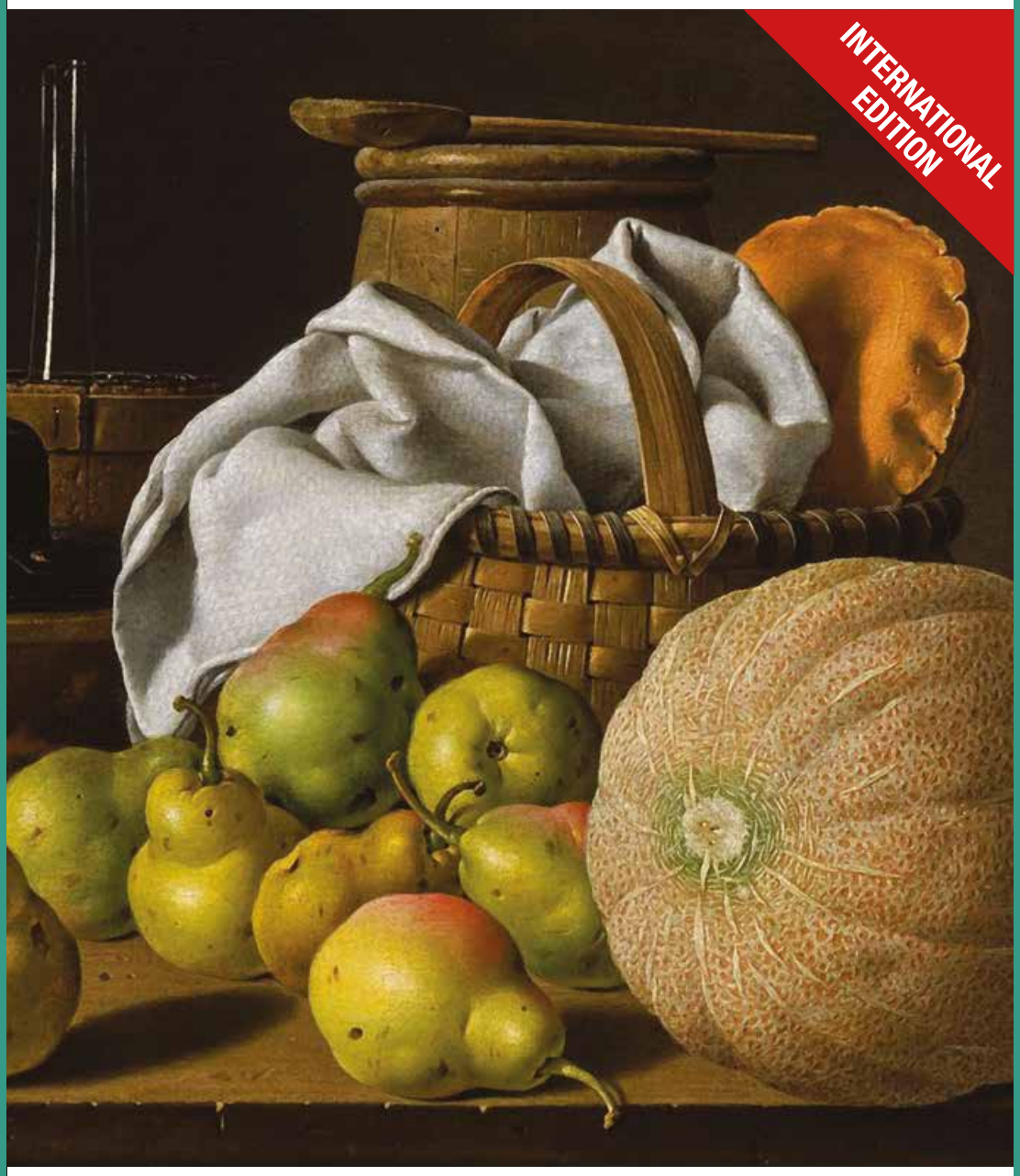
# CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL EDITION



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**On the cover:** graphic elaboration of *Still life with melon, pears and a basket* (ca. 1772) by Luis Egidio Meléndez; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston (Massachusetts, USA)

## Focus of the President



## Tradition • History



## Territories • Tourism • Folklore



## Restaurants and Cooks

# Mara Severin, a precious example *of restaurant professionalism*

*Passionate about wine and her sommelier position: a very rare job nowadays.*

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

The roof collapse at the **Essenza** restaurant in Terracina on 7 July caused the death of the *sommelière* **Mara Severin**, a 31-year-old youngster with an enthusiasm for wines and her job. She was a cousin of the owner-operator, chef **Stefano Nardoni**. The venue is in a vast zone created by the fascist regime through the ***Opera Nazionale Combattenti*** (National Combatants' Foundation) in the malaria-infested **Agro Pontino** (Pontine Marshes). Many families from the Veneto were brought to those dangerous areas by the promise of a house and fields to cultivate. Mara Severin (a Veneto surname), born in **Pontinia**, descended from these poor colonists. She had been working in this innovative restaurant for ten years, and was **the beating heart of its wine cellar**, stocked with around 900 labels. Beyond suggesting wines, she greeted guests and shared curious anecdotes and episodes about producers.

## *The sommelier is a very costly professional figure*

The sommelier's role has become exceedingly rare: we only find such figures in grand hotels or high-end restaurants. These very costly professionals **require a well-stocked cellar**, itself a substantial investment. Sadly, **the wine service in most restaurants is rather disappointing**. Some bring veritable wine encyclopaedias to the table, offering tens of options in which one gets lost without a guide; others offer few, standardised choices: always the same brands and wines. **Research on local wines, deserving further attention, is rare**. So are varied options for wine by the glass. People drink less nowadays, but for those who prefer variety throughout the meal, a bottle may be too much. Furthermore, some restaurants impose **excessive wine markups**. Too frequently, a splendidly tempting wine list is marred by scandalous prices. As a rule, restaurant wine should not cost more than 2.5-3 times its retail price, but the margin is often far higher. I chose to start by remembering the unfortunate Mara as an ideal representative serving both restaurants and clients: an able, specialised professional, but not solely dedicated to wine pairings.

## *The difference between a professional and a plate carrier*

In monetary economics there is a celebrated principle called **Gresham's Law**, stating that 'bad money drives out good'. When coins were made of gold or silver, worn coins abundantly circulated, while freshly minted ones disappeared into bankers' coffers. This law **is also applicable to restaurant service**. The abundance of affordable foreign workers has reduced the demand for more qualified but more costly personnel protected by labour laws. But the professional figure of Mara Severin **is not replaceable**. Only love and a passion for food service make the difference between a professional and a mere plate carrier.

# The Nobel laureate who ate *pasta in broth*

**by Ignacio Miró,** *Madrid Academician,*
**and Anna Lanzani,** *Buenos Aires Academician*

*Between Rome and Cartagena, García Márquez at the table as his friends remember him.*

"Gabito had a fine palate: he loved *la buena comida*". Gabito was **Gabriel García Márquez**, 1982 Nobel Laureate for Literature, and bringing him to life for us is his friend **Jaime Abello Banfi**, director of the Fundación Gabo. Abello Banfi - a Colombian descendant of Genoese merchants - greets us on the top floor of a colonial house in the walled citadel of Cartagena de Indias, a UNESCO World Heritage site. He calls for us to be served *agua aromática* and very strong coffee. The background music is provided by the bells of the 16th-century monastery of San Pedro Claver; we glimpse a cloister and a well through the open windows of the office. From the moment of crossing through the Foundation's green door, there is the palpable sensation of having walked into a novel.

*His passion for succulent foods is rooted in the popular culture of his childhood*

"**A gourmet, was Gabo**" - continues our host - "and his passion for succulent foods is rooted in the popular culture of his childhood in Aracataca, a riverside village in an area of banana plantations where he lived with his grandparents until he was ten". **Indeed, his novels do overflow with fish and fried bananas**. In his acclaimed novel *Love in the Time of Cholera*, Florentino Ariza habitually dines on boiled fish and white rice after accepting a job at the Compañía Fluvial del Caribe (River Company of the Caribbean). In *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Úrsula Iguarán cooks fish and meat in banana leaves while awaiting outsiders arriving in Macondo by train. In *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*, Luis Alejandro Velasco feeds on raw fish.

**The scholar Orlando Oliveros Acosta has overseen research** - published by the Fundación Gabo - **on the symbolic significance of fried fish in the work of García Márquez: it foretells a decisive element of the plot**. In *Chronicle of a Death Foretold*, on the morning of his murder, Santiago Nasar refuses a fried fish breakfast at a market stand. In *The General in his Labyrinth*, a few weeks before dying in Santa Marta, Simón Bolívar has a vision of dried and fried *mojarras* (sand perches). In "The Trail of Your Blood in the Snow" (a story in *Strange Pilgrims*), Billy Sánchez de Ávila recalls the flavour of coconut rice and fried fish a few days before discovering that his wife has died in a grim hospital. And it is while eating fried fish that Florentino Ariza (*Love in the Time of Cholera*) announces to his last lover, América Vicuña, that their love affair is over.

*Gabriel García Márquez*

## *He roamed the markets of Cartagena*

Abello Banfi recalls that not only García Márquez but also his inseparable wife **Mercedes** was a gourmet, to the point where they would playfully tell friends that a dish of perfectly cooked rice was what had induced her to reside in Mexico in 1961 after his stint as a *Prensa Latina* correspondent in New York. Indeed, though Gabo mostly lived in Mexico, he had a special relationship with Cartagena, and it is in the centre of that walled citadel, in the Claustro de la Merced, that his ashes repose. Remembering his youth - he moved, aged barely 21, to the 'Pearl of the Caribbean' on 17 June 1948 escaping unrest in Bogotá - he would later say: "When I arrived in Cartagena, I was reborn". **Here he is remembered as a youngster wandering through the markets and the port, frequenting the bar La Cueva (whose landlord was the later inspiration for Catarino in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) with his Bohemian friends**, and listening to the tall tales of the Bar Verde's often inebriated patrons. It was in Cartagena that, guided by **Clemente Zabala**, he drew closer to journalism, abandoning his legal studies. Here, too, he was hired by *El Espectador*, kicking off his career as a correspondent; and here on 24 June 1994 he founded the FNPI (Fundación para un Nuevo Periodismo Iberoamericano, or Foundation for a New Ibero-American Journalism), asking his friend Jaime Abello Banfi to direct it.

It is again Abello Banfi who recounts the later travels of García Márquez to Cartagena. After gaining fame and a certain financial well-being, the Nobel laureate bought a seaside house in his beloved Caribbean city, spending long periods there.

**Yolanda**, the director of an important museum in the city who shared many a dinner with Gabo and his wife, recounts: "We would often go out for dinner; in later years Mercedes would order for him. **He had refined tastes, having dined at the word's finest tables, yet of an evening he often had simple chicken stock in memory of his Italian years: he wanted to keep light**".

## *Remembering his time in Rome*

And indeed, Gabo's Italian years are the final subject of our 'magical' chat in the cloister of the Fundación Gabo. On Sunday 31 July 1955, after covering the Geneva Summit as a correspondent for *El Espectador*, Gabriel García Márquez rode a train to Rome. The city on strike and the dusty heat reminded him of his Aracataca. Through his Italian visit, he aimed mainly to broaden his knowledge of cinema, but his newspaper had entrusted him with documenting the illness of **Pope Pacelli** (Pius XII). He therefore established himself in a dingy hostel in Via Nazionale with a view of the Colosseum, and soon let himself be enveloped by the incipient *dolce vita* and postwar society. Regarding Rome, Gabo would say years later: "It's the only city that I already remembered before even seeing it". He voraciously observed the Capital, which he described in a series of memorable reportages. **Concerning the Romans, he said**, in a retrospective column published in *El País* in 1982: "**After a light lunch of pasta - that prodigious food that changes flavour simply by changing shape** - we took a simple, deep siesta nearly similar to death (...) But shortly after six in the afternoon (...) a joyous crowd would flow into the streets, among the rumble of Vespas, the calls of watermelon sellers and the love songs among flowery terraces, with no goal other than to live". During the summerr, Pius XII recovered and Gabo met him at Castel Gandolfo. He even **got the servants to reveal the papal diet**: "A bland luncheon, as his physician has forbidden him salt". After the hostel on Via Nazionale, García Márquez lived in a guesthouse in Villa Borghese. In *Strange Pilgrims* he mentions Aunt Antonietta, the sister of the landlady: "**She it was who taught us to eat the small birds caught by her husband Bartolino: a habit left over from the war**". Regarding his joyrides on a Vespa with his friend, the Colombian tenor **Rafael Rivero Silva**: "**We would give ice creams and chocolates to the street girls who loitered under the centuries-old bay trees at Villa Borghese**". Between coffees and *trattoria* dinners in Trastevere, the future Nobel laureate inched towards Neorealism. He was in Venice for the 16th International Film Festival; he met **Zavattini** and attended the film-directing course at the Experimental Cinematography Centre, where he honed his perception of the world. He was even the third assistant director to **Blasetti** during the filming of *Too Bad She's Bad*. He later said of that experience: "My job consisted of holding up a rope to keep curious onlookers away; I never met **Sophia Loren**".

**Ignacio Miró, Anna Lanzani**

# Carpaccio

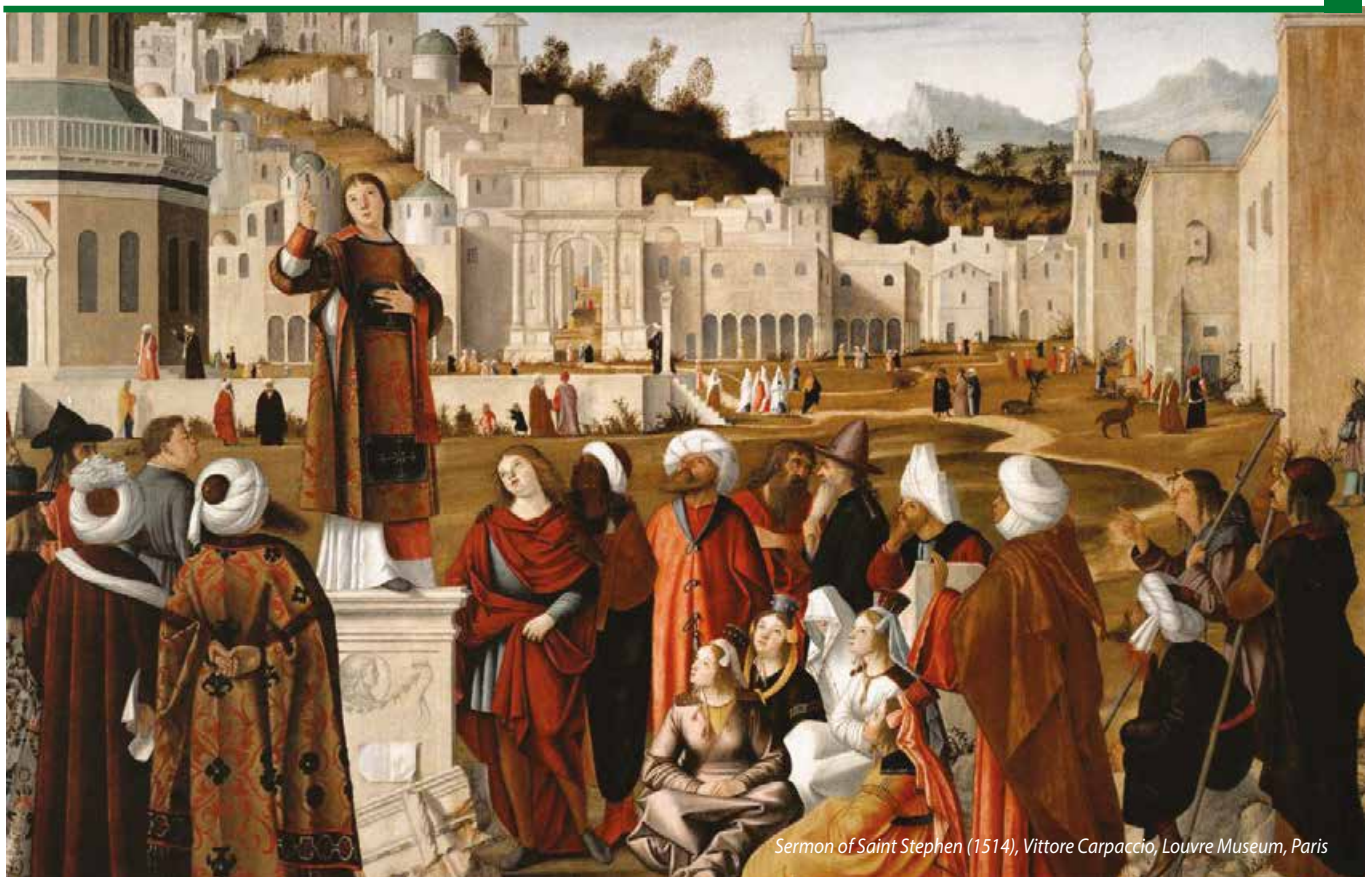
**by Roberto Mirandola**
*Padua Academician*

*How incredible things arise by chance.*

The most obvious answer to the question "how can an artist gain fame?" is "through flair and ability in one's art". But for some, success and fame arrive entirely differently, hand in hand with - in this case - cuisine and gastronomy in general. **Among the most salient examples is Vittore Carpaccio**, **a Venetian painter** who lived between the 15th and 16th centuries and owes his fame to a dish named after him.

*Cipriani drew inspiration from the painter's colours when choosing the recipe's name*

Venice, as we all know, is a city of art and culture. Probably **Giuseppe Cipriani**, the founder of Harry's Bar, also remembered this when adding to his menu a dish of raw meat aiming to accommodate a friend and regular, the countess **Amalia Nani Mocenigo**, whose physician had forbidden her to eat cooked meat. It was 1963, the year when an exhibition in the Ducal Palace in Venice displayed works by Vittore Carpaccio, an acclaimed Venetian painter of the Renaissance **whose works were notable for their lively contrasts of reds and brilliant yellows**. The redness of the thinly sliced beef, the yellowness of their sauce and the proximity to the painting exhibition inspired Cipriani to name his creation'Carpaccio', **suggesting a "Kandinsky-style" decoration technique**, recalling the Russian-French pioneer of



*Sermon of Saint Stephen (1514), Vittore Carpaccio, Louvre Museum, Paris*

abstract painting. **The novelty was to dip a fork or spoon into the sauce**, dribbling it into **an abstract painting over the meat**. After an initially lukewarm reception by the Bar's customers, it became so successful that restaurants worldwide began copying it.

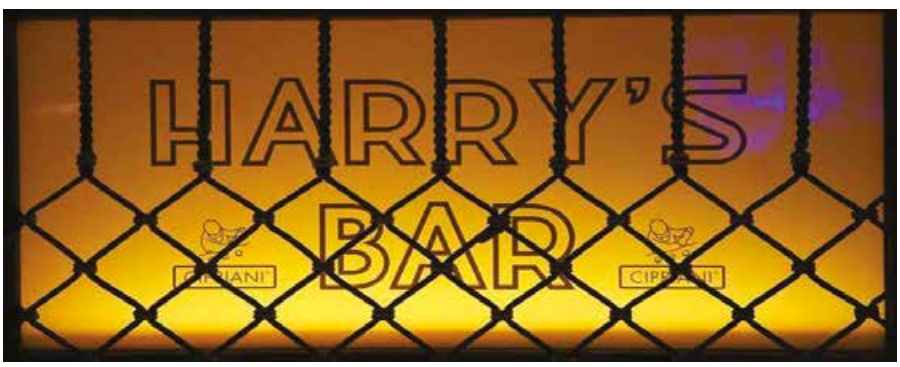
## *The original recipe*

The original recipe is made with very lean, unmarbled beef sirloin, fillet or topside steak, **sliced while fridge-cold** with a thickness between 0.1 and 0.4 millimetres (the thinner it is, the more delicate its taste), arranged on a serving dish directly. **The sweet-and-sour, slightly spicy sauce** is mayonnaise lightened with a little milk and flavoured with a few drops of Worcestershire sauce. Cipriani called this 'universal sauce' because it suited both meat and fish.
Carpaccio can be served equally well as an appetiser or a second course, preferably without salads or vegetable side dishes to fully appreciate the delicate flavour of raw flesh. There is a variant (*carne cruda all'albese* or 'Alba-style raw meat') which uses the topside (*girello*) or thigh meat of Piedmontese cattle seasoned with lemon juice, a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil, salt and black pepper.

## *Interesting nuggets*

■ **The painting that inspired Cipriani**, in all probability, is *The Sermon of St Stephen*, an oil painting from 1514 now kept in the Louvre Museum in Paris.
■ We know little about Vittore Carpaccio, sometimes known as Vittorio Carpaccio. A citizen of the Venetian Republic, he was born in Venice around 1465 or 1466 and died in Capodistria (Koper) between 1525 and 1526. The surname 'Carpaccio', **an Italianisation of the author's signature of *Carpathius* or *Carpatio***, was an adaptation of his father's name, Scarpazza or Scarpazo.
■ ***Carpaccio Cipriani* at Harry's Bar in Venice costs €58**, plus a €10 cover charge.
■ The birthplace of carpaccio is named after **Harry Pickering**, an American tourist who stayed at a hotel in Venice where Giuseppe Cipriani worked in 1927. Cipriani lent the youth money wherewith to return home. **Four years later, Pickering came back to Venice and gave Cipriani four times the amount** previously borrowed. That hefty sum allowed Cipriani to open a bar in an old rope depository near Piazza San Marco, calling it Harry's Bar in honour of his friend and sponsor.

**Roberto Mirandola**



# The Italian superchef
## *unknown in Italy*

**by Roberta Messina**
*Palermo Academician*

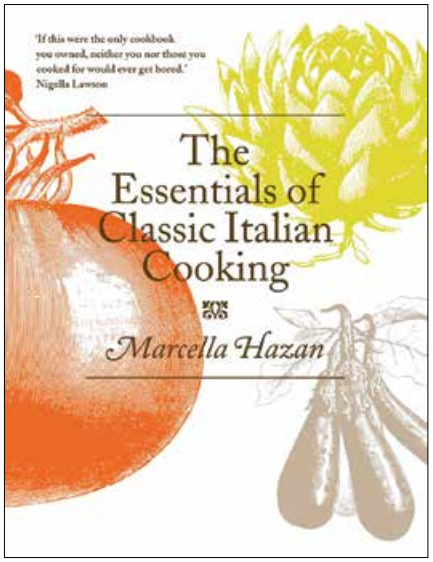
*The American media still celebrate the beloved and popular Marcella Polini Hazan, who died in 2013.*

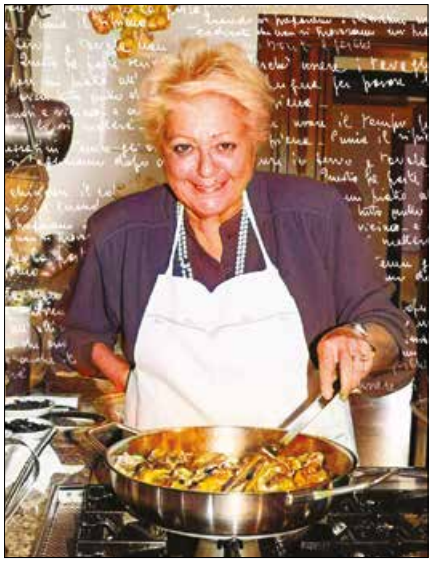
**Marcella Hazan**: who was she? The protagonist of what the *New York Times* calls the best American documentary of 2025. A shy but enormously successful chef. Try asking anyone **from New Jersey to California: they all know her**. And many have her famous books on their shelves. **Lidia Bastianich** (mother of the MasterChef Joe) defines her as "the mother of Italian cuisine in America". Hazan, born **Marcella Polini, a true-blue Italian from Cesenatico**, is, however, **practically unknown in Italy, where her books have never been translated**. Yet she is the one who **changed how Italian cuisine is perceived in the United States**.

*The New York Times recently featured a documentary about her life*

**The six recipe books that she published over her long life** - she died in 2013 - remain a milestone for millions of families. "Twelve years after her death, nobody has overtaken Marcella Hazan as the **source Americans consult to understand the food of Italy**", proclaims the *New York Times*, presenting the documentary recently released about her life, directed by **Peter Miller**.

With degrees in both palaeontology and biology from Padua and Ferrara, Marcella began teaching in university. She then married **Victor Hazan**, also from an Italian family, who, however had fled fascism by relocating to the USA after the first ignoble antisemitic laws. The couple moved to New York, where after the birth of their son and having abandoned her scientific career, Marcella began attending Chinese cookery classes. Following the suggestion of her Chinese teacher and friend, **she began offering micro-courses on Italian cuisine at home**. Thanks to these, one day she received a phone call from a certain "crakcrak", as she told her husband. Though exceedingly cultured - she had even worked at the Guggehneim Institute of Research before her son Giuliano was born - Marcella had not mastered English, and never would in all her 89 years, always retaining a strong but lovable Italian accent. Mr Crakcrak was none other than **Craig Claiborne**, the dizzyingly famous *New York Times* food editor. **They invited him**



**to a luncheon of Roman-style artichokes, chard-filled *tortelloni* and veal roulades**: all made by Marcella's fair hands. A revelation! The following day, 15 October 1970, a very long article enriched with photos and recipes heralded the entry of Marcella Polini into the Empyrean heights of American gastronomy.

*Her cookery classes gained immense popularity*

Her cookery classes gained immense popularity, and within three years she had published **her first book, *The Classic Italian Cookbook***, immediately and still a bestseller, and now found in millions of homes. It was written in Italian and translated by her husband. An intellectual and scientist, never having set foot in a kitchen before arriving in New York, she emulated **Escoffier** by being horrified about the woeful food quality in the USA in 1955. At most, by way of Italian fare, one could expect spaghetti bathed in "a sort of spiced ketchup", she said, and served in restaurants with straw-covered Chianti flasks and red gingham tablecloths. Their food, only rarely fresh, was mostly pre-cooked and insipid, their coffee "was like dirty water", and there was not a herb in sight… So Marcella got to work, aided by **Ada Boni**'s *Il Talismano della Felicità* (*The Talisman of Happiness*), for the love of her husband, who managed his family's furriery business and was a dedicated gourmet. Indeed, Victor had selected an abode near work, so as to return home for lunch. Marcella, who had learnt the local newlywed wives' motto "for better or for worse, but not for lunch", decided that for Victor the gourmet, she would become a chef. And with her sharp scientific mind, she succeeded perfectly, **taking NYC by storm with previously unheard-of north-central Italian dishes when the city hadn't ventured beyond meatballs marinara and chicken alla parmigiana**: emigrants' food that sticks to the ribs, but certainly not gourmet fare. Being somewhat allergic to interviews, Marcella **never chose to present a television programme**, ashamed of her English and her disability: an arm that was of scant use after an operation years before. Perhaps this reserve contributed partially to her overwhelming success. And it is truly strange that in Italy we have **not heard much** about her.

*The capacity to make Italian food easy for Americans to prepare*

The two things for which Marcella is most remembered in the USA are her eponymous tomato, onion, butter and salt pasta sauce and the introduction of balsamic vinegar. So writes the ***Washington Post*, which has dedicated a long article to her to accompany the release of the documentary *Marcella***. Her husband Victor and their son **Giuliano Hazan**, who also teaches cooking, have participated in the events promoting the film. The oeuvre, both amusing and interesting, especially for us Academicians, can be streamed and has already been presented at various festivals. Its director, Peter Miller, has revealed that **it was financed entirely by donations from thousands of Marcella's fans**. Marcella also opened **various cooking schools including two in Italy, in Bologna and Venice**. What made her so beloved and popular was her capacity to make Italian food easy for Americans to prepare, counting mainly on **ingredient quality**. She was the 'mother' of such recipes as *ossobuco*, *vitel tonné* and *pasta all'ortolana*, previously unknown in the Americas, and garnished with winsome anecdotes and memories. Her husband Victor, a youthful 94-year-old, has committed himself to preserving her memory; and through this new documentary, he seems to be admirably succeeding.

**Roberta Messina**