



FEATURES

Mario Batali's Game Plan 28

Looking for a higher class of snack for the big game? *Mario Batali*, host of the Food Network's *Molto Mario* and the co-owner of *Pó* and *Babbo* in New York City, shares some simple Italian recipes with weekend warrior *David Lynch*. *Babbo* co-owner *Joe Bastianich* brings the wine.

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Chef Mario Batali in a rare moment of repose.



Mario Batali photographed by Arthur Cohen. Hair and makeup by Jay Pendley.

TV



DINNER

Be it a Superbowl party or some other game day, don't be content to call *Domino's*. Chef Mario Batali of New York's red-hot *Babbo* shares some simple recipes even a couch potato can tackle.

His partner, Joseph Bastianich, throws some no-nonsense wines into the mix.

by David Lynch



all food photography by Susan Robins

There comes a time in a man's life when a large pizza, a case of Bud and a roll of paper towels no longer constitute "entertaining." Yet the transition from glutton to gourmand can be fraught with peril: Break out a bottle of pinot grigio and a plate of bruschetta at a Superbowl party, for example, and you risk being pelted with beer cans.

Wine rarely gets the call on game day. And the food, well, it's often the greasier the better. Why is that? Is there a way to elevate the Sunday afternoon bill of fare without being precious? Can it be done without sacrificing too much TV time? And what's wrong with a little vino?

I put these questions to Mario Batali, chef and co-owner of *Pó* and the recently opened *Babbo* in New York's Greenwich Village, host of *Molto Mario* on the Television Food Network and author of *Simple Italian Food: Recipes from My Two Villages* (Clarkson-Potter, NY; \$30). Batali's food philosophy was shaped during a three-year sojourn in Emilia-Romagna, where he learned that Italian cuisine is "based more on superior ingredients than it is on fancy techniques." In *Simple Italian Food* he shares scores of creative regional recipes that require minimal time or expertise in the kitchen—perfect for the weekend warrior in search of a higher class of snack.

A beefy, ponytailed redhead with a machine-gun speech pattern, Batali is devoid of pretense despite his celebrity chef status. He's a no-nonsense guy, a hearty soul, yet pinot grigio and bruschetta would suit him just fine on game day. Heck, slice him some quiche while you're at it.

"Go to any bar in Italy and all the grizzled old guys sit down and order a *bianco fermo*—white wine," he says. "You see that and certain macho stereotypes go out the window."

To further shatter such stereotypes, Batali and his partner in *Babbo*, Joseph Bastianich (also the owner of *Becco* and *Frico* in New York), devised a food and wine menu for the sporting set. Batali applied the principles of the Italian meal to the average football or basketball game—creating some simple antipasti for the first and second quarters, a more substantial *secondo* for halftime, a cheese course for the third quarter and, of course, dessert for the fourth. Bastianich, with his keen eye for wine value, selected ten Italian whites and reds best suited for casual quaffing; the kind of wines "that you can crack more than one of and leave them out for people to try."

Even if you're not a sports fanatic, Batali's recipes and Bastianich's wine picks are just the ticket for a lazy Sunday afternoon around the house. The goal here is maximum enjoyment for minimum effort, every couch potato's greatest wish.

(Note: The recipes below are all adaptations of preparations included in Batali's book, *Simple Italian Food*.)



FIRST QUARTER

Truth be told, Batali isn't much of a sports guy. In winter his thoughts turn to seasonal foods, not March Madness. "Root vegetables, braised meats, citrus, apples; all that stuff's great now," he says. This salad betrays his very Italian penchant for combining sweet fresh fruit with savory ingredients, creating an "unusually refreshing" interplay of flavors. He's a big fan of Friuli's San Daniele prosciutto, which he says is sweeter than the more intense Prosciutto di Parma and thus a better complement to the apples.

Prosciutto di San Daniele with Apple Salad

Serves six.

- $\frac{3}{4}$ pound thinly sliced San Daniele prosciutto
- 2 granny smith apples, peeled and cored
- 2 golden delicious apples, peeled and cored
- 1 macintosh apple, peeled and cored
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons poppy seeds
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons red wine vinegar

Fan prosciutto slices around a large platter. Julienne the apples and place in a mixing bowl. Add poppy seeds, olive oil, vinegar and salt and pepper to taste and toss to coat. Arrange salad in center of the platter and surround with grilled bread. Serve immediately.

SECOND QUARTER

The casual nature of game day makes hand-held foods a good choice. As Batali notes in *Simple Italian Food*, crostini are typically served at room temperature, so make the rich chicken liver paste for his Crostini Toscane in advance and simply smear it on some toasted peasant bread before the game. "Terra y mare" refers to the melding of ingredients from the earth and the sea, as Batali does in the mushroom-and-shrimp bruschetta. Bruschetta is best served hot, the preparation below requiring some fifteen minutes away from the tube—but it's time well spent.

Crostini Toscane

Serves six.

- 4 1/2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 large red onion, cut into small dice
- 1 1/2 tablespoons capers
- 3 tablespoons anchovy paste, or 5 anchovy fillets, rinsed and patted dry
- 3/4 pound chicken livers
- 3/4 cup dry red wine
- 3 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 1/2 tablespoon balsamic vinegar
- salt and pepper to taste
- 12 one-inch-thick slices Italian peasant bread (either Pugliese or Toscano, something with a light, airy crumb & firm, hard crust)

In a 12-inch skillet, heat olive oil over medium heat until smoking. Add onion, capers, anchovy paste and cook until golden brown, about 8 to 10 minutes. Add chicken livers and stir until lightly browned, about 4 to 5 minutes. Add wine, tomato paste and balsamic vinegar and bring to a boil. Lower heat and simmer 15 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Place mixture in a food processor and pulse 5 or 6 times until chopped but not paste-like (there should be some lumps). Remove from processor and set aside. (Note: A potato-masher may also be used to make the paste.)

Toast bread under broiler; spread liver mixture over one side of each piece and serve.



Joseph Bastianich

Shrimp Bruschetta "Terra y Mare"

Serves six.

- 1/4 cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 3-4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced
- 18 large shrimp, peeled and de-veined (or 1 pound rock shrimp)
- 1/2 cup dry red wine
- 1/2 pound cremini mushrooms, brushed clean & thinly sliced (stems & all)
- 6 3/4-inch-thick slices Italian peasant bread (same type as above)
- 1 bunch chives, snipped into 1/4-inch lengths
- salt and pepper

Preheat a grill or broiler.

In a 12- to 14-inch sauté pan, heat the olive oil over medium heat until it begins to smoke. Add the garlic and cook until it turns golden brown, 30 seconds to 1 minute. Add the mushrooms and stir to coat with garlic and oil, then allow to cook without stirring for 3 minutes.

EASY DRINKING

A lazy day of sports and snacks obviously isn't the time for a \$100 Brunello. But don't rule out wine entirely: To accompany Mario Batali's simple recipes, *W&S* asked his partner in *Babbo*, Joseph Bastianich, to select some complementary Italian whites and reds that won't break the bank. Bastianich built his reputation as a sharp value-hunter with his prix-fixe wine list at *Becco*, his first restaurant, which opened in 1993.

While *Babbo's* wine list tends toward the higher end of the Italian wine spectrum, it still takes its share of cues from the diverse and intelligent list at *Becco*, where dozens of wines can still be had for \$18 a bottle. Here are ten great buys, with their suggested retail prices included, for casual sipping with Batali's game day delectables; Bastianich's comments are included.

Whites

- **Alois Lageder 1997 Alto Adige Chardonnay** \$12 (Dalla Terra, Napa, CA)
Cool, clean, varietally correct chardonnay; a great choice with Mario's prosciutto and apple salad.
- **Bruno Giacosa 1996 Roero Arneis** \$19.50 (Winebow Inc., NY)
Crisp, acidic and effervescent with pear-apple fruit, here's another option for the salad.
- **Zamo & Zamo 1997 Tocai Friulano** \$18 (Vinifera Imports, Ronkonkoma, NY)
Perfumed, minerally and elegant, but with enough stuffing to take on the veal.
- **Zenato 1997 Lugana San Benedetto** \$11 (Winebow Inc., NY)
A harmonious trebbiano with a long, clean finish. Great all-purpose white.
- **Teruzzi & Puthod 1996 Terre di Tufi** \$20 (Empson USA, Alexandria, VA)
Rich, ripe vernaccia fruit wrapped up in lots of oak; a big white that might also suit the veal.

Reds

- **Coppo 1996 Barbera d'Asti L'Avvocata** \$11 (Winebow Inc., NY)
The bright cherry fruit and crisp acid in this wine would be nice alongside Crostini Toscane.
- **Lungarotti 1995 Rubesco Rosso di Torgiano** \$12 (Paterno Imports, Lake Bluff, IL)
Tart, well-structured; this Umbrian red is another good choice for the crostini.
- **Banfi 1996 Col di Sasso** \$9 (Banfi Vintners, Old Brookville, NY)
A 50-50 sangiovese-cabernet blend, this soft, fruity Tuscan is great with the shrimp bruschetta.
- **Frescobaldi 1995 Chianti Rufina Nipozzano Riserva** \$20 (Paterno Imports, Lake Bluff, IL)
Chunky black berry fruit and a velvety texture characterize this modern Chianti; try it with the veal.
- **Brusco dei Barbi 1997** \$12.99 (Palm Bay Imports, Boca Raton, FL)
Probably the most extracted, rustic wine in the bunch. This sangiovese is the one for cheese.



Add the shrimp and cook, stirring constantly, 2 to 3 minutes, or until bright red. Transfer shrimp and mushrooms to a plate and add the wine to the pan. Boil for three minutes, or until reduced by two-thirds.

Grill or toast the bread slices. With tongs or a spoon, divide the shrimp and mushroom mixture evenly over the 6 pieces of bread. Stir the chives into the wine sauce in the pan and season to taste with salt and pepper. Spoon a small amount of the sauce over the shrimp and mushrooms and serve immediately.

HALFTIME

Rather than listen to the TV talking heads or suffer through one of those horrendous Superbowl production numbers, steal off to the kitchen to sauté a few of Batali's veal skewers. Easily prepped well in advance, these Ital-ified kabobs can be finished off with plenty of half-time to spare—leaving you time to check the scores around the league. The title of this dish, "Uccelli Scappati," translates as "escaped birds"—meaning, according to Batali, the "birds that a hunter fails to bring home." The recipe, therefore, is "the cook's response to a meal without the expected catch."

Barbecued Veal Skewers "Uccelli Scappati"

Serves 6

- 12 pieces veal leg (scallopine), sliced thin (about 3 pounds)
- 1/2 pound fontina cheese, sliced thin
- 24 sage leaves
- 3/4 cup finely chopped parsley
- 12 one-inch cubes pancetta (or 8-ounce slab bacon, cut into 12 cubes)
- 1 stick unsalted butter
- lemon wedges

Soak 4 12-inch bamboo skewers in water for at least 30 minutes (or use metal skewers).

Pound the veal pieces into a 1/2-inch thickness and spread out on a work surface. Place 1 fontina slice on each and top with 2 sage leaves and sprinkling of parsley. Roll up each piece in jelly roll fashion. Arrange 4 of the rolls side-by-side. Thread a cube of pancetta on a skewer, then thread skewer through one end of all 4 rolls. Repeat with a second skewer and pancetta cube at the other end of the rolls.



Place a second cube of pancetta on the end of each skewer and press so that the meat is pushed tightly together from both sides. Repeat with remaining rolls and skewers.

In a 10- to 12-inch sauté pan, heat the butter over medium heat until the foam subsides. Sauté the skewer sets for 10 minutes, turning several times. Remove from heat, cut in half between the skewers, and serve one hot skewer to each guest, with lemon wedges. A side of new potato salad, or just some crusty bread to mop up the juices, might accompany the skewers.

THIRD QUARTER

Much more so than sweet desserts, *formaggi* are the after-dinner repast of choice for Italians. Plus, a selection of Italian cheeses is perhaps the ultimate in simple preparations. Batali suggests a combination of three or four different cheeses across different style categories. A platter might include a soft, creamy cheese such as taleggio (a washed rind cow's milk cheese from Lombardy); a nutty, spicy hunk of Parmigiano-Reggiano; a pungent aged gorgonzola; and a slightly sweet chunk of pecorino Toscano or Sardo. Batali can't resist a drizzle of chestnut honey over the pecorino cheeses.

FOURTH QUARTER

Sweet and savory come together again in this traditional dessert, which might just as easily be made from melons, peaches or strawberries. In Modena, birthplace of *aceto balsamico*, such fruit-vinegar combinations are local favorites.

Clementines with Balsamic Vinegar and Black Pepper

Serves 6

- 6 Clementine oranges, peeled and sectioned
- 3 tablespoons best-quality balsamic vinegar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sugar
- freshly ground black pepper

In a medium-sized bowl, toss the orange sections, vinegar and sugar together. Divide evenly among six shallow bowls or plates, drizzling the remaining vinegar in the bowl over the fruit. Grind fresh black pepper over each portion. Add a scoop of vanilla gelato if you like. ■