

T MAGAZINE

A Dinner — and a Recipe — Celebrating Naples

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Rossana Orlandi is renowned for the inspired contemporary design selection at her Milan gallery — but as she transforms the space into a part-time social salon, its contents, and even the era it evokes, are subject to change. “This place is made for celebrations because it was made with love,” Orlandi pronounced Tuesday evening by a table set with an 18th-century-style Neapolitan feast and lit by towering silver candlesticks. Around the courtyard, guests dined while reclining on her collection of wildly modern chairs, but the celebration in question was borne of nostalgia for another city and another time.

“To see Naples is to love Naples,” sighed a guest. Set on a sparkling Mediterranean bay and lined with glorious Baroque remnants, the city still inspires a deep affection despite its crumbling facades and a throttling criminal network; it was once the most populous city in Italy and the flourishing capital of a kingdom that extended through Sicily. Its Bourbon dynasty built the Reggia di Caserta, an amplified version of Versailles, and established a court notorious for the excesses of its luxuries. Queen Maria Carolina was sent chefs from France by her sister, Marie Antoinette, and in the Bourbon court, a fusion of lofty French cuisine and the “poor” cuisine of pasta and tomato-loving Naples was born, with dishes so complex that they could only be prepared by highly trained professional chefs, referred to as *Monzù* — a Neapolitan corruption of “monsieur.”

At the gallery on Tuesday, Franco Santasilia di Torpino — a retired engineer who has dedicated his golden years to gastronomy — presented a book of recipes (“I Primi”) inspired by the royal Franco-Neapolitan cuisine of the 1700s. “My mother encouraged me to rediscover the forgotten roots of this cuisine,” he said. “This country’s history is reflected in its cooking.” He pointed to a dish of sartù del riso, a crisp-baked cake of rice and meat sauce that, since the Bourbon era, has been used as a centerpiece of the dinner table (its name comes from the French “surtout,” meaning “first and foremost”).

For this evening’s dinner, anelli pasta with sweet peppers, pine nuts and raisins (“a classic in aristocratic kitchens,” writes Santasilia in his book) accompanied the sartù, along with three styles of buffalo-milk mozzarella and a dessert table of flaky sfogliatelle, rum-soaked babà cake and globes of sponge cake in lemon-cream icing topped with a whipped-cream dollop, unambiguously called zizza — “breast” in the Neapolitan dialect.

A full-wall video of the grandiose Reggia di Caserta played footage of erupting fountains, topiary footpaths and marble statues carved as if wearing delicately fluttering garments. Guests, many themselves descended from Neapolitan aristocracy, clustered around the food, praising the delights of a city often the subject of infamy in Italy. Glasses were raised, filled with Greco di Tufo from the Cantine di Marzo in Campania (a region of Naples), where a di Marzo ancestor, escaping the plague in 1647, brought his grapevines to the sulfurous lands of Tufo and first created the mineral-rich wine.

Before speaking, Marilena Citelli Francese, who collaborated on Santasilia’s book and organized the dinner with Orlandi, set down her wine glass. “Naples is going through a tough time now,” she said. “We need to talk about the beauty of the past to make things better. Even when people are in crisis, talking about a wonderful past can change their ideas about themselves.”



Rossana Orlandi took a night off from contemporary design to present a dinner in the style of the 18th-century Neapolitan Bourbon court at her Milan gallery, in honor of a new book of recipes inspired by the historical cuisine.

Andrea Wyner

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Merilena Citelli Francese, seen here in front of the dessert table, organized the dinner and collaborated on the book.



Three kinds of buffalo-milk mozzarella, a Naples specialty, were served.



Dinner was served in the courtyard, now covered by vines heavy with bunches of grapes.



Franco Santasilia di Torpino presented his cookbook "I Primi."

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Anelli ai Peperoni

Yield: 6 servings

4-5 large sweet red and yellow peppers
1 tablespoon yellow raisins
1 tablespoon salt-preserved capers
2 tablespoons Gaeta olives
2-3 tablespoons Extra-Virgin Olive Oil, or more to taste
2 cloves of garlic
1 tablespoon pine nuts
600 grams (about 21 ounces) Anelli pasta (a smooth, elongated ring shape)
Salt and pepper to taste

1. Cut the peppers into wide strips, removing the seeds and stem. Place the strips with skin up on a baking tray.
2. Grill the peppers at 350 degrees in the oven until the skin blackens, about 20 minutes. As soon as they cool, remove and discard the skin, and cut the pepper pieces into narrow strips and place aside.
3. Place the raisins in room-temperature water to soften. Rinse the capers under water to remove salt. Cut the olives into halves and remove the pits.
4. Place the pepper strips in a pan with the 2-3 tablespoons of olive oil and the garlic gloves. On medium heat, cook for about 10 minutes in order to flavor the peppers.
5. Drain the raisins well. Remove the garlic cloves and add the pine nuts, olives, capers and raisins. Cook for 6-7 minutes, stirring frequently.
6. In a full pot of boiling, well-salted water, cook the pasta until al dente, drain well and add to the pan with the peppers, placing on heat and cooking for one minute to unite the flavors. Serve immediately.



The recipe for the anelli ai peperoni, seen here, was taken from the new cookbook.



Inside, a table was set with the silver, crystal and china in the traditional style of the court.



A bar was installed in the courtyard garden, serving Greco di Tufo from the di Marzo vineyard where it was first created in 1647.



The Neapolitan dessert zizza.