

FEATURE

9 Roman Dishes You Need to Know (and Where to Get Them)

By Matt Rodbard | April 27, 2016



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Regional Italian cooking has swept across America, with Tuscan style steakhouses and Milanese risottorias attracting diners in search of authentic flavors of the Boot. (Of course, let's not forget our obsession with Neapolitan-style pizza.) As for Rome, what do 2.5 million locals and many more tourists share?

The food of Rome is exciting, exacting and considered some of the most enjoyable in all of Europe, as Katie Parla argues thoughtfully in her new cookbook, *Tasting Rome*. Parla moved to Rome in 2003 after graduating from college and has studied the cuisine ever since — both in Italy and back home in the States. And as it turns out, there are some pretty great U.S. restaurants cooking these dishes, both traditionally and adapted. Here are the key Roman dishes to know — including the ultra-of-the-moment *cacio e pepe* — and where to find them.



Porchetta

It seems like every New American has done a version of porchetta, a de-boned and slow-roasted “roll” of pork. The Instagram-worthy dish often uses many parts of the pig, including loin, shoulder and belly, and is coated with herbs (usually rosemary) and salt. The origins are pure Roman, and there are only a few places that prepare it the classic way. At Pennypacker’s in Somerville, MA, pork is rubbed with toasted fennel seeds, juniper berries, parsley rosemary and garlic, and slow-roasted for 12 hours, before being sliced and placed between crusty bread and garnished with an apple mostarda. It’s one of the best sandwiches in the Boston area.

Pennypacker’s, 514 Medford St., Somerville, MA; 857-523-8948

Union Restaurant, 37 E Union St., Pasadena; 626-795-5841



Photo by: Kristina Gill/Tasting Rome

Cacio e Pepe

The iconic Roman pasta, made with the simplest of ingredients (pasta, black pepper, Pecorino and olive oil), is found on all kinds of Italian menus in the States and has become something of a foodie craze. But in its most-classic form, the key is in the sauce—a creamy “condiment” (to quote Mario Batali) that is achieved by a very precise technique. “You shake the shit out of the pasta that activates the starch,” says Parla of the way chefs vigorously stir and agitate the pan of dente noodles, causing the sauce to transform from goopy to smooth. It’s a refined practice that is done exquisitely at Osteria Mozza in Los Angeles, Nancy Silverton’s stunning pasta emporium. Restaurants in the United States often introduce butter into this dish, and Silverton’s fans are hardly crying foul.

Osteria Mozza, 6602 Melrose Ave., Los Angeles; 323-297-0100

Locanda, 557 Valencia St., San Francisco; 415-863-6800



Pizza by the Slice

Pizza by the slice, Roman style, is nothing like what you will find on the white paper plate in New York City. It's cooked in long sheet pans, cut into rectangular pieces and sold by weight. The toppings are mostly vegetables, and sometimes mixed with a spicy sausage, with a thin and slightly crispy crust. The pizza bianca (simply olive oil and sea salt) is the most popular. The Foodshed in Napa has transformed what is a classic fast food into an elegant lunch dish. And "Pam Yung at Semilla is absolutely killing it with pizza by the slice experimentation," notes Parla of the pastry chef's rising interest in Roman pizza making. Parla often hosts pizza pop-ups at the Brooklyn restaurant.

The Foodshed; 3385 Old California Way, Napa; 707-255-3340

Semilla, No. 5, 160 Havemeyer St., Brooklyn; 718-782-3474



Carbonara

There are no rules with carbonara: it's more that the dish comes with a set of constants. There is a pasta (rigatoni or spaghetti). There is pork (guanciale or pancetta). There is black pepper. Sometimes there is an egg yolk, sometimes Parmigiano-Reggiano. But when you have a properly made plate of the stuff, you know you've hit the jackpot. There's nothing finer in life. But first you have to find it. "It's one of those dishes that is so incredibly bastardized in the U.S., that it would not be recognized by a Roman," says Parla with a laugh. Indeed, bad carbonara is like a bad tunc roll: you know it before you even take a bite. Thankfully, New York City chef Sara Jenkins has perfected her version at Porsena, using the classic rigatoni, egg and parm while subbing in tingly Szechuan peppercorns.

Porsena, 21 E 7th St., New York; 212-228-4923

Angelini Osteria, 7313 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles; 323-297-0070

Sportello, 348 Congress St., Boston; 617-737-1234



Photo by: Katie Parla

Gricia

If there was one dish that recalls the peasant origins of Roman cuisine, it would be gricia—a simple and rich pasta (usually spaghetti) tossed with guanciale, white wine and grated Pecorino Romano. Black pepper is typically added too. While carbonara is far more ubiquitous, Parla is convince that gricia will have its moment in the United States. “This is the one dish I want to see more of,” she says. At Marc Vetri’s Philadelphia trattoria Amis, the chef uses bucatini and pork belly to put his own spin on the rustic dish.

Amis, 412 S 13th St., Philadelphia; 215-732-2647



Fried Vegetables

In Rome, small fried things are ever-present: zucchini, squash blossoms, cheese rice balls, lamb brains. Seasonality is one of Italy's strictest culinary bylaws, and often chefs will pluck what's left from their market bin, dust it with flour, egg wash and bread crumbs and fry away the first course. According to Parla, many of the chefs at Portland's Ava Gene's have trained at the Sustainable Food Project at Rome's American Academy, and the menu includes a dedicated "Fritto" section.

Ava Gene's, 3377 SE Division St., Portland; 971-229-0571



Suppli

Suppli is an egg-shaped parcel of risotto rice flavored with tomato sauce, packed with a hunk of mozzarella, then breaded and fried. When done right, it's ridiculously good, like a fried mozzarella ball from the Roman food gods. It's a close cousin to the Sicilian arancini, though it's typically smaller and drowned in more red sauce. At Marta in New York City, chef Nick Anderer does his with no tomato sauce, and more with the flavors of cacao e pepe (like pecorino and black pepper).

Marta, 29 E 29th St., New York; 212-651-3800



Aperitivo

You can think of aperitivo (definition: “afternoon”) as Italian happy hour, where small bites like crudité and pizzette (a puff pastry with a dab of tomato sauce) are laid out — to be eaten for free — with a glass of wine or Aperol spritz. The practice was invented in Milan, but it’s found in many café and bars in Rome, where it has been adopted as its own. New York City has a couple of spots that does it well, the old-school/new-school Dante, as well as the luxurious four-star Del Posto.

Dante, 79-81 Macdougall St., New York; 212-982-5275

Del Posto, 85 10th Ave., New York; 212-497-8090



Photo by: L'Albero dei Gelati

Gelato

Rome is blessed with nearly 2,500 gelaterie, offering many flavors and styles. But, as Parla reports, many of these sellers offer an inferior product, aiming for volume over perfection. Thankfully, here in the States, gelato making has become art. Gelato, by definition, is lower in fat content and higher in sugar than its kissing cousin ice cream. At L'Albero dei Gelati in Brooklyn, the rotating menu utilizes fresh produce and high-quality products, serving unique flavors like lavender, organic lettuce and green beans and mint – along with classics like chocolate and strawberry.

L'Albero dei Gelati, 341 5th Ave., Brooklyn, NY; 718-788-2288

Capogiro Gelato Artisans, 117 S 20th St., Philadelphia; 215-636-9250

PLACES MENTIONED

Union Restaurant

Gastropub | Pasadena

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
25	19	24	\$54

Osteria Mozza

Italian | Hancock Park

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
26	23	23	\$74

Marta

Pizza | NoMad

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
24	21	23	\$50

L'Albero dei Gelati

Italian | Park Slope

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
26	20	22	\$20

Locanda

Italian | The Mission

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
25	21	22	\$56

Semilla

American | Williamsburg

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
26	22	26	\$117

Porsena

Italian | East Village

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
24	17	21	\$45

Sportello

Italian | Seaport District

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
26	19	23	\$53

Angelini Osteria

Italian | Fairfax

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
28	18	25	\$60

Amis

Italian | Washington Square West

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
26	23	25	\$53

Dante NYC

Bar | Greenwich Village

ATMO.	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
-	-	-	E

Del Posto

Italian | Chelsea

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
27	27	27	\$134

Capogiro Gelato Artisans

Ice Cream Shop | Rittenhouse Square

FOOD	DECOR	SERVICE	COST
26	16	21	\$8

RECOMMENDED ON ZAGAT
