

THE ITALIAN WAY

By Janine Robinson



Growing up in a small rural town in Southern Italy, Chef Marco Criscuolo loved helping his mother and grandmother in the kitchen—especially when they made pasta.

"We ate pasta at least once, sometimes twice a day," said Chef Marco, head chef at Andrea Ristorante. "What I loved was starting from scratch from such simple ingredients like flour and water and how that led to a complete family meal to share together. It's a way to unify people, and spend time with those you love and care about."

But when Chef Marco, the youngest of three brothers, started expressing his desire to cook as a profession, his parents started to worry.

"They were concerned and told me, 'It's not what you see on TV,'" he recalled. "'You will be going to work when other people are celebrating,' they said."

Chef Marco tried to appease his parents by studying economics in college. "But after a year, I told them that was not what I wanted to do."

He then attended culinary school at Italy's Istituto Alberghiero Cesare Braico in Brindisi for five years, and traveled all over Europe to do "ragings," or internships at the finest restaurants.

"While my friends were spending time at the beach, I was going to the seasonal job," said Chef Marco, now 32. "I now joke with my mom and say, 'You should have warned me when I insisted on this career.'"

Inspired by years of watching US action-adventure shows, such as "MacGyver" and "Magnum, P.I.," he dreamed of moving to the US, and finally crossed the Atlantic for a job in Santa Barbara. He fell in love with Southern California, where the climate reminded him of home.

But his heart was in Italy, mainly with Italian food, especially Italian pasta.



When The Resort at Pelican Hill had an opening in 2011, he jumped at the opportunity to work as sous chef at Pelican Grill, and quickly moved over to the Resort's signature Italian restaurant, Andrea, as sous chef.

"What I'm trying to do here every single day is take what I learned growing up in Italy, and little by little, twisting it a bit on the American palate and the dishes I prepare," he said. "I think I'm so fortunate that the kind of Resort guests and locals that dine with us travel widely, and they often know what good fresh pasta is. They've been to Italy and all over the world."

Chef Marco, who runs, swims, deep-sea fishes and reads cookbooks in his free time, still loves traveling and dining at other restaurants.

"I'm curious and like to go out and see what others are doing," he said. "How they present the food, cook it and I go to the local farmer's markets, too."

Preparing authentic Italian dishes by hand—including some of his favorite family recipes—for Andrea diners keeps his precious childhood days close by.

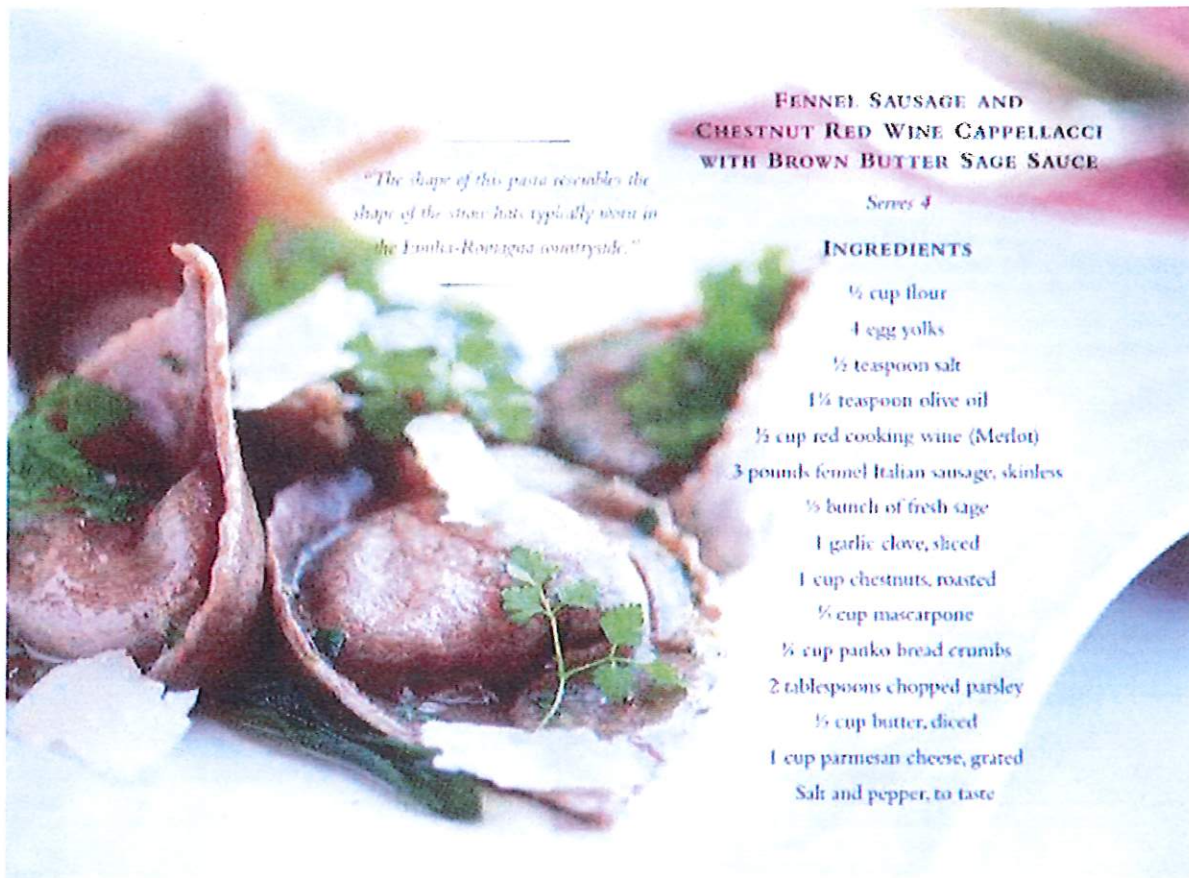
"I have memories of waking up on a Sunday morning and seeing my mom making fresh pasta early in the morning for the Sunday feast, and getting the whole family together," he said.

Andrea features all types of homemade pastas, including several gluten-free options. But Chef Marcos' favorite shape was called orecchiette, which resembles its namesake, "small ear." "It's from the region I'm from, called Puglia, and the pasta holds the sauce so nicely," he said.

He loves to incorporate seasonal vegetables from the nearby Irvine Ranch as fresh as those he used to pick in his family's vegetable garden, which also had figs and ancient olive trees.

One of his favorite dishes is orecchiette with rapini and Burrata cheese, a whole grain pasta dish served with broccoli rabe.

"Fresh ingredients and the simplicity of the recipe is what makes it such an elegant dish," he said. "I could eat pasta every day."



"The shape of this pasta resembles the shape of the stone hats typically worn in the Emilia-Romagna countryside."

**FENNEL SAUSAGE AND
CHESTNUT RED WINE CAPPELLACCI
WITH BROWN BUTTER SAGE SAUCE**

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup flour
- 4 egg yolks
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1½ teaspoon olive oil
- ½ cup red cooking wine (Merlot)
- 3 pounds fennel Italian sausage, skinless
- ½ bunch of fresh sage
- 1 garlic clove, sliced
- 1 cup chestnuts, roasted
- ½ cup mascarpone
- ½ cup panko bread crumbs
- 2 tablespoons chopped parsley
- ½ cup butter, diced
- 1 cup parmesan cheese, grated
- Salt and pepper, to taste

PREPARATION

Heat 1½ teaspoon of olive oil in a medium skillet. Add half of the sage, chopped, and the garlic, then sauté about 1 minute until garlic is lightly colored. Add sausage and cook about 3-4 minutes over medium-high heat, stirring to break up larger pieces, until liquid evaporates and meat browns. Drain off fat, and transfer meat mixture to a medium bowl. Stir in the chestnuts, mascarpone, bread crumbs, parsley, salt and pepper, then set filling aside.

In a small pot on low heat, reduce the red wine to ¼ cup. Let wine reduction cool, then fold it into the 4 egg yolks. Place flour in a mound on a lightly floured wooden board. Make an indent in the middle of the mound, and add egg mixture into the well. Whisk eggs together, slowly incorporating the surrounding flour until the mixture becomes too thick to whisk. With floured hands, finish combining the flour until the dough no longer sticks to your hands. Knead dough on a floured surface for about 5 minutes or until it becomes smooth and elastic. Cover dough tightly with plastic wrap, and let rest for 30 minutes.

Unwrap dough, and cut in half twice creating four pieces. On a hard surface, flatten dough into paper thin sheets until

you can see your fingers through it. Using a pastry cutter, divide the sheets into strips approximately 2¼ inches wide, and then cut into squares the same width.

Place a heaping teaspoonful of filling in the center of each square. On two sides of each square, dab or brush a little water. Fold one corner of the pasta to the opposite corner to form triangles, carefully pushing out any air from the center toward the edge before sealing. Fold the outer corners of the triangle together, and seal by pressing down gently. The cappellacci will have four layers of pasta dough, so press down to squash the dough, keeping the shape and making it less thick and chewy.

Cook the cappellacci in a pot of boiling salted water for about 5 minutes, until the pasta begins to float. In the meantime, prepare the sauce by melting the butter in a skillet over medium heat and letting it turn a caramel brown color. Add the remaining sage leaves to infuse in the butter. Add a ladle of water from the pot that the cappellacci are cooking in, then whisk sauce to create an emulsion. Remove cappellacci from boiling water with a slotted spoon, and place into the sauce, gently coating them. Serve with grated parmesan cheese.

**ORECCHIETTE,
ROASTED BUTTERNUT SQUASH,
CLAMS AND PANCETTA**

Serves 4

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup flour
- 1 cup semolina
- ½ cup water
- 7 tablespoons olive oil
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 pounds butternut squash,
diced ¾-inch thick
- 1 cup Italian-style pancetta,
diced ¾-inch thick
- 1 sprig of thyme
- 1 pound fresh Manila clams
- 1 tablespoon shallots, finely diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 2 cups dry white wine
- 1 cup bread crumbs
- 2 tablespoons parsley, finely chopped
- 1 tablespoon sweet paprika
- Salt and pepper, to taste

PREPARATION

Mix together flour and semolina in a bowl, then place mixture in a mound on a lightly floured wooden board. Make an indent in the middle of the mound, and add salt and half of the water. Gently mix flour into the liquid, slowly incorporating more water as needed, until dough becomes a smooth, elastic ball. (More water may be required depending on the flour.) Cover dough tightly with plastic wrap, and let sit for 20 minutes.

Unwrap dough, cut in half and flatten on a hard surface. Break off plum-sized balls, roll into tubes about a half-inch to three-quarters of an inch thick, and cut into quarter-inch discs. With your thumb, flatten each disc, dragging it slightly toward you so the dough curves around your finger to resemble the shape of a small ear. Allow pasta to dry on a flat tray for 4-6 hours or overnight.

In a sauté pan, heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil. Add the bread crumbs and paprika. Sauté until golden brown, then season with salt, to taste.

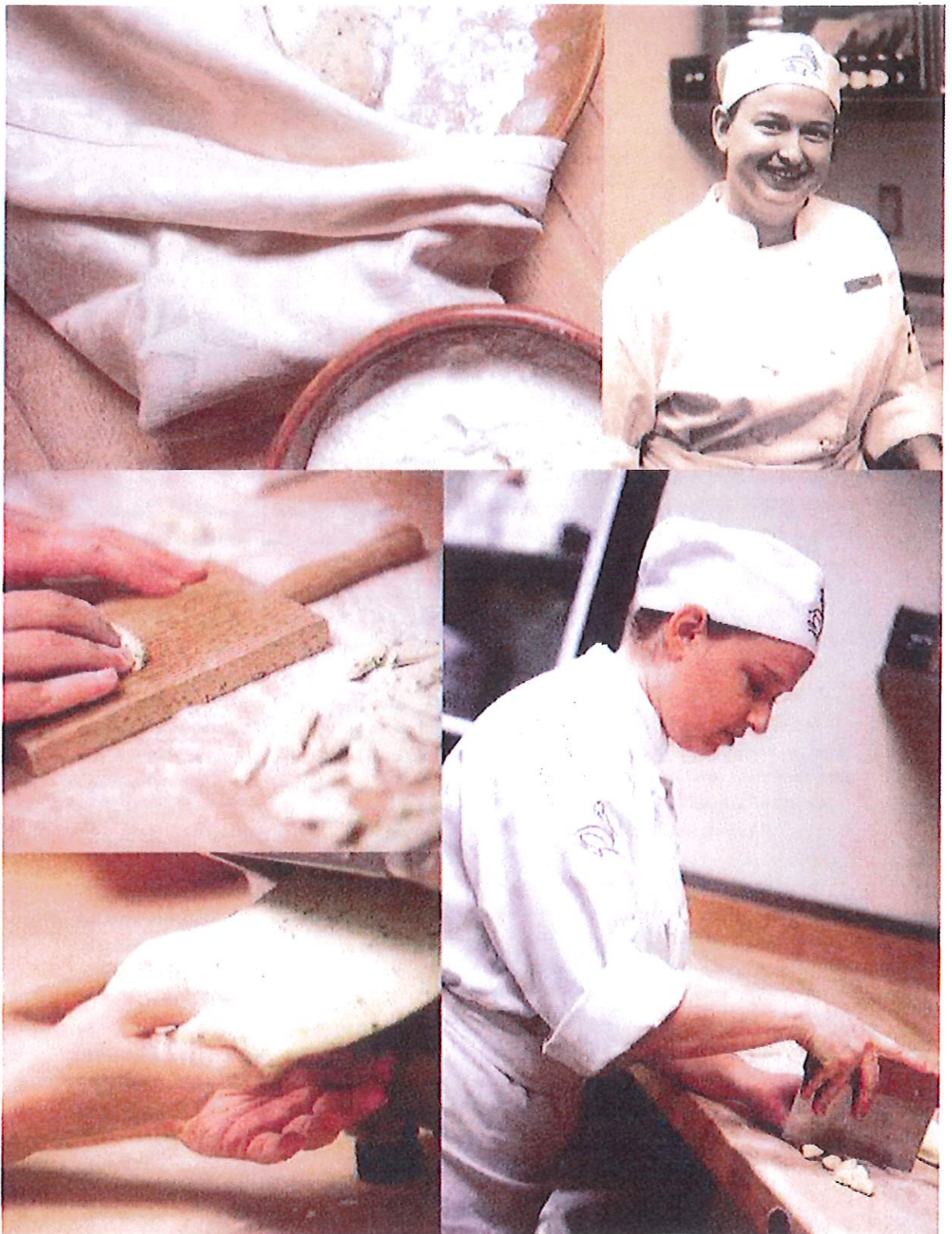
In a large pot, boil 8 quarts of salted water, then add the orecchiette pasta, stirring constantly in the beginning to prevent it from sticking together. Cook until al dente. Meanwhile, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil in a hot sauté pan. Add the pancetta and roast for one minute. Add the diced butternut squash and thyme. Sauté until golden brown. Season with salt and pepper, then set aside.

In another large sauté pan, heat 2 tablespoons of olive oil. When the oil is almost smoking, add the shallots, garlic and clams. Deglaze with the white wine to remove and dissolve browned residue from pan. Cover and simmer for 6-8 minutes or until most of the clams have opened. Add the butternut squash, pancetta and 2 tablespoons of parsley.

Drain pasta in a colander, reserving a cup of the water. Add reserved water and pasta into the clam pan and mix thoroughly. Drizzle with olive oil, and taste to check seasoning. Dish pasta into a bowl, and sprinkle the breadcrumbs on top, then serve immediately.

*"It's usually served with bitter green
Southern Italian style, but I used roasted
butternut squash as an autumn flavor."*





PASTA PASSIONS

As her favorite opera singers belt out arias on her iPod, Julia Holland joyfully toils away in the dedicated pasta room at Andrea Ristorante. Pressing, pulling, slicing and shaping dough into tiny morsels for hours on end, she considers her job making homemade pasta a unique art.

"You don't see many people spending time at just one thing anymore," said the 24-year-old master pasta maker for the Resort. "I feel very fortunate all the time."

With her singular passion for Italian pasta, Holland sometimes believes she might have the wrong last name.

"My family background is obviously not Italian, but some days I feel like it should be," says Holland, who comes from Irish and Dutch descent. "Food has always been a huge part of my life."

While growing up in Lancaster, California, Holland was surrounded by "foodies," especially her mom's best friend, who she called "Aunt Nora" and watched make homemade pasta, and then learned her techniques.

"It looks so complicated to make when you watch, and when you make it for people they are so in awe," she said. "There are so many things you can do with just one recipe. You can find versions of it in almost every culture, from egg noodles to ramen and spaetzle."

During a high school trip to Italy when she was 18, Holland saw pasta being made in restaurants—from cavarelli and ravioli to tagliatelle and orecchiette—and that sealed her devotion to the magic dough.

"From there on, that opened my eyes," she said. "That's when I started to really drive toward a career making pasta."

Holland set out on her own to learn the best recipes, techniques and secrets about making perfect pasta. "I researched things on my own, and did a lot of work at catering companies. I was always reading up on it."

She attended Le Cordon Bleu culinary school in Pasadena, and after graduating, a friend told her the Resort was looking for a full-time pasta maker.

"I knew I had such a personal passion for making pasta, and I have been in the pasta room here ever since," she said.

Holland makes nearly all the pasta at the Resort, mainly for the Italian restaurant Andrea but also for In-Room Dining, Piccolo and, sometimes, Pelican Grill and private banquets.

As queen of her pasta room, Holland uses several machines to help roll out ribbons of dough. But much of the pasta she cuts, rolls and lovingly shapes by hand.

"I'm loving it here," she says. "I have my own space and tools. It's just me and the pasta."

Her boss, Chef Marco Cristuolo, has been the perfect mentor.

"Chef Marco shares his family recipes and techniques and he says it's about being passionate and feeling it. Every time he talks about his family teaching him, it's all about being happy and making it. It's not just about the techniques, he says, you need to have the emotion to put into it."

"It's all about how you feel while you make it. You have to have a love for what you're creating since the pasta will show that in the texture," she said.

As much as Holland longs for a return trip to Italy, she is grateful to work in the Italian-centered world of the Resort.

"I just love the Italian culture," she said. "There's just something about it. It's romantic, and beautiful and I'm so fortunate to be a part of it here in Newport Beach. I feel like it's a little hidden Italy." □

For Andrea reservations please call 877-624-6845.