



ITALIAN ADVENTURE SERIES:

LOMBARDIA

February 16-22

\$30 for four courses

Bona Sera and welcome to IAS 2020. While I'm busy planning my next trip across the drink to Venezia & northern Italy in March, I've decided to do some features from other trips over the last 14 years. Some are riffs off of other IAS menus and some completely new dishes. As always, thank you to my muse, Ms. Emily (for starting my adventures) and you, dear guest for allowing me to revisit the memories that have inspired my cooking since opening Stella.

★

RAINBOW TROUT

house smoked & served chilled, green cabbage & caper relish, watercress, lemon, EVOO

This region of Italy features the mountainous Alps of Switzerland to its north, five large glacial lakes (Maggiore, Lugano, Como, Iseo, Idro, and Garda), the foothills leading into Milan, and the plains butting up to the Po river on its southern border. It is from the freshwater lakes mentioned above that inspiration for our first course comes. Much like our own Great Lakes, the tiny towns on the shores have always relied on their waters for sustenance. There are still fisherman today who make their living on going out every morning and catching a daily quota to feed their families and sell to the inns and ristorante that feed the star-studded rich folk who frequent the area. The light, flaky trout is brined for 2 days and warm-smoked. We feature this little ditty every summer at The Franklin. It's paired with a salty, vinegary, slaw and watercress which is often wild foraged in the hills surrounding the towns, much like that which Mike Werp sells us every spring from the wetlands on his farm in Buckley. Enjoy.

★

PIZZOCCHERI

buckwheat fettucine, potatoes, brussels sprouts, sage, Grana Padana cheese

The Romans conquered their way up to Milan by 200 AD building an extensive system of roads and tapping the agricultural bounty of the Po River Valley. Pliny the Elder and Virgil were both born in this region. Mediolanum (Milan) was even briefly the capital of the Western Roman Empire. By 400 AD, however, the empire was crumbling (that was pretty fast, huh?) and the Lombards, or "long beards" from Germany were invading and sacking the cities and towns. What followed were years of fighting with back & forth occupation until assimilation between the two groups eventually won through. In the far north, hints of Germanic food still exist. This traditional pasta from the foothills of the Alps features a hearty buckwheat noodle with staples that the poorer folk could harvest and forage to keep them through the cold winters. Potatoes store in the cellar. Brussels and sage both can grow in milder winter temperatures. It is finished with a grating of cow's milk cheese specific to the Po Valley similar to Parmigiano Reggiano.

★

RISO INSALATA

chilled red & brown Italian rice, slow cooked duck leg, young Pecorino, golden raisins, candied pumpkin seeds, radicchio

The Po River Valley is famous for its plentiful rice fields. I visited a rice producer that grew four different varieties- red, brown, long grain, and arborio. They featured 40-50 varieties of handmade risotto "kits" for the home cook including ones I could never imagine from butternut squash with baking spices to seafood with dehydrated mussels and shrimp... all Artisan inspired. It was truly mind-blowing. This dish is a riff off of a "salad" that I ate at the farm. The tiny cubes of medium-bodied sheep's milk cheese play so well with the chilled rice. I couldn't help viewing this dish as a celebration of the riso. The duck is my addition to put it over-the top, but it's not far off to imagine hunters sourcing the ducks from the

marshy banks of the Po and surrounding rivers.

★

COTOLETTA ALLA MILANESE

pounded, breaded, and pan-fried bone-in pork chop, saffron risotto, gremolata

This is the quintessential “dish” from Milan. The coteletta, or “little rib” is typically veal and covers an entire platter...not particularly conducive to a tasting menu. I’ve substituted Heritage pork pounded thin and coated with a crumbled foccacia breading. The risotto is again a celebration of the rice grown in the surrounding area. The addition of saffron goes back to 1535, when the Spanish king Charles V made his son the Archduke of Milan. What followed was 200 years of Spanish rule. Much of the saffron was acquired by Spain from its Kingdom of Naples and Sicily that ruled over the peoples of southern Italy from the 1300s to the late 1700s. As so often has occurred in Italy’s history, the rich and powerful from outside countries attained many of their special foods off the backs of the peasants. The poor were left to develop their own cuisine often referred to as “cucina povera”.

★

SBRISOLONA, \$5 ADDITIONAL

crumbly almond “cookie”, vanilla gelato, vanilla steeped sundried figs, caramel

This dish originates around Mantua on the Eastern side of Lombardia. It was a popular dessert among the poor often being referred to as the “tart of three cups” the recipe being a cup of cornmeal, a cup of wheat flour, and a cup of sugar brought together with a hunk of lard- pretty much straight up pie dough.

Over the years butter replaced lard and toasted almonds were added to make it a little more special.

I’ve chosen to add some gelato and sauces to jazz it up as well.

ON THE NEXT EXCITING EPISODE...LIGURIA (MARCH 15-21)

-the original “Crazy Bread”

-Fried Rings of Death

-mortar and pestle highjinks

-“a Genovese sailor walks into a bar...”-another weird Italian dialect dessert