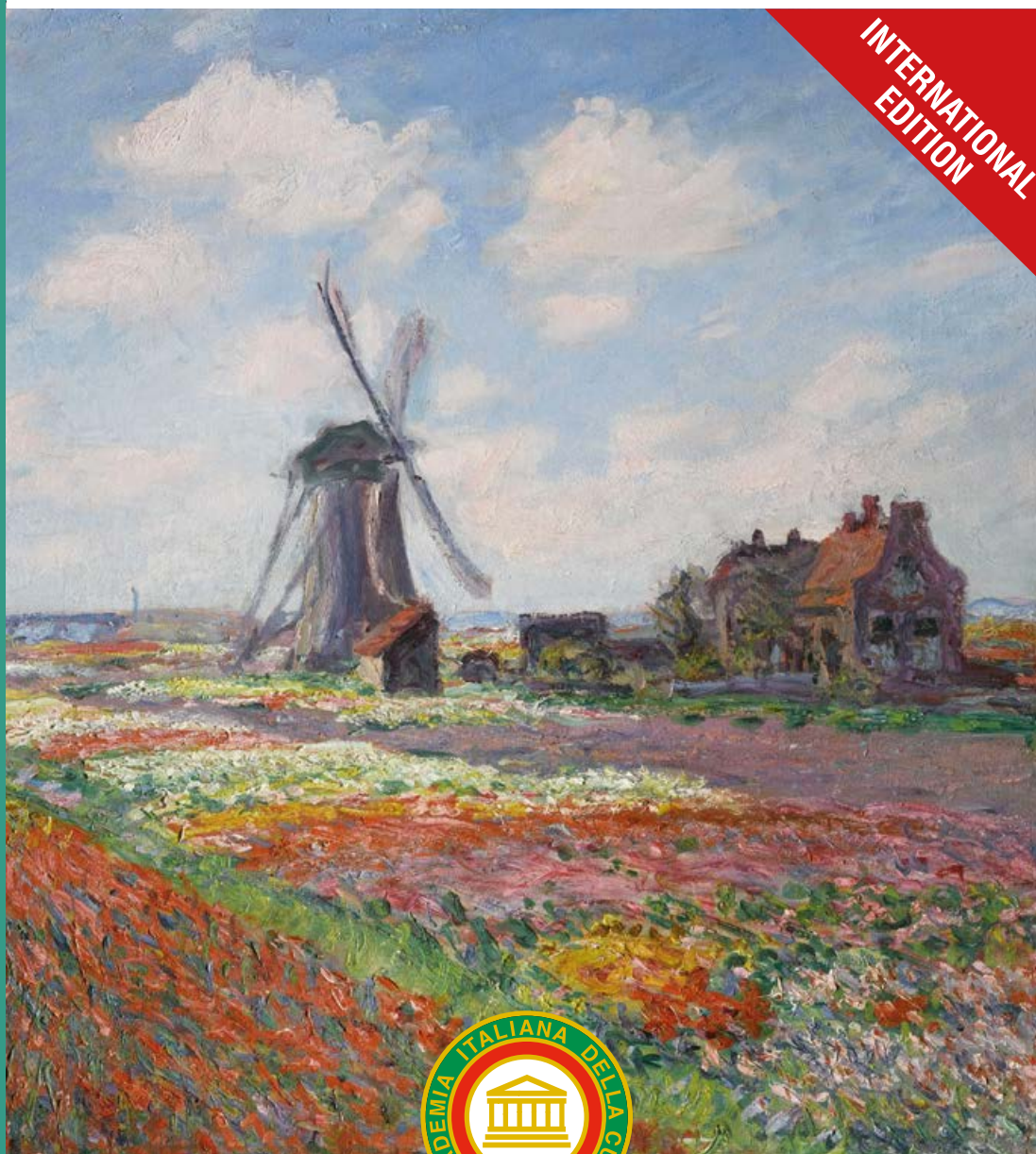


CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL
EDITION



ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
ISTITUZIONE CULTURALE DELLA REPUBBLICA ITALIANA
FONDATA NEL 1953 DA ORIO VERGANI

The President of the Italian Republic Sergio Mattarella meets the Academy



The President's Council. From the left: Dino Betti van der Noot, Roberto Ariani, Mimmo D'Alessio, Marinella Curre, the President Mattarella, Paolo Petroni, Maurizio Fazzari, Ugo Serra, Alessandro di Giovanni, Renzo Rizzi

On the occasion of the Academy's seventieth anniversary this past 29 March, the President's Council was received by the Italian President, **Sergio Mattarella**, at the Quirinal Palace, his official residence. After introducing each member of the Council to the Head of State, President **Paolo Petroni** gave a detailed account of how the Academy's activities through its Delegations and Legations have supported Italian food culture in recent years.

President Mattarella **warmly praised** what we are doing, emphasising the importance of cuisine for tourism and Italy's international image. **He then conversed with each member of the Council.** The Head of State was then given two Academy publications: *I menu del Quirinale* (*Menus from the Quirinal Palace*) and *History of Italian Cuisine in Comics*, which has been translated into eight languages. Mattarella, who has always been especially sensitive to the issues of youth and education, greatly appreciated our publications.

In a particularly moving moment, President Mattarella was given a **commemorative plaque** reproducing two pages of our members' roster: one from the Palermo Mondello Delegation, where his wife, **Maria Luisa Chiazzese Mattarella**, was enrolled in 2005, and one from the Roma Eur Delegation, whose members in 2006 included his sister, **Marinella Mattarella Adragna**. Both have since passed away.

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DALLE ROSE, MICHELE GUIDO FRANCI, GIANNI MAZZOCCHI
BASTONI, ARNOLDO MONDADORI, ATTILIO NAVA,
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The new recipe for *ragù alla bolognese* has been registered with the Chamber of Commerce

*An iconic recipe
of Italian cuisine requested
by over 3000 enthusiasts worldwide.*

Particularly important among our Delegations' many activities is **protecting traditional recipes** through historical and cultural study and registering them with notaries' offices or public entities such as Chambers of Commerce. This was pioneered by the Bologna Delegation which long ago, on 7 December 1974, established and registered the 'traditional and classic filling for the authentic tortellini of Bologna' with the Bologna Chamber of Commerce alongside the Dotta Confraternita del Tortellino (Learned Brotherhood of the Tortellino). That recipe was a milestone and remains a crucial reference point. Later, in 1982, the Bologna Delegation, founded in 1956, researched and registered the traditional recipe for true '*Ragù alla bolognese*' for the first time. Over the years, that recipe appeared in books, magazines, newspaper articles and websites in Italy and worldwide, becoming firmly and clearly established. The Academy's headquarters has also received **over 3000 requests from all over the world** for the recipe!

*The three Delegations from Bologna have
constituted a 'Study Committee'*

Today, 40 years later, the firstborn Bologna Delegation has been joined by those of Bologna dei Bentivoglio in 1995 and Bologna-San Luca in 2002. Together they have created a '**Study Committee**' to perfect and update the Bolognese *ragù* recipe. **After four decades, indeed, it became necessary to learn about the modifications** added over the years to this representative Italian dish, beloved the world over. Ingredients and the quality of cooking vessels and heat sources have been improved, and changing food habits have also partially influenced the preparation of *ragù*. Bologna's best restaurants, guardians of tried and tested recipes, as well as long-standing families and food experts were sent a specially designed questionnaire to **obtain an updated and comprehensive panorama of the dish in question.**

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia



A new ragù recipe for 2023

After conscientiously synthesising these data, the Committee drafted a new *ragù alla bolognese* recipe for 2023, **with very detailed instructions as well as variants and suggestions**, depositing it on 20 April with the Bologna Chamber of Commerce (recipe on the inside back cover).

We wish to specify that, similarly to all recipes with a long history, *ragù alla bolognese* is prepared in many different ways by families and restaurants, as demonstrated by the fact that the recipes we received while undertaking our study all differed, sometimes in small details but occasionally in more substantial ways. **The goal of providing a certified recipe is neither to present it as the only possibility nor to calcify our cuisine, but simply to offer a reliable blueprint for preparing an excellent dish while respecting tradition and establishing some firm guidelines.**

Then, as with musical scores, the true art lies in execution.



Cricket flour: *fad or necessity?*

by Maurizia Debiaggi

Singapore-Malaysia-Indonesia Academician

The most fiercely debated, controversial topic of recent months.

A new type of food frightens and fascinates Europeans in equal measure: cricket flour. The EU has authorised the sale of products using cricket (*Acheta domesticus*) flour from January 2023, making this the past few months' most controversial and fiercely debated subject. **The cricket is not, in fact, the only insect permitted for food use by the EU:** so are lesser mealworm larvae (*Alphitobus diaperinus*), migratory locusts (*Locusta migratoria*) and yellow mealworm larvae (*Tenebrio molitor*), all to be sold frozen, dried or in paste form.

It's a necessity, applaud the satisfied sustainability advocates. **It's a fad**, maintain the worried proponents of food sovereignty.

If, however, *in medio stat virtus*, let us try to reason about such ingredients by asking a few questions: **is all this fuss justified? Why sell them? Are they safe to eat?**

*Possible answers
to many questions*

A substantial hurdle hindering European acceptance of 'novel food' is cultural: we are squeamish about insects. Many, indeed, infest our crops, drink our blood or infect us; we associate them with poor hygiene and can't bear to find them in our homes, let alone our plates! Insects as food represent, how-



ever, a long-standing tradition in many Latin American countries and some regions of Africa and Asia, including **Japan**, famed for its culinary refinement. A traditional dish in some inland and mountainous areas is *inago no tsukudani*, consisting of **locusts boiled in soya sauce and sugar**. Furthermore, though it is a **'forbidden' cheese**, we cannot overlook the popularity in **Sardinia of casu marzu**, the famous 'walking cheese' infested by cheese fly larvae. According to legend, *casu marzu* was created when a poor peasant forgot a wheel of *pecorino* sheep's cheese outside where it was preyed upon by insects; having nothing else to assuage his hunger, he tasted the cheese and appreciated its potent, pungent flavour, thereby making a virtue of necessity. Close 'relatives' of *casu marzu* ('rotten cheese') exist in other Italian regions, including *furmai nis*, the maggot-infested *robiola* of the Piacenza area; the Piedmontese *bross ch'a marcia*; the *salterello* from Friuli; or the *cace fraceche* or *marcetto* ('little rotter') from Abruzzo, whose name transparently reveals its nature!

In Italy, the production and sale of cheeses fermented by fly larvae is now illegal, even though on the 1st of January 2018 the European Community approved the regulation of 'novel food' which governs the sale of insects as food.

They are still made by small, family-run cheese workshops, however, demonstrating **our local entomophagous traditions and the disproportion of such alarmism surrounding our food customs**.

Regarding **commercial feasibility**, we rely on studies by the Food and Agricultural Organisation, according to which edible insects have **high nutritional value** and can usefully be integrated into the human diet. They provide energy, fats, protein and fibre, and can also, depending on the insect, be good sources of such micronutrients as calcium, zinc and iron. *A perfect food, apparently!* Again according to the FAO, **insect husbandry provides ecological advantages** because its greenhouse gas emissions and water and land requirements are far



inferior to those of livestock rearing. And there's more. Crickets, for instance, require 12 times less food than cattle to produce the same amount of protein: though tiny, they convert their food into protein with amazing efficiency!

Cricket rearing and food safety

Let us now consider food safety. Commercially raised insects **are not identical to their wild cousins hopping about the countryside** or hiding in our homes, but grow under controlled artificial conditions. In December 2020, **the FAO published detailed criteria for insect breeding**. Even in such places as Thailand, China or Indonesia, with a thriving and profitable insect market, crickets are bred **in dedicated areas**, easy to clean, with constantly monitored humidity and temperature, and even protected by mosquito nets to prevent entry by other insects. These methods

minimise the risk of microbial contamination which may cause diseases, keeping the crickets as safe as any other livestock animal. To produce cricket flour, they are frozen, thawed, dried and pulverised according to a technique evaluated and approved by the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA). So, no fear of mycotoxins, heavy metals or pesticides!

According to another authoritative source, the Veronesi Foundation, the only problem created by cricket flour could be that the chitin in crickets' exoskeletons could sometimes provoke serious allergic reactions; this also applies to many other arthropods, including lobsters, crabs and prawns.

A final question: is our land of fine dining and the Mediterranean Diet ready for this breakthrough? We await cricket crackers, bread and pasta to sample: perhaps, like that Sardinian farmer, we'll find them delicious and welcome them into our 'new menu'!

Maurizia Debiaggi



Savoury sorcery

by **Elisabetta Cocito**
Turin Academician

Dainty savoury pastry creations with subtly blended flavours.

A magic trick, but also a word game. **Preparing savoury pastries requires the ability**, as if by magic, to make dainty creations emulating the shapes of their sweet counterparts, thereby visually impressing observers while also increasing their creators' prestige. If the illusionist's art is woven, indeed, from illusions, the pastry chef's is a physical reality, however swiftly they may be magicked away by our hands and mouths.

Savoury pastries are now outselling sweet ones

Savoury pastry has established itself in recent years as **a major food trend**, to the point of becoming a crucial attraction for many businesses whose creations use

a plethora of cutting-edge pastry-making, baking and cooking techniques. Business obviously depends on attracting buyers, of whom there are more than for sweet pastries. The latter generally have more limited consumption times and occasions, while **savoury pastries have a wider scope**, from brunch to apéritifs to buffets, and may encompass a far greater variety. Gone are the days of sad frozen mini-pizzas and uninspired cracker mixes: **the challenge today is to surprise customers with unexpected combinations** and impress them visually. These tiny masterpieces are made by artisans who, like jewellers, painstakingly create miniatures, drawing on their imagination and expertise when combining shapes and colours.

The importance of colour and form

Here is a curious fact bearing out the importance of colour: one of Turin's most eminent and imaginative chefs **uses RAL colour charts as references to produce the best visual effect** for dishes or sauces. The acronym RAL refers to a European system of colour classification mostly used for defining the hues of paints, coatings or plastics. Every colour is presented in many nuances, each assigned a code. The restaurant's tasting menu has the title "RAL 6001", corresponding to emerald green: the colour of the chef's favourite original sauce. Shape is also important: spheres, cubes or tartelettes are generally served on paper pastry cups, as with sweet pastries. Naturally,



the appropriate flavour combinations, in terms of harmony and contrast, are crucial. This requires more effort with savoury pastries because **the visual aspect needs additional care**, since classic decorative elements for sweet pastry, such as coloured creams or fresh fruit, are unavailable, and adequate replacements must be found.

Savoury reinterpretations of sweet classics

Customers may be amused by coming face to face with a **savoury plum cake** or mini cheesecake, or a **savoury charcuterie croissant**. A small *panna cotta*, thanks to its neutral flavour, can serve as a canvas for whimsical decorations, such as caramelised peppers. Shortcrust or briséé pastry, muffins, biscuits or other basic doughs used for sweet pastries can be reinterpreted with stuffings inspired by the restaurant world, such as fish or steak tartare or vegetables, raw or confit. Alongside these dainty delicacies, the **savoury panettone** takes pride of place. Its basic preparation is less complex than that of the sweet original: unsweetened brioche-like dough stuffed according to taste and imagination. Stuffed in layers with a variety of ingredients, besides cutting a scenic figure it also allows diners to select pieces according to their preferences. Each layer is independent and can be eaten like a sandwich. **Excellent stuffings include savoury mousses**, 'Russian salad' (Italian-style coleslaw), charcuterie, salads, various vegetables, and so on, almost limitlessly. Any list of delightful edible frivolities must include **canapés**: small crustless bread slices spread with butter or mayonnaise and **festooned with whatever savoury ingredients take one's fancy**, perfect for apéritifs. Canapés weren't born yesterday, having long graced elegant buffets beginning in the 18th century, when, we are told, they were invented in France as morsels that guests at the royal court could pick up in their fingers and eat whole. Their name re-



mained, in Italy and elsewhere, to indicate refinement and elevate them above 'plebeian' sandwiches. For example, an interesting selection of canapés appears in **Ada Boni's** 1935 masterwork *Il talismano della felicità* (*The Talisman of Happiness*); these were destined to be presented on elegant crystal or silver trays in bourgeois homes.

If we venture, whimsically, to assign an anthropological value to savoury pastry, particularly as finger food eaten while standing, we might consider it a liberating, 'transgressive' ritual performed before sitting at the table and submitting to etiquette governing cutlery, glasses, nap-

kins and timing. Not by chance has (often inelegant!) buffet behaviour been sociologically studied: buffets apparently awaken atavistic memories of ancient struggles for food.

In closing, I would like to point out that Pfatisch, one of Turin's oldest pastry shops, operating since 1915, has been named Italy's best purveyor of savoury pastries by a respected food guide. Turin, lest we forget, is the homeland of sweet pastries, including the famous cream-filled *bignole*, even cited by the poet Guido **Gozzano**, celebrated for their diminutive size and dazzling variety of flavours.

Elisabetta Cocito





The surprising lives of eels

by **Tullio Sammito**
Ragusa Academician

The eel's life cycle has truly surprising features.

Francesco Berni, the 16th-century poet who gave his name to the 'Bernesque' tradition of facetious poetry, **praised the eel** as 'all good and all beautiful', 'soft, white, delicate and never naughty'. The Latin word *anguilla*, now the Italian word for eel, is the diminutive of *anguis*, 'snake'. Readers and gourmets need not

fear, however: the eel is a fish; somewhat hybrid-looking, to be sure, but still a fish. Indeed, it belongs to the category of physostomes: fish whose swim bladder connects to their alimentary canal via a pneumatic duct; and it is among the apodal fish, which lack ventral fins. These two characteristics, alongside a skin covered in slippery mucus, tough, deeply embedded, nearly invisible scales, two lateral fins and a third running the length of their bodies, and sturdy jaws bearing numerous tiny, sharp, conical teeth, **allow eels to thrive both in seawater and brackish water**. Due to the shape and elasticity of their gill slits, which can retain residual water in contact with the gills, **eels can survive outside water for several days**.

Eels can leave their preferred muddy canals or murky riverbeds to slither on damp grass (only on moonless nights), aided by the slipperiness of their skin.

Females over 50 centimetres long are known in Italian as capitoni

The capitoni found on Italian festive tables are only ever female: easily surpassing 50 centimetres in length, they **can weigh 2 or 3 kg**, while **the males always stop growing between 40 and 45 centimetres** and weigh less. Eels can be found a considerable distance away from the sea, up to 200 kilometres upstream of river estuaries, and are equally likely to inhabit sweet-water lakes up to 3000 metres above sea level.

Roman eels are celebrated; Bonaparte called them cloacine or chiavicarole, since they inhabited sewers (*cloaca*, *chiavica*) or wells. **Voraciously carnivorous**, they devour many minuscule organisms, especially annelids (including earthworms, leeches etc), crustaceans and molluscs. Especially in ponds and marshes, eels can be necrophagous or saprophagous (feeding on dead animals or decomposing matter).

Eels' growth and maturation period ranges between eight and eighteen years

Eels' life cycle is complex and has truly extraordinary features: for instance, eels grow and mature (females almost always more than males) over a period lasting between eight and eighteen years. Once this ends and **they achieve reproductive maturity, eels reach the sea**, colonising coastal or even open waters. **Their voyage is incredible**, be-





ing only comparable, perhaps, to certain bird species' continental migrations: indeed, female eels, whether followed by the males or not, **can travel 15-40 km a day** over a total journey of 40 to 200 km, or even **a maximum of 6,000 km to reach the Sargasso Sea**, where many of them converge, attracted by a biological compass and also, according to certain fisherfolk, guided through the total darkness of the watery abyss by other perceptions as yet unknown to science.

During their journey, whether brief or epic according to environment, ecology, species and instinct, **the eel is transformed**: it undereats until its digestive tract atrophies; it slims down, surviving on its abundant reserves of accumulated fat; its abdomen turns a silvery-white colour, hence the name 'silver eel' for eels migrating to the sea; its cornea becomes transparent, and the lenses of its eyes become larger.

Upon reaching its destination, it lays between one and six million eggs and then dies

Once it has reached its destination, whichever it might be as noted earlier, the female lays between one and six million eggs **approximately a thousand metres underwater** and then dies. The

extraordinary epilogue of the eel's reproductive cycle is that after their earliest life stage, in which they are similar to larvae and are passively transported by currents, **all juvenile eels** (from those born close to shore to those observed in the Sargasso Sea) **retrace their parents' journey in reverse** once they have developed enough to swim, reaching the same location whence their parents once departed.

Once principally a Christmas delicacy in Italy, eel is now enjoyed on other occasions

Culinarily, the eel is grouped in the same category as other fish. Its **high fat content makes it calorie-dense**; it is high in cholesterol, vitamins A, B and E, essential polyunsaturated fatty acids, protein, and iron.

The characteristics of its flesh make **eel ideal for grilling**; this may be done using skewers, alternating eel 'steaks' with bay leaves, a method whereby the fish will lose up to 50% of its weight as water and fat run off. Originally associated with Yuletide, nowadays eel is also enjoyed on other occasions, as **in Sardinia**, where it is traditionally **prepared year-round**. For smaller eels, **frying or stewing are preferred, and even leftovers are appreciated** and served in the days follow-

ing an eel feast, after **being marinated in vinegar flavoured** with origano, bay leaves, garlic and pepper. A delicious traditional dish is **pasta with eels**, briefly sautéed in a sauce containing stewed and filleted eel.

Let us not forget **eel cooked in wine**, and finally, the many **recipes for cèe** (the Tuscan dialectal pronunciation of *cieche*, 'blind'), namely juvenile eels that swim up rivers and canals including the Arno and the Burlamacca Canal in winter, becoming a typical dish in Pisa and Viareggio and forming the main ingredient in **frittelle di cèe** (cèe fritters), **polenta or pasta with cèe**, **Viareggio-style cèe**, **cèe fried in batter**, or **cèe meatballs**.

A flourishing and profitable tourist and culinary industry

In Comacchio, in the province of Ferrara, **or on Lake Bolsena**, eel fishing and farming have constituted a flourishing and profitable tourist and culinary industry since Etruscan and then Roman times.

In Sasso d'Ombrone, in the province of Grosseto, **a Sagra del Capitone** (Capitone Festival - referring again to large female eels) is held yearly in September. Comacchio holds its annual *Sagra dell'Anguilla* (Eel Festival) from late September to early October.

Cintello di Teglio Veneto, in the province of Venice, has a yearly **Sagra del Bisàt** ('Eel Festival' in Veneto dialect) between June and July.

However, European eels are a threatened species classified as 'Critically Endangered' by the IUCN Red List, the most comprehensive inventory of global conservation status. For eels, this assessment rests on two main reasons: **difficulty with reproduction**, which only happens in the open sea and never in captivity (a serious problem for breeders, who resort to introducing sea-caught juveniles or small specimens into fish farms) and **pollution from dioxins** and highly carcinogenic PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls).

Tullio Sammito



ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

THE RECIPE FOR REAL RAGÙ ALLA BOLOGNESE

SERVES 6

Coarsely ground beef (see note): 1 lb (400g)

Fresh pork pancetta, slices: 6 oz (150g)

½ onion, peeled: about 2 oz (60g)

1 medium carrot, peeled: about 2 oz (60g)

1 celery stalk, trimmed: about 2 oz (60g)

½ cup (1 glass) of red or white wine

Strained tomatoes: 7 oz (200g)

Tomato paste (double-concentrated): 1 tbsp

½ cup (1 glass) of whole milk (optional)

Light meat or vegetable broth (or stock cubes)

Extra virgin olive oil: 3 tbsp

Salt and pepper

PREPARATION

In a heavy non-stick 10-inch (24-26cm) casserole (aluminum or enameled cast-iron (Dutch oven) or terracotta saucepans can be used), melt the ground or chopped pancetta with olive oil.

Using a chef's or chopping knife, finely chop the onion, celery, and carrot (do not use a food processor); add the vegetables to the oil and pancetta and cook over low heat, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon until softened but not browned.

Raise the heat to medium and add the meat, break it up, then cook for about ten minutes, always stirring, until it sizzles and browns.

Add the wine; cook over medium heat until it has completely evaporated. Add the tomato paste and purée. Mix well; add a cup of boiling stock (or water) and simmer, covered, for about 2 hours (or 3 depending on preference and type of meat), adding hot broth (or water) as needed.

Add any milk (traditionally used) half way through the cooking; allow to evaporate completely. Season with salt and pepper before serving. When ready the sauce will be a rich maroon hue, thick and glossy.

NOTE

Traditionally, in Bologna hanger or skirt steak is used (the diaphragm of the beef, which is difficult to find today). In lieu or in addition, favour anterior cuts, rich in collagen, such as shoulder or chuck, brisket, plate or flank. Combinations are acceptable, as is the modern technique of browning the meat separately and then adding it to the softened minced vegetables in the pan.

PERMITTED VARIANTS: Mixed beef and pork (about 60% beef) | Meat minced with a knife | Cured pancetta instead of fresh pancetta.

