

44 AUTHENTIC ITALIAN RECIPES • COOK EGGPLANT LIKE A PRO

Tastes of Italia

THE BEST IN ITALIAN COOKING

AUGUST 2008

Summer comes alive!

SPAGHETTI WITH
SWORDFISH **FRESH**
FRUIT TART **COOL**
REFRESHING DRINKS
ASIAGO LASAGNA
BRAISED SHORT RIBS
GRILLED T-BONE
STEAK **ZITI** WITH
LEEK **LEMON**
SEMIFREDDO
AND MORE

PIZZA WITH A PUNCH

ADD GORGONZOLA
CHEESE TO YOUR
NEXT PIZZA
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DISCOVER THE BEST EGGPLANT CAPONATA EVER!

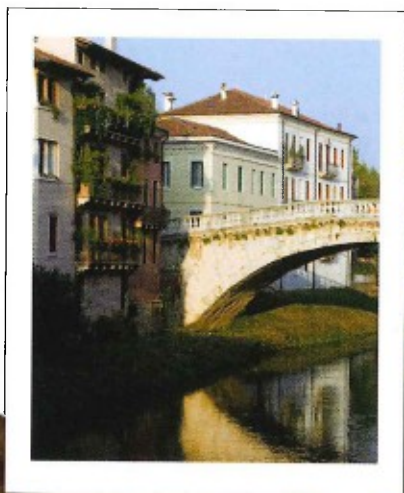
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TRENTINO - ALTO ADIGE
Mother Nature's Finest Region
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BRIDGE OVER over a canal in Venice; olive oil is used to make creamed baccala; Pecorino di Farindola, a sheep's milk cheese.



PHOTOGRAPHY ENZO FERRI

Dreaming of the Veneto

Venice is only one of the beautiful sights and culinary delights of this region. **By Susan Van Allen**

When I dream of meals I've had in Venice, the first image that appears is a tumbler of sparkling Prosecco and a slice of crusty bread slathered with creamed baccala. It was this combo, served to me at Cantinone Gia Shiavi, a wine bar in the Dorsoduro neighborhood, which sparked my love affair with Venetian food.

Over many years, I've returned often to satisfy my craving for the city's specialties, with meals centered on seafood from the lagoon and Adriatic. My favorite first course is bigoli, a thick, buckwheat spaghetti-shaped pasta, sauced with anchovies and oil. I'm in heaven following that up with Sarde in Soar (sardines marinated in onions and vinegar), a dish created centuries ago by fishermen who used vinegar to preserve the fish and onions for medicinal properties, to prevent scurvy. Vegetables, grown on the nearby island of Sant' Erasmo, include such unique choices as purple artichokes or spareselle (slender asparagus) and six different varieties of radicchio. To complement the ex-

perience are outstanding regional wines that range from delicate Soave to rich, full-bodied Amarone.

The only drawback to my love of Venice is that its attractions are no secret to travelers all over the world. Every year 19 million visitors traipse through here, making high tourist season too crowded for the city to be experienced the way I feel it was meant to be: as La Serenissima (its nickname), which translates to The Most Serene.

So last summer, after briefly elbowing through the Venice crowds, I drove inland with some friends to the Vicenza province of the Veneto, where more culinary treasures awaited. With the busy lagoon behind us, the road opened up to a calming landscape of vineyards and abundant fields of corn.

We landed in Vicenza, an ultra-elegant town packed with beautiful buildings designed by the 16th century master Andrea Palladio and his followers. The sophistication of the palazzos matched our dining experience that evening at Al Molin Vecio, a converted flour mill. The restaurant is located just outside of

inside italy

cialty: Asiago cheese lasagna, made by his mamma, which had us oohing and aahing to the last forkful. A gentle breeze blew through, carrying with it the fresh scent of grass. It was simple rustic Italy at its finest.

I walked through the quiet meadow surrounding the hut, imagining the crowds a couple of hours away filling the Piazza San Marco in Venice. Sure, I'll return to La Serenisima, but the delicious tastes of this surrounding region will undoubtedly pull me back to discover even more of the

great variety that is to be enjoyed in the Veneto.

Risotto with Fresh Herbs

- 5 cups vegetable broth
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped shallots or yellow onion
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1½ cups Arborio or Carnaroli rice
- ½ cup dry white wine
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (best to use Parmigiano-Reggiano)
- ½ cup chopped fresh basil leaves
- ¼ cup chopped parsley leaves
- ¼ cup chopped mixture of fresh herbs of your choice, such as thyme, mint and oregano
- Salt

In a saucepan, bring the vegetable broth to a low simmer. In another heavy bottomed 2½ to 3 quart pan, sauté the chopped onion in the butter over medium heat until the onion softens and becomes lightly colored. Add the rice and stir to coat it with the butter, for about 4 minutes. Add salt to taste and then the wine. Stir and cook until all the wine bubbles away.

Stir in ½ cup of the warm broth and continue to stir occasionally until almost all the broth is evaporated. Keeping the rice cooking at a steady simmer, continue to add ½ cup of broth at a time, stirring occasionally and adding more broth as soon as the rice absorbs the liquid.

The risotto will be done in about 30 minutes, when it is creamy, but al dente. Stir in the Parmesan and herbs. Add salt to your taste and serve immediately.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

Creamed Baccala

- 1 pound dried, skinless and boneless salt cod
- ½ cup extra virgin olive oil (a bit more may be needed to produce the cream)
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley
- Salt and pepper
- 1 loaf of crusty Italian bread, if desired for serving

To prepare the salt cod: Place the fish in a large container and cover with cold water. Over the next 36 to 48 hours, change the water about every eight hours. Then boil a large pot of water and cook the fish for about 10 minutes. Drain.

In a sturdy mixing bowl, break up the fish with your hands into small pieces, then mince with a wooden mallet or spoon. Drizzle in olive oil, mashing and mixing until it becomes creamy. Some cooks use an electric beater or food processor for this step, which can be done if you're careful that the mixture does not become too liquid.

Stir in the garlic and parsley. Add salt and pepper to taste. Slather the cream on slices of crusty Italian bread and serve as an antipasto.

Makes 8 to 10 servings.

Asiago Cheese Lasagna

- 1 pound lasagna
- ¾ cup mozzarella, shredded
- 1½ cups Asiago Dolce cheese, shredded
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- ⅓ cup chopped parsley
- ½ cup butter, sliced in thin pats
- Salt and pepper

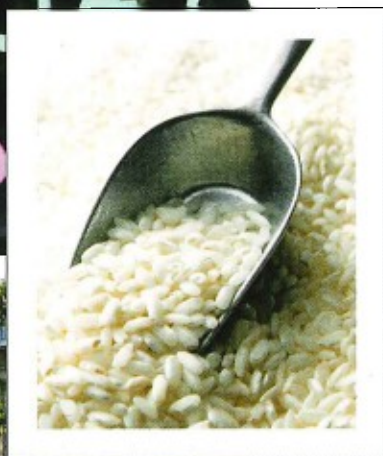
Put a large pot of water (about 5 quarts) over high heat and salt it when it boils. Cook the lasagna noodles a few at a time, until they are al dente. Drain in a colander.

Preheat the oven to 350°F.

Smear the bottom of a 9 x 13 inch baking pan with butter. Place a layer of noodles in the pan, so they touch but don't overlap. Cover the noodles with 1/3 of the mozzarella and Asiago cheeses, then 1/3 of the parsley, salt and pepper to taste, then 1/3 of the butter and slightly less than a 1/3 of the Parmesan. (You will want to save some Parmesan for the top layer). Repeat two more times. Sprinkle top layer of lasagna with Parmesan.

Bake for about 30 minutes, until the lasagna is bubbly. Remove from the oven and let rest 5 minutes before cutting and serving.

Makes about 6 servings.



town, presenting itself as a tranquil rural oasis, adjoined by an herb garden where 65 different varieties are grown. Fresh herbs were the centerpiece of our dinner, used boldly in a basil sorbet and also combined with risotto which was cooked all'onda—the Venetian term for “like a wave,” meaning not too solid or too liquid.

Our explorations took us farther north, to the foothills of the Dolomites where the atmosphere became Bavarian: narrow church steeples, store signs with Germanic lettering, houses styled like Swiss chalets, and Fresia cows grazing in grassy meadows. From the milk of these cows, prized Asiago cheese is produced in mountain huts (or malga) which dot the landscape.

Turning down a gravel road, we arrived at Malga Pusterele just in time to join Italian families for lunch at the hut's outdoor restaurant, with a view of a lush valley and ridge of fir-tree covered mountains. A blonde teen-age waiter in jeans and T-shirt served us the hut spe-