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restaurant

August 2015 | £4.99

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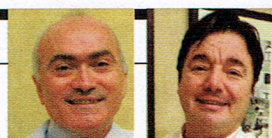
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Chef Masterclass

Orecchiette with broccoli

Created by **Giuseppe Turi** and **Michele Blasi** at **Enoteca Turi**

The narrow lanes around Bari's cathedral have a medieval tranquility, but a sharp-eared visitor might just hear rhythmic flicks of metal on wood, emanating from the open front rooms of some of the ancient stone houses, as their inhabitants expertly flick little discs of pasta with a knife on to a wooden board. They are making orecchiette, Puglia's proudest contribution to Italian gastronomy. Little ears of simple flour-and-water pasta, their concave shape and slightly thickened edges are perfect for catching every drop of sauce.

Actually, you might well hear a TV blaring, too, and you would certainly hear a gossipy squawk or two. Bari's pasta-making nonnas are sociable types and, after decades of making orecchiette, they hardly need to keep their eyes on the job. The little ears are flicked into a neat pile on the board at a rate of about one per second, left to dry slightly, then sold for a few euros a bag.

At Enoteca Turi, the restaurant near Putney Bridge that has been cooking and serving authentic Italian food for the past 20 years, both owner Giuseppe Turi and chef Michele Blasi are from Puglia. Being from different towns - Turi is from Ostuni, Blasi from Bari - they sometimes disagree, in a good-natured fashion, about matters gastronomic, especially the correct size of orecchiette. As they both chop snakes of pasta into little lozenges, then flick them into shape, the restaurateur's output is noticeably smaller than his chef's. One thing they both agree on is that dried orecchiette are not OK. They must be fresh.

Mastering the art is not easy, and perfecting it from a recipe is even harder. It's better to look online at any of several YouTube videos, some of them made in those Bari front rooms. The one entitled 'Orecchiette e strascinete di Nonna Rosa' features a typical grandmother using her admirably beefy forearms to make both orecchiette and the similar strascinete, made by rolling two or three fingers across each piece of pasta to leave sauce-catching indentations. At one

Words/Bill Knott

point, she makes strascinete with both hands simultaneously.

Orecchiette pasta itself is very simple, made with fine semolina flour - 'semola di grano duro rimacinata' in Italian, De Cecco's is widely available - and water.

Blasi adds a dash of olive oil to give a slight flavour and a silky feel to the pasta. "In the north of Puglia," says Turi, "orecchiette were traditionally made with grano arso flour - literally 'burnt grain' - milled from wheat gathered after the stubble had been burnt in the fields. Real cucina povera."

Once rested, take about a quarter of the pasta (lightly cover the rest to prevent it drying out) and roll it into an even snake just less than a centimetre in diameter. Chop it into one centimetre lengths, then drag the tip of a round-ended knife across each piece of pasta to achieve the characteristic ear shape. The inside should be thin and striated, the edge slightly thicker.

The classic winter sauce for orecchiette features another of Puglia's culinary specialities, cima di rape (turnip tops) characteristically peppery and slightly bitter, available from November onwards and a favourite at Enoteca Turi. Garlic and chilli are in the mix, too, as might be anchovies and the thick-skinned, rot-proof tomatoes that are strung up and dried at the end of the

summer in Puglian farmhouses.

Turi also suggests serving meat ragù with orecchiette during the winter months. Trimmings from lamb, beef and pork, and cuts like knuckle or neck, not too fatty, are caramelised in olive oil and gently stewed with onions, tomatoes and white wine for a few hours. The orecchiette are served first, with the sauce from the stew, then the meat is served afterwards.

"In summer, we would serve the pasta with wild rocket, tomatoes and basil, with some grated caciocotta (a speciality of Puglia, made from sheep's milk in the summer months and eaten fresh, or matured for a few months until hard). But you can make a sauce like the one for cima di rape as well. Just use broccoli instead. The long-stemmed green or purple variety is best," he says.

Because it has anchovies in it, Turi doesn't serve cheese with the cima di rape sauce, or indeed the broccoli-based sauce that's currently on his menu.

"Of course, the orecchiette are the most important part of the dish, but they are the vehicle for the sauce. It's amazing how much flavour you can get from simple ingredients," he adds. How, though, do Turi and Blasi manage to reproduce the flavours of sun-drenched Puglia in their corner of south London? Turi smiles, confidently. "After 20 years here, we've got some good suppliers." ■

Orecchiette is Puglia's proudest contribution to Italian gastronomy

Orecchiette with broccoli, chilli, tomato and anchovy

Serves four

For the pasta

*500g fine semolina flour
200-250ml tepid water
1 tbsp olive oil*

For the sauce

*Olive oil
1 fat clove of garlic, peeled and thinly sliced
6 anchovy fillets
1 red chilli, finely sliced
100g cherry tomatoes*

500g long stemmed broccoli, stalks peeled, boiled for 3 mins and refreshed in iced water

1. Mix the flour, water and olive oil and knead to a smooth, stiff paste. Leave to rest for at least two hours before using, then make the orecchiette as described above.

2. To make the sauce, heat the oil in a saucepan, then add the garlic, anchovies and chilli and

cook over a medium-high heat until the garlic starts to caramelise. Add the tomatoes and allow to soften. Add the broccoli and cook until tender.

3. If the orecchiette are fresh, simply add them to the pan and cook for a minute or so until they are ready. If they have dried out a little, cook them in salted boiling water until they rise to the top. Add them to the pan, then stir and serve.

All ears: peasant
food that's fit for a king

