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APRIL 2014

The Spring Table

PERFECT ROAST LAMB,
SECRETS OF RISOTTO
MILANESE, ELEGANT
LEMON DESSERTS AND
GREAT VEGGIE SIDES

APRIL 2014



U.S. and CANADA \$5.95

Bologna

The of Magic MAJANI

Founded in 1796, Bologna's Majani chocolates are among the world's most tempting creations.

*Text and Photography
By Lauren Birmingham Piscitelli*

On the via Carbonesi, just off the Piazza Maggiore, the main square in Bologna, is a chocolate shop. There are no signs, just a majestic wooden window frame with the words Giuseppe Majani 1796 raised in gold leaf. If you did not know the name Majani to be synonymous with chocolate, you would never know what it is. But a visit to Bologna would not be complete without a visit to Majani, an old-fashioned, one-of-a-kind chocolate shop of yesteryear.

Walk inside and a long white marble countertop is lined with grand apothecary jars filled with tempting chocolate creations. Round ones, square ones, and bars in fondente 50 percent and 70 percent, with chili pepper, citrus and mint, to name a few. Dark cherry wood shelves are stacked with elegant bon bon boxes that have been wrapped in white paper and gold ribbons. The smell of chocolate permeates the air. "Buongiorno," say Signore Patrizia and Sara, the chocolate experts who greet each customer while filling



Majani's Patrizia, left, and Sara.

boxes with dark, milk and white chocolate. "Ciao, Lauren," they both look up and call out my name. In smart overcoats and using silver prongs to take each treat, the women know a lot about chocolate, as they have worked here their whole lives. Over the years I have come to know the two signore. They helped me select the dark, milk and white tortellini di cioccolato for my wedding, and every time I visit, I learn more about the magic of Majani.

It started out as a very small pastry shop in 1796. It was the brainchild of Teresina Majani. There was a small production area, the shop and a tearoom. Then in 1865, when Italy was still divided into various states and duchies, Giuseppe Majani went to Turin on a passport that was issued by the Papal State, and he was allowed to cross the border

Patrizia explains.

In 1911, after more than a century, Majani had earned its keep in the chocolate trade industry. At this same time, Fiat, the Italian car manufacturer, commissioned Majani to create a customized chocolate for the launch of the Tipo Quattro car. The chocolate, called The Fiat, is a small cube of four alternating layers of chocolate and hazelnut cream. The Fiat was an instant success. Majani extended the line and included Noir, a three-layer version of toasted almonds, hazelnuts and chocolate cream, and Caffè, another three-layer version of hazelnuts, almonds and a coffee cream. In 2011, Majani celebrated the Fiat chocolates' 100-year anniversary.

Another chocolate, the scorza, takes its name from the bark of a tree and is the oldest, most important and well known

in mirtillo (dark berry), albicocca (apricot), ciliegia (cherry) and fragola (strawberry) for summer.

"It is all made at our workshop in Crespellano, a small town about 15 kilometers west of Bologna. We start out with the best raw chocolate, 100 percent pure cocoa beans. Then artisan hands create everything you see in the shop with Majani's Old World recipes. We have been doing it for 217 years and we are a 100 percent Italian product," Sara explains.

"E' una storia molto dolce," I say, thanking them for their story. Everyone smiles. As Sara puts my purchase in the shopping bag, she says, "I put in a few of the new novelty Fiats in there. Lemon, cherry and orange chocolates...and don't worry they are senza zucchero (without sugar)."

In 1911, after more than a century in the chocolate industry, Fiat, the Italian car manufacturer, commissioned Majani to create a customized chocolate for the launch of the Tipo Quattro car.

of frontiers. He wanted to buy the most technologically advanced machinery for chocolate making.

When he returned to Bologna, he posted a sign in his shop that read, "Stablimento a Vapore di Confetture e Cioccolata," meaning steam-driven confectionery and chocolate establishment. Majani instantly became an important name, and during the Belle Epoque period, the salon turned into a prestigious meeting point where Bologna's aristocrats and intellectuals, including Carducci, Marconi, Eleonora Duse and Arrigo Boito, gathered to socialize.

"Majani soon became the finest chocolate maker in Europe and won several awards. They participated at the Universal Exhibitions of Paris in 1867 and 1878, went to Vienna (1873) and Milan (1881) winning first prizes for the best chocolate in Europe. At the same time, they became the official maker of chocolates for the Royal House of Savoy, and at the end of 1878, Umberto I granted them the right to include the royal coat of arms on the Majani shop emblem,"

chocolate at Majani, Patrizia explains. The recipe was first created in 1832 and has not changed since.

It is believed to be the first solid chocolate to be produced in Italy. Although scorza literally means peel (usually of a lemon, orange or citrus), this chocolate has no citrus fruit peel in it. It is a 100 percent chocolate that is so rich and dense it crumbles when you bite into it.

"Tell me about the Tortellino," I ask. Il Tortellino di cioccolato is the sweet version of the hand-made Bolognese pasta. Following the tradition of the Tortellini Bolognese, it is a chocolate version of tortellini, Sara explains. Made of milk, white and dark chocolate, it is filled with a soft cream.

The seasons change and the chocolatiers continue to create the classics such as traditional Christmas chocolates, La Crema (a soft chocolate spread for the cold winter months), La Pasqua Majani, chocolate eggs wrapped in colorful foils for Easter, and Le Gelatine di Frutta, natural fruit jellies made

Travel Notes

Bologna is one of my favorite cities in Italy. Porticos cover pedestrian walkways that are lined with delicious food shops of yesteryear still owned and operated by the same families who started them, some more than 200 years old. There is an air of elegance, from the morning when all the signori sip their caffè, to the late afternoon when the world comes out and the aperitivi begin. Men wear suits, women wear dresses and everyone walks arm in arm. There is something about Bologna, la città grassa, the fat city, that keeps me coming back for more.

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AN ASSORTMENT of Majani chocolates that are almost too beautiful to eat.



THE MAJANI sign hangs above the door at Italy's finest chocolate maker that dates to 1796.



Chocolate Macaroons

- 1½ cups hazelnuts
- ¼ cup almonds
- 2¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 1 large egg
- 1¾ cups milk
- ½ cup Majani dark chocolate 70 percent, or another high quality dark chocolate, broken into small pieces and chopped in a food processor
- ¼ cup unsalted butter, room temperature
- 2¼ cups granulated sugar
- 1½ teaspoons baking powder

Preheat oven to 325°F.
Grind the hazelnuts and almonds into small pieces.

On a clean work surface, place the flour in a mound. Make a hole in the center, crack the egg, and put it in the center of the flour. Using your hands, mix in the egg, add the milk and the rest of the other ingredients. Slowly mix together, pulling the flour in gradually and working until you obtain a pliable dough.

Roll the dough into thin logs. Cut the log into small pieces about 3 inches each and roll them into balls more or less the size of a small golf ball. Place the balls on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake 20 minutes.

Makes 36 cookies.

Vermouth Doughnuts

- 2 cups hazelnuts
- 4 ounces (½ cup) Majani chocolate, 70 percent or other high quality dark chocolate with a similar cocoa content
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 2 large eggs, beaten

- 1 ounce vermouth liqueur
- 3½ cups granulated sugar

Preheat oven to 325°F.

Grind the hazelnuts and break the chocolate into small pieces and chop together in a food processor.

Put the flour and baking powder in a large bowl, add the beaten eggs and begin mixing. Pour in the vermouth, then slowly mix in sugar and then the nuts and chocolate. Add additional flour as needed to obtain a light, pliable dough.

Roll the dough into ½-inch diameter logs and cut them into 4- to 5-inch pieces. Wrap the ends together to shape them into donuts. Place on a nonstick baking tray. Bake doughnuts for 25 minutes until golden brown.

Makes 48 doughnuts.

Sweet Pizzicotti

- ½ cup raisins
- Warm water
- 8 ounces (1 cup) Majani dark chocolate or other high quality dark chocolate suitable for baking
- 2¾ cups all-purpose flour
- 1¼ cups granulated sugar
- ½ teaspoon cinnamon
- 2 tablespoons Majani or other high quality unsweetened cocoa powder
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 1 cup canola oil
- 1½ cups white wine or Vin Santo

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Soak the raisins in a bowl with enough warm water to cover them for about 15 minutes; drain and set aside. Shave the chocolate into small, irregular flakes to make about 1 cup.

On a flat surface, place the flour in a

mound, make a hole in the center and add in the sugar, cinnamon, drained raisins, cocoa powder, baking soda, oil and wine. Add the chocolate shavings.

Knead the dough with your hands until it is workable, then roll out into a long log. It will be soft and the consistency will be sticky. You can add additional flour if dough is too soft.

To make the cookies, take small pinches (pizzicotti) of dough about an inch in length, and place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Bake 25 to 30 minutes.

Makes 48 cookies.

Chocolate Cake

The recipe calls for Majani chocolate 70 percent, meaning it is made of 70 percent cocoa. You can find Majani online at shop.majani.com. If you don't have Majani chocolate, another high quality chocolate with a similar cocoa content may be substituted.

- 3 large eggs
- ¾ cup sugar, divided
- 1¼ cups Majani dark chocolate, 70 percent
- ½ cup butter, room temperature
- 2¼ tablespoons flour
- 2¼ tablespoons unsweetened cocoa
- 3 tablespoons fresh cream or whole milk
- 3 tablespoons Grand Marnier or chocolate liqueur or dessert wine

Preheat oven to 350°F.

Separate the egg whites from the yolks. First, whisk the whites with half the sugar. Do not over-whisk the whites; they should still be at the soft, billowy stage. Set the whites aside, and in another bowl beat the yolks with the other half of the sugar until they are almost white in color and frothy in consistency.

Meanwhile, melt the Majani dark chocolate in a double boiler or using a microwave. Once the chocolate is completely melted, add the softened butter and stir until melted. Pour this mixture into the bowl with the yolks and mix well.

Add the flour, sift in the cocoa, and pour in the fresh cream and liqueur. Alternate dry and liquid ingredients so the mixture is always homogeneous.

Gently fold in the whisked egg whites. Pour the mix in a greased and floured 10-inch round baking pan and bake about 20 minutes.

Note: In the baking pan, the batter should only be a couple of inches thick. Do not overcook the cake, it should be deliciously moist.

Makes 8 servings.