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AUGUST 2012



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TASTES

THE MAGIC ISLE CAPRI

Conquerors and current-day celebrities have fallen under the spell of this romantic island, with its signature foods and spectacular scenery. Let us take you to Capri Palace.

[*By Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli*]



There is no spot in the world with such delightful possibilities of repose as this little isle..." Charles Dickens once wrote about Capri. Its magic and mystic continues to cast a spell on everyone who visits.

Cuddled between the Bay of Naples and the Tyrrhenian Sea, the island spans four square miles and reaches 1,932 feet at its highest point in Anacapri. Historians say it was once attached to the Sorrentine Peninsula, but disconnected during the Phlegrean volcanic eruption thousands of years ago. Due to its strategic point in the Tyrrhenian, Capri was considered a desirable location to rule from. First there were the Greeks who built La Scala Fenicia (the famous stairway with 1,017 stairs up from Capri to Anacapri), then the Pheonicians, Turkish Ottoman Admiral Khair-ad-din, who was known as Barbarossa ("the red bearded one") invaded and violently sacked the island around 1500, and the French and British also came and went. There was also Roman Emperor Augusto who traded the nearby island of Ischia for Capri in 29AD, followed by Tiberio who continued to rule from Capri at Villa Jovis, Jupiter's Villa.

Through the many cultures and people who have visited, Capri has evolved into an international playground attracting travelers, movie stars, and a globe trotting jet-set, from Jackie Kennedy Onassis to Queen Victoria, great writers such as Graham Greene and Axel Munthe to Leonardo DiCaprio. And with the crowds that come and go, lavish garden parties, formal dinners and sagras (seasonal outdoor food festivals) celebrate every kind of local food from pizza fritta to Torta Cap-

rese, Capri cake.

Capri's cuisine is simple starting with the Caprese, a simple mozzarella and tomato salad garnished with basil and extra virgin olive oil. Ravioli Capresi, the pasta of choice by the locals, small ravioli stuffed with ricotta and marjoram follow. A classic secondo, Acqua Pazza, made with local white fish, Pezzogna, is sautéed with a handful of cherry tomato, garlic, parsley and white wine; and the famous Torta Caprese, an almond-flour chocolate cake.

Although tradition and simplicity are what you find throughout the cuisine in Campania, if you want to experience Michelin star magic, hop into one of the convertible cabs that summit their way up to Anacapri. The ride takes just about ten minutes wrapping a narrow road that curls along a vertical cliff.

You'll arrive at the Piazza Victoria, and hidden behind palm trees and lush exotic flowers is Capri Palace. The majestic palazzo is decked with white arches, courtyards and gardens that date back to 1700, and in the kitchen is a rising star chef who is cooking up international attention.

"I learned from my nonna," says executive chef Andrea Migliaccio. A native of Ischia, with a world of experience under his belt including engagements in Rome, Tuscany, Cortina, France and Spain, he is almost shy with his words. After gaining experience, including sharing the kitchen with executive chef Franck Cerutti at il Pelicano, Chef Migliaccio returned home to Ischia.

I had the exceptional experience to spend the day in Chef Migliaccio's kitchen at the Capri Palace watching him take simple fresh food and turning them into artistic creations that were almost too beautiful to eat. He began with a farfalla pasta set on a bed of coconut cream that



was adorned with tiny pieces of fresh shrimp, tuna, cuttlefish and rose petals. He transformed simple rice into an emerald green risotto. There was pan-seared sea bass accompanied with summer white peaches. Baby braised lamb complimented by a petite portion of caramelized onion. Desserts included wild summer fruits, white peaches, watermelon and cantaloupe, cut, peeled and piled high. And lastly, a torroncino, also called semifreddo, garnished with a ribbon of candied lemon zest.

"After being away from my home, I decided to return to my land along with its local flavors and products. I wanted simple Italian cooking with big flavors. I wanted to taste big red tomatoes from the hills of Vesuvio and our extra-virgin, first cold-pressed olive oil," Chef Migliaccio explains.

"My passion for cooking started when I was a little boy. My mamma always worked a lot, and so I grew up with my nonna, Spana Constantino, in the kitchen. She was a Sarde. At school as a young boy I was a little capriccio, mischievous, so my nonna would take me in the kitchen and keep me busy. I learned to cook by her side. We would make lots of fish, coniglio Ischitana, the famous Ischia rabbit, and simple fresh pastas. She raised me. From her I learned the most important thing was to cook well, simple and keep the tradition," he says.

At just 31 years old, Chef Migliaccio is at the helm of Capri Palace Hotel & Spa's l'Olivio Ristorante. The restaurant boasts two Michelin stars. Supervising a team of 25 chefs in the kitchen and working from a shop-



TASTE TREATS: Previous page, La Piazzetta, officially called Piazza Umberto, is a favorite dining spot. The centuries-old courtyard is in the heart of Capri. This page, left, pizzaiola and pizza maker Signore Gregorio of Le Grotelle Ristorante. At right is Giovanna Buonocore, owner of Gelateria Buonocore, home to Capri's most coveted artisan gelato, served in freshly made waffle cones. She also serves tavola caldo, or "hot table" food, and caprilu al limone, cookies made with honey, lemon and almonds. Photography pages 44-46 by Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli.

ping list of quality exotic and organic produce, he is well known in the food world.

"I started here with executive chef Oliver Glowig, and worked by his side for four years. When he left, I was moved into his position. After gaining extensive experience in a variety of kitchens around the world, I wanted to return to the foods that are near to me, the foods that I love. There is a harmony to cooking with simple products, like quality local tomatoes with extra-virgin olive oil, and alici from Cetara. I wanted to return to Ischia, develop my career and use the great products that nature blessed our region with. I love to work with these local products, like eggplants grown in volcanic soil, grass fed baby lamb, wild Ischian rabbit, and of course, fresh Mediterranean fish," he says.

He goes on to say, "Il mio lavoro è un bel lavoro." Or, "My work is a beautiful work," literally translated. "It's a work that has to be done with passion, a lot of passion. I don't look at the clock when I am in the kitchen. We have a team of about 35 chefs in total between l'Olivio and il Riccio, its sister beach club restaurant just by the Blue Grotto. Capri Palace gives us a great opportunity to work as a team and create superlative cuisine for our guests. I love my work," he adds.

When asked what his favorite dish is, he replied, "I love simplicity and quality. Dolce e salato, morbido e croccante," - sweet, salty, soft and crispy. "When I eat something, I need to taste the flavor of each ingredient. I use minimal ingredients, usually no more than three or four. I cook with ingredients that go together and yet contrast, while never putting too many flavors in the same dish. My favorite is pesce crudo, raw fish. I am privileged to live on an island like Capri, because each day the local fisherman brings his daily catch to me. It goes from the sea to the kitchen."



CAPRI SIGHTS: La Top left, Arco Naturale, the natural arch on Capri's east side. Top right, Torre dell'Orologio, Capri's clock tower next to La Piazzetta. Below right, Le Grotelle Ristorante's famous rosemary foccacio.



"In Campania, we also have the good fortune to have excellent grains that make our great Gragnano pasta. We have the best extra-virgin olive oil along with fresh fish, meat and vegetables. The rich volcanic soil grows things with a different taste and a big flavor. We are also fortunate to have hard working food artisans who continue to improve their products all the time. For example, each year our extra virgin olive oil gets better. This is a unique passion here in Italy," he says.

When I ask Chef Migliaccio about the famous people he has cooked for, he quickly replies, "I have had the opportunity to cook for many interesting celebrities, actors, soccer players and generals. I once cooked for Luca Cordero di Montezemolo, who heads Fiat. It is beautiful to cook for famous people, however I cook the same for everyone and do not differentiate whether one is famous or not! Everyone is equal and every plate that comes out of the kitchen must be the same, from antipasto, to pasta, secondo to dessert," he says.

Every sweet ending has a dessert. Chef Migliaccio's take on the famous Torta Caprese, "it's a cake to be precise. I do not know when it was created, but it is delicious, full of chocolate, almond, butter, sugar, cocoa and calories, and loved by everyone. My favorite dessert is tiramisu with café."

A Note On Capri Palace

Capri Palace has 78 rooms and 11 suites, some with private pools and gardens that are decorated in Mediterranean style. In addition to l'Olivio, there are Bistrot Ragú, Bar degli Artisti, Dolce Vita wine cellar (with more than 1000 labels) and Il Riccio, beach club and restaurant.

Capri Beauty Farm is also on the property and offers beauty and medical services including its famous Leg School therapy. It is led by Professor Francesco Canonaco, who boasts a recipe of success for total physical well-being, blending the Mediterranean diet and application of hot and cold water with mineral mud. The five-star deluxe dream property has a one-of-a-kind swimming pool that was painted by Andy Warhol. Cook At Capri Palace with Cooking Vacations www.Cooking-Vacations.com

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SUPER CHEF:
Andrea Migliaccio of Capri
Palace is becoming world-
renowned for his cuisine.

Almond Chocolate Cake

Butter, for the cake pan

Flour, for the cake pan

5 ounces dark chocolate

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup granulated sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter

$1\frac{3}{4}$ cups almonds, finely ground

4 large whole eggs beaten

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter and

flour two 8-inch round cake pans. Melt the chocolate in a double boiler over hot water. In a mixing bowl, whip the sugar and butter together until light and fluffy. add the melted chocolate, ground almonds, and eggs and combine gently. Pour the batter into the baking pans and bake for 35-40 minutes. Remove, let cool to room temperature, serve with whipped cream if desired.

Makes 2 cakes.

Recipe courtesy of Capri Palace





Ravioli Capri Style

For the pasta dough:

- 3 cups all-purpose flour**
- ¼ cup hot water**
- Pinch of salt**
- 1 teaspoon olive oil**

For the filling:

- 12 ounces whole milk Caciotta cheese or you may substitute another soft, white cheese, such as Fontina**
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese**
- 1 large egg**
- Pinch of marjoram**
- Salt and black pepper, to taste**

For the dough:

In a large bowl combine the flour and water. Using a wooden spoon, stir to combine and knead into a large ball. Cover with plastic wrap and let rest for 10 minutes.

For the filling:

Place all the filling ingredients in a medium bowl and stir to combine.

To form the ravioli, cut the dough into four evenly sized pieces. The dough should be slightly sticky. Add extra flour as needed while rolling, but not too much.

Lightly dust the work surface and rolling pin. Working with one piece of dough at a time, roll the dough into a 4- by 19-inch

rectangle. Place 9 rounded teaspoons of filling about 1 inch apart down the center of the dough. Fold the dough over the filling. Cut into the desired shape, such as rectangles.

Press down around the edges of each of the ravioli with your fingertips. Place the finished ravioli on a baking tray and continue forming the remaining ravioli.

Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Add half the ravioli and cook until the ravioli float, stirring occasionally, about 3 to 4 minutes. Drain into a large bowl and cook the remaining ravioli.

Makes 2 servings.



Lemon Risotto with Seafood Carpaccio

For the lemon butter:

- 2½ tablespoons butter
- ¼ white onion, finely diced
- ½ clove garlic
- 2 bay leaves
- ⅛ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 sprig of lemon thyme
- ¼ teaspoon saffron
- 1¾ cups lemon juice
- Zest of 2 lemons, grated
- 1½ cups butter (3 sticks)

For the bisque:

- 5 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 pounds heads of prawns
- 2 tablespoons brandy
- 1 medium stalk celery
- 1 medium carrot
- 4 medium shallots
- ½ clove garlic
- 1 star anise
- ⅛ teaspoon white pepper
- 1 sprig of fresh thyme
- 2 fresh basil leaves
- 1 bay leaf

- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 2¾ cups white wine, divided
- 1 quart fish stock

For the risotto:

- 9 prawns
- 1 cup Arborio, Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano rice
- 1 quart fish, heated

For the lemon-scented butter:

Heat 2½ tablespoons of butter in a pan. Sauté the onions with the garlic, bay leaves, pepper, and thyme. Add the saffron and lemon juice. Cook until it has reduced by half, then add the lemon zests. Reduce the heat to low and add the 1½ cups of butter. Continuously whisk the butter mixture until it has reduced by a quarter. Remove from heat and pour through a strainer. Chill in the refrigerator.

For the bisque:

In a saucepan, heat the olive oil. Add all of the ingredients except the wine and the fish stock. Sauté on high. Deglaze with ¾ cup white wine and simmer until most of the wine has evaporated. Add the fish

stock and continue cooking until reduced by at least half.

Pour through a strainer and return the stock to the pan. Continue cooking on moderate heat until reduced further and ultimately obtain a creamy, thick mixture.

For the risotto:

Cut prawns partially in half lengthwise, leaving one end still connected. Crush the prawns lightly with a mallet.

Sauté the rice with the lemon butter previously prepared. Add remaining white wine and then hot broth, a little at a time, stirring continuously as liquid absorbs.

On a serving plate, form a circle with six of the prawns. Spoon the finished risotto in the center. Garnish with the remaining prawns.

Makes 4 servings.

Recipe courtesy of Capri Palace

Focaccia

- ½ tablespoon yeast
- 4 cups lukewarm (110°F) water
- 1½ tablespoon sea salt
- 3⅓ pounds flour (about 10 cups)
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1 garlic clove, thinly sliced
- 3 tablespoons fresh rosemary, torn
- Sea salt, as desired

In a large bowl, mix the yeast into the water until fully dissolved. Add the sea salt. Add the flour, a little at a time, and start to mix by hand. When you have a smooth and elastic dough, add the oil.

Cover with a damp kitchen towel and let rise in a warm place for 2 hours. Divide the dough into smaller balls, about the size of a fist, and work briefly into round balls. Cover and leave on a floured surface for about an hour.

Preheat the oven to 500°F (or the highest temperature setting you have to simulate a wood-burning oven).

Now the dough is ready (and can be used for the next five hours). Flatten each ball into a circle and stretch it to form a thin disk.

Add toppings and bake for 5 to 10 minutes until golden brown.

Makes 10-12 servings.



Anacaprese Cake

Butter, for the cake pan

Flour, for the cake pan

1/2 cup white chocolate, chopped

1/2 cup granulated sugar

6 tablespoons butter

1 1/2 cups almonds, finely ground

2 large whole eggs, beaten

Zest of 2 lemons

1/4 cup Limoncello

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Butter and flour two round 8-inch cake pans.

Melt the chocolate in a double boiler over hot water. In a mixing bowl, whip the sugar and butter together until light and fluffy. Add the melted chocolate, ground

almonds, and eggs and combine gently. Add the lemon zest and Limoncello and blend. Pour the batter into two baking pans and bake for 1 hour. Remove and let cool to room temperature. Serve with whipped cream and fresh fruit if desired.

Makes 2 cakes.

Recipe courtesy of Capri Palace