

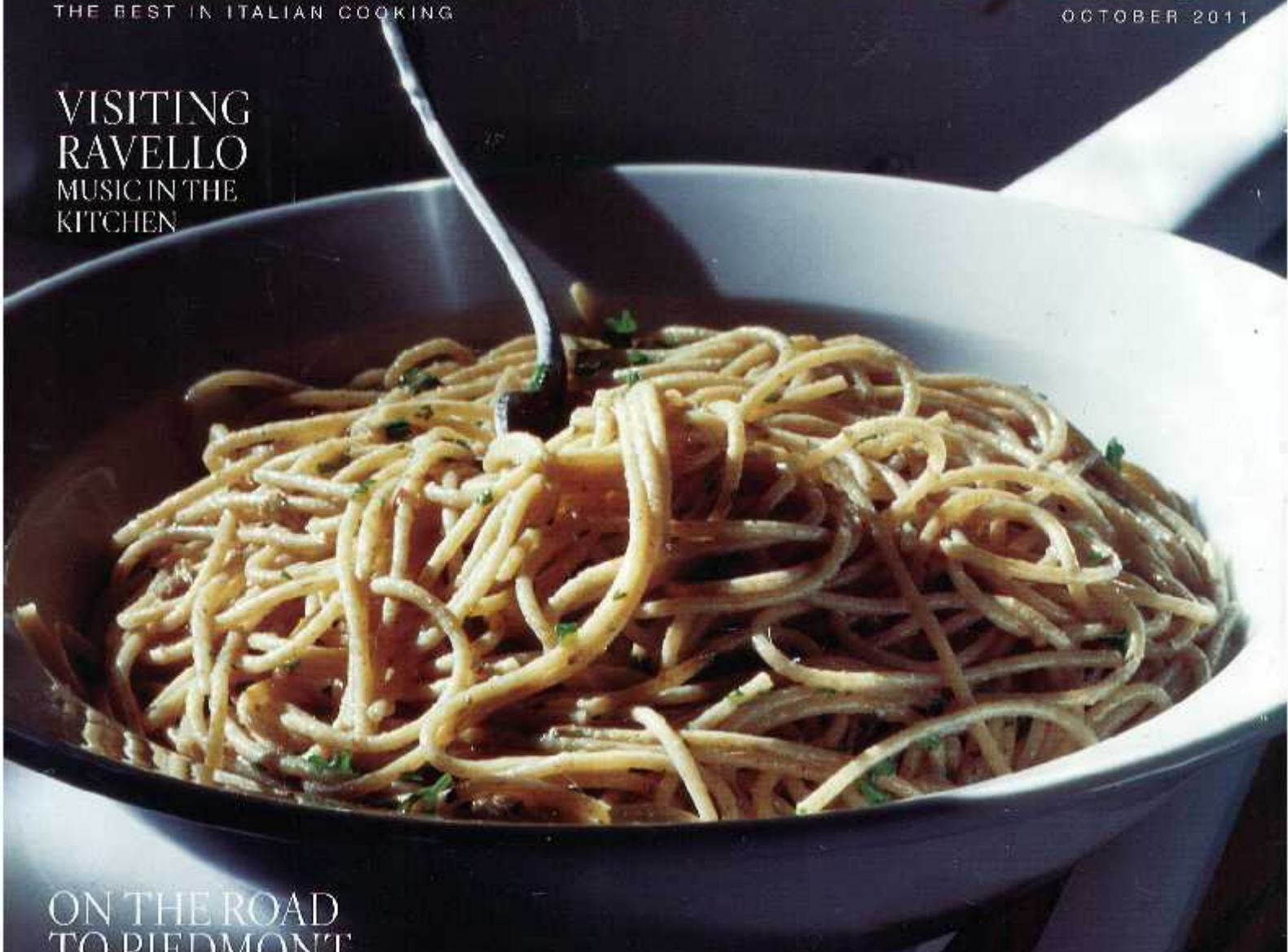
INSIDE ITALY: COOKING WITH MUSHROOMS

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OCTOBER 2011

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MUSIC IN THE
KITCHEN



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SPAGHETTI WITH
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AT HOME

RAVELLO: MUSIC IN THE KITCHEN

Visit the city that has enchanted
visitors—from Hollywood stars to artists and
writers—with fine food and ocean views.

[*By Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli*]



PASTA TWIRL: Chef at Cumpa Cosimo Trattoria prepares a pasta dish for guests at the Ravello restaurant.

Ravello crowns the Amalfi Coast from a balcony of limestone spur 1,100 feet above sea level. From this high position, the fortified town overlooks the Tyrrhenian Sea and the Gulf of Salerno. On one side the city descends onto the valley of Dragone and on the other side down to the coastal town of Minori. And from the Terrazzo dell'Infinito, the Terrace of Infinity, at the Villa Cimbrone, one can see the infinite plain of cerulean sea with Paestum on the left, Cape Licosa to the right, and the violet Apennine Mountains in the center.

Giovanni Boccaccio described the Amalfi Coast as: 'the most delightful place in Italy...a coast covered with little towns...gardens and fountains...amongst which there is one called Ravello.' Ravello is immortalized in Boccaccio's *Decameron*, circa, 1349 to 1351. Getting to Ravello involves a vertical climb of hairpin turns that wind upward; where parts of the road turn into a fine line one-way strip. Once up to the top, one falls upon winding walkways, terraces with colorful lemon trees, Medieval towers, the Cathedral of San Pantaleone, Villa Rufolo and Villa Cimbrone, and typical whitewashed houses that cling to the rugged coastline in a quietness that lies away from the crowds. While you stroll along the narrow alleyways (no cars allowed) and discover the little gems of chapels and residences, it's hard to imagine that this town was once called *Rebeldom*, the rebel, which comes from Latin.

Invaded by the Lombards, Saracens, Normans, Pisans, the French house of Anjou, the Bourbons of Spain, and the Amalfitani of the Republic of Amalfi, Ravello has maintained its strength and position through time. As invaders and wars faded, a long list of artistic coterie followed with paper and pen in hand.

Artists found inspiration in Ravello. The long list of writers, composers, painters, and musicians who held court in this hamlet include Richard Wagner, who wrote *Parisfal*, while finding his quest for the Holy Grail, D.H. Lawrence penned



TOWER POWER: Ancient towers are part of the architecture in the town of Ravello, on Italy's Amalfi Coast.



VILLA RUFOLO: The famous Villa Rufolo in Ravello was originally built in the 13th century.



Lady Chatterley's Lover whose publication was initially prohibited, and Virginia Woolf, British author, essayist, publisher, and writer, filled her pages for *To The Lighthouse*.

Others came and went including, Italian conductor Arturo Toscanini, Spanish artist Miró, English romantic painter J.M.W. Turner, Italian composer Giuseppe Verdi, Italian tenor Enrico Caruso, French writer André Gide, German conductor Bruno Walter, American composer and author Leonard Bernstein, English author, playwright and literary critic Graham Greene, American writer Tennessee Williams, British novelist E. M. Forster, German pianist and composer Wilhelm Kempff, American actor Humphrey Bogart, Greta Garbo, who lived her long love affair with

conductor Leopold Stokowski in Ravello, and American author, playwright, essayist, screenwriter, Gore Vidal, a permanent resident who lived the summer months in the Villa Rondinaia (part of Villa Cimbrone and formerly owned by Lord Grimthorpe).

The locals say that Vidal arrived in Ravello in 1948, in a jeep driven by Tennessee Williams. It was love at first sight, and he described Ravello as 'the most beautiful in the world.' Ravello has held court to an illustrious guest list through time. Folklore and archeological information says that the village sprouted around the 6th century with the Romans who saw that its strategic position provided protection against barbarian invaders. Then in 1000, the noble expats from Amalfi had revolted against the Doge and moved to Ravello.

They were prosperous merchant traders, who built lavish villas and entertained kings and prelates.

By 1292 the town was thriving with its wool spinning trade, then called cellendra. The most famous villa of that time was the 13th century Villa Rufolo, built by the Rufolo family. The Villa Rufolo passed through a few owners' hands and then in the middle of the 19th century was bought and restored by Scotsman Francis Neville Reid. Other villas of importance are the Cimbrone, Sasso and Palumbo. Ravello's historical past remains a mélange of Medieval to the 19th century, blending Arabic, Norman, Roman, Byzantine and Sicilian influences.

And high up in 'the city between sea and sky' are the local folks, like Luca and Netta



SCENIC VISTA: The picturesque scenery of Ravello, seen from Villa Rufolo, includes old walls, the roofs, and mountain views.

Bottone. The brother and sister Ravellesi are owners of Cumpà Cosimo Trattoria, and they tell their story of Ravello's glorious past.

"This is the story of la casa...the casa that my mamma started 89 years ago, and when I was a small boy she always made pasta e patate con cipolle fritte e pancetta, it was something typical for the contadini, farmers," tells Luca. "My Mamma was Chiara, she was a great cook, she started this trattoria in 1929. Netta is my sister, 'the grand boss.' She is the grand boss because she knows the kitchen, and was a little girl when she first worked here with my Mamma. I on the other hand went to school and became a veterinarian. I returned to Ravello later and then worked in our family trattoria," tells Luca.

"Many famous people came to Ravello, and also came to our trattoria. We were always discreet, and never told the newspaper. From Humphrey Bogart, Jennifer Jones, Gina Lollobrigida, Lawrence d'Arabia, to Jacqueline Kennedy who ate our pizza, and even 'the Fonz,'—they all dined here. Gere Vidal always ate here," he exclaimed.

Luca points to an old black and white photo on the wall and tells of the day when Humphrey Bogart rode on back of their horse led by his father in the main piazza of Ravello.

"What did the stars eat and did they like the local food?" I asked Luca. "They loved to eat with us, and they ate what we ate. They ate Crespolini alla Ravellese, a type of crepe or cannelloni stuffed with prosciutto,

mozzarella, fior di latte, and provolone. It was folded over like a dumpling and covered in béchamel.

"The Crespolini alla Ravellese were created by a local chef 120 years ago, they caught on, and everyone ate it. There were many poor man's dishes too, such as pasta e fagioli (pasta and beans), or minestra maritata, (a soup whose ingredients include, the bone from a prosciutto, small pieces of beef, lamb, pork, chicken, with broccoli, chicory, escarole, borage and cabbage, all slow cooked). Eggplant and chocolate, the eggplant are flash fried and the chocolate layered between, were the ancient poor man's food," he retells of Ravello's past.

"Chestnuts are also from Ravello, and neighboring Scala too. We would grow

chestnuts, harvest them and then make our Ravellesi dessert, like *troneo* or *crème di castagne* and *zeppole di castagne*, a light dough with chestnuts lightly flash fried into small puffs," he says.

"These are the classic rustic Mediterranean foods and we have a classic kitchen that carries on the tradition. *La cultura è cultura*, cultivating a garden is a culture. It is also the tradition of the *contadini*—the farmers. The culture of the *contadini* was their land. These farmers and gardeners knew all the tricks, and they cultivated the exquisite *sfusato* Amalfitano lemons, and with these lemons we make *scaloppine al limone*, the famous *limoncello*, *sorbetto limone*—always served in a fresh half lemon, and Netta's *limone soufflé*," he explains while using his hands.

"Ravello has been hosting tourists for 120 years. Richard Wagner arrived here in 1880 on a donkey from Amalfi, before there was a road to Ravello, and he stayed at the Villa Rufolo. And every year since 1953, the city celebrates the music of Wagner at the Ravello Music Festival at the Villa Rufolo," he says.

"Have you ever met Gore Vidal?" I ask. "Come no, Gore Vidal è nostro cliente," (but of course, Gore Vidal is our client) Luca proudly exclaims.

"What kind of man would you describe him as?" I inquire. "A man of the world," Luca says. "He is a man from afar, not a simple man, a man with charisma, and who has a certain way of living. He is a very reserved man, and a person who knows what he wants. He even has citizenship in Ravello. His favorite food here was *provola e salsiccia con broccoli rape*, homemade sausage and provolone cheese with broccoli. He always came to eat here, and always remembered Netta's birthday," he adds.

Thousands of years of a story—traders, invaders, kings, queens, writers, artists and musicians. The food hasn't changed and people continue to cook with their family recipes that are based on the season, and ingredients from the gardens. The microclimate, salty sea air and volcanic soil are the perfect recipe for producing ripe tasty fruits and vegetables. The simplicity of cooking lets the few ingredients in each recipe stand on their own and be tasted on



TOWER ROOM: Villa Rufolo features towers, walls, and arches in its extensive gardens, said to have inspired composer Richard Wagner as he wrote *Parsifal*.



their own.

A bottle of Tenuta San Francesco E' Iss Reserve, produced by Dr. Gaetano Bove using precious Tintore grapes grown on 300-year-old vines in nearby paese Tramonti, along with Netta's fusilli e frutti di mare, followed by a garden concert in the Villa Rufolo, make for a perfect Midsummer Night's Dream.

Cooking Vacations offers hands-on cooking classes in Ravello with Chef Raffaele. See www.cooking-vacations.com/programs-italy.asp

Laurer Birmingham Piscitelli is founder and owner of Cooking Vacations Italy which specializes in culinary tours, hands-on cooking classes and cultural adventures in Italy. www.cooking-vacations.com; (517) 847-4118.

The Recipes

Pasta, Patate, Pancetta & Cipolle

- 2 small onions
- 1 or 2 strips of pancetta (to taste)
- 3 to 4 small potatoes
- Olive oil
- Sea salt
- Pepper
- 4 cups dried rigatoni
- Pecorino Romano

Simple broth (6 cups of water, 1 tablespoon extra virgin olive oil and a small piece of prosciutto bone or red meat. Slow cook ingredients on low heat for 1½ hours.)

Peel the onions and dice into very small pieces. Chop the pancetta into small pieces as well. Peel the potatoes and cut into ¼ inch pieces and slice in half.

Add the onions and potatoes to the simple broth. Cook until soft. Remove the onions and potatoes once cooked.

In a sauté pan, warm two to three tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil. Add the cooked onions, potatoes, and pancetta, and sauté. While that is browning, take a large pasta pan, fill with water, salt to taste and bring to a boil. Add the pasta and cook al dente.

As soon as the pasta is finished cooking, drain and keep a cup of the pasta water. Add the pasta to the mixture of onions, pancetta and potatoes. Toss until mixed well. You can always add a little of the pasta water to the pan if it is dry. Salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with Pecorino Romano.

Makes 2 servings.

Netta's Artichokes

- 4 small artichokes
- ½ lemon
- ½ cup of olive oil
- Handful of chopped Italian parsley

- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1½ cups of water

Cut off the tips of the outer leaves of the artichoke. Cut the stem, so artichoke will sit flat. Slice 1 inch off the top of the whole artichoke. Cut out all the little leaves on the inside and remove the fuzzy choke. Rub all the cut parts of the artichoke with lemon half to prevent discoloration. Stand artichokes, tops up, in a pan just large enough so they sit snugly. Drizzle olive oil in the centers. Mix together parsley, garlic, salt and pepper and stuff equally inside the artichoke. Add two inches of water and simmer for 40 minutes until tender.

Makes 4 servings.

Crespolini alle Ravellesi

For the crepes:

- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 whole egg, plus 1 yolk
- 2 teaspoons butter, divided
- Pinch of salt

For the Béchamel:

- 1 tablespoon of butter
- 1 tablespoon of flour
- ½ cup hot milk

For the filling:

- ½ cup Mozzarella, chopped into small pieces
- ½ cup Provolone, grated
- ½ cup Gruyere, grated
- ½ cup ricotta
- ¾ cup prosciutto, mortadella or ham, chopped into tiny pieces
- Salt and pepper, to taste
- 4 tablespoons of melted butter

For the crepes:

Gradually add flour to milk, whisking

until completely blended. Add eggs and salt and mix well. Refrigerate at least 30 minutes or overnight.

Melt $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of butter in a crepe pan and turn pan to coat evenly. Add 2 tablespoons of batter to center of pan, lift from heat and swirl pan coating the whole bottom with the mixture. Cook until set and lightly browned on one side. Turn by flipping in the air or prodding loose with a fork, and cook on other side for one minute. Repeat until all the batter has been used.

For the Béchamel:

To make the béchamel, melt the butter in a heavy pan and add flour. Cook 2 minutes without browning, remove from heat 30 seconds. Add hot milk all at once and whisk to remove any lumps. Return to medium heat. Whisking all the while return to boil and cook 2 minutes more. Remove from heat and continue whisking 30 seconds more.

For the filling:

Mix about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of béchamel with the cheese and ham to form a thick spread. Salt and pepper to taste. Place a heaping tablespoon of this spread in the center of the crepe and roll up into a triangle. Roll in melted butter and bake at 400°F for 20 minutes, until golden brown.

Makes 4 servings.

Veal Scaloppina

- 4 (4-oz. each) pieces of sliced veal**
- Juice of 2 lemons**
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup all-purpose flour**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup white wine**
- Sea salt, to taste**
- Pepper, to taste**
- Juice of 1 lemon**
- 1 tablespoon flour**
- Handful of parsley, finely chopped**

Marinate the veal in the lemon juice for 15 to 20 minutes. Take and drain after marinating. Dip each slice of veal in flour and press so the flour sticks.

In a large frying pan, melt the butter over low heat. Add the floured veal slices

and cook until golden on one side; turn over and allow to cook on the other side until golden. When the veal is cooked, add the white wine, and raise the heat a bit. Add salt and pepper to taste and then turn down the flame. Add a little more lemon juice and let it sit until the veal absorbs the wine. Remove from pan and place on a platter.

In a cup, squeeze another lemon and add a tablespoon of flour; whip. Add this mixture back to the pan and put the veal back in the pan for a couple of minutes and let it simmer. Remove when the sauce is condensed. Plate and garnish with finely chopped parsley.

Makes 4 servings.



Lemon and Espresso Soufflé

For the espresso sauce:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons of espresso coffee beans**

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons of flour**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar**
- 2 egg yolks**

For the lemon sauce:

- $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons flour**
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup heavy cream**
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup sugar**
- 2 egg yolks**
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice**
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon rind**

For the egg whites:

- 5 egg whites**
- $\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon salt**
- 1 tablespoon sugar**

For the espresso sauce:

Steep coffee beans in $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of hot cream for five minutes. Strain cream and blend into flour. Add sugar, whisk over medium heat until mixture boils. Continue whisking and boil 30 seconds. Remove from heat and whisk 1 minute more to cool. Add egg yolks one at a time whisking and thoroughly incorporating after each addition. Set aside.

For the lemon sauce:

Blend flour and cream. Add sugar, whisk over medium heat until mixture boils. Continue whisking and boil 30 seconds. Remove from the heat and whisk 1 minute more to cool. Add egg yolks one at a time whisking and thoroughly incorporating after each addition. Slowly beat in lemon juice and lemon rind and set aside.

For the egg whites:

Beat egg whites until frothy. Add salt and beat until slightly stiff. Sprinkle on sugar and continue beating until stiff. Fold half of the egg white mixture into the espresso sauce and the remaining half into the lemon sauce.

Spoon each mixture into half of a buttered and sugared 6-quart soufflé mold. Bake at 375°F for 25 to 30 minutes.

Makes 3 servings.