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Italian cuisine *is suffering*

*Alongside euphoria over
UNESCO recognition, restaurants
gradually decline.*

“Dum Romae consulitur, Saguntum expugnatur”: “While Rome debates, Saguntum is taken”. This famous observation, attributed to **Livy**, comes to mind as I consider all that is befalling Italian cuisine. After the glory reaped when it received UNESCO Intangible Heritage recognition, we were drunk with pride and overwhelmed by the satisfaction of reaching those dizzy heights: not only we Academicians, whose contribution to this milestone was nothing to be sneezed at, but also, and especially, our starred chefs and politicians, who unfurled flags, celebrations, logos, televised evenings, prizes and acknowledgements. All well and good, and we are glad of it.

*Our cuisine is defeated by the reality
of our restaurants*

Yet while all this happens, our imaginary Saguntum, namely our cuisine, is defeated. Not by UNESCO, with its vote of confidence, but by the reality of our restaurants. After the dreadful pandemic era which plunged the sector into a crisis, its rebirth was tumultuous. New restaurants, catering to customers’ desire for the pleasures of yore, contrived phony bubbles of improvised cuisine spurred only by fads and social media. With mostly barely bearable service, endured only to avoid offending or depressing unfortunate, exploited employees,

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia

we face a desperate **unprofessionalism in the kitchen**. A few traditional dishes, a handful of trite innovations, some token, mysterious Asian or South American ingredients, and hey presto: a stunning menu, they think. In reality, they’re missing **the culinary basics** that should be taught in hotel schools, or maybe are taught, but not to those who end up in restaurant kitchens, as we have noted several times.

*Ignorance of the most elementary
cooking techniques often prevails*

They don’t know how to select and cook rice, or season pasta, or prepare side dishes, other than chips and salads; and above all, they are **ignorant of frying techniques**. Frying is an art. It requires the right oil, the right temperature and especially the right ‘barrier’: flour, batter, nothing. Vanished are the true great mixed fry-ups of Piedmont, Bologna, Tuscany, and the Neapolitan *frijenno e magnanno*: ‘fry and eat’. Heavy batter everywhere, and off we go! Even the Milanese *cotoletta* (breaded cutlet) suffers. **The decline is gradual but relentless, accompanied by a vertiginous rise in prices**. Italian cuisine, despite the daily overcrowding of trendy restaurants in multiple shifts, **is, in reality, suffering**. Let’s make sure that success doesn’t go to our heads.

Academic friends, let us not queue up at the press offices of fashionable restaurants, but judge using our customary circumspection. Only thus can we truly help Italian cuisine to retain the coveted recognition received.





The birth of the modern kitchen

by Laura Melara-Dürbeck
Frankfurt Delegate

*The Frankfurter Küche:
when design reinvented
the food space.*

One of European design's most far-reaching, enduring revolutions occurred in a seemingly ordinary domestic realm: **the kitchen**. It was, indeed, on Frankfurt am Main, in the second half of the 1920s, that the celebrated *Frankfurter Küche*, the 'Frankfurt Kitchen', took shape. This is now considered **one of the foundational moments of modern design and rational interior decoration**.

To understand the magnitude of this innovation, we must return to the historic interwar context. Germany was undergoing a phase of profound economic and social instability: housing shortages, inflation and overwhelming material privation marked the daily life of large cities. In such a scenario, **Frankfurt became one of Europe's main urban experimentation laboratories**. Under the guidance of the city's progressive mayor **Ludwig Landmann**, in 1925 an ambitious urban

planning and social programme known as *Neues Frankfurt* ('The New Frankfurt') was launched, aiming to radically rethink modern living.

The project was entrusted to the architect **Ernst May**, who gathered an international team to construct **a new idea of a city: rational, functional and socially accessible**. **Within it, a reorganisation of domestic space took shape**, conceived as an integrated system for concretely improving working-class lives.

*Redefining the domestic
environment with
scientific methods*

So it came to pass that May summoned to Frankfurt the Austrian architect **Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky**, one of Europe's first female architecture graduates





and the only female team member, assigning her the task of redefining the domestic environment par excellence. Schütte-Lihotzky tackled this challenge methodically and scientifically: **she interviewed cooks and housewives and studied workflows, task timings and sequences of operations, inspired by Taylor's theories** of 'scientific management' and rational factory organisation. Equally fundamental were her observations of **kitchens on trains and ships**, where limited space required maximum efficiency.

This research yielded the **Frankfurter Küche**, presented officially in 1927 at the exhibition *Die neue Wohnung und ihr Innenausbau* ('The New Dwelling and its Interior Furnishings'). It was **a compact environment of scarcely six square metres** (1.96 x 3.44 metres), structured as a veritable 'domestic laboratory'. Its central goal was **minimising movement and optimising every single gesture** during food preparation. Its innovation lay not so much in its acclaimed 'L-shaped' configuration as in its systemic logic: **furnishings, work surfaces and cupboards were coordinated according to rigid ergonomic criteria**. The counter was under the window to make the most of natural light, while the cupboards had an air vent leading to the outdoors to favour food preservation when fridges were not yet commonplace. What made this kitchen surprisingly advanced for the 1920s was, partially, the rest of its **technological equipment**, which included cold and hot running water, a double sink and a gas or electric stove with incorporated food warmer and hood. **Particularly ingenious**

were the space-saving retractable elements, including a folding drying rack, movable counters and extractable surfaces. Equally modern was the dry food storage area, organised with labelled aluminium drawers (including one for pasta: 'macaroni') recalling those in office archives, designed for facilitating the dosage of ingredients. Flour containers were instead made of oak, famously capable of repelling mealworms. The kitchen also contained home care equipment, such as an incorporated foldable ironing board and a broom cupboard accessible from two sides. **Hygiene received maximum attention**: linoleum, tiles and varnished surfaces were chosen for their **ease of maintenance**. A revolving, height-adjustable stool on casters permitted **seated work**, anticipating an extraordinary ergonomic awareness. Even **colours were selected** not merely for aesthetic but also psychological reasons: **to alleviate fatigue** and make the work environment more pleasant (and blue was chosen because of studies finding that it repels flies).

*Today the Frankfurt kitchen
is displayed in several
cities' museums*

Between 1926 and 1930, **approximately ten thousand Frankfurt kitchens were installed in the city's new neighbourhoods**, marking the **first example of large-scale domestic standardisation**. Perfectly preserved specimens can still be found in some of those flats. Today the Frankfurt kitchen is displayed

in several cities' museums including **the Museum Angewandte Kunst** (Museum of Applied Arts), an **institutional point of reference for applied arts**, which honours its historical and social significance. Outside Germany, it has become a stable part of the twentieth-century design canon: original examples and project sketches are kept in the **Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York** and the **Victoria and Albert Museum in London**.

This prestigious cultural heritage helps to explain why **Frankfurt was named World Design Capital 2026**: an international recognition for cities which have distinguished themselves by **innovative urban and social design**. This title has deep roots in the avant-garde tradition which, already a century ago, had made the Hessian city one of the hubs of European modernity.

A hundred years later, **this little kitchen continues talking to us**. Not only because it anticipated contemporary modularity, but because it **embodies a concrete utopia**: the idea of a design which doesn't merely decorate space but organises it, simplifies it and, in the final analysis, improves the quality of daily life.

Paradoxically, Margarete Schütte-Lihotzky, considered the mother of the modern kitchen, could not cook and, as she herself admitted later in life, had never dealt with domestic matters. With her typical cheek she declared: "I've done a lot more in my life than just this! If I had known that everyone would keep talking about nothing else, I would never have built that damn kitchen!"

Laura Melara-Dürbeck



Menus: paper or QR code?

by Attilio Borda Bossana

Messina Delegate

The evolution from simple list to interactive digital experience reflects technological, social and cultural changes in the restaurant world.

Lhe 'silent generation' (born between 1928 and 1945) clearly prefers paper menus; 'boomers' (1946-1964) appreciate 'technological' menus, though most react with confusion and perceive them as 'cold service', tending to favour a hybrid approach offering both formats; **from 'generation X' (1965-1980) onwards, QR codes are perceived as modern, fast and practical.** This is a simplification of customers' preferences regarding paper or QR code menus, documenting an evolution from simple paper list to interactive digital experience, reflecting technological, social and cultural changes in the restaurant world.

Many customers appreciate the speed, hygiene and practicality of QR codes

Many customers appreciate the speed, hygiene and practicality of QR codes, especially in casual dining (where around 72% of clients prefer QR menus). They let us view photos, details and various languages, with approximately 78% of clients

favouring their convenience, **particularly in restaurants with a high turnover. Physical menus are often preferred in fine dining** (around 58%) and in restaurants emphasising experience and atmosphere, offering a sensation of 'solidity' and a more relaxed, screen-free approach. It is in any case an element of design and hospitality, with approximately **81% of customers appreciating the availability of both options**, allowing them to choose according to circumstances.

For restaurateurs, digital menus using QR codes **offer operational advantages**, including real-time updating of prices, dishes and allergens, eliminating re-printing costs.

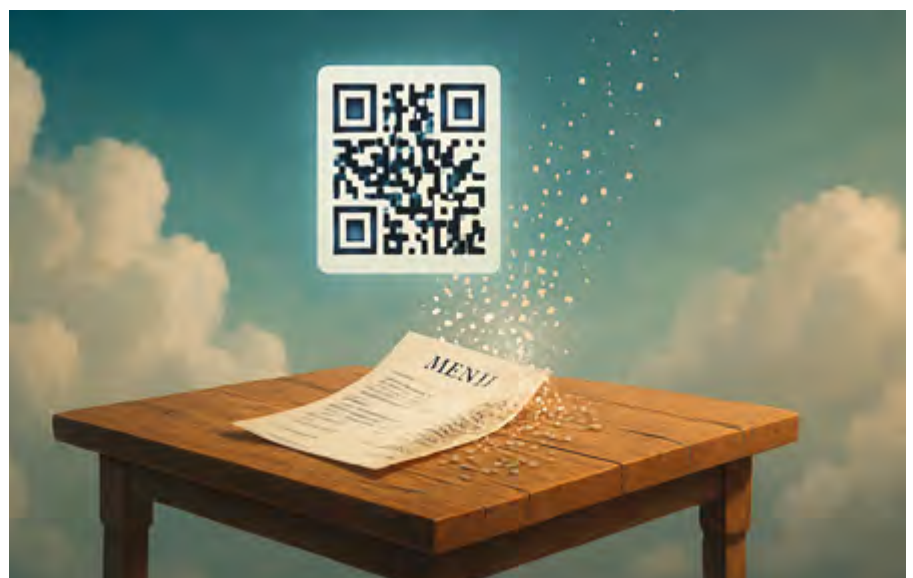
The ideal solution today is, often, to offer a well-designed digital menu (accessible via QR code) as the main option, while also retaining paper or laminated menus for those who request them. So suggests *On the Menu: The World's Favourite Piece of Paper* by **Nicholas Lander**, published

in 2018, which narrates the evolution of menus, providing historical depth on the nature of the *minuta delle vivande* ('minutes of viands'), as it was called in nineteenth-century Italy. *On the Menu* presents over 100 splendid colour menu reproductions, from cutting-edge contemporary examples to relics of a bygone era.

Analysing the reproductions, the author examines the principles of design and layout used for these menus; the evolution of cocktail and wine lists; and the menu as evidence of the past, but also a document on which present staff are briefed before their shift.

The menu arose to inform guests at aristocratic banquets of the 16th and 17th centuries

The menu arose to inform guests at aristocratic European banquets of the 16th





online menus, tablets on tables, digital screens and electronic ordering to make service quicker and more flexible.

QR codes are increasingly entering daily life

The QR code, **invented in 1994 by the Japanese company Denso Wave**, was initially used **by the auto industry** to trace components. With smart phone cameras, QR codes increasingly entered our daily lives for digital payments, marketing, rapid access to websites, electronic tickets and bus timetables. **The large-scale diffusion of QR menus occurred during the Covid-19 pandemic, between 2020 and 2021**, imposed for hygienic and sanitary reasons, **to eliminate shared paper menus**.

Today QR menus are often supplemented by photos of dishes, automatic translations, allergen and nutritional information, online ordering, digital payment and loyalty programmes. The evolution from paper menus to QR codes represents the shift from traditional to digital restaurant paradigms: no longer a mere list of dishes, but **a dynamic instrument of communication**, marketing and interaction with customers.

Paper menus continue to be appreciated because they offer a more traditional, immediate experience, and are easier to read: no need for a smart phone or internet; a 'warmer', more personal experience; greater convenience for older customers; the feel of higher quality in traditional restaurants. They remain associated with tradition, elegance and simplicity, while QR code menus represent innovation, speed and flexibility. Rather than one replacing the other, nowadays both are tending to coexist, offering freedom of choice and a more inclusive experience.

In ordinary life, the word 'menu' assumes different meanings according to circumstances: daily specials; à la carte menus; tourist, tasting or vegan menus.

The menu surely remains crucial to the historic and cultural evolution of meals,



an eloquent witness to events and personages and the numerous convivial gatherings which are so significant in political and social life. **Paper menus are also coveted by meticulous collectors** as indispensable for understanding the tastes of an epoch, tracing their development through evolving food preparation, contributing to a vast mosaic of habits, traditions and customs and indicating a gastronomic trajectory whose knowledge is **necessary for writing about culinary history**. Digital menus follow the changing perceptions of what constitutes memory and sharing already evident in the shift from printed to digital photography, and if the photo album, whether physical or virtual, will retain its importance in preserving personal memories, the same could be said of menus. The French photographer **Henri Cartier-Bresson**, considered such a pioneer of photojournalism that he earned the nickname 'The Eye of the Century', maintained that "for something to acquire enduring value, it must pass through the whole process of human emotions"; at the table, such words mean even more, because **reading a menu is the first step of a voyage into taste**: a prelude to the quest for flavour and emotion.

Attilio Borda Bossana

and 17th centuries, **particularly in France, where it provided a detailed list of available dishes**. Its ascendancy is commonly traced to the shift from French to Russian table service. The first requires a certain autonomy among the guests, who must serve themselves from the platters all displayed at the same time on the table; the Russian style simplifies everything, and cooks codify the sequence of courses to be served. **'Menu' is etymologically related to 'minutes'**, notes that the head cook or steward wrote each day for the sovereign, the noble, the diplomat, the aristocratic or wealthy bourgeois householder, based on the resources of the larder, the market or one's own creativity. As modern restaurants became commonplace **in the nineteenth century, paper menus became fundamental**, communicating prices and offerings; and the array of starters, first and second courses, and desserts became part of a restaurant's identity. **Menu design also became crucial to a restaurant's aesthetic experience**. For over a century, the printed menu remained the worldwide standard, conveying the advantages of simplicity, immediacy and physical contact with customers.

It had and has its limits, including reprinting costs, delayed updates, physical deterioration and problems with multilingual communication.

With the diffusion of the internet and smart phones **in the 2000s, many restaurants began experimenting with**



The sleep formula

by **Giorgia Chinaglia**, Padua Academician
and **Annalisa Fiore**, medical education and culinary medicine expert

*When the Sleep
Medicine meets
the pleasure
of Italian cuisine.*

An invisible but steely thread binds the tinkling of forks in Italian kitchens to the regenerating silence of our bedrooms. **Sleeping well is not merely a physiological act**; it is the apex of a ritual that starts at the table. **Sleep Medicine, a young specialised branch** of Medicine, teaches us that rest is not merely turning off a switch but is a complex active process that is fed, literally, by what we choose to eat.

*The importance of sleep:
the silent guardian*

Sleep is the great restorer. During its phases, beginning with light sleep, then deep, then the dream phase known as REM

(rapid-eye movement), the brain does not rest: it cleanses its circuits to prepare for the following day's activity; it consolidates memory and builds energy-laden molecules. 'Good sleep' is discernible when waking: that sensation of clarity and vigour which makes us feel ready to face the world. Instead, fragmented sleep leaves us pervaded by brain fog which no coffee can truly dispel.

Our bodies follow precise circadian rhythms marking the alternation of sleep and wakefulness. **Taking meals in the two hours preceding nocturnal sleep**, especially with elaborate food, diverts **considerable energy expenditure** into digestion instead of the process of preparing for sleep. **It is not merely a question of what we eat, but when.** With too brief a time between food and sleep,





the brain will not even have time to receive the substances that aid good sleep. The golden rule? Honour dinner as a prelude, not an obstacle, to sleep.

The allies of rest

Let us enter the body's chemistry laboratory. Here two main characters dominate: ghrelin and leptin. The first is the appetite hormone, the voice that shrieks "hunger"; the second is the signal of satiation. When we sleep insufficiently, their equilibrium is broken: ghrelin levels increase and leptin levels plummet. The result? Uncontrollable cravings for calorie-dense foods throughout the night. **Sleeping well is, in every way, the first real step in dieting.**

Italian cuisine, rich in biodiversity, is a gold mine for sleep. Its complex carbohydrates (e.g. rice and pasta), often demonised, are in reality 'special friends': if chosen carefully and in moderation, ideally whole-grain, they enter the body's energy reserve. Similarly, unsaturated fatty acids (known as 'good fats'), contained in such foods as fish and olive oil,

intervene in cell repair. Tryptophan, deriving from protein digestion, entering the brain can permit the formation of serotonin, an important neurotransmitter for certain sleep phases and a precursor of melatonin, the night hormone. However, beware: the secret is equilibrium, not excess. Did you know that **pistachios are one of the richest natural sources of melatonin? Alongside oranges, amarena cherries, bananas and oats, they form a formidable sleep squad.** Melatonin is the Sovereign of Sleep, signalling bedtime to the body. What about people whose taste buds won't give up? **Dark chocolate, if consumed in small doses, is a pleasure that we can allow ourselves.** Rich in tryptophan and magnesium, it also aids muscle relaxation, if not consumed in excess to avoid the exciting influence of theobromine. **Natural plain yoghurt** is also an ally, as it contains another neurotransmitter deriving from protein digestion: GABA (gamma-aminobutyric acid), a protagonist of the early sleep phases. **Watch out for traps: sugared yoghurts are enemies dressed as friends,** for excessive sugar hinders restful sleep. The freshness of kiwi fruits, laden with vitamin C, and the savoury

delight of oysters and scampi, rich in zinc, are other sleep helpers. This is the poetry of ingredients transformed into **the biology of well-being.**

Micronutrients and 'sleep vandals'

Yet each story has its villains. In this case they are the 'vandals' **caffeine and alcohol.** If the first blocks adenosine receptors, tricking the brain into disregarding its need for sleep, the second is a false friend. Alcohol can help us to fall asleep quickly and deeply, but as time elapses, in excessive quantities it undermines the quality of deep sleep, causing nocturnal awakenings and nightmares.

Choosing what is on our plates means planning how we'll wake up tomorrow. Italian cuisine, with its passion for raw materials and respect for the seasons, is the ideal companion for sleep science. It is not a renunciation of pleasure, but its elevation: eating intelligently to sleep soundly.

**Giorgia Chinaglia
Annalisa Fiore**