

The Joy of Pasta

Natasha Lardera (November 27, 2013)



Food authority Francine Segan comes out with a new book "Pasta Modern, New & Inspired Recipes from Italy", that sets the scene in an Italy that is vibrant, ever-changing, and moving forward and where the hottest, newest, and most unusual pasta dishes, 100 recipes in total, are provided by food bloggers, home cooks, artisan pasta makers, and vanguard chefs



She knows more about Italian food than the most notable Italian authorities in New York City: Eugenio Magnani, director of Enit, and Lucia Pasqualini, Deputy Consul, both agree... when they want to find out something about a specific regional dish or they need a recipe to impress, [Francine Segan](#) [2] is the authority to go to.

She is a noted public speaker and food historian, the author of seven books, including [Opera Lover's Cookbook](#) [3], nominated for both James Beard and IACP awards, and she has just released a new one by the title [Pasta Modern. New & Inspired Recipes from Italy](#) [4].

Introducing the book, Francine states "Here in the States, we imagine an Italy populated by black-clad grandmas, patiently stirring enormous pots of tomato sauce for Sunday's family dinner. But today's Italy is a different scene: vibrant, ever-changing, and moving forward." indeed the book features the hottest, newest, and most unusual pasta dishes, 100 recipes in total, provided by "Italy's food bloggers, home cooks, artisan pasta makers, and vanguard chefs." The recipes range from simple and elegant Pappardelle with Escaroleto to cutting-edge dishes like Pasta sushi. The latter was invented by two Michelin star chef Davide Scabin, who substituted pasta shells for rice. He wanted to show how versatile Italian pasta is and how easily it crosses over into other cuisines. So conchiglione (large pasta shells) can be filled with raw tuna, sea urchin, caviar... whatever pleases your palate.

Francine is more than happy to share with i-Italy a bit of her knowledge and also a great recipe!

Please tell me what is so special about pasta and what brought you to put together Pasta Modern.

After the success of my book, DOLCI: Italy's Sweets, my editor at Stewart, Tabori & Chang wanted another book on Italian food. It was easy to suggest pasta as a topic, since it is my #1 favorite food! I wanted to share with Americans the many many Italian pasta recipes that are unknown here in the USA. I wanted to share both classic, traditional recipes and also the recipes that have been created in Italy in the past 10 years.

You mentioned the recipes are from bloggers, chefs, housemaids and even nonnas. How did you select what ended up in the book and do you have any cute/fun story to share with us behind a specific recipe.

For a recipe to make it into my book it has to pass several tests: #1, it must be so delicious that I want to make it again right way, #2, it must be a recipe that is not very known here in the USA and #3 it must be fairly common in the province or city in Italy where it originates. I did NOT want recipes that just one Italian chef "invented." I have many friends in Italy, in each region, so I would also test the recipe on Italians to be sure that what I was bringing back to the USA was authentic & true to the philosophy in Italian cuisine.

Fun story: So many! Italians are one of the most hospitable, gracious and lovely people in the world, especially when you ask about their hometown dishes!! They opened their homes, kitchens, and hearts to me. So generous. One example. I made an appointment with [Garofalo](#) [5], a fairly large pasta company in Gragnano (an area famous for centuries for its dried pasta). I asked if I could have a tour of their factory to learn how dried pasta is made. I also asked if they might tell me about a recipe that is very Neapolitan. When I arrived they had organized a wonderful surprise. In their office kitchen (very small) were 3 friends of employees of the company who were ready to show me how to make an interesting dish that dated to the 1800s.

I watched them make the recipe, Cupola di Bucatini (Bucatini Dome) then took the tour of the



factory, and afterwards we all sat down to lunch! We started chatting, hours passed, and then they invited me to dinner! In Rome! To see the newly opened Eataly. Luca deLuca and Flavia Garzia of Garofalo drove me to Rome & back to my hotel in Naples. A wonderful, wonderful, unforgettable day. For me it highlights the essence of Italy. If you express to an Italian a little interest in Italian culture & a desire to learn more you will be rewarded with appreciation and warmth. In truth, I have made a new friend with each recipe!

Is there anything about pasta that people do not know? Or some myth about pasta that is actually incorrect?

Marco Polo did NOT bring back pasta from China. He went there in the late 13th century. Pasta factories were already well documented in Italy in the 9th century & there is archeological evidence of its existence in Italy since Etruscan times.

Do you have a nice pasta dish to recommend for the upcoming holidays?

My absolute FAVORITE recipe is Pasta al Risparmio (Cheapskate Pasta), a dish from Naples that was eaten on Christmas Eve. It was for poor families who couldn't afford fish for Christmas Eve dinner, so to make it special they added dried fruit and nuts to the sauce. Please read the recipe below and make it at home! It's a real treat.

You have written several books, what is your favorite step in the production?

I adore doing the research, either in gathering the recipes by meeting nonnas, chefs, bloggers or looking up information in old manuscripts, journals, newspapers, and books in Italy.

What is going to be next?

More Italian food, more Italian wine, more Italian travel. There is so much in Italy yet to be discovered.

To find out where Francine Segan is going to be next check out:

[>>>](#) [6]

Cheapskate Pasta

Pasta al risparmio

From: PASTA MODERN: New & Inspired Recipes from Italy (Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 2013) by Francine Segan

Serves 4

I love this recipe because there's hardly any chopping or fussing. A handful of chopped nuts, some dried fruit for sweetness, capers and black olives for tang with a hint of garlic and tomatoes--- a feast in 5 minutes. I've suggested measurements, but you can really ignore them. The idea of this recipe is to empty your cupboards into the pot, so feel free to use any sort of nuts, dried fruit and pantry favorites in any quantities you like!

Poor families in Naples who couldn't afford fish for Christmas Eve dinner would instead make this dish, using up their pantry leftovers. In the area around Naples this dish has quite a few names, none of them very appetizing---Fruit & Nuts from the Trash, O Sicchie da Munnezza or Cheapskate Pasta,



la Pasta al Risparmio.

Even though the hard times are over, you can still get this dish in Naples during the winter. The name's been change though. It's now called the cheerier Spaghetti di Natale, Christmas Spaghetti.

1 pound fussili or other short pasta, preferably Garofalo brand

Salt

5 tablespoons olive oil

1 garlic clove, sliced

½ cup chopped assorted nuts, like hazelnuts, walnuts, pine nuts

2 tablespoons raisins or any dried fruit

2 tablespoons salted capers, rinsed

1 28-ounce can diced tomoatoes

10 pitted oil cured black olive, cut in half

1 teaspoon dried oregano

1/4 cup chopped fresh parsley, plus more

Cook the spaghettoni in salted boiling water until al dente.

Meanwhile, heat the oil and garlic in a pan until golden, then add the nuts, raisins, and capers and cook for a few minutes. Stir in the tomatoes and cook for 4 or 5 minutes, then add the olives, oregano and parsley and cook for a minute. Drain the pasta and toss in the sauce along with some of the cooking liquid to amalgamate the flavors. Serve topped with more parsley.

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