

# THE ITALIAN CULINARY FOUNDATION NEWSLETTER

## Tony May Wants You to Study Like an Italian!



Les Dames D'Escoffier toured Sicily. Flavor Forays brought American chefs to cook at Tony May's school in Rome. Photo by Nanette Bedway

*By Beverly Stephen*

After 52 years as a distinguished restaurateur in New York City at the Rainbow Room, Palio, San Domenico, and SD26, Tony May decided to devote himself full time to his other passion, Italian culinary education. Retirement held no allure. "What am I going to do?" he asked, "Play golf three times a day?"

So he created the Italian Culinary Foundation Culinary Arts Program, as a project of the Italian Culinary Foundation, which offers intensive five-day courses geared towards professionals who wish to learn or refresh their knowledge of Italian cooking techniques and products. It promises them taste memories to carry back home.

Training in Italy is the real deal. Some studying, others living and working in Italy. It has enabled chefs to think about food the way an Italian does. For some of the most highly regarded American chefs cooking Italian, this has been the case (see Paul Bartolotta, Michael White, Andrew Carmellini, Mark Vetri, and more.) For all these professionals, it has been and it is still a lifelong quest.

Three groups have already come to study and cook in Italy at these courses arranged by Tony May and his daughter Marisa.

Last fall, Wolfgang Puck, with David Robins and Joe Essa, sent the first group of 10 executives to experience the course at ICIF in Costigliole D'Asti Piedmont to great success and rave reviews. Also last fall, Flavor Forays, the culinary immersion company founded by former Food Arts publisher Barbara Mathias and executive editor Beverly Stephen joined Tony May and Marisa to bring a group of food and beverage executives and American chefs to Rome. More recently this spring, the Italian Culinary Foundation hosted a group of women culinary professionals from Les Dames D'Escoffier in Sicily.

Each morning, students receive instruction in specific areas such as fish cookery, pasta and rice, meat, and desserts. These are traditional dishes and contemporary versions, including vitello tonnato, veal Milanese, carbonara, and risotto with porcini. In the afternoon, students visited producers and then in the evening returned to class to cook as what they learned.

Some of the most poignant taste memories were created by the passionate producers visited. Mauro Secondi held students enthralled at his Pastificio Secondi with his impassioned descriptions of the fresh artisanal pasta he produces. He literally had students eating raw samples of filled ravioli out of his hand and marveling at the bright orange yolks of the

in-shell eggs he uses. (Hint: the chickens are fed carrots and corn.) He charmed with stories about the origin of pasta with names such as "navel of Venus" and "priest stranglers." He concluded with bear hugs for all. There were similar experiences with the producer of Le Pile olive oil and Vincenzo Mancino, a dedicated local cheese monger. More taste memories were created in local restaurants where students were treated to variations on the theme of Rome's classic trinity of pastas: cacio e pepe, carbonara, and bucatini all'amatriciana as well as roasted veal, fried squash blossoms, the freshest mozzarella, tomatoes and porchetta, and prosciutto aplenty. All washed down by vino red and white and the group's favorite discovery, limoncello. At Assunta Madre, which Tony May believes to be the best seafood restaurant in Rome, students were greeted by a stunning display of freshly caught fish which in short order would be on their plates in a staggering variety of crudo of tuna, sea bass, shrimp, and transparent thinly sliced

prawns as silky as butter. Cooked preparations followed and naturally, there were a couple of pasta courses. Students were stuffed to the point of begging for mercy which arrived in the form of - what else? - limoncello. In Piedmont, a highlight was a truffle hunt with Sandrino Romanelli, followed by a Lucullian white truffle breakfast washed down with local Barbera wine. In Sicily, participants took a trip on a professional fishing boat, learned how the fishermen use nets, and finally enjoyed a lunch prepared by the fishermen.

For more information: [www.italianculinaryfoundation.com](http://www.italianculinaryfoundation.com)  
[www.may-meitalianculinaryacademy.com](http://www.may-meitalianculinaryacademy.com)  
This is where you will find: THE SCHOOLS, THE ARRANGEMENTS AND MORE...

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## An Italian Culinary Foundation Project

*The ICF Culinary Arts Program is The Italian Culinary Foundation Project through which the Foundation generates funds to support its mission.*

**What:** This culinary institute for the hospitality industry offers practical short and intensive five day courses for working cooks or Italian cuisine enthusiasts.

**Why:** These short courses are perfect for students, professionals or Italian cuisine enthusiasts who wish to learn more or refresh their knowledge of Italian cuisine. They are also adaptable for chain restaurant operations as a training/incentive program, to motivate their kitchen staffs. They can also use this program as a marketing tool for their companies.

**Where:** The Italian Culinary Foundation will offer the same curriculum at many schools throughout Italy: Dolce & Salato in the Neapolitan Region, Lorenzo de Medici in Florence, Italian Culinary Institute for Foreigners in Costigliole D'Asti in the heart of the white truffle region in Piedmont.

**How:** The classroom teaching is under the supervision of celebrated Italian chef Sergio Mei, formerly of The Four Seasons. Each morning students will study theory and practice from 9 a.m. till noon.



Afternoons will be devoted to getting to know authentic Italian products on carefully curated field trips. Each day students will visit the producers and touch, smell, and taste the products. The goal is to teach a better understanding of authentic products vs the widespread use of foods with Italian names but produced outside of Italy.

Evenings it's back in the kitchen where students will cook and eat what they learned that day.

**Who:** Everyone can participate in these short courses, as long as they have knife skills.

[www.may-meitalianculinaryacademy.com](http://www.may-meitalianculinaryacademy.com) [www.ItalianCulinaryFoundation.com](http://www.ItalianCulinaryFoundation.com)

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# The State of Italian Cuisine in America

*an ICF Editorial*

While great improvements have been made in America since the early 1960s, Italian cuisine is still too often mistreated with ignorance and contempt. One simple example, on the lists of the best Italian restaurants in America, most of the selected restaurant chefs are American born. How can that be possible? Most food publications compile their own list, all of them repetitive and similar in concept.

To the best of the ICF editors' knowledge, the following native-born Italian chefs who are still working in America: Odette Fada, Matteo Bergamini, Vito Gnazzo, Gino Angelini, Fortunato Nicotra, Celestino Drago, Nicola Mastronardi, Sandro Fioriti and many more.

Unfortunately, these native Italians often have difficulty communicating in English with the food press to help them understand the difference between the Italian American and the native Italian versions of dishes. To understand the difference between the two interpretations of recipes, we need a well-travelled press, one that has had many eating experiences in Italy. In other words: what makes a dish Italian? Is it because the chef tells you it is Italian or because one truly understands the flavor or nuance of authentic Italian taste. We do not have too many journalists like Colman Andrews, John Mariani, Corby Kummer, the late Barbara Kafka and a few more who have travelled over and over to Italy to truly understand the subtleties of the two versions of Italian cuisines we are now experiencing in America. Though there are many writers who have written numerous books on Italian cuisine, many of them actually lived in Italy to write their books. Unfortunately, they do not compile the rating lists!

On the positive side, all the American chefs are serving an Italian cuisine that is a lot better than it used to be. They use Italian products. They have travelled to Italy. Some of them have stayed in Italy for long periods, sometime years. Yet, they always add or delete something to the preparation, changing the final results of the dish, therefore altering the authentic taste. Their logic is dictated by their belief that the consumer will accept their version as being more American. Because of the ignorance of the authentic taste, their cuisine is accepted as Italian, first by the press and subsequently by the general public.

American consumers have made Italian cuisine their ethnic cuisine of choice, yet there is still a poor understanding of true authenticity of Italian food products, starting with olive oil. Supermarkets are inundated by hundreds of different brands, different prices, and even different colors, so how does one select the proper product?

## HOW CONSUMERS CAN SELECT AND USE AUTHENTIC ITALIAN PRODUCTS

Here are some suggestions to keep in mind when buying olive oil. The top 3 rules: buy small amounts at a time, select bottles with dark glass, keep the olive oil in a cool place away from light. When selecting the product, check the expiration date on the bottle and deduct 12 months. Third rule: Buy EVOO that says it is made in Italy with Italian olives and bottled in Italy. Extra virgin olive oil is best used up to 12 months from its bottling. (you can still use the left over EVOO for cooking). Quality extra virgin olive oil can be expensive and should be used raw such as drizzling for pasta, soups, selected antipasti and for salad dressings or sauce such as pesto or quick marinades.

More to come in the next issue on how to recognize, use, and conserve genuine Italian products.



# A Visit with the King of Florentine Cuisine, Fabio Picchi

By Tony May

I met chef Fabio Picchi a long time ago (40 years or more) and was fascinated by his understanding of authentic products, his ingenuity on how to get the best out of the ingredients, his passion for his Tuscan/Florentine Cuisine, and the memory of the cooking of his mother whom he adores - "That blessed woman." Chef Fabio's Florentine charm has fascinated Florentines and clients for almost 40 years. I proudly consider this man my friend.

Picchi opened his first restaurant, Cibreo, in September of 1979 and has been an innovator ever since.

He chose this name for his restaurant to pay homage to his family myths and to the flavors and recipes that marked his childhood with joy and enjoyment. Food is a tradition that has passed from one generation to the next as proof of care and affection. From the grandfather to the then-young mother of Fabio, and from him to his sons and his wonderful partners: a treasure of knowledge on how to properly cook vegetables, fish and meat with no waste and with great respect for the life that was given us. He provides a way to bring back to our mind the joy of being alive.

Picchi's new ideas are all concentrated into Bio Products, he has in fact named his new store C.BIO. I visited with chef Fabio recently and he took me all around his new store, looking at the breads and the flour he uses, the vegetables and his Bio's miniature farm above the store. His main farm worker doubles his boss' passion and enthusiasm for the new approach to food production for all of us. His work extends well beyond what he has in the C.BIO store. His olive oils, his jarred vegetables in EVOO, the legumes and everything else engaged my curiosity to continue to learn more about his new ideas. C.BIO Motto says it all: "Cibo Buono, Italiano e Onesto" (Good Food, Italian & Honest!)

He is continuously learning and passes his new ideas to his Florentine friends, clients, and foreigners. His new restaurant Cibreo, opened in 2017, conjures a Florentine take on a mix of oriental cuisines. With this restaurant, chef Fabio wants to show the world that we all speak the same language when we are in the kitchen!



In 2003, chef Fabio and his wife, Maria Cassi, an actress, author and director, took ownership from the City of Florence of the Teatro del Sale, which is now a club with an artistic calendar and a kitchen that shows off the cuisine of his home town, Florence. Cibreo, Cibreo La Trattoria, Cibreo Cafe, C.Bio are all in one corner of Florence.

So when you travel to Florence, make it a point to visit Cibreo Square. (This is the name his friends have given Fabio Picchi's corner). Here you will find Cibreo Il Ristorante, Cibreo La Trattoria, Cibreo Café, the Innovative Cibreo, the C-Bio store, Il Teatro del Sale, and Fabio Picchi. Ask for Fabio and tell him we sent you!

*Each issue Tony May will visit with an Italian Culinary Foundation featured chef.*

## The Italian Culinary Foundation is now offering a STAGE program at Chef Picchi's Restaurants!

Come to Florence to experience a full immersion in Italian cuisine! For this course, students will enter the world of Fabio Picchi, the celebrated Florentine chef, who will direct the Tuscan-Italian cuisine Stages.

For FIVE DAYS, Students will work in each of Chef Picchi's restaurant's kitchens in the heart of Florence alongside the regular kitchen staff. This stage program is an effective and direct way for students to become more familiar with Italian cuisine - its flavors, nuances, and techniques.

For more information or to make a reservation, contact [TonyMay@italianculinaryfoundation.com](mailto:TonyMay@italianculinaryfoundation.com)

