

DISCOVER ITALY'S FAMOUS SEA URCHIN

Tastes of Italia

THE BEST IN ITALIAN COOKING

FEBRUARY 2014



THE WINTER TABLE

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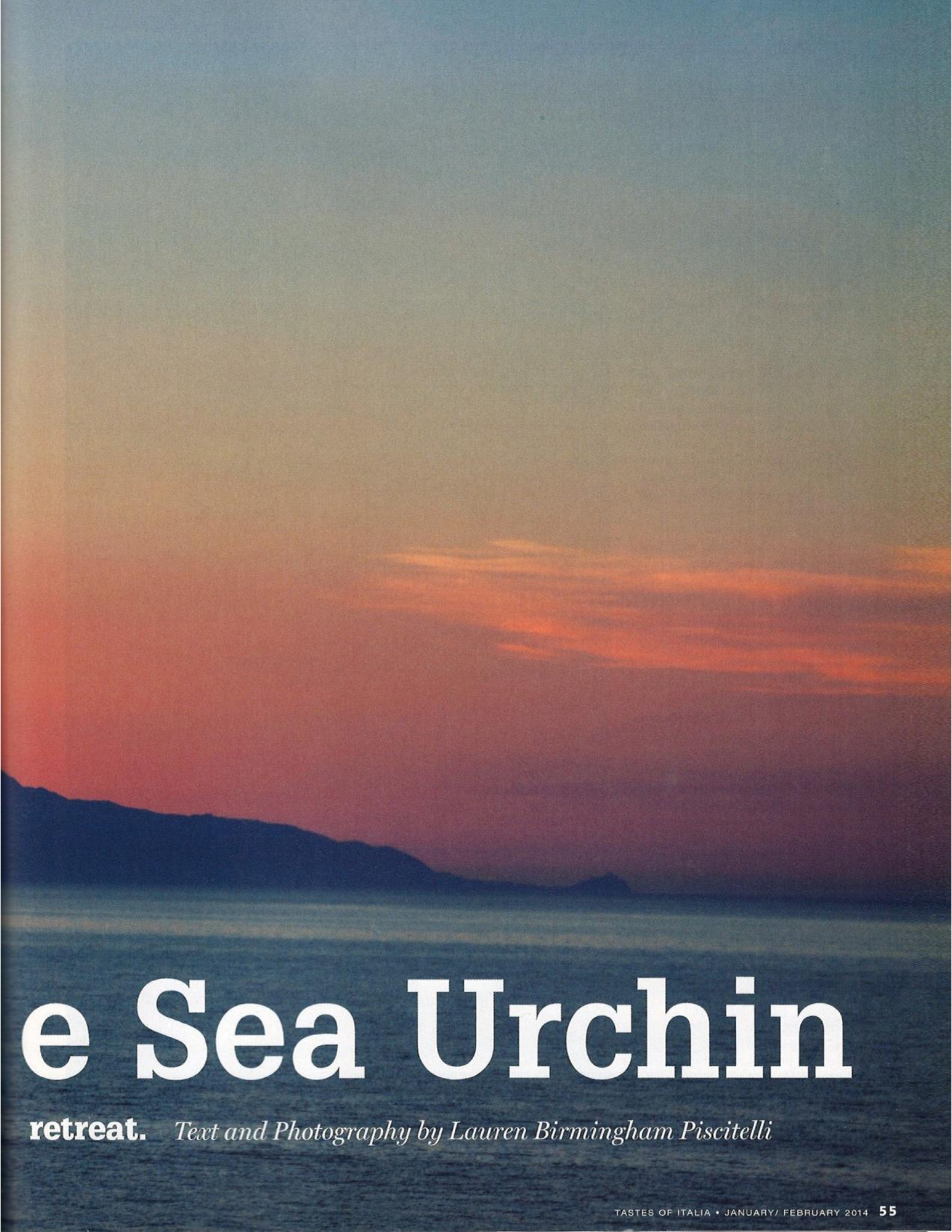
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TASTY STEWS, PERFECT PASTA,
AND GREAT PIZZA TOO! PULL UP
A CHAIR AND ENJOY DINNER!

Inside Italy

Il Riccio, Th

A seaside escape makes the perfect winter



e Sea Urchin

retreat. *Text and Photography by Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli*

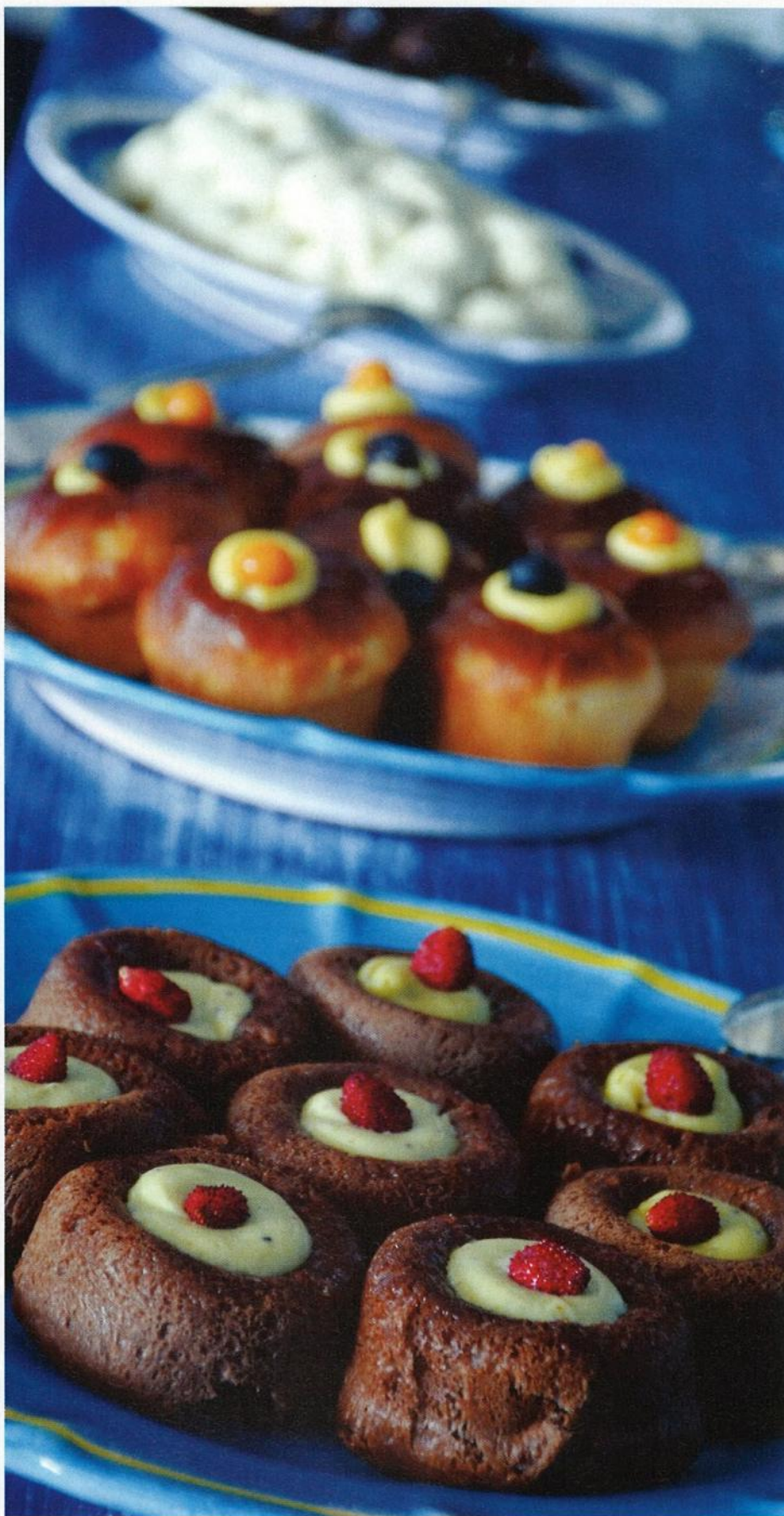
Le tradizioni sono sempre," the tradition is forever, says Salvatore Elephante, executive chef and behind-the-scenes star of the kitchen at Il Riccio, part of the Capri Palace. He is still glowing after earning his first Michelin star for Il Riccio, the first restaurant of its kind to earn the award. The popular destination spot is set on the western side of Capri just above the Grotta Azzurra. The ubiquitous style of Capri Palace shines here. In winter, Capri is quiet and peaceful, allowing you to truly enjoy its beauty.

Far from the bustling Piazzetta is Il Riccio. Set between jutting coastal cliffs and deep blue sea, you can sail to the restaurant by boat (docking is available) or follow the winding road up to Anacapri along Via Grotta Azzurra and arrive by car. A large sign with a signature sea urchin welcomes guests and points them in the right direction. A short walk along the pedestrian footpath boasting a panoramic view that spans Sorrento's Coast to Vesuvio, Procida and Ischia, and you have arrived.

At Il Riccio, the décor includes cerulean blue wooden tables and chairs dressed with white linen that line the dining room and outdoor beach club. Everything is served on hand-painted plates with a solo riccio. An emporium showcasing the daily catch of Mediterranean fish such as cuttlefish, bream, sea bass, lobsters, oysters and shrimp, and The Temptation Room (a room dedicated to and filled with traditional desserts) set the atmosphere in the two-level, open-air restaurant. Il Riccio is a crown jewel in the Cacace empire, owned by Signor Tonino Cacace.

Chef Elephante takes me into the kitchen, shows me around and tells me his story. "I was born in Gragnano, the small hilltop town that is so famous for its pasta, and I have been working here at Capri Palace for the last eight years," he says. After honing his skills, he was promoted to Il Riccio where, for the last three years, he has led a team of 37 chefs who churn out homemade everything, every day, by hand.

"We are on the sea and our cuisine is Mediterranean. We use only high quality products from the sea and land around



A full-page photograph of Chef Salvatore, a man with dark hair and a friendly smile, wearing a traditional white chef's uniform and a tall, pleated toque. He is holding a small, ornate plate with a colorful, artistic dish. The setting is a balcony with a white railing, overlooking a bright blue sea under a clear sky. The balcony has a rustic wooden roof structure. The chef's uniform has a small black logo on the left chest.

CHEF SALVATORE
Elephante of Il Riccio,
part of the Capri
Palace on the Isle
of Capri. Among his
many creations are
delectable desserts,
like those shown on
the opposite page.

Inside Italy

us, always in season, and never add anything else," says Elephante. "The flavors are simple and stand on their own. We use the absolute best of everything—extra virgin, first-cold-pressed olive oil, red tomatoes and buffalo mozzarella brought in daily. We are so fortunate to have such wonderful local, natural products in our region," he says.

Tall, confident, and never forgetting his roots, Chef Elephante was always in the kitchen making pastry as a young boy. Then step-by-step, and always working hard to move ahead, he studied at a hotel and restaurant school in Castellammare. Right after school he took his first official job in a local trattoria in his small paese.

"My love for cooking is always growing stronger and I never stop working to improve. To be a chef in the kitchen you need to have passion and love. I am in the kitchen 10 hours, sometime 14 or more each day, it is not about a paycheck. I do it because I love it," he says.

When he first started his career, he worked on Capri, then traveled to Europe and landed a position at Rocco Forte Berlin Hotel Group, where he gained a lot of experience. "When I returned to Capri, I was offered the incredible opportunity to work at the Capri Palace under Executive Chef Oliver Glowig. When Chef Glowig left, Executive Chef Andrea Migliaccio was promoted to the helm, and I was promoted to Il Riccio," he says.

I congratulate him on his Michelin star and he smiles. "Even though we were awarded a star nothing has changed and Il Riccio remains the same. We are always improving and creating new interpretations, but the tradition of the Mediterranean kitchen remains...like spaghetti con le vongole (pasta and clams)," he says.

There is research and heartfelt care behind their menu too. "Our menu has one very important thing, we never use the endangered red tuna. We support the World Wildlife Fund and Greenpeace educational efforts to speed the recovery of endangered species and use only certain varieties of fish from the Mediterranean Sea in order to protect the marine ecosystem. Each item is carefully selected according to the fishing regulations of

the European Union," he says.

The menu begins with raw fish, oysters, lobster in parchment, amberjack tartare, bonito and sea bass. The antipasto signature is sabre fish served on a bed of creamy eggplant with cherry tomato and tartare di palamita (bonito), which is another local fish.

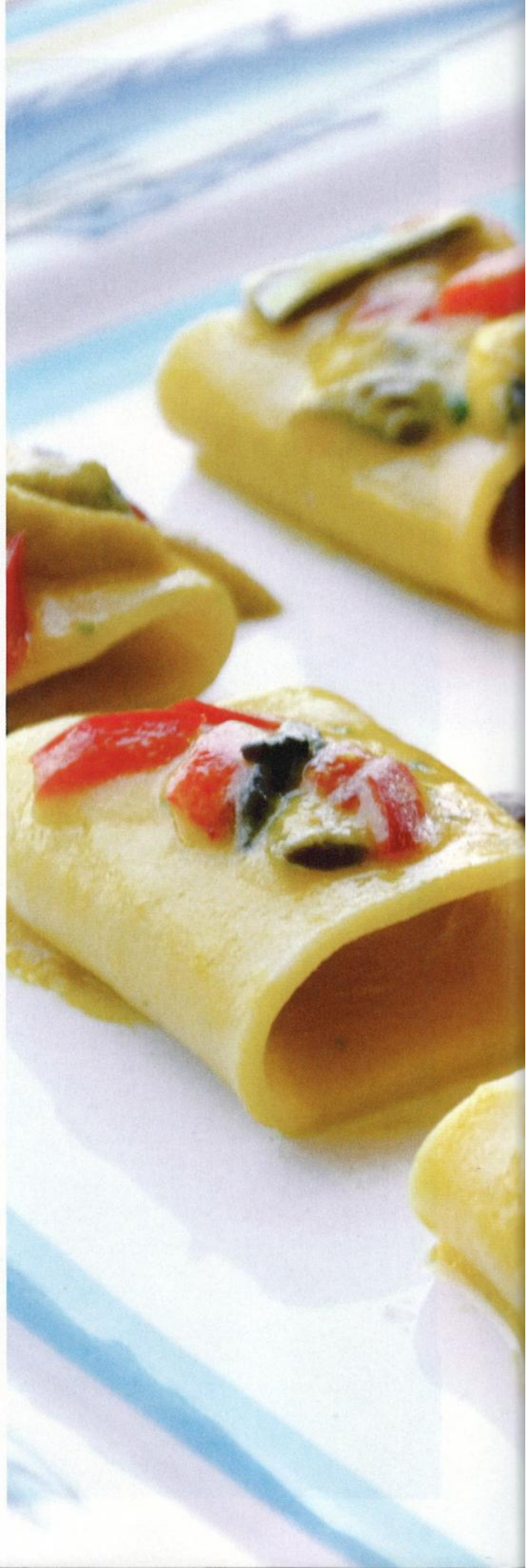
Tradition reigns with buffalo mozzarella cheese, Sorrento tomatoes, marinated small fish, classical Capri ravioli, and linguine in a spicy lobster and tomato sauce. There is also risotto alla pescatora o paccheri con peperoni rossi e gialli con alici di Cetara. The signature entrée is il Riccio di Mare, which is pasta served with sea urchin's roe and is an absolute delicacy.

The word *il riccio* translates to sea urchin, and the Capri Palace boasts its own *fornitore*, an environmentally protected farmer who raises the precious sea creatures in Sciacca, Sicily exclusively for them.

Secondi, or main courses, include *zuppa di pesce*, a sauté of the daily catch including shellfish served in a light tomato sauce; *totano ripieno*, stuffed squid or *medaglione di baccala con pappia di pomodoro in una crosta di peperoni cruschi*, medallions of fresh, local cod fish served with tomato and sweet pepper crust. All of the fish in the showcase can be prepared to order, from a crust of sea salt, grilled, baked, or *acqua pazza* style with potato.

And then there are desserts. The Temptation Room is dedicated solely to traditional desserts of the region and it is designed like a kitchen pantry. A long blue wooden table is filled with *Torta Caprese* (Capri flourless cake), *cannoli*, *crostate*, *panne cotte*, *tiramisù*, *torte*, *frutta*, *confetti* (almond candy), and more. "E per questo viene chiamata la camera delle Tentazioni," and this is why it is called The Temptation Room, says Chef Salvatore Elephante.

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PACCHERI unusually large Neapolitan pasta, is among the many elegant menu items. Sushi antipasto is also among the offerings at Il Riccio, as shown on page 60.

Inside Italy

Flourless Chocolate Hazelnut Cake

- 1 cup hazelnuts, toasted
- 1 cup sugar
- 9 tablespoons butter
- 8 ounces semisweet dark chocolate chips
- 5 large eggs, separated
- 2 tablespoons dark rum
- Powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9-inch cake pan with cooking spray. Line the bottom with waxed paper and spray the paper on top side. Set aside. In a food processor combine nuts and 1 tablespoon of the sugar. Process until "flour-like." In the top of a double broiler combine butter, remaining sugar and chocolate and cook over medium heat until mixture is smooth. Let cool. When cool beat the egg yolks one at a time into chocolate mixture. Stir in the nuts and rum. In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites until stiff peaks form. Fold into chocolate mixture. Pour into prepared pan. Bake about 45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into center comes out clean. Cool on a rack and remove from pan. To serve, dust with powdered sugar.

Makes 6 to 8 servings.

Flourless Chocolate and Almond Cake

- 1 cup almonds, toasted
- 1 cup sugar
- 9 tablespoons butter
- 8 ounces semisweet dark chocolate chips
- 5 large eggs, separated
- 2 tablespoons amaretto
- Powdered sugar

Preheat oven to 350°F. Spray a 9-inch cake pan with cooking spray. Line the bottom with waxed paper and spray the paper on top side. Set aside. In a food processor combine nuts and 1 tablespoon of the sugar. Process until "flour-like." In the top of a double broiler combine butter, remaining sugar and chocolate and cook over medium heat until mixture is smooth. Let cool. When cool beat the egg yolks one at a time into chocolate mixture. Stir in the nuts and amaretto. In a separate bowl, beat the egg whites until stiff peaks form. Fold into chocolate mixture. Pour into prepared pan. Bake about 45 minutes or until a toothpick inserted into center comes out clean. Cool on a rack and remove from pan. To serve, dust with powdered sugar.

Makes 6 to 8 servings.



TRADITIONAL DESSERTS
of the region have
their own arena in The
Temptation Room which
is arranged like a kitchen
pantry.



Inside Italy

Octopus in White Wine

Octopus is found in many seaside Mediterranean cuisines. It needs to be cleaned well and cooked slowly in a covered pan much longer than most seafood. Most recipes call for a cooking time between 30 minutes to 1½ hours. Mild in taste, it makes the perfect base for a variety of Italian seasonings.

- 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 cloves garlic
- 2 fresh sage leaves
- ⅛ teaspoon dried rosemary
- 2 pounds octopus, cleaned and cut into pieces
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 1 bay leaf
- Sea salt and black pepper, to taste

Heat the olive oil in a pan, add the onion, garlic, sage and rosemary and cook over low heat, stirring occasionally, for about 5 minutes. Add the octopus and cook another few minutes, then add the wine, bay leaf and season with salt and pepper to taste. Simmer over very low heat for about 1½ hours.

Makes 4 servings.

Fusilli with Baby Octopus Ragout

- 3 ounces baby octopus tentacles
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil, divided
- 3 cloves garlic, divided
- 3 cherry tomatoes
- ⅛ teaspoon sea salt
- ¼ teaspoon thyme
- ¼ to ½ cup octopus cooking liquid
- ¼ cup green pepper, finely diced
- 3 ounces dried fusilli
- Basil leaves for garnish

Preheat the oven to 200°F.

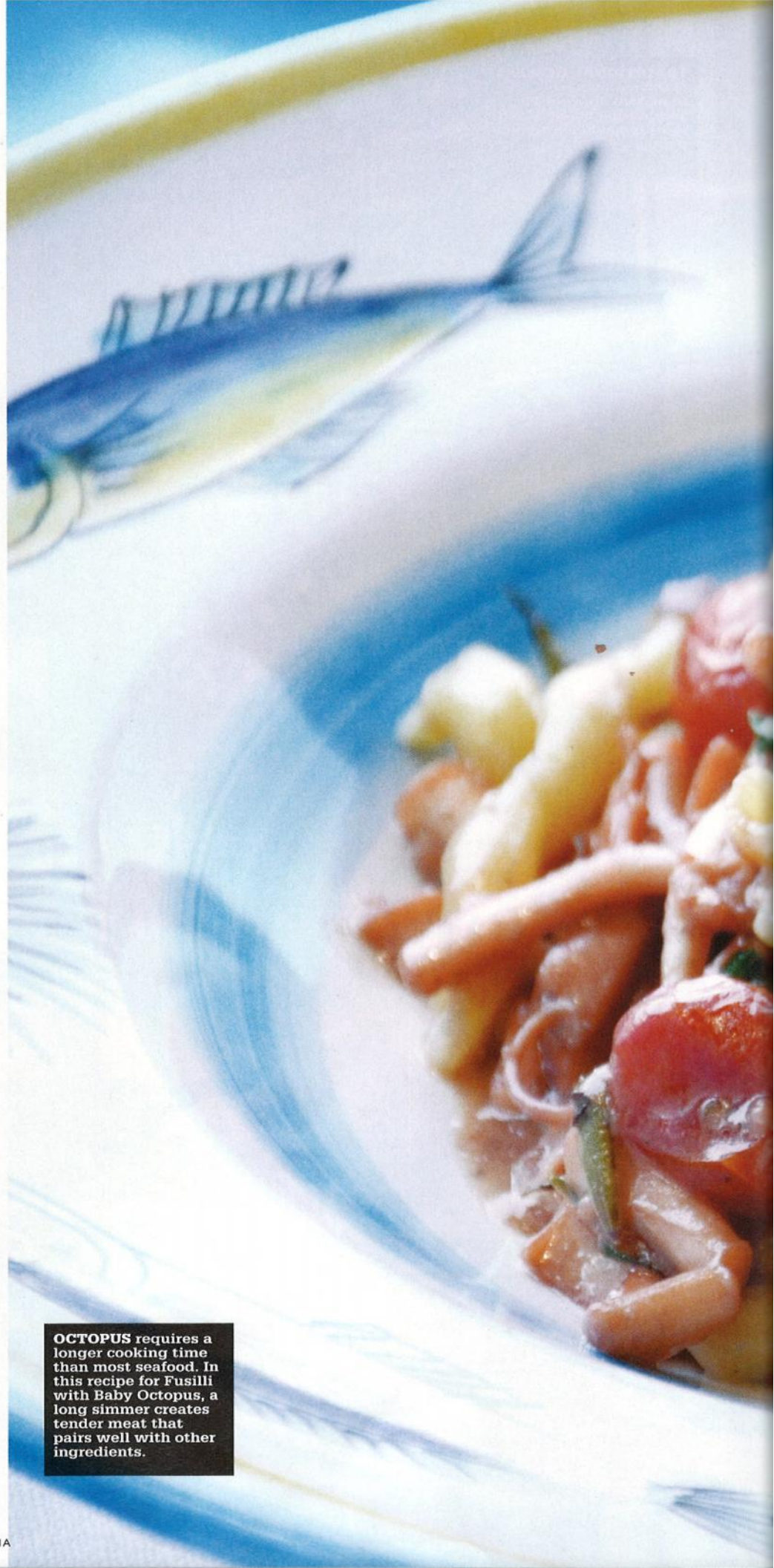
Finely chop the baby octopus tentacles. In a large pan on the stove, add 2 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil, a clove of garlic and the diced octopus. Cover the pan and let cook at low heat for about 45 minutes.

In the meantime, remove the seeds from the cherry tomatoes and place them in an ovenproof pan. Sprinkle with 1 tablespoon olive oil and add a clove of garlic, a pinch of salt, and thyme and let cook about 40 minutes. Reserve the liquid from the pan the octopus was cooking in. The amount may vary, but you should have about ¼ cup. Set aside. In another pan, add 1 tablespoon olive oil and a clove of garlic. Let cook until the garlic is tender, then add the green pepper and octopus and cook for an additional few minutes. Add the liquid from the pan the octopus was cooking in and bring to a simmer.

Cook the fusilli to al dente according to manufacturer's directions. Drain and add the pasta to the pan and let simmer for a minute or two. Add the cooked tomatoes and stir. Serve with basil leaves.

Makes 2 servings.

— Recipe courtesy of Il Riccio, Capri



OCTOPUS requires a longer cooking time than most seafood. In this recipe for Fusilli with Baby Octopus, a long simmer creates tender meat that pairs well with other ingredients.

