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Tradition in Evolution

I am an Italian chef. I grew up under the kitchen table, escaping my older brothers. I clung to my grandmother Ancella's knees while she rolled out the pasta dough and I stole raw tortellini from under her nose. I was born and raised in Modena, Emilia-Romagna, and nurtured on her bread basket. For the Modenese, November is like Christmas, with festivals celebrating the slaughtering of the holy pig. Prosciutto, culatello, pancetta, mortadella, salami and *ciccioli frolli* are our cache. Handmade egg pasta is a family affair, and tortellini are as individual as our genealogy. My bones are made of Parmigiano Reggiano and balsamic vinegar rushes through my veins. This is my story and my kitchen.

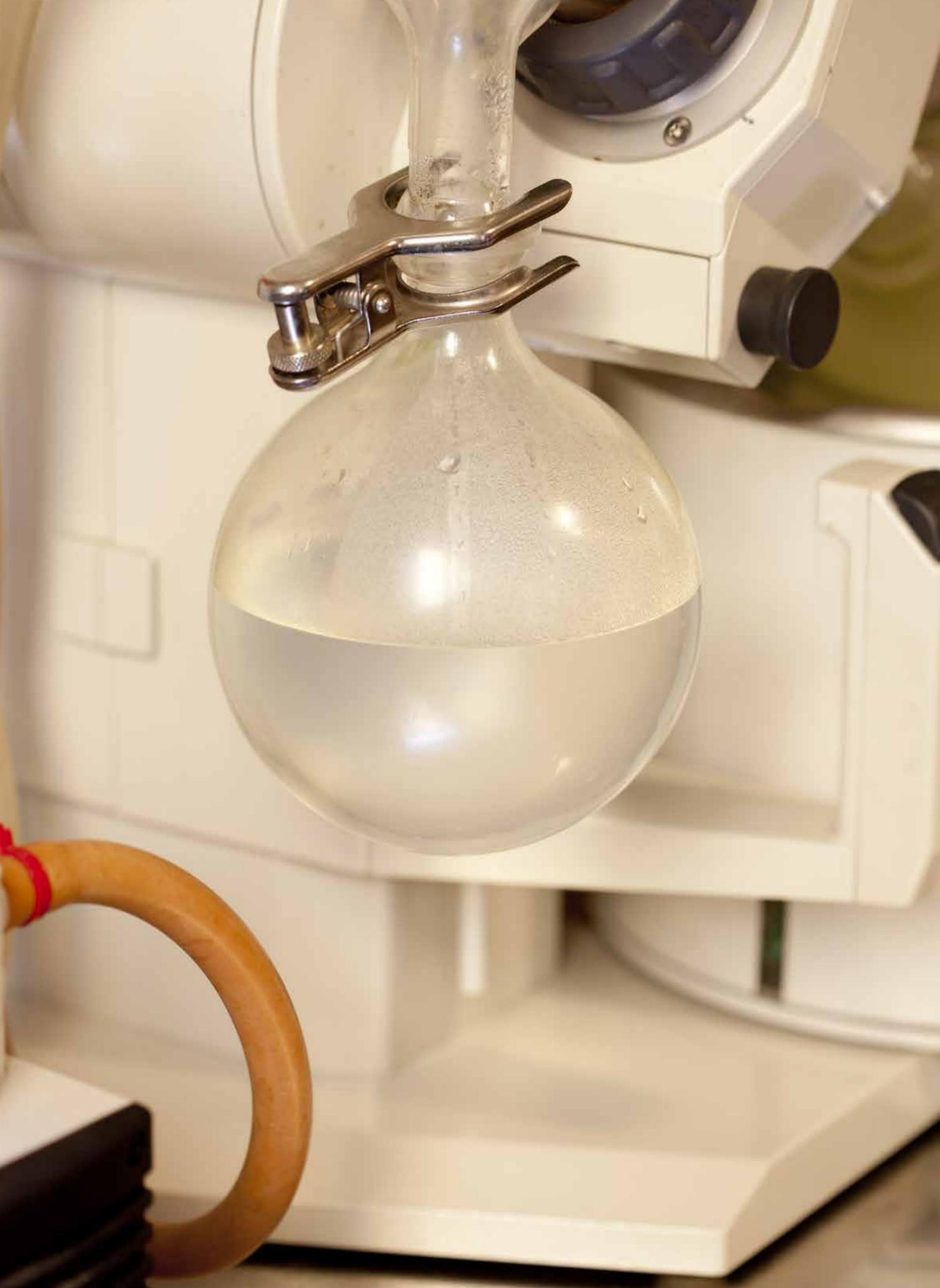
I was raised in a boisterous house with older brothers, a younger sister, aunts, uncles and my grandmother. Every meal was a festivity. No one dared to eat before my father was seated; in silence we waited until he lifted his fork. Eating was what we did best. Italy was at the peak of its economic boom. Modena had recovered from German occupation during the war with mechanics and ingenuity. Ferrari, Maserati and Lamborghini cars inspired the world; small industries – ceramic tiles, textiles and knitwear – generated prosperity; Modena exported her know-how and gastronomy. Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, cured hams, aged balsamic vinegar and Lambrusco travelled to distant continents. Fast cars and slow food were our interconnected identities.

The kitchen has always been my refuge. Hiding under the table as a child, I saw the world from upside down, but when I entered the kitchen at the age of 23 I took everything very seriously, and discovered that cooking is a science and a skill. It is something you can learn. A recipe is the sum of a series of successful experiments or mistakes, however humble or triumphant they may be. It has a life of its own. It can be repeated and interpreted. It can be taught, forgotten and remembered again. I began to ask myself, 'How has this recipe survived for so many centuries?' And I learned that a recipe is a living thing.

Tradition in evolution is nothing less than seeing ingredients and recipes at a distance and through a magnifying glass, from both near and far. Take a step back, then come in closer. Make enquires about texture, flavour and form. Throw out the recipe. Start from scratch. But most importantly, never stop questioning. Over time, our recipes have dislocated ingredients from their original context and questioned the wisdom of some of our traditional cooking methods. We have worked through centuries of Italian culinary history, finally to discover that recipes are containers for ideas.

Modena sits smug in the lower Po Valley, between the Secchia and the Panaro rivers, with the Apennine mountain range to the east and the Adriatic sea to the west. When Benedictine monks drained the marshlands around the Po River a thousand years ago, the once-flooded plains became the Val Padana, or Po Valley, a fertile area that could support cattle, pigs, fruit trees and grain. The combination of humidity and crosswinds proved ideal for *stagionatura*, the ageing process of the Parmigiano Reggiano, salt-cured meats and balsamic vinegar that became unique to the climate and geography of this region. In this chapter we pay tribute to Emilia-Romagna, her ingredients and culinary traditions, seen upside down from under the table, through the eyes of a mischievous child. Some recipes focus on these ingredients, such as Five Ages of Parmigiano Reggiano, and some, like Tagliatelle al Ragù, work through time-worn traditions, honouring, revising and remembering them. Some, like Osso Buco or Cappuccino, attempt to reinvent the wheel by breaking the rules. Our recipe for Bollito Misto replaces an old cooking technique with a new one to safeguard the integrity of the ingredients. All the recipes address our culinary heritage with varying degrees of contradiction, and always with the best of intentions. After all, we hope that they too will be passed down from generation to generation.

Cooking is the only way I know to bring the best of the past into the future. If traditions are put under glass, they stagnate. It is important to look for that critical distance, to keep moving forward even when you are looking back. It is hard to stay one step ahead of nostalgia. The Italian kitchen offers many opportunities to repeat our grandmothers' recipes, but far too few to unleash them. Tradition in evolution is not only a cornerstone of Osteria Franceseana, but also the underlying premise of everything we do. But we did not find it; it found us. As we cooked and shared ideas, the concept grew around us like the roots of a tree. I used to think the words tradition and evolution contradicted one another. Now I see that they are two sides of the same identity.



Cappuccino

In the beginning there was a cappuccino. The word *cappuccino* has become synonymous with Italy. The name comes from the Capuchin monks, who were sent by the Pope to fight off the invading Turks in xxx. The monks were victorious, and legend has it that the Turks left behind bags of roasted coffee beans during their retreat. The monks brewed the beans and drank the coffee with honey and milk. In every corner of Italy at almost any time of day, you can find someone standing at a bar drinking a cappuccino. Sweet or savoury pastries called *cornetto*, after their horn-like shape, complete the picture of a typical Italian breakfast.

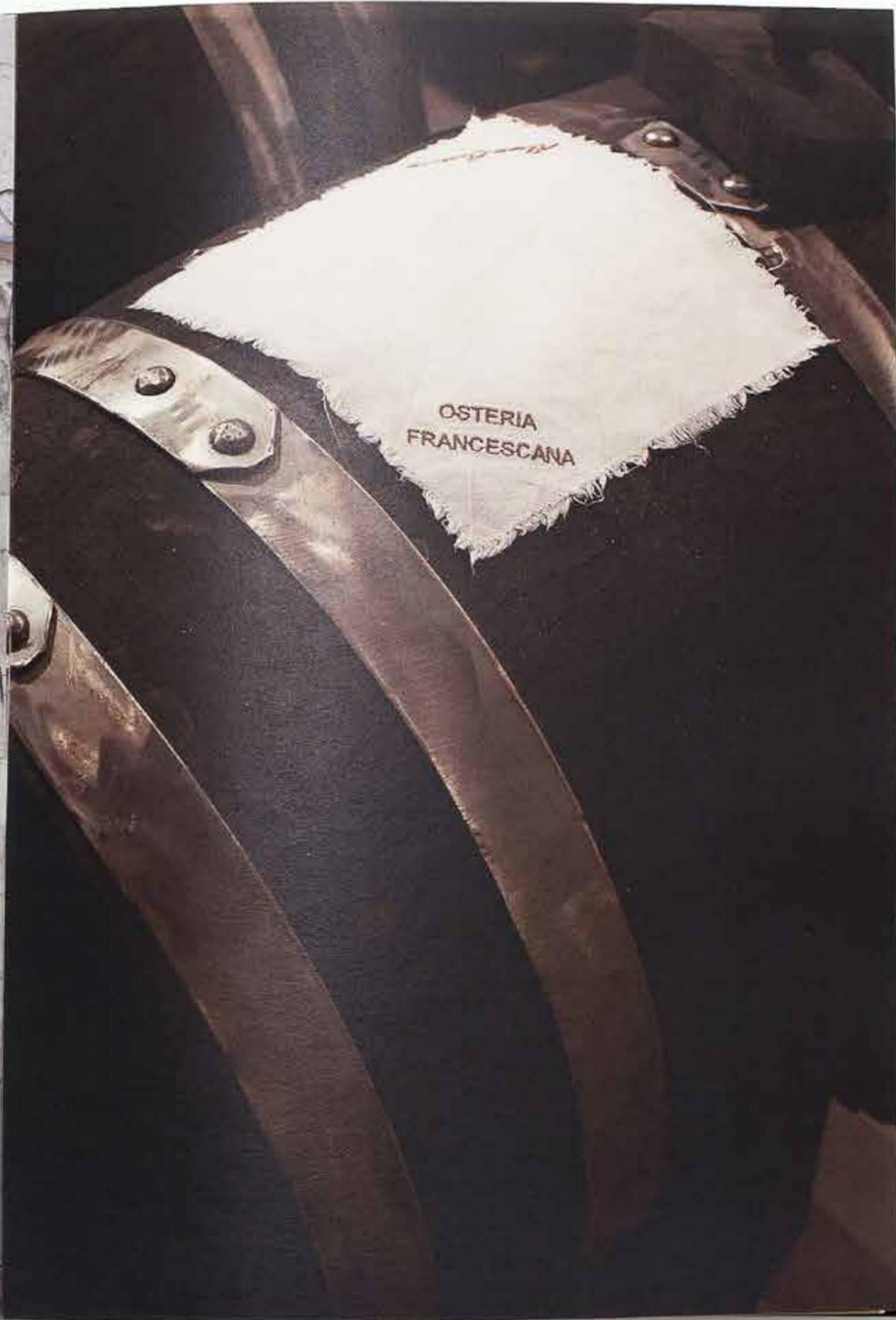
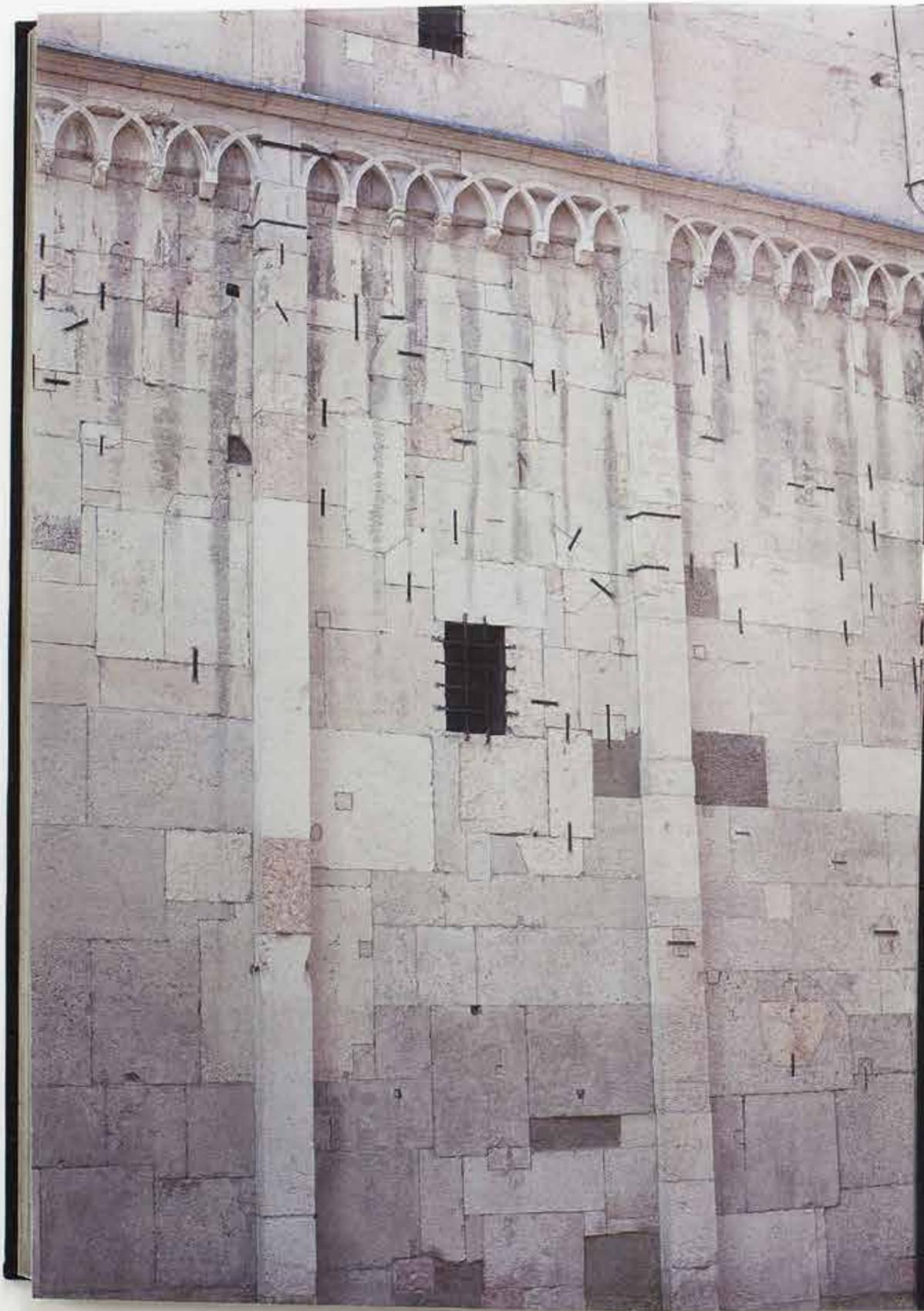
Cappuccino is one of my oldest recipes. It dates back to 1989 and my first restaurant, Trattoria del Campazzo: a creamy onion and potato soup served straight up in a bowl with a swirl of traditional balsamic vinegar on top. What I have always loved about this velvety soup is the curious gap between the deceptively simple ingredients and the outstanding pleasure on the palate.

Before opening Osteria Francescana in 1995 I was already thinking about how to modify the soup, and the recipe keeps evolving as our techniques mature. First we separated the two main ingredients, onion and potato, and broke down the soup into two consistencies, like a cappuccino. Today we make the onion foam in a siphon, but before we had siphons we whipped it up with a hand-held electric mixer, to similar but less dramatic effect. At first the dish received a lot of attention; our guests thought we were playing a joke. They'd look at the cappuccino and *cornetto* and laugh nervously. But I was deadly serious. I must have explained it 100 times: 'What you see is sweet, but what you taste is savoury. What you see is Italy, but what you get is Emilia.' By taking ingredients out of their familiar context and putting them in a new container we were asking our guests to suspend their doubts, to trust us. Once people became accustomed to the idea, they actually enjoyed the novelty of sipping

a potato and onion soup out of a cappuccino cup. The whipped onion, wet with aged balsamic vinegar, played against the potato purée and evoked true Emilian flavours. The savoury, pork-crackling-laced pastry served with the cappuccino added drama; the scene was an exact reproduction of a breakfast table. The only thing missing was the sugar bowl.

Cappuccino also signalled an eagerness on our part to play with words, something I had never done before. What could words do that flavour could not? They opened up dialogue, criticism, praise, exchange. We were pushing boundaries, taking risks and making our first provocations, looking for a little conflict that would wake up the senses and nudge the Italian kitchen forward, out of its comfort zone. 'Local' wasn't a catchphrase yet. The Slow Food movement anticipated the opening of Osteria Francescana's doors by only a few years. Cappuccino became a symbol of changing times to come: it was like a call to arms in defense of locally sourced ingredients and a return to our Emilian terroir as we strived for an identity and a language of our own. What had changed in the kitchen since Trattoria del Campazzo can be measured in Cappuccino. You could say there was a lot of noise in my head. Now even the recipes answered back: 'Really, Massimo? That's it?' It's a good thing I listened.





Memory of a Mortadella Sandwich

I spent the summer of 2000 at elBulli. It wasn't a vacation: I collected sea water from the bay and carried two buckets at a time up the beach. I made microscopic couscous from cauliflower heads. My feet ached, my hands were swollen and most of the time my head was spinning from everything that was happening around me. When I returned to Modena, the general wisecrack was, 'What are you going to do now, Bottura, make a mortadella foam?' What a great idea.

Italian mothers spoil their children. I was a skinny kid; too busy to eat because I was always running off to play soccer. In a concerted effort to feed me, my mother would chase me down the street every morning on my way to school with a mortadella sandwich. Can a recipe ever replace a memory?

Mortadella is a heat-cured pork sausage from Bologna, which is so renowned for it that in America, mortadella is known as Bologna. It's not a sophisticated meat but it is flavourful, soft and buttery. Sliced thinly over toasted bread, the fragrance alone has you salivating even before the first bite. The most difficult part of creating a mortadella foam was convincing the mortadella producers to abandon their commercial techniques and return to the original method of stuffing the meat into a pig's bladder, rather than in a synthetic skin. The natural material not only eliminates excess fat while the mortadella is baked, but also concentrates the flavour during the cooking process.

More flavour is better flavour. Over the years, we have focused a lot of attention at the restaurant on creating clean, pure flavours by eliminating anything that could interfere with the perception of them, in particular fat molecules such as butter and cream. Mortadella is already high in fat, so any more would coat the palate and kill the intensity.

Finding a way to make mortadella foam was an exercise with this intent in mind. That wisecrack became our obsession. After many abortive attempts we found a solution: soaking small chunks of mortadella in water for several

days in the fridge. The meat bled flavour and fat particles into the water, creating a milky, fragrant liquid. This water is blended with the mortadella solids to make a creamy paste that goes into a siphon with two charges of gas. It comes out pale pink, with a distinctive fragrance and flavour: a pure concentration.

Memory of a Mortadella Sandwich is all about reducing an element to its essence. I was chasing a memory, and what is a memory if not a pure essence distilled by time? Nothing is added to the mortadella; the work in the kitchen helps the ingredient become more like itself. The pistachios and the garlic – always present in a classic mortadella – are removed, refined and placed next to the foam as a side note. The foam is served with a toasted square of *gnocco ingrassato*, a typical Modenese flat bread laced with lard, on the side. It's one of those recipes that gets taken off and then put back on the menu over the years. Guests ask for it by name. It's funny how hard it is to let go of the thing I spent most of my youth running away from.



MEMORY OF A MORTADELLA SANDWICH

Mortadella foam:
600 g artisanal mortadella
150 g mineral water

Cut half the mortadella into very thin slices and leave to marinate overnight in mineral water at 10°C (50°F). Using a rotary evaporator, distill the water and mortadella infusion at 23°C (73°F). Reserve the liquid and discard the mortadella solids. Blend the mortadella water with the remaining mortadella in a Thermomix for 15 minutes at 40°C (104°F). Pass the mixture through a fine sieve and transfer to a siphon. Charge the siphon with 2 cartridges and let stand for 2 hours in the fridge.

Gnoccho ingrassato:
300 g ciccioli frolli
300 g pancetta arrotolata
700 g '00' flour
750 g Manitoba flour
400 g mineral water
500 g natural yeast
250 g pork fat

Blend the ciccioli frolli to a powder and pass it through a sieve to achieve a homogeneous texture. Slice the pancetta into 1-mm (1/16-inch) slices, then cut it into 5-mm (1/2-inch) squares. Mix all the flours with ciccioli frolli powder and pancetta squares and mix until thoroughly and evenly combined. Transfer to a stand mixer, add the yeast and water and mix it to a dough at medium speed, taking care not to over-heat it, for at least 4 minutes, but no more than 7 minutes. Add the pork fat and mix it for another 7 minutes. Leave the dough to rise for 3 hours at room temperature.

Knead the dough again and spread it out in 2 oven trays (53 x 32.5 cm/21 x 13 inches, or gastronorm 1/1 size) to a depth of 1.5 cm (3/8 inch). Cover with a clean dish towel and leave it to prove until it is 4 cm (1 1/2 inches) high. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C/400°F). Bake the gnoccho for 25 minutes with the fan at top speed, if possible.

Pistachio powder:
100 g pistachios

Put the pistachios in a blender and process briefly on the turbo setting until crushed to a powder. Take care not to overheat them.

Liquid garlic:
30 g garlic cloves
150 g milk
0.2 g salt
0.9 g agar agar

Peel the garlic and blanch it 3 times in mineral water, changing the water each time. Combine the still-warm garlic with the milk and blend it to a cream. Add the salt, stir and pass through a fine sieve. Heat the mixture on the stove, add the agar agar and cook, stirring, until the agar agar has dissolved completely. Let it cool down, then blend it until it is completely smooth.

To serve:
Toast the gnoccho cube in a hot pan until well toasted on each side. Serve it with the mortadella foam on the side, a thin line of pistachio powder and a line of liquid garlic.

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CAPPUCCINO

Potato cream:
2 leeks
1 large white onion
1 garlic clove, unpeeled
2 g extra-virgin olive oil
500 g capon stock (broth)
250 g potatoes, quartered and steamed
1 g salt
1 g white pepper

Wash the leeks thoroughly, removing any traces of soil. Slice the onion and leeks into thin rounds and steam them for 7–8 minutes. Blanch the garlic clove, drain it and set aside. Sauté the onions and leeks in the olive oil, along with the garlic. Add a little capon stock (broth) and continue cooking over low heat. Add the steamed potatoes and remaining stock.

When the flavours have amalgamated completely, purée and pass through a fine sieve, adjusting the consistency with extra stock if necessary. Season with salt and pepper. The mixture should have a smooth, velvety texture. Keep warm.

Foam:
1 leek
2 shallots
1 tablespoon butter
25 ml double (heavy) cream
10 g capon stock (broth)
1 g salt

Wash the leek thoroughly, removing any traces of soil. Cut it into pieces and steam it. Finely chop the shallots and sauté them in butter. Add the cream, broth and leeks. Reduce, season with salt, purée and pass through a fine sieve. Cool quickly over an ice bath. Transfer the mixture to a siphon and charge with two cartridges.

Croissant:
250 g plain (all-purpose) white flour
8 g fresh (brewer's) yeast
3 medium eggs, lightly beaten
4 g salt
15 g sugar
200 g softened butter
100 g ciccioli frolli

Make a mound of one quarter of the flour on the work surface and make a well in the centre. Combine the yeast with 10 g tepid water and carefully pour it into the centre of the mound. Gradually fold in the surrounding flour and knead until the ingredients are just combined and have formed a soft dough. Transfer to a bowl and make 2 slashes in the surface with a sharp knife. Cover and allow to rest in a warm place for 3 hours.

Place the remaining flour in a large bowl, add the beaten eggs and mix well until the dough has a smooth, elastic consistency. Add the salt, sugar, butter and ciccioli frolli and mix until well distributed. Gently combine the reserved risen dough, taking care to knock as little of the air out as possible.

Lightly dust a large bowl with flour and transfer the dough to it. Leave it to rest for 3–4 hours in a warm place. Turn the

raised dough out onto the work surface and knead it energetically until smooth and elastic. Leave to rest for another 6–7 hours in a warm, dry place.

Preheat the oven to 180°C (350°F). Shape the croissants in the traditional manner and bake them for 15 minutes.

To serve:
2 g extra-virgin olive oil
4 g traditional balsamic vinegar

Pour the hot potato cream into a cappuccino cup and top with the foam, directly from the siphon. Drizzle with a few drops of traditional balsamic vinegar and olive oil and serve with a croissant.

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FIVE AGES OF PARMIGIANO REGGIANO

Demi-soufflé:
200 g organic ricotta
60 g egg white
100 g 24-month Parmigiano Reggiano, grated
40 g double (heavy) cream
1 g salt
0.5 g white pepper

Prepare 8 x 4-cm (3 1/4 x 1 1/2-inch) aluminium cups or timbales. Smoke the ricotta lightly for 3 minutes. Whisk the egg white to stiff peaks. Whip the ricotta. Mix the Parmigiano with the cream, combine with the ricotta and season with the salt and pepper. Fold in the whisked egg white and steam for 45 minutes. Remove from the timbales and shape the soufflés into quenelles.

Parmigiano sauce:
20 g capon stock (broth), not strained
100 g 30-month Parmigiano Reggiano, grated

Bring the stock (broth) to 60°C (140°F) at medium speed in a Thermomix. Add the Parmigiano Reggiano and bring it to 85°C (185°F). Increase the speed and process to create a smooth, velvety sauce. Pass through a fine chinois.

Parmigiano foam:
125 g capon stock (broth)
250 g 36-month Parmigiano Reggiano, grated
100 g double (heavy) cream

Put the capon stock (broth) in a Thermomix and bring to the boil at setting 3. Add the Parmigiano, a spoonful at a time. Increase the speed for 1 more minute, then add the cream. Let the mixture cool to 4–8°C (39–46°F). Place it in a siphon, shake it, charge it with a double cartridge and shake again. Let rest in the fridge for at least 1 hour at 4–8°C (39–46°F) before serving.

Parmigiano wafer:
100 g 40-month Parmigiano Reggiano, grated
100 g mineral water

Mix the Parmigiano and water in a saucepan and slowly bring it to the boil until the cheese becomes stringy. Remove from the heat and let it rest at room temperature for 2 hours. Strain off the liquid and leave the cheese in the fridge overnight.

Preheat the oven to 170°C (325°F). Roll out the cold cheese dough to a thickness of 1 mm (1/16 inch) and lay it out flat on a silicone baking mat. Bake for 12 minutes until it is a thin wafer. Let cool at room temperature, then crack it into 4 parts. Break it into an imperfect triangular shape, about 5 cm (2 inches) on each side.

Parmigiano air:
200 g 50-month Parmigiano Reggiano crust
200 g 50-month Parmigiano Reggiano, grated
2 g lecithin

Place the Parmigiano crust in a pan with xx g water and simmer for 3 hours over low heat. Strain and cool the liquid. Blend the chilled broth and the grated Parmigiano for 30 minutes, then let it rest in the fridge overnight. Strain it through a tamis sieve and transfer the strained liquid to a large bowl. Just before serving, add the lecithin and whisk with a hand-held blender until it rises into a cloud of air.

To serve:
Place 2 quenelles of demi-soufflé at the base of each plate and add 2 spoonfuls of sauce around the soufflé. Place the foam on top, add the wafer at a diagonal slant, and finally a cloud of air covering one quarter of the plate.

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TORTELLINI WALKING ON BROTH

Tortellini filling:
30 g pork loin
30 g veal fillet
20 g mortadella
20 g 24-month prosciutto crudo
20 g 30-month Parmigiano Reggiano, grated
1 g freshly ground black pepper
1 g freshly ground nutmeg

Toast the pork loin in a pan to brown the outside, then remove and let cool. Grind the rest of the meat together in a meat grinder, then add the rest of the ingredients. Mix it all together in a bowl to create a homogenous mixture. It is very important to taste the flavour of the filling at this point.

Capon stock (broth):
1 kg capon stock (broth)
2 egg whites
5 g agar agar

To clarify the stock (broth), whisk the egg whites gently in a bowl, making them slightly foamy (just few bubbles are fine; they do not need to have peaks). Mix the egg whites with the cold stock, gradually heating it over low heat.

When it starts to boil, remove from the heat and let rest for 10 minutes. Strain through a tamis sieve and let cool. Add the agar agar, then heat it through over the low heat until the agar agar has melted completely.

Traditional tortellini dough:
200 g flour
2 eggs
capon stock (broth), for cooking the pasta



At Osteria Francescana, Italy's most celebrated restaurant, chef Massimo Bottura takes inspiration from contemporary art to create highly innovative dishes that explore and reinterpret Italian culinary traditions. His playful and dynamic approach has won him three Michelin stars and the number three place on the World's 50 Best Restaurant list.

Never Trust a Skinny Italian Chef is an exploration and a tribute to Bottura's twenty-five year career and the evolution of Osteria Francescana. Divided into four chapters, each one dealing with a significant influence in the restaurant's evolution, the book features 48 recipes with accompanying texts explaining Bottura's inspirations, ingredients and techniques. Illustrated with photography by Stefano Graziani and Carlo Benvenuto, it is the first book from Bottura, the leading figure in modern Italian gastronomy.



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