

DISCOVER THE DELICIOUS CUISINE OF ETHIOPIA

SAVEUR

Savor a World of Authentic Cuisine

BEAUTIFUL
PIES

PAGE 13

Mediterranean
Seafood Stew

10 TOP
COOKBOOK
SHOPS

PAGE 26



CLASSIC PASTA

The secrets of Italy's greatest food revealed; plus regional sauces, rich lasagne, a pasta primer, and more

PAGE 44

APRIL 2008 US \$5.00



NUMBER 110
www.saveur.com

The Building Blocks

A true ragù alla bolognese served over fresh, handmade egg pasta could be called the ultimate tribute to the farmers, millers, and artisans of the fertile Po River valley and the surrounding region of Emilia-Romagna, Italy's agricultural heartland. The best cooks in Bologna and its environs know that a dish of pasta and ragù is only as good as the ingredients used to make it, and in this regard those cooks have an unparalleled bounty at their disposal. From parmigiano-reggiano cheese to the legendary cured hams of Parma, the agricultural and artisanal products from this part of Italy benefit from the region's uniquely humid and cool microclimate, as well as the tradition of filiera integrata, an integrated chain of production in which a by-product of one process (whey, for example, which is left over after the making of cheese) is conserved for use in another (for the feeding of hogs, say). Here is a closer look at the four elemental ingredients of pasta and ragù.

La Carne Ragù is, first and foremost, a meat sauce, and the meat that a cook chooses to add to the dish has historically depended on the particular region of Emilia-Romagna from which he or she hails. In Bologna, beef from retired dairy cattle was traditionally used, on its own or with a bit of veal. Cooks from outside the capital city have always been more flexible, using chicken livers, giblets, various kinds of game, and pork, another product for which the region is renowned. Nowadays, cooks are less tethered to geographic preferences, and they select their meat according to personal preference and availability. "I always add fresh pork," says Anna Nanni, the chef at Trattoria Amerigo dal 1934, outside Bologna, who says it adds a sweetness to the mix. "If I have prosciutto, I'll use it too." Prosciutto di Parma, the prized dry-cured, long-aged ham, is often deemed too pricey to add to ragù, though other, less expensive country-style prosciutti can give a lusty effect. Alberto Bettini, the owner of the restaurant where Nanni cooks, obtains his fresh and cured pork from a local farmer named Beppe Ferri, who raises hogs of a venerated breed, called mora romagnola, that was common in Emilia-Romagna until the 1950s, when other, more commercially viable breeds took over. The meat imparts a full flavor and, combined with other ingredients, makes Nanni's ragù one of the best in the region.

Il Latte The tradition of dairy farming in Emilia-Romagna reaches back to the Middle Ages, and butter and other dairy products figure prominently in the cooking of this part of Italy. The most famous among those products is parmigiano-reggiano cheese, which has a 700-year legacy in the region. This grana, as hard-grating cheeses are generically called in Italy, has a concentrated, nutty flavor that adds a distinctive dimension to many Bolognese dishes. In her book about the region's cooking, *The Splendid Table*, Lynne Rossetto Kasper notes that Renaissance cooks served pasta with a sprinkling of the cheese and a pinch of sugar and cinnamon. When ragù became pasta's favored companion centuries later, the cheese was often added to the finished dish as a final flourish. According to Rossetto Kasper, cream was traditionally added during the cooking process. Today, many cooks use milk instead.

La Farina Myriad factors contribute to the finesse of the region's pasta, but none is as critical to its characteristically ethereal texture as the flour, which is made from a soft wheat, or *grano tenero*, that flourishes there (as compared with the hard durum wheat used for making flour for dried pasta, or pasta secca, whose higher level of protein makes it chewier). The flour that many pasta makers seek out for fresh pasta bears the commercial designation "tipo 00", or *doppio zero* (double zero), a term that refers to the flour's high level of refinement and denotes a superfine, almost powdery texture. (In fact, *doppio zero* flour is similar to all-purpose flour, which is made from the same variety of wheat.) Some of the best flour produced in the region is made at Il Mulino del Dottore, a centuries-old, water-powered gristmill in the hamlet of Cà Bortolani, about 20 miles from Bologna, that grinds wheat grown on the property and sells it to restaurateurs and home cooks. It has a silkiness, freshness, and liveliness that even the best commercial flours lack.

Le Uova Emilia-Romagna's fresh pasta derives its unparalleled richness and bright yellow color from the use of fresh farmhouse eggs. The rust-colored yolks of the region's eggs (known as *rossi*, "reds") enrich the dough with fat and give the pasta a toothsome, springy quality. Though their hue isn't a sign of freshness (their color is simply the result of carotene in the grains the hens eat), they are exceedingly fresh: Italians don't typically refrigerate their eggs, so the ones sold at most produce markets aren't more than a day or two old.

Anna Nanni's Ragù alla Bolognese



MAKES 4 CUPS

"Everyone in this region makes ragù alla bolognese," says Anna Nanni, a cook at Trattoria Amerigo dal 1934, outside Bologna in the city of Savigno. "From ten women, you'll get ten different recipes, all of them traditional." Her ragù is brightly flavored and slightly tangy, owing to the addition of canned tomatoes.

1 28-oz. can whole peeled tomatoes (with juice)
1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
2 tbsp. unsalted butter
1 rib celery, finely chopped
1/2 medium yellow onion, finely chopped
1/2 medium carrot, finely chopped
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste
1 1/4 b. ground beef chuck
1/2 lb. ground pork shoulder
1 4-oz. piece pancetta, finely chopped

1/2 cup dry red wine
2 tbsp. Homemade Tomato Paste
Homemade Tagliatelle

1. Put the tomatoes and their juice into a blender; purée until smooth and set aside.
2. Heat the oil and butter in a large heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. Add the celery, onions, and carrots, season with salt and pepper, and cook, stirring frequently, until soft and lightly browned, about 15 minutes. Reduce heat to low and cook, stirring occasionally, until very soft and caramelized, about 15 minutes more.
3. Add the beef and pork and cook, stirring and breaking up meat with a wooden spoon, until the meat begins to brown, about 10 minutes. Add the pancetta and continue cooking, stirring occasionally, until its fat has rendered, about 10 minutes more. Increase the heat to medium, add the wine, and simmer, stirring constantly, until evaporated, about 5 minutes. Add tomato paste and cook, stirring frequently, for 2 minutes. Add reserved tomato purée, reduce heat to low, and simmer, stirring occasionally, until sauce is very thick, about 3 hours.
4. Season ragù with salt and pepper. Toss with fresh tagliatelle or the pasta of your choice, or use in lasagne. Serve with grated parmigiano-reggiano.

Anna Nanni's Baked Spinach Lasagne



(Lasagne Verdi al Forno)

SERVES 6

For a truly authentic lasagne see our **Spinach Pasta Gallery** for an illustrated, step-by-step guide to making the pasta called for in this dish.

1 lb. fresh spinach (not stemmed)
2 eggs
2 1/2 cups plus 3 tbsp. flour
1 tsp. kosher salt, plus more to taste
5 tbsp. unsalted butter
2 cups milk
Freshly ground white pepper, to taste
4 cups ragù alla bolognese, preferably **Anna Nanni's**
1 1/2 cups finely grated parmigiano-reggiano

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add spinach; cook until tender, 4–5 minutes. Drain. Squeeze liquid from spinach; chop very finely. Wrap spinach in a towel; squeeze to dry completely (you should have 3/4 cup).

2. Make the pasta: Combine spinach, eggs, and 1 tbsp. water in a bowl; mix with a fork. Mound 2 1/2 cups flour on a work surface; create a wide well in center with your hands. Sprinkle 1 tsp. salt over flour. Pour spinach mixture into well and, using a fork, begin to slowly incorporate flour from well into spinach mixture, using a circular motion, to make a stiff dough. Knead dough, adding a little flour as necessary to prevent sticking, until it is smooth and elastic, about 10 minutes. Wrap dough in plastic wrap; let rest for 30 minutes.

3. Divide dough into 6 pieces; cover all but 1 piece with a towel. Using your hands, flatten the piece of dough into a rectangle. Pass dough through widest setting of a hand-cranked pasta roller. Fold dough into thirds to create another rectangle; pass dough through widest setting again, feeding open edge through first; fold into thirds again and roll twice through same setting. Decrease setting one notch; roll pasta through to make a thinner pasta sheet. Lower setting again; feed pasta sheet through roller. Repeat through each setting until very thin, about 1/16", stopping at the second-to-last setting. Halve pasta sheet crosswise and transfer to a parchment paper-lined sheet tray; dust lightly with flour. Repeat above steps with remaining dough pieces, layering sheets between pieces of floured parchment paper.

4. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add roughly a quarter of the pasta sheets, stir gently, and cook until just al dente, 2–3 minutes. Using a slotted spoon, remove pasta sheets and lay flat on a damp towel without overlapping; cover with another damp towel. Repeat with remaining pasta.

5. Make the besciamella sauce: Heat 3 tbsp. butter in a saucepan over medium-low heat. Whisk in remaining flour and cook, whisking constantly, until it begins to bubble, about 3 minutes. While whisking, add milk in a steady stream. Bring to a simmer and cook, whisking occasionally, until sauce thickens, 10–15 minutes. Season generously with salt and pepper and set besciamella aside.

6. Assemble the lasagne: Heat oven to 450°. Spread 1 cup ragù over bottom of a 2-quart baking dish, then cover evenly with 2 sheets of pasta, cutting to fit. Top with 3/4 cup ragù, spread with 1/4 cup besciamella, then sprinkle with 1/4 cup cheese. Starting with another layer of pasta, repeat layering process 3 more times. Top with another pasta layer (don't trim edges), remaining besciamella, and cheese; dot with remaining butter. (Reserve any remaining pasta for another use.) Bake for 15 minutes; reduce heat to 350°. Continue baking until bubbly, 15–20 minutes more. Let cool slightly before serving.