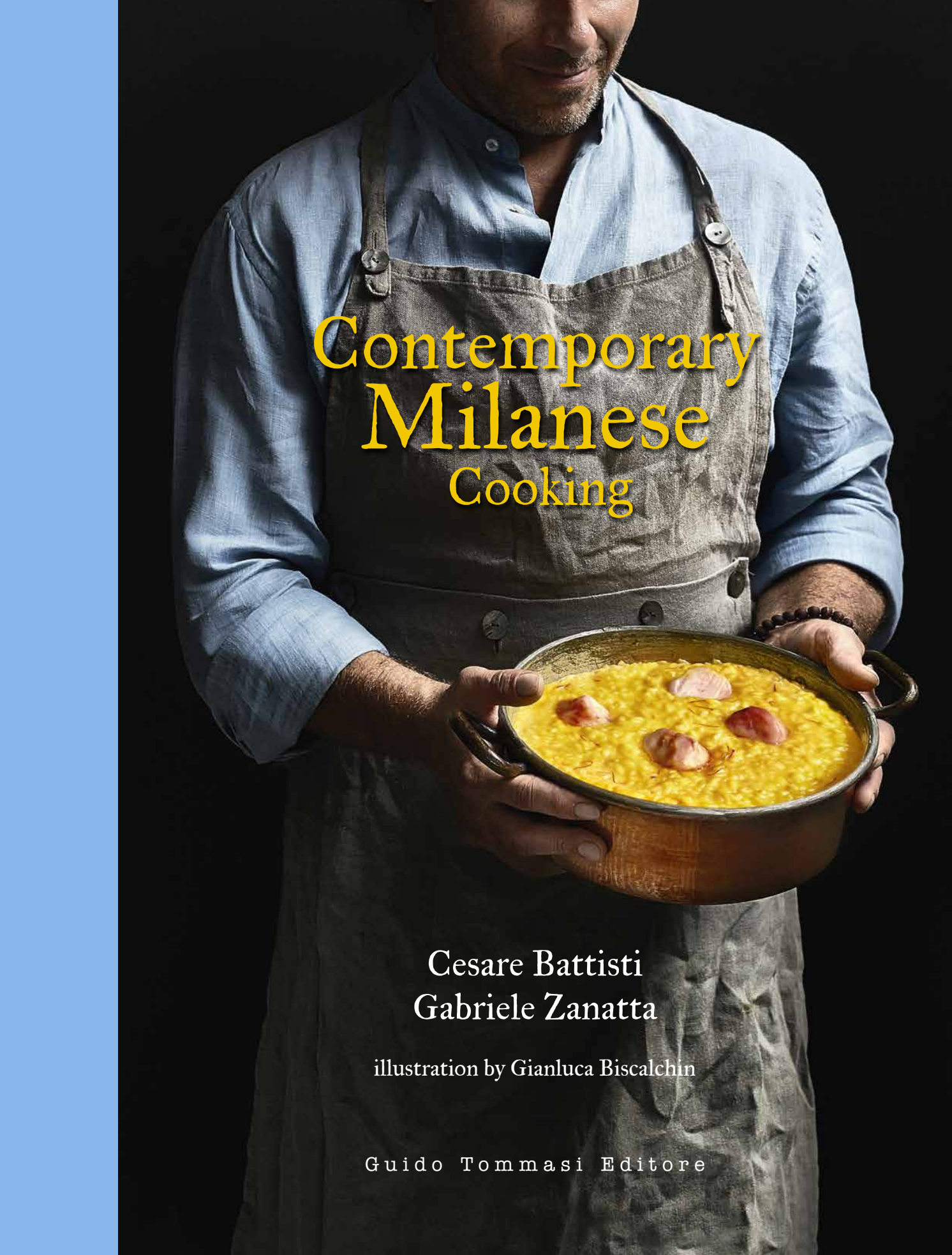


A man with a beard, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and a grey canvas apron, is holding a large copper pot with both hands. The pot is filled with a creamy yellow risotto, topped with several pieces of pink salmon. The background is dark, and the lighting is dramatic, highlighting the man's face and the food. A solid blue vertical bar is on the left side of the image.

Contemporary Milanese Cooking

Cesare Battisti
Gabriele Zanatta

illustration by Gianluca Biscalchin

Guido Tommasi Editore



Risotto alla milanese

SEPTEMBER – MARCH | 25 MINUTES

This is *the* symbolic dish of Milanese cooking, throughout Italy and the world. A popular legend recounts its earliest origins tale: a famous episode from 1574, the year in which an assistant to Flemish glassmaker Valerio of Flanders decided to use saffron to color a rice dish being prepared for the wedding of his master's daughter. An authentic "yellow Milanese risotto", however, didn't actually appear until 1829, with Milanese chef Felice Luraschi's mention of it in his book "Nuovo Cuoco Milanese Economico" (New Economic Milanese Chef). Our recipe for *risotto alla milanese* is lighter when compared to that first-documented version, yet at the same time doesn't deviate much from the original. We have stayed true to one key element: at the end of the cooking, the heat is turned off and the risotto is creamed with a spoonful of good *butirro* (a homemade, naturally acidic butter traditionally used in Alpine cultures) and then with spoonful of thick shavings of the typical cheese

from Lodi, called Lodigiano. For the *soffritto*—the sauté of chopped vegetables and spices which start this dish—we sweat the white onions and then remove them after they have released their liquid and aromas (thus preventing any unpleasant onion bits getting stuck in your teeth!). An extra virgin olive oil is used instead of butter, as it has a higher smoke point than animal fats. We do not add wine, because this lends the risotto an unwelcome flavor note. The saffron used here comes from Spain's La Mancha region, whose area producers are all members of a consortium (unlike the more fragmented producer set-up in, say, Navelli in Abruzzo). While the two types are virtually identical, their costs differ: from the Spanish producer we purchase saffron pistils at 6,000 euros per kilo (circa 3,500 dollars per pound)—a price 3 or 4 times less than saffron originating in Abruzzo.

Rice

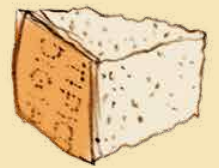
48



Carnaroli
rice



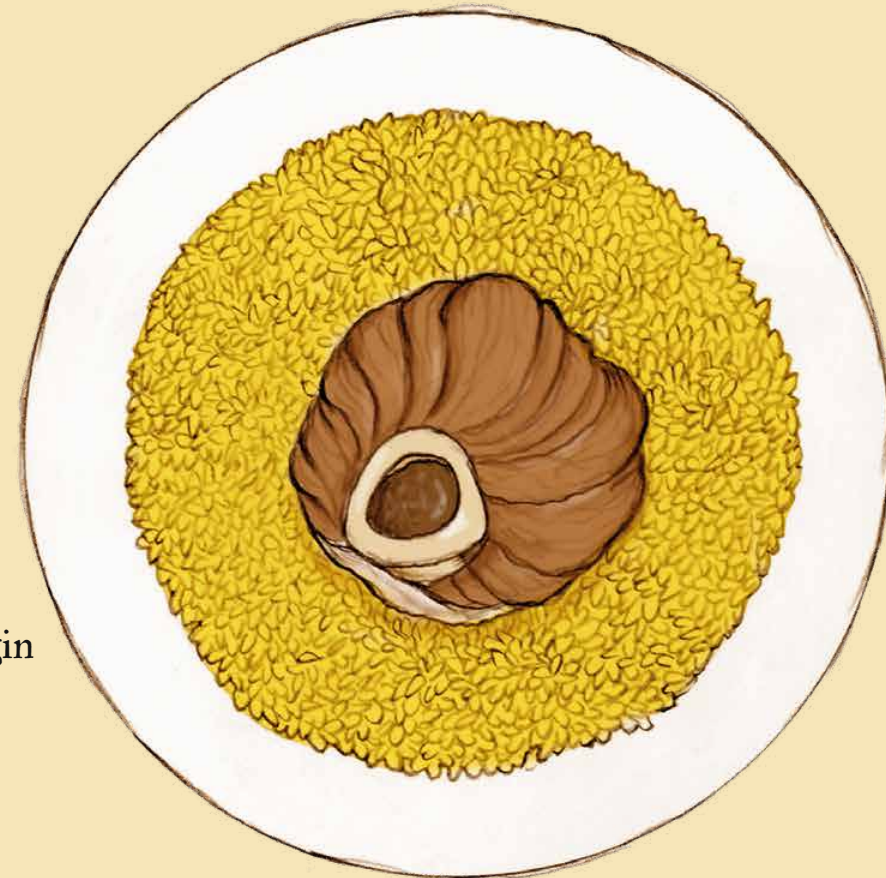
Onion



Lodigiano
cheese



Extra virgin
olive oil



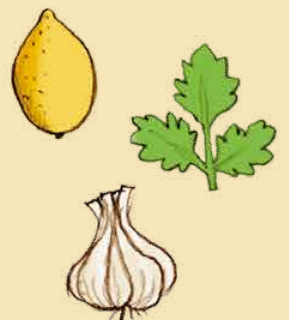
Saffron
threads



Bone
marrow



Malga
butter



Lemon, garlic
and parsley

Marinated eel

JULY – OCTOBER | 15 MINUTES

THIS IS THE SEASON WHEN FISHING IS AT ITS BEST, WITH EEL FISHING IN PARTICULAR REACHING ITS PEAK IN SEPTEMBER IN THE VALLEYS AROUND THE TOWN OF COMACCHIO IN EMILIA-ROMAGNA

Yet another great classic of Northern Italian and Milanese cuisine, eel is almost always fished in the Como area and has long been the only freshwater fish to arrive at the fish market still alive. This type of marinating, known as *in carpione* in Italian, is a traditional method of preserving certain fatty meats in white wine and vinegar. Our recipe here is a mellower version of the classic in carpione, given that the eel is cooked without its skin (which accounts for some 50% of the total fat). Our marinade does not call for sugar, in keeping with the Milanese custom. We purchase our eel from Ace Fish Suppliers at the Zermini fish market in the Comacchio valleys area. Do keep in mind, however, that the eel is on the verge of extinction; the World Wildlife Fund for Nature has listed it among the species in need of protected status.

INGREDIENTS

1 eel weighing 1 kg
(approximately 2
pounds)
500 ml (just over 2
cups) water
1 carrot
1 celery stalk
1 medium onion
2 bay leaves
500 ml (just over 2
cups) white wine
3 tbsp extra virgin olive
oil
500 ml (just over 2
cups) white wine
vinegar
black peppercorns

METHOD

Use a knife to make a clean, circular incision of the entire eel skin just below the head. With the aid of a cloth to manage the slippery eel, remove the entire skin (or have your trusted fishmonger do this step for you). Slice the eel into 4-inch fillets. Bring the water, wine and vinegar to a boil together with the peppercorns and bay leaves. Meanwhile, thinly slice the onion. Slice the carrot and celery into very thin “matchstick” shapes. Blanch the vegetables individually in the marinade until cooked: the onion for 2 minutes, the celery for 4 minutes, and the carrot for 7 minutes. Drain the vegetables and let dry on a cloth. Place the eel fillets between two sheets of parchment paper or cling film (as you would with a steak) and tenderize them with a mallet. Then place some of the cooked vegetables on each fillet and roll them up. Close the ends tightly by twisting and securing. Remove the marinade from the heat. Place the closed eel fillets in the liquid until it turns cold (about an hour). After an hour, remove the eel rolls and cool them in the refrigerator for at least 24 hours, allowing the flesh to densify. Slice the rolls into rounds and serve alongside a crisp quality salad featuring crunchy vegetables like radishes and carrots, and seasoned with the olive oil.



Fried frogs with saffron sauce

MARCH – JULY | 30 MINUTES

Fried frogs, another highly Milanese recipe, are traditionally fried in the Milanese style, by dipping the legs firstly in an egg batter and then coating with breadcrumbs. Here we use only rice flour for added crunchiness. The sauce, a simple mayonnaise with an orange juice and saffron reduction, lends a characteristic sweetness. Choose the smallest Italian frogs (or similar), so they won't need to be boned; if you select Chinese frogs, use only the thigh meat.

INGREDIENTS

FOR THE SAFFRON SAUCE

*2 egg yolks
juice of ½ a lemon
juice of 1 orange
1 tsp mustard
1 packet of saffron
1 cup filled half with
extra virgin olive oil
and the other half with
peanut oil*

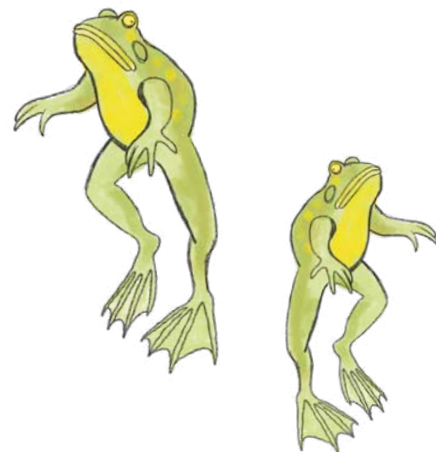
FOR THE FROGS

*600 g (1.3 pounds)
Italian frogs
(or similar)
80 g (½ cup) rice flour
2 small strips of lemon
peel
1 small bunch fresh
parsley
1 dollop of butter
2 tbsp extra virgin olive
oil*

METHOD

To make the saffron sauce, add a few drops of lemon juice and the mustard to the egg yolks and beat vigorously, adding the oil a little at a time. As the mayonnaise forms, add the remaining lemon juice. Heat and reduce the orange juice together with the saffron. Once reduced by half, let cool and add to the mayonnaise.

Rinse and clean the frogs under running water. Dry them with a cloth and dust with the rice flour. Melt a dollop of butter with the oil in a pan. Add the lemon zest to flavor the fats. Place the frogs in the pan and cook on low heat for a few minutes on each side. Transfer to paper towels to dry. Serve with the freshly chopped parsley and the mayo.



Frogs and snails



Milanese cotoletta

Let's begin by clearing up a few misunderstandings regarding the Milanese veal cutlet. Firstly, it's a dish with Milanese origins and not, rather, from Austria (it's cousin is the similar dish known as Wiener Schnitzel). This matter was resolved by Ottorina Perna Bozzi in 1965, in her book *Vecchia Milano in Cucina*, in which the author clearly tells us that one General Radetzky discovered this dish in Milan and not in Vienna. Precise documentation exists in support of this.

The second question relates to the name. Italians say *costoletta* to refer to a veal cutlet or chop, while in the Milanese tradition, the famous *cotoletta alla milanese* refers to its preparation, being breaded and fried. The bones that connect the veal loin where ribs start are included.

How to choose veal? It's important that the meat has very low water content so that once cut, it does not turn the breading too moist. Often in restaurants it happens that the first couple bites of this dish are crunchy, then disappointingly followed by morsels in which the breading has turned liquidy.

Our version is somewhat rustic, with the meat still pinkish and rare on the inside. We slice the cutlet, remove the bone and clean it bare, and then cook it whole. While formerly the practice would be to discard the "band" of the ribs and the lower part of the carré (which is equal to $\frac{2}{3}$ of the cut obtained), today we no longer prepare the cutlet this way: Our more modern "awareness" in the kitchen tells us it no longer makes sense to discard so much of this product.

In keeping with the traditional preparation, we do not flour the cutlets. We use a good amount of sage to flavor the butter, making use of a highly popular ingredient in Milanese cooking. One last curiosity: some traditionalists prefer not to dry the meat cutlets after frying, opting instead to pour the still-bubbling hot butter over them instead. Such a method clearly means surging cholesterol levels, yet who are we to deny anyone their preference?

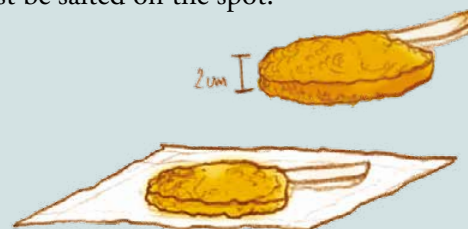
WIENERSCHNITZEL VERSUS MILANESE CUTLET

Wiener Schnitzel can be distinguished from the Milanese cutlet because:

- 1) it is floured first then passed through the egg;
- 2) it is not cut from the loin (but rather the thigh, generally) and does not include the bone;
- 3) it is fried in lard or oil.

In contrast, a Milanese cutlet:

- 1) is cut into the loin of a suckling calf (the meat is not beaten and must contain the bone);
- 2) is first dipped in egg and then passed through the breadcrumbs (which consist solely of white bread crumbs, and no crusts as that would be too dry);
- 3) must be fried in butter which has just about stopped foaming in the pan;
- 4) must be salted on the spot.



Veal



Milanese ossobuco

SEPTEMBER – MARCH | 80 MINUTES

The classic *risotto alla milanese* served with ossobuco is undoubtedly one of the most requested and enjoyed Milanese speciality plates. At Ratanà, we could not possibly remove it from our menu—such is its popularity and demand.

Ossobuco was once floured and then fried in butter, transferred to another baking dish, covered with the residual warm butter along with onion and tomato, and cooked for a long time until the meat fell off the bone. We have increased the amount of vegetables in the sauce, including carrots and celery, and left the tomato off altogether (which lent the dish a rather too-present acidity). We cook it in a baking dish with a few pieces of celery, carrots and wilted onions, and for less time (80 minutes)—thus the meat is tender and juicy and not overcooked and stringy.

The classic final touch to a traditional ossobuco is a gremolata sauce, made with lemon peel, parsley, garlic and anchovy. We leave off the garlic and anchovies and sometimes replace the parsley with rosemary.

INGREDIENTS

1 veal ossobuco weighing
250 g (9 ounces)
1 cup beef broth
1 small carrot
½ a celery stalk
1 cup dried mushrooms
½ onion
zest of 2 lemons
½ cup white wine
sage and rosemary
1 small bunch fresh
parsley
extra virgin olive oil
salt and pepper

METHOD

Flour the ossobuco slices and brown them in oil in a pan, together with the chopped vegetables. Separately, rehydrate the dried mushrooms with little warm water for about 15 minutes. Once the vegetables and ossobuco are browned, douse with the wine. When the wine has evaporated, transfer the contents to an oven pan. Add the broth, the (drained) mushrooms, sage and a few pieces of rosemary. Cook at 170°C / 340°F for 80 minutes. Remove the ossobuco from the pan and pass the pan sauce and remaining pan ingredients through a food mill. Adjust for salt and pepper. Dress the ossobuco with the steaming hot sauce. Complete with the sauce made from lemon zest, a little rosemary and parsley, and serve alongside a classic yellow risotto (see recipe on page 48).

CURIOSITY

Tradition dictates that one should eat the ossobuco's marrow using a long, thin teaspoon called *agent di tass*, meaning literally “tax agent” or “collector”.



Pan tramvai

YEAR-ROUND | 40 MINUTES | 3 HOURS RISING TIME

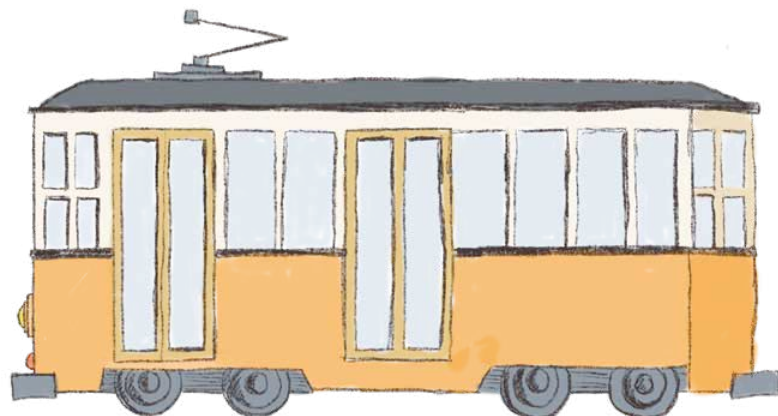
Pan tramvai dates to the beginning of the twentieth century, a historical period in which bread was far more than a mere accompaniment to a meal. Also known as “the poor man’s panettone”, this rich and substantial version helped keep workers going as they travelled the long and uncomfortable journey to work on Milan’s trams, back when they were first starting to connect the inner city to suburbs. Sold at stops where one would also purchase tram tickets, pan tramvai was sometimes even offered as change instead of money! This recipe is courtesy of the Grazioli bakery in Legnano, an artisan workshop that bakes using only sourdough obtained from stone-ground flours. Today the legacy of the great baker Massimo Grazioli has been inherited by his son, Nicolò.

INGREDIENTS

2 kg (4.4 pounds)
mature sourdough
starter
200 g (7 ounces)
michetta dough (2-3
hours)
6 g (1 & ¼ tsp) malt
6 kg (13 pounds)
sultanas (raisins)
6 g (1 tsp) salt

METHOD

Soak the raisins in hot water for about 1 hour. Drain the water and set the raisins to continue draining for 2 or 3 hours, until dry. Blend all the ingredients except the raisins together, slowly incorporating 30% water of the total weight of the dough and sourdough. Now add the raisins, mixing very little and only at the mixer’s first / lowest speed. Let the dough rise for less than 1 hour. Bake the dough for 40 minutes at 220°C / 430°F.



Breads and sweets





26£ | 35\$ | 30 € v.i.

ISBN: 978 88 6753 350 3



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