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Opening Extract from...

From Seed to Plate

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SALAD OF PRAWNS with 'Lattuga' Sauce, Basil and Orange Segments

by Chef Maurizio Morelli, Latium, London

SERVES 4

20 large uncooked prawns

2 heads of lettuce (Regina dei Ghiacci)

extra-virgin olive oil

2 oranges

1 clove of garlic, finely sliced

8 basil leaves

salt and freshly ground black pepper

CLEAN THE PRAWNS FROM THEIR SHELLS, removing the heads, and put aside.

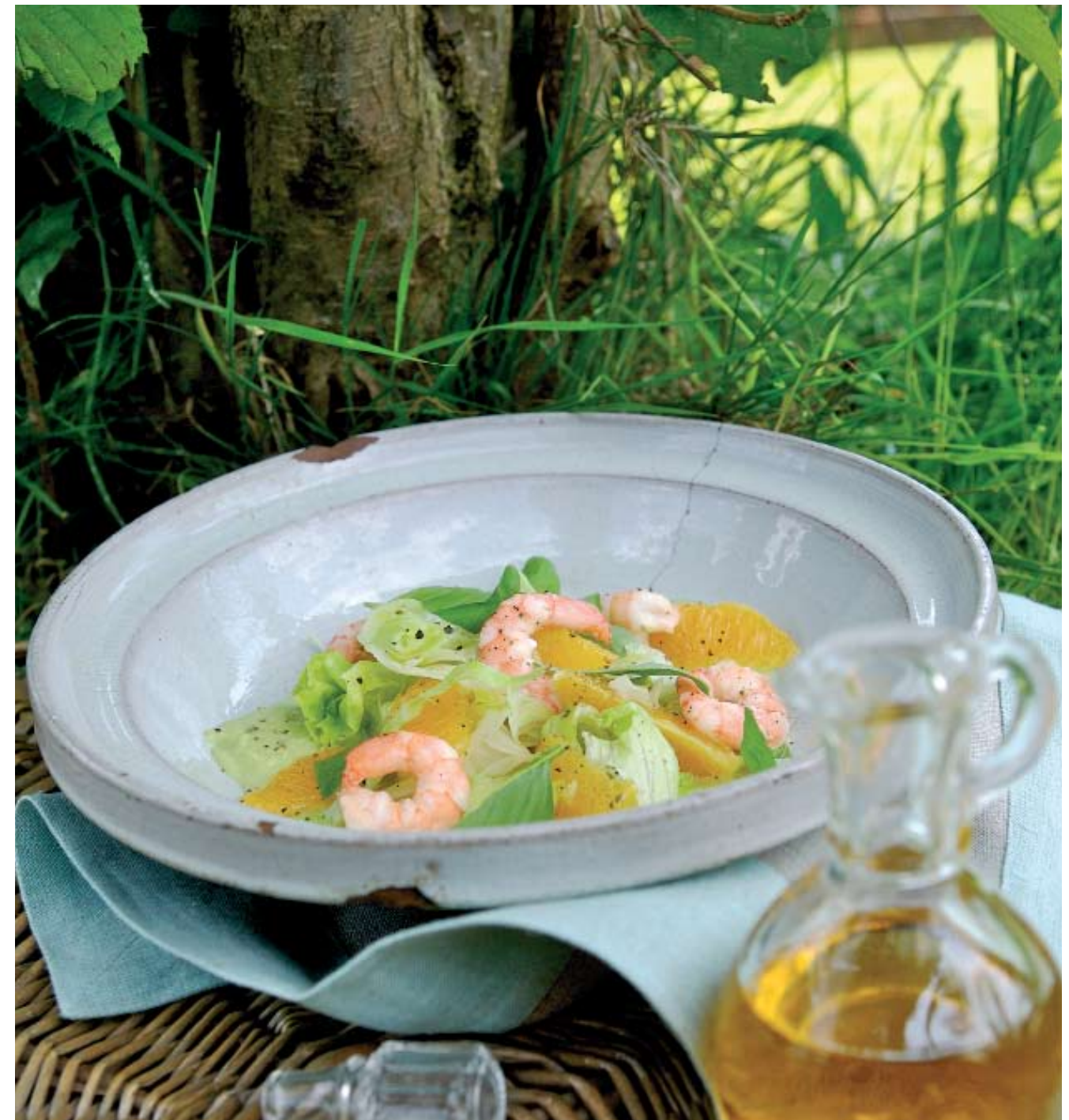
Wash the lettuce leaves and cook half of them in boiling salted water for 5 minutes. Strain the lettuce from the water and place in a blender with 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil. Blend to create a smooth sauce.

Peel the oranges, divide into deseeded segments and mix with the remaining lettuce leaves. Season to taste with salt and pepper and dress with some olive oil.

Heat a frying pan with olive oil, add the prawns and garlic and cook for 2 minutes each side. Season with salt and pepper.

Spoon the lettuce sauce on to a plate, covering the whole base, and place the cooked prawns around the edge. Place the lettuce and orange salad in the middle. Now take the fresh basil leaves, tear them and sprinkle all over the salad.

Serve with a bottle of chilled Italian white wine.



Nei campi si vive, in casa si muore'

IN THE FIELDS YOU LIVE AND IN THE HOUSE YOU DIE

Endives and Escaroles The experts on these are the French and the Italians, although the Americans make use of them infinitely more than the British.

In the UK we tend to think of endives as the French ‘frisée’ type, wonderful, slightly bitter with tough, serrated leaves and large splaying heads. These are always used in a salad, especially later on in the season and have beautiful blanched yellow hearts, turning greener towards the outer leaves.

But the real gem, and I think the best-kept Franco-Italian secret, is the escarole, as it’s known in France and America, or scarola as it’s called in Italy. Very large open heads with leaves so crunchy, they almost shatter in the mouth when bitten into. If you bend the leaves, they snap, rather than break. There’s hardly any bitterness and this is a variety that is cooked as often as it’s eaten raw. In the US, virtually every Italian restaurant has escarole on the menu. It’s almost always sautéed in olive oil with garlic and served hot as a vegetable, and it is very good. We’re not talking about wacky lettuce soups or other weird concoctions. This variety cooks really, really well.

Zuppa di Scarola
ESCAROLE SOUP

This recipe is from Bill McKay, who is one of the Franchi agents in America. His mother was from the Abruzzo region of Italy, and this is a variation on how she used to make it. There are as many ways of making escarole soup as there are cooks in Italy.

A variation on the bread is to add some cooked cannellini beans or broken pieces of pasta about 15 minutes before the end of cooking. SERVES 4

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| <i>1 clove of garlic, plus more to serve</i> | <i>1.2 litres stock or water</i> |
| <i>1 small onion, chopped</i> | <i>2 tomatoes, roughly chopped</i> |
| <i>50–75 g pancetta, chopped</i> | <i>1 head of escarole, cleaned and chopped into</i> |
| <i>olive oil</i> | <i>bite-sized pieces</i> |
| <i>2–3 celery sticks, chopped</i> | <i>bread slices</i> |

COOK THE GARLIC, ONION AND PANCETTA in some olive oil. Don’t let things brown. Add the celery, followed by the stock and the tomatoes. Bring to the boil and simmer for 15–20 minutes. Add the escarole and continue cooking until everything is done.

To serve, grill or toast some slices of good bread. Rub with garlic, place in a soup bowl and ladle the soup over the grilled bread.



Radicchio Rossa di Treviso in Frittura

BREADCRUMBED RADICCHIO ROSSA DI TREVISO

Radicchio is eaten mainly in the north-west of Italy, especially in the Veneto region. We are often unadventurous about cooking salad leaves, but radicchio of Treviso is one where it works really well. If it's not available you could also use the Palla Rossa type, which has tightly wrapped heads. The name translates literally as 'red ball'. SERVES 4

4 heads of radicchio (Rossa di Treviso) breadcrumbs for coating
4 tablespoons flour mixed with a pinch of salt olive oil
2 small eggs, beaten

CLEAN THE RADICCHIO and remove some of the outer leaves. Cut the remaining central part into quarters. Dry each piece and coat in flour, followed by the beaten egg and then the breadcrumbs. Fry in olive oil until golden brown. Remove from the oil and place on kitchen paper for a minute before arranging on plates for serving.

GRILLED RADICCHIO WITH MELTED CHEESE

by Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall

The harsh, bitter taste of radicchio, Treviso and other red chicories is not everybody's cup of tea and, to be honest, it's not always mine. But I grow them in my polytunnel anyway because, for the money, these hardy winter salad plants come into their own when thoughts of salad are banished and they are cooked for a change. The bitterness is mollified and their natural sweetness comes to the fore. A trickle of olive oil and a generous slab of melting cheese dissipate the last traces of austerity and make this a gluttonous winter treat. Incidentally, this dish also works well with sweeter summer lettuces such as Little Gem. SERVES 4 AS A STARTER

CUT 4 TIGHT HEADS OF TREVISO or other radicchio into quarters, leaving the base of the stems intact to hold the leaves together. Brush them with olive oil and season well with salt and pepper.

Then place cut-side down on a preheated heavy griddle pan – preferably the kind with raised ridges. Cook for 3–5 minutes, turning occasionally. They are ready when the outer leavers are well charred and striped from the grill and the stems are just becoming tender.

Arrange the quarters in a dish and lay thin slices of your chosen cheese over them: it might be goat's cheese or Taleggio (a personal favourite) or torta di dolcelatte. Add a few more twists of pepper and another trickle of olive oil and place in a very hot oven, or under a grill, until the cheese starts to bubble. Serve at once, four quarters per person.



Zucchini a Scapece

SUN-DRIED COURGETTES WITH MINT AND GARLIC

by Ursula Ferrigno

This method of ‘cooking’, called a scapece, is very Neapolitan and is often applied to fish such as sardines as well as vegetables. Aubergines and strips of sweet pepper can be prepared in the same way. This dish can be eaten as a vegetable accompaniment or on its own. SERVES 6

9 large courgettes, topped and tailed

175 ml olive oil

*a large handful of fresh mint leaves, coarsely
chopped*

3 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

6 tablespoons good-quality white wine vinegar

*4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
sea salt*

CUT THE COURGETTES INTO SLICES LENGTHWAYS. Place them on a wooden board, cover with a cloth and leave in the sun to dry for about 3 hours. Alternatively, put them on a baking sheet in the oven at Gas Mark 1/110°C for about an hour to dry out completely without discolouring.

Heat the olive oil in a large pan and fry all the dry courgette slices, in batches if necessary, until golden. Don’t bother to turn them over. Drain carefully on kitchen paper.

Transfer the courgette slices to a dish and sprinkle with the mint, garlic, vinegar, extra-virgin olive oil and salt. Cover and leave to stand in a cool place for at least 4 hours or overnight.

ZUCCHINI TRIFOLATI

by Rose Gray, The River Cafe

Vegetables ‘trifolati’ is a method of slicing and cooking with garlic, olive oil and parsley. Other ingredients maybe added. Here we add fresh ripe tomatoes. SERVES 4

500 g courgettes

300 g cherry tomatoes

2 cloves of garlic

2 tablespoons basil leaves

2 tablespoons olive oil

extra-virgin olive oil

salt and freshly ground black pepper

WASH THE COURGETTES and cut in half lengthways and then into rough pieces of about 2 cm. Tear the tomatoes in half and squeeze out some of the seeds and juice. Peel and cut the garlic into slivers. Chop the basil.

Heat the olive oil in a frying pan. Add the courgettes and garlic, and stir to combine. When the courgettes begin to brown, add the tomatoes and salt and pepper. Stir well, and cook for a further 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and add the basil. Drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil and cover. Let sit for at least 10 minutes before serving.

