



Autumn

CULINARY ADVENTURES

in Italy

By Catherine Ferraresi

We recently traveled to Europe during the autumn harvest season. Seeking inspiration for recipe development in Gustare's Test Kitchen, I attended an informative, full-day cooking class at the Culinary Institute of Bologna. My desire was to learn the traditions of Bolognese cuisine enhanced with premium olive oils and aged balsamic vinegars.

We created the Gustare Test Kitchen in 2010 in order to develop easy-to-execute recipes to offer our customer using their favorite Gustare extra virgin olive oils and balsamic vinegars at home.

I previously attended Giuliano Hazan's Northern Italian Cooking School in Verona in the fall of 2000. During the inaugural two weeks of the school, I met my favorite cookbook mentor Marcella Hazan, mother of Giuliano and author of "The Classic Italian Cookbook - The Art of Italian Cooking and the Italian Art of Eating."

This year, I chose to attend the Culinary Institute of Bologna to learn more about regional Italian cuisine of Emilia Romagna and, in particular, the secrets of a traditional ragu alla Bolognese!

Beginning with an early morning market visit – the green grocer, butcher and cheese shop – we headed back to the kitchen with rolling baskets filled with colorful fresh produce, farm fresh milk, eggs, Parmigiano-Reggiano (aged three years) and a whole lamb, just butchered. At the close of the day, we hung our aprons to enjoy the fruits of our labor:

- ▶ Prosciutto & Melon (Crenshaw) with a drizzle of balsamico
- ▶ Handmade Swiss Chard lasagna pasta (for lasagna alla Bolognese)
- ▶ Homemade stock
- ▶ Roasted vegetarian stacks of eggplant parmigiana, butternut squash, zucchini and herbs
- ▶ Ragu alla Bolognese Pork Tenderloin techniques
- ▶ Canneloni with ricotta and Swiss chard
- ▶ Green figs stewed in balsamico

Our European culinary travels began in late September with a brief trip to Paris where we lived in the mid-1990s. We traveled on to southern Spain to experience the early olive harvest in the awe-inspiring Andalusia region famous for the PICUAL cultivar (olive varietal) planted over thousands of hectares seemingly as far as the eye can see.

In Jaèn, more than 4,500 square kilometers are solely devoted to pristine olive groves containing approximately 40 million trees. During an average year, these trees will produce approximately 900,000 tons of olives which equates to approximately 200,000 tons of olive oil; just one-third of Spain's olive oil production.

We were able to increase our knowledge of olive farm harvesting with an informative visit to PICUALIA, a state-of-the-art EVOO processing center for the region and used by our exclusive importer.

Our travels continued to Tuscany where we enjoyed the final days of the grape harvest while tasting some of the finest Sangiovese regional wines at a wonderful vineyard in Montepulciano: POLIZIANO, established in 1961. They have been offering the famous Vino Nobile di Montepulciano since 1983.

Being nestled in for a week in our favorite little town of Cortona allowed us to explore quaint Tuscan and Umbrian towns and villages to enjoy their culinary delights. Some of our favorite seasonal menu items were Braised Beef Cheeks Stewed in Sangiovese grapes, Leek Risotto with Lemon Rind Sauce and Chicken Liver garnish, fresh green figs with gorgonzola mousse.

You can't go wrong with a healthy food source such as figs – one of the first plants to be cultivated by humans.

Ribollita, one of our favorite dishes, is a very popular Tuscan soup of seasonal vegetables, bread and beans considered lean and peasant style. It appears on menus in autumn around the grape harvest with slightly different versions offered from town to town.

As always, we thoroughly enjoyed returning to Spain and especially Northern Italy to enjoy the cultural pace of life. From each sip of morning cappuccino to each sweet bite at the end of the evening meal, ingredients are farm-to-table fresh, traditionally seasonal and always locally sourced. **Delizioso!** 🇮🇹



Catherine Ferraresi is Co-owner of Gustare Oils & Vinegars founded in Chatham in 2009. She has developed over 200 recipes using our premium olive oils and traditionally aged balsamic vinegars. Visit Gustare while shopping in Chatham village located at 461 Main Street (near the Mayflower shop) gustareoliveoil.com

BOLOGNESE SAUCE

Serves: 4-6

Prep Time: 30 minutes

Cooking Time: 1 hour

Total Time: 1 hour, 30 minutes

INGREDIENTS

2 tablespoons minced onion

1 tablespoon minced carrot

1 tablespoon minced celery

1/3 cup unsmoked pork belly (or pancetta) (80gr), finely chopped

3/4lb ground beef (350gr) sirloin preferred but cheaper cuts are ok, such as from the shoulder

1/2 cup dry white wine

2 cups homemade meat stock (250ml), simmering on the stove top

2 tablespoons tomato paste

3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil (40gr)

salt, to taste

RECIPE

1. Add onion, carrot, celery to a medium saucepan with 3 tablespoons of extra virgin olive oil and sauté for 1 minute over medium-low heat.
2. Add the pork belly. Continue to sauté to caramelize the mixture, stirring occasionally to avoid burning, approximately 4 minutes.
3. Add the ground beef, stir and continue cooking for about 5 minutes.
4. When the liquid released by the meat has evaporated, add the white wine and stir occasionally until the wine has evaporated.
5. In a small bowl combine the tomato paste with a ladle of stock. Stir into the saucepan.
6. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered. When the liquid in the pot reduces continue to add stock to just cover the mixture. Add more when necessary. The result should not be soupy or saucy but rather meaty.
7. The longer you cook your ragù the better it is. Some people cook it up to 4 hours! But don't worry, 2 hours in total will be enough for a delicious, flavorful sauce.
8. Add salt to your taste.

Serving suggestions: Any kind of pasta, handmade or packaged, is ok.

Note: Your ragù freezes well for later use so you can easily improvise a really nice last minute dinner!

