

The Art of Eating Well

If there is one book every serious cook of Italian food has in their kitchen it is this one, writes **Abi King**. Welcome to Casa Artusi and the fascinating story of Pellegrino Artusi and his seminal work...

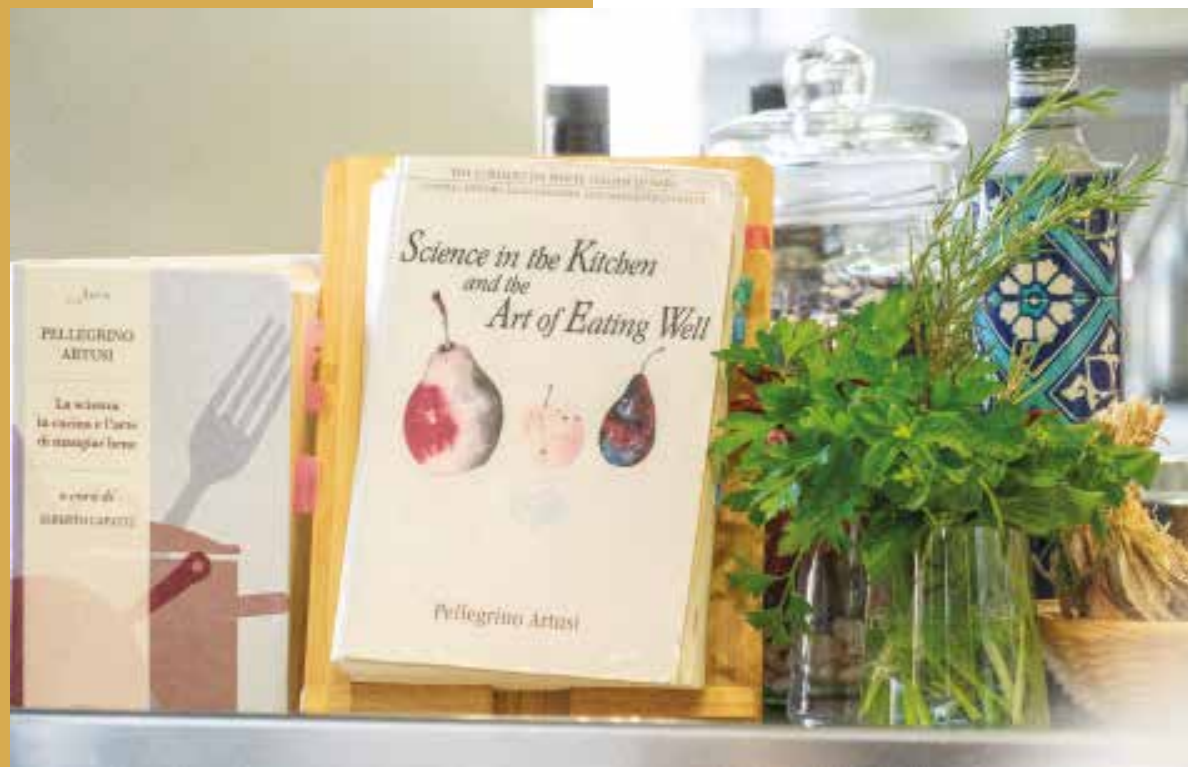
Forlimpopoli. The very name puts a spring in my step. Imagine peeling paint, fresh fruit and vegetable markets, the sing-song of Italian voices and the chiming of church bells. Imagine that and you're halfway to joining us in this small village in northeast Emilia-Romagna. But there's something else that puts this spot between Ravenna and Rimini on the map: Casa Artusi, a museum and cooking school dedicated to the oldest food blogger in the world. One Pellegrino Artusi.

Artusi compiled the first ever book of Italian recipes, travelling the length and breadth of this newly formed nation and consolidating tradition into a bible of gastronomy. By the final edition it included over 790 recipes, each peppered with advice and salted with amusing anecdotes. But Artusi himself was not a chef, a restaurateur, nor even a farmer. He was a scientist and businessman, and one with a lot of time and money on his hands. And, as you might expect, his approach was methodical and meticulous.

The timing helped too. Publication of *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well) came in 1891, only twenty years after reunification. Looking back, food historians muse that his work brought a sense of identity and purpose to a fledgling nation. Others think that he simply tapped into one of the nation's favourite pastimes, that of sharing a meal. *L'Artusi*, as the book also became known, sold over one million copies and was translated into more than seven different languages. The idea was new, modern and exciting, even though today it's hard to imagine that no-one had thought of it before.

FOODIE FOLLOWERS

But years before his literary fame and foodie followers, Artusi lived in Forlimpopoli, in a house just a stone's throw from today's Casa Artusi museum. Translated copies of *L'Artusi* fill the bookshelves in the lower part of the museum, while upstairs a food writing library awaits. Access is available for casual readers and researchers



Images, clockwise from left:

La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene (Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well) was self-published in 1891, when Pellegrino Artusi was 71 years old

An English translation of *L'Artusi* (as it is known for short) on display in Casa Artusi – the book has also been translated into Spanish, French, Dutch, German, Portuguese and Polish

The museum houses artefacts from Artusi's life and also serves as a research centre for students of gastronomy



Images by Abigail King. www.insidethetravelclub.com, unless otherwise stated



Images, clockwise from top left:

Casa Artusi, in Forlimpopoli, Pellegrino Artusi's home town

View over the town, which lies between Cesena and Forlì on the Via Emilia

Learning the craft of pasta-making in the cooking school

Examples of what the finished result should look like

The class graduates with honours, and the promise of lunch

Shopping for ingredients at the fruit and vegetable market in Forlimpopoli

All the gastronomic wonders of Emilia-Romagna can be bought here



WHAT TO EAT IN EMILIA-ROMAGNA



Emilia-Romagna is to food what Hollywood is to the entertainment industry. It's the hub and home of some of the most famous products in Italy, if not the world. You can spend weeks exploring the food scene here, and many do, but even on a shorter trip, look out for these classic highlights.

► PARMIGIANO REGGIANO

Imitations go by the name "parmesan" but the real deal is Parmigiano Reggiano. And it has the legal backing from the European Union to prove it. This regal sounding hard cheese is made from cow's milk and aged for at least twelve months. For the full Emilia-Romagna experience, visit a dairy and snap a photo of yourself surrounded by rows and rows of cheese.

► BALSAMIC VINEGAR

Dark, punchy and nothing to do with balsam, balsamic vinegar takes the skins, seeds and stems of (typically) Trebbiano and Lambrusco grapes and turns them into something special. The *mosto cotto* syrup is aged for at least twelve years in a series of barrels of ever-decreasing size. The different barrels, made from ash, juniper, cherry, mulberry, oak and chestnut, provide layers of flavour, and the premium products spend around 25 years waiting for their chance on a plate. Only two consortia produce true traditional balsamic vinegar: Modena and Reggio Emilia.

► PROSCIUTTO DI PARMA

Salty yet sweet, buttery and pliable, *prosciutto di Parma* has entertained tastebuds since Roman times. Parma ages its meat for around twice as long as other *prosciutto* production lines and farmers credit the superior texture and flavour to that patience.

► BOLOGNESE RAGÙ

Yes, the Bolognese name stems from Bologna but you'll find more differences than similarities between the UK canteen favourite and the traditional Bolognese *ragù*. First up, the pasta. In Emilia-Romagna, Italians pair the sauce with tagliatelle rather than spaghetti. Second, the sauce itself. While the Bolognese *ragù* does include ground meat, you'll find fewer tomatoes and more celery, carrot and onion in the original version of the dish.

alike, and you can take a tour of the wine cellar and ornate chapel with its grand altarpiece and gilded ceiling. There's even a piano and a range of Casa Artusi ceramics, plus portraits and drawings of the man himself. But the real delight lies beyond the yellowed parchment and cherub-covered ceilings.

USE YOUR HIPS

The best part resides in the Casa Artusi kitchens. Carla, our teacher, leads the first demonstration, using alchemy to transform a pile of flour and an egg into *maltagliati*, *anolini*, *cappelletti* and *garganelli*. Or in other words, pasta, twisted and shredded into shape only by the work of her hands. "It's easier if you use your hips," she says, leaning into the doughy mixture. "Rock from side to side and use the weight of your back to get the work done." In less than five minutes, she demonstrates how to make around twenty types of pasta, and every single one is perfectly formed. Right after that, it's our turn.

We're separated into workstations with a rolling pin, an apron and a *marietta*. (The name *marietta* comes from Artusi's maid and cook, Marietta Sabatini, a woman so important to him that he named her in his will.) Ours is called Corrada. All told, Casa Artusi keeps around 140 *mariette* on the books. And though ours were all women, I'm told that they also include men. They work on a voluntary basis and overtime is not allowed: they must return home in time to make lunch for their families. Imagine Santa Claus mixed with your grandmother, and that's the kind of spirit these women bring to their tuition. It's a magical, mirth-making experience. I get to work under the watchful eye of Corrada. I am not, it has to be said, a natural. My dough ends up lumpy, torn and uneven. I must be swaying too far to one side with my hips.

Corrada gestures for me to step aside. (She doesn't speak any English and my Italian mirrors my pasta technique.) Within seconds, she's repaired the tear, smoothed out the lumps and turned my dough into silky smooth parchment ready for transformation. *Cappelletti* is what we're aiming for. The word means "little hats". We're making pockets of pasta, like *ravioli*, only smaller and pointier. ➤



PLACES TO VISIT NEARBY

► FORLIMPOPOLI

Forlimpopoli is a charming place with peeling paint façades and a lively fresh produce market. It's a perfect place for a low-key stroll. Venture a little farther afield to explore three different and distinct places in Emilia-Romagna.

► RIMINI

Rimini is one of Italy's most popular beachside spots, with gentle, shallow waters and an Agatha Christie-era beachfront overlooking the Adriatic coast. But Rimini's Old Town feels a world away from the seaside. The grand Galli Theatre celebrates opera amid dripping chandeliers. Castel Sismondo hosts cultural events within its medieval walls. And Cinema Fulgor treats visitors to a time-defying visit back to the days when local lad Federico Fellini first fell in love with film. And don't miss taking a walk around the Borgo, a scenic spot with beautiful murals, cosy eateries, cobbled streets and crooked shutters.

► RAVENNA

Once the capital of the Western Roman Empire, the atmospheric streets of Ravenna host no fewer than eight World Heritage sites. Although the glory days were short-lived (Ravenna rose to power in 402 and fell in 476,) the town has plenty to show for it. Ravenna's mosaics draw the crowds. You'll find them everywhere, but look out for the octagonal Basilica di San Vitale, the 6th-century Basilica di Sant'Apollinare Nuovo and the Mausoleo di Galla Placidia in the shape of a cross.

► SAN MARINO

One of the world's oldest republics, San Marino sits high on a mountain top, surrounded by Italy. San Marino is both the name of the microstate and its capital, a place with whimsical stone turrets, cobbled streets and ankle-threatening hairpin turns. The entire city is a World Heritage site, and a treat at that, with a selection of high-quality restaurants serving *Torta tre monti* three-layer cake, with a side dish of incredible views.

But, speaking to us through the pages of his book (published twelve years before Auguste Escoffier's *Le Guide Culinaire*), Pellegrino Artusi has some wise words to impart between the instructions we receive from his *mariette*: "Cook the *cappelletti* in the capon broth, as they do in Romagna, where, on Christmas Day, you will find braggarts claiming to have eaten a hundred of them. This can also suffice to kill you, however, as happened to a friend of mine. For a moderate eater, a couple of dozen will be enough."

Next up is recipe 71, the more familiar *tagliatelle* Romagna-style. This I can do, as it involves folding the pasta and cutting straight and simple lines. Corrada dazzles again, with a laugh that's contagious, as she flicks the knife into a single *tagliatelle*-generating dance-off. *Mariette* 1 – Clumsy foreigners 0.

TWELVE LITTLE HATS

We part ways, laughing as we go, the *mariette* to their family, the rest of us to join Carla upstairs for lunch. For no food museum, nay, no Italian museum, could rightly rush its guests through the hospitality process. We sit down and feast on the local produce of Emilia-Romagna. We taste cheese, cold meats, olive oil, vinegar... and the very pasta we made ourselves. With wine we toast Pellegrino Artusi, the world's first food blogger, a pioneer in spreading information, community and some great gastronomic ideas.

But I'm not so excited as to forget the great man's advice. When it comes to *cappelletti*, a couple of dozen should be enough. ■

WHERE TO STAY

HOTEL ELISEO***

Lungomare Pinzon, 130
Bellaria Igea Marina, Rimini
www.hoteleliseo.com

HOTEL ELIOS***

Lungomare Pinzon, 116
Bellaria Igea Marina, Rimini
www.hotelelios.com

Right on the beachfront, two charming, family-run hotels with a Mediterranean atmosphere. Located in Bellaria Igea Marina, a seaside resort close to Rimini town, both hotels offer accommodation to suit every need, the perfect spot to relax for a few days.



Images, clockwise from left:

Appetisers at Casa Artusi

Local vegetables, simply grilled



Piazza Tre Martiri, Rimini

San Marino

Ravenna, away from the beaches

FIND OUT MORE

► CASA ARTUSI

A centre of excellence devoted entirely to Italian home cookery with a cookery school (virtual and in person), restaurant and shop. Most people visit as a day trip from Rimini or Ravenna, or even the larger city of Bologna at a stretch. The town lies on the Via Emilia between Cesena and Forlì. Once in Forlimpopoli, Casa Artusi is easy enough to find. Leave at least half a day in your itinerary to visit the market at Forlimpopoli, take a guided tour of Casa Artusi and enjoy a cooking lesson.

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► L'ARTUSI

You can find Pellegrino Artusi's book *La scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiar bene* (Science in the kitchen and the art of eating well) in the original Italian on Amazon. The English edition is hard to come by but is still available.

GETTING THERE

► BY PLANE

Bologna is the main airport in this region of Italy, and has good connections by rail and road to Rimini and Ravenna.



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