

TASTES *of* ITALIA

BASICS OF THE ITALIAN KITCHEN

FALL 2018

LET'S ROAST!

DELICIOUS MEATS
EARTHY VEGETABLES

FIVE ITALIAN WINES
FOR THE SEASON

MEMORIES OF ROME



Classic Meatballs
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Display until December 30, 2018

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FALL CLASSICS

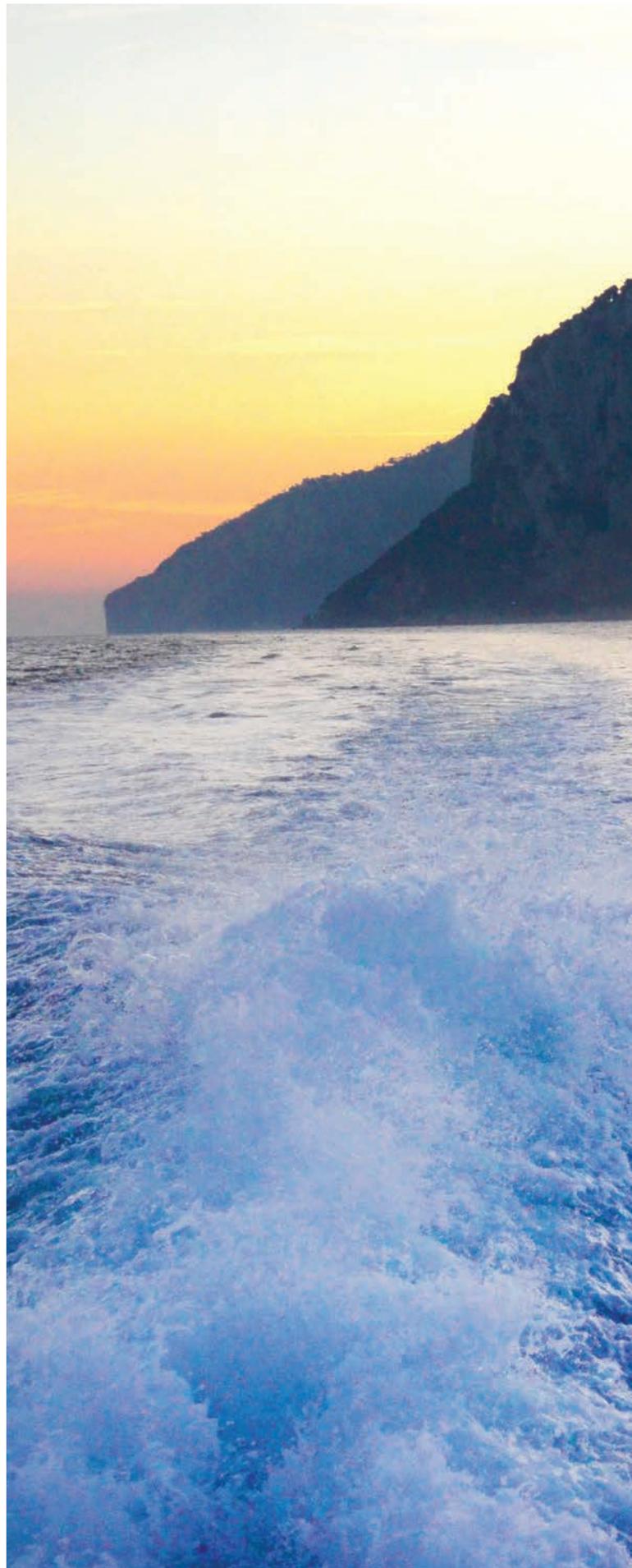
MAKE EVERY NIGHT
A PASTA NIGHT

AT HOME ON CAPRI

A view of paradise.
A talented rising star
chef in the kitchen.
A luxury villa that's
more than a hotel.
This is the Excelsior
Parco on Capri.

**By Lauren Birmingham
Piscitelli**

PHOTO BY LAUREN BIRMINGHAM / PISCITELLI





NATIVE SOIL



Fall is the perfect time to plan your spring and summer vacations, and there's no better place to daydream about than the Isle of Capri. Though it buttons up for much of the winter, it will be in the glory of its busy season before you know it, so plan early. If you do visit, don't miss the Excelsior Parco.

Located between Marina Grande and the Piazzetta, the Excelsior Parco's logo reads: a Villa Luxury Capri 1906. It's the new hip place on the island with an interesting past. It was built in 1906 in the Italian Art Nouveau style on the site of an ancient Roman villa. An original Roman column still stands in the hotel's lobby. Eleven exclusive rooms, some with garden views, others with sea views, and private terraces, are decked with cool Mediterranean tile floors and pastel color themes.

After a new concept and eco-sustainable philosophy was implemented, the hotel is getting lots of attention. Electric courtesy cars are available for guests, organic bath and personal products (without parabens or preservatives) are used in each guest room and there's an efficient electric cooling and heating system on the property. A revamped kitchen and menu using only local organic ingredients is another example of the eco-green atmosphere.

Eco and elegance blend as Perrier Jouët Champagne, the preferred bubbly, is poured in French flutes and served from brunch to aperitivo time.

In the kitchen serving breakfast, lunch and dinner is a new rising-star—executive chef Angelo Annunziata. Thanks to AnnaChiara della Corte, the hotel's public relations director and my close friend, I'm invited to meet Chef Angelo and experience his delicious organic cuisine.

I arrive at Marina Grande and the hotel's shuttle sweeps me up to the property, driving along the beautiful winding Via Marina Grande. We enter the garden area and are welcomed by a pure white villa set in a flowering green Mediterranean garden. Palm trees, vinca, periwinkle flowers, and lantana wreath the grounds.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY LAUREN BIRMINGHAM PISCITELLI



Previous page: The clock tower at La Piazzetta on Capri. **This page:** Handpainted ceramic tiles are found throughout Capri, including on benches.



I quickly check into my room, a world of white accented with soft colors of blue and beige. When I swing open the tall windows that open onto my balcony, I can almost reach out and touch the Bay of Naples. In the near distance is the Sorrento Coast on the left and the Amalfi Coast on the right. But right now I have an appointment with the chef, and I cannot wait to meet him.

I already knew a little of Chef Angelo. He was selected from a long list of talented, experienced chefs not only for his knowledge, but for his passion and calm temperament in the kitchen. His eco-cooking style already has the 28-year-old soaring to the top of the charts.

“Permesso,” I say as I ease open the kitchen door, asking permission to enter. A soft gentle voice welcomes me with a shy, “Ciao.”

With smiling green eyes, Chef Angelo thanks me for coming and tells me it’s his

pleasure to be my host.

Resembling a young Leonardo DiCaprio, he begins to share his story. “I’m from Somma Vesuviana, a small town at the foot of Vesuvius, and my little brother Roberto is also a chef,” he says.

As we tour the kitchen, he asks if we can speak Italian rather than English. He confesses that even though he worked in England, he’s not very good with the language. I agree, but for our purposes here, have translated it back into English.

He starts with his background. “After my studies at the Hotel School in Naples, I stayed in Naples and worked at the Grangusto. Following that, I wanted to expand my cooking style and so I accepted a position in Emilia Romagna. Then an opportunity brought me to London, but Italy is where my heart is. So when the position was offered to me at La Locanda Liuzzi, a one Michelin star restaurant in

PHOTOGRAPHY COURTESY OF THE EXCELSIOR PARCO



Crossover: The Excelsior Parco at dusk. **Previous page, lower left:** A patio at the Excelsior Parco. **Above:** Chef Angelo Annunziata.

Rimini, I accepted. I wanted to return to Italy. Now, I am at home on Capri,” says Chef Angelo.

“My kitchen is minimalist. I work exclusively with local organic and high quality raw materials, never using canned or boxed products. Plating is equally important. Calmness in the kitchen is also an absolute must,” he says.

“Simple and minimal ingredients create the best tastes. Ingredients must be extremely fresh and absolutely in season and, above all, organic. All of our produce, fruits, vegetables, fish and meat, arrive daily from our farmers who are officially controlled and are solo bio (only organic),” he explains.

In a charming Neapolitan accent, he tells me about his menu. “Our signature antipasto is Confusione di Polpo—seared octopus with very slow cooked tomato in a light citrus-infused soy sauce. Our pasta

specialty is Mezzo Paccheri con Guance di Ombrina, Limone e Fumetto di Pesce—tube-shaped pasta served in a fish stock with a lemon infusion. I use only Gentile Pasta; it’s a very high quality pasta from Gragnano,” he says.

“Slow-cooked cod fish served in a yellow pepper puttanesca sauce and garnished with thyme is near and dear to my heart because it is traditionally from my home town.

“For dessert, I suggest them all; however, everyone should try the slow-cooked pear surrounded by lightly whipped kisses of buffalo ricotta accented with air-dried orange slices and mignon macarons,” he says.

Attention is given to food allergies, and there is a gluten-free, vegetarian and vegan menu also available.

The octopus antipasto is his favorite dish on the menu.

“I love fish,” he says. His inspiration for using fish in recipes comes to him while he’s driving his car or sailing around Capri on his boat.

In his first year at Excelsior Parco, Chef Angelo plans to “keep on going. Studying. Striving for excellence and always learning. You can never stop learning,” he says.

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Baccala with Black Olives and Capers

Baccala with Black Olives and Capers

If you use salt cod, be sure to desalt it. First, rinse the cod under cold running water. Then, place it in a container of fresh water, about three parts water to one part cod. Place in the refrigerator. Soak for 12 hours, then rinse and repeat. A four-ounce cutlet should be ready to cook after about 36 hours and three changes of water.

- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 cloves of garlic
- 2 ounces capers, rinsed
- 2 ounces black olives
- 1 pound yellow tomatoes, quartered
- 1/8 teaspoon dried oregano
- 4 (4-oz. each) pieces of salt cod (desalted) or other white fish
- Purple basil leaves, if desired
- Fresh thyme, oregano or basil, for garnish, if desired

In a large sauté pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat and sauté the garlic until it is blond or translucent, but not dark. Discard the garlic, and add the capers, olives and tomatoes. Cook for a few minutes until the tomatoes are just softened. Add the fish and oregano.

Cover with a lid and cook for about 15 minutes until the fish is done.

To serve, place some of the tomato mixture in each bowl or plate and place the fish on top. Add a few purple basil leaves to each dish and top the fish with a sprig of fresh thyme, oregano or basil, if desired.

Makes 4 servings.

- Recipe adapted from Chef Angelo Annunziata

Paccheri with White Fish & Lemon

- 1 1/2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, whole
- 1 pound sea bass or white fish fillets
- 1/2 cup parsley
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 12 ounces paccheri pasta
- Zest of 2 medium lemons, grated
- Black pepper, to taste

In a large sauté pan, heat olive oil over medium heat and sauté garlic until blond, not brown. Discard the garlic and add the sea bass or white fish, cut in pieces. Add parsley and cook for a few minutes, adding a little water if needed. Season to taste with salt and black pepper.

Cook the paccheri pasta in boiling salted water until dente. Drain and transfer to the saucepan with the fish. Immediately add the grated lemon zest and pepper.

Toss pasta a few times over medium heat until all ingredients are well combined. Serve.

Makes 6 servings.

- Recipe adapted from Chef Angelo Annunziata



Spaghetti Nests with Clams

Dress up this popular recipe with a chef-inspired presentation. Creating a spaghetti nest takes practice, but it looks great on the plate. You may also serve this dish in the traditional way: spread out on a plate in all its glory. Add your favorite wine and a loaf of crusty Italian bread to complete the meal.

- 1 pound spaghetti
- 2 pounds of fresh clams in the shells
- ¼ cup dry white wine
- 6 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 pound shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 4 cups broccoli flowerettes, steamed
- ¼ teaspoon dried red chile flakes
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons olive oil

Cook the pasta according to package directions. Drain and set aside.

Soak the clams in cold water for 20 minutes, thoroughly scrubbing and brushing them. Drain the clams and place in a large skillet with the wine. Bring to a boil and cook about 5 minutes, until the shells have opened. Discard any that do not open. Remove the clams, cover and set aside.

In the same skillet, combine the olive oil, butter and garlic. Sauté until the garlic is translucent. Add the shrimp and cook several

minutes until pink and cooked through. Add the steamed broccoli, chile flakes and salt. Cook 3 to 5 minutes over medium heat until heated through. Remove from heat.

To make nests out of the spaghetti, sprinkle about two tablespoons of olive oil over the pasta and toss to coat. Take a long-tined carving fork and poke it into the spaghetti. Twirl until the spaghetti comes up onto the tines. Carefully place the spaghetti onto a serving dish. Top with a few clams. Add the broccoli and shrimp mixture around the nest and serve.

Makes 8 servings.

Note: Professional chefs often garnish dishes with petals from organically grown, edible flowers. If you choose to do the same, make sure you're using chemical-free petals from plants that are not poisonous. See teleflora.com/floral-facts/list-edible-flowers for more on this topic.

– Recipe inspired by Chef Angelo Annunziata

Tiramisu Angelo

For the sponge cake:

- 3 whole fresh eggs
- ¾ cup granulated sugar
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- Butter and flour for a 9-inch pie pan

For the cream:

- 3 egg yolks
- 1 cup granulated sugar, plus 2 tablespoons for the espresso
- ¾ cup whipping cream

- 1 cup mascarpone
- 2 cups espresso coffee
- Cocoa powder, as needed for dusting

For the sponge cake: Preheat the oven to 360°F. Butter and flour the pie pan; set aside.

Whip the eggs with the sugar until the mixture doubles in volume, then gently fold in the flour. Pour the batter into the pie pan. Bake for 13 minutes. Allow to cool completely before filling with the cream.

For the cream: In a mixing bowl, beat the egg yolks with the sugar until the color turns light, almost white. In a separate bowl, whip the whipping cream until it thickens. Gently mix the mascarpone in with the whipped cream. Then, carefully combine the egg yolk mixture with the mascarpone mixture; fold it in so the egg yolks and whipped cream do not deflate.

To assemble: Stir in two tablespoons of sugar to the espresso.

Slice the sponge cake horizontally into two halves—a top and a bottom. Place the bottom half into the pie pan. Spoon the espresso over the sponge cake until it is just moist. Do not soak. Spread half of the mascarpone cream mixture over the cake. Cover with the remaining sponge cake. Spread the rest of the mascarpone cream over the top of the sponge cake.

Garnish with a dusting of cocoa powder. Chill in the refrigerator at least three hours, or overnight.

Makes 4 to 6 servings.

– Recipe adapted from Chef Angelo Annunziata



Abeto, in the province of Perugia, is one of many hill towns in the region of Umbria.