

Tuscan Table
San Gimignano Dinner

Salumi

Lou's Notes: These items are sliced very thin and are served with pane toscano. The Finocchiona is commercially made in the US; the others may be difficult to find in the US.

Salume Toscano: pork sausage with black peppercorns
Prosciutto di Cinghiale: prosciutto made from wild boar
Finocchiona: pork salami flavored with fennel seeds

Antipasto Toscano:

-Crostini Erba e Carciofi Mascarpone-

Lou's Notes: This is an absolute winner; it is the highlight of all my antipasti classes at both Universities that I teach. We simply serve it on crostini, a Tuscan staple.

Ingredients:

- 8 oz. Mascarpone
- 2 cloves garlic, fine diced
- 1 can (14oz) artichoke hearts, drained and diced
- 1/3 cup pitted black olives, diced
- 4 green onions, chopped
- 3 oz sun dried tomatoes, softened and fine diced
- ¼ cup Italian parsley, chopped
- 1 tbsp fresh chives, chopped
- Salt and pepper to taste

Procedure:

In a medium bowl, mix mascarpone and garlic. Fold in artichokes, olives, onions and sun-dried tomatoes. Garnish with chopped chives. Chill; serve with on crostini.

Il Primo Piatto:

-Ribollita (Tuscan Bean Soup)-

Lou's Notes: This is a hearty winter vegetable soup that can be a meal in itself; it is a noted dish of Tuscany. We will be making this at our class in January. It is best prepared a day in advance to allow all the flavors to marry. This is a vegetarian dish.

Ingredients:

- 1¼ cups dried cannellini beans or white navy beans
- 1 medium Spanish onion, quartered
- 1 medium Spanish onion sliced thin

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- 2 medium red onions sliced thin
- 4 celery stalks, cut into small chunks
- 1 sprig of fresh rosemary
- 6 leaves of sage
- 1 small bunch of parsley
- 5 cloves garlic, sliced
- 2 garlic cloves, halved
- 6 tbsps of Extra Virgin (EV) olive oil
- 3 ripe fresh medium tomatoes or 6 roma tomatoes, peeled, seeded and coarsely chopped
- 1 small leek, quartered and sliced, remove tough green parts also use tender green parts.
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- 3 medium potatoes cut into small cubes
- 3 carrots cut into small cubes
- 2 cups shredded cavolo nero (dark green relative of savoy cabbage)
- 2 cups shredded savoy cabbage (use 4 cups if you can't find cavolo nero or use 2 cups Swiss chard in place of cavolo nero)
- 1 tsp crushed dried chilies
- 6-8 Fettunta (bowl sized, toasted, ½ inch thick, Tuscan sliced bread, rubbed with halved pieces of garlic, drizzled with Tuscan EV olive oil, salted and peppered)
- 1 cup freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

Procedure:

Soak beans in water overnight or at least 12 hours. Drain the water and rinse the beans. Put the beans in a heavy bottom stockpot, cover with about 3 ½ quarts of cold water, add 1 medium sized Spanish onion, quartered; 1 celery stalk, rosemary, sage, parsley, 3 cloves of sliced garlic and bring slowly to a boil. Cover and simmer until the beans are well done, about 1½ hours.

Drain the beans, saving the liquid. Place the beans in a glass bowl or crockery. Take ½ of the beans and puree them in a food processor and cover the balance of the beans that are in the bowl with wet paper towels and set aside.

Put the 6 tbsps olive oil in the pot in which the beans were cooked, add the one sliced Spanish onion, 2 cloves sliced garlic, 3 celery stalks that are cut into small chunks, the chilies and a pinch of salt, sauté for about 10-15 minutes, add the tomatoes, mix the tomato paste with a tad of bean broth and add that to the sauté; add the bean puree, stir well and cook for about 4-5 minutes. Add all the other vegetables: leek, potatoes, carrots, and all the cabbage.

Measure the bean broth and add enough water to bring it up to 2 quarts, add this to the pot, salt and pepper to taste, bring to a boil and then simmer slowly for about 2 hours. If possible on the next day, or sooner if your time demands, preheat the oven to 350, transfer everything to a large crock or a pot that can be placed in the oven, mix the whole beans into the soup, add the thinly sliced red onion on the top of the soup and cook for about 1 hour in the oven.

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To serve, place one fettunta in the bottom of each soup bowl, ladle the soup over the fettunta, and sprinkle liberally with Parmigiano. Serves 6 to 8.

Il Secondo

-Braised Veal with Saffron-

Lou's Notes: In the 13th century saffron was a typical product of San Gimignano and was dearer than servants or land. Its cultivation died out toward the middle of the 17th century and has been revived at a very productive rate since as recently as 1999.

Ingredients:

- 3 lbs veal roast
- 3 tbsps of butter
- 3 tbsps Tuscan EV olive oil
- 2 sprigs of thyme
- 12 juniper berries, crushed
- ½ bottle of Vernaccia di San Gimignano
- ½ cup heavy cream
- 1 good pinch of saffron
- ½ cup flour
- Salt and pepper to taste

Procedure:

Preheat oven to 350. In an oven pot, melt the butter and add the olive oil, thyme and juniper berries. Lightly flour the veal, and sauté it in the pot, turning it on all sides for about twenty minutes to get color and searing of the meat.

Pour over the wine, salt and pepper to taste, cover and place in the oven for about 2 hours.

Heat the cream a tad and add the saffron, crushing it gently to mix and bleed into the cream. Add the mixture about 20 minutes before the end of cooking for the roast and mix it well with the juices. Remove the meat, strain the sauce and reduce the sauce to thicken it.

Serve veal sliced and pour the cream over it. Serves 4 to 6. Goes well with Vernaccia di San Gimignano wine.

Il Contorno

-Finocchi al forno-

Lou's Notes: Another favorite of my Tuscan classes. A Master Italian Chef from Sicily who favored Tuscano Cucina, taught it to me.

Ingredients:

- 4 fennel bulbs
- ½ lb beef marrow
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 cups chicken broth

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- 1 ½ cups freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano
- 3 tbsps EV Tuscan olive oil

Procedure:

Preheat oven to 350

Remove hard outer leaves and cut the fennel vertically, in about ¼ inch slices. Keep a few fluffy fennel greens.

In a small pan, sauté the marrow; be careful not to turn it all into liquid fat. Save about 6 tablespoons of the liquid fat, and keep all the fried marrow.

In a large casserole dish or a ½ hotel pan, place the EV olive oil on the bottom of the dish, add the fennel in layers. Pour the chicken stock over it, add the fried marrow, garlic and the 6 tbsps of marrow liquid. Cover and bake for about 1½ hours. Uncover, sprinkle the parmigiano over everything and place under the broiler for another 20 minutes, careful not to burn the cheese. Serves 8.

I Formaggi Toscani

-Pecorino Toscano with sliced pears-

Lou's Notes: I recall vividly a small Salumeria in San Gimignano, where I saw from the storefront window a basket of summer truffles. This lured me into plethora of olfactory sensations and finally a mozzarella ovalini made with fresh summer truffles. Our classes will experience first hand, my favorite cheese and specialty store in all of San Gimignano.

Ingredients:

- Pecorino Toscano
- Pears, ripe fall pears

Procedure:

Slice Cheese thin and arrange on plate with alternate slices of ripe cored pears

N.B. Pecorino is a general name for any cheese made from sheep's milk. Pecorino Toscano is name controlled, and is made all over Tuscany. Try it, you'll like it !

Dolce

-Focaccia all'Uva-

Lou's Notes: We usually think of focaccia as a savory, but here is a version from Tuscany that is traditionally made in the fall during harvest season with freshly picked grapes and will please most dessert lovers.

Ingredients:

- 3 tbsps fresh rosemary, leaves removed from the stem
- ¼ cup EV Tuscan olive oil
- 1 pkg quick rise, active dry yeast
- 1 cup warm water (about 110 F)
- 1 tsp salt
- 3 ½ cups all-purpose flour

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- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 lb red grapes; destemmed, washed and dried
- 1 ½ cups walnut halves

Procedure:

In a small saucepan, add the EV olive oil, heat for about 3-4 minutes on medium, then add the rosemary, remove from heat immediately and allow to cool.

In a large mixing bowl, add the warm water then the yeast, wait until yeast is foamy, about 5 – 10 minutes, then stir. To the yeast add the EV olive oil, rosemary, 3 tbsps sugar, 3 cups of flour and the salt; mix until a soft dough forms.

Remove the dough to a floured surface where it can be knead by hand until smooth “as a baby’s bottom”, about 10-12 minutes. Add more flour if the dough feels sticky.

Oil the bottom of another mixing bowl, place the dough into it, turning it once to coat all the sides, cover with a cloth and place the bowl in a warm area for about 45 min to 1 hour or until it doubles in size.

Preheat the oven to 375 F, flour a 15 x 10 x 1 inch jelly-roll pan. Punch the dough down, and stretch the dough out with your hand to fit the pan. Scatter the grapes and the walnuts over the pan, press them down with your hand, just a tad. Sprinkle with the remaining 2 to 3 tablespoons of sugar. Bake for about 30 to 35 minutes or until the focaccia is lightly browned and crisp on the edges. Slide focaccia off the pan and serve in small 4 x 4 inch squares, warm or at room temperature.

Buon Appetito !