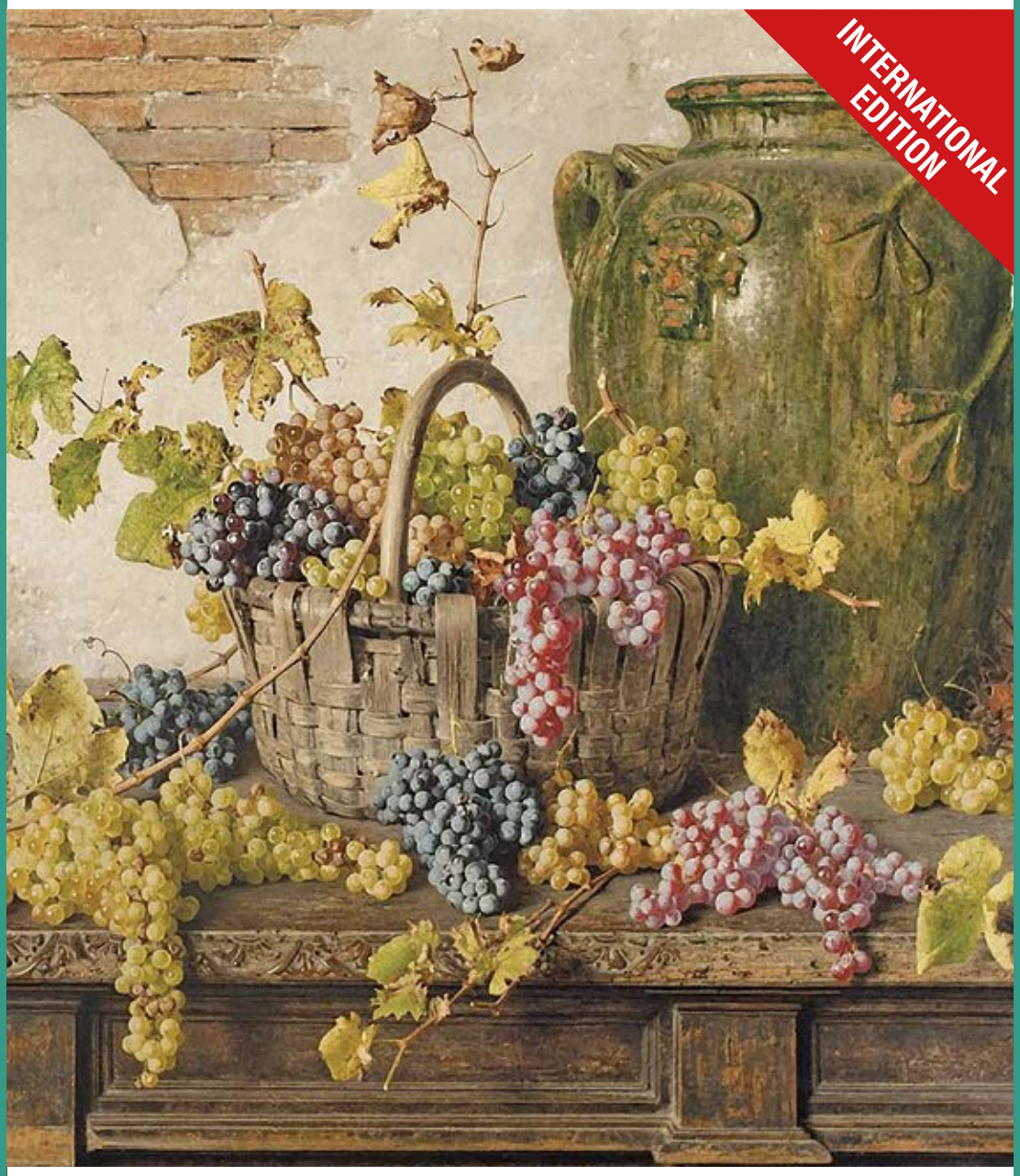

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***On the cover:*** *graphic elaboration of Basket of Grapes (1916) by Giorgio Lucchesi; private collection*

## Focus of the President

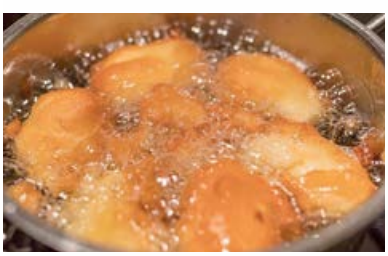


## Traditions • History



## Cuisine • Products • Food Technology







# Restaurants reopen, but some *problems continue to plague them*

**by Paolo Petroni**
*President of the Accademia*

*Among others, that of questionable service, often verging on the indecorous.*

All in all, it has been a reasonable summer for Academic activities; convivial gatherings have been frequent and well attended, both in Italy and abroad. A new hope is in the air, alongside the desire to meet again. Pleasant weather has facilitated outdoor dining, and vaccinations and the 'green passes' which they confer have permitted a steady influx of customers even to restaurants in cities without outdoor seating arrangements. Tourism has been lively, even unexpectedly so in some areas, and seaside or island locations have drawn crowds. Some restaurants have suffered the absence of large gatherings of friends and families, because most groups will include someone who, for one reason or another, has no 'green pass', hence the preference for outdoor dining while the weather allows it. By and large, however, the summer has ended rather well.

*Masked waiters scrambling to bring dishes, with no human rapport*

However, restaurants in general **have three problems nowadays**. Firstly there are restaurant **closures and sales**. Some tourist destinations admittedly had rather too many venues, calibrated for a huge stream of tourists which is gone, not to return for many months. Telecommuting has also emptied bars and casual restaurants dependent on quick employee lunches. We shall soon observe the effects of such developments, partly thanks to an upcoming survey of restaurants reviewed in our guide. Secondly, there has been a subtle but noticeable and sometimes considerable **increase in prices**, with no rationale other than to compensate for earnings lost during the various lockdowns. Lastly, there has been a **'flattening' of restaurants' offerings**, of the dishes available and of average food quality, often caused by overcrowding among diners. But the **lacklustre service**, which has always been among the weak points of restaurants in Italy, **has manifestly worsened**, often plunging to the lower limits of decorum. Hapless masked waiters scramble to deliver dishes, without any human rapport or knowledge of what food they are serving, and then disappear when they are most needed, don't notice when water or wine should be replenished, or, having been asked for salt, only bring it at the end of a meal. Hired with no regard for professionalism, they need only be cheap, since they count for nothing. Perceiving this, they experience their work as frustrating, bereft of satisfaction or prospects. Huge mistake! Restaurants survive, in part, thanks to their wait staff: encountering someone who remembers our face, knows our preferences, and is solicitous in making our time at the table as enjoyable as possible changes the atmosphere of a restaurant, making it markedly more pleasant.

*Livia and Alfonso Iaccarino*

*Customers are guests, and must be treated as such by true restaurateurs*

The importance of good service in a restaurant renowned for its cuisine is distilled most effectively in a recent interview with **Livia Iaccarino**, wife of **Alfonso** and mother of **Ernesto**, both chefs at the celebrated boutique hotel and restaurant **Don Alfonso 1890** in Sant'Agata sui due Golfi, a Relais & Chateaux property with two Michelin stars also awarded the status of 'Magnifico' by the President of the Academy. She said: *"I'm never in the kitchen, but my smile is worth as much as a great chef"*. She further explained: "*I talk to all the diners: I am like the hostess who awaits and welcomes every guest, and I stay late and see them all off*". There you have it: customers are guests; paying guests, but nonetheless guests, who must be treated as such by a true restaurateur.

# Hemingway, Italy, and its cuisine

**by Roberto Pirino**
*Albenga and Ponente Ligure Delegate*

*Remembering a writer in love with life and with Italy.*


**Hemingway** was in love with life - so much so that he wanted to breathe it in at every moment, on every continent. As a youth, he set sail from the United States of America **to volunteer for the Great War in Italy**, expressing his courage and heroism among the karst mountains of Friuli and the Veneto, where he was wounded several times and which he never forgot. Neither, surely, did he forget Venice, where he set his most melancholic and crepuscular work, *Across the River and Into the Trees*, which many literary critics failed to understand, though it potently anticipated themes which are well-known today.

*He loved Liguria and Venice, where he frequented Harry's Bar*

And he certainly never forgot Liguria, appreciating its colours and fragrances, which, alas, he was unable to render in writing, being by then too close to that morning of 2 July 1961, when he crossed into the great beyond. **60 years later, we still remember him in Alassio, where he signed one of the tiles of the famous *Muretto***, a wall signed by many illustrious personages. In Venice, he took refuge from the cold winter winds and sudden, intense heat waves which then plagued the city by repairing to Harry's Bar. Its founder, **Giuseppe Cipriani**, father of the current owner **Arrigo**, was a close friend of "Papa", as Hemingway was affectionately known.
It is said that **his favourite wines were Capri white and Valpolicella red**. In Alassio he may have been offered Pigato, the dry white wine typical of western Liguria.

*His food preferences were simple, almost rustic*

His food preferences were simple, almost rustic, and **in this, Liguria and Venice could amply satisfy him**. Fresh catch, game, vegetables and country soups were excellent representatives of the typical Italian flair for respecting raw materials and shaping them into art. Back then, in the 1950s, a rabbit casserole may have been a good Ligurian dish to offer him, with local Vessalico garlic and Taggiasca (Cailleter) olives, onion, bay leaves, thyme and rosemary.
In Venice he is remembered eating ducks and other waterfowl from the lagoon at the Locanda Cipriani on Torcello island alongside his friend Giuseppe, **veal Marsala and butter-sautéed cauliflower in the dining hall of the Gritti Hotel**, and local walnuts and dried figs washed down with Prosecco at Harry's Bar. Simple thoughts: how pleasant it is to imagine Hemingway, glass in hand, seated watching the horizon while awaiting his next adventure. This is our loveliest memory of this author whose every written work expressed that desire for liberty which rendered him immortal.

# New cooking techniques:
## *frying in sugar*

**by Roberto Zottar**
*Gorizia Delegate*

*Discovering the incredible ingredient for crunchy, healthy, grease-free frying.*

Few cooking methods are as gratifying as frying, whether for meat, fish, vegetables, fruit or desserts. What makes fried food so irresistible is its crunchy, golden crust which seals in its fragrance and juices. However, fried foods can also be hazardous to health because they are high in fat and calories. We might therefore wonder if there are alternative frying methods; but before answering we must first **explore the characteristics of immersion cooking**, of which there are two categories: immersion in watery liquids, or in fats. Let us disregard the first, encompassing stewed, boiled and, to a degree, braised foods, as their cooking temperature reaches 100°C at the most (apart from minor variations depending on local air pressure or dissolved salt content) and hence cannot produce a 'fried' effect.

### *High-temperature fat frying allows crust formation*

Fat immersion, however, allows higher temperatures which can produce a 'frying' effect. Oils or other fats used in frying often reach and maintain temperatures **between 160°C and 180°C**, with several important results. When encoun-

tering a liquid far hotter than the temperature at which water evaporates, food surfaces dry rapidly, **forming a crust**, often crunchy. This **prevents liquids from leaving the food, which consequently stays moist inside but externally dry**. In French cuisine, this high-temperature, crust-forming browning technique is called *cuisson par échange*, 'exchange cooking', since it allows an exchange of liquids and dissolved substances between the food and the cooking fluid. Its most characteristic aspect is **Maillard's reaction**: in a nutshell, when exceeding 140°C, proteins and carbohydrates break down into smaller elements which then recombine into a large variety of molecules, many of which are aromatic compounds which are pleasurable and highly prized in food. This explains, inter alia, the fragrance of roasted coffee or freshly baked bread, and the sudden aromatic changes when we cook a steak. The Maillard reaction, perhaps the most important chemical reaction in the realm of cooking, explains the success of fried, roasted or grilled food: it begins, as explained, above 140°C and is optimal around 160°C, creating the golden or browned appearance and flavour typical of cooked food, and making food more attractive to the eye, nose and palate. Obviously we mustn't go overboard in this endeavour, lest we burn our food.

*Molecular gastronomy has investigated sugar as an alternative cooking substrate*

To answer the initial question and reproduce the effect of fat frying, we must find an alternative cooking liquid which, **through immersion, allows foods to achieve and maintain temperatures above 140°C**.

'Modern' cuisine, based on **new techniques applying the physical and chemical principles used in gastronomy** and which is often dubbed 'molecular', has investigated sugar as an alternative cooking substrate.

Not common table sugar, sucrose, which is unsuitable because it melts at high temperatures but then quickly caramelises. **Suitable sugars for frying are the simpler ones called monosaccharides**, for example, **glucose (or dextrose) and fructose**. 'Simple' means, literally, that they **cannot be further broken down** into yet simpler sugars; hence they are called monosaccharides ('single sugar'). In the case of glucose, its melting and caramelisation temperatures make it ideal for frying: it melts between 146 and 150°C, permitting Maillard's reaction, and only caramelises above 190°C. Glucose, known to laypeople more for its biological functions in the human body than its gastronomic uses, is widely employed for making pastry and ice cream. Sugars create a fermentable substrate for yeasts and bacteria, delay gelatinisation of starches and interfere with gluten formation (which is important for making shortcrust pastry); by changing the freezing temperature of water, they also allow for softer ice creams and sorbets. Glucose and fructose are reducing sugars (they reduce oxidation) and highly water-soluble; they can keep

cakes moist and favour oven-browning, preventing unwanted crystallisation of sucrose in icings.

## What sugar?

If **fructose is the sweetest sugar**, up to 70% sweeter than sucrose weight for weight, **glucose is about 30% less sweet than sucrose**; this is helpful for making sweets that should remain soft and for enhancing the flavour of fruit without oversweetening.
Traditional recipes often used honey, which contains glucose and fructose, and some restaurants continue the tradition of honey-roasting. Alternatively, glucose was obtained by adding cream of tartar, which is acidic, to sugar: its acidity separated the sucrose into its components, glucose and fructose, yielding what is known as 'inverted sugar'.
**For frying, we should use powdered glucose**, deprived of water, rather than glucose syrup, whose excessive water content lowers its boiling point, hindering Maillard's reaction.
Powdered, or anhydrous ('lacking water'), glucose is **a natural sugar extracted from grapes, perfect for frying** both sweet and savoury foods, easily obtained in chemist's or specialised bakers' shops.

## How to fry with powdered glucose

Let us now turn to the method of frying in powdered glucose. It should be heated in a pan, stirring gently and continuously until it melts. **At 160°C, it will be fully liquefied** and transparent. Foods can now be **immersed in it for frying**: keep stirring until they are golden-brown. Using a cooking thermometer, make sure that **the temperature does not exceed 190°C, when the glucose will caramelise** and emit smoke. Its extraordinary viscosity **prevents it from seeping into foods**, unlike fats, forming a protective layer around them, while also **keeping moisture inside foods being fried**, which consequently remain soft and juicy. Glucose conducts heat better than oil, thereby **reducing frying times**. Two minutes after immersion, check the frying food's internal temperature: once it reaches approximately 50°C, the food is cooked (and fried) to perfection.
Glucose-fried foods will be plumper due to the internal evaporation of water. Once they are ready, remove them with a slotted spoon and place them on a rack: this way, their fragrance will remain more intense than for traditionally fried foods.

## Suitable for both sweet and savoury foods, this method produces no fried oil smell

This frying method can be used for both sweet and savoury foods: for sweets, the surface glucose will add a layer of toothsome flavour and crunch, while **savoury foods such as meat or fish can be wrapped in leaves** (e.g. lettuce, cabbage, leek, pumpkin flowers etc) **to prevent direct contact with the frying sugar**.
Frying in simple sugars instead of oil can still be termed 'frying' because it produces the Maillard reaction; indeed, molecular gastronomy textbooks call it '**absolute frying**'. Anhydrous glucose frying is also ecologically preferable. **Sugar breaks down even after cooking, while spent oil remains harmful** for a long time even though both are biodegradable: the difference is in degree of toxicity and speed of breakdown.
You may not have noticed, but many starred restaurants, and not only purveyors of molecular gastronomy, have long since adopted anhydrous sugar frying. We can end by pointing out that molten glucose frying is also neighbourly, since it spares neighbours the lingering smells produced by deep-fat frying!

**Roberto Zottar**

# Cooking 'under wraps'

**by Giancarlo Burri**
*Padua Academician*

*Rediscovering a simple and healthy cooking method.*

Delicate, flavoursome, diet-friendly and, why not, even picturesque. A cooking technique with all these prized qualities is hard to find, yet one that encompasses them all has been practically banished and forgotten because of increasingly hegemonic minimalist cooking in restaurants and the desire for quick and easy methods at home. Why not rehabilitate it, especially since the ardently desired return of conviviality and social interaction is on the horizon after the heavy restrictions necessitated by the coronavirus emergency?

**Cooking food within a wrapping**, whether of metal, paper or other vegetable matter, **is a technique with very ancient origins**. The ancient Greeks, for instance, often cooked eels wrapped in chard, and mackerel in fig leaves.

The Longobards (Lombards) had the custom of embellishing food presented at aristocratic banquets by serving it wrapped in precious gold leaf, while **chefs in the 16th and 17th centuries often used wrapped baking to finish particularly elaborate preparations**, such as tuna "wrapped in paper and cooked under the embers, served with lemon juice and crushed pepper, with delicious results", by **Bartolomeo Stefani** (*The Art of Good Cooking*, 1662).

**Many leaves are used, even today, in**

**'wrapped cooking**' throughout the world: banana leaves in the Philippines, Indonesia and Polynesia; agave, maize or avocado leaves in Mexico and Guatemala; and vine leaves in Lebanon and Greece. The food can be steamed or baked in an oven or underground, heated by stones.

*The wrapping is there to keep food soft and moist*

The wrapping is there to keep the food soft and moist, through a type of convection whereby the moisture within the food, upon reaching the right temperature, forms vapour which cooks the food, releasing fats and aromatic substances while preventing drying and flavour dispersal: in essence, **the food quickly cooks in its own juices because it is surrounded by humid heat**. It is prudent, when cooking in this manner, to leave some space between the food and its wrapping, thereby allowing vapour to circulate sufficiently.

**Besides being fast and easy, wrapped cooking is also among the healthiest cooking methods** as it greatly limits the loss and alteration of minerals and vitamins while **reducing or eliminating the need for cooking fat**, lowering calories, which is helpful for dieters.

*What materials can be used as culinary wrappings?*

Firstly, **baking paper**, derived from the older parchment, is cheap and rather heat-resistant, normally **retaining its integrity until 220°C**, beyond which it could begin falling apart: hence the common warning on its packaging against use above 220 degrees. Moistening it with water will prevent it from browning. To contain food completely, the wrapping should be thrice its width and twice its length, and can be made watertight by sealing it shut with egg white or a flour and water 'glue'.

**The most recommended 'wrapped cooking' method is oven-baking**, taking care not to place the parcel directly on the oven grill but rather on a baking sheet or tin to catch possible drips. An interesting British publication by **Vera, Countess Serkoff** *(Paper Bag Cookery*, 1911) provides much useful advice for cooking in a paper wrapping, as well as interesting meat, fish and vegetable recipes.

For **cooking on a hot plate or grill or under ash**, the most suitable wrapping is **aluminium foil**, which is malleable and easily sealed; food should face the dull side to limit oxidation. One should remember that very salty or acidic (e.g. with lemon or vinegar) contents might react unpleasantly with the metal, causing altered fragrance and colour. Also, since insufficiently moist foods might stick to the wrapping during cooking, the foil may have to be preventively greased.

*Innovative and practical, Fata ('fairy') paper also comes in convenient bag form*

Innovative and practical, ***Fata*** ('fairy') cooking **paper**, invented by the Veronese chef **Fabio Tacchella** and sold since 2004, resists not only high temperatures (up to 230°C for its professional version) but also very low ones (until -30°C). Convenient, sealable pre-formed ***Fata* bags** of the same material also permit high-temperature vacuum cooking. For die-hard 'green cuisine' aficionados, **wraps can be fashioned from outer cabbage leaves**, the large outer layers of **leeks** or tender **vine leaves**, blanched in boiling water: delicate, and edible too! Why not refresh our memory and skills by revisiting one of the many delectable classic recipes for parcel-cooked fish, vegetables or meat? Brought straight to the table, these delicious little packets release a surprising symphony of aromas and flavours which will delightfully envelop us the moment we unwrap them.

**Giancarlo Burri**