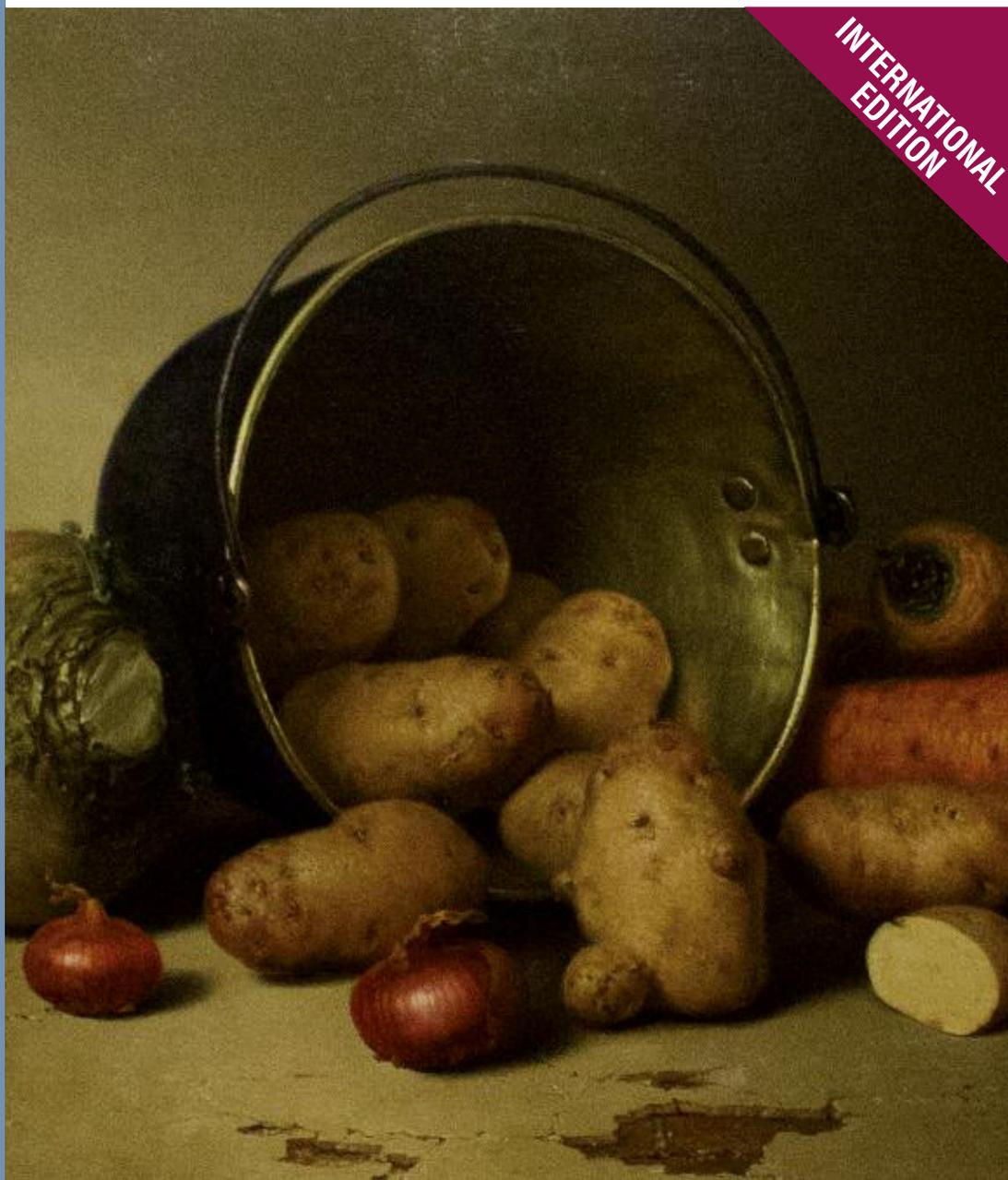


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INTERNATIONAL
EDITION



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WHIT MASSIMO ALBERINI AND VINCENZO BUONASSISI.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS



DEAR ACADEMICIANS...

2 Rational and irrational
cuisine
(Giovanni Ballarini)

7 Verdi's risotto
(Angelo Tamburini)

9 Manipulating taste
(Gianni Di Giacomo)

FOCUS

4 Restaurant Discounts:
an Opportunity
or a Gimmick?
(Paolo Petroni)

11 Drinking wine
vs. eating wine
(Antonio Gaddoni)

CULTURE AND RESEARCH

5 Carnival sweets
by any other name
(Sandro Bellei)



On the cover: "Still Life with Root Vegetables",
Robert Spear Dunning
New Britain Museum of American Art,
New Britain, Connecticut"



Rational and Irrational Cuisine

Man's dissatisfaction and search for something more hidden behind rational order. Modern man's dissatisfaction has a great deal to do with the sense of alienation induced by rational order (B. Wilson, 1992).

BY GIOVANNI BALLARINI
President of the Academy

Dear Academicians, irrationality is one of the characteristics of the dishes proposed by many modern chefs. It is an aspect of gastronomy that deserves investigation. A reflection on irrationality in cuisine gives us an opportunity to consider the role that logical and scientific thought has played in human nutrition, at least starting in the second half of the 19th century when the physiology and chemistry of food began to be studied. This kind of research is typical of Western societies, and has profoundly influenced our cuisine. We should recall that even Pellegrino Artusi entitled his famous cookbook *Science in Cuisine*, with the subtitle *The Art of Eating Well*.

The relationship between rational and irrational is a complex one, and largely inhabits the dark and shadowy world of the unexplored. This area of science

includes the unconscious mind, from which science itself both originates and destroys.

To consider nutrition irrational is not to deny or even reduce the role that scientific research has played and will continue to play in the undeniable progress made in our understanding of human nutrition and the evolution of cuisine. Regarding the latter, one need only think of the new tools and recent techniques that scientific knowledge has brought to cuisine. Although also undeniable, it is more difficult to establish whether this progress has constituted an improvement, and if so, how is that quantified? It is indeed disconcerting to realize that in the dishes proposed by many chefs who are considered cutting edge or experimental, the knowledge and techniques that have come about as a result of scientific research are used to create foods that frequently fly in the face of rational nutrition. Is it a simple love-hate relationship or perhaps something deeper, such as a sort of subconscious vendetta on the part of these irrational that has been pushed aside, if not denied, by an invasive sense of the rational, even in the world of nutrition? At any rate, while we must emphasize the importance of the indubitable and undeniable merits of a rational nutrition and cuisine, we cannot forget some of its failures. Many of the "new epidemics" that plague Western societies are not merely a result of nutrition per se but of incorrect nutrition in terms of a population and individual's lifestyle, genetics, and consumer age.

Cardiovascular pathologies, cancers, obesity, diabetes and osteoporosis are not the result of the intrinsic quality of foods, much less their security, but rather of how they are used, particularly in terms of quantity and nutritional balance as part of the complex picture of a daily, weekly, and seasonal diet. All are aspects that, at least in part, once were regulated by tradition. The incorrect use of our foods is undeniably a direct consequence of two types of factors, one biological and the other cultural.

On the one hand we have genetically determined behaviors, such as those that derive from the body's need for nutritional energy, such as our "craving" for fats and sweets (sugars) and our need to compensate for mineral losses ("craving" for salt), as well as our desire, at least in part, to eat fresh foods, often from the earliest harvest. We must bear in mind that our species seems to be more generically fruit-eating than vegetarian.

On the other hand there are nutritional behaviors that are stimulated and modulated by cultural elements, especially those belonging to certain social classes, for whom food and its consumption have rigid roles as status symbols, with meanings that have formed a sort of laical culinary religion. Unconscious and emotional - and therefore irrational - values are important in both sets of factors. And it is here that we all can clearly see the failures of nutritional education based only on a rational composition of foods and nutrition in general. At the same time



we are becoming aware of the onset and spread of eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia, but especially of the irrational fears that today as never before pervade the world of food and cuisine. They are not being addressed or controlled by technological and rational forms of the media, which instead contributes to creating new fears or reviving old ones!

Nutrition cannot be separated from the global anthropological context in which it is viewed by each society and each individual. Regarding nutrition, and especially nutritional behavior, we must reflect upon and discard conditions, unconscious compulsions and emotional impulses that belong to the vast and little known world of the irrational, which cannot be ignored much less denied. Rather, it seems that in the face of the diffusion of a rational concept of nutrition we are

witnessing a sort of “vendetta” on the part of the forgotten and rejected irrationality. This regards not only nutrition but a large part, if not all, of life in technologically advanced Western societies that were born of and developed from a culture, that of the ancient Greeks, in which the rationality of Hermes and the irrationality Dionysius existed in a wise but also dynamic state of equilibrium. If we are to nourish our bodies rationally we must not forget about the irrational dimensions of our social and individual souls that, even in terms of the foods we eat, are a consequence of the social status symbols that made up our nutritional traditions and bring us into contact with our surrounding environment. This is an aspect that should be carefully considered when examining the traditions of Italian cuisine that are increasingly less respected. It is a

condition that puts their existence at risk and impedes efforts to improve them. The latter may only be possible through a recovery, or better yet, a reconstruction, of a correct and appropriate, but also dynamic, relationship between the rational and the irrational, which our society desperately needs.

Never before have human beings had such a secure and balanced cuisine in terms of nutrition, but it lacks meaning and a soul because it is the expression of an emotional world that is foreign to the vast majority of consumers that see food as something unknown, if not as an enemy.

It is the job of our Academy to contribute to giving cuisine back its soul through a correct balance between the scientific and technological rationality of Hermes and the playful irrationality of Dionysius.

GIOVANNI BALLARINI



2014 ECUMENICAL DINNER

The convivial ecumenical meeting, that brings together all Academicians in Italy and around the world at the virtual table, will take place on October 16 at 8:30 pm, and



this year’s theme will be The Cuisine of Rice. This theme, chosen by the “Franco Marengi” Study Center and approved by the President’s Council, is aimed at rediscovering the cuisine of the many varieties

of rice using traditional recipes that may have been long forgotten and that are part of our regional culinary patrimony. We

will also examine some new culinary trends involving rice. Delegates are responsible for insuring that the ecumenical

dinner be accompanied by an appropriate cultural presentation

that illustrates the importance of the proposed theme, and that a menu devoted to the chosen theme is followed.

Restaurant Discounts: an Opportunity or a Gimmick?

Discount menus and online coupons are no longer confined to lower tier restaurants, but also are becoming popular with the more elegant ones.

BY PAOLO PETRONI

Secretary General of the Academy

We are all well aware of the difficulties the Italian economy is experiencing. The situation has been going on for several years now, with no end in sight. In fact, in some sectors the crisis is becoming worse. For the first time since the infamous energy crisis of 1973, consumer spending on food is falling: in the last five years spending has decreased by 10% - with a 3% decline just in the past 12 months. This is not just a crisis in terms of prices but one that is “structurally” altering spending habits. We are not merely witnessing a momentary fluctuation in consumption, but rather are facing a long-term phenomenon that will have a profound effect on our habits. In short: we shop more frequently and buy less; we look for discounts; we eliminate the non-essentials. The shopping cart loaded with useless items and impulse purchases is increasingly rare. Dining out finds itself in the heart this context of cost-containment. To be frank, restaurants were the first victims of the crumbling purchasing power of the Lira thanks to the coming of the Euro (in no time at all 35,000 Lire became 35 Euros for the same menu at the same restaurant). Now the industry is in the throes of agony. But lowering prices is not easy! Typical cost cutting measures at restaurants include reduction in personnel or spending less on ingredients and raw materials. The latter strategy risks an immediate drop in a restaur-

ant’s classification. So some establishments now offer special tasting menus, not just one but several, perhaps with some variation in the main dish, either meat or fish. This practice may be a common one in many countries, but not in Italy. However in recent months there has been an increase in specialized “social shopping”. Internet sites such as “Groupon”, “Groupalia”, “Glamoo” and “Let-sbonus” offer meals at deeply discounted prices. It is not a question of offering lower quality meals but rather of enabling the public at large to experience a restaurant - and fill dining rooms - during low traffic seasons. Until quite recently, this “coupon” technique was confined to modest establishments like pizzerias, but now even high end restaurants are participating. In some cities, groups of major restaurants, (even some with stars) dissatisfied with the bureaucracy and costs of creating Internet sites, have decided to form consortia and offer deeply discounted menus (a special reservation is required). Until just a few months ago such a thing would have been unthinkable in Italy. The basic concept is one of fixed price menus with wine pairings. But did we really need an economic crisis to arrive at this obvious solution that is so widespread abroad? Let us see this as an opportunity: clearly Italian restaurants don’t want to put on a poor show while promoting themselves. That would be a terrible contradiction indeed.

THE ACADEMY SILVER PLATE



An elegant silver plated dish engraved with the Academy logo. This symbolic object may be presented to restaurants that display exceptional service, cuisine and hospitality. Delegates may contact the Milan Headquarters (segreteria@accademia1953.it) for more information and orders.



Carnival sweets by any other name

Every year the period that precedes Lent is abounds with luscious sweets that are prepared in every region of Italy, just with different names.

BY SANDRO BELLEI

Academician, Modena Delegation



All over Italy, Carnival is a festive time, a mouthwatering opportunity to grace the numerous regional tables that compose the gastronomic jigsaw puzzle of the “*Bel Paese*” with traditional sweets, often of peasant origin. The names may be different, but the philosophy is the same. They are called *chiacchiere* in Basilicata, *bugie* in Liguria and Piedmont, *cenci*, *crogetti* and *berlingozzi* in Tuscany, *meraviglias* in Sicily and Calabria, *struffoli* in Campania, *cicerchiata* in Abruzzo, Marche, Umbria and Molise, *frappe*, *sfrappole*, *intrigoni*, *lattughe*, *fiocchetti*, *nodi*, *spelle*, and *lavagnette* in Emilia-Romagna, *crostoli* in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, *frappe* in Lazio, *chiacchiere*, *tortelli* and *farse* in Lombardy, *grostoli* in Trentino, and *grostoli* or *galani* in Veneto.

Thanks to its traditional rural roots, Carnival has always been tied to the agricultural and pastoral world. At one time it heralded the end of winter and the arrival of spring, the time of year that coincided with an opulent and fertile season for the earth, and insured fruitful harvests.

Carnival was also an opportunity to commit sins of gluttony, given the vast number of sweets prepared all over Italy, in obvious contradiction with the dictates of sound nutrition. The majority of the most famous sweets are fried. Many of them are indistinguishable from region to region, perhaps varying somewhat in shape and in some ingredients. Such a gastronomic bounty need only be accompanied by or dipped in a glass of sweet *spumante* or a thimble full of sweet dessert

wine. Fortunately, in Italy we have an embarrassment of riches in this regard.

Carnival *bugie* are not only enjoyed across Liguria and Piedmont but also in Calabria, where a drop of Moscato wine is added to the usual dough. There are endless variations. There are pastries that are filled with jam or covered with melted chocolate. The traditional version, however, is sprinkled with powdered sugar. The typical Carnival sweets of Tuscany are called *cenci*, *donzelline* or *nastrini di monache* (nuns’ ribbons), which clearly highlights their monastic origins. They are made with flour, sugar and yeast, and their flavor is enhanced with the local *Vinsanto*. The rolled dough is cut with a fluted rotary blade and fried in extra virgin olive oil. Sometimes they are sprinkled with powdered sugar and closely resemble *chiacchiere*. Tradition holds that they be served at the end of the meal accompanied by a glass of the same *Vinsanto* used in the dough. Because they are so delicious, Tuscan housewives didn’t always wait for Carnival to enrich their Sunday tables. *Berlin-*





gozzi are another typical Tuscan Carnival treat. Baked in the oven, they have the classic doughnut shape. It would seem that the name derives “*Berlingaccio*” which at one time referred to either “Fat Thursday” or a mask that was worn during festival days. The verb “*berlingare*” used by the 16th century poets who frequented the court of Cosimo I de’ Medici in Florence meant to enjoy oneself and live it up at the table. *Berlingozzi* are made with egg yolks, flour, sugar, yeast, grated lemon and/or orange peel, butter and a little milk. Basically the same ingredients as those used in *brigidini*, another typical Tuscan pastry. *Berlingozzi* are also widespread in northern Umbria, especially in the upper valley of the Tiber where the pastry plays a part in a country fair in Pigiano near the town of San Giustino.

Among all the sweets that are prepared during Carnival, the famous *chiacchiere* are perhaps the most popular, and are known from the Alps to Sicily. Although

the recipe is practically the same everywhere, the name differs from region to region. The name *chiacchiere* is of Lombard origin and it is indeed the most popular sweet in the region. In addition to the name, *chiacchiere* also differ in terms of the wine used in the dough, which is prepared exclusively with flour, sugar and yeast. The *cicerchiata* is widespread across central Italy and it boasts ancient origins. In the shape of a rustic doughnut, it is made by joining a mound of pastry balls today fried in oil, but once upon a time in lard, and covered with warm honey. A very similar pastry was said to be found on the ancient tables of Gubbio as a ritual and sacrificial food with the name, in the ancient Tuscan language of *strusla*, which was a spin off of *sruikla*, a diminutive of *struex* and variation of the more common *strues* which meant “mound”. In all probability, the name *cicerchiata* is of Medieval origin and derives from “*cicerchia*” (grass peas) that were very

common in that era in the regions of Umbria and Marche as well as southern Italy.

Crostoli or *grostoli* are typical Carnival treats all across Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The dough is made with flour, sugar, eggs, yeast, and a drop of Cognac or Grappa. *Farsi* are the fitters made in the area around Pavia. They have an irregular spherical shape, are amber colored and have a sweet flavor. Flour, sugar, lemon zest, eggs and yeast are combined, then the dough is divided into small spheres that are fried in hot oil for 6-7 minutes. The version that is filled with cream is also quite widespread and popular. *Frappe* or *sfrappole* are a specialty from Emilia

and Marche that are related to *chiacchiere*. They are prepared with flour, sugar, eggs and yeast, then cut into irregular diamond shape pieces. After being fried in oil, they are sprinkled with sugar and served piping hot. In many parts of Emilia-Romagna they are flavored with a small glass of anise liquor. And after frying and being sprinkled with sugar they are sometimes served with whipped cream.

Galani also belong to the *chiacchiere* family. They are eaten all over the Veneto region along with *crostoli*. They are made with flour, sugar, yeast and eggs.

Struffoli are a traditional Neapolitan sweet that is enjoyed all over Campania. This pastry which is very similar in appearance to *cicerchiata* is prepared with flour, eggs, lard, sugar, and a pinch of salt. It is imbued with anise liqueur and garnished with colored sprinkles that lend the food a festive air.

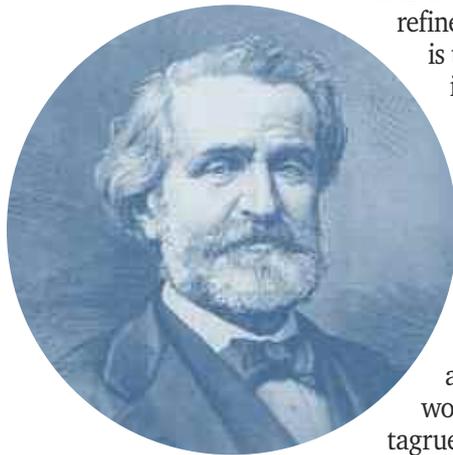
SANDRO BELLEI



Verdi's risotto

*The tradition of his family
was to eat and love rice in all seasons.*

BY ANGELO TAMBURINI
Siracusa Delegate



Giuseppe Verdi does not need an introduction but not everybody knows that he was a great lover of cuisine and gastronomy, and a real ambassador for Italian cuisine the world over. Giuseppe Giacosa wrote about him in 1889 when Verdi was at the pinnacle of his fame and wealth:

“Verdi is not a glutton, but a refined gourmet. His table is truly friendly, in that it is magnificent and sage. The kitchen of his house in Villa Sant’Agata deserves the honor of being a stage on account of being picturesque in its greatness and variety as it appears to be a workshop of high pantagruelian alchemy. There

is no danger that the indisposition of the chef may result in a bad meal. Verdi is not a big eater nor is he difficult to satisfy. He sits well at the table just like all healthy, wise and sober men. Most of all, he loves to see people rejoice around him, to watch the sincere and witty playfulness that accompanies and follows the good and exquisite repasts. He is a disciplined man and as such he believes that any function of life must have its moment of supremacy. He is an artist and as such he considers, with reason, a meal to be a work of art.”

A true child of his land, Verdi maintained an open and positive relationship with food. Every evening, the Maestro and his life partner Giuseppina Strepponi would dress up for dinner. Then, they

would take a short walk or, if they had guests, would play billiards or cards. The guests were rare but famous: the Ricordis, Arrigo Boito, Franco Faccio, the soprano Teresa Stolz, Emanuele Muzio and a few others during Verdi’s resplendent old age. At times, the mayor of Busseto came for lunch, as can be gathered from the sparse but cordial invitations that were found. Life in the villa allowed Verdi to make use of the products from the land he owned, a large extension of plots, most of them contiguous in the area of Villanova D’Arda, and more distant ones, over 2,000 acres in all. Farmland, woods, cattle pastures, a mill, a cheese making facility were managed with great competence, passion, sharp eyes and interest in innovative techniques of irrigation and fertilizing. The hen house of Sant’Agata still exists. Originally, it was managed by Verdi’s father. It is quite a building. A testimonial of Verdi’s interest in the good table can be found in many letters that he and Giuseppina wrote, offering suggestions, recipes and culinary anecdotes. When he was away from home, Verdi grew very nostalgic for polenta. In 1870, faced with many pressing projects in Europe and Egypt, he was wishing that all would end with “a polenta in Sant’Agata”, thus finding peace and the taste of home.

Rice, however, is something that totally enthused Verdi. In the tradition of his modest family from the municipality of Roncola, a tradition that was kept in Sant’Agata, rice was consumed and loved in every season. The local well-to-do families, like the Carrara, considered rice a food for Lent. In September



1869, Giuseppina sent to Camille Du Locle, the impresario of the Opéra, a recipe for making risotto for four persons. She pointed out that Verdi was helping her in spelling it out: “Put two ounces of fresh butter in a pan, with two ounces of marrow from ox or calf, and some sliced onion. After it takes on a golden color, put sixteen ounces of Piedmont rice in the pan; brown it (*rossoler*) on high flame stirring it constantly with a wooden spoon until the rice appears roasted with a nice golden hue. Take some boiling broth, made with good meat, and pour two or three ladles into the rice (*deux ou trois grandes cuillères à soupe*). As soon as the flame dries it, add some more broth and continue doing it until the rice is perfectly cooked. Take note that halfway through the cooking of rice (that is about fifteen minutes after the rice is placed in the pan) it will be necessary to pour half a

glass of white wine, of the kind that is natural and sweet; in addition, three nice handfuls of grated parmesan cheese should be added. When the rice is completely cooked, take a pinch of saffron, dilute it in a spoonful of broth and throw it into the rice. After mixing it in, take the rice out and pour it into a tureen. Slice a truffle thinly and spread it over the rice as if it were cheese. Otherwise use only cheese. Cover it and serve it hot.”

As far as wines were concerned, initially the Maestro favored French wines such as Bordeaux and champagne. On December 1864, however, he confessed to his friend Arrivabene: “The Asti (wine) bought from Cova was good but he also sent me a number of bottles of a quality called Dry Wine that I did not like. Very soon I will write him to send me more bottle of that wine but I want them to be sweet and sparkling”. On August 1869 he wrote to the same

friend: “Did you buy more wine from Oudar in Asti who sent you that excellent Cortese d’Asti and another quality wine, I don’t remember which, we drank together? Don’t be surprised if I talk about drinking: in the summer we do not desire anything else”.

At the end of 1885 he also longed for “good gnocchi, not unlike the good kind made by the farmers of Roncole”. When Verdi began to take the waters at Montecatini in 1880 he had already been converted to Tuscan wine. Yet, in his sojourn in the spa he did not give up the bottles of champagne. He even sent for six bottles of Moët & Chandon from Cremona. One more curious detail: it seems that Verdi was one of the first producers of Japanese persimmons in Italy. He loved to eat them at the end of his meal, paired with his favorite champagne.

ANGELO TAMBURINI

GUIDELINES FOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE MAGAZINE

Contributions to the magazine by Academicians are not only welcome, they are indispensable. However Academicians need to keep in mind some essential guidelines, so that their effort and passion are rewarded by rapid and thorough publication.

- **Articles:** It is essential that **articles be sent electronically**, in Word format (not pdf) to the following email address: redazione@accademia1953.it

- **Article Length:** To avoid cuts that are irritating for both the writer and editor, articles should be between **4,000 and 6,000 characters** (including spaces). Your computer provides character counts.

- **“From the Delegations” Column:** For ease of reading, **maximum length is limited to 2,500 characters including spaces.**

- **Convivial Dinner forms:** it is equally important that the “notes and comments” section of the rating sheets **respect the 800 character limit** (Maximum 1,000 characters) include spaces, in order to avoid cuts and errors. Rating sheets that arrive at Headquarters more than 30 days after the event will be discarded.

- **Please do not send reports on convivial dinners held outside the territory of your Delegation, or on those held in the homes of Academicians or places other than restaurants and public settings, as they will not be published.**

- **By observing these simple guidelines Academicians can be reasonably assured of rapid and accurate publication, thereby avoiding painful cuts.**

- **Obviously, the Editors reserve the right to edit all articles and publish them according to available space.**





Manipulating taste

Amplifying taste, intensifying the sensorial perception, could cause substantial changes in how we eat.

BY GIANNI DI GIACOMO
Academician, Chieti Delegation



Science, with its discoveries, its studies and its experimentation has influenced in a large measure the habits and customs of humanity. Unquestionably, food is the object of keen interest as a facet of research, since the food industry is ready to exploit any new offers in order to increase its profits.

The obsolescent knowledge of the sense of taste decreed that every region of the tongue was construed to recognize a certain type of taste, bitter in the back, salty in the front and also acidic midway between sweet and salty. At present, it is believed that all the taste buds are capable of perceiving all flavors and that each bud contains, albeit in different quantities, those cells that are able to recognize specifically what is sweet, salty, acid, bitter and the umami.

The umami is classified as the fifth taste and consequently must be added to the four classical tastes - sweet, salty, bitter and acid - that were previously known. In the Japanese language Umami stands for tasty, exquisite. It was discovered a century or so ago by Dr. Ikeda in the broth of the *konbu* seaweeds. It contains the highest level of glutamates in nature and thus it is classified as glutamate flavor.

Some research still underway suggests the existence of a sixth fundamental taste associated with fat. Every time that we chew or swallow food, many volatile molecules are freed in the air present in the mouth. They reach the nasal cavities activating the olfactory receptors and causing “re-

tro-nasal olfactory sensations”. The gustative and olfactory sensations are assembled together by our perceptive system in a meta-sensation that is defined as “taste”.

The result of the interaction between taste and olfaction is well known and utilized by the food industry with the purpose, for example, of increasing the sensation of fruit as in the case of pear juice when the level of sugar is increased (thus merely altering the perception of taste) in a way that enhances the olfactory perception of the pear. Natural variables do exist as with women who are pregnant whose sensitivity to bitter is influenced by hormonal levels. This sensitivity stems from the presence, in the breast feeding phase, of the adenosine mono-phosphate in mother’s milk that prevents the baby from experiencing the bitter taste that quite naturally he shuns.

Habitual behaviors can also modify some perceptions of taste, like in long term dieting, when we are deprived of sodium. Over time, these diets make it so that food with a normal content of salt are perceived as “salty”. Such findings have prompted a few researchers of the Biology Department of the University of California at San Diego to conduct a study on the structure and function of taste receptors. The studies have identified compounds that are able to modulate experimentally the functioning of the gustative system. The researchers have put to test the hypothesis that cells contained in the taste buds were endowed with specific sensors, or receptors of the external membrane,

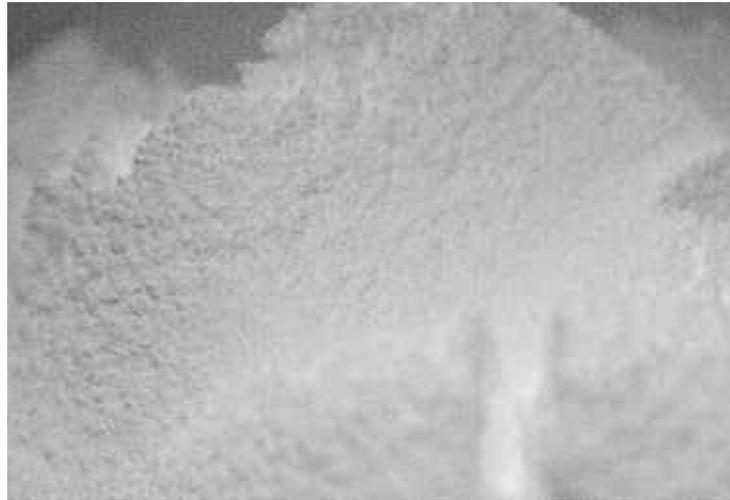


and that the salt receptor would link up selectively with a salty molecule while the sweet receptor would do the same with a sweet molecule and so forth. When such hypothesis was found to be valid through studies with animals, the same researchers started the production of chemical compounds capable of interacting exclusively with the sweet re-

ceptor or the salty receptor by influencing perception. This work led to identifying molecules with no taste that increase the probability of establishing a link between those molecules that carry a taste and the receptor that perceives them, intensifying such gustative perception. This interaction allows reaching the same sensation with a lower quantity of molecules that express the various tastes.

A molecule was found that is able to amplify the sweet taste of sucrose by doubling it, making it possible to obtain the same sweet taste with half the dosage of sweetener and to produce food with half the calories without changing the sweet taste. The researchers have also identified the main receptor for the perception of salt that allows the entry of the sodium ion into the cell. In addition, they are experimenting with compounds that are able to reduce the intake of salt with a significant impact upon health without losing the pleasure of tasty foods.

A wealth of studies are now concentrating on sweeteners. Aspartame, sucralose and saccharine tend to leave a bitter aftertaste in the dosage that is normally dispensed. Should a lesser quantity be used, the perception of bitterness would not be activated. A compound that modulates taste has recently completed the process of approval and could soon be added to some foods thanks to its property of making sucralose four times sweeter.



Obesity, hypertension, cardio-vascular disease and diabetes are the most frequent pathologies that could benefit from a more balanced diet with less salt and less sugar in the same quantity of food. These studies on the awareness of the perception of taste are revolutionary in comparison with previous knowledge and are ushering in a new path of research toward substances that amplify tastes by making food sweeter, more salty or tasty while reducing sugar,

salt, and glutamate. It remains to be proven whether the use of foods that can remain tasty while becoming healthier can also go along with the reduction of the total quantitative introduction of calories. While acknowledging what the researchers claim, that no undesirable collateral effects are induced, nonetheless it is

necessary to reflect on the fact that by interfering with our perceptions, by fooling the specific receptors, substantial changes could come about in our approach to foodstuffs. It is difficult to say whether this will result or not in any good, yet the fact remains that the industry is very interested in these studies. In the future, there may be an increased need to take into account the manipulation of food.

GIANNI DI GIACOMO

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Drinking wine Vs. eating wine

Many dishes call for it in cooking, as a reduction, to deglaze pans or as a marinade. However it would be a waste of vintage wines with grand bouquets therefore it makes more sense to drink them.

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Wine is not only a beverage but can be a food when through gastronomy it is used as an ingredient in many dishes and recipes. As Massimo Montanari often reminds us, wine can be many things. Of course drinking wine has slaked our thirst for centuries. Indeed up through the early 1800s drinking a decent glass of water was not easy, and was done with suspicion. In the past water was not safe to drink and there was no guarantee of its potability, thus confirming the validity of the old notion that water “will rot and rust your insides”. Therefore in the Mediterranean area people drank wine, or at least mixed it with water in the belief that doing so would make it safe to drink. But wine can also be a food, containing substances that nourish the body by proving a number of calories. And of course wine in the past was also consumed socially

given that the numerous other convivially consumed beverages we have today did not exist. And inebriation was not necessarily looked upon as something bad. Saint Augustine maintained that it was essential to get drunk once a month in order to be able to know one’s limits and not become a slave to wine. The expression “*e bè*” in the Romagna dialect was a synonym for wine. And as most medical texts from antiquity to the 18th century pointed out, wine had many health benefits, and was used as an excipient for some drugs or even as a medicine itself. Today we know that the enzymes contained in wine can be very beneficial in curing some diseases.

But let us focus on drinking wine today. What can be said, for example, about the “*barrique*” effect, that according to some when overused can flatten the taste, bouquet and personality of a wine? The same effect that has a stabilizing influence on wine and its longevity in addition to the dampening of aroma? And worrying about the alcohol content in wine is also a point of contention. Would it not be better simply not to over indulge, especially these days when common sense recommends drinking alcohol in moderation? Consumers’ interpretation of higher alcohol content as a result of climate change can also be a commercial nightmare for the producers.

As mentioned above, we also often find wine on our plates. Since the majority of dishes that call for wine primarily use it hot, either cooked or reduced, we must keep several things in mind. The alcoholicity, that is the majority of the calories, can be easily reduced through evaporation, with or without the flourish

of a flambé. Unfortunately, most of the other aromatic properties also tend to be lost with heat. This is why fine vintage wines with grand bouquets are wasted when cooked. What remains are the savory components such as sugars, minerals and organic acids that actually become concentrated when wine is reduced. A red wine’s color is maintained and remains fairly stable with heat and its health benefits are not diminished when cooked over a low flame. Finally, since it is an excellent solvent, wine is often used to deglaze the bottom of a pan and recover those tasty particles that make up the crust that is formed from sugar and protein at high heat, thus leading to the so-called process of “caramelization”. A more ancient use of uncooked wine is marination, which enhances the tenderization, infuses flavor and increases the conservation of meat. It also helps to reduce the “gaminess” of wild game, as in the classic “*salmi*”. A more modern use calls for small amounts of wine and liqueur to be used in gelatins and aspic, where the absence heat allows for the enhancement of the aromatic components. Must is also used to season cheese and salamis, and it is used as a reduction in making the traditional Romagna *saba*. And of course the organoleptic characteristics of wine make it a wonderful accompaniment to cheese, desserts and dried fruit.