

Recipes, and a lovely slice of a writer's life

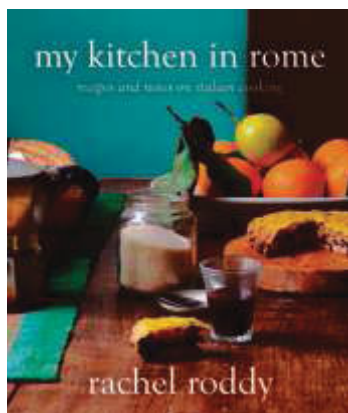
By Sheryl Julian
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

I have to get this off my chest before I say a word about "My Kitchen in Rome," by former Londoner and actress Rachel Roddy. I want her life. I also want access to what she can get in her markets. I want bowls of handmade pasta with luxurious ragu in exactly the right proportions. I want to be able to serve wine in stubby Duralex water glasses (which I often do) without having guests wonder where the real glasses are.

Roddy, who is a teacher, blogger (www.racheleats.wordpress.com), food columnist for The Guardian in London, mother to toddler Luca, and partner to Vincenzo, wrote the British edition of this book in 2015, originally published as the award-winning "Five Quarters: Recipes and Notes From a Kitchen in Rome." She explains the title in the introduction. "The quarter of Rome that I call home, Testaccio, is shaped like a quarter, or a large wedge of cheese." The words "quinto quarto" translate as fifth quarter, she writes, which is the offal in an animal, and part of the style of cooking created by the 19th-century neighborhood slaughterhouse workers, who were paid in organ meats like kidneys and liver. Roddy thinks of quinto quarto cuisine as "made up of things that are usually discarded," including stale bread, ricotta (left after making pecorino), pasta cooking water, and bean water.

Another fifth comes into play with the number of dishes in a typical meal. Romans start with antipasti, then comes primo (pasta, soup), secondo (meat or seafood), contorno (vegetable), and dolce (dessert).

She starts with dishes like fava beans with pecorino or deep-fried squash blossoms (she admits that afterward her flat smells like a fish-and-chips shop). In the pasta section, she offers lentils with small pasta, which she describes as something between a soup and a stew. It begins with a soffritto — onion, garlic, celery, parsley — to which you add pulverized tomatoes, a chile, cooked lentils



BOOK REVIEW

MY KITCHEN IN ROME: Recipes and Notes on Italian Cooking
By Rachel Roddy
Grand Central Publishing,
384 pp., \$28

and their liquid, then the pasta. The delicious dish simmers briefly but tightens dramatically right after cooking and needs a good deal more liquid.

Chicken hunter-style (alla cacciatora) is nothing like the cacciatora we know, in that it is not made with tomatoes, onions, or peppers. Here, chicken, or rabbit, cut into 12 pieces and browned, cooks with white wine, rosemary, chile, and garlic, then is brought to life with a splash of vinegar and olives. The tastes are bright and appealing in the most rustic way. You're supposed to simmer the dish for 45 to 75 minutes; that timing is way off for an American chicken, even a free-range one. The pieces of my organic bird cooked in 35 minutes (and I prefer it falling off the bone in a dish like this).

A tray of roasted potatoes with plenty of olive oil, rosemary, and garlic has a surprise ingredient. Lemon juice adds a faint pucker and makes them reminiscent of Greek potatoes. In this dish and some others, Roddy's recipe testers on this side of the pond have not taken size or texture into consideration. Golden potatoes in our markets, even cut into eighths as instructed, are far larger than what she is buying. It's a situation where bigger not only isn't better, but also throws off recipe times.

This charming book does not have endless photos of the author (in fact, hardly any), and offers only glimpses into what looks like a functional European kitchen. We see tiny oblong red radishes, freshly scrubbed, sitting on a towel with their scrubbing brush, street scenes, vendors, food in its pots.

Biscotti with almonds and pine nuts are made without additional fat, the way they were meant to be, so they come out exceptionally crisp. The dough forms easily, though you need an additional egg, slices nicely, and bakes the second time into cookies that will make you swoon. More shaping instructions would help a novice baker, and the yield is way off, to your advantage. You get almost twice what you're expecting.

The conversational writing makes you want to head to the kitchen. "Just the thought of making ragu makes me happy, not the least because if you're adding a glass of wine to the pan, it would be careless not to have one yourself," writes Roddy. That ragu, she explains, was part of her repertoire before she got to Rome, inspired by an old Elizabeth David recipe (brava! David's 1954 "Italian Food" is a classic). This version has only a spoonful of tomato paste. After you cook a soffritto, then brown beef and pork, reduce wine with the meat, and start simmering for an hour, you stir in whole milk, a little at a time. You get a very rich sauce with tender crumbles of meat that are sweet with just enough acidity.

This ragu will go into my own repertoire. So will the chicken alla cacciatora and other dishes. I can't have her life, but I can have her recipes. No small consolation.

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Pollo alla cacciatora (chicken hunter-style)

Serves 4

- 1 whole chicken (3½ to 4½ pounds), cut into 10 pieces
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 5 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 cloves garlic, chopped
- 1 jalapeno or other chile pepper, cored, seeded, and chopped
- 1 sprig fresh rosemary, leaves chopped
- 1 cup white wine, or more if needed
- 1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
- ½ cup pitted black olives

1. Sprinkle the chicken all over with salt and black pepper.
2. In a large flameproof casserole over medium heat, heat the oil. Add the chicken, skin side down, in a single layer. Cook without disturbing for 10 minutes. Turn and cook the other side 10 minutes more.
3. Turn the meat skin side up. Add the garlic, chile, rosemary, and wine. Cover the pan, turn the heat to low, and cook, turning occasionally, for 35 minutes, or until the meat pulls away from the leg and thigh bones. Add more wine during cooking if the pan seems dry.
4. Add the vinegar and olives, spoon the juices in the pan over the meat, and taste for seasoning. Add more salt and black pepper, if you like.

Adapted from "My Kitchen in Rome"



PHOTOS BY NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

By Niece Regis
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

BRISIGHELLA, Italy — In the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, the medieval village of Brisighella takes the concept of locally grown products to heart. After a taxi driver in nearby Ravenna touted an ice cream shop here, I scheduled time for a breakfast-cone detour en route to the airport in Bologna. I had no name for the shop, and only sketchy directions: "Walk up the hill near the park." The town is small, population about 3,700, with a castle dating back to the 14th century. How hard could it be to find an ice cream shop?

Wandering the quiet stone streets on a weekday morning, I was easily distracted — you might also say seduced — by the visual and aromatic delights presented by storefront shops with doors flung wide. The season was fall, and La Mela Verde vegetable and fruit market overflowed with varieties of tomatoes, plums, apples, and pears. There was abbondanza, a rosy-red acidic apple; angeleno, a sugary-sweet plum; and the round pera volpina, a small pear with the coloring of a Bosc. The shopkeeper handed me sorba, a crabapple-size fruit, and encouraged me to try. It had a tannic wine flavor, unlike any other fruit I have tasted, and she explained the shop sells what villagers call "forgotten fruits," or "ancient fruits," meaning things typical of the region that are rarely grown anymore. She then pointed me in the direction of a farmers' co-op selling local olive oil and wine.

Terra di Brisighella, a co-op of approximately 300 olive and 500 vine growers, operates a shop and tasting bar in a brightly lit contemporary space where carts for gypsum workers used to be stored during Renaissance times. The town is settled in at the tasting bar and sampled three varieties of oil. The colors were bright shades of green with flavors that ranged from grassy to spicy to one with an artichoke finish. (Artichokes are also grown in the area.) Wines were equally impressive — the region grows local albana, trebbiano, and

FOOD & TRAVEL

A medieval Italian village, a taste of the past



From top: The medieval Italian village of Brisighella; local pears at La Mela Verde; Arte Del Matteredello owner Beatrice Guaducci makes pasta, breads, and more; her pasta-making tools.

sangiovese grapes, as well as chardonnay, cabernet sauvignon, and merlot — and I lamented that my small suitcase was already jammed full.

The wine merchant sent me to Arte Del Matteredello, a bakery helmed by Beatrice Guaducci, a woman who makes traditional breads, pastas, and desserts featuring medieval recipes as well as those passed down from her mother. I walked two steps up to the unimposing doorway and stepped inside. The smells! Pungent, yeasty aromas mixed with sweet scents of fruit. The top shelf of a glass case — spanning the width of the tiny shop — offered baked savory and sweet selections; the lower was filled with trays of golden stuffed pasta in various sizes and shapes. Behind the counter, a wood bookcase was repurposed as shelving for loaves of bread. In the midst of it all, Guaducci stood, smiling, her hair tucked in her white baker's cap.

Through another customer who spoke English, I was able to chat with Guaducci. She opened the shop 25 years ago, after getting a degree in business, and began cooking the recipes learned from her mother.

"I was born in Brisighella. I love the town. I knew that people would appreciate the old flavors and quality, the typical ways of production and fresh pasta," she said.

I was given a tour of the day's offerings: tortellini stuffed with ricotta, spinach, and Parmesan; "dirty pasta" (whole wheat) stuffed with soft cheese, eggs, and nutmeg; spoja lorda, small square pasta cushions stuffed with cheese, to be served in meat broth; torta di pane, medieval bread with apricot marmalade, almonds, pine nuts, and raisins; torta di marroni, chestnut cake; migliaccio, lemony ricotta cake; castagnaccio, dense cake made with chestnut flour; and seasonal strudel with pera volpina, the fruit I had seen in La Mela Verde market.

After stuffing me with bites of pastry, Guaducci pulled me into the minuscule kitchen to show what she was making that morning — tortellini with potato filling. It was there I discovered the secret of the gold-colored pasta: eggs.

"I use 10 eggs to 1 kilo of flour to make the dough. With a pinch of salt. No oil, no water, no milk."

Guaducci offers a pasta-making class for two in her kitchen, including a meal after preparation (50 euro). A translator can be arranged for another fee.

After leaving the bakery, I raced to catch my flight. I never did locate the ice cream shop. What I found instead was a town that preserves and celebrates long-forgotten products and flavors of the region. I can't wait to return.

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