

From a Family of Chefs, a Feast of Robust Neapolitan Food

By CRAIG CLAIBORNE

It looked for all the world like a cooking marathon but it was in truth just another day in the life of the Migliucci family. The only difference was, on this day they were doing it for pleasure. They were cooking a dinner for 20, which included themselves, their family and friends.

The Migliuccis—Mario, the father; Clemente, the brother, and Joseph, the son and nephew—are the principals in the kitchen at Mario's Restaurant in the East Tremont section of the Bronx. We had heard that it has one of the best Neapolitan-style kitchens in the area and that they are famous for, among other things, their spiedini alla romana, a stacked version of mozzarella in carrozza, which is to say a deep-fried, batter-coated sandwich made with slices of mozzarella cheese between bread, served hot and crisp with an anchovy sauce. The kind of dish, we reflected, the thought of which can trigger salivation.

Octopus Salad

4 or 5 baby octopus, about five pounds
5 cloves garlic
2 cups finely chopped celery
15 pitted California black olives
½ cup olive oil
8 to 12 tablespoons lemon juice, according to taste
Salt to taste
Freshly ground pepper to taste
1 teaspoon red pepper flakes
½ cup finely chopped parsley
1 tablespoon fresh basil leaves, snipped with scissors, or use one teaspoon dried.

1. Have a fish dealer prepare the octopus for cooking.
2. Bring a large quantity of water to the boil and add the octopus, one or two at a time. When the water returns to the boil remove the octopus and cool briefly. Return the octopus to the boiling water, let the water return to the boil and remove. Let cool briefly. Repeat this one more time. Cook all the octopus in the same fashion and let cool.
3. Bring another large quantity of water to the boil and add salt to taste. Add all the octopus and simmer 20 to 40 minutes or until the octopus are tender. Cooking time will depend on the size and age of the octopus. When the octopus are tender, drain them and chill under cold running water.
4. Cut off and discard any non-fleshy parts of the octopus if there are any. If the "beak," a plasticlike small ball, is in an octopus, remove and discard it.
5. Cut the octopus into bite-size pieces. There should be about five cups.
6. Place the octopus pieces in a bowl and add the remaining ingredients. Toss to blend and let stand an hour or longer before serving.

Yield: 12 or more servings.

We visited the Migliuccis at Mario's, at 2342 Arthur Avenue, on two occasions and what we found was much to our liking. First-rate, unpretentious but adventurous Neapolitan cookery, a trifle more robust than they would have it in the North.

In our presence the chefs prepared an impressive array of dishes, accompanied by an assortment of cheeses, both fresh and aged, plus various salamis

and breads purchased on Arthur Avenue, that inimitable, bustling street of great Italian delicacies. The menu for the day would include a selection, extravagant in number, of such things as a lighter-than-air potato gnocchi; the spiedini with anchovy sauce; striped bass marechiarie with clams and mussels; fillet of beef scallopine with marsala and mushroom sauce; stuffed clams; octopus salad; assorted

pastas with three tomato sauces; and a ricotta cheesecake.

As Mario Migliucci kneaded the potato gnocchi ("You must be careful not to add too much flour," he cautioned, "or the dumplings will be gummy"), Clemente occupied himself with the striped bass fillets for the marechiarie dish, and Joe chopped and assembled the ingredients for the octopus salad.

The gnocchi finished, Mario Migliucci moved toward a platter of raw octopus and a kettle of boiling water.

"A Sicilian fisherman taught me how to cook octopus and keep it tender," he said. "After cleaning it, you drop it into boiling water. When the water comes back to the boil you take out the octopus and let it cool. You do that three times before the final cooking, which may take from 10 to 45 minutes, depending on the size and age of the octopus."

A Family Affair

Mr. Migliucci told us that his family had entered the restaurant field more than 60 years ago, by way of Cairo.

"My grandparents left Naples with my father in the early 1900's and

opened the first Italian restaurant ever to open in Egypt," he said. "It was a success but my father became restless and decided to come to America. When my grandfather died, my grandmother came too and the three of us opened Mario's on the same site where it stands today. It was much smaller, of course, and I was very little. I remember I had to stand on Coca-Cola boxes in the kitchen to make pizza.

Celebrity Visitors

"I suppose you could say we've become famous over the years. The restaurant is mentioned in 'The Godfather' and they wanted to shoot some of the film there, but we refused, thinking it might be bad publicity. A lot of well-known people have eaten with us—Governor Rockefeller, Anna Moffo, Elizabeth Taylor, Eddie Fisher, back in the days when they were married; the Yankees and the Giants, all of them, as far as I know."

Mr. Migliucci, who is 62 years old and more or less in overall charge of the restaurant, explained that his brother Clemente, 58, was the key man in the

kitchen. He believes that the restaurant life can run in the family blood and he is proud of the fact that Joe, 37, is a dedicated cook in the establishment.

"His mother and I tried everything we knew to discourage him from going into the business," Mr. Migliucci said. "When he was in college he would help out on holidays. Then he decided he wanted to work full time. We made him mop the floors, then wash the dishes full time, then the pots and pans. Nothing fazed him.

"Finally I put him behind the range and thought, 'This will kill him, he's going to hate it.' Not a bit. And now he's good at everything. Terrific bartender, good host, the works."

Mr. Migliucci's wife, Rose, arrived in the kitchen bearing an interesting dish in a plastic container. "These are hot peppers that grew on the windowsill of the kitchen," she said. The peppers got there by accident, she explained, when one of the waiters, a few months back, emptied some of the red hot pepper seeds into a flower pot and they took root.



The New York Times/Gene Magglo

Striped Bass Marechiarie

2 fillets of striped bass with skin left on, about four pounds
Flour for dredging
Oil for deep frying
12 cherrystone clams
12 well-cleaned, large mussels
2 cups crushed imported tomatoes
4 cloves garlic, finely slivered
1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley
Salt to taste
Finely ground pepper to taste
2 tablespoons snipped fresh basil leaves or one teaspoon dried
½ cup salad oil
¾ cup fresh or bottled clam juice.

1. Cut each fillet crosswise into eight pieces of approximately equal size. Coat the eight pieces of fish in flour.
2. Heat the oil and when it is hot but not smoking add the fish pieces. This may have to be done in two steps. Deep fry for six or seven minutes. The pieces should not be thoroughly cooked but half cooked. Drain on towels.
3. Arrange the pieces of fish in one layer in a baking dish. Arrange the clams and mussels around the fish. Spoon the crushed tomatoes over the fish and sprinkle with garlic and parsley, salt, pepper and basil. Sprinkle with oil. Cover and simmer on top of the stove about five minutes. Sprinkle with clam juice. Continue simmering about 20 minutes or longer or until fish flakes easily when tested with a fork.

Yield: Eight servings.

Clemente Migliucci is the key man in operating the kitchen of family's restaurant.

Gnocchi di Patate

3 large potatoes, preferably Idaho potatoes, about one and three quarter pounds
Salt to taste
2 egg yolks
1¾ to 2 cups flour
6 tablespoons melted butter, optional
Grated parmesan cheese optional
2 cups filetti de pomodoro sauce (see recipe)
Fresh ground black pepper.

1. Place the potatoes in a kettle and add cold water to cover. Add salt to taste and bring to the boil. Simmer until the potatoes are tender but not mushy. Drain and let cool.
2. Peel the potatoes. Put them through a ricer, or food mill. Or put them through a meat grinder using the medium blade. Add egg yolks and blend well.
3. Scoop the flour onto a flat surface. Start kneading the potatoes adding the flour gradually. Add only enough flour to make a firm, soft and delicate dough. If too much flour is

added they become tough when cooked. Knead thoroughly, then shape the dough, rolling with the palms to make a thick sausage shape about 11 or 12 inches long. Using a knife or pastry scraper cut the roll into 11 equal slices. Roll each slice into a long cigar shape. Cut each cigar into 18 or 19 pieces. These pieces will resemble miniature pillows. Flour the pieces and set aside until ready to cook.

4. Drop the pieces of dough, half of them at a time, into a large quantity of boiling salted water and let cook until they rise to the surface. Drain quickly and chill under cold running water. Drain well.
5. When ready to serve, drop the pieces once more into a large quantity of boiling salted water. When they float the second time, drain them and return them to pot. Add the melted butter and cheese, if desired. Add the sauce and sprinkle with pepper. Serve with additional sauce on the side.

Yield: Six or more servings.

Filetti di Pomodoro

(Tomato and Onion Sauce)

8 cups canned tomatoes, preferably imported from Italy
¼ pound lard
3 cups thinly sliced onion
½ pound ham, preferably prosciutto, cut into very thin strips, about 1½ cups
Salt to taste
Freshly ground pepper to taste
¼ cup freshly snipped basil leaves or

- one tablespoon dried crushed basil.
1. Using the hands, crush the tomatoes.
 2. Heat lard and add the onions. Cook, stirring often, until the onions are golden brown, about 20 minutes.
 3. Add the ham and cook five minutes. Add the tomatoes and cook about two hours, stirring often to prevent sticking. Add salt, pepper and basil.

Yield: About six cups of sauce.

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