

JULY 2005

we have come to Bologna to eat. Not to see art and eat or shop and eat or wander beneath the ancient porticos unique to this city and eat. No. We are just eating. Our exercise will be walking from one restaurant to another. If there's a church on the way, we'll look up at it as we pass. Maybe. Otherwise, we are unwavering.

Our Ahab is Mario Batali. Our crew includes three of Batali's chef cohorts: the urbane Mark Ladner of Lupa, the meditative Zach Allen of Otto, and the youthful Matt Molina from Del Latte, in L.A. Also along is Babbo's head manager and wine aficionado, the debonair Alfredo Ruiz. Bearing witness is one intrepid reporter who should have taken Batali's advice and stopped eating a week before the trip. At the end of our five days, we will have eaten 62 courses, not counting desserts—a glorious and terrifying amount of food.

Batali is undertaking this intense foray into the cuisine of Emilia-Romagna because he is opening a new restaurant, Del Posto, in New York City, and he wants to revisit, with his staff, the food that continually serves as his inspiration. The cooking of this region is characterized by simplicity, perfect balance, and an intense devotion to high-quality ingredients. And they mean it here. No cheating. These dishes have been refined over hundreds of years.

DAY ONE: Lunch begins 15 minutes after we arrive. Why wait? We sit at an outdoor table at the lovely Trattoria Caminetto d'Oro, established in 1927. A Prosecco is poured. "I hope everyone is feeling good about themselves," Batali says, "because by our last meal, you won't be."

We warily raise our glasses. "Cin cin [expletive deleted]!" This toast will become our battle cry, periodically rallying any of us who have gone timid in the face of another meal.

Our antipasti are placed in front of us. Immediately, like an old man in prayer or a kid studying a toad, each chef hunches over his food, his nose mere inches away. The group breathes in deeply, then everyone lifts his head and smiles. Only then do we begin to eat.

Some prosciutto is passed my way. "This is about the best prosciutto I've ever tasted," I venture boldly.

"Oh, that's not prosciutto," Zach Allen says. Allen is our salami and cured-meat expert. "It's *culatello*, made from the heart of the back leg. What is it, Mario, a 300-day cure?"

"Three hundred days," Batali confirms. "It's soaked in white wine first."

It's not that I feel stupid, just magnificently quotidian. I have discovered via *culatello*, and it will be reconfirmed many times over the next five days, that chefs do not eat like normal people. Their experience of every dish is more complex, incorporating a vast knowledge of food and the science of cooking. Ruiz brings the same expertise to the nuances of the service—the comportment of the waiters, the heft of the napkins. Nothing escapes the group's scrutiny.

The first of many bowls of tortellini arrives. A 16th-century recipe in Bologna's Camera di Commercio states the city's official preparation of the dish: The filling is always

prosciutto, mortadella, pork loin, and a hint of parsley. It is implicit that the pasta be prepared that morning, if not even more recently. This version is glossed with butter and two-year-old Parmigiano-Reggiano. It is the ideal prologue.

Dinner, two hours later, is at Diana, a stately restaurant with overly bright lighting. Ladner plans to serve *bollito misto* at the new restaurant, and at Diana, they are serious about their *bollito*. Tongue, capon, and veal simmer in a pot for several hours and are served, sliced, along with sausage. In winter, the meats are presented in a shallow bowl, knee-deep in the broth they were cooked in. In summer, the broth is left in the pot.

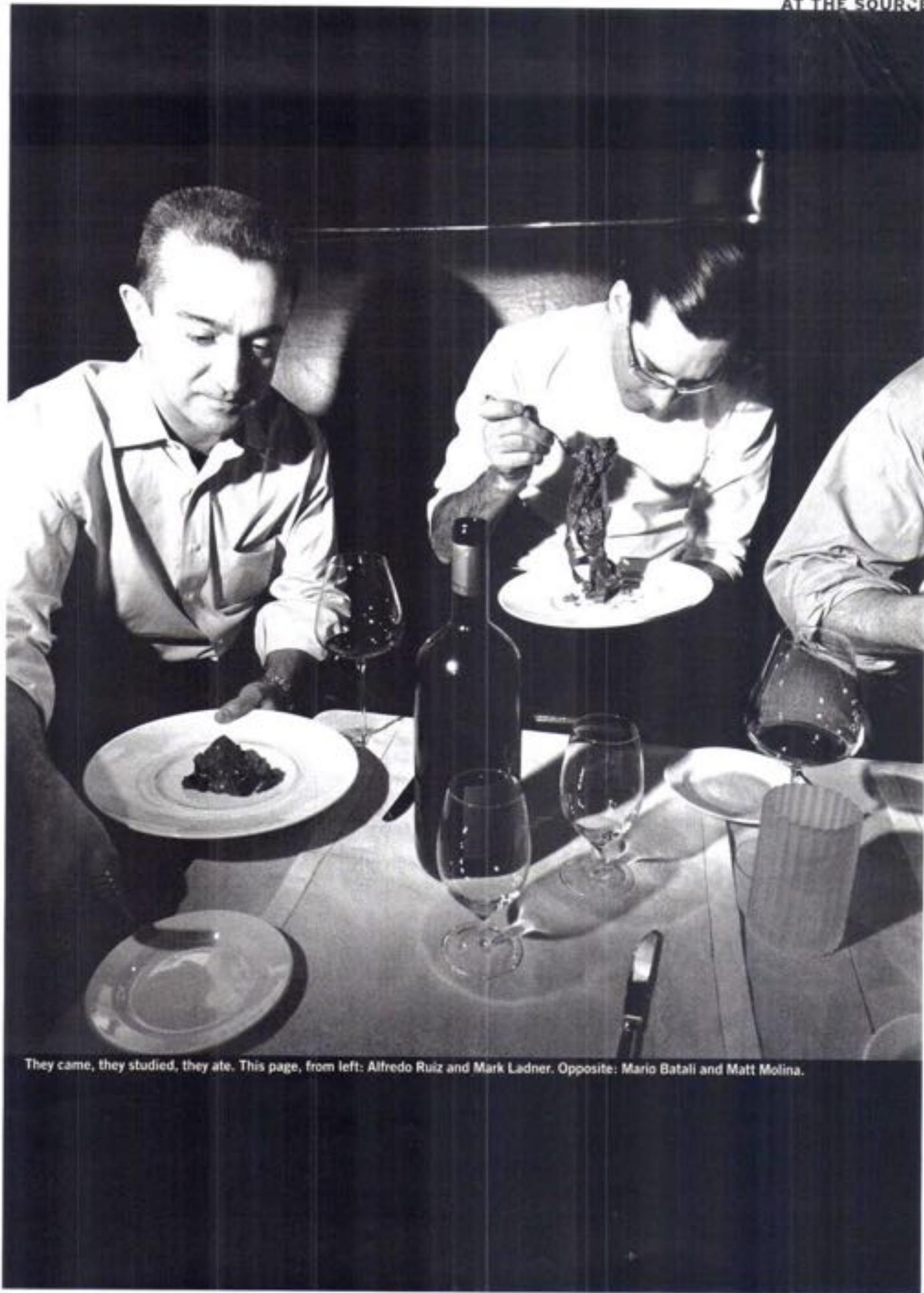
Our *bollito* arrives along with the two traditional sauces, savory salsa verde (made from olives, capers, and herbs) and *mostarda*, unripened quince, pear, and mandarin in a sweet jellylike reduction. Referring to the *mostarda*, Batali points out that the marriage of sweet and meat goes back to the Renaissance. "It was a way for the nobles to distinguish themselves from the common folk."

DAY TWO: We take a 30-minute train ride to Modena to eat at Hosteria Giusti, an eight-table restaurant attached to a 400-year-old *salumeria*. When we arrive, the shop is closed, the gate half-shut. Batali disappears underneath. From within, joyful cries—"Mario!" The gate opens. Bottles of wine line one wall of the tiny *salumeria*; salami, cured *guanciale* (pork cheeks), and prosciutto the other. Allen is in heaven. Giusti's proprietor, Adriano Morandi, shows off his mortadella the way a kid would his new bike. "I make it now with more honey, Mario!" He cuts a piece, holds it out to me, pinned on an imposing knife. It is now my favorite mortadella. A cork pops: Morandi's Lambrusco. "It is unfiltered, Mario!" He pours. We hold up our glasses to see the transition from clarity to cloudiness. *Cin cin* [expletive deleted]! We drink. Morandi sells it for eight euros a bottle. Ruiz wants to buy the whole production. We head into the back room for lunch.

A narrow gap in the counter leads through a low, wide arch to the kitchen. Morandi's wife smiles at us like Bellini's Madonna through the steam from the pasta pot. In the dining room, under ancient oak beams, five tables have been gathered together for us alone. Something magical is about to happen.

Here are the highlights from our eight courses (not including dessert) at Hosteria Giusti:

Gnocco fritto, a triangular dough puff, warm and savory and just corporeal enough to support the weight of a thin slice of melting Gorgonzola. The chefs are entranced; Mario, amused. He has tasted this before. He has tasted everything before and savors our reaction, as if he were sitting with someone watching *Casablanca* for the first time.



They came, they studied, they ate. This page, from left: Alfredo Ruiz and Mark Ladner. Opposite: Mario Batali and Matt Molina.

Two courses featuring squash blossoms: one fried, the other a frittata topped with a 50-year-old balsamic vinegar.

Two pastas now. First, perfect *tortelloni*. Then *garganelli* with duck *ragù*. Morandi serves this himself, spooning it right from the pan, then placing the pan with the last portion in front of Ladner. Ruiz's eyes light up, perhaps as he imagines himself pulling this off in the new restaurant, watching the guests smile with surprise, as we did.

Cold pork prepared like tuna, served with warm roasted torpedo onions. Morandi's wife emerges from the kitchen to explicate the dish. The shoulder of a 17-month-old pig is cooked slowly in broth, then pulled into pieces and placed in a large tin with olive oil, juniper berries, pepper, a bit of salt, and bay leaf, and pressed down to soak up the flavors for a week. "Cooked with the skin on?" Allen wants to know, his version already coalescing in his head. Morandi and his wife watch as we eat wordlessly, their beaming faces suggesting that our silence is our highest compliment.

Stewed *guanciola*—veal cheeks. Like synchronized swimmers, we all take a bite and in unison set our forks down, look at each other, and laugh. We have just tasted one of the best things we have ever eaten, and we are too full to finish.

Dinner that night at Trattoria Battibecco is somewhat disappointing. The décor is tasteful, but after Giusti, it seems slightly pretentious. Perhaps any restaurant would. Battibecco specializes in fish from the Adriatic, and after so much meat, some fish is welcome. In fact, one of us, I will not say who (it wasn't me), orders a salad as his *secondo*. We mock him mercilessly: "Maybe they have some tofu and mashed yeast to go with it." Still, the quiet at the table suggests maybe we are all thinking about that salad.

DAY THREE: We travel an hour by car to Ristorante Perbellini, a *Michelin* two-star located off the *superstrada* in a kind of industrial park. Perbellini is our contemporary eating experience, featuring deconstructed food, each dish served, it seems, on a plate designed specifically for it.

Cin cin [expletive deleted]!

But today there is much grumbling. Over eight courses, there are remarkable flavors, beautiful presentations; but we are disheartened by the disconnect we sense between the countryside and the food. We are dazzled, but strangely unmoved, as if we were looking at a painting that, even if well executed, was chosen solely because it matched the color of the couch. It is a good lesson.

That afternoon, we have a little time before dinner, so I take a stroll with Ladner and Allen, seeking out not Niccolò Dell'Arca's justly famous life-size terra-cottas but cooking supply stores. Allen wants a new *mezzaluna*. Ladner needs a mortar and pestle. We stumble upon a charming *gelateria*. Inside, the owner has his sleeves rolled up and is teaching his son to work the handsome gelato machine. An exquisite young woman (his daughter?) delicately assembles a cone by shaping the gelato into a flower, strawberry flavored in the center and sweet-cream petals. I order one of the same. This is everything I love about Italy—the craftsman father, the apprentice son, the luminous girl behind the counter, all coalescing around the luxuriant flavor of authentic gelato.

Smiling, I emerge from the shop with my gelato flower and spoons to share.

"Did you see that machine?" Allen says.

"Cool, wasn't it?" I say. "Kind of Deco?"

"It's the French pot method. The gelato has to be scraped by hand as it freezes."

I offer Allen a taste. He scoops away one of the petals. His face clouds ominously.

"I think they use a base."

A base?

"They first make a vanilla and a chocolate base," he says. "Then add other flavors to it."

"That's bad?"

He shrugs. Clearly it's not good. Besides salami, Allen knows gelato.

I offer some to Ladner, who dispatches another petal.

"Definitely a base."

I look at my gelato. In another, more innocent time, I would have savored it. Now, older, wiser, I toss the base-tainted cone, three petals still intact, into the garbage.

DAY FOUR: We travel by commuter train to Porretta Terme, where we eat with the family who owned the restaurant where Mario apprenticed for three years. We sit at a long table that fills the back wall of Enoteca La Capannina. Having heard that Batali is visiting, the mayor stops by to say hello.

Cin cin [expletive deleted]!

It is here that we have the perfect rendition of the sacred trio of Emilia-Romagna pastas—*tortellini in brodo*, *tortelloni*, and *lasagne*. Three pastas to start a meal seems wrong for so many reasons, though I cannot, at the moment, think of what they are. The *lasagne bolognese* is ethereal: very little sauce, very little filling, not even served hot. And still, the individual components are so dramatically redolent and melting in texture that the dish is just miraculous. This *lasagne* is to what I think of as "lasagne" what a Michelangelo sculpture is to a lawn ornament.

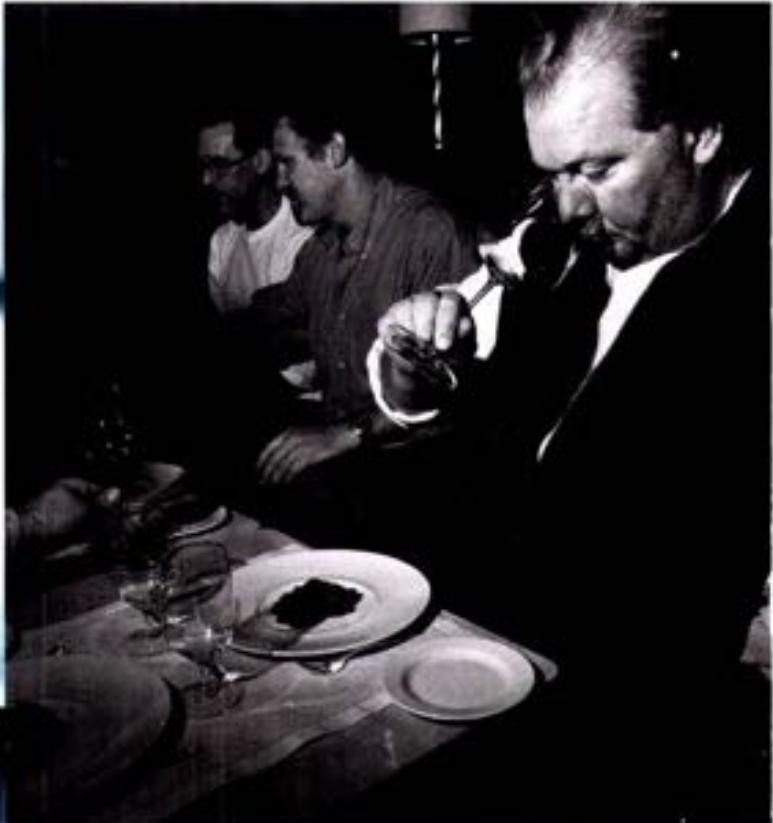
DAY FIVE: I didn't think it was possible, but Batali has saved the best for last. The Tamani brothers chose to locate Ambasciata in a small, unassuming house in Quistello because, well, it's the house they were born in. A helipad behind some shrubbery is the only indication that some of Italy's affluent are regulars here. That, and the nine-course tasting menu that costs 100 euros.

Francesco Tamani runs the front of house; Romano runs the kitchen. We will have a meal created for us, including four pasta courses—which are quickly modified to five, because, as Romano informs us, "four pastas is simply not enough."

Cin cin [expletive deleted]!

Prosecco is poured; then the restaurant's own salami is served, whimsically, two slices at a time on wooden skewers laid out on a silver tray. This mixing of high and low is duly noted by Ruiz. Allen waxes eloquent about the texture, flavor, fat content, and general perfection of the salami. Our Prosecco flutes are removed in preparation for the first course. Then I hear behind me the disconcerting sound of liquid spilling on the rug. But when I turn around, instead of one of the waiters being reprimanded, there is Francesco Tamani in his tailored suit, merrily flinging what's left of our Prosecco onto the carpet. He grabs another glass and repeats the gesture, this time angling between two tables to get more distance on his fling. (He does!) And in this moment, like Duchamp adding a mustache to the Mona Lisa, Francesco (Continued on page 174)

For RECIPES, see page 138.



Like synchronized swimmers, we all take a bite and, in unison, set our forks down, look at each other, and laugh. We have just tasted one of the best things we have ever eaten, and we are too full to finish.

Lasagne bolognese, left, is a little slice of heaven. Right: The author, center, takes a breath before digging in yet again.

LASAGNE BOLOGNESE

Adapted from Enoteca La Capannina and Mario Batali

SERVES 8 GENEROUSLY (MAIN COURSE)

ACTIVE TIME: 2 HR. START TO FINISH: 3 HR.

Refined and gorgeous, this elegant lasagne is simply the best we've ever had. The pasta is whisper-thin and flecked with spinach; the ragù is rich and understated; and a silky layer of besciamella (Italian for "white sauce") melds the two for an ethereal eating experience.

FOR RAGÙ

- 5 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 carrot, finely chopped
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 1 celery rib, finely chopped
- 1 garlic clove, thinly sliced
- 1/4 lb sliced pancetta, cut into quarters
- 1 lb ground veal
- 1 lb ground pork (not lean)
- 1/4 cup tomato paste (2 1/2 oz)
- 1 cup whole milk
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper

FOR PASTA DOUGH

- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 cup firmly packed spinach (1 oz; coarse stems removed)
- 4 extra-large eggs

1/2 teaspoon extra-virgin olive oil
About 4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

FOR BECCHIAMELLA

- 5 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour
- 3 cups whole milk
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

FOR ASSEMBLING LASAGNE

- 2 tablespoons salt
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 9 tablespoons finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (see Tips, page 184)

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: a pastry or bench scraper; a pasta machine; a 13- by 9-inch lasagne pan or roasting pan at least 2 inches deep

MAKE RAGÙ: Heat oil and butter in a wide 6- to 8-quart heavy pot over moderate heat until butter is melted, then cook carrot, onion, celery, and garlic, stirring occasionally, until tender but not browned, 10 to 15 minutes.

• While vegetables cook, pulse pancetta in a food processor until finely chopped.
• When vegetables are tender, increase heat to high and stir in veal, pork, and pancetta. Cook, stirring occasionally and breaking up any lumps, until meat is starting to brown, 10 to 15 minutes. Stir in tomato paste, milk, and wine and gently simmer, uncovered, over low heat, stirring occasionally, until almost all liquid has evaporated but ragù is still moist, 1 to 1 1/2 hours. Stir in salt and pepper and remove from heat.

MAKE PASTA DOUGH WHILE RAGÙ COOKS: Bring 3 quarts water to a boil in a 4- to 5-quart pot and add salt (1 tablespoon). Have ready a large bowl of ice and cold water next to the stove.

• Blanch spinach in boiling water 45 seconds, then drain in a sieve and immediately chill completely in ice bath. Drain spinach and squeeze dry in a kitchen towel, removing as much liquid as possible, then chop very finely.

• Stir together spinach, eggs, and oil (1/2 teaspoon) in a small bowl until combined well.

• Mound 3 1/2 cups flour in center of a large cutting board (preferably wooden). Make a well in center of flour and add egg mixture. Using a fork, beat egg mixture, incorporating flour a little at a time, starting with inside wall of well and keeping wall intact by supporting outside with other hand. When you have a thick paste that you can't beat any more, and about half of the flour is incorporated, start kneading dough with both hands, using palms (not fingers) and kneading in some of remaining flour (from board). Once you have a cohesive mass (you will have 1/2 to 1 cup flour unincorporated), remove dough from board and scrape board clean with scraper, discarding any leftover bits of dough and flour. Lightly dust board with clean flour and continue kneading until dough is elastic, about 8 minutes. (Dough will be firm.)

• Wrap dough in plastic wrap and allow to rest at room temperature 30 to 45 minutes. (Dough will soften as it rests.)

MAKE BESCIAMELLA WHILE PASTA STANDS: Melt butter in a 2- to 3-quart heavy saucepan over moderate heat. Whisk in flour until smooth, then cook, whisking frequently, until pale golden brown, 4 to 6 minutes.

• Meanwhile, heat milk in a separate 1- to 1 1/2-quart saucepan until just about to boil. Add milk 1 cup at a time to butter mixture, whisking constantly until very smooth. Bring sauce to a boil, whisking, then cook, whisking, 30 seconds. Remove from heat and whisk in salt and nutmeg. Cover with a buttered round of wax paper (buttered side down) and cool to room temperature, stirring occasionally.

ROLL OUT PASTA WHILE BESCIAMELLA COOLS: Cut pasta dough into 8 equal pieces. Cover 7 pieces with plastic wrap and pat out remaining piece of dough into a flat rectangle. Lightly dust with flour.

• Set rollers of pasta machine on widest setting. Feed rectangle, a short end first, through rollers. Fold rectangle in half crosswise and feed it, folded end first, through rollers 7 or 8 more times, folding it in half crosswise each time, feeding folded end first, and dusting with flour if necessary to prevent sticking.

• Turn dial to next (narrower) setting and feed dough through rollers without folding, a short end first. Continue rolling once at each (narrower) setting, until narrowest setting is reached. Lay pasta sheet on a lightly floured surface to dry until slightly leathery but still flexible, about 10 minutes. Meanwhile, roll out remaining pieces of dough in same manner.

• Trim ends and cut pasta sheets crosswise into 5-inch lengths, then cover with a barely dampened kitchen towel.

ASSEMBLE AND BAKE LASAGNE: Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 375°F.

• Bring a 6- to 8-quart pot of water (about three-fourths full) to a boil and add salt (2 tablespoons). Have ready a bowl of ice and cold water next to the stovetop and add oil to ice bath. Drop 6 pieces of pasta into boiling water and cook until just tender, about 1 minute. Transfer with a slotted spoon to ice bath to chill, then transfer to clean kitchen towels, laying pasta flat, and pat dry. Keep water at a boil.

• Spread 1 cup ragù over bottom of lasagne pan (ragù will barely cover bottom) and sprinkle with 1 1/2 tablespoons Parmigiano-Reggiano, then cover with cooked pasta (pieces can overlap slightly). Spread 1/2 cup besciamella over pasta (layer will be thin).

• Cook, chill, and dry remaining pasta, 6 pieces at a time, and layer with remaining ingredients in same sequence as above 4 more times (ragù, then cheese, pasta, and besciamella; final layer of besciamella will be 1 cup). Sprinkle top of lasagne with remaining 3 tablespoons cheese.

• Bake lasagne, uncovered, until top is pale golden in spots and saucers are bubbling, about 45 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

COOKS' NOTES: *Ragù* and *besciamella* can be made 2 days ahead and cooled completely, then chilled, covered. Warm *ragù* over low heat just until stirrable before using.

• Lasagne can be assembled 4 hours ahead and kept chilled, covered.

• Any leftover dry uncooked pasta can be lightly dusted with flour and frozen in a sealed plastic bag. Do not thaw before cooking.

GNOCCHI FRITTO WITH GORGONZOLA DOLCE

Adapted from Hostaria Giusti and Mario Batali

SERVES 8 (FIRST COURSE)

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN. START TO FINISH: 1 1/2 HR.

These melt-in-your-mouth pillows of fried dough are deliberately undersalted to provide a subtle base for the cured meats and cheeses of the Emilia-Romagna region.

2 tablespoons whole milk

1/2 cup plus 3 tablespoons water

1 teaspoon active dry yeast (from a 1/4-oz package)

1 1/4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

1/2 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1/4 teaspoon fine sea salt

1 lb lard

1/4 lb chilled Gorgonzola dolce, cut into thin slices

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: a deep-fat thermometer

• Bring milk and water to a simmer in a small heavy saucepan. Remove from heat and cool to a temperature that is comfortable to the inside of your wrist (105 to 115°F), then stir in yeast and let stand until mixture develops a creamy foam, about 5 minutes. (If mixture doesn't foam, discard and start over with new yeast.)

• Put flour in a large bowl, then stir in yeast mixture along with oil and sea salt to make a soft dough. (This dough will not be kneaded.)

• Cover bowl with a dampened kitchen towel (not terry cloth) and let rise in a warm, dry place for 1 hour.

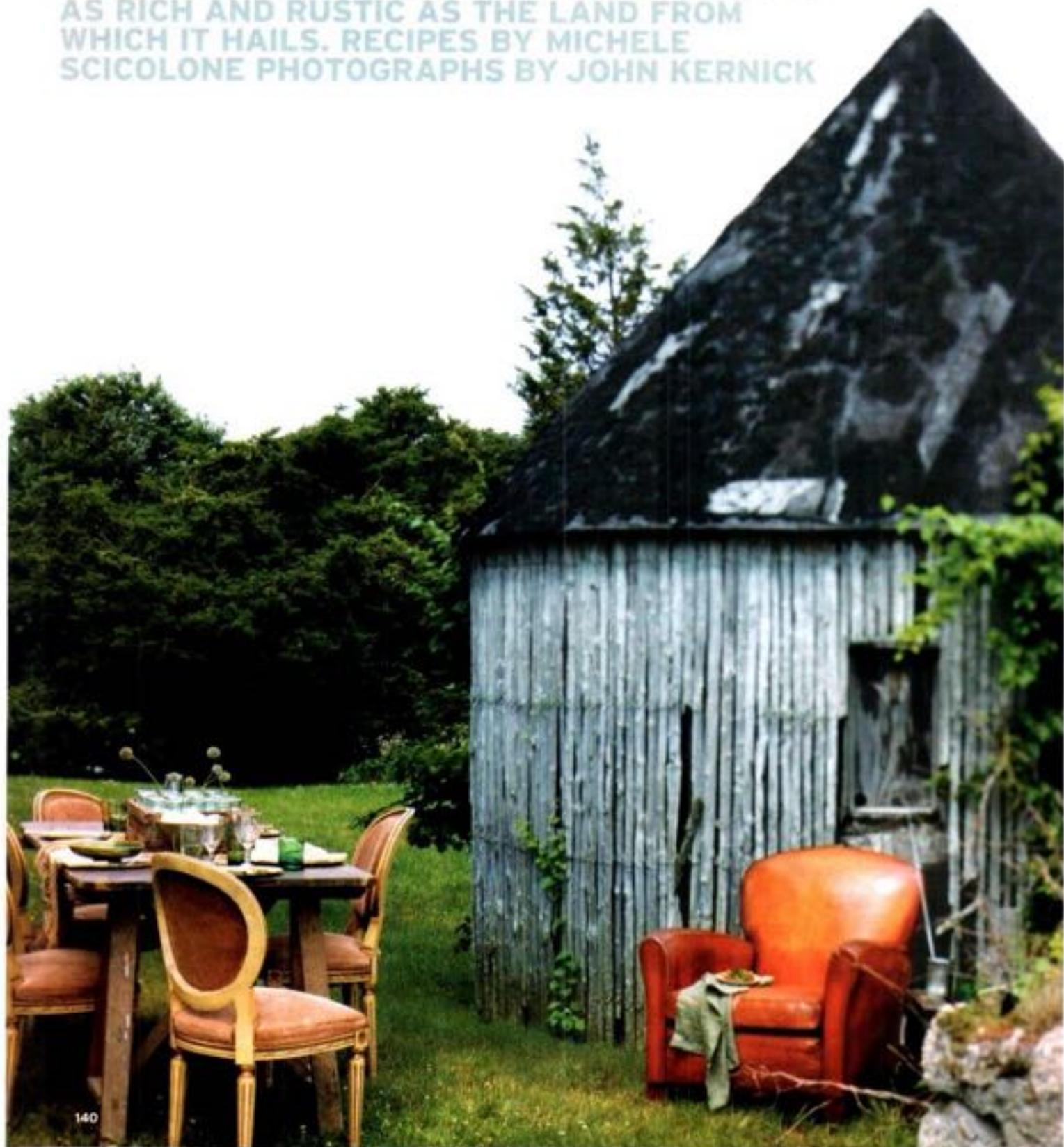
• Preheat oven to 250°F.

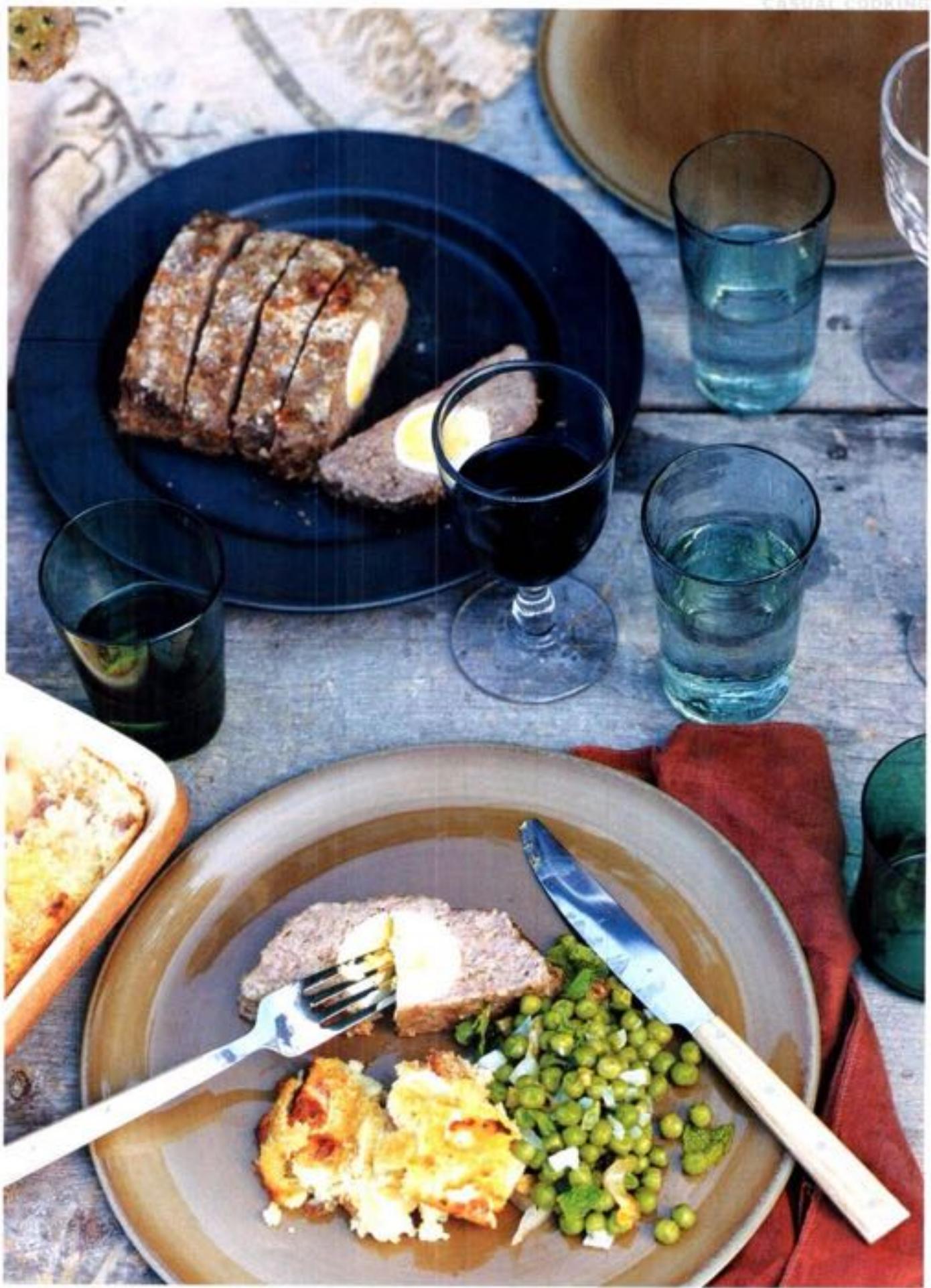
• Heat lard in a 4- to 5-quart pot over moderately high heat until it registers 375°F on thermometer.

• Meanwhile, pat out dough into a 1/4-inch-thick rectangle on a lightly floured surface and cut into 8 equal pieces. Fry 2 or 3 pieces (without crowding), turning over once, until golden brown, about 2 minutes total. Transfer with a slotted spoon to a shallow baking pan lined with paper towels. Lay a slice of Gorgonzola over top of each piece of fried dough and transfer baking pan to oven to keep warm. Return lard to 375°F and fry and top more gnocchi in same manner.

IT STARTED IN NAPLES

COOKBOOK WRITER MICHELE SCICOLONE'S FASCINATION WITH ITALIAN CUISINE BEGAN EARLY: SHE GREW UP EATING THE HEARTY, STRAIGHTFORWARD FOOD BASED ON RECIPES PASSED DOWN BY HER NEAPOLITAN GRANDPARENTS. HERE, SHE SHARES SOME OF HER FAMILY FAVORITES IN A MENU THAT'S AS RICH AND RUSTIC AS THE LAND FROM WHICH IT HAILS. RECIPES BY MICHELE SCICOLONE PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOHN KERNICK





MEATLESS DAY: GREENS, PASTA,
SWEET PEAS, AND MINT

VEGAN POTATO PIE





**SCICOLONE IS A FIRM BELIEVER
IN THE OLD ITALIAN ADAGE A TAVOLA
SI STA SEMPRE IN ALLEGRIA (AT
THE TABLE, ONE IS ALWAYS HAPPY).**

BROCCOLI RABE CROSTINI

MAKES 16 HORS D'OEUVRES

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN. START TO FINISH: 30 MIN

A popular side dish, emerald-green broccoli rabe tastes even better as an hors d'oeuvre served on crusty bread. After blanching and a quick sauté, the beautifully wilted stems—still dripping with olive oil and garlic—are piled on little toasts.

FOR TOASTS

16 (1/2-inch-thick) slices from a 10-inch-long Italian loaf

2 tablespoons olive oil

1 garlic clove, halved crosswise

FOR BROCCOLI RABE TOPPING

1 lb broccoli rabe, tough ends discarded and remainder chopped

2 large garlic cloves, thinly sliced

1/2 teaspoon dried hot red-pepper flakes

1/4 cup olive oil

3 tablespoons water

1/2 teaspoon salt

MAKE TOASTS: Preheat broiler. Put bread slices in a large shallow baking pan. Brush both sides of slices with oil, then lightly season with salt and pepper. Broil 4 inches from heat, turning over halfway through broiling, until golden, about 4 minutes total. Rub both sides of toasts with cut sides of garlic (discard garlic).

MAKE BROCCOLI RABE TOPPING: Cook broccoli rabe in a 6-quart wide heavy pot of boiling salted water (see Tips, page 184), uncovered, until tender, 5 to 6 minutes. Drain well in a colander, gently pressing out excess water. Wipe pot clean. Cook garlic and red-pepper flakes in oil in pot over moderate heat, stirring occasionally, until garlic is golden, about 2 minutes. Add broccoli rabe, water, and salt and cook, covered, stirring occasionally, 2 minutes.

ASSEMBLE CROSTINI: Spoon a heaping tablespoon of warm broccoli rabe topping onto each toast.

COOKS' NOTES: Toasts can be made 1 day ahead and cooled completely, then kept in an airtight container at room temperature.

• Broccoli rabe topping can be made 1 day ahead and cooled completely, uncovered, then chilled, covered. Reheat before assembling crostini.

RIGATONI WITH TOMATO SAUCE AND RICOTTA

SERVES 8 (FIRST COURSE)

ACTIVE TIME: 1 HR. START TO FINISH: 1 HR (INCLUDES MAKING SAUCE)

Pasta, lush tomatoes, and a pool of ricotta lend this dish all the flavor of a lasagne—without the heaviness. We served the ricotta on the side for a more attractive presentation, but you could also stir it into the cooked pasta.

1 lb rigatoni

2 1/2 cups marinara sauce (recipe follows) or other tomato sauce, heated through

1 cup ricotta (1/2 lb; preferably fresh; see Kitchen Notebook, page 173)

ACCOMPANIMENT: finely grated Pecorino Romano

• Cook pasta in a 6-quart pot of boiling salted water (see Tips, page 184), uncovered, until al dente, then drain in a colander. • Toss pasta with warm marinara sauce in a large bowl. Serve with ricotta and grated Pecorino Romano.

MARINARA SAUCE

MAKES ABOUT 2 1/2 CUPS

ACTIVE TIME: 40 MIN. START TO FINISH: 40 MIN

Just the right amount of garlic and red-pepper flakes makes Scicolone's marinara sauce deliciously robust. It tastes best when made with fresh tomatoes, which need to be peeled, but if you're short on time, canned tomatoes work just fine (see cooks' note, below).

3 lb fresh plum tomatoes or 1 (28-oz) can whole tomatoes in juice
2 large garlic cloves, crushed with side of a large heavy knife
Pinch of dried hot red-pepper flakes
1/4 cup olive oil
1 1/4 teaspoons salt
4 fresh basil leaves, torn into bits

• If using fresh tomatoes, cut a shallow X in bottom of each tomato with a paring knife and blanch tomatoes in 3 batches in a 5- to 6-quart pot of boiling water, 1 minute per batch. Transfer blanched tomatoes with a slotted spoon to a cutting board and, when cool enough to handle, peel, beginning from scored end, with knife, then halve lengthwise and seed. Chop tomatoes (fresh or canned), reserving juice (from cutting board or can).

• Cook garlic and red-pepper flakes in oil in a 4-quart heavy pot over moderate heat, stirring, until garlic is golden, about 5 minutes. Discard garlic, then add tomatoes with their juice and salt and simmer, uncovered, until sauce is

thickened, about 20 minutes. • Remove from heat and stir in basil and salt to taste.

COOKS' NOTES: Sauce can be made ahead and cooled completely, uncovered, then chilled, covered, up to 5 days or frozen in an airtight container 2 months.

• If using canned tomatoes, whose sodium content varies, use only 1/4 teaspoon salt, then season your finished sauce with additional salt if desired.

MEATLOAF, OLD NAPLES STYLE

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 30 MIN. START TO FINISH: 1 1/4 HR

Ideal for a Sunday supper, this is the kind of substantial centerpiece Italian grandmothers have been making for years.

1/2 cup torn (1/2-inch) pieces crustless day-old Italian bread

1/2 cup milk

1 lb ground beef chuck (not lean)

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

1 teaspoon salt

1/4 teaspoon black pepper

1/2 lb baked ham, finely chopped (1 cup)

2 oz sliced provolone, finely chopped (1/2 cup)

1/4 cup fine dry bread crumbs (not seasoned)

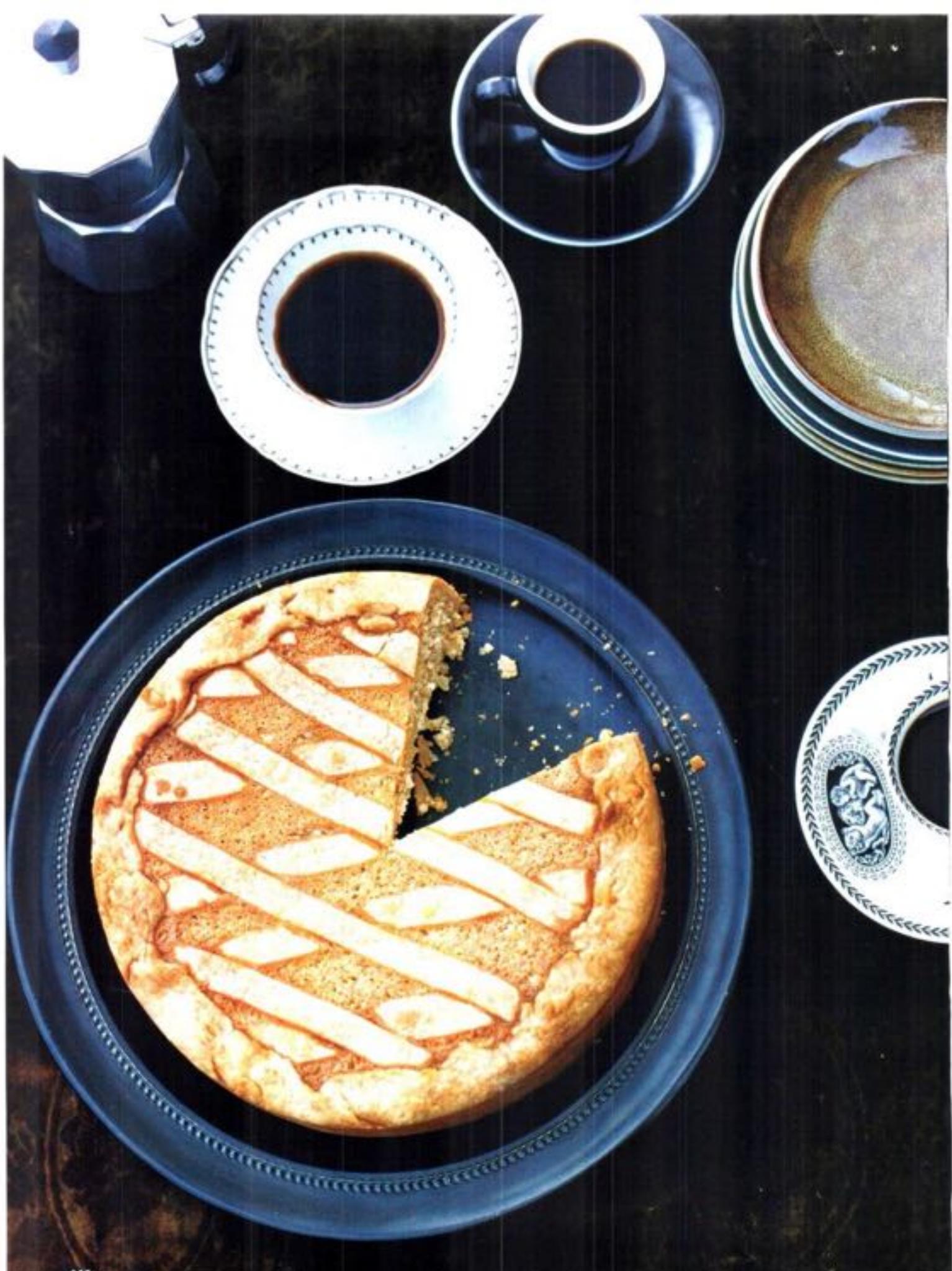
3 hard-boiled large eggs

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: an instant-read thermometer

• Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 350°F. Oil a 9-inch square baking pan. • Stir together bread and milk in a large bowl and let stand 10 minutes.

• Add beef, lightly beaten eggs, salt, and pepper to bread mixture and mix with your hands until combined, then mix in ham and cheese. • Scatter 2 tablespoons bread crumbs in an 8- by 4-inch rectangle on a 16-inch-long sheet of wax paper. Spread half of meat mixture into an 8- by 4-inch rectangle over crumbs, then arrange hard-boiled eggs lengthwise, about 1/2 inch apart, in a row down middle of meat mixture. Cover eggs with remaining meat mixture, pressing it to form a single 8- by 4-inch loaf. Transfer loaf with a spatula from wax paper to baking pan and sprinkle top and sides with remaining 2 tablespoons bread crumbs. • Bake until thermometer inserted near center of loaf (but avoiding eggs) registers 155°F, 50 to 60 minutes. Let stand 10 minutes before serving. (Internal temperature will rise to 165°F while loaf stands.)





NEAPOLITAN POTATO PIE

SERVES 8

ACTIVE TIME: 45 MIN. START TO FINISH: 1 1/4 HR

From the comfort of mashed potatoes to the bold flavors of salami and cheese—this savory pie has so much going on, it could be a meal in itself. If you're making this entire menu, bake the potato pie before the meatloaf, then reheat the pie in the oven for 10 minutes while the meatloaf stands.

2 1/2 lb yellow-fleshed potatoes such as Yukon Gold (3 or 4 large), scrubbed
1 cup milk
1/2 stick (1/4 cup) unsalted butter, softened, plus additional for buttering pan
1/4 cup fine dry bread crumbs (not seasoned)
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper
1/4 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
1 large egg, lightly beaten
1/2 lb mozzarella (preferably fresh), chopped
1/2 lb salami or prosciutto, chopped
2 1/2 oz finely grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (1 cup plus 2 tablespoons; see Tips, page 184)

- Cover potatoes with salted cold water (see Tips, page 184) by 2 inches in a 5-quart pot. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, until potatoes are tender, 18 to 20 minutes.
- Shortly before potatoes are done, bring milk just to a simmer in a small saucepan over moderate heat, then remove from heat.
- Put oven rack in middle position and preheat oven to 400°F. Butter a 2- to 2 1/2-quart shallow baking dish and sprinkle with bread crumbs.
- Drain potatoes well in a colander. When cool enough to handle, peel potatoes and return to pot along with hot milk, salt, pepper, nutmeg, and 3 tablespoons butter. Mash with a potato masher until combined well and almost smooth. Stir in egg, mozzarella, salami, and 1 cup Parmigiano-Reggiano.
- Spread potato mixture evenly in baking dish. Sprinkle with remaining 2 tablespoons Parmigiano-Reggiano and dot with remaining tablespoon butter. Bake until top is browned, 35 to 45 minutes. Let potato pie stand 5 minutes before serving.

COOKS' NOTE: Potato pie can be assembled 1 day ahead and chilled, covered. Bring to room temperature before baking.

EASTER WHEAT-BERRY CAKE

SERVES 8 TO 10 (DESSERT)

ACTIVE TIME: 1 1/4 HR. START TO FINISH: 13 1/2 HR (INCLUDES SOAKING AND CHILLING)

Referred to in Italy as *pastiera napoletana*, this lattice-crusted dessert is like a cheesecake, with chewy wheat berries suspended inside. A delicate whiff of orange-flower water lends it a subtle hint of spring.

FOR FILLING

1/2 cup hulled soft wheat berries (1/4 lb)
1 stick (1/2 cup) unsalted butter, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1 teaspoon finely grated fresh orange zest (see Tips, page 184)
1 lb ricotta (preferably fresh; 2 cups; see Kitchen Notebook, page 173)
4 large eggs at room temperature, lightly beaten
3/4 cup granulated sugar
2 tablespoons orange-flower water
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 cup finely chopped candied citron (3 oz)
1/2 cup finely chopped candied orange peel (3 oz)

FOR PASTRY DOUGH

3 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 1/2 sticks (1/4 cup) unsalted butter, softened
1 cup confectioners sugar
1 whole large egg
2 large egg yolks
2 teaspoons orange-flower water

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT: a 9- to 9 1/2-inch (24-cm) springform pan
GARNISH: confectioners sugar

SOAK WHEAT BERRIES FOR FILLING: Cover wheat berries with cold water in a bowl, then soak, covered and chilled, at least 8 hours. Drain in a sieve and rinse. **MAKE DOUGH WHILE WHEAT BERRIES SOAK:** Whisk together flour, cinnamon, and salt in a bowl. Beat together butter and confectioners sugar in a large bowl with an electric mixer at medium speed until light and fluffy, about 3 minutes.

Beat in whole egg, yolks, and orange-flower water until smooth. Reduce speed to low, then add flour mixture and mix until incorporated. Gather dough into a ball (it will be soft) and quarter. Form one quarter of dough into a 3-inch disk, then form remaining three quarters of dough into a 6-inch disk. Chill disks, wrapped in plastic wrap, until firm, at least 1 hour.

FINISH MAKING FILLING: Cover soaked wheat berries with cold water by 2 inches in a 2-quart saucepan and simmer, covered, until wheat berries are tender, about 30 minutes. Drain in sieve, then transfer to a bowl and stir in butter and zest. Cool completely, about 15 minutes. Stir together ricotta, eggs, sugar, orange-flower water, cinnamon, candied citron, and candied orange peel in a large bowl, then stir in wheat-berry mixture.

ASSEMBLE AND BAKE CAKE: Put oven rack in lower third of oven and preheat oven to 350°F.

Roll out larger disk of dough into a 14-inch round on a well-floured surface with a floured rolling pin. Fit dough into ungreased springform pan, pressing dough all the way up side to rim of pan (dough is very tender and will crack; patch any cracks). Chill until cold, about 20 minutes.

Roll out remaining dough into a 10-inch round on well-floured surface with floured rolling pin and transfer to a baking sheet. Cut dough into 1/2-inch-wide strips with a fluted pastry wheel or a sharp knife.

Spoon filling into chilled piecrust (filling will not reach top).

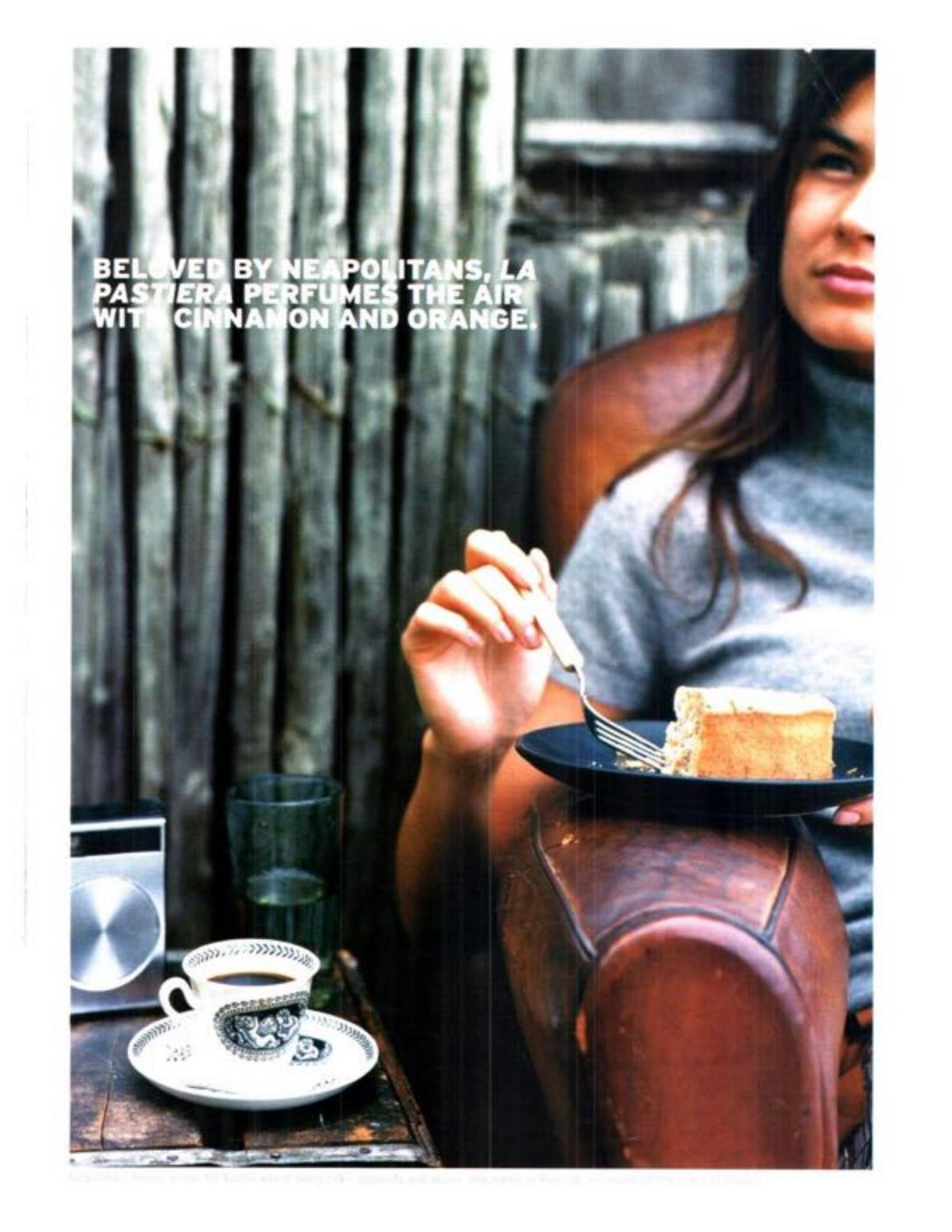
Arrange 5 dough strips parallel to each other on filling (1 inch apart), pressing ends of strips into crust. (Patch together any cracks in strips; if dough becomes too soft to handle, chill until firmer.) Arrange another 5 strips diagonally over them to form a lattice. Fold edge of crust over ends of lattice strips, pressing to seal.

Bake until pastry is golden and filling is puffed and set, about 1 to 1 1/4 hours. Transfer to a rack and cool 10 minutes. Run a thin knife around edge of cake and remove side of pan. Cool cake completely on rack, about 2 hours.

COOKS' NOTES: Dough can be chilled up to 1 day. Bring to room temperature before rolling out.

* Cake can be baked 1 day ahead and cooled completely, uncovered, then chilled, covered. Bring to room temperature before serving if desired.

For the **SWEET PEAS WITH LETTUCE AND MINT** recipe, see page 175.



BELOVED BY NEAPOLITANS, LA
PASTIERA PERFUMES THE AIR
WITH CINNAMON AND ORANGE.

SEA OF LOVE

NAPLES HAS VIEWS TO DIE FOR

Soon after the city wakes, Neapolitans begin the *passeggiata* along the Via Partenope, the promenade that runs beside the silvery Bay of Naples. The daily spectacle is a lively affair for which guests at the Grand Hotel Vesuvio have grandstand seats. Opera legend Enrico Caruso used to live at this old-world classic, which faces the sea across from the medieval fortress of Castel dell'Ovo (at the end of the causeway, below), and his antique Victrola still graces the Caruso Suite. The singer, who cared as much about food as he did about music, once remarked: "You can call me a mediocre tenor, but don't ever say I'm a bad cook." His creation *bucatini alla Caruso*—made with San Marzano tomatoes and yellow peppers and topped with rounds of fried zucchini and a touch of *peperoncino*—is still a favorite at the hotel's rooftop restaurant. (011-39-081-764-0044; vesuvio.it; from \$507)

