

Metropolitan Home

MARCH/APRIL 1999

115 WHAT THE PROS KNOW

Welcome to the homes of the style-makers. For this issue, we visited groundbreaking architects and designers—as well as a landscape innovator and a celebrated chef—and asked them to show us how they actually live. The results are surprising—and inspiring!

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Mario Batali—adulated chef of Manhattan restaurants Pó and Babbo—is the author of a new book called *Simple Italian Food*, which is just what he serves when he cooks for family and friends.

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SIMPLY

WHEN NEW YORK CHEF EXTRAORDINAIRE MARIO BATALI AND HIS WIFE, SUSI CAHN, HAVE FRIENDS IN FOR DINNER AT HOME, THE FOOD IS ALWAYS ABUNDANT, EXUBERANT—AND EASY.

ITALIAN



Asparagus alla Milanese



When a chef gets home from work, what does he want to eat? That's a question Mario Batali, owner/chef of New York City restaurants Pó and the new, red-hot Babbo, answers with no hesitation: "Simple food." After long days turning up the heat in two restaurant kitchens, real home cooking is the object of his desire. "No one wants to cook for a chef," he mourns. So Batali and his wife, Susi Cahn (above), set aside an occasional evening for dinner parties at home, giving Batali the chance to cook like the rest of us—almost.

"What takes me three hours takes him 15 minutes," Cahn says of her husband. Like any professional, he can get the chicken in the oven in the time it takes a home cook to get the measuring spoons out of the drawer. Confidence, knife skills and no need for written recipes fuel the whirlwind of activity. Cahn has impressive culinary credentials herself—she's a renowned cheesemaker (her family owns the Coach Farm) and gardener. But with the couple's two young sons, Benno, 3, and Leo, 9 months, and hundreds of goat cheeses to rear, she has a lot on her plate. So, after Cahn takes out her favorite Russell Wright dishes, Batali takes over.

Simple Italian Food (Clarkson Potter, \$30) is the title Batali chose for his first cookbook, and it is an accurate, if incomplete, description of his spirited cooking style. "Spring just explodes in Italy," rejoices Batali, who designed this menu around the vibrant ingredients of springtime. As we continue to learn more about the many cuisines of Italy, these easy, exuberant renderings of Italian seasonal classics show us home cooking at its best.

Produced by Linda O'Keeffe. Photographs by André Baranowski. Food Styling by Roscoe Betsill. Written by Julia Moskin.



Tortellini with Goat Cheese and Scallions



Crostini Toscano

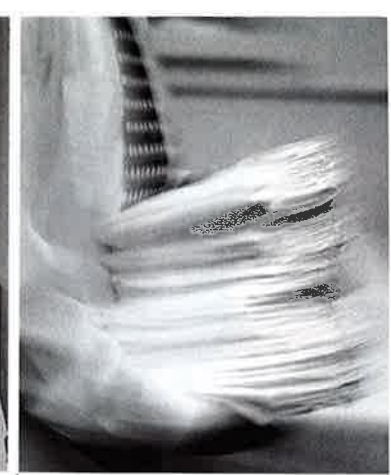




Fennel Gratin with Robiola



Cheeses at Babbo



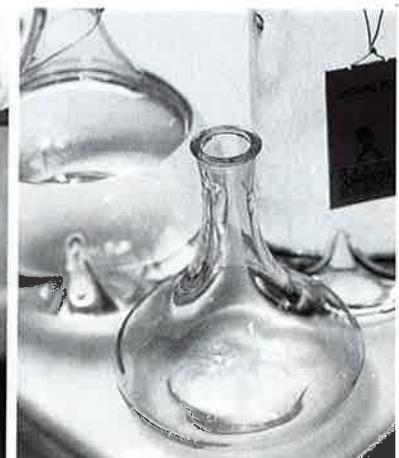
Batali grew up outside Seattle amid the bounty of the Pacific Northwest and in an Italian-American family where “food was everything.” After six years in professional kitchens, he moved to a small village in Italy to apprentice at a tiny trattoria. A three-year stint served as an immersion program in Italian cooking, from making handmade pasta and sausages to selecting porcini mushrooms and dressing wild game birds.

Now he is confident enough to spin his own vibrant variations on what he learned. The high standards Batali absorbed in Italy are in his bones. “Buy the best ingredients, then do as little as possible to them,” he advises. The “best ingredients” are not necessarily the most expensive: Foie gras and caviar are rarely spotted on his menus. Batali’s gift is to make white beans, veal shanks and radicchio taste just as luxurious.

His popular cuisine is literally and figuratively zesty, incorporating orange and lemon zests, hot peppers, vinegars and spices into Italian recipes. At Babbo, Batali’s exciting specialties—like striped bass in preserved lemon broth and creamy saffron *panna cotta* (eggless custard)—coupled with strong reviews, are burning up the reservation lines.

Given his considerable professional expertise, what might Batali choose to cook at home? “Three times out of four it’s a roast chicken,” he says, suddenly seeming very approachable. In fact, all the recipes here are well within the reach of a home cook. Pantry ingredients like olives, capers and anchovies lend intensity to a spread for Tuscan *crostini*. Servings of asparagus are topped with a sunny-side up egg; the yolk provides the smooth sauce. Balsamic vinegar is rubbed on the roast chicken to caramelize and make a crackly crisp glaze.

Finally: Try wearing neon-orange clogs when you cook, as Batali always does, to remind you to have fun in the kitchen. **MH** See Resources, last pages. Recipes follow.





Balsamic-Glazed Chicken
with Grilled Treviso



Sprigoni di Zabaglione
with Strawberries

Mario Batali's
recipes

Crostini Toscane

- 3 tbsp. virgin olive oil
- 1 medium red onion, diced
- 2 tbsp. anchovy paste
(or 4 anchovy fillets, rinsed and finely chopped)
- 1 tbsp. capers
- ½ lb. chicken livers
- ½ cup Chianti or other dry red wine
- 2 tbsp. tomato paste
- 1 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- ¼ tsp. salt, or to taste
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 8 1-inch-thick slices Italian peasant bread

1. In a large skillet, heat the olive oil, onion, anchovy paste and capers over medium heat and sauté until golden, about 8 to 10 minutes. Add chicken livers and cook until lightly browned, about 5 minutes. Stir in wine, tomato paste, balsamic vinegar, salt and pepper, and heat to boiling. Reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, 15 minutes.

2. Spoon into a food processor and pulse 5 or 6 times until chopped but not pasty; some lumps should remain.

3. Toast bread and spoon some of the liver spread onto 1 side of each piece. *Serves 4.*

Tortellini with Goat Cheese and Scallions

- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- 3 large eggs
- 5 oz. soft, mild goat cheese
- ⅛ tsp. grated nutmeg

- ¼ tsp. salt, or to taste
- 2 scallions, minced
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- 4 cups chicken broth

1. Put the flour in a mound on a work surface and make a "well" in the center. Break 2 of the eggs into the well and beat them with a fork, gradually working in the flour. When it becomes too stiff to work with a fork, knead in the flour. Continue to knead 8 to 10 minutes until dough is smooth, compact and elastic. Cover and let dough rest 30 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, in a medium-size bowl combine goat cheese, nutmeg, salt, half the scallions, ¼ cup Parmesan and the remaining egg. Mix well.

3. On a lightly floured surface, roll dough into about a 10-inch square. Cut into 2-inch squares. Place 1 teaspoon of the cheese filling in the center of each square. Fold opposite corners together to form a triangle. Press edges firmly to seal, moistening them with a little water if necessary. Bring the points of the triangle along the folded edge together and press to seal.

4. About 15 minutes before serving, heat broth to boiling and keep warm. In a large saucepan, heat 4 quarts of water to boiling. Drop tortellini into boiling water and cook until tender, about 7 minutes. Drain well.

5. Spoon tortellini into 4 soup plates and add hot broth. Sprinkle with remaining Parmesan and scallions. *Serves 4.*

Asparagus alla Milanese

- 28 stalks medium asparagus
- 6 tbsp. butter
- 4 large eggs
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese

1. Heat 4 quarts of water to boiling. Fill a large bowl with ice water. Trim asparagus of hard ends and drop into boiling water. Cook about 2 to 3 minutes, or just until tender but still crisp. Remove with tongs and plunge into ice water.

2. Heat 4 tablespoons of the butter over medium heat in a large skillet, swirling the skillet until the butter turns a rich, nutty brown. Add asparagus and toss until

heated through. Remove and divide among 4 plates.

3. Wipe skillet clean. Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in skillet and cook the 4 eggs, sunny-side up. Place 1 egg over each serving of asparagus and sprinkle with cheese. *Serves 4.*

Fennel Gratin with Robiola

- 2 bulbs fennel
- 2 tbsp. butter
- 2 tbsp. all-purpose flour
- 1 cup warm milk
- ¼ tsp. salt
- ¼ tsp. grated nutmeg
- 4 oz. fontina cheese, grated
- 8 oz. Robiola (or any fresh, young goat cheese), cut into 4 pieces
- 1 cup fresh bread crumbs

1. Heat oven to 450° F. Butter 4 1½-cup dishes (or a shallow casserole).

2. Bring 4 quarts of salted water to a boil. Trim away stalks from the fennel and discard. Halve the bulbs and cut into ¼-inch-thick slices. Blanch fennel in the boiling water until tender, about 8 to 10 minutes. Drain and set aside.

3. In a saucepan, melt butter over medium heat. Blend in the flour and cook, but do not brown, stirring 2 to 3 minutes. Slowly whisk in milk until sauce thickens and boils, about 5 minutes. Stir in salt and nutmeg.

4. Combine fennel, sauce and fontina. Spoon into buttered dishes and pat down with the back of a spoon. Bake 25 minutes, or until bubbling. Remove from oven and put 2 ounces of the Robiola (or goat cheese) on each serving and sprinkle with the bread crumbs. Bake 5 to 6 minutes more, or until Robiola is hot and soft, and the crumbs have melted into the cheese. Allow to stand 3 to 5 minutes before serving. *Serves 4.*

Balsamic-Glazed Chicken with Grilled Treviso

- 1 3½- to 4-lb. chicken
- 2 oz. prosciutto rind or salt pork rind
- 2 oz. Parmesan rind
- ¼ cup chopped fresh rosemary leaves
- 2 cloves garlic, finely minced
- 2 tsp. freshly ground black pepper



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Mario Batali's

recipes

- 1 tsp. coarse sea or kosher salt
- 5 tbsp. virgin olive oil
- 2 medium red onions, sliced into 1-inch disks
- ½ cup Lambrusco or other fruity red wine
- 6 tbsp. balsamic vinegar
- 4 large radicchio di Treviso

1. Rinse the chicken and pat dry. Remove giblets and set aside.
2. Combine the rosemary, garlic, pepper, salt and 3 tablespoons of the olive oil. Place the prosciutto and Parmesan rinds inside the bird and tie legs together. Rub rosemary paste over the bird. Cover and refrigerate at least 8 hours or overnight.
3. Heat oven to 375° F. Put onion disks and giblets in the bottom of a small roasting pan. Put chicken, breast-side up, on top of the onions. Pour in the wine and rub the bird with 4 tablespoons of balsamic vinegar. Cook 1 hour and 10 minutes, or until juices run clear and an instant-read thermometer, put into the thickest part of the thigh, registers 180° F. Remove from oven.
4. Heat broiler. Cut the radicchio in half lengthwise and broil about 4 inches from heat, 3 to 4 minutes on each side. Brush with remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil.
5. Strain pan juices from the chicken into a small bowl and add remaining 2 tablespoons vinegar. Carve bird and serve with broiled radicchio and sauce. *Serves 4.*

Spumone di Zabaglione with Strawberries

- 6 large eggs
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ cup marsala
- 3 tsp. dark rum
- ½ tsp. ground nutmeg
- 1½ cups heavy or whipping cream
- 1 pint strawberries, hulled

1. Combine eggs, sugar, marsala, rum and nutmeg in the top of a double-boiler over hot (but not boiling) water. Beat with a whisk until very thick, about 3 minutes. Set double-boiler top in bowl of ice water and continue beating until cold.
2. Beat cream to soft peaks. Fold in egg mixture.
3. Spoon into ice cream machine and freeze according to manufacturer's directions. Serve with strawberries. *Serves 4 to 6.* **MI**

Recipes adapted from Mario Batali Simple Italian Food (Clarkson Potter, \$30)

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