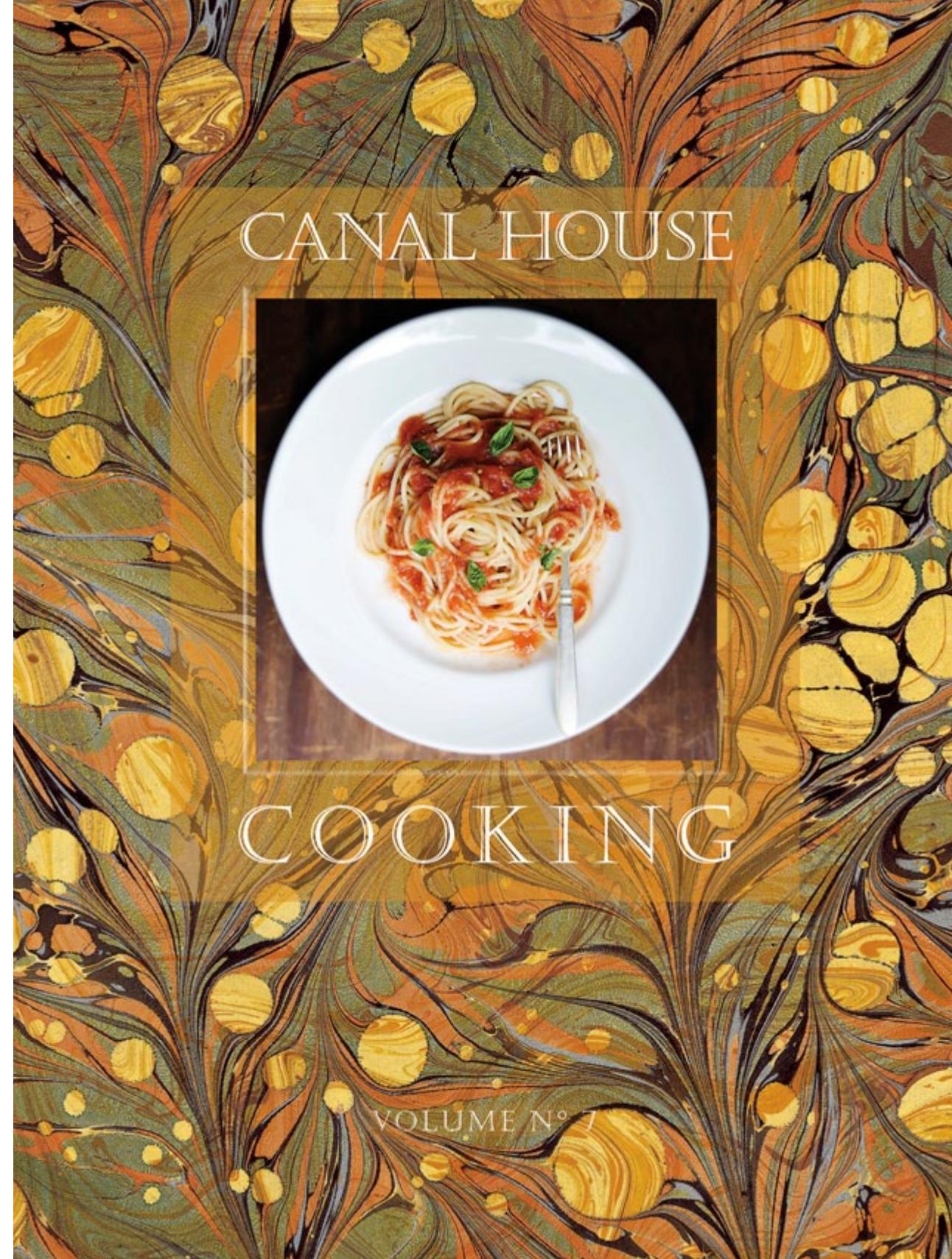


CANAL HOUSE COOKING VOLUME N° 7, *La Dolce Vita* is a collection of some of our favorite Italian recipes, the ones we cook for ourselves, our friends, and our families during the fall and right through the holiday season. These are recipes that will make you want to roll up your sleeves, pour yourself a glass of prosecco or Lambrusco, and start cooking.

We are home cooks writing about home cooking for other home cooks. Our recipes are easy to prepare and completely doable for the novice and experienced cook alike. In this volume we celebrate the bounty of fall and the festive holiday season with delicious Italian dishes, some classic, some reinterpreted Canal House style. We make *tramezzini*, and tender spinach gnocchi, bathing them in a simple sage butter. We roll out sheets of pasta and layer them into rich, delicate lasagne. We simmer classic ragù Bolognese and serve it with wide ribbons of pappardelle. We roast game birds, stir up creamy risottos, slice porcini, char peppers, poach capons, and turn the beloved chestnut into sweets just right for the holidays. Take a peek at the pages to the right to see what we've cooked up for you.

Canal House Cooking, Volume N° 7, *La Dolce Vita*, is the seventh book of our award-winning series of seasonal recipes. We publish three volumes a year: Summer, Fall & Holiday, and Winter & Spring, each filled with delicious recipes for you from us.

Cook your way through the fall and holidays with *La Dolce Vita*, and all year long with *Canal House Cooking!*



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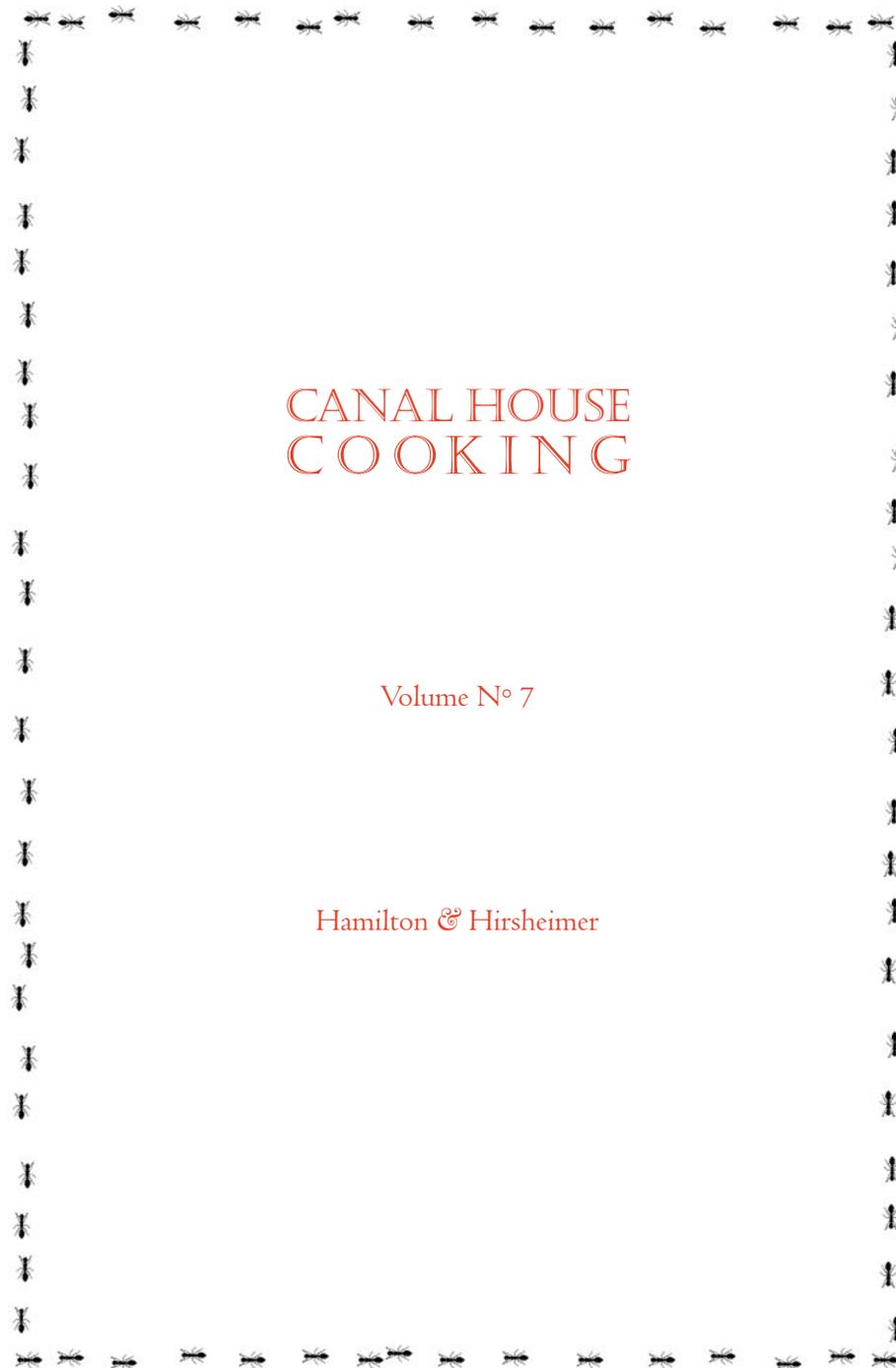
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CANAL HOUSE COOKING

Volume N° 7

Hamilton & Hirsheimer

Welcome to Canal House—our studio, workshop, dining room, office, kitchen, and atelier devoted to good ideas and good work relating to the world of food. We write, photograph, design, and paint, but in our hearts we both think of ourselves as cooks first.

Our loft studio is in an old red brick warehouse. A beautiful lazy canal runs alongside the building. We have a simple galley kitchen. Two small apartment-size stoves sit snugly side by side against a white tiled wall. We have a dishwasher, but prefer to hand wash the dishes so we can look out of the tall window next to the sink and see the ducks swimming in the canal or watch the raindrops splashing into the water.

And every day we cook. Starting in the morning we tell each other what we made for dinner the night before. Midday, we stop our work, set the table simply with paper napkins, and have lunch. We cook seasonally because that's what makes sense. So it came naturally to write down what we cook. The recipes in our books are what we make for ourselves and our families all year long. If you cook your way through a few, you'll see that who we are comes right through in the pages: that we are crazy for tomatoes in summer, make braises and stews all fall, and turn oranges into marmalade in winter.

Canal House Cooking is home cooking by home cooks for home cooks. We use ingredients found in most markets. All the recipes are easy to prepare for the novice and experienced cook alike. We want to share them with you as fellow cooks along with our love of food and all its rituals. The everyday practice of simple cooking and the enjoyment of eating are two of the greatest pleasures in life.

CHRISTOPHER HIRSHEIMER served as food and design editor for *Metropolitan Home* magazine, and was one of the founders of *Saveur* magazine, where she was executive editor. She is a writer and a photographer.

MELISSA HAMILTON cofounded the restaurant Hamilton's Grill Room in Lambertville, New Jersey, where she served as executive chef. She worked at *Martha Stewart Living*, *Cook's Illustrated*, and at *Saveur* as the food editor.



Right: above, Melissa (left) and Christopher (right) in Siena; below, the Canal House ride



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WE RENTED A FARMHOUSE IN TUSCANY—a remote, rustic old stucco and stone house at the end of a gravel road, deep in the folds of vine-covered hills. It had a stone terrace with a long table for dinners outside, a grape arbor, and apple and fig trees loaded with fruit in the garden. There was no phone, TV, or Internet service, just a record player and shelves and shelves of books. It had a spare, simple kitchen with a classic waist-high fireplace with a grill. It was all we had hoped for. It was our Casa Canale for a month.

The decision had been made back in our New Jersey studio six months earlier on a cold rainy day in early spring. Over a lunch of cannelloni, we'd gotten into a long conversation about why Italian food tastes so damn delicious. We sat there for a couple of hours discussing it. We have both traveled extensively in Italy, eating in every region, and in one sense we really do know Italian food: We know that *seppie* (cuttlefish) is served with white polenta in the Veneto; that bread crumbs replace grated cheese in Sicily; and that in Genoa, only tiny, sweet Genovese basil is used to make pesto—leaves grown in warmer climes are deemed too aggressive in flavor. But the more you learn, the less you know. And we realized that for all the times we'd been to Italy, there was still so much we wanted to understand about Italian home cooking. By the end of lunch we had a plan. We'd go to Italy, find a house with a kitchen, and cook. We looked at each other and laughed, surprised that we could imagine doing such a thing. But that's just what we did.

We arrived on a warm autumn afternoon. There was a note from our landlady—under a bottle of Chianti on the stone table outside the kitchen door—listing area restaurants, market schedules, where to shop, and where to find our morning cappuccino. There was no food in the house, and by now the shops were closed, so, following her advice, we put on our coats and walked down the road to buy vegetables from a nearby gardener. Evening was falling as we knocked on the door of a small house surrounded by a big garden. A man answered, and we could see he'd been enjoying an early dinner. We apologized for disturbing him but when we said we'd come to buy vegetables, he replied, “*Ma certo!*”, and gestured toward the garden. Out we headed in the moonlight, into rows of silvery cardoons, as he motioned us to follow. We pointed at a big head of cabbage. He took his sharp sickle knife and thwacked it from its stalk. Then he harvested four heads of radicchio and some of the cardoons for us. We shook hands in the dark garden and then

hurried up the road back to the safety of our farmhouse. We were thrilled at our good fortune; we never would have had this experience at home.

Early the next day, we hiked over the hill and through the woods to find the caffè-bar and a market. As we came into the village, we passed a garage with the door rolled up and noticed two aproned women standing on either side of a table, chatting away as they plucked a pile of chickens. We walked over to get a closer look and noticed a particularly big bird. “*Cappone*,” said the older lady, confirming our hopes that it was a capon. Money was exchanged and the bird went right into our market bag. We bought chestnuts at the market, and our first proper Italian meal was roasted capon with chestnut stuffing, spit-roasted in the fireplace.

Every day we had small adventures. Driving through the countryside, we'd stop at markets, dairies, and wineries to check everything out. Along the way, we'd gather what looked good to cook for our dinner. We preferred to eat out for lunch; it was more fun, and then we didn't have to brave the narrow, winding roads after dark. We'd peek inside the kitchens of the restaurants where we ate. More often than not, it was women in white cooks' smocks who were manning the stoves, tending big pots of *ragù* and cutting and filling *anolini* from smooth sheets of fresh pasta.

The big, rich flavors of fall were coming through the markets and farms and into our kitchen. We cooked with chestnuts, rabbit, porcini, pumpkin, cabbage, peppers, radicchio, apples, and pears. Like the Italians, we developed flavors as we cooked. We fried *battuto*—onions, carrots, and celery—into fragrant *soffrito*; toasted tomato paste to add color and richness to sauces; deglazed pans with red wine, allowing it to reduce to its very essence; and we balanced sweet and sour in *agrodolce*.

We know that cooking is not only about ingredients and techniques. Recipes have a spirit, they are born of a place and a culture, and to cook well you have to be sensitive to and honor that spirit. Italians are refined traditionalists; they want their *ragù bolognese* served with *parmiagano-reggiano* and never *pecorino romano*. It just wouldn't taste right otherwise. They are generous, too: It's evident in the way they cook. They pour olive oil liberally, shave white truffles with abandon, toss their pasta in the sauce, dress salads by feel—and they have a word for it: *abbondanza*.

Then one day we found ourselves in Florence in a beautiful wine bar, Procacci, drinking prosecco and eating *panini tartufati*—but we were melancholy. We were ready to go home to the real Canal House and start cooking Italian food our way. And that's just what we did.

Christopher & Melissa

RISOTTO ALLA CERTOSINA

serves 4

This is our take on a risotto from Certosa di Pavia, a fifteenth-century monastery in the center of Lombardy's rice region. Carthusian monks, the very same religious order that created the herb-based liqueur Chartreuse, lived a life of self-sufficiency. They used whatever was around them: rice and the things they found in the watery fields—frogs, small fish, and crayfish. We simplified, it just seemed right.

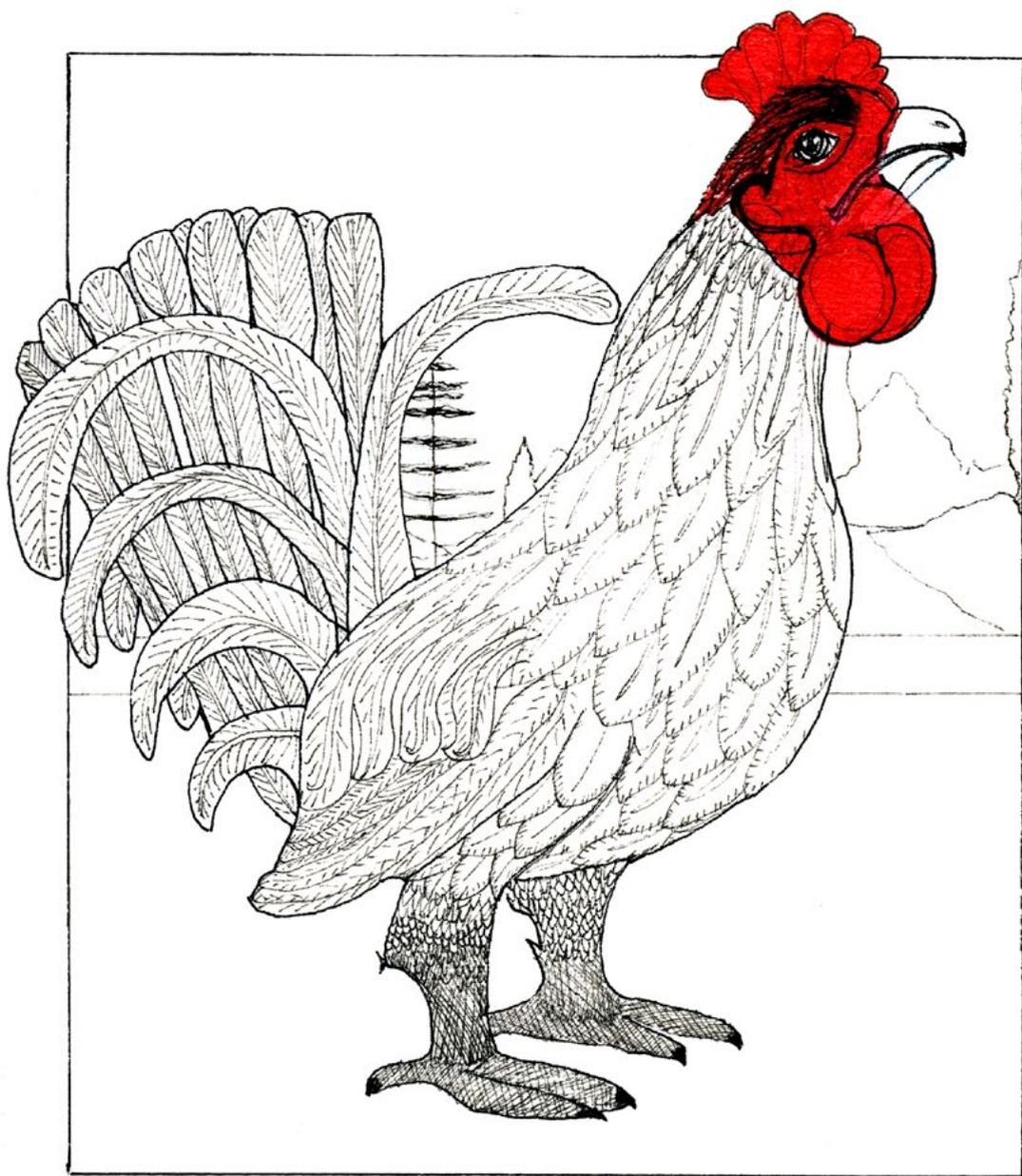
1 pound shrimp	Handful of parsley stems, chopped
4 tablespoons butter	Salt and pepper
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil	One 14-ounce can crushed tomatoes
2 small onions, finely chopped	$\frac{2}{3}$ cup dry vermouth
1 rib celery, finely chopped	Peel of 1 lemon
1 carrot, finely chopped	1 cup arborio, carnaroli, or vialone nano rice
1 clove garlic, sliced	

Peel and devein the shrimp, reserving the shells for the broth, and set aside. Melt 1 tablespoon of the butter with the olive oil in a large pot over medium-high heat. Add the shrimp shells, half of the onions, the celery, carrots, garlic, and parsley stems. Season with salt and pepper, and sauté until golden, about 10 minutes. Add the tomatoes, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup of the vermouth, and lemon peel, and cook for 5 minutes. Add 4 cups water and cook for 15 minutes. Strain the broth, then return it to the pot. Add the shrimp and place the pot on the stove, off the heat.

Melt 2 tablespoons of the butter in a heavy deep sauté pan over medium-high heat. Add the remaining onions and cook, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until soft and translucent, about 3 minutes. Add the rice, stirring until it is coated with butter. Add the remaining $\frac{1}{3}$ cup vermouth.

Add $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of the hot broth, stirring constantly to keep the rice from sticking to the bottom of the pan. Push any rice that crawls up the sides of the pan back down into the liquid. When the rice has absorbed all the broth, add another $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of simmering broth. Keep adding broth and stirring. Taste the rice, it is done when it is tender with a firm center. Add the shrimp and the remaining 1 tablespoon of butter and stir until it has melted into the rice.





big birds



little rabbit

ROAST CAPON WITH DRESSING

serves 6–8

We stay true to Thanksgiving and serve turkey, but for Christmas we love to roast big, juicy capons like the Italians do. For large gatherings, we roast a few, stuffing each one with a different dressing.

1 capon or roasting hen, 6–9 pounds
3 tablespoons butter, softened
Salt and pepper
5–8 cups dressing (recipes follow)
Fresh sage, optional

Preheat the oven to 350°. Rub the capon all over with butter and season it inside and out with salt and pepper. Spoon the dressing into the cavity. Tie the legs together with kitchen string.

Put the capon on a rack set inside a large roasting pan, and add 1 cup water. Roast the capon, basting it occasionally with pan juices, until it is golden brown and the internal temperature of the thigh meat registers 165°, about 2 hours.

Let the capon rest for about 20 minutes before carving it. Serve the capon and pan juices with the dressing on a large serving platter, and garnish with fresh sage, if you like.

CHESTNUTS, PRUNES & BREAD CRUMBS

makes about 8 cups

Although prepared peeled chestnuts, the ones that come vacuum-packed or in jars, are already cooked and reasonably tender, their flavor and texture benefit from a bit of time simmering in hot liquid—in this case, sweet wine.

1½ cups vin santo or Marsala
4 cups peeled whole chestnuts, vacuum-packed or in a jar
1½ cups pitted prunes, halved
8 tablespoons butter
8 ounces pancetta, diced
1 medium onion, finely chopped
5 cups coarse, fresh bread crumbs
½ bunch parsley, leaves chopped
Salt and pepper

Put the wine and chestnuts into a medium saucepan and simmer over medium-low heat for 15 minutes. Add the prunes and set aside to cool.

Meanwhile, melt the butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add the pancetta and onions and cook, stirring often, until the onions are soft, about 5 minutes. Add the bread crumbs, reduce the heat to medium, and cook, stirring often, until golden, about 10 minutes. Remove the skillet from the heat. Using a slotted spoon, add the chestnuts and prunes to the skillet. Add the parsley and season generously with salt and pepper. Mix the dressing together, stirring in just enough of the wine to moisten without it becoming packed or dense.

Spoon the dressing into the capon cavity and roast. Put any extra dressing into a buttered ovenproof dish, cover, and bake in a 350° oven until hot, 20–30 minutes. Uncover and bake until golden on top, about 20 minutes.

SAUSAGE & APPLES

makes about 6 cups

4 tablespoons butter
1 onion, chopped
1 rib celery, chopped
¼ teaspoon fennel seeds
1 pound sweet Italian sausage, removed from casings
½ bunch parsley, leaves chopped
2–4 fresh sage leaves, chopped
Salt and pepper
3–4 cups fresh bread crumbs
1 apple, peeled, cored, and diced
½ cup chicken stock

Melt the butter in a large skillet over medium heat. Add the onions, celery, and fennel seeds, and cook, stirring occasionally, until soft, about 5 minutes. Add the sausage and cook, breaking it up with the back of a spoon, until it is no longer pink, about 5 minutes. Stir in the herbs and generously season with salt and pepper. Transfer to a large bowl. Add the bread crumbs and apples and toss until well combined. Stir in the stock, mixing until the dressing is moist but not packed or dense. Adjust the seasonings.

Spoon the dressing into the capon cavity and roast. Put any extra dressing into a buttered ovenproof dish, cover, and bake in a 350° oven until hot, 20–30 minutes. Uncover and bake until golden on top, about 20 minutes.



BRAISED LAMB & GREEN BEANS

serves 4

Look for whole San Marzano plum tomatoes in cans, imported from Italy. They are worth the hunt. Full of flavor, they have tender meaty flesh that melts into sauces. Italians like their vegetables thoroughly cooked—they may like their pasta *al dente*, but not their green beans.

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil	3 cloves garlic, sliced
¼ teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes	½ cup red wine
2 pounds lamb shoulder, cut into 2-inch pieces	3 small branches fresh rosemary
Salt and pepper	1 cup canned whole plum tomatoes
4 anchovy filets	1–2 pounds of green beans, trimmed

Heat the olive oil in a heavy large skillet with a lid over medium-high heat. Add the pepper flakes. Add the lamb and season it with salt and pepper. Brown the lamb in 2 batches, transferring the cooked lamb from the skillet to a platter.

Add the anchovies to the skillet and stir with a wooden spoon until they have melted into the oil. Add the garlic, and stir for a minute. Return the lamb and any accumulated juices to the skillet. Add the wine and tuck the rosemary around the lamb. Reduce the heat to low, cover, and slowly simmer the lamb until tender, about 1 hour.

While the lamb cooks, put the beans in a medium pot with about 1 cup water. Cover and cook over medium heat until very well done, 15–20 minutes. Drain and season with salt and pepper.

When the lamb is tender, remove the rosemary. Add the crushed tomatoes and stir them into the sauce until the tomatoes dissolve and the sauce thickens slightly. Serve the lamb and its sauce over the green beans.



MEATBALLS WITH MINT & PARSLEY

makes about 24

We serve platters of these tender meatballs along with broccoli rabe sautéed with garlic and crushed red pepper flakes.

1 pound ground pork	¼ cup packed finely chopped fresh parsley leaves
1 pound ground veal	½ whole nutmeg, grated
¼ pound prosciutto, finely chopped	Pepper
1 cup fresh whole milk ricotta (page 102)	¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil
1 cup grated pecorino	½ cup white wine
2 eggs	¾ cup heavy cream, optional
¼ cup packed finely chopped fresh mint leaves	Salt

Mix together the pork, veal, prosciutto, ricotta, pecorino, eggs, mint, parsley, nutmeg, and pepper in a large mixing bowl.

Use a large soup spoon and scoop up about 2 ounces of the meat into your hand and roll into a ball. Make all the meatballs the same size so they will cook evenly. As you make them, arrange them in a single layer on a baking sheet. You can do this a few hours ahead, cover with plastic, and refrigerate until you are ready to cook them.

Heat 2 tablespoons of the oil in a heavy large skillet over medium-high heat. Brown the meatballs in batches, about 15 minutes per batch, using two forks to delicately turn them over so that they brown on all sides. Add more oil if needed. Transfer cooked meatballs to a platter and cover with foil to keep warm.

Increase the heat to high and deglaze the skillet with the wine, stirring with a wooden spoon to loosen any browned bits stuck to the bottom of the skillet. Add the cream, if using, and cook, stirring, until the sauce thickens. Taste, then season with salt if necessary. Pour the sauce through a fine-mesh sieve over the meatballs and serve.



PEPPERS IN AGRODOLCE

makes 8 peppers

Look for meaty red peppers with an elongated shape, we think they're prettier. Our agrodolce is a balance of sweet and sour—currants and aged balsamic vinegar—with anchovies adding a mysterious salty flavor. There is a luscious sensuality to these peppers. We make a double recipe and keep them on hand to drape over quickly grilled fish, meat, or poultry, an easy way to dress up an everyday meal.

1 cup currants	8 anchovy filets
2–4 tablespoons aged balsamic vinegar	Salt and pepper
8 large, long red bell peppers	Really good extra-virgin olive oil
	Fresh basil leaves, optional

Put the currants in a cup and add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup boiling water and the vinegar, cover, and set aside to macerate for about 1 hour.

Char the peppers by placing them directly on the burners of a gas stove, or on a grill, with the flame turned up high. Use tongs to turn the peppers so their skin blackens on all sides. Or roast them in a preheated 450° oven on a baking sheet, turning several times, for about 30 minutes. Place in a plastic bag and allow the peppers to steam. When the peppers have cooled, peel off the blackened skin. Cut off the stem ends, slit open the peppers on one side and remove the seeds. Don't rinse the peppers, it will wash away their smoky flavor.

Slip 1 anchovy filet inside each pepper. Arrange the peppers in a container with a cover. Season with salt and pepper. Strain the currant soaking water into a small pot and reduce over high heat to about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup then pour over the peppers. Scatter the currants over the peppers. Then add enough olive oil to just cover. Serve garnished with basil leaves, if you like. Refrigerate peppers, covered, for up to 1 week.





APPLE CAKE

serves 8–10

We first ate this cake in the fruitful Val di Non in Trentino, where orchards abound. Back home we didn't know which apple variety to use, so we called Karen Bates, of the Philo Apple Farm in the Anderson Valley in California, who passed on these tips: Early apples tend to break down very easily—great for applesauce and very tender, juicy pies. Mid-season apples cook up fairly tender and hold their shape, while late-season apples border on staying a little too firm and are a lot less juicy. So make your applesauce early in the season and store your late apples as long as you can. We decided on Golden Delicious for their rich perfume and the ability to hold their shape when cooked.

6 tablespoons butter, at room temperature, plus more for the pan
1½ cups flour, plus more for the pan
¾ cup granulated sugar, plus more for the apples
1 egg
1 teaspoon vanilla extract

2 teaspoons baking powder
1 pinch of salt
½ cup milk
Grated zest of 2 lemons
2–3 Golden Delicious apples, peeled, cored, and thickly sliced
Powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350°. Butter and flour a 9-inch springform pan. Beat the butter in a large mixing bowl with an electric mixer until creamy. Gradually add the sugar and beat until fluffy, then beat in the egg. Add the vanilla.

Whisk together the flour, baking powder, and salt in a bowl. Add the flour to the butter mixture gradually, alternating with the milk in thirds, beating well after each addition. Stir in the zest. Pour the batter into the prepared pan, and smooth the surface with a spatula.

Starting from the outside, arrange the apple slices in a circle standing them on end with the narrow point in the batter, then fill in the center with as many slices as you can fit. The apples should be quite close together and cover most of the batter. Sprinkle 2 tablespoons granulated sugar over the apples.

Bake for 50–60 minutes, until a toothpick inserted into the cake (not the apples) comes out clean. Place on a rack, remove the outer ring, and allow the cake to cool. Dust the cake with powdered sugar just before serving, if you like.

For more information, email us at