

CIVILTÀ DELLA TAVOLA

ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA



ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA
A CULTURAL INSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ITALY
FOUNDED IN 1953 BY ORIO VERGANI

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ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

JUNE 2013 / N. 250

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MONTHLY MAGAZINE
REG. N. 4049 - 29-5-1956
TRIBUNALE DI MILANO

PUBLISHED BY

RICCIARDI & ASSOCIATI SRL
VIA DEL CASALE DI TOR DI QUINTO 1 ROMA
TEL. 06 3336164 - FAX 06 3336174



Rivista associata
all'Unione Stampa
Periodica Italiana

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On the cover: detail from one of six panels (oil on wood) of the polyptych *The Peasant Wedding* (ca. 1575) by Marten van Cleve. The work is on display at the Cloister of Bramante in Rome through July 7 as part of the exhibition *Breughel - Marvels of Flemish Art*. This is the first major Roman exhibition dedicated not only to the masters who made that name famous (Pieter the Elder and the Younger, and Jan the Younger) but also to the entire line of exceptionally talented artists who took their cue from their ancestor. Among this group we also must include the Belgian Martin van Cleve (Antwerp, 1527-1581) who although not related to the Breughels by blood was accepted as master in the Antwerp guild the same year as his contemporary Pieter Brueghel the Elder. In addition to being inspired by his famous father's work, Pieter Brueghel the Younger was also inspired by van Cleve. The exhibition traces the history of this painting dynasty, active during the 16th and 17th centuries over a familial and pictorial span of 150 years. In the work shown on the cover (from a private collection in New York) we can see several elements that were dear to the painter: the women's broad white bonnets, the head cloths that tie up around the head, and the ever present dogs, nearly always depicted in profile.



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Tradition and Handing Down Culture

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

A tradition is alive only if it is handed down from one era to another, bequeathing behaviors that constantly improve, adjusting to changes and creating a cultural bond across generations.

Dear Academicians, Tradition is associated with both the negative aspects of unfaithfulness and the positive ones of trans-generational handing down of legacies. Much has been said and written about traditions being sold out, and under various circumstances. Much more rarely have we examined the positive value of tradition, what its instruments and modes of transmission are, and when handed down that it usually means looking backward and hardly ever forward. We seldom think that we ought to maintain, interpret and construct a system of behavior that can be improved before being handed down to the generation that will follow us. Furthermore, we must not forget that the founding principle of our Academy is to foster the improvement of our traditions in Italy and abroad.

Tradition can be seen as a network of strands that link the generations that constantly succeed us, but in different times and with different rhythms. Together these strands weave a web that is alive and constantly changing, in which the most varied and diverse behaviors intersect and influence one another, creating a fabric that confers support and meaning to each society. Culinary traditions are just one of these strands that assume more general roles and meanings - lifestyles, for example, but also economics, concepts about nature, and so on. One need only think how our passage, at least partially, from a mythical concept to a scientific interpretation of life, and thereby also of nutrition, has profoundly changed many culinary traditions.

In the so-called "cold", or northern societies that are characterized as im-

mutable or changing only very slowly or partially, the transmission of nutritional traditions is slow, and from a certain point of view, relatively "easy". Very different - and "difficult" is that transmission within "warm" societies, especially during times of social and cultural transition like the one in which we are now living. Under these conditions we are forced to accept our duty to hand down to the next generation a behavioral model that is somewhat different from that which we received from the generations that preceded us. It should be noted that this is a process that should always include the improvement of the above-mentioned traditions.

It is interesting that that transmission of traditions is a very complex process and often can skip one or more generations. This is also true for cuisine, where we can see how one generation, having gone from rural poverty to the (supposed or perceived) urban riches, disdains and abandons the traditions of their parents only to see them rediscovered, in a different way, by the next generation, often in a mythologized way. Such was the case with *polenta*, *bacalà*, and other dishes that from being popular "foods of the poor" achieved nearly cult status of the "new" gastronomy. Similarly, nothing seems more novel than an unknown past, and so it is sometimes not only recreated but invented outright, often including the creation of "historical falsehoods" with which our industrial society seems to want to satisfy the hunger not only of the body but of the soul as well.

We have briefly mentioned the falsification of tradition, as contrasted with its improvement. This requires a

profound knowledge of the tradition itself, in all its components, starting with the anthropological ones, to successfully interpret and adapt them to today's reality. It is a process that is open ended and infinite, but that must be open to the future through a continuous transmission.

There are many aspects of the improvement of tradition, and they may vary in the way foods are used and especially in terms of recipes. When examined closely, these modes of use are also the ones that influence the persistence and success of a nutritional behavior, a recipe, dish, or food. It is similar to what happens with other traditional elements, and a

nutritional pattern lives on, and maintains a role in society even if this role constantly changes. An old livery stable can survive, or rather, continue to function only when it is used as multi-purpose room. The same is true for a medieval castle when it becomes home to a museum. As far as cuisine is concerned, an ancient recipe, or one that is only a generation or two old can live on if, while maintaining its own specific individuality, it is made available today. As such, it is subject to the same process of modification.

Lasagne constitutes a typical example, among many. The earliest recipes that appeared in the 13th Cen-

tury Code of Frederick, have been passed down to us by interpreting and incorporating a vast series of traditional ingredients, both local and exotic, such as meat *ragù* and tomato paste, without excluding eventual additions and variations.

The Darwinian principle of survival also applies to traditions. But their success depends on knowing how to adapt them not only to the physical but especially the social environment while maintaining their genetic individuality. We must also transmit our own genome while adapting to the social environment in our nutritional traditions.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI

FOCUS DI PAOLO PETRONI

THROWING FOOD IN THE GARBAGE CAN: TRUTH AND HYPOCRISY

The economic crisis continues. In fact it's getting worse. People are paying more and more attention to saving money. In a previous FOCUS we discussed the art of recycling and shopping, emphasizing that it is often more talk than action. Certainly after our discussion of "Christmas dinner bargains" the "media" will be asking us for suggestions on for an ideal Easter luncheon for 10 euros per person. However, a great deal of attention today is focused on wasted food. In fact, the European Union declared 2013 to be the year of eliminating food waste. And by food waste we usually refer to the groceries that we end up throwing out. But in reality, the waste starts much earlier. One quarter of harvested fruit and vegetables are discarded before they even reach our tables. Not to mention the thousands of tons of un-harvested products that are left to rot in the fields. Large scale distribution systems lead to the dumping of tons of unsold and expired products, with grave consequences for the environment and high social costs associated with waste disposal. Official studies are needed, and data on waste vary according to their source. However the statistics are indeed frightening: In Italy, between 6 and 10 million tons of discarded food. Nearly 30 percent of the food we purchase ends up in the trash, especially vegetables, fruit, bread, and dairy and salami products. About half of Italians are trying to put the brakes on this enormous waste by reducing the quantities they buy, by paying close at-

tention to expiration dates and by using leftovers. At least consumers are trying. But what is the food and distribution industry doing to help? Almost nothing. Let's just wonder for argument's sake what would happen if we were all careful and attentive in our food shopping. The result would be a more or less commensurate reduction in consumption. A disaster! It is the other side of the profit coin. In fact, packages are increasingly larger even though household size is decreasing. Italian families with only one or two members make up 29% of the population, but how many food packages are appropriate to this size family? Giant sized packages, and buy one/get one free are marketing schemes that encourage waste. Have you ever stopped to consider the sugar wasted in coffee bars where a law prohibits open sugar bowls and each packet contains 6 grams of sugar?

P.S. In our FOCUS devoted to "meats to forget" we recommended buying only eggs only from open air free range chickens. Now we hear that Italy has been cited by the European Court for not implementing the directive that bans raising egg laying chickens in cages. The decision to provide these animals with a better living environment was taken in the last century - in 1999. Starting January 2, 2012 all chickens must have a minimum living area of 750 square centimeters (116 square inches). Italy has had 12 years to comply with this law, and has not done so. For shame!

Ballarini Reelected President

BY FRANCESCO RICCIARDI

*The Assembly of Delegates
that met in
Montecatini Terme reelected
Giovanni Ballarini
to lead the Academy
for the next two years.*

The Fifteenth Assembly of the Delegates, held in the Congress Hall of the Imperial Theater of Montecatini Terme on Saturday 25 May 2013, confirmed Giovanni Ballarini as the head of the Italian Academy of Cuisine. The President will serve a two-year term until the spring of 2015. In his address to the Assembly, Ballarini thanked the Delegates who had come to the Congress in large numbers for their academic esprit. Then he gave the floor to the Vice President Severino Sani who has been called “from time immemorial”, said Ballarini, to lead the Delegates’ Assembly and the voting process. Following the procedural requirements (nomination of the vote screeners and instructions about the vote) Sani started the voting and at the completion of the vote counting, proclaimed Ballarini re-elected with a large majority: 127 votes out of 149 cast.

Giovanni Ballarini pledged his renewed commitment in leading the Academy and thanked the Delegates for the renewal of trust in his leadership. He also reviewed the main points of programs already accomplished and of those that face the Academy and the President’s Council in the next two years: making the Statute more responsive to the times, expressing wishes to the recently re-elected President of the Republic, escaping isolation by establishing joint programs with other academies such as the one with the Georgofili, a relationship that has just been revived.

“We must look to tomorrow with a responsible attitude - Ballarini said - “dipping into the past and our tradition.” He then talked about the Acad-

emic Library that is currently situated in Milan’s Bicocca University and included in the world library system. He also invited the Delegates to establish territorial libraries with the final objective of setting up a multi-location library to be connected through a web.

The President devoted his attention to the social profile of the Academy using graphic charts and slides to comment upon the status of the Academy. He termed such status satisfying but open to improvements in terms of quality. He also dealt with the capillary presence of the Academy in the national territory and the distribution of 211 Delegations in Italy (91 in the North, 55 in the Central regions and 65 in the South). He stated that the strength of the Academy is the result of the work accomplished by the Delegates and the Presidents who led the Academy in the past. Looking at the foreign picture of the Academy, the President stated that the general orientation is to build new Delegations entrusting them to the solid base of Italians living in foreign countries and to meet the need of accessing new areas.

Ballarini touched upon the fundamental themes of academic life: the activities of the Delegations, the organization of meetings (forty were held last year, an excellent result, he noted, adding a recommendation to pay attention not just to the meeting *per se* but to “the content of the meeting”); the editorial enterprise with the e-book perspective. The last volume of the *Collection of Gastronomic Culture* just published the contributions of one hundred Academicians. The President also present-

ed the project of a “manifest” of the Academy intended for the Milan Expo of 2015, aimed at replicating the success of *The menus of the Quirinale*. He recalled that work is underway on *National Recipes*, the *Restaurant Guide* on line (with the delicate problem of bringing its data up to date) and on *The Good Traditional Table*.

At the end of his address, President Ballarini called on Victor Dana, the *Consultore* who had just resigned, announcing that his name would be entered in the Honor Roll. Dana greeted the audience and explained that his resignation was due to personal reasons, particularly to the need to concentrate on his work toward the reconstruction of areas of Ferrara damaged by the earthquake. “I do not have enough time to dedicate to the Academy”, he said. “In 34 years of membership, I worked with five presidents. Now is the time for a renewal and for giving space to the new forces”.

Severino Sani announced the composition of the new academic organs, starting with the - Board of Auditors - up to the - Arbitration Board - and the new academic council. He then called out the names of the new members of the two organs and the Council, introducing them to the Assembly (the list of the members is published on Page 2 of the magazine). Following a speech by Paolo Petroni, who stressed the fact that all regions are represented in the Council, Sani thanked the vote screeners for their excellent work and declared

the assembly adjourned. Following adjournment, the new Council met in the meeting hall of Tamerici & Principe Grand Hotel to elect the new President’s Council. The Council met immediately afterward.

To replace outgoing members Benito Fiore and Maurizio Moreno, new nominations were made with Roberto Ariani and Mario Ursino taking over. (The composition of the new President’s Council and relevant assignments can be read on page 2).

The work of the Academicians had already begun on Friday with the meeting of the President’s Council and the Academic Advisory Council that was held at the Tamerici & Principe Grand Hotel. Following the President’s welcome address and his remarks to the Council members, the day’s agenda called for a report by Treasurer Giuseppe De Martino, and an explanation of the 2012 financial statement and remarks by Board of Auditors president Roberto Ariani. The two precise and exhaustive reports were followed by the unanimous approval of the 2012 financial report.

Following the resignations presented to the Council by Victor Dana it was time to nominate a new member. The President’s Council recommended Mimmo D’Alessio, who was unanimously approved. Gianni Foscati then thanked Victor Dana for his service during a difficult period for the Milan delegations.

It then fell to Secretary General Paolo Petroni to report to the Council on the state of the membership

profile: “The institution is solid” - he said - “and is holding its own”. In 2012, while 280 Academicians stepped down, 282 new ones were added. This should be seen as a positive situation that expresses membership solidarity without necessarily looking toward expansion. A discussion of the various issues raised in the presentations ensued. Among others, that of Annabella di Montaperto (insufficient communication regarding Academic events in Barcelona), Antonio Ravidà (clarifying the mission of the Academy, and high level publications that should be better diffused), Vittorio Brandonisio, Francesco Menichini, and Guido Schiaroli.

Alongside the work conducted by the participants, the convivial events during the Assembly included the traditional welcome dinner Friday evening at the restaurant in the Grand Hotel Tettuccio, and a working lunch on Saturday comprised of a rich Tuscan buffet that the Academicians deemed particularly good. Saturday morning included an excursion (unfortunately a rather wet one) to explore the Tuscan diet, led by a local guide from Lucca and organized by the Delegations of Montecatini Terme - Valdinevole (Delegate Alessandro Giovanini and Honorary Delegate Roberto Doretta) and Pistoia (Delegate Maurizio Giacometti). The grand finale was the gala dinner in honor of the President that took place in the restaurant of the Grand Hotel La Pace in Montecatini Terme.

FRANCESCO RICCIARDI

Identity, Disenchantment and Love

BY SILVIA DE LORENZO

“Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well in the New Millennium” was the theme of the conference in Montecatini Terme.

It fell to Secretary General Paolo Petroni, in his role as moderator, to open the 23rd international Conference on *The Civilization of the Table*. He noted that the Academy’s cultural mission in this, the 60th anniversary of its founding, should rightly focus on analyzing the current state of cuisine and its potential development in this new millennium in which a great deal has changed since Pellegrino Artusi first published his book - which was considered quite revolutionary for its time.

After a speech by the mayor of Montecatini expressing appreciation for and solidarity with the Academy’s objectives which represent an important cultural reality in Italy and around the world, Paolo Petroni introduced the conference speakers.

President Giovanni Ballarini got straight to the heart of the matter: “Where is Italian cuisine headed?” What is the legacy of the last century of the previous millennium, when *Science in the Kitchen* taught bourgeois ladies, among other things, “the art of eating well”? First and foremost, where are we headed with a cuisine that is no longer created in the kitchen? What of frivolous articles in magazines, both specialized and not, and the numerous virtual books published online “on the fly” about which a recent study showed that those who read them only understand 30% of the content (just like medicine patient information slips or product assembly instructions)? The aggressive assault of televised cooking shows? Just as the spread and popularity of crime shows does not make us potential criminals, cooking shows do not turn us into cooks.

What kind of cuisine do we speak of today, when even that reference

point known as “family cooking” has all but disappeared? Following the suggestion of President Ballarini we focus on a situation that is, at least, “familiar” to us today: what type of family are we talking about where no more than three people sit down to a meal together? And what is the environment, given that today many kitchens are relegated to a mere cooking “corner”? And how have the consumers of cuisine changed in an ageing population (20% of Italians are over 65), that even though they retain the memories of cuisine past, must be increasing careful about what they eat owing to health and age concerns? The President followed with the disenchanted vision (in the objective and critical sense) of cuisine today. And he offered a final analysis that examines the fragmentation of today’s lifestyles compared with those attributable to the different types of regional, bourgeois, working class, and peasant cultures of the last millennium. The cuisine that is identified with the new lifestyles cannot but be a composite cuisine - a “culinary system” that is associated with different figures (no longer just the housewife), different ways of transmitting recipes (no longer just our mother’s and grandmother’s notebooks and oral traditions), and different foods (seldom the fruit of our own labors). In fact, today the “culinary system” is comprised of the cook (a media figure), the food critic (without whom neither the cook nor gastronomy itself exists), communications (which becomes the main means of recipe transmission), and industry (that often takes away the joy of cooking and exalts the new reference points of modern cuisine: the

refrigerator, the microwave, and a lack of time).

However, disenchantment does not necessarily mean regret. It means looking at the reality of cuisine today with eyes that are wide open, objective and aware, and trying to anticipate the latest developments, take advantage of new opportunities, correct potential dangerous deviations, and study and focus on trends and potential. This role falls to the Academy, for which cuisine is culture, passion, and love.

Innovations are often regarded with suspicion - as in the past with foreign foods - or they are accepted enthusiastically simply because of their novelty, which just as quickly fades. But if tradition is maintained by successful innovations, fads and experimentation notwithstanding, it represents a hope for the future, as both elements work out of a desire to keep cuisine alive. It was in this light that Professor Davide Cassi, Director of the Physical Gastronomy Laboratory of the Agricultural Faculty of the University of Parma, presented his remarks on *Good Science*.

As a physicist with an interest in gastronomy, Professor Cassi discussed the progress of a project he promoted aimed at discovering what science can do for gastronomy. Two seemingly very different worlds, because science has never been terribly interested in what's cooking and has largely considered cooking to be "frivolous". But in the past 20 years, the world of high level cuisine has been the scene of the greatest revolution in its history, because it was in this environment that culinary experimentation was born and it was during this period that more recipes than ever before were created. This is largely owing to many innovations: new techniques, new instruments, and new ways of cooking. According to Davide Cassi, with the transfer of many of these innovations to day-to-day cooking (not only the microwave but siphon or vacuum sealed cooking) today we have arrived at the

complete integration of science and cuisine. In describing the phases of the project he referred to earlier - from the laboratory with 6 ovens controlled by computer to the workshops and conferences (before launching into the cuisine of Ferran Adrià) the speaker emphasized that we should not fear good science in the kitchen since it often is helpful to cooks - traditional as well as curious and experimental ones.

For example, molecular cuisine was born out of Ferran Adrià's curiosity and his desire to apply new culinary techniques and tools to traditional dishes. Initially it was praised as revolutionary, but with time, acquired its detractors and critics. But it is part of the reality of cuisine today, with Adrià's instruments and dishes - so much so that it has been the object of poor imitations and of a market that has benefited from ingredients and objects for inferior cuisine.

Professor Cassi concluded that it will fall to future generations to judge whether all the innovations science has brought to the kitchen, (like the use of liquid nitrogen to turn a cup of coffee into ice cream), the new cooking techniques (like frying in glucose or cold cooking eggs), and the new ingredients (like agar agar) can become part of our tradition. One thing is certain: Cuisine would not be alive if its practitioners didn't occasionally ask, with curiosity and a desire to discover something new, "what would happen if.....?"

The third speaker was Professor Simone Orlandini of the Department of agro-alimentary production and environmental science at the University of Florence. In his presentation entitled *Good for the Environment and Good to Eat*, Professor Orlandini pointed out how the meaning of "eating well" has changed since Artusi's time. From a gastronomic meaning that referenced the family and the individual, today we have added others, especially respect for the environment. "Good to eat" now also means understanding the raw materi-

als and how foods are transformed, taking into consideration water use and the production of greenhouse gases, the environmental costs of transportation and the energy costs of conserving "fresh" food, the use of non-renewable energy sources, the environmental impact of packaging, and the production of food waste.

Before bringing the conference to a close, Secretary General Paolo Petroni paused to reflect on Pellegrino Artusi and his work, to which he dedicated the introduction in the edition honoring the centenary of the author's death. He mentioned some interesting and unpublished curiosities, but focused especially on the book's evolution from the 475 recipes that made up the original nucleus of the book to the 790 in the final edition that Artusi included after years of patient work, travel and experimentation. With his work and constant dialogue with his countrymen, Artusi managed to unite Italians around a cultural patrimony. We owe several major innovations to him (not only the introduction of ingredient measurement in grams and recipes for four people) that made *Science in the Kitchen* a source of inspiration for today's great chefs. The book constitutes a full stop for the Academy, which has as one of its objectives the safeguarding of traditions. But the Academy, continued Paolo Petroni, also knows that tradition is in perpetual motion and new life must always be breathed into the past. Thanks to this knowledge, the Academy is grateful to its founding fathers, but also to the presidents that followed them and protected our institution from false illusions, partiality, and political and economic involvement, thereby allowing it to always be vital and perennially up to date. To this end, recalling the other important event with which the day began, he announced in a tone that belied his emotion, that once again the Academy has elected another great president.

SILVIA DE LORENZO

Cuisine as Obedience?

BY ALFREDO PELLE

Academician, Apuano Delegation
Franco Marengi Study Center

*Cuisine is obliged to move
forward according
to the fashions of the times.*

It should be made clear from the outset that this concept, by itself, may seem excessive when applied to cuisine. Obedience? In what sense? In terms of taste, perhaps? We know that taste is an individual preference (Kant said “everyone has an original idea in his head of what constitutes taste”), therefore I am not referring to obedience in terms of taste. But then, strictly speaking, neither is obedience to the Roman Catholic Church. Must cuisine obey the laws of the state? Yes, but only certain branches. So what do I mean when I speak of cuisine as obedience?

Let us begin with a premise that will clarify things: cuisine as a producer of food that in turn produces its own language. In the year 400 A.D. Hippocrates affirmed in his *Aphorisms* that in the beginning, “man had to be content with the eating the same foods that nourished all creatures, not just humans; that is, the simple products of the Earth like leaves, fruit, herbs and hay. It was only through a subsequent process of selection that man learned to grind, chop, sift, cook, boil, roast and mix and temper strong flavors with more delicate substances, always inspired by nature and its forces.” Thus was born and developed a socially and economically differentiated cuisine.

In 2009 in Imola, a “Bacchanal” took place, entitled *Poverty and Nobility* referring to Montanari’s two extremes of a nutritional and gastronomic history characterized by contrasts and differences. On the one side were the peasants and common

folk, careful in the expense of their limited resources, and on the other the dominant class always in search of new forms of pleasure. Still, there were constant exchanges of knowledge, products and recipes between the two categories that continued changing over time. This constant evolution imposed rules, priorities and customs.

We must recognize that for different reasons, cuisine and gastronomy resemble a religion that has its own rites, dogmas, faiths, heresies and “great priests”. The relationship that man has established with food is a special one. Certainly it is no accident that the Bible tells us how the fall of man was linked to a food restriction. The transgression was only man’s first and most important rejection of obedience. For Voltaire, this event and man’s successive fall from grace was “A 6000 year old act of gluttony”. Jesus, the “new Adam” issued a similar invitation to obedience during a Eucharistic meal: “Take and eat, all of you”.

Every culture has established strict relationships with food, and as a result with certain types of “obedience”, which has led to nutritional movements such as vegetarianism and veganism. And I would go one step further: a people’s nutritional traditions impacted on gastronomy by creating actual nutritional “calendars”, relegating the use of certain foods to certain festivals, both laical and religious. Thus eating lentils at New Year’s and hosting a grand wedding reception constitute “obedience.”

In this way food becomes pure or

impure, subject to the contamination of the “state of grace” that each one has. And even though our religion does not encompass a pure-impure or legitimate-prohibited relationship with food, it recognizes that temptation can also take place at the table and the corresponding penitence called for are fasting and abstinence. Meat is one of the major culprits. With few exceptions, fruits and vegetables are seldom prohibited.

The evolution of food, having passed from need based to pleasure based, has inescapable rules and obligations. We are witnessing a caste system of “public” gastronomy (i.e., restaurants) with its own gurus and disciples that define the gastronomic lexicon, the new language of food, the intrusion of science in the kitchen, and the inescapable presence of culinary television programs and books that invade our lives.

We should also point out how in the past food was (and in some cases still is) a status symbol and indicator of one’s social standing.

There is no doubt that today as in the past food represents lifestyle as well as nutrition. It represents our dominant values and today is also a vehicle for sending other kinds of messages: a healthy lifestyle, “made in Italy”, the defense of identity, and social and cultural responsibility and sustainability in the face of globalization.

If we look back through history we will see that the advent of a socially discriminating culinary mode is a fairly recent phenomenon in the history of man. For many years, food quantity was the primary indicator of one’s social class.

Guido da Spoleto was denied the throne of France because he was considered an overly frugal eater, but Charlemagne, on the other hand, was said to have no limits and ignored the advice of his physicians

to eat boiled rather than roasted meats to mitigate his digestive problems.

And yet, in confirmation of the obedience to the social and economic rules of the table, Brillat-Savarin created menus according to income levels, calibrated according to the quantity and refinement of the dishes. He determined that a typical meal for a wealthy person would consist of a 3 kilo chicken so stuffed with Perigord truffles as to become spherical, and a large Rhine carp Chambord style. Thus cuisine obeys the rules and styles identified with a given part of society, follows fashions and fulfills the needs of a conformist class that follows the trends in order to show that they are “in”.

Food has taken over our lives today, no longer as a basic element of survival but as an expression of a certain way of interacting and measuring up.

The places and means of food consumption have changed. It has

become necessary to eat outside the home and in a hurry - often less than an hour. So we eat a sandwich, a salad, a hot dog or even a kebab - these latter two the offspring of the prevailing global society.

Today cuisine obeys the ever more pressing call for “standardized food”.

And so the television cooking shows continue to terrorize us and the new arbiters of taste (that have determined the increased trend of “theatrical cooking”) have taken over our lives. In sum, we have entered the era of eating according to the canons established by this society; canons that oblige cuisine to evolve along a pre-determined line, restrained by the fads and fashions of the moment.

It remains clear that we live between the channels of culinary “obligation”, just as we do in terms of fashion, goods, services and even entertainment.

ALFREDO PELLE

2013 ECUMENICAL DINNER



The 2012 ecumenical dinner based on the cuisine of herbs and spices once again brought Academicians in Italy and around the world together at the virtual table. Next year the convivial ecumenical dinner will take place October 17 at 8:30 pm, and its theme will be The Cuisine of Unforgettable Meat. The theme, chosen by the Franco Marengi Research Center and approved by the President’s Council, includes the cuisine of the “fifth quarter”, but also other meats and animal products that have always had a place in popular cuisine but that are seldom used today because we are no longer subject to a “cuisine of poverty”. The objective for 2013 therefore will be to rediscover traditional dishes that use offal - giblets, organ meats and tripe - that can still have a place in frugal modern Italian cuisine. Delegates will be charged with ensuring that the ecumenical dinner is accompanied by an appropriate cultural presentation that discusses the proposed theme and that the dishes chosen reflect the foods that have been selected by the Council.

The Best Way to Fry

BY NAZZARENO ACQUISTUCCI
Treviso-Alta Marca Delegate

*Some advice on what oils
to use and why.*

Extra virgin olive oil has become an increasingly important ingredient in the kitchen and one should know how to use it to get the best from of its characteristics.

Dr. Andrea Giomo, international expert in sensory analysis and professor at the University of Ancona, elaborated on this subject during a meeting with the Treviso-Alta Marca Delegation, and provided some particularly interesting explanations. First of all, it is worth mentioning that for every cultivated variety of olive (and there are about 400 in Italy) there is a dish to match it. This is no coincidence. Over the millennia man has chosen what was good to eat based on a food's taste, the regional cuisine and what could be prepared locally.

There are blended extra virgin olive oils (EVOs), made with different cultivars, and mono-cultivars, made with a single type. In the kitchen, they should be selected based on their optimal compatibility with the dish. For example, oil used in bread making should be different from that served on the table. And the oils we cook with should not be the same as the ones we serve to season cooked food or salad. Each oil has its own characteristics that enhance the dish.

When we talk about oils used for cooking, the first thing that comes to mind is frying - the slow immersion of a food in oil. The English divide frying into two categories: total immersion, or "deep frying" and partial immersion, or "light frying".

For a light fry we must exclusively use extra virgin oil, because the volume-surface ratio heavily favors the cooking surface (large surface oxidation, low volume of anti-oxidants). Thus an oil high in anti-oxidants is required: i.e., an extra virgin oil. Frying also poses problems of temperature. Oil degrades at high temperatures, and forms acrolein, which can cause both acute and chronic liver problems. The triglycerides in the oil break down, forming glycerol, which in turn produces acrolein.

The result is that we must fry at a temperature that is not excessively high (beyond the smoking point). When frying potatoes or other products that contain sugar very high temperatures can produce acrylamide, which can be harmful in that it can produce permanent mutations.

When using extra virgin oil we must keep in mind that it contains 1.1% water, in the form of microspherules surrounded by water soluble anti-oxidant poly-phenols. When frozen, extra virgin oil becomes a green block. When the block melts, the water sinks to the bottom and the oil remains on top. Therefore all the water soluble anti-oxidants sink to the bottom leaving the oil on top - with no anti-oxidants. Thus the oil goes rancid very quickly. This is why oil should never be frozen.

When frying, the water in the oil lowers the temperature. In fact, depending on the cultivar and many other factors, oil begins to smoke

between 160 and 210 ° C (320-410° F). There is not a fixed temperature because it depends on the kind of oil, but this implies that it does not reach a high enough temperature to create a crust (sealing) on the food that is being fried. The crust should form immediately so as to keep the oil from penetrating the food while at the same time allowing the water in the food to escape and effectively arrive at a cooking temperature of 100° C (212°F) which maintains the food's nutritional properties. When done this way, frying is an excellent way of cooking food.

Cooking with extra virgin olive oil then has problems from the physical-mechanical point of view, while its chemical perspective is excellent because it can reach high temperatures without forming acrolein, acrylamide and other harmful byproducts of oxidation such as peroxides and hydro-peroxides that can affect the epidermis. However,

there is a compromise solution: double frying. Bring the oil to 180-190° C (356-374° F) and immerse the food for one minute (there should be ample foam), remove and dry it well. Bring the temperature back to the initial temperature and immerse the food once again until it is completely cooked.

The best oil for frying is one that polymerizes at high temperatures and immediately forms a crust: For example, highly oleic sunflower oil. Unlike the common polyunsaturated one that quickly oxidizes, this genetic variety produces an oil that is rich in oleic (monounsaturated) acid that does not oxidize easily.

The best fat for frying however, is lard, but not the one Grandma used. Today we have lard that is refined in a centrifuge at high speed, known as extra virgin lard. At room temperature it is an odorless white paste. It is a saturated fat that tolerates the high temperatures needed

to form a crust without oxidation. However it is important to keep track of how much of it we eat because we know that saturated fats are not healthy. But lard should be used when frying certain foods like sweet or savory pastry.

To sum up, we can affirm that there is an appropriate oil for every type of frying. For fish or light foods we recommend high-oleic sunflower oil, either pure or blended with peanut oil (even if the latter does not have a pleasant odor). Extra virgin olive oil is good for seafood, but always respect the "fry twice" rule.

Butter is also wonderful for frying, but alas, it contributes to a noble but costly dish. What's more, due to its significant water content it cannot get hotter than 97° C (206° F) and thus it cannot form a crust, the essential characteristic for perfect and light frying.

NAZZARENO ACQUISTUCCI

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Contributions to the magazine by Academicians are not only welcome, they are indispensable. However Academicians need to keep in mind some essential guidelines, so that their effort and passion are rewarded by rapid and thorough publication.

■ **Articles:** *It is essential that articles be sent electronically, in Word format (not pdf) to the following email address: redazione@accademia1953.it*

■ **Article Length:** *To avoid cuts that are irritating for both the writer and editor, articles should be between 4,000 and 6,000 characters (including spaces). Your computer provides character counts.*

■ **"From the Delegations" Column:** *For ease of reading, maximum length is limited to 2,500 characters including spaces.*

■ **Convivial Dinner forms:** *it is equally important*

*that the "notes and comments" section of the rating sheets **respect the 800 character limit** (Maximum 1,000 characters) include spaces, in order to avoid cuts and errors. Rating sheets that arrive at Headquarters more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.*

■ **Please do not send reports on convivial dinners held outside the territory of your Delegation, or on those held in the homes of Academicians or places other than restaurants and public settings, as they will not be published.**

■ **By observing these simple guidelines Academicians can be reasonably assured of rapid and accurate publication, thereby avoiding painful cuts.**

■ **Obviously, the Editors reserve the right to edit all articles and publish them according to available space.**

The Disappearance of Asian Restaurant Guides

BY MAURIZIO CAMPIVERDI
Bologna - San Luca Delegate

The silent suppression of the 2013 Michelin Guides to Tokyo, Kyoto and Hong Kong.

About fifteen years ago many experts in the field came to the conclusion that Michelin had decided to sell its editorial division that publishes their famous *Red Guides* to hotels and restaurants, only maintaining the map sections and the *Green Guide* that dealt with historical and artistic information. How else could one explain the fact that the year 2000 publications appeared with the new name of *Red Guides*, that had always been an unofficial way of recognizing them without having to present the image of the world's most famous tire maker on the cover and spine. It was inconceivable that another publisher would boast the name of the great French multinational company.

For the first and only time in its century-long history the 2000 edition for France published the details of its circulation, which had reached a stratospheric 880,254 copies. This also seemed to be an explicit pitch to attract potential buyers. In reality however, a deal was not reached and in 2004 the famous tire trademark reappeared as part of the name of the *Guide* and there it remained. But something had definitely changed at the Clermont-Ferrand company headquarters and Michelin dove into a major expansion of its traditional *Red Guides*. In 2005 the *Guide* to Austria appeared and with that addition Europe was totally covered by Michelin, with the exception of Russia and its ex-satellites. In 2006 the company crossed the Atlantic and published a New York *Guide*, followed by San Francisco in 2007, Los Angeles and Las Vegas (two separate volumes) in 2008, and Chicago in 2011. In the

meantime Michelin arrived in Asia with a Tokyo *Guide* in 2008 and then Kyoto/Osaka and Hong Kong/Macau in 2010.

Michelin's landing in the United States may have possessed a gastronomic and cultural logic, but the company was faced with competition from other guides with long track records in America such as Mobil, Triple A, and Zagat. Furthermore, they were structured for the American market. The result was a negative one: the Los Angeles and Las Vegas *Guides* stopped publication after just two years. The fate of the San Francisco and Chicago *Guides* is uncertain and for the time being only the New York *Guide* is still hanging on.

The landing in the Orient was even riskier, and was aggravated by the fact that Michelin decided to promote Tokyo as a world gastronomic capital, assigning its coveted "Three Star" status to 8 Japanese restaurants in 2008. That number rose to 16 in the 2012 edition, bypassing Paris, which had remained at 10 for many years. In 2012 Japan could also boast of another 7 "Three Star" restaurants in Kyoto, 5 in Osaka, 2 in Kobe, 1 in Nara and 1 in Fujisawa, for a total of 32. By itself Japan was "worth more" than France (including the 26 in Paris), and almost equaled the whole of Europe (32 restaurants)! Among the Japanese "Three Star" restaurants, many - a good 12 - were modest, or small carry-out places, usually specializing in sushi, that have nothing in common with modern high end restaurants. If Michelin is giving three stars to that sort of place, why not pay equal respect to Italian pizzerias?

The situation in Hong Kong and Macau is different. Michelin rewards only luxury restaurants specializing in Chinese (1), French (2) and incredibly enough, Italian: Umberto Bombana's *8 e Mezzo* in the island's Central district.

I happened to be in Paris in early March when the brand new 2013 France *Guide* was on display everywhere (It is always the last one to be published). I could not find the three Asian *Guides*, which are difficult to find in Italy, in two major bookstores. So to be on the safe side, I went to the Michelin store on the Avenue de l'Opéra, and to my surprise I discovered that it no longer exists. Next I phoned Michelin's Paris office, and with some difficulty found an employee who told me, hesitatingly, that the Asian *Guides* will not be published in 2013. By itself this merely confirmed that the ship had already foundered, but there is another more serious problem.

On the back cover of the various European *Guides*, including France and Italy, the 2013 "pearls" of the Michelin Red *Guide* series are listed. The three Oriental "pearls" figure proudly. It's a sign of the times that a company as important as Michelin, that has always had a policy of reliability, is not living up to its reputation. In my opinion it would have been much better to print a small run of the preannounced *Guides* with a statement that they will not be published the following year.

It is easy to make comments after the fact, but one fact remains incontrovertible: the *Red Guides* are primarily purchased by tourists travel-

ing through Europe by car. That constitutes a large variety of users most of whom are older, culturally savvy, and who willingly combine art and gastronomy. (Very few Italians, Germans, British or Spaniards collect the various issues of the *Guides* year after year.) In Japan and Hong Kong this category of tourist is almost non-existent. Asia is primarily a destination for all-inclusive tours or business people who are visiting clients. Furthermore, the local elite is competent and mature

and does not need advice from Michelin - which in any case is not able to fully evaluate a culinary reality that is very complex and distinct from our own.

In conclusion, let me congratulate chef Enrico Crippa who this year received "Three Stars" for his restaurant *Piazza Duomo* in Alba. That still makes seven "Three Star" restaurants in Italy, because *Sorriso* in *Soriso*, perhaps too severely, was demoted to "Two Stars".

MAURIZIO CAMPIVERDI

INTERNET, BLOGS, FACEBOOK AND THE ACCADEMIA WEBSITE

Recently some Delegations have expressed an interest in opening their own websites. In order to avoid content conflicts with the Accademia's official website, the Office of the President has expressly stated that this is not possible. The Office of the President would like to stipulate that online conversations among Academicians and/or Delegations in blogs and on platforms such as Facebook are permitted. However, in these cases the use of Accademia logo is not allowed, and content should not discuss or involve the Academy's organizational activities.

