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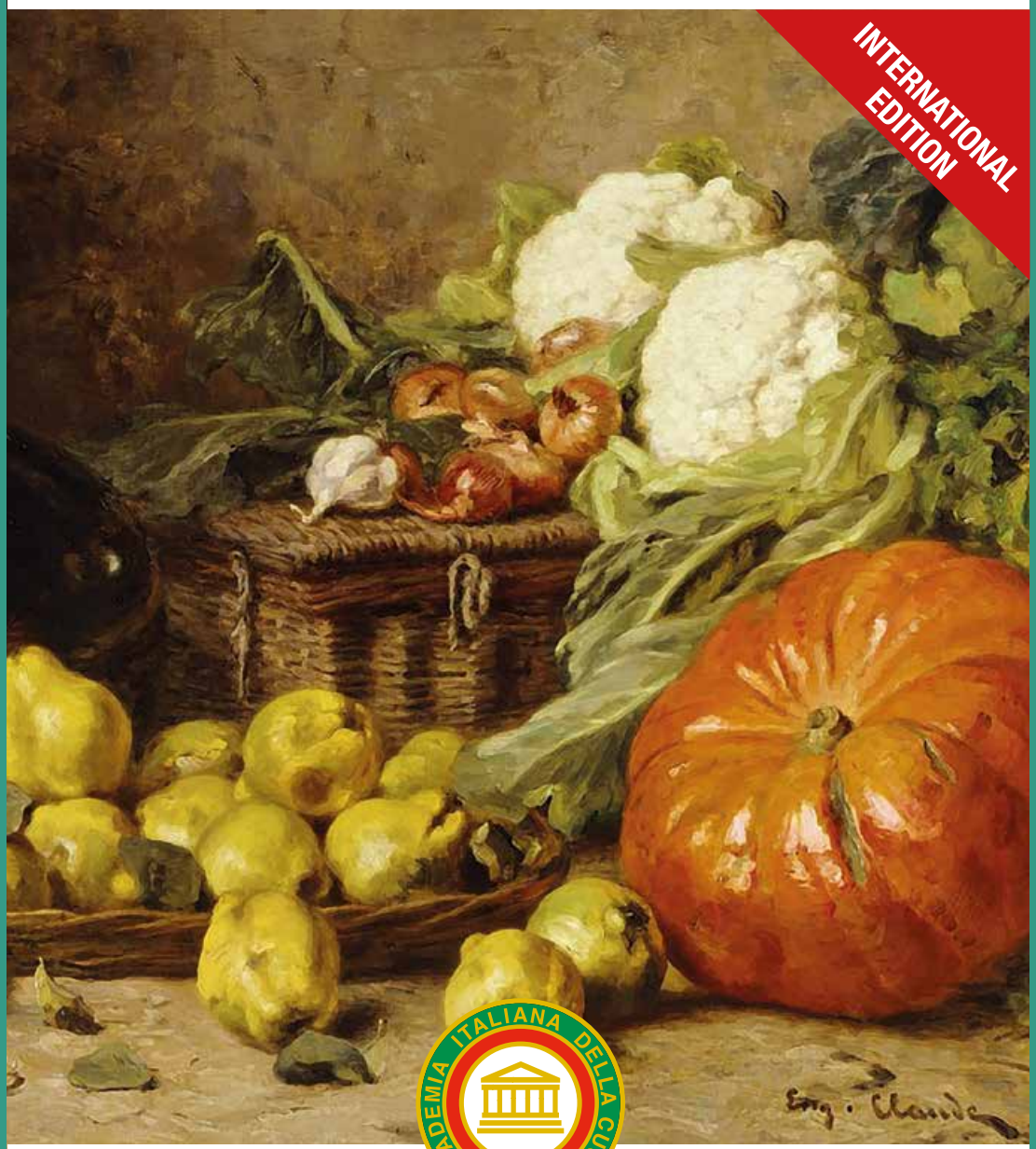
ACCADEMIA ITALIANA DELLA CUCINA

INTERNATIONAL EDITION



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On the cover: graphic elaboration of *Still Life with a Wine Flagon, a Basket, Pears, Onions, Cauliflowers, Cabbages, Garlic and a Pumpkin* by Eugène Claude (1841-1923); private collection

Focus of the President

Traditions • History

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Twilight of the Guides

They're losing their appeal, reviewing the same restaurants with few novelties or score changes.

by Paolo Petroni
President of the Accademia

Last month we announced the new edition of our Good Table Guide, joining our tried and tested Restaurant Guide: both can be consulted for free online and are frequently updated. Traditionally, until a few years ago, this was the season when the most famous restaurant guides were issued, including the *Espresso*, *Gambero Rosso* and *Osterie d'Italia* Guides. The most anticipated, the red Michelin Guide, came out last, followed by glowing accoladese, articles in all newspapers and a general hubbub of excitement. Gourmets, and especially professionals in the field, awaited this moment excitedly, with morbid curiosity about who was rising or falling, eager to discover newcomers and see how Italian cuisine was doing in the restaurant world.

Time passed and printing entered a crisis

However, as time passed, printing entered a crisis; **the ascendant internet platforms** were constantly updated and reviewed a prodigious number of restaurants. Are they reliable? Not very; **they must be read cautiously**, but they are free and always available. Then **Covid struck**. Things ground to a halt. Restaurants closed, and thus could not be reviewed. No more guides for a couple of years or so. **Peeping out again, we beheld a changed world**. Printed guides were struggling for sales, having lost their appeal. After all, they always reviewed the same restaurants, with few newcomers or score variations. **Publishing costs became unsustainable**. Paying reviewers was problematic, and eating out was expensive: reviewers cannot stop at one dish, but must sample various offerings, easily racking up 70/80-euro bills. Even without compensating reviewers' time and effort, costs soared. Then there were the publishing and distribution expenses: a haemorrhage which only advertising and paid sponsorships could staunch, if merely in part.

After all this, the product came out already dated!

After all this, the product came out already dated, **with many reviews pertaining to months beforehand**. Online sales were attempted as a remedy: online guides are cheaper and easier to consult, but have the sa me content. The Michelin guide is a partial exception, with its legendary 'inspectors', whose number is unknown but is probably in the order of ten or so, in charge of reviewing hundreds of restaurants (395 have Michelin stars). This year the guide should come out in November: **a crucial moment for many chefs, because the Michelin guide is more important for them than for customers**. A restaurant can substantially raise its prices based on stars received, and its value will suddenly increase. The reasons behind this remain mysterious; **true gourmets assess restaurants based on their food**, not their star count; yet some chefs inhabit a world apart. For now, this is how things are; but the decline of restaurant guides ultimately affects them all.

Torrone: a contested sweetmeat

by Elisabetta Cocito
Turin Academician

It resists, then sweetly, tenderly rewards us.

A venerable tradition attributes a threefold **symbolic significance** to the lustrous, creamy-hued nougat known as *torrone*: **sweetness** (honey), **vital force** (dried fruit) and **rebirth** (egg white). As in other areas of life, what may at first appear hard may reveal surprising tenderness and sweetness once we have overcome its initial resistance, learning to savour the subtle harmonies among its constituent parts. This might partially explain, alongside such prosaic reasons as easy availability and not too many ingredients, the enduring popularity of *torrone* in many regions, of which several claim to be its birthplace. A first-century epigram of **Martial** declares: "If your slave is culpable, do not punch him and break his teeth; rather, give him the celebrated sweet from Rhodes that I have sent you". This apparently refers to *copta rhodiaca*, a Greek sweet similar to nut brittle or firm *torrone*. Such a sweet was also indubitably widespread in Italy; **Marcus Terentius Varro** (116–27 BC) refers to it as *cuppedo*, which calls to mind *cupeto* or *copeta*, a type of *torrone* found in some parts of southern Italy. According to the historian, the Romans encountered this delight, made of oily seeds, egg white and honey, during the Samnite wars. Other scholars, however, identify the term *copeto* as a generic word for 'delicacy'.

Apicius later mentioned *nucatum*, a sweet made with walnuts, honey and egg white. The chapter "La breve descrizione di Napoli" ("A brief description of Naples") of *Lo scalco alla moderna* (*The Modern Steward*) by **Antonio Latini** (17th century) praises the "excellent *torrone*"

of the Principato Ultra (present-day Irpinia) and the "exquisite *torrone*" of Aversa. Another important citation is from the three-volume tractate *Banchetti, composizione di vivande et apparecchio generale* (*Banquets, Compositions of Courses and General Table Design*) by **Cristoforo Messisbugo**, steward at the Este ducal court, published posthumously in 1549. The author describes *torrone*, a protagonist of Renaissance banquets, as befitting the tables of "princes and great princes".

One of the best-supported hypotheses traces torrone to the Arab world

Returning to the question of origins, one of the best-supported hypotheses traces *torrone* to the Arab world. Indeed, it is mentioned by the 11th-century Arab physicians **Ibn Butlan** and **Ibn Jazla** in Baghdad and **Abenguefith** (Ibn al-Wāfid) in Toledo. This might explain the diffusion of *torrone* in Italy, particularly in Sicily. The most recognised hypothesis, however, involves the Holy Roman Emperor **Frederick II**, thought to have been accompanied by Sicilian cooks from his court at Palermo during his northern military campaigns, particularly in Cremona where he established his headquarters. **A more romantic origin story suggests that *torrone* was created in Cremona** in October 1441 for the wedding of **Bianca Maria Visconti** and **Francesco Sforza**. The cooks prepared a celebratory sweet of almonds, honey and egg white shaped like the city's Torrazzo bell tower. Since then, *torrone* has been a symbol of Cremona, which holds a well-attended annual **Cremona Torrone Festival**.

As hinted at the beginning, a sweet made of toasted nuts (hazelnuts, almonds, pistachio, sesame) bound in a paste of honey, egg white and aromatic flavourings is part of a large family spanning the Slavic nations, the Middle East and India, where it is generally known as *halva*. Closer to Italy, in France there is *touron* or *nougat*, which contained walnuts before almonds became established in Provence in the 15th/16th centuries. In Spain, *turron* has been attested since the 15th century.

Piedmont also produces prestigious torrone

Piedmont also produces prestigious *torrone*, which notably **uses PGI Piedmont hazelnuts** of the *tonda gentile* ('gentle round') cultivar from the Langhe area. This particularity is attributed to the pastry chef **Giuseppe Sebaste** from Grinzane Cavour, who in 1885 replaced costly almonds with the hazelnuts that grew abundantly in the surrounding hills. Today, growers great and small continue this tradition and even export this product abroad **in brittle, soft and chocolate-covered versions**. The Academy's Alessandria Delegation recently awarded the Dino Villani Prize to the *torrone* from the Canelin bakery in Visone (Alessandria), made by a skilled artisan who has created this little masterpiece since 1948. Its secret lies in its excellent raw materials (*tonda gentile* hazelnuts from Cortemilia, local wildflower honey, white cane sugar and egg white).

Nowadays, we can programme advanced machinery for perfect cooking, mixing, slicing, slivering, kneading, ultrasound-assisted mincing and separating, and chocolate tempering and enrobing. Once, there were only such precious, non-standardisable tools as dexterity, the senses of smell and sight, and the expert selection of ingredients, which over time allowed our artisans to create a cuisine coveted by the entire world.

Elisabetta Cocito

Homage to the 'Queen of Apples'

by Alessandro Abbondanti
Firenze Pitti Academician

The crunchy, juicy annurca apple, both tart and sweet, is very aromatic and fragrant.

The *annurca* apple, or *melannurca*, is typical of the Campania region where it is held to have existed for at least two millennia and perhaps even before the Romans, among the Osci and Samnites. The famous **fresco in the House of the Deer at Herculaneum** depicts a fruit basket which bears witness to the indubitable presence of that apple varieity in the Roman world, particularly its region of Campania Felix, which included the area of Pozzuoli, then called *Puteoli*, defined as *agro puteolano* in **Pliny the Elder's** 1st-century tractate *Naturalis Historia*. That same Pliny called this fruit *mala orcula* (apple of Orcus, an underworld god) because it grew in the land around **Lake Avernus**, considered the entrance to the underworld. In the agricultural treatise *Pomarium* (1583) by **Giovanni Battista Della Porta** (1535-1615), these apples are described as

"*orbiculate*, or *orcule* in popular parlance: those apples whose red peel appears bloodstained, which grow in the area of Pozzuoli". In later centuries, the names *anorcola* and *annorcala* appeared, until in **1976 the name *annurca* was officialised**, based on the *Manuale di Arboricoltura* (*Manual of Arboriculture*) by **G. A. Pasquale**.

2018 seems to have brought the largest annurca harvest

The Consortium for Protecting the PGI *Melannurca* of Campania (where PGI is 'Protected Geographical Indication') was formed in Caserta in 2005. It was recognised at the European level in 2006 and definitively by Italy's Agriculture Ministry in 2007.
2018 seems to have brought the largest *annurca* harvest, followed by an approximate 30% drop in 2019. Gathering reliable data is not easy, but generally around 50-60,000 tonnes are grown annually, accounting for about 5% of Italy's apple production. Almost all municipalities in Campania grow *melannurca*, **representing 80% of the region's apple harvest**, on approximately 4,000 hectares of land. *Annurca* may, however, be considered more of a niche product if we count only the 288 hectares cultivated by the 86 companies that follow PGI protocol, producing around 2000-2500 tonnes annually.

Manual labour is vital to the entire melannurca production cycle

To avoid bruising their skin, which promotes decomposition, **the apples are picked while unripe** around mid-September. The ensuing ripening phase, called ***arrossamento*** ('reddening'), requires exposure to sunlight for about a fortnight. Manual labour is vital to the entire *melannurca* production cycle. Unripe apples are arranged in ***melai*** ('apple yards') also known as *porche* or *prosoni*. These are small, adjoining portions of land about 1.5 metres wide, separated by water-drainage grooves, covered by **'beds' of sundry vegetable matter** (hemp, straw, maize leaves, pine needles, fir shavings etc). These sun-exposure areas are sometimes protected by cloths or straw mats elevated on poles and wire, to filter out excessively harsh sunlight (*ombreggiatura*: 'shading'). The apples are disposed on these 'beds' of plant matter, yellow-green side up, to promote acquisition of the typical red hue. These traditional procedures, which must be performed by hand until the apples are fully ripe, are crucial for giving the *melannurca* of Campania its distinctive qualities and organoleptic properties.

Regulation features of melannurca fruits

The regulations governing *melannurca* classify it into two types: **Classic or Campanian *annurca*** and its descendant, **Southern Red *annurca***. The same regulations decree the shape of the fruit:

rounded and slightly flattened, ideally symmetrical, with a minimum diameter of 60 mm. It must have medium-thick skin, which upon harvesting is yellow-green with red streaks over 50-80% of its surface; following *arrossamento* the skin must be 90-100% red.
The pulp must be white, crunchy, compact, juicy, tart and sweet, and very aromatic and fragrant. The *melannurca* of Campania is rich in polyphenols (procyanidins), vitamins (A, B, C, PP), minerals (potassium, magnesium, phosphorus, iron, calcium) and fibre (pectin) and low in sodium. **It has a low glycaemic index** (10-15% sugars). This fruit seems to distil **every possible health-giving organoleptic property**, and this may be why it has been called 'Queen of Apples'.

Culinary uses

Annurca apples yield many products from simple fruit juice to compotes to (sometimes alcoholic) infusions, and can be used in both sweet and savoury recipes. In Campania *melannurca* **is cooked with *maialino nero casertano*** ('Caserta black hog', a heritage breed) in various preparations, both as a stuffing and a side dish in puréed form.
The following recipe, a homage to this fruit, is a **dessert which uses *melannurca* in every possible form**, with flavour combinations that some could find rather daring.
It includes chestnut mousse, *melannurca* jelly, whipped salted caramel, caramelised *melannurca*, sliced raw *melannurca*, and white truffle slivers.

Alessandro Abbondanti

DESSERT WITH MELANNURCA VARIATIONS

Ingredients: ***For the chestnut mousse: 240 grammes of chestnut purée, 100 g of cold cream, 100 g of hot cream, 3 g of isinglass. For the annurca jelly: 100 g of annurca apple juice, 1 g of agar. For the whipped salted caramel: 280 g of cream, 170 g of sugar, 85 g of butter, 2 g of salt. For the caramelised annurca apple: 2 annurca apples, 30 g of butter, 200 g of granulated sugar.***

Preparation: ***First prepare the whipped salted caramel, which requires more time. Bring the cream to a boil. Separately, caramelise the sugar, dry, and when it is golden, add the cold butter. Once the butter absorbs, gradually add the cream and then the salt. Leave to cool over 12 hours and then whip with a planetary mixer.***
Prepare the caramelised apples, which must also rest for 12 hours. Caramelise the sugar in a pan, add the apples cut into peeled segments, add a few curls of butter and cook for 2 minutes on a low flame. Once they cool, vacuum-pack them and let them rest for a minimum of 12 hours.
For the chestnut mousse, whisk the cold cream into the chestnut purée in a bowl. Slowly add the hot cream, after dissolving the isinglass into it. Pour into moulds and cool.
Prepare the annurca jelly by boiling the apple juice and the agar; mix with a hand-held mixer to obtain a fluid gel.
Place the chestnut mousse on a plate. Along one side of it, position dollops of melannurca gel and whipped caramel; top them with caramelised apple segments, a few small slices of raw melannurca and some pieces of steamed chestnut. Complete the plating with slivers of white truffle.

Ris giald

by Morello Pecchioli
Honorary Academician for Verona

The many avatars of an iconic Milanese recipe.

Ornella Vanoni likes the classic recipe: beef marrow, butter, saffron, beef broth and onion, generously topped with grated *grana* cheese. *Ris giald* - the 'yellow rice' also known as 'Milanese risotto' - in this classic form could hardly fail to please Ornella, born in Milan and a resident of Brera in the city's historic heart. The preferences of this august Italian songstress are divulged by **Delia Scala** and **Sylvia Sodi** in *Il cibo dei grandi* (*Food of the Greats*).

Ugo Tognazzi, an inspired cook and kaleidoscopic actor ("I don't know which of the two is my hobby", he confessed in his memoir *L'Abbuffone*, translated into English as *The Injester*), added a handful of dried mushrooms and "two hand-spans" of *luganega* sausage. He called the result ***risotto longobardo*** ('Longobard risotto': Milan is in Lombardy, named after the Longobards) "to differentiate it from the traditional *risotto alla milanese*: my little additions make it suitable for all of Lombardy and even Lucania", he snickeringly explained. Amusingly, Tognazzi was convinced of having created a *giald* variant. He didn't know that a hundred years before, in his *La gastronomia moderna* (*Modern Gastronomy*), **Giuseppe Sorbiatti**, scholar-cook to **Napoleon III** and General **Cialdini** and head chef at

that sanctuary of Milanese culinary excellence, the Grand Hotel et de Milan, had suggested adding "a little spoonful of gravy from a roast" and truffles and mushrooms as desired once the rice was off the burner. Nothing new under the sun: we are sure of innovating, and instead we relive the past.

The history of Milanese risotto officially begins in the early 19th century

The history of Milanese risotto begins officially – *documenta habemus* – in the early 19th century. **Discussions of its preparation date from that period**. **Felice Luraschi**, another cultured cook, was among the first who committed the recipe to writing, though it must have had several unwritten centuries under its belt. In his *Il Nuovo cuoco milanese economico* (*The New Frugal Milanese Cook*, 1829) it consists of **rice, saffron**, beef marrow, nutmeg, broth and grated cheese. A flotilla of cooks followed him until the advent, in the late 19th century, of **Pellegrino Artusi**, who unified Italian regional cuisine just as Garibaldi united the country. In his seminal *La Scienza in cucina e l'Arte di mangiare bene* (*Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*), the gastrographer from Forlimpopoli suggests **three recipes for *risotto alla milanese***.

The second ("a more complicated but more flavoursome risotto") keeps the marrow and the broth, removes the nutmeg, but adds a fair amount of butter and white wine, which the third recipe replaces with Marsala. Artusi recommends a final *mantecatura* (mixing until creamy) with abundant butter and parmesan.

A charming legend

We have hitherto anchored Milanese risotto in written texts; however, like all great historical dishes, it has a charming legend surrounding it, as follows. An apprentice was nicknamed Saffron by the (historical) Flemish glass painter **Valerius van Diependale** (also known as 'Valerio Profondavalle' or 'Valerius of Flanders'), commissioned to work on the stained glass windows of Milan Cathedral. Saffron so loved the spice's colour that Valerius told him: "If you could, you'd mix it into the butter for risotto". And so he did. He added saffron to the rice for his master's daughter's wedding banquet, obtaining an auspicious golden-hued rice whose colour and flavour enchanted the guests. It was 1574.

An amusing tale, but let us keep to the oldest extant written sources from the early 19th century providing a recipe with ingredients more or less identical to ours, though the rice was softer and soupier and was eaten with a spoon: lengthy cooking increased the volume of the rice grains in the *risottiera*, a low copper casserole with a handle and spout, for pouring the yellow rice into dishes.

Breaking out of the cookbook cage, it leapt into literature

Milanese risotto broke out of the cookbook cage and leapt into literature when two good friends undertook a **poetry battle**: **Augusto Guido Bianchi**, a crime journalist for the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper, and the poet **Giovanni Pascoli**. The newsman, equally at home with courts and criminals as among pans and hobs, prodded the poet with a 'perfect recipe' for Milanese risotto in verse: "…a hundred grammes of butter, a soupçon/

of onion; when it gains a ruddy hue/ pour in raw rice to toast it; whereupon/ the garlic and the steaming broth ensue:/ add broth a little at a time, and then/ keep the rice moist by adding broth anew,/ that it might boil continuously; and when/ the grains are nearly cooked, then introduce/ a little saffron, and add broth again,/ but sparingly, in order to produce/ a princely texture and a golden gleam./ And now, abundant parmesan let loose/ into the pot will form the sumptuous cream/ of which the Milanese townspeople dream."

How could Pascoli refuse the gastro-poetic challenge? From his home in Castelvecchio he sent a flawlessly prosodic recipe **whose protagonist was still saffron, but alongside other delicious ingredients**. "Your recipe, good friend, is meritorious,/ though its commanding tone induces me/ to answer in a manner less stentorious./ I shall proceed, therefore, descriptively,/ reporting that for lunch today, Mariù/ mixed butter with minced onions; obviously/ being Milanese, she added saffron too,/ and chicken liver, and mushrooms as well;/ then for some time she left them all to stew./ I was invigorated by the smell/ though wearied by my Latin and my Greek./ She squeezed in some tomatoes as the bell/ informed us that the sun had reached its peak;/ she poured the raw rice in, as you suggest,/ and suddenly I am no longer weak./ Thus, as I take my leave, I must attest: / the red rice of Romagna is the best."

Gadda's 'Homeland Rice'

A long sequence of decisions and revisions, battles and skirmishes, leads us to **Carlo Emilio Gadda** in 1959. As a good Milanese and even better gourmet, he could not avoid grappling with Milanese rice. He provided his personal recipe for it in 1959 in *Il gatto selvatico* (*Wildcat*), the magazine of the Italian energy company ENI. The article's title: "Risotto patrio" ("Homeland Rice"). **Gadda was punctilious and pernickety about everything**: he suggested which rice to use, namely

Vialone, singing its nutritional and culinary praises. He recommended a round tin-plated copper pot. Ingredients: *slices of tender onion; a quarter-ladleful of beef broth; Lodi butter as needed, according to the number of diners. "When this modicum of oniony butter begins to simmer, add the rice gradually, until a total of two-three handfuls per person is reached. In this phase of the ritual, the grains must be toasted by the sizzling metal until golden, each maintaining a separate 'personality', without sticking together or growing pasty. Meanwhile, dissolve powdered saffron in a bowl: this vivacious, incomparable gastric stimulant comes from dried and ground crocus pistils. For eight people, two coffee spoonfuls. The saffron infusion should acquire a mandarin-orange hue, giving the rice, when cooked to perfection after 20-22 minutes, an orange-yellow colour".*

A masterpiece of culinary jewellery

In 1981, Milanese risotto became a masterpiece of culinary jewellery when **Gualtiero Marchesi** laid gold leaf over those flaming red pistils. "The new cook", he declared, "besides knowing how to prepare food, also arranges it on a dish so as to satisfy a balance of textures, volumes and colours".

Finally, there's **the variant known as *riso al salto*** ('sautéed rice'). In 2014, the Academician **Carlo Valli** wrote: "A method of **using leftover Milanese risotto** is to sauté it in a pan, creating '*riso al salto*': a crunchy and very pleasant first course. When preparing risotto, the clever Milanese make it in abundance to enjoy it later in this unassuming manner".

Morello Pecchioli