

A Roman Easter with a Touch of Naples

Charles Scicolone (April 03, 2009)



Easter Dinner with a Cookbook Author

“Natale con i tuoi, Pasqua con chi vuoi” (Christmas with your family, Easter with whomever you want) say the Italians, but no matter who you spend it with, Easter is a day of celebration.



This year, I decided to ask my wife, Michele, about what she is planning to make for our Easter dinner celebration. She is the author of 16 cookbooks and I could see her mind working on the menu possibilities. She suggested making some of our favorite foods from Rome, and one or two things from Naples where her family came from.

We will start with dates stuffed with pecorino served with Prosecco. This was something we first tasted many years ago at restaurant Colonna in the town of Labico just outside Rome. Since then, it has become one of our favorite starters.

We would have to have pasta. (My grandmother from Palermo always made baked macaroni for Easter.) Michele knows what pasta I want. Bucatini alla matriciana, thick dried pasta strands in a sauce made with tomatoes, guanciale and a little bit of peperoncino. With it we will drink Quattro Mori (the four Moors), made from syrah, merlot, cabernet sauvignon and petit verdot, produced by Castel de Paolis, in the town of Grottaferrata in the Castelli Romani. It costs about \$44 and it will be perfect with the pasta. The Cesanese del Piglio, made from the Cesanese grape, and produced by Casale della Ioria \$24 would also work.

What would Easter and spring in Rome be without lamb? So the main course will be roast leg of lamb with garlic, rosemary, and little potatoes along with those harbingers of spring asparagus, artichokes and fava beans. With the lamb my wine choice is Vigna del Vassao, made from 60% Merlot, 30% Cabernet Sauvignon and 10% Cabernet Franc. The producer is Colle Picchione in the town of Marino just outside Rome. This is one of the best Bordeaux blends made in Italy \$44.

Our touch of Naples will be La Pastiera Easter (Wheat Berry Cheesecake) which Michele learned to make with her mother when she was growing up. Now makes it every Easter with her niece, Amy. Traditionally it was only made at Easter time but now can be found at all times of the year. It is a ricotta cheesecake, but with the extra texture of cooked wheat grains. It is flavored with cinnamon, candied citron and orange flavoring, among others. If you would like a recipe for La Pastiera, which is also known as Piazza Gran, go to her website www.MicheleScicolone.com [2]. If she has the time, she will also make Pizza Rustica (pizza chiena in dialect, meaning full pie or stuffed pie). Traditionally made on Good Friday to be eaten on Easter Sunday or Easter Monday (Pasquetta), this pie lives up to its dialect name because it is practically overflowing with sausages, ricotta, diced cheese, and salumi. It is practically a meal in itself.

My family comes from Sicily and every Easter my father made a twisted loaf of bread studded with whole eggs in their shells. Michele's Neapolitan grandmother made a similar loaf in the shape of a ring and called it casatiello. Eggs are symbolic of fertility and rebirth and are used in many dishes at this time of the year, as is cheese, especially fresh creamy ricotta.

The day after Easter is known as Pasquetta or little Easter. It is a big holiday in Italy and everyone takes the day off, packs up the leftovers from Sunday's feast, and heads to the country for a picnic or day out of doors. The blueberries and pear tree on our terrace are starting to bloom. Maybe we will open a bottle of barbera and enjoy an al fresco meal Roman style.



Links

[1] <http://iltaly.org/files/8406fava-beans1238682034.jpg>

[2] <http://www.michelescicolone.com/>