



Barolo

Matthew Gavin Frank

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Book Synopsis:

At once an intimate travelogue and a memoir of a culinary education, the book details the adventures of a not-so-innocent abroad in Barolo, a region known for its food and wine (also called Barolo).

AT TABLE SERIES

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Book Description

After a childhood of microwaved meat and saturated fat, Matthew Gavin Frank got serious about food. His “research” ultimately led him to Barolo, Italy (pop. 646), where, living out of a tent in the garden of a local farmhouse, he resolved to learn about Italian food from the ground up. *Barolo* is Frank’s account of those six months.

At once an intimate travelogue and a memoir of a culinary education, the book details the adventures of a not-so-innocent abroad in Barolo, a region known for its food and wine (also called Barolo). Upon arrival, Frank began picking wine grapes for famed vintner Luciano Sandrone. He tells how, between lessons in the art of the grape harvest, he discovered, explored, and savored the gustatory riches of Piemontese Italy. Along the way we meet the region’s families and the many eccentric vintners, butchers, bakers, and restaurateurs who call Barolo home. Rich with details of real Italian small-town life, local foodstuffs, strange markets, and a circuslike atmosphere, Frank’s story also offers a wealth of historical and culinary information, moments of flamboyance, and musings on foreign travel (and its many alien seductions), all filtered through food and wine.

Author Biography

Matthew Gavin Frank’s books include *Sweat and Venom* (forthcoming from Barrow Street Press), and *Sagittarius Agitprop* (Black Lawrence Press), and the poetry chapbooks *Four Hours to Mpumalanga* (Pudding House Publications), and *Aardvark* (winner of the West Town Press annual chapbook contest). His work has appeared in *The New Republic*, *Creative Nonfiction*, *The Best Travel Writing 2008* and *2009*, *The Best Food Writing 2006*, *Epoch*, *Field*, *Crazyhorse*, *Indiana Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *North American Review*, *AGNI*, *Hotel Amerika*, *Gastronomica*, *Brevity*, *The Tampa Review*, *Sonora Review*, *The Literary Review*, *Willow Springs*, *The Florida Review*, *Pleiades*, *Ninth Letter*, *Confrontation*, *The Madison Review*, *Rosebud*, *Bellingham Review*, *Rhino* and others.

Matthew Gavin Frank was born and raised in Chicago. Bitten by the food, wine, and travel bug, he left home at age seventeen, embracing the vagabond lifestyle that often lent itself to work in the restaurant industry. He ran a tiny breakfast joint in Juneau, Alaska, worked the Barolo wine harvest in Italy’s Piedmont, sautéed hog snapper hung-over in Key West, designed multiple degustation menus for Julia Roberts’s private parties in Taos, New Mexico, served as a sommelier for Chefs Rick Tramonto and Gale Gand in Chicago, and assisted Chef Charlie Trotter with his Green Kitchen cooking demonstration at the Slow Food Nation 2008 event in San Francisco. He returned to academia and received his MFA in Poetry and Creative Nonfiction from Arizona State University. He taught creative writing to undergraduates in Phoenix, Arizona, and poetry to soldiers and their families near Fort Drum in upstate New York on the Canadian border.

Frank is the recipient of an Illinois Arts Council Fellowship, an Artist’s Grant to the Vermont Studio Center, the Sonoran Prize for Poetry, and numerous grants from the Virginia G. Piper Center for the Creative Arts. Presently, he lives in Michigan with his wife, Louisa, and is an assistant professor of creative writing at Northern Michigan University.

Praise for the Book

“A misfit in America, an unhappy cook in a series of second-rate restaurants, Frank seizes a chance to escape into a better world. We never learn how he first met Rafaella, or convinced her to let him pitch a tent behind Il Gioco dell’Oca, her bed-and-breakfast near Barolo. But there he is, struggling with minimal Italian, working the grape harvest with Luciano Sandrone, plunging headfirst into a world of mysterious, overwhelming sensations.”—*Wine Spectator*

“One swig of this book, and you’re hooked.”—*Napaman.com*

“This is pleasure not just in the subject of Barolo, but also in Frank’s writing. A master of the unexpected metaphor, Frank commands prose that is lively and original; he never resorts to cliché.”—*Gastronomica*

“Aaahhh . . . ! Here are all the joys of being young and exuberant and passionate and in love with women, and life, and better yet . . . in Barolo. This remarkable and enchanting tale makes me want to set the clock back many years and to book passage to Italy and to the sips of the world’s greatest wine, and to be inspired by all the things that make life such a wonderful journey! Kudos to Matthew Gavin Frank for reminding us what really makes life worth living!”—Charlie Trotter, chef, author, and host of PBS’s *The Kitchen Sessions with Charlie Trotter*

“If you love red wine, you’ll love this book. And it’s just as hard to put down this book as it is a glass of good red. This irresistible story takes you to the real Italy and its rich fragrant wine region where Barolo is made. I want to live in this book forever.”—Gale Gand, executive pastry chef and partner of Tru in Chicago and host of the Food Network’s *Sweet Dreams*

Please visit this book’s [Web page](http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/978-0-8032-4006-3-Barolo,674189.aspx?skuid=13534) (<http://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/product/978-0-8032-4006-3-Barolo,674189.aspx?skuid=13534>) for the most current praise.

Book Club Study Guide

Matthew Gavin Frank would be glad to talk with your book club—in person or online. He would also be glad to visit your bookstore or classroom. Please contact him at mattfrank76@yahoo.com OR barolobook@yahoo.com.

Can tasting be an art?

How can memory impact the way we taste? What is necessary in order for us to revise our eating habits?

According to this book, what is the importance of food and wine? Do you agree? Why or why not?

When the writer confronts his childhood memories within the context of Italian life, what happens?

What's the result of memory confronting the present?

Does the writer's narrative voice or style change depending on whether he is describing the past or the present? If yes, how so?

Does the writer evoke a sense of loneliness throughout the book, in spite of the hedonistic experiences?

How so? What are some examples?

How do the dynamics of relationships between the writer/traveler and Barolo's residents manifest themselves in Barolo?

Does Barolo, as a location, change the interior life of the writer/narrator? How so?

Does the style of writing affect you, as a reader in any specific way? For instance, does it make you hungry? Point to some specific examples that affected you most greatly.

Does the writer give you a sense of the region, its people, and its culture? In what ways?

Who were your favorite "characters" in this book? Why?

What surprised you most in this book? Did the book stir any specific curiosities in you?

Did you find the conclusion of the book resolved or unresolved? How so?

How did the writer/narrator change throughout the course of the book?

Did the book make you want to travel to Barolo? If so, what about the book stirred this desire within you?

Which sensory details did you find most effective? Why?

In nonfiction, what role does the imagination play?

Can an author speculate about the lives of others in memoir?

If you are a writer, what tools did you notice in this book that may impact your own work?

What are your favorite portions of the book? What will you take with you?

Would you like to read more work by Matthew Gavin Frank? His most recent works of poetry are *Sagittarius Agitprop* (Black Lawrence Press/Dzanc Books) and *Sweat and Venom* (forthcoming from Barrow Street Press, Spring 2010). He recently completed a memoir (tentatively entitled *Pot Farm*) about his seasonal work on a Northern California medical marijuana farm. He is at work on a new series of travel essays about his experiences in Oaxaca, Mexico.

For further information, visit www.matthewgfrank.com or email mattfrank76@yahoo.com / barolobook@yahoo.com.

Q&A With the Author

Q: How did you get started traveling?

A: Hmm. Perhaps it's as simple as indulging an innate curiosity about the world. As a kid, I always went out of my way to uncover new shortcuts between places on my bicycle—finding a new park, triangle of prairie, dogless backyard, school football field penetrable only via a small opening in a chain link fence, section of train track to cut through. I loved the things that I'd find there. Somehow they felt foreign—windows into an alternative way of living. The glass shards of broken 40-ouncers and beer cans, sure, but sometimes an abandoned pair of blue jeans, the Black Sabbath cassette tape so sun blistered it wouldn't play anymore, the tube of lipstick still streaked with the leavings of an implacably erotic red, and, as I hit puberty, the very placeable, and occasional, discarded porno magazine. Finding these hidden places and secret things in the neighborhood, as a kid, was as close to foreign travel as I could get then, and it woke in me that restless wanderlust.

Q: As a traveler and fact/story gatherer, what is your biggest challenge on the road?

A: Oftentimes, dough. Juggling employment, lodging (be it tent, motel room, flat...), and the time to write, take notes. I'm lucky in that my wife, Louisa, and I are on a similar wavelength when it comes to these things...most of the time. In Italy, when I was harvesting the Nebbiolo grape and mopping cantina floors, I was able to stay as long as I did by sleeping in a tent in the garden of a local farmhouse. I was paid in food and wine (supplemented with a very small stipend—enough for bus fare, bread, and the occasional truffle). I kept a very loose travel journal in a series of spiral notebooks purchased from the local tobacco shop, writing mostly in the evenings, at an outdoor table, with cold, red hands. When my wife and I were later seduced, on a road trip around the States, by New Mexico, we pulled up stakes and, again, looked to our tent. We lived for the summer out of that Coleman Cimarron, camping for free along the ski valley road outside of Taos. We bought this environmentally-friendly soap and shampoo and bathed in the frigid Hondo River. We dried off in this makeshift arena of lawn-and-leaf bags that we set up in a circle of trees. Once a week, we would splurge, drive to the hostel in Arroyo Seco, pay the six bucks apiece and take a proper (and probably 40-plus minute) shower. After cooking breakfast on our propane stove, I would spend the rest of the morning and early afternoon accessing those Italy notebooks, and writing longhand at the picnic table in a new spiral notebook, while Louisa would hike in the mountains. Then, we'd go wait tables at night. This was how I wrote the first draft of Barolo. For writing prose, that kind of set-up was ideal for me.

Q: What is your biggest challenge in the research and writing process?

A: I'm easily distracted. Sometimes this is a very good thing—good for research, good for writing. Sometimes, not so much. I was living in Alaska before I moved to Barolo. It was summer. After an Alaskan winter, without much sun, dealing with every patron and matron saint of the inhospitable, the outdoors, the hiking trails, the glacial lakes speak with loud voices. Sitting indoors and teaching myself the Italian language, as was my plan, inevitably took a back seat to a clear sky and weather that permitted, at sea level at least, short sleeves.

Q: Have you ever done other work to make ends meet?

A: Most of my work life has been spent in restaurants, or another faction of the food-and-wine industry—from washing dishes and bussing tables to working as a chef, sommelier, server, garde manger, manager... I co-founded the now-defunct Chicago Boys Catering Company in Juneau, Alaska, preparing such odd over-the-top items as Deconstructed Venison Osso Buco with Cremini-Venison Jus, Carrot Risotto, Braised Rainbow Shard, Saffron Ice Cream, and Bone Marrow Latte. Did I mention it was now defunct? I apprenticed in many kitchens throughout the States and Europe. I drove an ice cream truck. I packed computer parts into boxes in a warehouse. Ran the diesel ski lifts and did snow removal at a ski area in Alaska. Did some farm work—picking wine grapes and other fruit. The restaurant work in particular reinforced my obsession with food and the unique energy of the people who gravitate toward that industry. Without that work, and the desire to know and read a lot about it, I likely never would have found out about Barolo.

Q: What advice and/or warnings would you give to someone who is considering going into food or travel writing?

A: Don't skimp tent-wise. Purchase one that decently blocks out the rain. This is your home for a while. Make it so. Create a little nightstand in the corner with a stack of books you plan on reading, and your notebook. Keep your watch, glasses and lantern on it, each in their own little spot. It's strange how that little consistency can go a long way in creating a small ease within the big exhilaration of travelling.

Q: How/when did you decide to pursue a career in writing as opposed to one in the food/wine industry?

A: I suppose after having lived in quite a few places (Alaska, Italy, Key West, New Mexico), working in restaurants, I began to feel isolated from a writing community. While I found that the restaurant industry harbors one of the more intelligent factions of our culture, I also found that bringing up my love of poetry was one of the quicker ways to end a kitchen conversation, the sound of the chef's knife disemboweling the tomato taking over. I missed being around other writers, talking about writing, going to readings, getting drunk and piecing together a bad exquisite corpse on the dirty floor of some other poet's one-bedroom in the desert. So I went and got my MFA in Arizona. While I continued to supplement my writing (and teaching) with restaurant work after that, I realized that the community of writers is invaluable to me, my favorite blanket, so I continued to foster that path. But after all, in writing about food and wine, aren't I part of the food and wine industry?

Q: You write in a few different genres. How do you decide between genres once you have decided to write about something?

A: As someone who writes in multiple genres, the struggle, *Which genre for which topic?* occasionally asserts itself, but usually resolves itself quickly. Writing prose is more of a labor for me than writing poetry—oftentimes certain lines around which I’ll build a poem leak from the celestial monochord, and I’m lucky enough to be there to catch the drips. This, of course, takes practice, observation, trust, etc. Especially etc. The poet Bruce Cohen inscribes his books, “Be alert—Art can be anywhere!” so it’s the same kind of thing. The trick is down-tuning enough to notice what’s interesting about that trainyard storage container you pass while riding the Pere Marquette Amtrak through Hammond, Indiana. The beasts who nest there, and the beasts who chase them away. Anyhow: this is a long-winded way of saying, instinct.

Q: What are you reading now?

A: I just finished Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, which blew me away. I can’t believe it took me this long to get to it. Earlier this summer, I read Ron Carlson’s book on fiction craft, *Ron Carlson Writes a Story*. It’s a great behind-the-scenes account of how a great short fiction writer puts a piece together. It’s like taking a class from the guy. Apparently at UC-Irvine, where Carlson teaches, his colleagues give him shit about the title, follow him around the hallways muttering, “Ron Carlson walks down the stairs,” or “Ron Carlson sips from the water fountain.” I once went to a reading by the fiction writer Paul Friedman, titled “I Don’t Claim to be Paul Friedman,” and I think he caught a lot of shit from his colleagues too. I’ve learned a lesson here.

Additional Information

Events

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Author Website

<http://www.matthewgfrank.com>

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Recipes

BREAD AND COOKIES

Grissini and Baci di Dama

(Italian breadsticks and “lady-kisses” cookies)

Courtesy of Panetteria Cravero (Barolo, Piemonte, Italy).

Barolo’s panetteria, known as Panetteria Cravero, is run by Guillermo Cravero and two of his sisters. A third sister, Nella, heads Barolo’s Cantinella restaurant (not to be confused with Cantinetta, another local hot-spot). Panetteria Cravero is famous for their grissini and baci di dama cookies, purveying such delights to restaurants all over Italy, the remainder of Europe, the United States, and beyond.

For grissini:

2 pounds all-purpose flour

1 ounce compressed yeast

2 cups warm water

3 pinches salt

enough olive oil to grease a baking sheet

Dissolve a half-ounce of yeast in a cup of warm water; mix this with about three ounces of flour. Gently knead together and allow the dough to rest in a fairly warm spot for about ninety minutes, or until the size of the dough ball doubles. Into this doubled dough ball, heap about one pound, three ounces of flour; the rest of the yeast; the few pinches of salt; and just enough warm water to render the dough soft, silken, and elastic. Knead the dough until it peels freely from your hands. Form it into a ball, drape it with a towel, and let it rest for about five hours, or until doubled. Then combine the dough ball with the remaining water and flour, and knead until it is sleek and pliable. Cut or pinch the dough into small pieces; roll these pieces into long snakes on a counter or some sort of wooden board. Depending on the size of your oven, or your deftness with dough, these snakes can be arm-length or a bit shorter. Oil a baking sheet. Place the “grissini snakes” on the oiled baking sheet and, again, let them rest until doubled. Bake for ten minutes (or until browned) at a whopping 550 degrees Fahrenheit.

For baci di dama:

Baci di dama (or “lady-kisses”) can be made with an array of nuts. In the Piedmont, hazelnuts are preferred due to their local status. Almonds can easily be substituted. Or macadamias. Or pinenuts.

Pick your favorite and experiment.

1 cup hazelnuts (or as we’ve discussed . . .)

1 cup plus 1 ounce butter

1 cup sugar

1 cup flour

2 ounces bittersweet chocolate

Combine the hazelnuts with the butter, flour, and sugar until smooth and luscious. Form the mixture into small, ping-pong-sized balls; bake them on an oiled or buttered baking sheet for about fifteen minutes at 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Meanwhile, melt the chocolate down in a double-boiler. Once removed from the oven, plunge a cookie bottom into the chocolate and press it to the bottom of another cookie. Hold the two cookie-lovers in this position until they stick. Repeat with the remainder and allow them to cool (though the cookies will remain hot for each other).

ANTIPASTI

Carne Cruda

(Piemontese raw beef appetizer)

Carne cruda is a stunning way to open a multicourse meal. Unlike many cultures, the Piemontese do not add an egg to this dish, in favor of a stunning and often unfiltered olive oil.

1 pound filet of beef of optimal quality
juice of 2 lemons
3 tablespoons good, unfiltered olive oil (or about an equivalent amount to the lemon juice)
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 white anchovy, chopped (optional)
salt and pepper, to taste

Garnishes:

Traditional Piemontese garnishes include any or all of the following: shaved white truffle, drizzle of white truffle oil, slivers of parmigiano-reggiano cheese, chiffonade of fresh arugula, thinly sliced porcini mushroom.

In a dry skillet, sear the beef filet over high heat on all sides (about thirty seconds per side). Trim away the seared portions, leaving only the raw interior (this process is for the bacterially neurotic, removing all “impurities” from the surface of the meat). Eat the seared sections as you cook, or save them for tomorrow’s steak-and-eggs breakfast. Chop the raw meat with a knife. Do not use a meat/sausage grinder as this would destroy the silken texture of your optimal cut. Toss the chopped beef with the lemon juice, olive oil, salt and pepper, crushed garlic cloves, and, if so desired, the white anchovy. Let the beef marinate for about an hour (at least fifteen minutes and up to two hours, depending on how long you want the lemon juice to “cook” the meat). Remove the garlic prior to serving. Garnish with traditional garnishes.

Prosciutto Crudo con Insalatina all’Aceto di Barolo

(prosciutto with small salad garnished with Barolo vinegar)

1 leg of pork
5 bulbs of garlic
7 ounces black peppercorn
2 cups salt
2 tablespoons cloves
a good green (such as arugula), chopped
Barolo vinegar (can substitute excellent-quality red wine vinegar)
salt and pepper, to taste
white truffle oil
an excellent, unfiltered olive oil
thinly sliced porcini mushroom (optional)
slivers of parmigiano-reggiano cheese (optional)

Make a paste of the garlic and rub it over the pork leg. Grind peppercorns coarsely. Mix the dry spices and pack them on to the pork leg over the garlic. The pork leg should be completely covered with spices. You may need more, depending on the size of the leg. Put the leg on a rack in a large pan, cover, and store in a cool, dry place (some people use a refrigerator for this stage) for six weeks.

After six weeks, rinse the leg completely with water and vinegar. Wrap the meat in a thin cloth (such as a cheesecloth), and hang it in a cool, dry place for approximately eight months.

When it is ready, slice the prosciutto very thin.

Toss the salad greens with enough olive oil and Barolo (or red wine) vinegar to coat. Salt and pepper to taste, and drizzle with white truffle oil.

On a plate, place a small amount of salad next to two slices of prosciutto. If you choose, garnish the salad with mushroom and cheese.

Salamina da Sugo

(essentially . . .)

This rare, banned Italian dish begins with the grinding of the “less noble” but more flavorful parts of the pig: liver, tongue, belly, shoulder, chin, top neck, throat lard, cheek, thigh. The ground meat is then coupled and cured with an array of spices--types and amounts differ with each producer. Typical spices include salt, pepper, nutmeg, cinnamon, clove, and garlic. Red wine (approximately two liters per ten kilograms of meat, or eight and a half cups per twenty-two pounds of meat) is added to the mixture--usually a Sangiovese, Barbera, or Semisecco del Bosco Eliceo. Certain producers also add rum, grappa, or brandy.

The mixture is then packed into a pork bladder, tied with twine, and traditionally divided into eight segments. In a well-ventilated, dark chamber, at about 50 degrees Fahrenheit, the salamina is hung to ripen and age for at least one year. During this time, the salamina is periodically brushed with olive oil and vinegar.

Once sufficiently aged, the salamina will bear a protective coating of white mold. Prior to preparation, the mold is rinsed away and the cased meat is soaked in lukewarm water for at least twelve hours. After the soaking session, the salamina is placed inside a cloth bag, which is then tied to the center of a long wooden stick. The stick is laid across the top of a large stockpot, so that the salamina bag is hanging in the middle, away from the pot’s bottom and sides. The pot is filled with water, and the salamina cooks for about four hours at a low simmer. Once ready, the salamina is cut from the bag and gently removed from its casing with a spoon. The salamina’s wine is released during the cooking process, yielding a viscous and spicy sauce.

Go ahead. Give it a try . . .

Minestra di Ceci

(chickpea soup)

Courtesy of Adriana Pittatore.

Minestra di ceci is a popular Piemontese soup, typically served in the fall and winter. Serves six.

2 1/2 cups chickpeas, soaked, boiled, and rinsed (can substitute canned chickpeas)
5 cups chicken stock or water
1 small onion, chopped
1 stalk celery, diced
2 small carrots, peeled and chopped
2 cups fresh spinach, chopped
3 tablespoons olive oil
1 sprig fresh rosemary, chopped
4 garlic cloves, minced
1 1/2 cups tomato, chopped
salt and pepper, to taste

Blend half the chickpeas with one cup of the chicken stock or water in a blender. Over medium heat, add the olive oil to a stockpot and cook the onion, carrots, and celery for three to four minutes. Add the garlic and rosemary, and cook for one more minute, stirring occasionally. Add the tomatoes and cook for five minutes, allowing the tomatoes to release their juice. Add the chickpea puree, half the remainder of the whole chickpeas, and the remainder of the stock. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for about an hour. Add the remaining whole chickpeas and the spinach, season to taste with salt and pepper, simmer ten more minutes, and serve in shallow bowls.

PASTA

Tajarin with Savoy Cabbage, Mushroom, Hazelnut, and Sage Butter

Tajarin is like the Piemontese version of tagliatelle but cut a bit thinner. This recipe can work just as easily with fettuccine, linguine, or spaghetti cuts of pasta as well. This recipe calls for fresh pasta (which will really make the dish sing), but dried pasta can be substituted if time is an issue. The recipe yields either four main-course portions or eight mid-course portions.

For pasta dough:

1 3/4 cups all-purpose flour, unbleached and sifted
2 teaspoons olive oil
2 teaspoons milk
6 large egg yolks
1 large egg
enough coarse cornmeal to lightly dust the cut pasta (about 3 to 6 pinches)

For sauce:

5 tablespoons unsalted butter
1/4 cup fresh sage leaves, finely chopped
2 sage leaves per plate for garnish
1 cup mushrooms, sliced
1 cup chiffonade of Savoy cabbage
1/4 cup hazelnuts, chopped (can substitute walnuts, if necessary)
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
1/2 cup onion, chopped or thinly sliced
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 teaspoon balsamic vinegar
salt and pepper, to taste
parmigiano-reggiano cheese for garnish, freshly grated or finely chopped

For pasta dough:

On a clean, dry work surface, heap the flour into a mound, then create a circular well in the center. Into the well, add the wet ingredients. With your index finger, slowly stir the wet ingredients in a circular motion until the surrounding flour incorporates. Once the dough begins to thicken a bit, fold the remaining flour into the well; knead the dough for fifteen to twenty minutes until it is smooth, not sticky, and a bit elastic. (Initially, the dough will look a bit ragged.) Wrap the dough ball in plastic wrap and let it rest for thirty minutes. Clean the work surface. With a knife, cut the dough ball into four equal-sized pieces. Keep the remaining pieces plastic wrapped while working with each. Dust the work surface with a bit of flour, and with a rolling pin, roll the sections of the dough ball until they are about 1/8 inch thick. (If you have a hand-crank or electric pasta roller, this step is a breeze. With the roller, pass the dough through the widest setting three times. Switch to a thinner setting, and repeat. Continue until you have reached the thinnest setting.) With a knife, carefully cut your pasta to the desired “noodle” width. Some pasta rollers have a setting for this step as well. Dust the cut pasta with coarse cornmeal (to prevent sticking); set it in a loose pile until you have finished this process with the remaining dough.

Cooking the fresh pasta:

Boil in lightly salted water until cooked (for fresh pasta, this should take about two minutes or so). The pasta can be made ahead and frozen. To work with the frozen pasta, DO NOT DEFROST IT. Simply add the frozen pasta to the boiling salted water and allow it to cook until finished (only about three minutes or so). Drain in a colander. In the colander, drizzle a small amount of olive oil over the pasta, and stir to prevent sticking.

For sauce:

In a dry skillet, over medium heat, toast the chopped hazelnuts for about two minutes, circulating them throughout the pan to prevent burning. Remove them from the pan and set aside. Add olive oil to the pan and sauté the onion and cabbage for about four minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the mushrooms, garlic, and hazelnuts; cook, stirring constantly, for one minute. Add the balsamic vinegar and cook for another two minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the butter and chopped sage, and lower the heat to medium-low. Cook, stirring occasionally, for about one minute. Season to taste with salt and pepper.

To finish:

Either portion the pasta onto plates and drizzle the sauce over the top, or add the pasta to the sauce skillet and toss to coat. Garnish each plate first with parmigiano-reggiano cheese, then the two sage leaves, arranged in a V at the top-center of the pasta. Eat noisily.

DOLCI

Saffron Panna Cotta with Moscato-Macerated Carrot, Shaved Dark Chocolate, and Garam Masala Syrup

Panna cotta is a traditional Piemontese Italian dessert (literally meaning “cooked cream”) that is simultaneously rich and light. This recipe is a riff on tradition, beginning with the Italian base and adding global flavors. All of the prep work can be done a day ahead. Serves eight.

For panna cotta:

2 1/2 cups heavy cream

1/2 cup whole milk

1 tablespoon unflavored powdered gelatin (or 1 1/2 sheets of “sheet” gelatin)

1/3 cup sugar

2 tablespoons cold, filtered water (or, if using “sheet” gelatin, enough water to cover the sheets and to allow them to “bloom”—in other words, let the gelatin soak in a bit of water until it becomes akin to the consistency of a soft contact lens)

1 teaspoon saffron threads

For carrot:

3 large carrots, peeled

1 cup Moscato (Piemontese Italian dessert wine; can substitute Asti Spumante sparkling wine or, for a stronger flavor, grappa or rum)

2 tablespoons sugar

For chocolate:

good-quality dark chocolate bar

sharp knife

For garam masala syrup:

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 cup water

1/4 teaspoon garam masala spice (can substitute curry powder, or cumin, or five spice)

For panna cotta:

In a saucepan, combine the gelatin and water and let stand for a couple of minutes. Heat the water-gelatin mixture over low heat until it is dissolved, then remove it from the heat. If using “sheet” gelatin, simply remove the bloomed gelatin from its water bath and discard the water. In another saucepan (this one a bit larger), combine the cream, milk, and sugar; bring to a boil, stirring incessantly. Remove from the heat, and stir in the gelatin mixture (or add the bloomed “sheet” gelatin) and saffron. Cover and let steep for a half-hour. Divide the mixture into eight half-cup ramekins, four one-cup ramekins, or one magnanimous four-cup ramekin (don’t listen to me; go for the eight half-cuppers). Allow to cool at room temperature, and chill for six hours or overnight, until set.

For carrot:

After peeling the carrots, continue to use the peeler to strip each carrot into a series of ribbons. In a large cup or bowl, toss the carrots with the sugar and Moscato, and refrigerate for six hours or overnight.

For chocolate:

Um . . . Shave the chocolate. With the knife. Set aside.

For garam masala syrup:

Combine the sugar, water, and garam masala in a saucepan. Stirring occasionally, bring the mixture to a boil. Once the mixture comes to a boil, remove from the heat and allow it to cool and thicken.

To finish:

Immerse the ramekin bottoms in a bowl of hot water for a few seconds. Run a knife along the edges of the panna cotta, and invert the ramekin onto the center of a plate. Top each panna cotta with just enough macerated carrot to cover the top, but not the sides. Scatter the shaved chocolate around the panna cotta in a ring. Drizzle the garam masala syrup, sparingly, lightly, in a loose ring around the outside of the chocolate (you will likely have extra syrup and carrot, both of which can be refrigerated and stored). Eat lustily.

The Revisionist Caprese Salad

Few things (eating notwithstanding) provide greater pleasure than taking an established dish and spinning it, ever so slightly, to the left. The resulting dish will play by the rules of the original, while reinventing itself within these distinct parameters. In this world, what was once an appetizer salad can now be a dessert.

For basil ice cream:

1/3 cup fresh basil leaves
1/2 teaspoon orange zest
1 cup heavy cream
2 large egg yolks
1/4 cup sugar

For mozzarella syrup:

1/2 cup finely chopped or shredded fresh buffalo mozzarella, plus 4 thinly sliced discs of buffalo mozzarella, about 1/4 inch thick and 2 inches in diameter
1/2 cup whole milk
1/2 cup sugar

For oven-dried sweet tomato:

1 tomato (heirloom if possible--if not, any good tomato will do), sliced thinly to about 1/4 inch thick
1 cup tomato simple syrup (recipe follows)

For tomato rock candy:

1 cup tomato water (recipe follows)
3 cups sugar

For basil ice cream:

In a small saucepan, combine the orange zest, the cream, and approximately half the basil. Bring to a boil and remove from the heat. Cover and steep for forty-five minutes. In a small bowl, beat the egg yolks together with 1/4 cup of sugar. After the ice cream mixture has steeped, bring it once again to a boil. In order to temper the eggs (a process that prevents the eggs from scrambling), very slowly pour some of the hot cream mixture into the egg bowl, while simultaneously whisking the beaten eggs. Then pour the tempered eggs from the bowl into the cream saucepan; cook, stirring often for an additional minute or two, until the mixture coats the back of a spoon. Using your kitchen facilities, make an ice water bath. You can, quite simply, stop up your kitchen sink, add about six inches of cold water (the water level will depend on the height of your saucepan--you certainly don't want any water creeping into your ice cream mixture), and a bit of ice. Place the saucepan in the ice water bath, stirring occasionally until the mixture is cool. Add the mixture to a food processor, and blend thoroughly with the other half of the fresh basil. Strain through a fine-mesh strainer, pour into an ice cream machine, and freeze. Store the ice cream in an airtight container in the freezer until it is needed.

For mozzarella syrup:

Combine the mozzarella, milk, and 1/2 cup of sugar in a small saucepan and bring slowly to a boil. Remove from the heat, and puree the cheese into the liquid with an immersion blender. (If you don't have an immersion blender, add the mixture to a regular blender, puree, and return it to the saucepan.) Cover the saucepan and steep for forty-five minutes. Return the mixture to medium heat and let it steam (but not boil) for an additional three to five minutes, stirring often. Remove from the heat and strain through a fine-mesh strainer. Let cool at room temperature.

For tomato water:

To make approximately two cups of tomato water, puree about ten to fifteen good large tomatoes in a food processor with a small pinch of salt. Spoon the puree into an adequately sized piece of cheesecloth and tie it up. Suspend a strainer over a large bowl, place the tied-up cheesecloth into the strainer, and set in the refrigerator overnight, or until the juice has dripped from the tomatoes into the bowl. You can save the tomato solids for a homemade vegetable stock. Store the tomato water in the refrigerator (it should keep for about a week, but the leftovers can be frozen).

For tomato simple syrup:

Combine one cup tomato water with one cup sugar (in other words, equal parts sugar and tomato water, depending on the yield you desire). Stir. Bring to a boil in a medium saucepan, remove from the heat, and let stand at room temperature until cool. After plating, store any leftover syrup in the refrigerator.

For oven-dried sweet tomato:

Preheat the oven to 275 degrees Fahrenheit. Dip each tomato slice in the tomato simple syrup and place on a baking rack over a sheet pan. Bake the tomatoes in the oven for about twenty minutes, then flip the slices and bake for an additional fifteen minutes, until the tomatoes have caramelized and dried. Cool at room temperature. Reserve the remaining tomato syrup at room temperature until the dish is plated.

For tomato rock candy:

In a small saucepan, combine the tomato water and 1 1/2 cups of sugar. Heat over medium-high heat, stirring often, and boil until the sugar dissolves. Add the remaining 1 1/2 cups of sugar, and continue to stir until it dissolves. Remove from the heat. Let the mixture stand for five minutes at room temperature, then pour it into a large, sturdy drinking glass or glass jar. Meanwhile, tie a few lengths of string along a pencil. The string should be about half the height of the glass or jar. Balance the pencil over the mouth of the glass or jar so that the ends of the strings hang in the mixture. Allow to sit at room temperature for at least twenty-four hours or up to a week (the longer you wait, the larger the rock candy crystals). Strip the crystals from the strings. If you have more candies than you can use for this recipe, save them for a late-night indulgence.

Plating:

Dip each slice of buffalo mozzarella into the tomato syrup. Place a slice at the center of each plate. With a small ice cream scoop, place a sphere of basil ice cream on top of the mozzarella slice (the scoop of ice cream should just cover the mozzarella). Top the basil ice cream with a slice of oven-dried sweet tomato. Spoon a small amount of mozzarella syrup around the plate. Float a few crystals of the tomato rock candy in the syrup.

Eating:

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhh. Revisionism.