

Cook Red Sauce at Home



Recipes with love from
The Robot Book Club

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Classic Italian-American Restaurant Recipes for Your Kitchen

The Robot Book Club

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Preface

This book, and The Robot Book Club, is an experiment large scale AI generation. Every page, from layout to images to copy, was generated with zero human review.

The authoring and publishing teams were implemented in the Kaya scripting language. They were given only the input: American red sauce Italian restaurant food.

This is the only page authored by a human: Hello there!

— Ted Benson

Prologue

Sunday at four in the afternoon, the kitchen already running out of room, the air hangs thick with the smell of garlic, slowly caramelizing, mingling with San Marzano tomatoes and the promise of rich, melting cheese. This is a distinct American tradition, forged in kitchens that swelled with new families and an unheard-of abundance.

For generations, these places—the red sauce joints, from the humble corner trattoria to the mahogany bars of white-tablecloth dining rooms—have served as the unofficial living rooms of a certain kind of immigrant dream. They've churned out platters of deep-fried mozzarella, piled tables high with massive bowls of Sunday Gravy, and presented chicken parm, crust crisp and cheese bubbling, with the casual grace of a masterwork. This cuisine, often maligned by purists, is in fact a testament to resourcefulness and cultural memory, stretching a single pound of meat with soaked breadcrumbs to feed eight.

This is not about striving for some imagined Old World purity. It's about taking the essence of that loud, boisterous, utterly delicious experience and bringing it home, for a table full of friends, for a family feast. Just three tools: a heavy-bottomed Dutch oven, a versatile sheet pan, and an old-school box grater.

Ditch the tweezers, the microgreens, and the foam. Embrace the fatty, the garlic-laden, the scrape of a box grater echoing over the conversation, the foil-wrapped garlic bread steaming on the counter. Fill your home with the intoxicating aroma of a slow-cooked



Chapter 1 — The Sauces: The Foundational Layer

The absolute building blocks of the Italian-American repertoire, from all-day Sunday Gravy to weeknight marinara.

The entire cuisine is built on crushed tomatoes, olive oil, garlic, and time. A red sauce joint doesn't run on tweezered herbs; it relies on the garlic-heavy adaptations of immigrants who arrived with nothing and fed a hungry room by keeping the marinara sputtering for six hours on the back burner. From the all-day Sunday Gravy sputtering violently in a heavy Dutch oven to a pint of heavy

cream boiling fiercely into an American Alfredo, these are the calorie-dense building blocks of the repertoire; pull a pot from the bottom cabinet and start laying the brickwork.





The East Harlem Marinara

This is not a thirty-minute weeknight pasta sauce, so do not let anyone tell you otherwise. This is Sunday Gravy, the unapologetic, aggressively comforting culinary bedrock of the Italian-American experience. It requires a four-hour commitment, a Dutch oven, and a houseful of loud people waiting at the table. You do not make this dish to be subtle; you make it so that when your friends take their first bite, they close their eyes and know exactly what that legendary red-leather booth on Arthur Avenue tastes like.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb ground beef chuck

1/2 lb ground veal

1/2 lb ground pork

1 cup high-quality breadcrumbs

1 cup	whole milk	1 lb	Italian sausage links
2 large	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>	1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>
1 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated</i>	6 med	garlic <i>smashed and roughly chopped</i>
1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>	6 oz	tomato paste
3 med	garlic <i>minced into a paste</i>	1/2 cup	dry red wine
clove		84 oz	whole peeled San Marzano tomatoes
1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes
1 tsp	freshly ground black pepper	2	bay leaves
3 tbs	extra-virgin olive oil	1 small	fresh basil <i>torn</i>
1 lb	pork neck bones or spareribs	handful	

PREPARATION

- **Hydrate the breadcrumbs to create a panade.**

In a small bowl, soak the breadcrumbs in the whole milk until it looks like thick, wet oatmeal, and let it sit for 5 minutes.

- **Mix the meatball blend gently.**

In a massive mixing bowl, combine the beef, pork, and veal with the soaked bread mixture, eggs, grated Pecorino, parsley, garlic paste, salt, and pepper. Use your hands to mix lightly—do not squeeze or overwork the meat, or your meatballs will turn into hockey pucks.

- **Form and par-bake the meatballs.**

Roll the mixture into balls slightly larger than a golf ball, space them out on a lined sheet pan, and bake at 425°F for 15 to 20 minutes until they develop a beautiful browned crust. They will finish cooking in the gravy.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sear the pork and sausage aggressively.

Place your largest Dutch oven over medium-high heat with the olive oil. Sear the pork bones and sausages until they develop a deep, dark brown crust, leaving a sticky fond on the bottom of the pot, then set the meats aside and keep the rendered fat in the pot.

2. Sauté the aromatics and caramelize the paste.

Drop the heat to medium, toss the diced onions into the pork fat, and sauté for 5 to 7 minutes until golden. Add the smashed garlic and red pepper flakes for 60 seconds, then squeeze in the tomato paste and stir continuously for 3 minutes until it turns a deep, dark brick-red.

3. Deglaze the pot with red wine.

Pour in the wine to release every browned bit stuck to the bottom of the pot, letting it reduce until almost entirely evaporated.

4. Crush the tomatoes and add them to the pot.

Dump the San Marzano tomatoes into a large bowl and crush them by hand to keep a varied, rustic texture. Pour them and their juices into the Dutch oven, slosh a little water in the empty cans to salvage the leftover juice and add that to the pot along with the bay leaves.

5. Submerge all the meats into the tomato bath.

Drop the browned pork bones, sausages, and your par-baked meatballs directly into the sauce, bringing the whole cauldron to a rapid simmer before immediately dropping the heat to the lowest possible setting.

6. Simmer the gravy for at least four hours.

Partially cover the Dutch oven and let the sauce barely breathe. Stir gently with a wooden spoon every 30 minutes, scraping the bottom so nothing burns, as the collagen in the pork bones slowly melts into the sauce, turning it glossy, thick, and profoundly rich.

1. Finish with fresh basil and serve.

After 4 hours, turn off the heat, stir in the torn fresh basil, and use tongs to carefully extract the meats onto a serving platter. Toss the thick, stained gravy with freshly cooked, al dente pasta and eat loudly.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not rush this sauce.**

A thirty-minute Sunday Gravy is a culinary impossibility. Start this at 11:00 AM on a Sunday, not 5:00 PM on a Tuesday. The four-hour timeframe is biologically necessary for the tough collagen in the pork bones to hydrolyze into gelatin.

● **The Garlic Bread Protocol.**

Do not slice a baguette and toast it open-faced like crostini. Slice a soft Italian loaf horizontally, slather the interior heavily with garlic butter, close the loaf, wrap it tightly in aluminum foil, and bake. The foil traps the steam to soften the bread while the butter melts deeply into the crumb.

● **The tableside Caesar.**

To fully achieve the intended aesthetic, construct a Caesar salad tableside in a wooden bowl aggressively rubbed with a raw garlic clove. The emulsion of raw egg yolk, anchovy paste, Dijon, lemon juice, and olive oil forms the base.

● **Chicken Parm is two distinct recipes.**

If using this marinara for Chicken Parmigiana, treat it as two entirely separate techniques. Perfectly pound, bread, and shallow-fry the cutlet first. Only then do you assemble it on a sheet pan, spoon the Sunday Gravy over it, drape with mozzarella, and broil until bubbling.



Spicy Rigatoni alla Vodka

If Sunday Gravy is the undisputed patriarch of the Italian-American table, Spicy Rigatoni alla Vodka is its glamorous, slightly dangerous younger sibling. We didn't invent vodka sauce—it was whipped up in the neon-soaked discotheques of 1980s Italy—but the red sauce joints of New York absolutely perfected it. By swapping delicate penne for massive, sauce-catching rigatoni, trading generic pepper flakes for the smoky fire of Calabrian chilies, and aggressively caramelizing tomato paste in pancetta fat, we transformed a retro novelty into unapologetic, slow-simmered luxury. It's rich, it's heavy on the cream, and it demands to be wiped clean with a foil-wrapped loaf of garlic bread.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	dried rigatoni	1/2 cup	vodka
4 oz	pancetta <i>diced into 1/4-inch cubes</i>	1 cup	heavy whipping cream
3 tbsp	unsalted butter	1 cup	crushed tomatoes
1 large	Spanish yellow onion <i>very finely diced</i>	1/2 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>freshly grated</i>
4 clove	garlic <i>minced</i>	1 pinch	kosher salt
6 oz	tomato paste	1 pinch	freshly cracked black pepper
2 tbsp	Calabrian chili paste	1 handful	fresh basil <i>torn</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the pancetta slowly over medium heat until browned and crispy.**
Add a tiny splash of olive oil to get things moving in your Dutch oven. Once crispy, remove the pancetta to a paper towel-lined plate but leave every drop of the rendered fat in the pot.
- 2. Melt the butter into the pancetta fat and sweat the onions for at least 15 minutes.**
Pour yourself a drink and do not rush this. Cook them over medium-low heat with a pinch of kosher salt until they melt into a sweet, translucent paste without taking on any brown color.
- 3. Stir in the garlic and Calabrian chili paste until fragrant.**
Stir continuously for about two minutes to kill the raw edge of the garlic and wake up the chilies.
- 4. Squeeze in the tomato paste and fry it until it turns a dark, rusted brick-red.**
This takes 5 to 7 minutes and is completely non-negotiable. The Maillard reaction happening here is the absolute secret to a restaurant-quality sauce.

- 1. Pour in the vodka and scrape up every browned bit from the bottom of the pot.**
Let it sizzle and reduce for about three minutes until the harsh alcohol smell burns off and the liquid has almost entirely evaporated.
- 2. Stir in the crushed tomatoes and simmer on low for 15 minutes.**
Keep it at a bare simmer until the edges of the sauce start glistening with a deep orange oil.
- 3. Boil the rigatoni in fiercely salted water until strictly al dente.**
The water should taste like the Atlantic Ocean. Pull the pasta about two minutes before the package instructions dictate, saving a cup of the starchy pasta water.
- 4. Drop the heat to low and gently fold in the heavy cream and crispy pancetta.**
Watch the sauce transform into that glorious, vibrant pink-orange hue, but do not let it come to a hard boil once the cream is in or it will break.
- 5. Toss the drained rigatoni and grated Parmigiano vigorously into the sauce.**
If it feels too thick, splash in the reserved pasta water a quarter-cup at a time until the sauce is glossy and coats every ridge of the pasta. Serve immediately straight from the Dutch oven with torn basil.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Serve with foil-wrapped garlic bread.**
Garlic bread in an Italian-American home must be foil-wrapped and baked, never toasted open-faced. The foil traps the steam, softening the bread while the butter melts deeply into the crumb, perfuming the entire loaf.



Linguine with White Clam Sauce & Caramelized Garlic

This isn't the delicate, minimalist bowl of pasta you'll find on the Amalfi coast. This is the loud, unapologetic food of the Italian-American diaspora, built for a hungry Sunday crowd. It's a love letter to the cash-only red-sauce joints of Queens where they slow-cook entire heads of garlic into sweet, melting submission. We use a high-low hybrid of fresh littlenecks for their delicate liquor alongside canned chopped clams to ensure every single twirl of linguine is coated in a thick, briny, buttery sauce that demands your full attention.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb dried linguine **3/4 cup** extra-virgin olive oil

2 large	garlic heads <i>cloves separated, peeled, and left whole</i>	4 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>cubed and kept cold</i>
1 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf Italian parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
1 cup	dry white wine	1/2 med	lemon <i>juiced and zested</i>
2 cup	bottled clam juice	1 tbsp	kosher salt
13 oz	canned chopped clams <i>undrained</i>	1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
24 med	fresh littleneck clams <i>scrubbed clean under cold water</i>		

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Gently confit the whole garlic cloves in olive oil over medium-low heat until they are deeply caramelized.**

Place a large Dutch oven over medium-low heat with the olive oil and garlic. Let them slowly sizzle for 15 to 20 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the cloves are incredibly sweet, soft, and golden-brown. If they start turning dark brown, immediately kill the heat.

- 2. Bloom the red pepper flakes and reduce the white wine to build the broth's foundation.**

Turn the heat up to medium-high, add the red pepper flakes, and let them bloom for 15 seconds. Stand back and pour in the white wine, letting it boil vigorously for 3 to 4 minutes to cook off the alcohol. Pour in the bottled clam juice and the liquid from the canned chopped clams, holding the chopped meat back, and bring the cauldron to a rolling boil.

- 3. Steam the fresh littleneck clams in the boiling broth until they pop open.**

Drop the scrubbed littlenecks into the broth and cover with a tight-fitting lid. Steam for 5 to 8 minutes, transferring them to a foil-tented bowl as soon as they open. Throw away any clams that refuse to open after 10 minutes.

1. Boil the linguine in heavily salted water until aggressively al dente.

While the clams steam, drop the linguine into a large pot of boiling, ocean-salty water. Cook for exactly two minutes less than the package instructions. Reserve a mug of the starchy pasta water, then drain.

2. Finish cooking the undercooked linguine directly in the bubbling clam broth.

Drop the drained linguine and the reserved canned chopped clams into the Dutch oven over medium heat. Toss aggressively for about 2 minutes, allowing the pasta to absorb the briny liquid and release its starches to thicken the sauce.

3. Remove from the heat and vigorously toss in the cold butter, parsley, and lemon to emulsify the sauce.

Pull the pot off the heat entirely. Toss in the cubed cold butter, chopped parsley, lemon juice, and zest. Vigorously stir until the melting butter and starchy liquid create a thick, glossy sauce that clings to every strand. Add a splash of reserved pasta water if it looks too tight.

4. Serve the linguine immediately on a massive, warmed platter topped with the steamed clams.

Transfer the pasta to a platter, making sure the caramelized garlic cloves are proudly visible. Nestle the cooked littlenecks in their shells over the top and serve right in the middle of the table, alongside a massive loaf of foil-wrapped garlic bread so the trapped steam softens the crust while the butter melts in.



Seafood Fra Diavolo

Brother Devil. Michele Pezza was an eighteenth-century Neapolitan guerrilla fighter, but this magnificent, fiery beast of a dish is pure New York hustle. Born when immigrant ingenuity met an abundance of cheap American shellfish, Fra Diavolo is the unapologetic centerpiece of the Italian-American Sunday table. It is loud, it requires your largest Dutch oven, and the garlic-spiked, chili-laced aroma will perfume your home like a Tuesday night at the best red-sauce joint in Brooklyn. Serve it with tightly foil-wrapped garlic bread and let your guests fight over the last clam.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb linguine

1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil
divided

1 lb	large shrimp <i>peeled and deveined, shells reserved</i>	1 tbsp	anchovy paste
1/2 lb	sea scallops <i>halved horizontally</i>	3 tbsp	tomato paste
12 med	littleneck clams <i>scrubbed</i>	1 cup	dry white wine
12 med	black mussels <i>scrubbed and de-bearded</i>	28 oz	San Marzano whole peeled tomatoes <i>crushed by hand</i>
1/2 lb	calamari rings	1 tsp	dried oregano
6 large cloves	garlic <i>smashed and minced</i>	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>chopped</i>
2 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes	1/4 cup	fresh basil <i>torn</i>

PREPARATION

- **Crush the tomatoes by hand.**

Do not buy pre-crushed tomatoes. Squeeze the whole peeled tomatoes between your fingers in a bowl to achieve the irregular, rustic chunks essential for a proper fisherman's style sauce.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Extract the sea.**

Heat a quarter cup of olive oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat, then aggressively fry the reserved shrimp shells until they turn pink and spotty brown, releasing their briny compounds into the fat, before removing and discarding them.

- 2. Sear the sweet meat.**

In that perfumed oil, sear the shrimp and scallops for just one minute per side until they develop a little color but remain entirely raw in the middle, then transfer them to a plate.

1. Summon the devil.

Reduce the heat to medium, add the remaining quarter cup of olive oil, and sauté the minced garlic, red pepper flakes, and anchovy paste until intensely fragrant, taking care not to scorch the garlic.

2. Build the foundational depth.

Stir in the tomato paste and toast it until it darkens to a deep rust color, then deglaze the pot with the white wine, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom and letting the liquid reduce by half.

3. Commence the Sunday simmer.

Add the hand-crushed tomatoes and dried oregano, bring the sauce to a gentle bubble, and let it simmer on the lowest heat for forty-five minutes to establish that slow-cooked restaurant flavor.

4. Steam the bivalves.

Bring the sauce up to a vigorous bubble, nestle the scrubbed clams and mussels directly into the red liquid, and cover the pot until they pop open and release their briny liquor into the sauce, which should take about ten minutes.

5. Marry the pasta to the sauce.

Meanwhile, boil the linguine in heavily salted water until it is two minutes shy of al dente, drain it while reserving a cup of the starchy pasta water, and toss the noodles vigorously directly in the Dutch oven.

6. Reunite the remaining seafood.

Turn off the heat, gently stir in the seared shrimp, scallops, and raw calamari rings so the residual heat poaches them to tender perfection in two minutes, then finish with a heavy shower of parsley and torn basil.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Wrap the garlic bread in foil.**

Do not toast it open face like a diner. Heavily butter the sliced bread, pack it with fresh garlic, and wrap it tightly in aluminum foil before baking so the steam softens the crumb while melting the fat.

- **Discard stubborn shells.**

Any clams or mussels that refuse to open after steaming must be thrown away; do not force them open or you will ruin a masterpiece.

- **Respect the frozen aisle.**

If using a high-quality frozen seafood mix, thaw it completely overnight in the fridge and pat it bone-dry with paper towels before searing, otherwise it will boil in its own water.



Fettuccine Alfredo

Let's get one thing straight before we even melt the butter: if you go to Rome and ask for Alfredo with heavy cream, garlic, and nutmeg, they will look at you like you have two heads. But we aren't in Rome—we are in Brooklyn, or the Bronx, or South Philly, where generations of immigrants built a cuisine that unapologetically embraces dairy richness. This is the ultimate twenty-minute restaurant indulgence, built to be whipped up in a massive Dutch oven while a houseful of people opens the wine and pulls the foil-wrapped garlic bread from the oven.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb dried fettuccine

8 tbsp unsalted butter

3 large cloves garlic
smashed and finely minced

1 1/2 cup heavy whipping cream

1/8 tsp ground nutmeg

1 1/2 cup Parmigiano-Reggiano
freshly grated on the fine holes of a box grater

1 large egg yolk
lightly beaten

to taste kosher salt

to taste black pepper
freshly cracked

to taste flat-leaf Italian parsley
finely chopped

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Bring a large Dutch oven of aggressively salted water to a rolling boil and cook the fettuccine until just al dente.**

Before you drain the pasta, scoop out about one cup of the starchy pasta water to keep as an insurance policy for the sauce.

- 2. Return the empty Dutch oven to the stove over medium-low heat and melt the butter.**

Add the minced garlic and let it gently sizzle for a minute or two to infuse the fat, making sure it does not brown or crisp.

- 3. Pour in the heavy cream, nutmeg, and a generous crack of black pepper, whisking gently to combine.**

Let the mixture come to a gentle simmer and bubble away for three to four minutes until it slightly coats the back of a spoon.

- 4. Whisk two tablespoons of the hot cream mixture into the beaten egg yolk to temper it, then whisk the warmed egg back into the pot.**

This old-school Arthur Avenue trick instantly gives the sauce an unparalleled velvet texture and a pale-golden hue.

- 5. Turn the heat completely off, drop the drained pasta into the pot, and furiously toss in the grated cheese by the handful.**

The cheese will melt into the cream and butter to create a glossy emulsion; if it feels too thick or sticky, splash in a little of your reserved pasta water until every noodle is perfectly coated.

- 1. Transfer the pasta immediately to a warm serving platter, topping with more cheese, black pepper, and chopped parsley.**

Call the crowd to the table, unwrap the steaming foil from the garlic bread, and eat it while it is piping hot.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Grate the cheese yourself.**

Pre-grated cheese is coated in cellulose to prevent sticking, which will make your sauce grainy instead of glossy. Buy a block and put your box grater to work.

- **Turn the heat off before adding the cheese.**

If you boil the cheese, the proteins will separate and turn gritty. The residual heat of the cream and the hot pasta is plenty to melt it.



"Sunday" Meat Sauce

Let's get one thing straight right out of the gate: this is not a quick weeknight marinara. This is Sunday Gravy, a magnificent, unapologetic, four-hour minimum project born when Southern Italian immigrants took one look at the glorious abundance of American meat and said, 'put it all in the pot.' Do not apologize for it not being authentically Neapolitan. This is its own distinct cuisine, the proud, deeply comforting taste of a Tuesday night at your favorite red-sauce joint in Brooklyn. It is meant to bubble slowly on the stove while you make foil-wrapped garlic bread, drink a glass of Chianti, and listen to the chaos of your friends arriving.

INGREDIENTS

3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil	1/2 lb	ground pork
1 lb	pork spareribs or neck bones	1/2 lb	ground veal
1 lb	sweet and hot Italian sausages	1 cup	stale Italian bread <i>crusts removed and torn into chunks</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely grated on a box grater</i>	1/2 cup	whole milk
5 large	garlic cloves <i>smashed and roughly chopped</i>	2 large	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>
6 oz	tomato paste	3/4 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano or Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated on a box grater</i>
1/2 cup	dry red wine	1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
56 oz	whole peeled plum tomatoes <i>crushed by hand</i>	2 med	garlic cloves <i>minced to a paste</i>
28 oz	tomato purée or passata	2 tsp	kosher salt
2 small	fresh basil <i>left whole on the sprig</i>	1 tsp	black pepper
1 lb	ground beef	1/2 tsp	red pepper flakes

PREPARATION

- **Make the panade.**

Combine the torn Italian bread chunks and whole milk in a bowl. Let it sit and soak until completely softened. Do not substitute dry breadcrumbs; the milk-soaked bread keeps the meatballs incredibly tender.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sear the pork and sausage.**

Heat the olive oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat, then brown the ribs and sausages on all sides until deeply crusty. Remove them to a platter, leaving that dark, sticky, rendered pork fat exactly where it is.

1. Build the aromatic base.

Drop the heat to medium-low, add the grated onion to the pork fat, and sauté until soft and translucent. Stir in the smashed garlic and red pepper flakes for exactly one minute, just until it hits your nose.

2. Caramelize the tomato paste.

Add the tomato paste and fry it, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, until it darkens from bright red to a rusty brick color to cook out the metallic tin flavor and build a deep, umami-rich foundation.

3. Deglaze with red wine.

Pour in the Chianti—it will hiss and spit—and use your wooden spoon to aggressively scrape up every last browned bit from the bottom of the pot. Let the wine reduce until it's almost entirely a thick syrup.

4. Begin the four-hour simmer.

Pour in the hand-crushed tomatoes and purée, slide the browned meats and their juices back into the pot, and tuck in the basil. Bring to a gentle bubble, then drop the heat to the absolute lowest setting, partially cover, and let it lazily blub for at least four hours, scraping the bottom every thirty minutes.

5. Mix the meatballs.

Around hour two, squeeze the excess milk from your soaked bread, crumble it into a large bowl, and gently combine it with the beef, pork, veal, eggs, grated cheese, parsley, minced garlic, salt, and pepper. Use your hands, but do not overwork the meat or the meatballs will turn tough.

6. Par-bake the meatballs.

Roll the mixture into large, golf-ball-sized spheres and place them on a lightly oiled sheet pan. Bake at 400°F for 15 minutes just to set the crust so they survive the sauce.

1. **Integrate and finish.**

With 90 minutes left on the sauce's journey, gently slip the par-baked meatballs into the simmering tomato bath. Let them poach slowly until the four hours are up, the ribs are falling apart, the sauce is a dark, oily red, and the whole house smells like heaven.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Holy Trinity of Meatballs.**

The ratio of 50% beef, 25% pork, and 25% veal is the non-negotiable secret to a perfect meatball. The beef brings flavor, the pork provides sweet fat, and the veal yields gelatinous tenderness. If you absolutely cannot find veal, a 50/50 split of beef and pork will do.

- **Do not wipe out the pot.**

After you sear the ribs and sausages, the sticky brown fond and rendered fat left behind are the absolute soul of your Sunday gravy. Build your sauce directly on top of it.



Penne all'Arrabbiata with Calabrian Chili

In Rome, *arrabbiata* means "angry"—a fiery, fifteen-minute flash in the pan of garlic, oil, and tomatoes. But in Brooklyn, we don't flash and fade. We hold a grudge. We take that authentic, fruity Calabrian heat and marry it to the ultimate Italian-American institution: the Sunday Gravy. This isn't a delicate weeknight sauce, and we make no apologies for that. It is a massive, loud, four-hour endeavor of browning ribs, blistering sausages, and sinking huge meatballs into a bubbling red sea until the pork collagen melts into a rich, fiercely flavorful gravy. Put on a pot of coffee, open the Chianti, and let this simmer all damn morning.

INGREDIENTS

2 lb	bone-in country-style pork ribs	1 tbsp	kosher salt <i>plus more to taste</i>
1 1/2 lb	sweet Italian sausage links	1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground, plus more to taste</i>
3 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil	1 lb	ground beef
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1/2 lb	ground pork
8 large	garlic cloves <i>peeled and sliced thin</i>	1/2 lb	ground veal
3 tbsp	Calabrian chili paste	1 cup	whole milk
6 oz	tomato paste	1 1/2 cup	day-old Italian bread <i>crusts removed and torn into small pieces</i>
1 cup	dry red wine	2 large	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>
56 oz	crushed tomatoes	1 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>freshly grated, plus more for serving</i>
28 oz	whole peeled San Marzano tomatoes <i>crushed by hand</i>	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
1 cup	water	3 large	garlic cloves <i>grated</i>
2 med	bay leaves	2 lb	penne rigate
1 tsp	dried oregano	1/2 cup	fresh basil <i>torn</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Brown the meats in a massive Dutch oven.**

Place your Dutch oven over medium-high heat with the olive oil, sear the heavily seasoned pork ribs in batches until they have a dark crust, then blister the sausages until browned but not cooked through, transferring all meat to a platter and leaving the shimmering fat and fond behind.

1. Build the angry foundation of the sauce.

Lower the heat to medium, sauté the diced onion in the pork fat until soft, then drop in the sliced garlic for exactly one minute before vigorously stirring in the Calabrian chili paste and tomato paste. Let it fry for a few minutes until it turns rust-colored and the oil glows violently red, blooming the fruity heat of the chili.

2. Deglaze the pot and add the tomatoes.

Pour in the red wine, scraping up all the caramelized bits of pork and spicy tomato paste from the bottom, then simmer until reduced by half before stirring in the crushed tomatoes, hand-crushed San Marzanos, water, bay leaves, and oregano.

3. Submerge the meats and begin the four-hour simmer.

Sink the browned ribs, sausages, and their resting juices into the bubbling red sea, immediately drop the heat to the absolute lowest setting, cover with a lid left slightly ajar, and walk away to let it simmer for four hours, returning only to stir occasionally so the natural sugars don't scorch.

4. Prepare the holy trinity meatballs.

About two hours into the simmer, mash the milk and torn bread together to form a panade, then gently use your hands to mix in the beef, pork, veal, beaten eggs, grated Parmesan, parsley, grated garlic, salt, and pepper without overworking the meat.

5. Bake the meatballs on a sheet pan to set their shape.

Roll the mixture into golf-ball-sized portions, place them on a rimmed sheet pan, and bake in a 400°F oven for 15 to 20 minutes until they develop a light crust so they don't disintegrate when they hit the sauce.

6. Sink the meatballs into the gravy for the final hour.

After the sauce has simmered for three hours, gently drop the baked meatballs into the Dutch oven and let them braise in the spicy tomatoes until the four-hour mark, by which point the sauce will be thick, slick with fiery oils, and the pork will be falling off the bone.

1. Toss the pasta and serve the feast.

Boil the penne rigate in heavily salted water until strictly al dente, pull the meats onto a foil-covered platter, and dump the drained pasta directly into the Dutch oven to toss vigorously over low heat for sixty seconds until every ridge is gripped by the spicy, pork-infused red sauce.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Wrap your garlic bread in foil.**

Do not toast it open-faced; slather a halved loaf of soft Italian bread with butter, minced garlic, and parsley, press it back together, and wrap the whole thing tightly in aluminum foil before baking at 375°F. The foil traps the steam, softening the crumb while the garlic butter permeates every inch.

● **Construct the Caesar salad tableside.**

The tableside construction is the entire point. Get a large wooden bowl and rub the inside vigorously with a cut clove of garlic. Whisk a raw egg yolk, a squeeze of anchovy paste, Dijon mustard, and lemon juice directly in the bowl, slowly emulsifying in olive oil before tossing in crisp Romaine, massive handfuls of Parmesan, and croutons.



Chapter 2 — Antipasti & Starters

Family-style starters designed to overwhelm the table with flavor and texture right from the jump.

Friday night at eight o'clock, the tablecloth disappearing under plates, the wooden Caesar bowl clattering against the water glasses, the true Italian-American meal doesn't gently commence—it detonates. Long before anyone considers the veal parm, a procession of platters hits the table, overwhelming the senses with hot oil, sharp cheese, and garlic right out of the gate. This is the antipasti, a chaotic opening salvo of foil-wrapped garlic bread, blistered clams, and towering wedges of iceberg.

You don't need a commercial deep fryer or a brigade of prep cooks to pull this off at home. As the oil spits, a rolling Dutch oven makes short work of the fried calamari and mozzarella in carrozza, while a single sheet pan handles the stuffed mushrooms and clams casino. Crack open the cheap Chianti, tear off a hunk of bread, pass the clams, and try to keep up.





Ozone Park Sheet-Pan Baked Clams Oreganato

If you ask a nonna in Naples for baked clams, she'll hand you a polite, delicate plate of seafood. We are not in Naples; we are in Queens. This is an unapologetic, loud, and aggressively garlicky homage to the legendary red-sauce joints of Ozone Park. We swap the tedious shucking knife for a screaming-hot sheet pan to effortlessly pop the shells open, packing them with a wet-sand mixture of pecorino, oregano, and breadcrumbs. Broil them into a nearly blackened, buttery submission and serve right off the metal pan. Do not apologize for the garlic, and do not forget the foil-wrapped bread to mop up the sauce.

INGREDIENTS

36 med	live Littleneck clams <i>scrubbed</i>	1 1/2 tbsp	dried oregano <i>crushed</i>
1/4 cup	kosher salt	1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 cup	plain unseasoned dry breadcrumbs	1/2 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes
1/2 cup	Panko breadcrumbs	1/3 cup	extra-virgin olive oil
1/2 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated</i>	1/2 cup	dry white wine
4 large cloves	garlic <i>finely minced</i>	4 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>cut into small cubes</i>
1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf Italian parsley <i>finely chopped</i>	3 large cloves	garlic <i>smashed and peeled</i>
		1 large	lemon <i>zested and juiced</i>

PREPARATION

- **You can prep the entire sheet pan of half-shelled clams hours before your guests arrive.**

Purge, oven-steam, half-shell, and arrange the clams on the pan in the morning, then cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate until you're ready to stuff and broil them.

- **Mix the dry oreganata stuffing up to a day in advance.**

Store the mixed breadcrumbs, cheese, and dry spices in an airtight container at room temperature. Don't add the olive oil until right before you pack the clams.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Purge the clams of any sand in a cold saltwater bath.**

Submerge the live clams in a bowl of cold water mixed with the kosher salt for one to two hours in the fridge, then lift them out leaving the grit behind and give the shells a vigorous scrub under running water.

- 1. Blast the clams in a 450°F oven just until the shells surrender and pop open.**

Arrange the scrubbed clams in a single layer on a dry, rimmed sheet pan and roast for 3 to 5 minutes, removing them the exact moment they crack open to avoid cooking the meat. Discard any that refuse to open.
- 2. Remove the top shells and sever the bottom muscle, preserving every drop of clam liquor.**

Once cool enough to handle, pry off and discard the top shell. Slide a butter knife under the meat in the bottom shell to loosen it, then snuggle the prepared clams back together on the sheet pan so they sit upright in their natural juices.
- 3. Massage the dry ingredients and olive oil together until the mixture resembles wet sand.**

In a bowl, toss the standard breadcrumbs, Panko, grated Pecorino, minced garlic, chopped parsley, dried oregano, black pepper, red pepper flakes, and lemon zest. Drizzle in the olive oil and work it through with your hands until the mixture clumps slightly when squeezed.
- 4. Pack the clams with the breadcrumb mixture and assemble the pan sauce directly on the sheet pan.**

Mound a generous spoonful of the stuffing onto each clam, pressing it firmly into the edges to form a protective cap. Scatter the smashed garlic and butter cubes onto the sheet pan between the shells, then carefully pour the white wine and the lemon juice onto the pan's surface, taking care not to wash away your breading.
- 5. Broil the pan on high until the crust is borderline charred and the buttery pan sauce furiously bubbles.**

Place the sheet pan about six inches under the broiler for 3 to 6 minutes. You want a deeply browned, nearly blackened Ozone Park-style crust. The butter will melt into the wine and clam juice beneath them, creating an intoxicating, emulsified broth.
- 6. Serve the clams straight from the hot sheet pan with a loaf of foil-wrapped garlic bread.**

Spoon the bubbling garlic-butter broth directly from the tray onto the plates, completely avoiding the top of the clams to preserve their crunch.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Source dried Sicilian oregano on the branch if you can find it.**

Generic supermarket oregano is often dusty and lacks potency. The essential oils preserved in dried branches will change your life and vastly elevate the dish.

- **Foil-wrapped garlic bread is mandatory, not optional.**

Do not toast it open-faced; wrapping it in foil ensures the steam softens the bread while the butter melts in and the garlic perfumes everything. It is the only proper vehicle for mopping up this pan sauce.



Caesar alla ZZ with Tomato Paste Semolina Croutons

This is not a delicate palate cleanser. It is a loud, rich, unapologetically Italian-American Caesar meant to be eaten while your Sunday gravy bubbles on the stove. The secret lies in massive blocks of semolina bread baked in butter, tomato paste, and roasted garlic until they become savory candy. You roast the garlic on Sunday morning alongside the pork bones. When guests arrive, you stand at the head of the table with a giant wooden bowl and build this dressing from scratch, making no apologies for the anchovies that give it its soul.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cup	whole garlic cloves <i>peeled</i>	12 small	brown anchovies packed in oil <i>drained and mashed into a paste</i>
1 cup	extra-virgin olive oil	1/2 cup	grainy Dijon mustard
8 oz	semolina bread <i>crusts removed, cut into 2-inch by 1-inch rectangular blocks</i>	1 tsp	roasted garlic puree
8 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>melted</i>	1 large	raw garlic clove <i>halved</i>
5 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil	2 tbsp	fresh lemon juice
3 tbsp	roasted garlic puree	1 1/2 tsp	Worcestershire sauce
2 tbsp	double-concentrated tomato paste	1 tsp	nonpareil capers <i>drained, rinsed, and minced</i>
1 tsp	crushed dried Calabrian chili flakes	11 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp	dried oregano	2 1/2 tsp	freshly cracked black pepper
2 tsp	kosher salt	5 small	Little Gem lettuce <i>ends trimmed, leaves separated, washed, and dried completely</i>
2 large	egg yolks <i>pasteurized</i>	1/4 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>finely grated</i>
		1 small	Ricotta Salata <i>for tableside grating</i>

PREPARATION

- **The Sunday morning garlic roast.**

While your Sunday Gravy is coming up to a simmer on the stove, preheat your oven to 300°F. Place the peeled garlic cloves in a small, oven-safe ramekin and pour the 1 cup of olive oil over the top until completely submerged. Cover tightly with foil and roast for 1 to 1 1/2 hours, until the garlic yields completely when pressed with a spoon. Let cool, then mash the cloves in their own oil into a smooth puree.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Bake the tomato paste semolina croutons.**

Preheat the oven to 400°F and line a sheet pan with parchment paper. In a large bowl, whisk the melted butter, 5 tablespoons of olive oil, 3 tablespoons of roasted garlic puree, tomato paste, Calabrian chili flakes, oregano, and salt until it forms a thick, red emulsion. Toss the semolina rectangles in the mixture, massaging the fat into the bread. Spread evenly on the sheet pan and bake for 6 to 10 minutes until the edges turn a deep mahogany brown.

2. **Season the wooden bowl for service.**

Gather your guests around the dining table with a massive, dry wooden salad bowl. Take the halved raw garlic clove and forcefully rub the cut side all over the interior of the wood, impregnating it with garlic oils, then discard the remaining raw garlic.

3. **Build the emulsion tableside.**

Add the pasteurized egg yolks, mashed anchovy paste, Dijon mustard, minced capers, Worcestershire sauce, and 1 teaspoon of roasted garlic puree to the bowl. Beat into a thick paste, squeeze in the lemon juice, add the black pepper, and whisk to combine. While whisking continuously with one hand, slowly drizzle in 11 tablespoons of extra-virgin olive oil until the dressing thickens into a glossy, opaque cream.

4. **Toss and finish the salad.**

Drop the completely dry Little Gem leaves into the bowl and toss gently but thoroughly with wooden salad tongs until heavily coated. Sprinkle in the grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, throw in the cooled croutons, and toss again. Serve onto chilled plates, raining down a mountain of freshly grated Ricotta Salata over each portion.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Sourcing the bread.**

If a true Italian bakery semolina loaf is unavailable, look for a dense, high-quality artisanal sourdough. Avoid airy ciabatta or pre-sliced sandwich bread, which will disintegrate in the heavy garlic-tomato butter.

- **Scaling the dressing.**

If scaling the dressing for more than eight people, exercise caution during the oil drizzle. A massive volume of dressing is prone to breaking if the oil is introduced too rapidly. Maintain patience and whisk aggressively.



Sheet-Pan Eggplant Rollatini Al Forno

Let's get one thing straight: you will not find this dish in a trattoria in Florence. This is the proudly, unapologetically massive Italian-American restaurant classic, engineered for a houseful of people and a Sunday Gravy that's been simmering since morning. We ditch the messy deep-frying station for a high-heat sheet pan roast, yielding perfectly tender eggplant planks ready to be loaded with a heavy matrix of whole-milk ricotta and mozzarella. It is dense, it is loud, and when it hits the table next to the foil-wrapped garlic bread, it tastes exactly like the joint on Arthur Avenue.

INGREDIENTS

2 large	globe eggplants <i>trimmed and cut lengthwise into 1/4-inch-thick planks</i>	1 large	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
1 tbsp	kosher salt	3 tbsp	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
1/4 cup	extra-virgin olive oil	1 tbsp	fresh basil <i>chopped</i>
15 oz	whole-milk ricotta cheese	2 large	garlic <i>minced or finely smashed</i>
1 lb	low-moisture whole-milk mozzarella <i>grated on the large holes of a box grater</i>	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1/2 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated on the small holes of a box grater</i>	4 cup	Sunday Gravy or heavy marinara <i>simmering hot</i>

PREPARATION

- **Start the Sunday Gravy hours before the guests arrive.**

A proper Italian-American sugo is a four-hour project, minimum. Get your pork neck bones, sausage, and meatballs simmering in the Dutch oven long before you start prepping the eggplant. For the meatballs, stick to the 50% beef, 25% pork, and 25% veal ratio bound with a milk-soaked panade.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Sweat the eggplant to draw out the bitter vegetation water and collapse the spongy cellular structure.**

Lay the planks flat on wire cooling racks or clean kitchen towels. Sprinkle them aggressively on both sides with kosher salt and walk away for 30 minutes. Use paper towels to rigorously wipe away all the brown water and excess salt until the planks are completely dry.

1. Roast the eggplant planks on oiled sheet pans until deeply pliable and lightly golden.

Preheat your oven to 400°F and line two sheet pans with parchment paper. Brush both sides of the dried eggplant generously with olive oil and roast for 15 to 20 minutes, rotating the pans halfway through. Remove from the oven to cool, then drop the oven temperature to 375°F.

2. Mix the ricotta with the egg, herbs, and grated hard cheeses to form a thick paste.

In a large mixing bowl, vigorously combine the whole-milk ricotta, half of the shredded mozzarella, the Pecorino Romano, the beaten egg, minced garlic, parsley, basil, and black pepper. Taste for seasoning, remembering that the Pecorino carries a good deal of salt.

3. Assemble the rollatini by wrapping the roasted eggplant around a generous dollop of the cheese filling.

Ladle about a cup and a half of hot Sunday Gravy into the bottom of a heavy 9×13-inch baking dish. Spoon two tablespoons of the cheese mixture onto the wider end of each cooled eggplant plank, roll it gently but firmly, and place it into the baking dish seam-side down.

4. Bake the dish smothered in sauce and the remaining mozzarella until bubbling and charred at the edges.

Ladle another heavy dose of gravy over the bundles, leaving the edges slightly exposed, and shower evenly with the remaining shredded mozzarella and a final dusting of Pecorino. Cover tightly with aluminum foil and bake at 375°F for 25 minutes, then uncover and bake 10 to 15 minutes more until the cheese is deeply browned.

5. Let the rollatini rest for at least ten minutes before serving so the molten cheese matrix can set.

If you hit it with a spatula immediately, it will collapse into a soupy mess. Once rested, garnish with torn basil leaves and serve hot alongside a foil-wrapped loaf of garlic bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not compromise on the dairy.**

Skim ricotta lacks the necessary milk fat and will weep water into your sauce. Pre-shredded mozzarella is coated in anti-caking starches that prevent a smooth melt. Buy the blocks and break out the box grater.



"Corona di Ferro"

In Italy, the Corona di Ferro is an ancient, jeweled iron crown. In America, it means something entirely different. It was a Philadelphia boarding house born in 1899 where immigrants fresh off the boat traded the poverty of the old country for the shocking, glorious abundance of American meat. This is the Piatta di Carne—the hot platter of meats that spent the last four hours giving their soul to the Sunday gravy. It is a massive, unapologetic mountain of meatballs, sweet sausage, and stuffed veal bracirole drowned in dark red sauce. It requires a heavy Dutch oven, loud guests, and a Chianti bottle with a candle in it. Make no apologies.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp	olive oil	1/4 lb	ground pork
1 large	yellow onion <i>grated on the large holes of a box grater</i>	1/4 lb	ground veal
4 med cloves	garlic <i>grated on the fine holes of a box grater</i>	1 large	egg
2 28-oz cans	Centio whole peeled tomatoes <i>crushed by hand</i>	1/2 cup	Parmesan cheese <i>freshly grated</i>
1 cup	water	1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
1/2 cup	dry red wine	1 med clove	garlic <i>minced into a paste</i>
1 med	bay leaf	4 med	sweet Italian sausage links
1 tsp	kosher salt	2 med	thin veal cutlets
1/2 tsp	black pepper	2 slice	prosciutto
2 slice	sturdy white bread <i>crusts removed</i>	2 slice	provolone cheese
1/4 cup	whole milk	2 tbsp	Parmesan cheese <i>grated</i>
1/2 lb	ground beef	1 large	crusty Italian loaf <i>slashed and slathered in garlic butter</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Lay the veal cutlets flat, top with prosciutto, provolone, and a sprinkle of Parmesan, then roll tightly and tie with kitchen twine.**

Treat this like rolling a cigar. It needs to hold together during a long, violent simmer in the gravy.

- 2. Soak the white bread in milk, squeeze out the excess to form a wet paste, and gently mix it with the beef, pork, veal, egg, half cup of Parmesan, parsley, minced garlic paste, salt, and pepper.**

This bread paste is the panade, the non-negotiable secret to Italian-American meatballs. Roll them into golf-ball-sized spheres, but do not overwork the meat or it will turn into a brick.

- 1. Sear the sweet sausages in a large Dutch oven with olive oil over medium-high heat until deeply browned, then remove to a sheet pan.**

Do the exact same with the braciolo, then the meatballs. You want a dark, sticky, beautiful layer of rendered fat coating the bottom of the pot. The meatballs just need a crust; they will finish cooking in the sauce.

- 2. Drop the heat to medium, add the grated onion to the rendered fat, and cook until soft before stirring in the grated garlic and red wine.**

The moisture from the onion will deglaze the pot. Let the wine aggressively bubble and reduce by half, scraping up every bit of fond.

- 3. Pour in the hand-crushed tomatoes, the water used to rinse the cans, and the bay leaf, then nestle the meats gently into the red bath.**

Bring the pot to a gentle bubble, then drop the heat to the lowest possible simmer with the lid slightly cracked.

- 4. Simmer the gravy for an absolute minimum of four hours, stirring gently every 30 minutes to ensure nothing catches on the bottom.**

Do not attempt a 30-minute shortcut. The magic of the red-sauce joint is the slow, agonizing breakdown of the meats, releasing their fat and gelatin into the tomatoes and turning the sauce a rich, dark mahogany.

- 5. Rescue the meats with a slotted spoon, remove the twine from the braciolo, and arrange everything on a massive warmed serving platter drowned in the dark gravy.**

Serve immediately alongside foil-wrapped garlic bread. The leftover sauce stays in the Dutch oven, waiting to dress your baked ziti or tomorrow's Chicken Parm.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Foil-Wrapped Garlic Bread is mandatory.**

Slashing the loaf, heavily applying garlic-parsley butter, and sealing it in an aluminum pouch creates a steam chamber. The ambient heat melts the butter deep into the crumb while the steam softens the bread, turning it into a pull-apart sponge designed for soaking up gravy. Toasted open-face is a rookie mistake.

- **The Caesar Protocol.**

A platter of heavy meats demands the acidic cut of a proper Caesar salad. The tableside construction is the point. You need a large wooden bowl rubbed vigorously with a cut garlic clove. Mash anchovy paste and a raw egg yolk against the wood, whisk in Dijon, lemon, and oil, then toss with romaine, an aggressive handful of Parmesan, and croutons.

- **The Chicken Parm Directive.**

If you plan to use this leftover Sunday gravy for Chicken Parm, respect the process. It is not a single recipe; it is a two-stage architectural project. First, pound, bread, and fry the cutlet in a skillet until perfect. Only then do you transfer it to a sheet pan, ladle over the marinara, and blanket it in mozzarella to bake. Never combine these steps. It should arrive at the table with the marinara bubbling so loud your guests think they're on Arthur Avenue.



Dutch Oven Fried Calamari with Cherry Peppers & Lemon

Do not apologize for this dish. It isn't something you'll find in a quiet seaside trattoria in Amalfi; it is the proud, chaotic invention of Italian immigrants on the docks of Rhode Island and the red-sauce joints of Brooklyn. We tenderize the squid in buttermilk, dredge it in a flour-cornstarch blend for an aggressively crisp shell, and fry it in a heavy cast-iron Dutch oven. In a move of pure Italian-American genius, the screaming-hot squid is then tossed in a sizzling pan of garlic butter, hot cherry peppers, and vinegar brine. It is glossy, spicy, beautifully messy, and absolutely perfect.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 lb	calamari (tubes and tentacles) <i>cleaned, sliced into 3/4-inch rings, large tentacles halved</i>	3 tbsp	unsalted butter
1 1/2 cup	buttermilk	1 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
2 tsp	kosher salt <i>divided, plus extra for serving</i>	4 med	garlic <i>minced</i>
1 1/2 cup	all-purpose flour	1/2 cup	jarred hot cherry peppers <i>sliced</i>
1/2 cup	cornstarch	1/2 cup	jarred banana peppers <i>sliced</i>
1/4 cup	fine cornmeal	2 tbsp	pepper vinegar brine <i>reserved straight from the jar</i>
1 tbsp	garlic powder	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>roughly chopped</i>
1 tsp	freshly ground black pepper	2 large	lemons <i>cut into wedges</i>
1 tsp	dried oregano	1 cup	marinara sauce <i>warmed</i>
8 cup	peanut oil		

PREPARATION

- **Submerge the calamari in a buttermilk brine.**

In a mixing bowl, combine the buttermilk and 1 teaspoon of the kosher salt. Add the sliced calamari, cover, and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes, or up to 4 hours, to tenderize the squid and prime it for the dredge.

- **Whisk the dry dredge ingredients together.**

In a large, shallow baking dish or sheet pan, whisk together the flour, cornstarch, cornmeal, garlic powder, black pepper, oregano, and the remaining 1 teaspoon of kosher salt.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Heat the oil in a heavy Dutch oven.

Pour the peanut oil into a large cast-iron Dutch oven to a depth of 2 to 3 inches and attach a deep-fry thermometer. Heat over medium-high until the oil reaches exactly 360°F.

2. Stage the garlic-pepper butter in a separate skillet.

Before frying a single piece of squid, melt the butter and olive oil in a large skillet over very low heat on an adjacent burner. Add the minced garlic and gently sweat until blonde and fragrant, then stir in the cherry peppers, banana peppers, and pepper brine. Leave this skillet on the lowest possible warm setting.

3. Dredge the calamari in small batches.

Lift a handful of calamari from the buttermilk, letting the excess drip off, and toss vigorously in the flour mixture. Use a wire mesh strainer or spider to shake off all excess flour before the squid hits the oil so you do not burn the flour in the pot.

4. Fry the calamari until crisp and golden.

Carefully lower the breaded calamari into the hot oil and fry for exactly 2 to 3 minutes; any longer and the squid becomes rubber tires. Transfer the fried calamari to a wire rack set over a sheet pan, immediately sprinkle with a pinch of salt, and allow the oil to return to 360°F before frying the next batch.

5. Toss the fried calamari in the warm garlic butter.

The moment the final batch of calamari comes out of the oil and gets its dusting of salt, dump all the fried calamari directly into the skillet with the warm garlic butter and peppers. Turn the heat up slightly and toss vigorously for no more than 15 to 20 seconds so the crust absorbs the butter and brine without turning soggy.

6. Garnish aggressively and serve immediately.

Instantly tumble the calamari and peppers onto a warmed serving platter, shower with the chopped parsley, and surround with lemon wedges. Serve instantly with a bowl of warm, bubbling marinara on the side.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not keep your guests waiting.**

Fried calamari has a half-life of roughly seven minutes. Do not plate this dish until every guest is seated at the table with a drink in their hand and the foil-wrapped garlic bread has been passed.

- **Use cornstarch to hack the perfect crunch.**

Native Italians achieve a shatteringly crisp crust by using durum wheat semolina. By cutting all-purpose flour with cornstarch, you inhibit gluten formation and achieve that identically airy, dry crunch using standard American pantry staples.



Shrimp Luciano

If you've ever sat shoulder-to-shoulder in a buzzing dining room in South Ozone Park, practically shouting over the clinking of cheap wine glasses, you know Shrimp Luciano. When Italian immigrants traded the delicate octopus of the old country for massive, sweet American shrimp, they grabbed a stick of butter, a heavy pour of white wine, and a handful of garlic to create a proudly American masterpiece. You build a deeply jammy, slow-simmered onion and wine sauce while your Sunday gravy works on the back burner, then drop the shrimp in for exactly three minutes before the hungry crowd descends. It comes to the table bubbling furiously, demanding to be mopped up with hot, foil-wrapped garlic bread.

INGREDIENTS

4 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil	to taste	freshly cracked black pepper
6 tbsp	unsalted butter	2 tbsp	tomato paste
2 large	white onions <i>halved and very thinly sliced</i>	1 cup	dry white wine
6 large clove	garlic <i>smashed and roughly chopped</i>	1/2 cup	crushed tomatoes
1/2 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes	2 lb	jumbo shrimp <i>peeled and deveined, tails left on</i>
to taste	kosher salt	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Melt the olive oil and butter in a large Dutch oven over medium-low heat.**
Add the thinly sliced white onions and a generous pinch of kosher salt, letting them sweat and collapse slowly for 20 to 25 minutes until incredibly sweet, translucent, and melted into the butter.
- 2. Stir in the chopped garlic and crushed red pepper flakes, cooking until wildly fragrant.**
After about 3 to 4 minutes, clear a space in the center of the pot and drop in the tomato paste, letting it fry in the fat for a minute or two until it darkens to a deep rust color.
- 3. Pour in the white wine and scrape up any browned bits from the bottom of the pot.**
Let the wine simmer and reduce by half to cook off the harsh alcohol. Stir in the crushed tomatoes, turn the heat down to low, cover the pot, and let this Luciano sauce simmer gently for 10 minutes to marry the flavors.

- 1. Increase the heat to medium-high and tumble all the shrimp into the bubbling sauce.**

Toss the shrimp constantly for exactly 3 to 4 minutes until they curl into tight shapes and turn an opaque, vibrant pink, then pull the pot off the heat immediately.

- 2. Shower the pot with the chopped fresh parsley and give it one final toss to release the oils.**

Bring the heavy Dutch oven straight to the table alongside foil-baked garlic bread, letting the buttery steam billow out as you unwrap it, and tell everyone to dig in.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The secret to proper Italian-American garlic bread is the foil wrapper.**

Do not toast your garlic bread open-faced. Wrap the slathered semolina loaf tightly in aluminum foil before baking so the steam softens the crumb while the butter melts deeply into the bread, perfuming everything.

- **Borrow from your simmering Sunday gravy.**

If you already have your mandatory four-hour Sunday gravy simmering on the next burner, skip opening a new can of crushed tomatoes and just steal a ladle of the simmering tomato sauce for this base.



Sheet-Pan Mozzarella in Carrozza

In Naples, mozzarella in carrozza was an act of survival—a clever way to fry up stale bread and souring cheese. But when immigrants hit the States, abundance turned survival into celebration. Peasant loaves became soft white bread; modest cheese became thick slabs of whole-milk mozzarella. Deep-frying these one by one while a houseful of hungry friends drinks your Chianti is a rookie mistake. This sheet-pan adaptation delivers the same shatteringly crisp exterior and epic cheese pull, letting you cook a dozen at once. Drop them on the table next to a simmering bowl of Sunday gravy and watch the crowd lose their minds.

INGREDIENTS

12 slices	soft white sandwich bread	3/4 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>freshly grated</i>
1 lb	whole-milk low-moisture mozzarella cheese <i>cut into 1/4-inch thick slices</i>	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1/2 cup	whole milk	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
3/4 cup	all-purpose flour	1 tsp	dried oregano
4 large	eggs <i>beaten vigorously with a splash of water</i>	4 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>melted</i>
2 cup	plain dry breadcrumbs	3 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
		2 cup	Sunday gravy or marinara sauce <i>warmed</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven and prepare the sheet pan.

Preheat your oven to 400°F (convection preferred) and line a half-sheet pan with parchment paper. Whisk the melted butter and olive oil together, then generously brush half of this mixture directly onto the parchment to ensure a fried-like crust.

2. Architect the sandwiches.

Lay out six slices of bread and distribute the mozzarella evenly, leaving a strict 1/2-inch border so the cheese doesn't erupt during baking. Top with the remaining bread, trim the crusts completely off, and press the edges firmly to seal the cheese inside. Cut each square diagonally into twelve triangles.

3. Establish the breading station.

Line up four shallow dishes: one with the milk, one with the flour, one with the beaten eggs, and one with the breadcrumbs mixed thoroughly with the Parmigiano-Reggiano, salt, pepper, and oregano.

1. Execute the triple-dip technique.

Quickly tap each sandwich triangle into the milk to hydrate the seal, dredge it completely in the flour, submerge it into the beaten egg, and finally pack it tightly into the seasoned breadcrumbs.

2. Bake the carrozza.

Arrange the breaded triangles on the oiled sheet pan with an inch of space between them, drizzling the remaining butter-oil mixture over the tops. Bake for 10 minutes, carefully flip each piece with a thin spatula, and bake for another 7 to 10 minutes until deep golden-brown and hollow-sounding when tapped.

3. Serve immediately with Sunday gravy.

Let them rest for exactly two minutes so the molten cheese doesn't strip the skin from anyone's palate, then pile them high alongside a generous bowl of your four-hour simmering Sunday gravy for dipping.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Use the right bread and cheese.**

Do not substitute rustic sourdough or fresh mozzarella. Supermarket white bread provides the necessary structural seal, and low-moisture block mozzarella melts perfectly without turning your sheet pan into a watery swamp.



Stuffed Baby Bello Mushrooms

FOON-ghee ree-PYEH-nee ahl SOO-goh

These mushrooms are a tribute to the Mezzogiorno immigrants who arrived in America and found themselves suddenly surrounded by cheap meat. Taking the old-world Sicilian technique of stuffing hollowed vegetables with stale bread and cheese, they added sweet, fennel-heavy sausage and swapped foraged mushrooms for the abundant American cremini. But what makes this definitively Italian-American is the finish: these caps are nestled directly into a bubbling pool of your four-hour Sunday Gravy. It is rich, meaty, deeply savory, and requires an entire foil-wrapped loaf of garlic bread to mop up the glorious aftermath. This is the ultimate red-sauce joint starter.

INGREDIENTS

24 large	baby bello mushrooms <i>wiped clean, stems removed and reserved</i>	1/4 cup	dry white wine
3 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	3/4 cup	Italian seasoned breadcrumbs
1/2 lb	sweet Italian sausage with fennel <i>casings removed</i>	1/2 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated on a box grater, plus extra for topping</i>
1 small	yellow onion <i>very finely diced</i>	1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
1/2 cup	green bell pepper <i>finely minced</i>	2 tbsp	unsalted butter
4 clove	garlic <i>minced to a paste</i>	2 cup	Sunday Gravy <i>simmered for 4 hours minimum</i>
		to taste	kosher salt
		to taste	freshly ground black pepper

PREPARATION

- **The Dutch Oven and Sheet Pan Pipeline.**

Hollow the mushrooms and prep the stuffing hours before your guests arrive, keeping the assembled caps on a sheet pan in the fridge. When it is time to eat, transfer them to a baking dish, ladle in the hot gravy straight from the Dutch oven, and bake.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Hollow out the mushroom caps and mince the stems.**

Gently scrape out the dark gills from the inside of the caps using a small spoon to create a larger cavity, and arrange them cavity-side up on a sheet pan. Trim the tough bottoms off the reserved stems and finely mince them.

- 2. Brown the sweet Italian sausage.**

Heat one tablespoon of olive oil in a wide skillet or Dutch oven over medium-high heat, add the sausage, and aggressively break it into the smallest pieces possible with a wooden spoon until deeply browned and the fat has rendered.

- 1. Sauté the vegetables in the rendered pork fat.**
Lower the heat to medium, add the minced onion, green bell pepper, and mushroom stems, and cook until softened and the liquid has evaporated. Clear a small circle in the center, drop in the garlic paste, and toast for 45 seconds before mixing it in.
- 2. Deglaze the pan and build the stuffing.**
Pour in the white wine, scrape the bottom of the skillet, and let it reduce until nearly dry. Remove from the heat, let it cool slightly, then stir in the breadcrumbs, Pecorino Romano, parsley, and butter until it forms a cohesive, deeply seasoned paste.
- 3. Mound the stuffing into the hollowed mushroom caps.**
Drizzle the caps with a tablespoon of olive oil and a pinch of salt, then tightly pack the sausage mixture into each one, mounding it high above the rim.
- 4. Braise the stuffed mushrooms in Sunday Gravy.**
Ladle the Sunday Gravy into a large baking dish to form a shallow pool, nestle the stuffed caps directly into the sauce, and top with a final dusting of Pecorino.
- 5. Bake until the mushrooms are tender and the tops are golden.**
Bake uncovered at 400°F for 20 to 25 minutes so the earthy mushroom liquor enriches the bubbling gravy, hitting them with the broiler for 60 to 90 seconds at the end if the breadcrumb crust needs more color.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Foil-Wrapped Garlic Bread is Non-Negotiable.**
Serve this dish directly from the baking dish alongside a heavily steam-softened, foil-wrapped loaf of garlic bread. The steam softens the bread, the butter melts in, and the garlic perfumes everything, making it the perfect vessel to swipe through the mushroom-infused Sunday Gravy.

- **The Vegetarian Adaptation.**

If omitting the sausage, honor the original Sicilian cucina povera: increase the minced mushroom stems, and add a quarter cup of chopped oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes and two tablespoons of pine nuts to the breadcrumb mix.



Chapter 3 — The Pastas

Heavy, baked, and heavily sauced pasta main events from the Italian-American red sauce canon.

Eight o'clock at the crowded table, a half-sheet pan of baked ziti with those scorched, crispy edges that families quietly fight over hits the wood, the mozzarella bubbles popping, a cheap box grater knocking against heavy ceramic bowls while the wine keeps pouring. These are sprawling centerpieces that demand the middle of the table, a second bottle of wine, and steaming bowls of linguine fragrant with garlic and clam liquor. These dishes require little more than a Dutch oven, the box grater, and a profound respect for carbohydrates. Forget the tweezers and the tasting menus. Clear the center of the table, feed the loud crowd, stain a white shirt, and leave everyone undeniably full.





The South Philly Stovetop Spaghetti & "Golf Ball" Meatballs

This is the red-sauce holy grail, the unabashed, unapologetic crowning achievement of the Italian-American immigrant experience. Do not look for a shortcut. You are making Sunday gravy, which demands four hours, a heavy Dutch oven, and a profound respect for the transformative power of time. As the pork bones render and the meatballs release their fat into the simmering tomatoes, the sauce morphs into a deep, oily, brick-red lava. When you bring this heavy platter to the table, your guests will know exactly what this food is supposed to be.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	fresh white sandwich bread <i>crusts removed and torn into pieces</i>	1 lb	bone-in pork neck bones <i>patted dry</i>
1/2 cup	whole milk	1 lb	sweet Italian sausage links <i>patted dry</i>
1 lb	ground beef <i>preferably 80/20 chuck</i>	3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil
1/2 lb	ground pork	1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>
1/2 lb	ground veal	4 med	garlic <i>smashed</i>
1 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>freshly grated on a box grater, plus extra for serving</i>	6 oz	tomato paste
2 large	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>	84 oz	canned crushed tomatoes <i>preferably San Marzano</i>
1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>	1 cup	water
3 med	garlic <i>minced to a paste</i>	1/2 cup	fresh basil leaves <i>torn</i>
1 small	yellow onion <i>grated on the large holes of a box grater</i>	1 pinch	red pepper flakes
1 tbsp	kosher salt	1 tbsp	sugar
1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	1 1/2 lb	dried spaghetti

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sear the pork bones and sausages in a heavy Dutch oven.

Heat the olive oil over medium-high heat. Working in batches, deeply brown the neck bones and sausages on all sides for about 8 to 10 minutes. Transfer the meats to a platter, leaving the rendered fat in the pot.

2. Sweat the aromatics and fry the tomato paste in the rendered fat.

Lower the heat to medium and add the diced onion, scraping up the browned bits from the bottom. Once soft, add the smashed garlic for a minute, then push the aromatics aside. Drop in the tomato paste and fry it directly in the oil for 3 to 5 minutes until it turns a deep, sweet-smelling rust color.

1. Build the gravy and begin the simmer.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes. Slosh the water in the empty cans to get every last drop, and add it to the pot along with the basil, red pepper flakes, sugar, and a pinch of salt and pepper. Bring to a bubbling boil, reduce to the lowest possible simmer, and submerge the seared meats back into the sauce.

2. Mix the panade to ensure a tender meatball.

In a large bowl, mash the torn bread and milk together with a fork until it forms a uniform, wet paste. Do not skip this; it interferes with protein cross-linking and is the secret to a meatball that can survive a long simmer without turning into rubber.

3. Combine the meats and bake the meatballs.

Preheat the oven to 400°F. Add the beef, pork, veal, grated Parmigiano, eggs, parsley, minced garlic, grated onion, kosher salt, and pepper to the panade. Gently fold the mixture together with your hands without overmixing. Roll into golf ball-sized spheres, place on a lined sheet pan, and bake for 15 to 20 minutes until a brown crust forms.

4. Submerge the browned meatballs into the gravy for a long, slow simmer.

Using a slotted spoon, gently transfer the meatballs from the sheet pan directly into the simmering Dutch oven. Partially cover the pot and let it simmer for the remaining two and a half hours, checking occasionally to give it a gentle, careful stir so the meatballs remain intact while they absorb the sauce.

5. Toss the pasta with the red sauce and serve family style.

Cook the spaghetti in heavily salted boiling water until al dente, reserving a half-cup of pasta water before draining. Return the pasta to its pot, ladle in a generous amount of the hot, oil-slicked gravy—leaving the meat in the Dutch oven—and toss vigorously. Transfer the red spaghetti to a massive serving platter and crown it majestically with the meatballs, sausages, and tender pork.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Veal is crucial but substitutable.**

Veal provides high gelatin content for a remarkably tender texture. If it's unavailable at your butcher, simply adjust the meatball ratio to equal parts ground beef and ground pork.



Baked Ziti Parmigiana

This is not a breezy Tuscan affair. It is a massive, bubbling cauldron of Sunday gravy, molten mozzarella, and immigrant pride, engineered to feed a loud houseful of people. Do not apologize for its weight; celebrate it. Block out four hours, pull out the Dutch oven, and let the pork fat do the talking.

INGREDIENTS

3 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil	1 large	large yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>
1 lb	meaty pork spare ribs or neck bones <i>patted dry</i>	9 large	garlic cloves <i>6 smashed and roughly chopped, 3 minced to a paste</i>
1 lb	sweet or hot Italian sausage links	1/4 cup	tomato paste

84 oz	canned whole peeled San Marzano tomatoes <i>crushed by hand into a bowl</i>	3 large	eggs <i>lightly beaten, divided</i>
1 large	fresh basil <i>left on the sprig</i>	2 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>freshly grated, divided</i>
1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>	1/4 cup	neutral oil
1/2 lb	ground beef	1 lb	dried cut ziti
1/4 lb	ground pork	1 1/2 cup	whole milk ricotta
1/4 lb	ground veal	1 lb	low-moisture whole-milk mozzarella <i>grated by hand on a box grater</i>
2 large	thick white bread <i>crusts removed, torn into pieces</i>	2 tbsp	Kosher salt
1/4 cup	whole milk	2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
		1/4 tsp	red pepper flakes

PREPARATION

- **Create the panade.**

Soak the torn white bread in the whole milk until mushy. Squeeze out excess liquid and mash into a paste before mixing into the meat; this is what keeps the meatballs incredibly tender.

- **Hand-grate the mozzarella.**

Do not buy pre-shredded cheese. The anti-caking agents will ruin the glorious cheese pull. Buy a block and use the large holes of a box grater.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Render the pork ribs and brown the sausages in olive oil in a large Dutch oven.**

Sear them aggressively over medium-high heat until deeply browned, about 10 minutes. Transfer the meats to a sheet pan; this rendered fat is the foundation of your gravy.

- 1. Sweat the onion and garlic in the pork fat, then caramelize the tomato paste.**
Cook the onion until translucent, add the smashed garlic and red pepper flakes, then clear a hot spot and fry the tomato paste for 2 to 3 minutes until it darkens to a brick red.
- 2. Build the Sunday gravy and simmer for at least three and a half hours.**
Pour in the hand-crushed tomatoes, toss in the basil sprig, and return the ribs and sausages to the pot. Bring to a boil, drop the heat to the absolute lowest setting, and partially cover, stirring every 30 minutes.
- 3. Mix the meatballs using the panade, ground meats, two eggs, one cup of Parmesan, minced garlic, and parsley.**
Mix gently with your hands. Do not over-compress the meat or your meatballs will turn out dense.
- 4. Form into golf-ball-sized spheres and brown them aggressively in a skillet.**
Heat the neutral oil over medium-high heat and fry the meatballs until a deep brown crust forms on all sides.
- 5. Slide the browned meatballs into the simmering gravy for its final forty-five minutes.**
Let them gently poach in the red sauce until they are perfectly tender and infused with tomato.
- 6. Boil the ziti for three minutes less than the package instructions.**
This is a critical step. The pasta must be stiff and chalky in the center, otherwise it will disintegrate into mush when baked.
- 7. Whisk the ricotta, the remaining egg, a half cup of Parmesan, salt, and pepper in a bowl.**
The egg binds the ricotta, preventing it from turning into a watery soup in the oven.
- 8. Toss the undercooked ziti with three cups of the finished, hot gravy.**
Fish the meats out of the gravy and set them aside on a platter. Toss the pasta thoroughly so every single noodle is coated.

1. Layer the ziti, ricotta cream, mozzarella, and gravy into a large baking dish.

Start with a thin layer of gravy, add half the ziti, dollop the ricotta, scatter half the mozzarella, add the rest of the ziti, more gravy, and top with the remaining mozzarella and extra Parmesan.

2. Bake tented with foil at 375°F for 20 minutes, then uncover and bake until violently bubbling.

Remove the foil and bake for another 15 to 20 minutes until you have a glorious, golden-brown crust. Let it rest for 10 minutes before serving.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Serve the meats on the side.**

The gravy-braised ribs, sausage, and meatballs should be piled high on a platter and served alongside the ziti.

- **Make it a proper feast.**

Serve with foil-wrapped garlic bread—so the steam softens the interior while the garlic butter permeates the crumb—and a cheap bottle of Chianti.



Brooklyn New-Wave Cavatelli with Sausage & Browned Sage Butter

Let's get one thing straight: Italian-American food isn't a watered-down apology for Old World cooking; it's a magnificent, unapologetically hearty cuisine of its own. This dish represents the new-wave Brooklyn red-sauce joint, marrying the rustic chew of Southern Italian cavatelli and spicy pork with the elegant, nutty perfection of Northern brown butter and sage. It's meant to simmer on a Sunday morning, built to feed a loud, hungry household of people, and arrives at the table swimming in an aromatic, golden emulsion. Open a bottle of Chianti, light the candle, and get to work.

INGREDIENTS

1 lb	hot Italian pork sausage links	1/2 tsp	white pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 lb	ricotta cavatelli <i>fresh or high-quality bronze-die dried</i>	1 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated on a box grater</i>
7 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>divided</i>	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>coarsely chopped</i>
12 large	fresh sage leaves	to taste	kosher salt

PREPARATION

- **The sausage poach can be done ahead of time.**

Hosting a Sunday dinner can be chaotic; you can simmer and slice the sausage up to a day in advance and keep the coins in the fridge until your guests arrive.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Poach the sausages to ensure they remain plump and sliceable.**

Place the whole sausage links in a wide Dutch oven, add a half-inch of water, and simmer over medium heat for 10 minutes. Flip and simmer for 5 more minutes, then remove them to a board to slice into half-inch coins.

- 2. Hard sear the sausage coins to build the foundational crust.**

Wipe out the Dutch oven, melt a tablespoon of butter over medium-high heat, and arrange the sausage coins in a single layer. Step away and let them sit completely untouched until a deep, dark brown crust forms on the bottom, about 3 to 4 minutes, before flipping to sear the other side. Remove to a plate.

- 3. Brown the butter to the perfect nutty *beurre noisette* stage.**

In the same pan over medium-high heat, melt the remaining 6 tablespoons of butter with the fresh sage and white pepper, scraping up the caramelized sausage fond. Watch closely as the foaming subsides and the milk solids toast into an incredibly nutty, deep golden brown.

1. Boil the cavatelli and emulsify the sauce.

Drop the pasta into a large pot of heavily salted boiling water and cook until just al dente. Do not drain it in the sink; use a spider to scoop the noodles directly into the bubbling brown butter, letting the starchy pasta water instantly emulsify with the fat into a creamy, luxurious coat.

2. Finish with the cheese and parsley to serve immediately.

Toss the pasta aggressively, fold the seared sausage coins back in, and pull the pan off the heat. Shower in the freshly grated Pecorino Romano, tossing until melted and thick, then scatter the parsley over the top and carry the heavy Dutch oven straight to the table.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not substitute dried sage.**

Dried sage is a completely different ingredient that cannot fry in the butter and will ruin the texture of the dish.

● **Grate the cheese yourself.**

Pre-grated cheese contains anti-caking agents that will turn your beautiful brown butter emulsion into a gritty, broken mess. Use the fine side of a standard box grater.



The 12-Table Jumbo Stuffed Shells with Spinach and Ricotta

This isn't some delicate, whisper-thin pasta from a Tuscan hillside; it is a magnificent, unapologetic masterpiece of the Italian-American diaspora. Built to feed a loud room on a Sunday afternoon, it requires pulling no punches—copious amounts of ricotta, a blanket of low-moisture mozzarella, and a bubbling, garlic-heavy marinara that blisters in the oven. Serve it straight from the Dutch oven to a table flanked by foil-wrapped garlic bread and a few cheap bottles of Chianti.

INGREDIENTS

16 oz	jumbo pasta shells <i>none</i>	16 oz	whole milk low-moisture mozzarella <i>grated on a box grater and divided</i>
2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil <i>divided</i>	1 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>finely grated</i>
4 cup	marinara sauce <i>none</i>	1 large	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
16 oz	whole milk ricotta cheese <i>strained for at least 30 minutes</i>	1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely minced</i>
10 oz	fresh baby spinach <i>wilted, aggressively wrung out, and finely chopped</i>	1 tsp	dried oregano
2 large clove	garlic <i>finely grated or minced</i>	1/4 tsp	nutmeg <i>freshly grated</i>
		1 tsp	kosher salt
		1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>

PREPARATION

- **Strain the ricotta cheese.**

Place the ricotta in a fine-mesh sieve over a bowl for at least 30 minutes to rid it of excess whey, preventing a watery filling.

- **Aggressively remove the moisture from the cooked spinach.**

Whether using freshly wilted spinach or thawed frozen, wrap it in a clean kitchen towel and twist it over the sink until every drop of green water is expelled before chopping it.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Boil the shells to a strict al dente.**

Boil the shells in heavily salted water for exactly three to four minutes less than the package directs so they remain rigid enough to stuff and finish cooking in the oven.

1. Build the cheese filling.

In a large bowl, aggressively fold together the strained ricotta, dry chopped spinach, half of the grated mozzarella, Pecorino Romano, egg, parsley, oregano, nutmeg, salt, and pepper until perfectly homogenous.

2. Lay the foundation in the pan.

Ladle a cup and a half of marinara sauce into the bottom of a wide Dutch oven or a baking dish to prevent the pasta from burning.

3. Stuff and arrange the shells.

Spoon two heaping tablespoons of the ricotta mixture into each cooled shell, nestling them open-side up and shoulder-to-shoulder in the bed of sauce.

4. Top with remaining sauce and cheese.

Ladle the rest of the marinara over the shells, leaving the cheese domes slightly exposed, then scatter the remaining mozzarella across the entire pan.

5. Bake tightly covered with foil.

Cover the dish with foil lightly rubbed with oil so the cheese will not stick, and bake at 375°F for 25 minutes to let the pasta steam.

6. Blister the crust under the broiler.

Remove the foil, crank the heat to 425°F or turn on the broiler, and bake for another ten to fifteen minutes until the cheese is a bubbling, continuous blanket scarred with dark, charred spots.

7. Rest the dish before serving.

Let the pan sit for ten to fifteen minutes before bringing it to the table so the molten filling can set up and maintain its structural integrity.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Do not skip the foil-wrapped garlic bread.**

This dish requires a vessel to mop up the orange-tinted oil left behind by the mingling of the marinara and the cheese fat. Wrap your bread in foil so the steam softens it while the butter melts all the way through.

- **Make it ahead of time.**

The dish can be fully assembled up to the point of baking, covered tightly, and kept in the refrigerator for up to 48 hours before your guests arrive.

- **Add meat if you want.**

Fold half a pound of crumbled, browned Italian sausage directly into the ricotta filling for an even heavier, unapologetic red-sauce joint experience.



Williamsburg Gnocchi Bolognese

Let's get one thing straight: if you go to Bologna and ask for this, they will politely ask you to leave. In the old country, a ragù is a delicate, milk-braised affair with barely a whisper of tomato and absolutely zero garlic. But this isn't Italy—this is Brooklyn. This unabashedly heavy, garlic-laden, four-hour Sunday gravy pays homage to the legendary red-sauce joints of Williamsburg, where immigrants married the northern meat sauce to the southern slow-simmered tradition. Do not attempt to rush it. You want the kind of Sunday where the windows fog up, the smell of pork fat and crushed tomatoes seeps into the upholstery, and you're pairing it all with dense, handmade potato

gnocchi structurally sound enough to carry the weight. Light a drip candle in a Chianti bottle, pull the foil-wrapped garlic bread out of the oven, and feed your people.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup	extra-virgin olive oil	28 oz	whole peeled tomatoes <i>crushed by hand</i>
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	28 oz	crushed tomatoes
1 large	carrot <i>peeled and finely diced</i>	2 large	bay leaves
1 large	celery stalk <i>finely diced</i>	3 small	fresh thyme sprigs
6 large	garlic cloves <i>smashed and minced</i>	1/2 cup	fresh basil leaves <i>torn</i>
1/2 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes	1/2 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>freshly grated, plus more for the table</i>
1/2 lb	ground beef (80/20 chuck)	1 kg	starchy potatoes <i>left whole with skins on</i>
1/2 lb	ground pork	2 cup	All-Purpose flour <i>plus extra for dusting</i>
6 oz	tomato paste	1 large	egg <i>lightly beaten</i>
1/2 cup	dry red wine	1 tsp	Kosher salt

PREPARATION

- **Clear your schedule.**

This is a four-hour Sunday project; do not attempt to rush the simmer on a Tuesday night. The Maillard reaction from browning the meat and the slow reduction of the crushed tomatoes take time to develop into a proper gravy.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Place your Dutch oven over medium heat with the olive oil, then sauté the diced onion, carrot, and celery until softened.**

After 8 to 10 minutes, add the minced garlic and crushed red pepper flakes. Cook for exactly one minute until the garlic violently perfumes the kitchen.

- 2. Increase the heat to medium-high and add the ground beef and pork, breaking the meat apart into fine crumbles.**

Season generously with salt and pepper. Cook until the water evaporates and the meat is deeply browned and sizzling in its own fat. Do not drain the fat; that is flavor.

- 3. Clear a hot spot in the center of the pot and squeeze in the tomato paste.**

Let the paste fry in the fat for about 3 to 4 minutes, stirring it into the meat, until it turns from bright red to a deep, rusty brick color.

- 4. Pour in the red wine, scrape up all the caramelized brown bits stuck to the bottom of the pot, and let it reduce until the smell of raw alcohol cooks off.**

This deglazing step should only take about 3 minutes and builds the foundational depth of the gravy.

- 5. Pour in the hand-crushed whole tomatoes and the crushed tomatoes, tossing in the bay leaves, thyme, and torn basil.**

Bring the pot to a bubbling boil, then immediately drop the heat to the lowest possible setting. Cover the Dutch oven with the lid slightly ajar to let steam escape.

- 6. Let the sauce simmer for a minimum of 4 hours, stirring every 30 to 45 minutes and scraping the bottom so nothing burns.**

Over time, the sauce will reduce, darken, and a layer of glistening orange fat will rise to the top. Taste for seasoning in the last hour and stir in the grated Parmigiano-Reggiano.

- 1. During the last hour of the sauce's simmer, place the whole, unpeeled potatoes into a large pot of cold, heavily salted water.**

Bring to a boil and cook for 40 to 50 minutes until a paring knife slides easily into the center of the largest potato. Do not peel them before boiling; exposed potato flesh acts like a sponge, and watery potatoes mean dense, heavy gnocchi.

- 2. Drain the potatoes and, while they are still as hot as your hands can tolerate, peel off the skins and immediately press them through a potato ricer.**

Rice them directly onto a clean countertop or a large sheet pan. If you don't own a ricer, wait for them to cool slightly and use the large holes of a box grater. Spread them out and let the steam evaporate for 5 minutes.

- 3. Sprinkle the salt over the potatoes, drizzle the beaten egg evenly over the top, and dust with 1 1/2 cups of the flour.**

Quickly fold the mixture together using a bench scraper or your hands. Knead gently and swiftly just until it forms a soft, slightly tacky ball, adding the remaining flour only if it is too sticky. Do not over-knead.

- 4. Cut the dough into 4 sections, rolling each out into a long snake about 3/4-inch thick, then cut into 1-inch pillows.**

Keep the unrolled sections covered with a clean kitchen towel so they don't dry out.

- 5. Press a piece of gnocchi against the back of a fork's tines with your thumb and roll it downward to create ridges on one side and a dimple on the other.**

This texture helps the heavy meat sauce cling to the dumpling. Place the finished gnocchi on a heavily floured sheet pan, making sure they do not touch.

- 6. Drop the gnocchi into a large pot of heavily salted boiling water in batches.**

They are cooked exactly when they float to the surface, which usually takes 2 to 3 minutes.

- 1. Use a slotted spoon to transfer the floating gnocchi directly into a large skillet, ladle a generous amount of hot Bolognese over them, and gently toss over medium heat for 1 minute.**

This allows the starch from the gnocchi to bind with the fat of the sauce. Serve immediately in warm shallow bowls, topped with a blizzard of grated Parmesan and a fresh basil leaf.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The Foil-Wrapped Garlic Bread.**

Do not toast the bread face-up under the broiler. Slice a soft American supermarket French baguette horizontally, slather the interior with a heavy mash of softened butter, minced garlic, parsley, and salt, then wrap it tightly in aluminum foil. Bake at 375°F for 15 to 20 minutes so the trapped steam softens the bread into a pull-apart sponge while the garlic-butter melts completely into the crumb.

- **The Tableside Caesar.**

A proper Italian-American Caesar is about construction. Vigorously rub the inside of a large wooden bowl with a halved raw garlic clove, then whisk together a raw egg yolk, a squirt of anchovy paste, Dijon mustard, lemon juice, and a slow drizzle of good olive oil until emulsified. Toss with crisp Romaine, a massive handful of grated Parmesan, and thick homemade croutons.



Arthur Avenue Lasagna Verde

If you've ever spent a Sunday afternoon at a communal table on Arthur Avenue, you know Italian-American food isn't apologizing for not being authentic—it's its own glorious, heavyweight cuisine. While Bologna's green lasagna is an exercise in delicate restraint, this Bronx-born giant trades dainty white sauce for a massive matrix of fresh ricotta and mozzarella, swapping subtle ragù for a towering, four-hour Sunday gravy. It's unapologetic, built for a crowd, and demands a slow simmer, a box grater, and a bottle of Chianti with a candle shoved in the neck.

INGREDIENTS

1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1 lb bone-in pork shoulder

1 lb	sweet Italian sausage links	2 large	eggs <i>lightly beaten</i>
4 large	cloves garlic <i>smashed but left whole</i>	1 cup	Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated</i>
56 oz	certified San Marzano whole peeled tomatoes <i>crushed by hand</i>	1/4 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
28 oz	crushed tomatoes	1 tsp	kosher salt
2 tbsp	tomato paste	1/2 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 tsp	dried oregano	1 1/2 lb	whole-milk low-moisture mozzarella cheese <i>shredded on the large holes of a box grater</i>
1 lb	raw homemade meatballs	1 lb	dried green spinach lasagna noodles
32 oz	whole-milk ricotta cheese		

PREPARATION

- **Preheat the oven to 375°F.**

Have a standard sheet pan ready to catch the inevitable glorious drips during baking.

- **Shred the pork shoulder.**

Once the four-hour simmer is complete, pull the pork shoulder and stir a handful of shredded meat back into the Sunday gravy for texture.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Brown the meats deeply in a large, heavy-bottomed Dutch oven.**

Heat the olive oil over medium-high, generously salt the pork shoulder, and sear the pork and sausages until deeply browned on all sides (about 8-10 minutes) before removing them to a platter.

- 1. Toast the garlic, tomato paste, and oregano in the rendered pork fat.**
Lower the heat to medium-low, cook the smashed garlic gently until golden, then stir in the tomato paste and oregano for about 2 minutes until it darkens to a rust color.
- 2. Build the Sunday gravy and settle in for a four-hour simmer.**
Pour in all the tomatoes, scrape up the browned bits, and return the pork, sausages, and optional meatballs to the pot; let it bubble on the lowest heat for 4 hours until the pork shreds easily and an orange oil slick rises to the top.
- 3. Combine the ricotta matrix ingredients in a large bowl.**
Mix the ricotta, beaten eggs, grated Pecorino, chopped parsley, salt, and pepper until completely homogenous.
- 4. Par-boil the spinach lasagna noodles.**
Boil the noodles in a massive pot of heavily salted water, pulling them 2 minutes before they are perfectly al dente, and lay them flat on a lightly oiled sheet pan so they don't stick.
- 5. Assemble the architecture of abundance in a deep baking dish.**
Layer a cup of gravy, spinach noodles, one-third of the ricotta, another cup of gravy, and a handful of mozzarella in a 9x13 dish, repeating until you reach the top.
- 6. Crown the lasagna with a final layer of pasta, pure gravy, and an aggressive blanket of mozzarella.**
Do not put ricotta on the top layer; finish with just pasta, sauce, the remaining mozzarella, and a dusting of Pecorino.
- 7. Bake covered for 45 minutes, then uncovered until the top is a landscape of golden-brown crispy cheese.**
Place the dish on a sheet pan to catch drips, cover tightly with foil sprayed with nonstick spray, and bake at 375°F; remove the foil for the last 15 to 20 minutes.
- 8. Let the lasagna rest for at least 30 minutes before cutting.**
If you cut it immediately, it will slide apart into a delicious swamp; resting lets the immense structure set.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The meatball ratio is non-negotiable.**

If making meatballs for the gravy, use 50% beef, 25% pork, and 25% veal (or 50/50 beef and pork) bound with a milk-soaked bread panade, egg, parmesan, parsley, and garlic.

- **Pre-shredded mozzarella is an absolute dealbreaker.**

The anti-caking agents prevent melting; you must use a box grater on a block of whole-milk, low-moisture mozzarella.

- **Complete the spread with foil-wrapped garlic bread.**

Slice a soft Italian loaf, slather it in garlic-parsley butter, wrap it entirely in foil, and throw it in the oven during the last 15 minutes to let the steam soften the bread while the butter melts in.



Neapolitan-American Pasta e Fagioli

pah-stuh eh fah-zool

Pasta e fagioli began as a humble peasant staple in Campania, a clever way for farmers to stretch beans and broken pasta scraps. But when those recipes crossed the Atlantic to the red-sauce joints of New York and Brooklyn, they hit the culinary lottery. Suddenly, there was sweet Italian sausage, heavy pours of crushed tomatoes, and mountains of Parmigiano. This is a proudly unapologetic, deeply American stew. The trick is boiling the ditalini directly in the broth—a Neapolitan technique that releases starches into the fat to create a thick, clinging,

majestic gravy. Apologize to no one for the excess; just serve it with a heavy hand of cheese and a loaf of foil-wrapped, steam-softened garlic bread.

INGREDIENTS

2 tbsp	Extra-virgin olive oil	1 small	Fresh rosemary sprig <i>kept whole</i>
1 lb	Sweet Italian pork sausage <i>casings removed</i>	2 small	Fresh thyme sprigs
1 large	Yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	1 small	Bay leaf
2 med	Carrots <i>peeled and finely diced</i>	15 oz	Cannellini beans <i>drained and rinsed</i>
2 med	Celery stalks <i>finely diced</i>	15 oz	Dark red kidney beans <i>drained and rinsed</i>
6 large	Garlic cloves <i>minced</i>	1 1/2 cup	Ditalini pasta
1 tsp	Crushed red pepper flakes	1 tsp	Kosher salt
3 tbsp	Tomato paste	1 tsp	Freshly ground black pepper
28 oz	Crushed tomatoes	1/2 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>freshly grated</i>
6 cup	Chicken broth	1/4 cup	Fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>roughly chopped</i>
1 large	Parmigiano-Reggiano rind		

INSTRUCTIONS

1. **Brown the sweet Italian pork sausage in a large Dutch oven until a deep crust forms.**

Place the Dutch oven over medium-high heat with the olive oil. Once shimmering, add the sausage, breaking it into bite-sized crumbles. Let it cook undisturbed to develop the Maillard reaction, then remove it with a slotted spoon.

- 1. Sauté the onion, carrots, and celery in the rendered pork fat.**
Lower the heat to medium. Add the vegetables directly into the fat, season with salt and pepper, and scrape up the browned bits from the bottom until everything is deeply softened and translucent.
- 2. Toast the tomato paste, garlic, and red pepper flakes.**
Push the vegetables to the perimeter of the pot. Add the garlic, red pepper flakes, and tomato paste to the center, cooking until the paste darkens from bright red to a deep, rusty brick color, then stir to coat the vegetables.
- 3. Build the broth with the tomatoes, chicken stock, beans, and the browned sausage.**
Return the sausage to the pot, then pour in the crushed tomatoes, chicken broth, cannellini beans, and dark red kidney beans.
- 4. Add the aromatics and simmer gently for nearly an hour.**
Drop in the Parmigiano-Reggiano rind, rosemary, thyme, and bay leaf. Bring to a rolling boil, then reduce the heat to the lowest setting, partially cover, and simmer for 45 minutes to an hour to emulsify the fat and break down the tomatoes.
- 5. Cook the ditalini directly in the bubbling stew.**
Remove the herb stems and cheese rind, bringing the heat up to a lively simmer. Stir in the dry pasta, cooking it in the broth so it releases its starches and thickens the liquid into a clinging gravy known in Naples as the azzeccata technique.
- 6. Turn off the heat and let the stew rest covered for ten minutes.**
This resting phase is crucial. It allows the starches to settle and the pasta to absorb the last bit of moisture, transforming the dish from a loose soup into a thick, majestic stew.
- 7. Serve immediately with a heavy hand of cheese and olive oil.**
Ladle the thick Pasta Fazool into wide, shallow bowls. Top with freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, chopped parsley, and a generous drizzle of high-quality extra-virgin olive oil.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Save your cheese rinds.**

Never throw away the rinds from your box-grated Parmigiano; dropping a seemingly inedible rind into the simmering broth releases a deep, nutty sodium profile and naturally thickens the stew.

- **Reheating realities.**

Because the pasta stays in the liquid, it will absorb almost all the remaining moisture overnight. When reheating the next day, add a splash of chicken broth or water to loosen the colloidal starch matrix back into a stew.



Spaghetti Aglio e Olio

In Naples, this dish is a ten-minute midnight snack of garlic, oil, and pasta. But in the Italian-American kitchens of New York, we don't do minimalist—we do unapologetically hearty. When you want the comfort of a Sunday feast but lack four hours for the Sunday Gravy, we take the midnight classic and slow it down. A fistful of garlic and anchovies confit gently in a heavy Dutch oven, melting into a profound, savory oil that emulsifies with starchy pasta water. Showered in crispy, spicy breadcrumbs, it is a glorious, candle-in-a-Chianti-bottle, crowd-feeding masterpiece.

INGREDIENTS

4 oz day-old crusty Italian bread
grated on the large holes of a box grater

2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
for the breadcrumbs

1/4 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes <i>for the breadcrumbs</i>	6	oil-packed anchovy fillets
1 lb	dry bronze-die spaghetti	1 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes <i>for the pasta</i>
3/4 cup	extra-virgin olive oil <i>for the pasta</i>	1/2 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>finely chopped</i>
8 large cloves	garlic <i>peeled and sliced razor-thin</i>	to taste	kosher salt
		to taste	Pecorino Romano <i>freshly grated, for serving</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Preheat the oven to 375°F and toss the grated bread with two tablespoons of olive oil, a pinch of salt, and a quarter teaspoon of red pepper flakes on a sheet pan.**

Spread them out into an even layer and bake until deeply golden and shatteringly crisp, about 10 to 12 minutes, then set aside to cool.

- 2. Place the Dutch oven on the stove, add three-quarters of a cup of olive oil, the sliced garlic, and the anchovies, then turn the heat to the absolute lowest setting.**

Let the garlic and anchovies slowly warm up, using a wooden spoon to gently mash the anchovies until they disappear entirely, allowing the garlic to gently bubble for 25 to 30 minutes until pale golden and incredibly sweet.

- 3. Stir in the remaining teaspoon of red pepper flakes and let them bloom for one minute, then turn off the heat.**

The oil will now be infused with a profound, savory flavor.

- 4. Bring a large pot of heavily salted water to a rolling boil and cook the spaghetti for exactly two minutes less than the package instructions dictate.**

Right before draining the pasta, carefully scoop out one and a half cups of the highly starchy, boiling pasta water and set it aside.

- 5. Turn the heat under the Dutch oven back to medium, carefully pour in a half cup of the reserved pasta water, and stir vigorously until the liquid emulsifies.**

It will violently sputter and hiss, forming a cloudy, thick liquid.

- 1. Drop the undercooked spaghetti into the Dutch oven and violently toss the noodles in the bubbling liquid using tongs.**
The pasta will absorb the flavorful oil and finish cooking, binding with the starches to create a thick, glossy sauce; if the pan looks dry, splash in more reserved pasta water a quarter-cup at a time.
- 2. Remove the pot from the heat, add the chopped parsley, and toss one final time.**
Taste a strand of pasta to ensure it has a firm bite but no chalky center, adjusting the salt if necessary.
- 3. Transfer the glistening pasta to a massive warmed serving platter and shower the top heavily with the crispy breadcrumbs.**
Serve immediately with a block of Pecorino and a box grater on the table for anyone looking to flout tradition.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Never use a garlic press for this recipe.**
Crushing garlic ruptures its cell walls and releases a flood of allicin, turning pungent and bitter when cooked; slicing it thinly ensures it stays sweet and mellow.
- **Do not omit the anchovies out of fear of fishiness.**
They completely dissolve to restore a necessary backbone of umami that elevates the dish to a majestic Sunday dinner.
- **The starchy pasta water is an absolute requirement for a proper emulsion.**
Throwing drained pasta into a pool of hot oil without it will result in a greasy, heavy dish; if your sauce breaks, add another splash of hot pasta water and toss furiously.



Chapter 4 — Chicken / Veal / Eggplant Parm + Mains

The heavy protein centerpieces of the red sauce joint, engineered to feed a crowd without the fuss of a deep fryer.

A red sauce main course isn't a tweezered plate of negative space; it is the food of shouting over the jukebox, of oversized platters slammed down onto tables crowded with cheap wine and good bread. It is the standard trio of thinly pounded chicken, veal, and eggplant, stacked beside a box grater and submerged in gravy until the mozzarella blisters. You don't come to this chapter for restraint—you come to eat right.

But feeding a noisy room shouldn't mean spending your night a prisoner to a sputtering deep fryer. These are the workhorse classics—Marsala, Francese, Cacciatore—adapted for a home kitchen. By leaning hard on a 400-degree oven and a battered half-sheet pan, you can churn out bubbling trays of Parmesan and slow-braised Osso Buco without losing your mind. Just heavy meats, high heat, and the blast of pulling hot trays from the oven.





The "Bone-In" Sheet-Pan Veal Parmigiana

This is the ultimate culinary flex of the American red-sauce joint—a massive, unapologetic celebration of immigrant ingenuity. A towering, bone-in veal chop is violently pounded to the size of a dinner plate, breaded, and fried to mahogany perfection before a bubbling baptism of four-hour Sunday gravy and molten mozzarella. You do not combine the frying and the baking; they are distinct, sacred rituals. When this gargantuan monolith hits the table, steam rising from the charred bone and red sauce bubbling violently, no apologies are necessary. This is exactly what the legendary places on Arthur Avenue taste like.

INGREDIENTS

2 large	bone-in veal rib chops <i>frenched</i>	1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly cracked</i>
1 cup	all-purpose flour	1/2 cup	olive oil
3 large	eggs	4 tbsp	unsalted butter
1 tbsp	whole milk	2 med	cloves garlic <i>lightly smashed</i>
2 cup	Italian-seasoned breadcrumbs	2 small	sprigs fresh thyme
1/2 cup	Parmigiano Reggiano <i>freshly grated</i>	1 1/2 cup	Sunday Gravy
1 tsp	garlic powder	8 oz	fresh mozzarella <i>sliced 1/4-inch thick</i>
1 tbsp	kosher salt	1/2 cup	Parmigiano Reggiano <i>freshly grated</i>
		1/4 cup	fresh basil leaves <i>torn</i>

PREPARATION

- **Ask your butcher to french the veal chops.**

Having the bone scraped entirely clean of meat and fat provides a clean visual presentation and a literal handle for the finished dish.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Pound the veal to a quarter-inch thickness.**

Place the chops inside a heavy-duty zip-top bag or between thick plastic wrap. Using the flat side of a meat mallet, firmly pound from the bone outward until the meat stretches to the size of a dinner plate. Season both sides generously with salt and pepper.

1. Set up a three-station breading assembly line.

In your first wide dish, whisk the flour with a heavy pinch of salt and pepper. In the second, thoroughly beat the eggs with the milk. In the third, combine the breadcrumbs, half a cup of grated Parmigiano, and the garlic powder.

2. Bread the chops and let them rest.

Dredge each chop in the flour, shaking off the excess. Submerge it fully in the egg wash, then lay it into the breadcrumbs. Use the heel of your hand to firmly press the crumbs into the meat, ensuring an impenetrable crust. Transfer to a sheet pan and rest for 10 minutes to hydrate the breading.

3. Heat the frying fats in your widest skillet.

In a wide, heavy-bottomed pan, heat the olive oil and butter over medium-high heat until the butter foams. Toss in the smashed garlic and thyme to perfume the oil, removing them when they turn deeply brown.

4. Fry the cutlets to a deep, blistered mahogany.

Lower a chop into the hot fat, laying it away from you. Fry for 2 to 4 minutes until the bottom is dark golden brown. Flip carefully, tilting the pan to baste hot butter over the meat near the bone. Transfer the blistered cutlet to a wire rack to drain, avoiding paper towels that would steam the crust. Repeat with the second chop.

5. Assemble the parmigiana on a sheet pan.

Preheat your oven to 400°F. Move the rested, fried cutlets to a clean, foil-lined half-sheet pan. Ladle the Sunday Gravy onto the center of each, leaving a one-inch border of crispy breading exposed so the crust does not drown.

6. Layer the cheeses and bake until molten.

Arrange the fresh mozzarella over the sauce and bury the entire top under a heavy blizzard of grated Parmigiano. Bake for 5 to 10 minutes, just until the cheese is bubbling violently and browning in spots.

1. Garnish and serve immediately.

Remove the sheet pan from the oven and scatter torn basil leaves over the bubbling cheese. Use two spatulas to transfer the cutlets to plates and serve immediately alongside heavily dressed rigatoni and steaming, foil-wrapped garlic bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the distinct stages of the parmigiana.**

The breaded and fried cutlet is one recipe; the baked assembly with sauce and cheese is a second recipe. Never conflate the two. You must crisp the crust completely in the pan before applying any wet ingredients on the sheet pan.



Chicken Francese

Listen, if you walk into a real red-sauce joint in Brooklyn, you aren't ordering food from the old country. You're ordering Italian-American food, forged by immigrants who arrived with empty pockets and built an empire of culinary abundance. Chicken Francese doesn't apologize for not being French, and it sure as hell doesn't apologize for the sheer volume of butter. We're taking this fast-paced restaurant staple and turning it into a slow Sunday simmer. You're going to fry a mountain of cutlets, build a massive lemon-wine brodo in your heavy Dutch oven, and let the chicken gently braise until that parmesan-laced batter swells up like a dumpling. Serve it right out of the pot with foil-wrapped garlic bread and a bottle of Chianti.

INGREDIENTS

2 1/2 lb	boneless skinless chicken breast <i>butterflied, cut in half, and pounded to 1/4-inch thickness</i>	1/2 cup	olive oil
1 cup	all-purpose flour	4 tbsp	unsalted butter
2 tsp	kosher salt	1 large	large shallot <i>finely minced</i>
1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	4 med	garlic <i>smashed and minced</i>
1 tsp	garlic powder	1 cup	dry white wine
4 large	large eggs <i>beaten</i>	3 cup	chicken stock
1/4 cup	whole milk	2 large	large lemons <i>one juiced, one cut into thin rounds with seeds removed</i>
1/2 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>grated</i>	6 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>cold and cubed</i>
1/4 cup	flat-leaf Italian parsley <i>finely chopped, divided</i>	2 tbsp	all-purpose flour

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Butterfly and pound the chicken breasts into thin, even cutlets.

Slice each breast horizontally to yield two pieces, then place them between heavy-duty plastic wrap and pound gently with a meat mallet to a uniform quarter-inch thickness. Season them generously on both sides with kosher salt and black pepper.

2. Set up your breading station for the defining reverse-dredge.

In a wide, shallow dish, whisk together the one cup of flour, salt, pepper, and garlic powder. In a separate shallow dish, aggressively beat the eggs with the milk, parmesan, and half the parsley. This cheese-laced batter is the soul of the dish.

1. Fry the cutlets in batches until deeply golden and puffed.

Heat the olive oil and four tablespoons of butter in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Dredge a cutlet in the flour, shake off the excess, and then submerge it entirely in the egg wash. Drop it into the hot fat, frying for three to four minutes per side until the egg batter puffs up. Set aside on a wire rack.

2. Deglaze the pot and build the massive, lemony brodo.

Pour off all but two tablespoons of fat from the Dutch oven. Sauté the minced shallot and garlic until highly fragrant, using a wooden spoon to scrape up the browned fond. Pour in the white wine and boil violently until reduced by half, then add the chicken stock and fresh lemon juice, bringing the entire bath to a rolling boil.

3. Thicken the pan sauce with a beurre manié.

Mash the remaining two tablespoons of flour into the six tablespoons of cold, cubed butter until a paste forms. Whisk this paste directly into the boiling broth a little at a time until it transforms into a velvety, glossy sauce. Toss in the lemon slices.

4. Return the chicken to the pot for a slow Sunday braise.

Lower the heat to a whispering simmer and carefully shingle the fried cutlets back into the Dutch oven, submerging them in the lemony sauce. Cover loosely and let it gently simmer for twenty to thirty minutes so the golden crust drinks in the broth and softens into an incredibly tender, dumpling-like sponge.

5. Serve massive portions directly from the Dutch oven.

Garnish the pot with the remaining parsley. Spoon the cutlets and copious amounts of the velvety sauce over buttered angel hair pasta, making sure there is plenty of foil-wrapped garlic bread on hand.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Serve with unapologetic, foil-wrapped garlic bread.**

Do not toast your garlic bread open-faced. A loaf of Italian bread must be sliced, slathered in garlic butter, wrapped tightly in aluminum foil, and baked. The trapped steam softens the crumb while the butter melts deeply into the bread, creating the perfect vehicle to wipe your plate clean.



The Williamsburg Pork Chops

If you've ever walked into a century-old joint in Brooklyn where the waiters still wear bowties and the walls are lined with photos of guys named Carmine, you know this dish. In Naples, our ancestors made a rustic version with leftover pork and pickled round papaccelle peppers. But when they arrived in New York, they adapted and went big, swapping them for massive bone-in chops and jars of local cherry peppers. While a restaurant line cook might sear these off in ten minutes flat, at home, we treat this like a proper Sunday project. We take heavily marbled shoulder chops, sear them hard in a Dutch oven, and let them simmer low and slow in wine, chicken stock, and sharp

pepper brine until they surrender to the fork. Serve it alongside a loaf of foil-wrapped garlic bread to mop up every drop of that tart, deeply savory pan sauce. No apologies.

INGREDIENTS

4 large	bone-in pork shoulder or blade chops <i>patted completely dry</i>	16 oz	hot and sweet cherry peppers <i>stems and seeds removed, quartered</i>
1 tbsp	kosher salt	1/4 cup	cherry pepper brine <i>reserved from the jar of peppers</i>
1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	1 tbsp	tomato paste
3 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil	3/4 cup	dry white wine
10 large cloves	garlic <i>smashed and roughly chopped</i>	3/4 cup	chicken stock
		2 tbsp	unsalted butter
		1/4 cup	flat-leaf Italian parsley <i>finely chopped</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sear the pork chops aggressively until a dark crust forms.

Heat the olive oil in a heavy Dutch oven over medium-high heat until shimmering. Season the chops generously with the kosher salt and black pepper. Sear them in batches, undisturbed, for 4 to 5 minutes per side until they develop a deep mahogany crust, then remove them to a platter and tent with foil.

2. Sauté the garlic and peppers in the rendered pork fat.

Lower the heat to medium. Add the smashed garlic to the fat and sauté for a minute or two until pale blonde, ensuring it does not burn. Toss in the quartered cherry peppers and cook for another two minutes. Drop the tomato paste into the center of the pot and stir it into the fat until it turns a rusty brick red.

1. Deglaze the pan with the white wine and reserved pepper brine.

Turn the heat back up to medium-high. Pour in the wine and the reserved 1/4 cup of cherry pepper vinegar brine, using a wooden spoon to violently scrape up all the browned bits from the bottom of the pot. Let it boil and reduce by half, about 3 minutes, then stir in the chicken stock.

2. Braise the pork chops low and slow until fall-off-the-bone tender.

Nestle the chops back into the Dutch oven along with any resting juices from the platter. Bring the liquid to a gentle simmer, cover with the lid slightly cracked to let steam escape, and drop the heat to the lowest possible setting. Braise for 1 1/2 to 2 hours, flipping every 30 minutes, until the meat offers absolutely zero resistance to a fork.

3. Thicken the pan sauce and finish with butter and fresh parsley.

Carefully transfer the fragile, tender chops to a warm serving platter. Raise the heat under the Dutch oven to medium and reduce the sauce for a few minutes to thicken it slightly. Turn off the heat, swirl in the butter until glossy, and stir in the parsley. Spoon the peppers, garlic, and that tart, garlicky gravy generously over the chops.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Never substitute lean center-cut loin chops for this braise.**

The prolonged cooking time requires the abundant fat and connective tissue found only in shoulder or blade chops; leaner cuts will completely dry out and turn to sawdust.

● **Serve with foil-wrapped garlic bread.**

Do not toast the bread open. Wrap it entirely in foil before baking so the steam softens the crumb and the garlic butter melts into every crevice, creating the perfect edible sponge for the briny gravy.



South 10th Street Veal Marsala

If you walk past the brick facade at 762 South 10th Street in Philadelphia, you're stepping into the epicenter of American red-sauce royalty. In those old-school dining rooms, veal Marsala is a fast-paced line-cook ballet, but you aren't running a restaurant—you're feeding a houseful of loud people on a Sunday. So we're taking that unapologetic, mushroom-heavy flavor and applying it to a slow-simmered Dutch oven stew. It breaks down into a dark, glossy gravy that demands a steamy, foil-wrapped loaf of garlic bread to mop the bowl clean.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	veal shoulder or veal chuck <i>cut into 1 1/2-inch cubes and patted dry</i>	1 lb	cremini mushrooms <i>wiped clean and quartered</i>
1/2 cup	all-purpose flour	1 oz	dried porcini mushrooms
1 tbsp	kosher salt	2 cup	hot water
1 tsp	black pepper	1 1/2 cup	dry Marsala wine
3 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil	2 cup	low-sodium beef stock
4 oz	thick-cut pancetta <i>diced</i>	2 sprig	fresh rosemary
1 large	yellow onion <i>finely diced</i>	4 leaf	fresh sage
4 med	garlic	3 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>cold and cubed</i>
clove	<i>smashed and peeled</i>	1/4 cup	fresh parsley <i>finely chopped</i>

PREPARATION

- **Tie the rosemary and sage together with kitchen twine.**

This makes it significantly easier to fish the woody herb stems out of the dark gravy before you serve it.

- **Mix the flour, salt, and pepper in a shallow bowl.**

You will use this seasoned dredge to lightly coat the veal right before searing.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Steep the dried porcini mushrooms in the hot water for thirty minutes.**

Lift the softened mushrooms out, squeeze them dry, and roughly chop them. Pour the remaining soaking liquid through a coffee filter or paper towel to remove any grit, and reserve this dark, earthy liquid for the braise.

- 1. Toss the dried veal cubes in the seasoned flour and brown them heavily in olive oil.**

Working in batches in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat, sear the floured meat until a deep, dark crust forms, about 5 to 7 minutes per batch. Move the browned veal to a sheet pan and set aside.

- 2. Lower the heat, render the pancetta until crispy, and sear the fresh mushrooms.**

Add the pancetta to the pot and cook for 5 minutes. Toss in the quartered cremini mushrooms, letting them sit undisturbed for 4 minutes to get a hard sear. Stir in the diced onions, smashed garlic, and chopped porcini, cooking until the onions are translucent.

- 3. Pour in the dry Marsala and scrape up every bit of fond from the bottom of the pot.**

Turn the heat up to medium-high. Let the wine furiously reduce by half to burn off the harsh alcohol and concentrate the sugars and aromatics, which takes about 4 minutes.

- 4. Return the veal to the pot with the reserved mushroom liquid, stock, and herbs, then simmer on low for at least two hours.**

Bring the pot to a rolling boil, drop the heat to the absolute lowest setting, cover the Dutch oven, and let it lazily bubble until the meat yields completely to a fork.

- 5. Remove the pot from the heat, discard the herbs, and vigorously stir in the cold butter.**

If the sauce is too thin, simmer it uncovered for 15 minutes before adding the butter. Emulsifying the cold butter gives the gravy the luxurious, velvety sheen of a high-end restaurant dish. Taste and adjust for salt and pepper.

- 6. Bring the whole Dutch oven to the table, garnished with fresh parsley.**

Serve over buttery mashed potatoes or wide egg noodles, flanked by a steamy, foil-wrapped loaf of garlic bread to ensure no drop of the Marsala gravy is left behind.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Dry Marsala is non-negotiable.**

Do not buy supermarket cooking wine or sweet Marsala used for desserts. Go to a liquor store and buy a dry (secco) Marsala, or your dinner will taste like a pastry.



Chicago-Style Chicken Vesuvio

There is a stubborn myth that real Italian food requires a light hand and exact pedigree. This book is about the cuisine built by immigrants in the American Midwest who looked at abundance and said, 'More.' Chicken Vesuvio is the ultimate expression of Italian-American bravado: a massive pile of bone-in chicken and thick potato wedges, aggressively seared, showered in dried oregano, and blasted in a hot oven in a pool of white wine, chicken fat, and whole garlic cloves. It is unapologetically hearty, taking up the entire table, sputtering and smelling of roasted garlic—serve it straight from the Dutch oven with foil-wrapped garlic bread to mop up the pan juices.

INGREDIENTS

4 large	whole chicken leg quarters <i>bone-in, skin-on</i>	1 tbsp	dried oregano
3 large	Russet potatoes <i>peeled and cut lengthwise into thick wedges</i>	1 1/2 cup	dry white wine
15 large	garlic cloves <i>peeled but left whole</i>	1 1/2 cup	chicken stock
1/3 cup	extra-virgin olive oil	1 cup	frozen green peas <i>unthawed</i>
1 1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1/3 cup	fresh flat-leaf parsley <i>roughly chopped</i>
1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	1 med	lemon <i>cut into wedges</i>

PREPARATION

- **Preheat your oven to 400°F.**
- **Pat the chicken aggressively dry with paper towels.**

Moisture is the enemy of crispy skin. Season the chicken all over with the kosher salt, black pepper, and dried oregano, pressing it into the skin so it adheres.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Heat the olive oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat and fry the potato wedges until deeply golden and crusty.**

Work in batches so you do not crowd the pan. They won't be cooked through yet, and that is fine. Remove them to a plate and sprinkle lightly with salt.

- 2. Sear the chicken skin-side down in the remaining olive oil and potato starches until deeply browned and the fat has rendered.**

Do not touch them. Let them sear undisturbed for 8 to 10 minutes. Flip and brown the underside for another 3 minutes, then remove to the plate with the potatoes.

- 1. Lower the heat to medium, drop the whole garlic cloves into the chicken fat, and fry until light golden brown.**

Stir them around for 2 to 3 minutes. Do not let them burn, or the entire dish will turn bitter.

- 2. Stand back, pour in the white wine, and aggressively scrape the bottom of the pan.**

The wine will spit and hiss. Use a wooden spoon to lift all the browned bits (the fond). Let the wine come to a boil and cook until reduced by half, about 5 minutes.

- 3. Pour in the chicken stock, nestle the potatoes at the bottom of the pan, and lay the chicken on top.**

Make sure the chicken skin stays above the liquid line—we want it to roast and stay crispy, not boil.

- 4. Transfer the uncovered pot to the 400°F oven and roast for 35 to 45 minutes.**

The chicken must be cooked through (165°F), and the braising liquid should reduce to a glossy, slightly thickened sauce. The whole garlic cloves will melt into soft, sweet butter.

- 5. Remove from the oven, immediately scatter the frozen peas over the top, and garnish with chopped parsley.**

The residual heat of the sauce will cook the peas perfectly in 60 seconds without turning them to mush. Serve straight from the pot with a squeeze of fresh lemon.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Respect the dried oregano.**

Do not swap in fresh herbs here. The pungent, earthy hit of dried oregano is the soul of this dish and a hallmark of mid-century Italian-American pantries.

- **Serve with foil-wrapped garlic bread.**

You are going to need it for the pan sauce. Wrapping it in foil ensures the steam softens the crumb while the butter fully permeates the bread.



Chicken Cacciatore

If you go to the hills of Tuscany, chicken cacciatore is a delicate, restrained affair—a splash of white wine, a sprig of rosemary, maybe a lean game bird. It's a beautiful thing, but it is entirely not what we are doing here. When our great-grandparents arrived in New York and Boston, they looked at the unprecedented abundance of American markets and decided restraint was overrated. They added massive handfuls of earthy mushrooms, sweet bell peppers, and gallons of thick, rich tomato sauce. This is the unapologetic, heavy-hitting hunter's stew perfected in the red-sauce joints of America. It is meant to drown a pound of rigatoni, feed a neighborhood, and simmer all Sunday morning. Pour a glass of Chianti, put a record on, and let the Dutch oven do the work.

INGREDIENTS

4 lb	bone-in skin-on chicken thighs and drumsticks <i>patted completely dry</i>	6 large	garlic cloves <i>smashed and roughly chopped</i>
1 tbsp	kosher salt	3 med	oil-packed anchovy fillets
1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>	3 tbsp	tomato paste
3 tbsp	extra virgin olive oil	3/4 cup	dry red wine
1 large	yellow onion <i>halved and sliced into thick half-moons</i>	28 oz	crushed tomatoes
1 large	red bell pepper <i>cored and sliced into thick strips</i>	1/2 cup	chicken stock
1 large	green bell pepper <i>cored and sliced into thick strips</i>	2 med	fresh rosemary sprigs
1 lb	cremini mushrooms <i>halved</i>	1 tsp	dried oregano
		1/2 tsp	crushed red pepper flakes
		1/4 cup	kalamata or green olives <i>pitted and halved</i>

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Sear the chicken skin-side down until deep golden brown and the fat is fully rendered.

Season the dried chicken generously with the kosher salt and black pepper. Heat the olive oil in a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Working in two batches so you do not crowd the pan, lay the chicken skin-side down and leave it completely undisturbed for 6 to 8 minutes. Flip and sear the other side for 3 minutes. Remove the chicken to a sheet pan and set it aside, leaving all the glorious rendered fat in the pot.

2. Melt the anchovies into the hot chicken fat.

Lower the heat to medium. Toss the smashed garlic and the anchovy fillets into the pot, stirring constantly for about a minute. The anchovies will dissolve completely into the oil, providing a deeply savory, umami backbone native to the dish's Roman roots.

1. Sauté the vegetables until softened and the mushrooms have released their liquid.

Add the sliced onions, red and green bell peppers, and mushrooms to the pot along with a pinch of salt. Sauté for 8 to 10 minutes, using a wooden spoon to scrape up any browned bits of chicken stuck to the bottom, until the vegetables begin to collapse.

2. Caramelize the tomato paste and deglaze the pot with the red wine.

Push the vegetables to the perimeter of the pot and drop the tomato paste directly into the center. Let the paste cook on the bare heat for 2 to 3 minutes until it deepens to a dark, rusty brick red. Stir it into the vegetables with the oregano and red pepper flakes, then pour in the wine. It will violently bubble and steam; let it reduce by half, about 3 minutes.

3. Build the braising liquid and return the chicken to the pot.

Pour in the crushed tomatoes and chicken stock, drop in the fresh rosemary sprigs, and stir everything to combine. Bring the sauce to a lively simmer. Nestle the browned chicken pieces back into the pot, skin-side up, along with any juices that pooled on the sheet pan. The liquid should come about halfway up the sides of the chicken, leaving the crispy skin exposed.

4. Cover tightly and let it braise for 45 minutes.

Lower the heat to medium-low, cover the Dutch oven, and let the stew simmer gently. This long, moist heat breaks down the tough connective tissues in the dark meat, rendering it fall-off-the-bone tender.

5. Uncover the pot, add the olives, and reduce the sauce for another 30 to 40 minutes.

Remove the lid, scatter in the olives, and keep simmering uncovered. This stage is critical: it concentrates the flavor and reduces the liquid into the thick, clinging tomato gravy that defines the red-sauce joint aesthetic. Discard the bare rosemary stems, skim any excess fat from the surface, and serve straight from the bubbling Dutch oven.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Give the schedule honestly.**

While this is not the mandatory four-hour commitment of a full Sunday gravy with pork bones and meatballs, it requires time. Expect about 30 minutes of active prep and searing, followed by an hour and fifteen minutes of unattended braising. Total time from fridge to table is roughly two hours. Do not rush the uncovered reduction phase; a watery sauce is unacceptable.

- **Serve with proper garlic bread.**

Garlic bread is always wrapped in foil, never toasted open. Wrap the loaf tightly before putting it in the oven so the steam softens the bread, the butter melts directly into the crumb, and the garlic perfumes everything. Use it to sop up the dark, chicken-fat-enriched tomato gravy left in your bowl.



Sheet-Pan Eggplant Parmigiana Stacks

If you go to Naples and order parmigiana, you will get an exquisitely delicate, unbreaded vegetable casserole. It is beautiful, but it is not this. This is the unapologetic, maximalist cuisine of the Italian-American diaspora, built by immigrants who arrived with nothing and cranked the volume of their homeland's food to ten. Instead of a sloppy, heavy casserole, this pragmatic sheet-pan method guarantees an earth-shattering crunch, allowing you to build individual, bubbling architectural marvels of Sunday Gravy and low-moisture mozzarella for a loud, hungry crowd.

INGREDIENTS

2 large	American globe eggplants <i>sliced crosswise into 1/2-inch thick rounds</i>	1 tsp	dried oregano
1 tbsp	kosher salt	1 tsp	black pepper <i>freshly ground</i>
1 cup	all-purpose flour	1/4 cup	extra virgin olive oil <i>or high-quality cooking spray</i>
4 large	eggs <i>beaten with 2 tbsp water</i>	3 cup	Sunday Gravy or thick marinara
1 1/2 cup	Italian seasoned breadcrumbs	1 lb	low-moisture whole-milk mozzarella <i>sliced into 1/4-inch thick rounds or heavily shredded</i>
1 1/2 cup	Panko breadcrumbs	1 bunch	fresh basil <i>torn</i>
1 cup	Parmigiano-Reggiano <i>freshly grated, divided</i>		
1 tsp	garlic powder		

PREPARATION

- **Sweat the eggplant to draw out bitter liquids and collapse its spongy cell structure.**

Line baking sheets with paper towels, lay out the eggplant rounds, salt both sides, and let sit at room temperature for 45 to 60 minutes before aggressively patting them completely dry.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Prepare the three-step breading station.

Preheat the oven to 425°F. Set up three shallow bowls: one with the flour and black pepper; one with the beaten eggs; and one with the Italian breadcrumbs, Panko, half a cup of the Parmigiano-Reggiano, garlic powder, and oregano.

- 1. Bread and bake the eggplant rounds until deeply golden and audibly crispy.**
Dredge each dry eggplant round in flour, submerge in the egg wash, and press firmly into the breadcrumb mixture. Lay them on two generously oiled baking sheets. Spray or drizzle the tops with olive oil and bake for 15 to 20 minutes. Flip, oil the second side, and bake for 15 minutes more.
- 2. Assemble the towering sheet-pan stacks.**
Lower the oven to 375°F. Consolidate the crispy rounds onto one pan. Top the largest foundational bases with a spoonful of thick Sunday Gravy, a slice of mozzarella, a pinch of Parmigiano, and a torn basil leaf. Top with a medium eggplant round, repeat the layers, and cap with a small round, finishing with a heavy mound of mozzarella and Parmigiano.
- 3. Bake the stacks for a final melt.**
Return the sheet pan to the oven for 10 to 12 minutes, until the mozzarella is completely melted, bubbling, and just starting to brown on the edges.
- 4. Rest briefly and serve with vigor.**
Let the stacks rest for 3 to 5 minutes so the cheese sets enough to hold its structure. Transfer with a large spatula to plates, top with fresh basil, and serve immediately alongside foil-wrapped garlic bread.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **The sauce must be thick.**
This dish demands a heavily reduced sauce to prevent the crisp breading from turning instantly soggy—watery marinara will ruin the architecture.
- **Respect the cheese rules.**
Do not use fresh buffalo mozzarella here; it contains far too much water and will flood your sheet pan, destroying the crunch.



Chapter 5 — Desserts & After-Dinner

The highly ritualized, heavily dairy-laden conclusion to the meal.

A chilled bottle of Sambuca sits freezing on the bar. The tablecloth looks like a crime scene of marinara and breadcrumbs, as a proper red sauce feast ends in a blunt-force collision of heavy dairy, fried dough, and hard liquor. The post-meal

espresso is non-negotiable, pairing the hiss of the espresso machine with the sharp, medicinal sting of amaro or sambuca, served with three roasted coffee beans.

This is the domain of a wedge of dense ricotta cheesecake and cannoli that must, under penalty of law, be filled to order. You are already dangerously full. You will eat it anyway. That is the entire point. The ice melts, the espresso pulls, and nobody is rushing to ask for the check.





"San Gennaro" Ricotta Zeppole

zep-po-lee

If you've ever navigated the chaotic, sausage-scented gauntlet of Mulberry Street in September, you know the singular magic of a hot zeppole violently shaken in a brown paper bag. Authentic street-fair versions demand vats of oil and hours of yeast proofing—a ridiculous ask after you've just spent your entire Sunday simmering pork bones and meatballs. This is the grandmother's workaround: whole milk ricotta and baking powder for instant lift, yielding a fritter that's ridiculously tender inside and deeply golden outside. No apologies, no pretension, just powdered sugar everywhere.

INGREDIENTS

1 1/2 cup	whole milk ricotta cheese <i>drained in a sieve for at least 30 minutes</i>	1 med	lemon <i>zested</i>
3 large	eggs <i>room temperature</i>	1 1/2 cup	all-purpose flour
1/2 cup	granulated sugar	1 tbsp	baking powder
1 tsp	pure vanilla extract	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 tbsp	dark rum	2 qt	neutral oil
1 large	orange <i>zested</i>	1 1/2 cup	powdered sugar

PREPARATION

- **Drain the ricotta.**

American supermarket ricotta is notoriously watery. Place the cheese in a fine-mesh sieve set over a bowl in the fridge for at least 30 minutes, discarding the liquid that pools at the bottom.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the wet ingredients until perfectly smooth.**

In a large bowl, aggressively whisk the drained ricotta, eggs, granulated sugar, vanilla, rum, orange zest, and lemon zest. The citrus oils are crucial here to cut through the heavy richness of the deep fry.

- 2. Fold in the dry ingredients and let the batter rest.**

Whisk the flour, baking powder, and salt in a separate bowl, then gently fold them into the ricotta mixture just until the flour disappears. Do not overmix. Let it sit for 10 minutes to hydrate the flour.

1. Bring the oil to 350°F in a heavy Dutch oven.

Fill the Dutch oven with about 3 inches of neutral oil and heat it over medium-high. You want the heavy cast iron to retain the heat like a vault once the cold batter hits it.

2. Fry the zeppole in small batches until deeply golden.

Drop 1.5-tablespoon mounds of batter into the hot oil, working in batches of five or six to avoid dropping the temperature. Fry for 3 to 4 minutes, turning them occasionally with a spider skimmer, until they are puffed and crisp all over.

3. Perform the San Gennaro paper bag shake.

Transfer the fried zeppole to a paper-towel-lined tray for just 30 seconds. Toss them while still hot into a brown paper lunch bag with a heavy handful of powdered sugar, fold the top, shake violently, and serve immediately.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **The paper bag is mandatory.**

Don't just dust these delicately with a sieve. The vigorous shaking in a closed bag forces the powdered sugar into every hot, oily crevice, replicating the authentic street fair experience.

● **Improvise if you lack a thermometer.**

If you don't have a deep-fry thermometer, dip the wooden handle of a spoon into the oil. If it spawns rapid, steady bubbles around the wood, you're ready to fry.



Lemon Ricotta Torte

Let's get one thing straight: Italian-American restaurant food is its own proud, sovereign cuisine, and this crustless torte is its perfect conclusion. When you're throwing a massive Sunday dinner—with a four-hour gravy bubbling in the Dutch oven, a proper 50/25/25 meatball dropping in, chicken parm frying, and foil-wrapped garlic bread steaming—you need a dessert that demands nothing at the finish line. Inspired by Frank Sinatra's favorite order at Patsy's, you whip this unapologetic block of whole-milk ricotta and lemon together in the morning and shove it in the fridge. By the time the Chianti bottles are empty, it emerges cold, dense, and sharply citrus-forward, cutting right through the beautiful, heavy assault of a red-sauce feast.

INGREDIENTS

3 lb	whole-milk ricotta cheese <i>drained if watery</i>	2 large	lemons <i>zested and juiced</i>
1 1/4 cup	granulated sugar	1 tbsp	butter <i>softened</i>
4 large	extra-large eggs <i>room temperature</i>	1 tbsp	all-purpose flour
1 tbsp	pure vanilla extract	2 tbsp	powdered sugar

PREPARATION

- **Preheat your oven to 400°F and prepare the baking pan.**
Rub the inside of a 9-inch round baking pan generously with butter, dust it with flour, and tap out the excess.
- **Build a foil collar to prevent the torte from spilling over.**
Fold a long sheet of aluminum foil in half lengthwise and wrap it securely around the outside of the pan so it extends two inches above the rim.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Beat the ricotta and sugar together in a massive mixing bowl.**
Use a sturdy wooden spoon to mix them until the sugar dissolves and the texture smooths out entirely.
- 2. Incorporate the eggs, vanilla, and heavy citrus aromatics.**
Add the eggs one at a time, mixing well after each, then stir in the vanilla extract, fresh lemon juice, and the finely grated zest of both lemons.
- 3. Pour the heavy, fragrant batter into the prepared pan and bake for 55 to 65 minutes.**
Smooth the top and bake on the bottom rack until the top is deeply golden-brown but the center still jiggles substantially when shaken.

- 1. Let the torte cool completely at room temperature while you start your gravy.**
Remove the foil collar and leave the torte on the counter; it will sink and condense into a dense, creamy block as it cools.
- 2. Chill the torte until service.**
Once at room temperature, cover the pan tightly with plastic wrap and place it in the refrigerator to rest while you finish the chicken parm and tableside Caesar.
- 3. Invert, dust with powdered sugar, and serve.**
Run a thin knife around the edge, invert onto a plate, flip right-side up onto a serving platter, and cover the dark top with a heavy snowfall of powdered sugar.

CHEF'S NOTES

- **Do not substitute low-fat ricotta or cream cheese under any circumstances.**
This is a traditional Italian-American torte, not a New York deli cheesecake, and it relies entirely on the milk fat and unique texture of high-quality whole-milk ricotta.
- **Use a box grater for the lemons, taking care to avoid the bitter white pith.**
The finest side of the grater will extract maximum essential oils, perfuming the entire kitchen and cutting through the richness of the cheese.



Deconstructed Cannoli & Broken Shell Board

In Sicily, a cannolo is an exacting work of art, meticulously wrapped around a mold and filled to order so the shell never goes soggy. But in Italian-American enclaves from Arthur Avenue to the North End, we feed armies. When you have a houseful of people recovering from a massive pot of Sunday gravy, nobody wants to stand in the kitchen individually piping twenty shells. Enter the deconstructed cannoli board. We take the exact same iconic flavors—Marsala-blistered dough, sweet ricotta cut with rich mascarpone, cinnamon, and chocolate—and

blow them up into a loud, communal sheet-pan masterpiece. You fry shards of dough right in your Dutch oven, pile them high, and let your guests dig in.

INGREDIENTS

32 oz	whole milk ricotta <i>strained overnight</i>	1/4 cup	shelled pistachios <i>finely chopped</i>
8 oz	mascarpone cheese	2 cup	all-purpose flour
1 1/2 cup	confectioners' sugar <i>sifted</i>	2 tbsp	granulated sugar
1/2 tsp	ground cinnamon	1 tbsp	unsweetened cocoa powder
1 tsp	vanilla extract	1/2 tsp	kosher salt
1 tsp	orange zest <i>freshly grated</i>	3 tbsp	unsalted butter <i>frozen</i>
3/4 cup	mini semi-sweet chocolate chips <i>divided</i>	1/2 cup	dry Marsala wine
		1 large	egg
		2 qt	peanut or canola oil

PREPARATION

- **Drain the ricotta for at least twelve hours.**

Line a fine-mesh sieve or the basket of your box grater with two layers of cheesecloth. Set it over a deep bowl, dump in the ricotta, wrap it tightly, and weigh it down with a heavy can in the fridge. This transforms supermarket ricotta into bakery-style ricotta impastata.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the flour, granulated sugar, cocoa powder, and kosher salt together in a large mixing bowl.**

- 1. Run the frozen butter down the large holes of a box grater directly into the flour.**

Toss the butter curls into the flour with your fingers until the mixture resembles wet sand. The box grater gives you the flaky pastry structure without melting the fat with the heat of your hands.

- 2. Create a well in the center of the flour, add the Marsala wine and the egg, and gradually whisk until a shaggy dough forms.**

Turn the dough out and knead aggressively for five to eight minutes until smooth and elastic. Wrap tightly in plastic and let it rest at room temperature for at least an hour to relax the gluten.

- 3. Discard the drained whey from the ricotta, then beat the dry cheese together with the mascarpone until completely smooth and velvety.**

Mascarpone is the secret weapon here. It introduces the high butterfat needed to stabilize wet American cow's milk ricotta, yielding a dense cream that won't weep on your board.

- 4. Fold the sifted confectioners' sugar, cinnamon, vanilla extract, orange zest, and a half-cup of the mini chocolate chips into the cheese mixture.**

Cover tightly and chill in the refrigerator for at least two hours to let the mascarpone set and the flavors marry.

- 5. Roll half of the rested dough out paper-thin on a lightly floured surface and cut it into rustic, uneven shards.**

Do not worry about perfect shapes; you are making a broken board. If the dough is too thick, the chips will be tough instead of shatteringly crisp.

- 6. Heat two inches of oil to 350°F in your Dutch oven and fry the dough shards in batches for one to two minutes per side.**

The Marsala alcohol vaporizes instantly in the hot oil, creating those iconic, shatteringly crisp blisters. Transfer the deeply golden chips to a paper towel-lined sheet pan to drain.

- 7. Mound the chilled cannoli cream in the center of a large sheet pan and garnish with the remaining chocolate chips and pistachios.**

1. **Pile the freshly fried cannoli chips around the cream, heavily dust the entire board with confectioners' sugar, and serve immediately.**

CHEF'S NOTES

- **This dessert is designed to fit seamlessly into a loud Sunday dinner schedule.**

The cream can and should be made up to two days in advance, and the dough can be mixed the day before. Frying takes fifteen minutes in the same Dutch oven you used for the gravy earlier in the day.



Tiramisu

tee-rah-mee-SOO

Let's get one thing straight: Tiramisu isn't some ancient Roman relic. It was invented in Northern Italy in the sixties, but the minute it hit American shores, neighborhood joint guys realized its true potential, swapping raw egg whites for heavy cream and spiking it with enough booze to kill a horse. This is the dessert you want waiting in the fridge after you've spent four hours simmering Sunday gravy, an unapologetic, massive slab of comfort that tastes exactly like the place with the red-checkered tablecloths on Arthur Avenue.

INGREDIENTS

2 cup	strong espresso or dark roast coffee <i>cooled completely</i>	2 tbsp	Kahlua or Marsala wine
1/4 cup	Kahlua or coffee liqueur	16 oz	mascarpone cheese <i>brought to room temperature for 15 minutes</i>
1/4 cup	dark rum or Marsala wine	1 1/2 cup	heavy whipping cream <i>chilled</i>
2 tbsp	granulated sugar	1 tsp	vanilla extract
6 large	egg yolks	48 med	crisp Italian ladyfingers
3/4 cup	granulated sugar	1/4 cup	unsweetened cocoa powder
		4 oz	dark chocolate block

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Brew and booze the coffee.**

Mix your cold coffee, a quarter-cup of Kahlua, the rum, and two tablespoons of sugar in a wide, shallow bowl until dissolved.
- 2. Rig the Dutch oven double boiler.**

Fill your Dutch oven with two inches of water and bring it to a gentle simmer over medium-low heat to create a safe heating station for your eggs.
- 3. Whip the yolks to pasteurize them.**

Place the egg yolks and three-quarters of a cup of sugar into a heatproof bowl set over the simmering water, whisking constantly for 7 to 10 minutes until pale, thick, and hitting 160°F on an instant-read thermometer.
- 4. Flavor and cool the custard base.**

Remove the bowl from the heat, whisk in the remaining two tablespoons of Kahlua or Marsala, and let the mixture cool completely.

1. Fold the mascarpone mousse together.

Use a spatula to aggressively fold the mascarpone into the cooled yolk mixture until perfectly smooth, then gently fold in the heavy cream and vanilla that have been whipped to medium peaks.

2. Soak the ladyfingers fast.

Dunk each hard ladyfinger into the coffee mixture for exactly one second per side, no lingering, then arrange them snugly in a single layer across the bottom of your sheet pan.

3. Build the slab.

Spread exactly half of the mascarpone cream evenly over the soaked cookies, dust lightly with cocoa powder through a fine mesh sieve, and repeat the process for a second layer of soaked cookies and the remaining cream.

4. Chill the sheet pan overnight.

Wrap the pan tightly in plastic wrap and leave it alone in the fridge for at least eight hours so the hard cookies absorb the moisture and transform into tender cake.

5. Garnish with the box grater.

Right before serving to your loud guests, hit the dessert with another heavy dusting of cocoa powder and run the dark chocolate block down the coarse holes of your box grater to shower the pan in rustic curls.



Biscuit Tortoni & Spumoni "Semi-Freddo" Cups

If you grew up anywhere near a proper red-sauce joint, your meal ended with a choice: a slice of tri-colored Spumoni, or a little pleated paper cup of Biscuit Tortoni. We refuse to make you choose. This is an unapologetic, fully loaded Italian-American heavyweight—a rich mascarpone semifreddo layered with pistachio, dark chocolate, and neon-red cherries, crowned with amaretto and crushed macarons. It sits patiently in the deep freeze while the four-hour Sunday gravy does its thing, ready to cap off the night alongside a shot of espresso and a table full of people.

INGREDIENTS

4 cup	heavy whipping cream <i>very cold</i>	1 tbsp	Maraschino cherry juice
14 oz	sweetened condensed milk	2 oz	dark chocolate <i>grated on the large holes of a box grater</i>
8 oz	mascarpone cheese <i>chilled</i>	2 tbsp	Amaretto liqueur
1 tsp	kosher salt	1/2 tsp	almond extract
1/3 cup	pistachio butter	1 1/2 cup	imported Italian Amaretti cookies <i>crushed</i>
1/4 cup	shelled pistachios <i>roughly chopped</i>	1/2 cup	sliced almonds <i>toasted</i>
1/2 cup	Maraschino cherries <i>finely chopped and patted dry</i>	12 large	whole Maraschino cherries <i>stems attached</i>

PREPARATION

- **Set up your freezing vessel.**

Line a standard 12-cup muffin tin with pleated white paper baking cups or foil muffin liners. This mimics the classic restaurant presentation and keeps the cups stable in the freezer.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whip the master base.**

In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the cold heavy cream, mascarpone cheese, sweetened condensed milk, and kosher salt. Whip on medium speed until the mixture holds firm, billowy peaks, being careful not to over-whip it into butter.

- 2. Divide the base into three separate bowls.**

You are going to build three distinct layers from this single master semifreddo.

1. Mix and freeze the pistachio layer.

Gently fold the pistachio butter and chopped pistachios into the first bowl. Spoon this green mixture into the bottom third of your prepared cups, tap the tin to level them out, and freeze for 15 minutes.

2. Mix and freeze the cherry-chocolate layer.

Fold the grated dark chocolate, chopped cherries, and cherry juice into the second bowl. Spoon this pink layer directly over the slightly firmed pistachio layer, then return the tin to the freezer for another 15 minutes.

3. Build the Tortonì crown.

Into the final bowl, fold the Amaretto liqueur, almond extract, and 1 cup of the crushed Amaretti cookies. Spoon this mixture over the cherry layer, filling the cups slightly past the rim to create a generous dome.

4. Garnish unapologetically.

Sprinkle the tops heavily with the reserved half-cup of Amaretti crumbs and toasted sliced almonds. Press a single whole Maraschino cherry right into the center of each cup.

5. Wrap tightly and freeze deep.

Wrap the entire muffin tin in plastic wrap, ensuring you don't smash the cherries. Freeze for at least 6 hours, or ideally overnight, to let the alcohol and sugars set the texture perfectly.

6. Temper slightly before serving.

Pull the cups from the freezer 5 to 10 minutes before dessert time so they soften enough to yield perfectly to a spoon.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Use proper Italian Amaretti.**

You want the hard, crunchy imported amaretti cookies for this, not the soft chewy ones, so they retain their texture when folded into the cream.

- **Embrace the pantry cherries.**

Traditional Italian Spumone uses sour cherries in syrup, but authentic Italian-American restaurant food demands the neon-red Maraschino cherry. Do not apologize for this.



Patsy Anise & Almond Biscotti

Let's get one thing straight: if you ask for biscotti in Tuscany, they'll hand you a rock-hard cantucci meant only for soaking. But we're in an American red-sauce joint, where dessert means something richer and unapologetically comforting. Borrowing a genius hack from Patsy's in Manhattan, these butter-laced cookies skip the traditional slow, dry bake for a screaming-hot ride under the broiler. Designed to be baked on a Sunday morning while the pork and meatballs start their mandatory four-hour simmer, the result is a caramelized, anise-scented masterpiece with a tender heart, built for a houseful of people, a late-night espresso, and a heavy pour of sambuca.

INGREDIENTS

3 cup	all-purpose flour	3 large	eggs
2 tsp	baking powder	1 large	egg yolk
1/2 tsp	kosher salt	1 1/2 tsp	honey
1 1/4 cup	granulated sugar	1 tsp	pure anise extract
1/2 cup	unsalted butter <i>softened to room temperature</i>	1 tbsp	whole anise seeds
		1 cup	whole raw almonds

PREPARATION

- **Preheat your oven to 350°F.**
Line a heavy-duty sheet pan with parchment paper.

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1. Whisk the dry ingredients together.**
In a medium bowl, whisk the all-purpose flour, baking powder, kosher salt, and whole anise seeds.
- 2. Cream the butter and sugar.**
In a large bowl, beat the softened butter and granulated sugar together until pale, light, and fluffy, which should take about 3 to 4 minutes.
- 3. Build the dough.**
Beat in the whole eggs one at a time, making sure each is absorbed before adding the next. Drop in the extra egg yolk, honey, and anise extract, then gradually mix in your flour mixture until a soft, slightly sticky dough forms. Fold in the whole almonds.

1. Shape the dough into logs.

Turn the dough out onto a floured counter and divide it evenly into three pieces. With floured hands, gently roll each piece into an 11-inch log, transfer them to your prepared sheet pan, and gently pat the tops until they are about 1/2-inch to 3/4-inch thick.

2. Bake until golden and firm.

Slide the pan into the oven and bake for 25 to 30 minutes. Crucially, remove the pan and let the logs cool entirely on the pan for at least 20 minutes; slicing them hot will result in a disastrous, crumbly mess.

3. Slice the cooled logs on a bias.

Transfer the cooled logs to a cutting board and use a sharp serrated knife to cut them crosswise on a slight bias into 1/2-inch-thick slices.

4. Execute the restaurant broiler finish.

Move an oven rack to about 8 inches below your heat source and preheat the broiler to high. Lay the biscotti flat on the sheet pan and broil for exactly 1 minute, flip every cookie with tongs, and broil for another 45 to 60 seconds to toast the other side.

5. Cool completely before serving.

Transfer the toasted biscotti to wire cooling racks. They will crisp up significantly as they come down to room temperature.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Watch the broiler like a hawk.**

The line between beautifully toasted and charcoal under a restaurant-style broiler is incredibly thin. Do not walk away while the cookies are toasting.



The Ammazcaffè

ahm-maht-tsay-cahf-FEH

If you've done Sunday right, your house smells like a triumph of four-hour simmering gravy, foil-wrapped garlic bread, and two-step chicken parm. Your guests are happy, loud, and dangerously full. If you serve them hot coffee now, they'll say their goodbyes and go home to sleep, and we don't want them to leave yet. It's time for the ammazcaffè—the "coffee killer." In an Italian-American kitchen, this isn't a quick pour of store-bought Sambuca; it's a homemade stovetop espresso liqueur that simmers on the back burner all morning alongside your meatballs. It reduces into a dark, syrupy elixir that you cool, spike, chill, and pour neat. Make no apologies for the sugar or the booze. This is how a proper dinner party ends.

INGREDIENTS

3 cup	strongly brewed espresso <i>brewed in a stovetop Moka pot</i>	1 med	vanilla bean <i>split down the middle</i>
3 cup	granulated white sugar	1 med	cinnamon stick
		2 1/2 cup	100-proof vodka

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Brew the espresso and start the simmer.

Fire up the stovetop Moka pot and brew enough dark, oily espresso to yield 3 cups. Pour it into a Dutch oven over medium-low heat and stir in the sugar, the scraped vanilla bean seeds, the empty pods, and the cinnamon stick.

2. Let it reduce low and slow.

Once the sugar completely dissolves and the mixture reaches a gentle simmer, drop the heat to the absolute lowest setting. Let it lazily steam uncovered for 30 to 45 minutes until it reduces into a glossy, dark syrup.

3. Cool it down completely.

Pull the pot off the heat and let it come down to room temperature. Do not rush this—if you add the booze while the syrup is still hot, the alcohol will immediately evaporate, and you will have ruined the punchline of the night.

4. Spike the syrup.

Once the liquid is entirely cool to the touch, fish out the vanilla pods and the cinnamon stick. Pour in the vodka and stir vigorously to combine.

5. Bottle and freeze.

Pour the liqueur through a fine mesh strainer into glass swing-top bottles. Stash them in the freezer for the rest of the afternoon so they are violently cold by the time dinner ends.

1. Pour the coffee killer.

When the tiramisu is gone and the table is littered with crumpled napkins and empty wine glasses, bring out the frosted bottle and pour it neat into chilled shot glasses.

CHEF'S NOTES

● **Respect the Moka pot.**

You must use a traditional stovetop Moka pot or a real espresso machine for this extraction. Standard American drip coffee is far too watery and will ruin the syrupy texture of the final liqueur.

● **Using Everclear instead.**

If you live in a state where 190-proof pure grain alcohol (like Everclear) is legal, you can substitute 1 1/2 cups of Everclear for the vodka to achieve an even more authentic bite.