

Cazzetta. Glocal Style Italian Olive Oil

Marina Melchionda (July 20, 2010)



Cazzetta oil is produced according to two principles: the company's production process follows ancient local traditions and the mission is to bring the best the Puglia region can offer in terms of oil to a global level. Here is our meeting with the President of this glocal firm...

The Italian Pavilion at this year's edition of the [Fancy Food Show](#) [2] featured dozens of booths exhibiting some of the best olive oil produced in the country. National or local, big or small firms, they all came to New York in search of a new market, the American one, which is discovering little by little the nutritional values of this product thanks to the recent re-evaluation of the Mediterranean diet of which it is a fundamental ingredient.

Travel to the Mediterranean and the resulting enthusiasm for its cuisine created a buzz for olive oil in



the last few decades. Food celebrities proclaimed the virtues of EVO – extra-virgin olive oil, the finest, most flavorful oil produced entirely by physical means (now in centrifuges, not presses) without the use of chemicals or excess heat. Consumption of olive oil in the United States has risen 272 percent since 1991, according to the [International Olive Oil Council](#) [3], and is mainly imported from Spain, Greece, and Italy.

The question now is: how should olive oil be consumed? What kind of oil goes on which dish according to the Mediterranean parameters?

And, most of all, how is one firm different from another and how can you tell which one is the best? At Fancy Food we tasted quite a consistent range of olive oils, appreciating their fruitiness or slight bitterness, and learning about the various ways to consume it, might it be on a slice of bread, in a thick pasta sauce, or raw on a grilled fish, depending on the various flavors and heat-resisting properties. One of those we appreciated the most was [Cazzetta Olive Oil](#) [4], originating from Lecce, Puglia.

Its four different extra virgin olive oil varieties, Spontaneo (Spontaneus), Biologico (Bio), Prezioso (Precious), and Quattro Macine (Four Mills), contain a secular family history of passion and dedication to this business. To explain why we found Cazzetta to be such a great representative of the best Italian oil, we first need to take a step back and provide a little history on the country's oil production in more general terms. As we know, in Italy the production of olive oil and its properties vary geographically based on the land where the trees are planted and the kind of olives produced.

As the cultivation itself is regulated by a complex array of norms and rituals that are passed from generation to generation, each business ends up making a very distinguished product with its own flavor and composition. This is especially true with the smallest firms where production is limited to a couple of thousand bottles a year and the olive oil is almost handcrafted by the few employees. It is generally sold in a niche market of gourmets and restaurant owners. Although Cazzetta happens to be a big firm, owning more than 300 hectares of land in the province of Otranto, its oils are still produced according to the most traditional principles that espouse in a balanced way the most modern cultivation, harvesting, and manufacturing techniques and methods.

The members of this family have never abandoned the spirit on which the company was first based: the love for the land that they own and have cultivated for more than four generations and their mission to bring to the people of Italy and beyond the best oil that the Puglia region can offer. The four varieties of oil produced by the company, Spontaneo, Biologico, Prezioso and Quattro Macine, come from olives picked from trees planted more than four hundred years ago. Just as it used to be in the old times, the harvest takes place by shaking the tree causing the olives to fall into nets so they never touch the ground. After being selected according to their origins and quality, they are processed between the months of October and January, when expert hands keep working 24 hours a day to obtain more than 100 hundredweights of oil a day from more than 500 hundredweights of olives.

As founder Raffaele Cazzetta would have wanted, the extraction still takes place through a cold process and the oil is still collected today with the “mappu”, an ancient circular and concave tool. The production process is controlled by the members of the family who take care of the business. They are accompanied by the young generation who is not only expected to learn all the secrets of the trade but also to educate those who will come after them to bring only the best to their tables. Education is indeed one of the cornerstones of the Cazzetta family and business.

When we met President Raffaele at Fancy Food we understood how much he cares about involving consumers in defending local production such as his own. They are able to bring to the world the local culture they represent. “It is not only about my business, it's about almost all the Made in Italy, a unique ‘label’ created to defend thousands of entrepreneurs that make their productions the basis on which they build and raise a family”, he told us. The danger he said lays in the unlimited expansion of the phenomenon of globalization that finally leads to a flattening and homogenizing of production. “It must instead be a tool to overcome national borders, export our knowledge worldwide, and share our goods with other peoples, and vice versa. Now the risk is that the global market will become a tool in the hands of very few big producers that will offer standardized



products at a better price maybe, but certainly to the detriment of quality”.

As he told us, his personal aim is to inform people about this risk and make them aware that local production can disappear in favor of stateless ones, where there is no connection among growers, producers, and consumers. “We need instead to build a glocal world, where productions remain local and anchored to their territory of origins, but can overcome every geographical border and be tasted throughout the world and appreciated in their specificity”.

Determined to achieve this goal, Mr. Cazzetta has already overcome the borders of most of the European countries and Japan. The Fancy Food Show was a perfect occasion for him to enter the US market and to present new products such as the Grappa-based Olive Liqueur “Several distributors and importers stopped by and showed great interest for my products as soon as they were given a taste. This shows that Americans are ready and open to new, different flavors and are also willing to spend a little more to have a product that is worth ten times more in terms of quality, in spite of what is commonly stated”.

300 hectares of cultivated land, but still a family run business; thousands of liters of oil, but still a niche firm; an international label, but a local based production. These are the pillars on which Cazzetta oils are produced. They are “ovicoltori per storia e per passione”, oil producers for history and passion, the two principles that every Italian business should follow now and in the future.

After all, if Made in Italy is now popular on a global scale, it is now up to us to promote and support it the Italian way, the glocal way.

Related Links: <http://www.masseriacazzetta.it> [4]

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[1] <http://iitaly.org/files/masseriaprincipale1279651966jpeg>

[2] <http://www.specialtyfood.com/fancy-food-show>

[3] <http://www.internationaloliveoil.org>

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