

Classico e Moderno: Essential Italian Cooking

By Michael White, Andrew Friedman

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NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY *PUBLISHERS WEEKLY*

Having won or been nominated for just about every known prestigious culinary award, Michael White is hailed by food critics as the next great hero of Italian gastronomy. His reach extends around the globe with a clutch of acclaimed fine dining restaurants, including Marea, Ai Fiori, Osteria Morini, and pizzeria Nicoletta.

Now, in *Classico e Moderno,* White brings his passion for authentic Italian cuisine to the home kitchen, with recipes—nearly 250—that cover both the traditional and contemporary dishes of the region. In the “Classico” portion, White shares such iconic dishes as Meatballs Braised in Tomato Sauce; Pasta and Bean Soup; Cavatelli with Lamb Ragù and Bell Peppers; and Roasted Pork Leg with Rosemary and Black Pepper. The “Moderno” chapters feature recipes that have put White’s restaurants on the map, including Chicken Liver Crostini with Marsala-Braised Onions; Fusili with Red Wine–Braised Octopus and Bone Marrow; and Veal Chops with Roasted Endive and Pancetta Cream Sauce.

Both the Classico and Moderno sections offer ideas for your whole meal: first courses (Vitello Tonnato, Garganelli with Caviar Cream), soups (Zuppa di Baccalá, White Bean Soup with Sautéed Shrimp), pastas (Tortellini alla Panna, Ricotta and Swiss Chard Tortelli), main courses (Pollo alla Diavola, Braised Lamb Shanks with Farrotto), and desserts (Crostata di Ricotta, Panna Cotta with Meyer Lemon–Basil Sorbet and Almond Milk Froth), as well as salads, pizzas, and basic formulas for pesto, stocks, and vinaigrettes. Including personal notes and anecdotes about White’s early sojourn in Italy and his flavorful career, *Classico e Moderno* will give you all the tools, tips, and tricks you need to cook tantalizing Italian dishes with the confidence of a seasoned chef.

Praise for Michael White and *Classico e Moderno*

“A masterpiece of culinary acumen and perfection in presentation . . . White once again sublimely deals with his cuisine of choice—Italian. In an attempt to bridge the gap between classic and modern, this chef extraordinaire offers the reader an

experience in beauty and taste. . . . This book is a testament to both the importance/influence of Italian cuisine and to the rich and varied experiences its ingredients and tradition still have to offer."**—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)**

"Exceedingly appealing . . . [Michael White] is one of the great chefs of modern Italian food in this country, and in *Classico e Moderno* he teaches us enough so that we can try to follow in his footsteps."**—*Vogue***

"Hugely ambitious . . . White is one of a number of rising chefs here who aren't Italian but have felt the freedom to refresh the concept of Italian food."**—Associated Press**

"The future of Italian gastronomy, thanks to the spectacular inventiveness he brings to modernizing the world's most popular cuisine."**—*Gotham***

"I've watched and tasted as Michael White has matured into his current position as one of the preeminent stewards and pioneers of Italian culinary tradition in America. Even his signature modern dishes are as relatable as the classics—and are perhaps even destined to be deemed classics in their own right some day."**—Thomas Keller**, from the Foreword

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Editorial Review

Review
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“Michael White has, in very short order, grabbed the Italian food crown for New York City. He’s created some of the most exciting new dishes of the last few years at Marea, and his Osteria Morini is my go-to casual for date night. He is well in his way to ruling the world. And when that happens it will surely be a more delicious place.”**—Anthony Bourdain**

About the Author
Michael White, a Wisconsin native, began his award-winning culinary career at Chicago’s renowned Spiaggia and Ristorante San Domenico in Imola, Italy. After eight years in Italy he moved to New York City and partnered with Ahmass Fakahany to form the Altamarea Group, which currently owns seven restaurants, including Marea in New York City (which holds two Michelin stars and won the 2009 James Beard Award for Best New Restaurant and membership in Relais & Chateaux) and Al Molo in Hong Kong. Additional locations include the Michelin one-starred Ai Fiori, Osteria Morini in SoHo and Washington, D.C., Due Mari and Osteria Morini in New Jersey, and Nicoletta Pizzeria. The group will open three additional New York City locations in 2013. White and his recipes and restaurants are featured regularly, everywhere from *The New York Times* to *Esquire* to the *Today* show. Michael White lives in New York with his wife and daughter.

Andrew Friedman has collaborated on more than twenty cookbooks with some of America’s finest and most well-known chefs, including Alfred Portale, Michelle Bernstein, Laurent Tourondel, and former White House chef Walter Scheib, and co-authored (with American tennis player James Blake) the *New York Times* bestselling memoir *Breaking Back.* Friedman is a two-time winner of the IACP Award for Best Chef or

Restaurant Cookbook, and co-editor of the popular anthology *Don't Try This at Home*. He is also the author of *Knives at Dawn*, about the famous Bocuse d'Or culinary competition. He is founder and chief contributor to the chef-focused website Toqueland.com. He lives in Brooklyn with his family.

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White / CLASSICO E MODERNO

Classico

There's something inherently antithetical about a traditional Italian cookbook, because so much about classic Italian cuisine and why it charms us has to do with an absence of structure, a free-flowing connection to the natural world, and, if we're honest with ourselves, a minimum of manipulation. In other words, exactly the opposite of what we expect between the covers of a cookbook.

Indeed, some of my most indelible taste memories from Italy are founded on simple pleasures that require no recipe: raw fava beans eaten out of the pod, alternated with slices of a young Pecorino Toscano cheese; affettati, assorted cured meats, presented with freshly baked bread and marinated olives alongside; or even the elemental delight of something as pure as Parmigiano-Reggiano or a drizzle of true balsamic vinegar.

Even where there are recipes, whether for soups or salads, pasta or risotto, fish or meat, they are there to be adapted. By now, the statement that recipes for any common dish vary from house to house throughout every region of Italy is a cliché, and I wouldn't repeat it except for the fact that it's so immutably true. Take ragù Bolognese, which offers a world of choices: whether or not to make it with chicken livers; to stir in milk at the end or not; to use red or white wine; to use skirt steak exclusively or to combine it with chuck and blade cuts; to add broth or not; and so on.

That is the main way in which this section of the book differs from Moderno. The recipes in this section can and should be freely adapted to suit any number of factors: what you have on hand (or don't), what's in season, and what looks good at the store or market that day.

On a more fundamental level, the dishes should be tweaked to suit your own personal taste: Use more or less garlic in sauces, add more acid to vinaigrettes, make soups thicker or thinner based on your preference, or vary the presentations as you like. These are all things that a cook would do without hesitation in Italy, and I encourage you to do the same with the recipes in this section.

Per Comincare

To Start

Italians often mark the end of the day with a glass of wine, or an aperitivo, and something to nibble. What that "something" is called depends on where in Italy you find yourself: stuzzichini (in the north), sfizi (Campania), cicchetti (Venice). Many of these foods were expressly created to accompany, if not encourage, a drink, and so are often referred to simply by what they have in common as un po' di salatini, which means, roughly, "a little bit of salty things" and can refer to anything from nuts to breadsticks to the kind of prepared dishes found in this chapter.

While I love that Italian tradition, the devotion to quality of life, to transitioning from the workday to one's

personal time, it could not be more different from the corresponding American ritual: There's no "happy hour" culture in Italy, no hordes of patrons raiding buffets and drinking themselves to intoxication as a blaring sound system rattles the bar. The after-work respite in Italy is more restrained in every way, from portion size to general disposition. The drink doesn't even have to necessarily be alcoholic; it might be, say, a Crodino (bitter aperitif), or a Chinotto (orange soft drink). And the bars themselves are a different animal from their American cousins; in addition to alcohol, you are apt to find a refrigerator proffering a small selection of beverages such as bottled water, lemon soda, and beer to go, and there's almost always an espresso machine against the back wall, right alongside the wines and spirits.

This custom falls under the umbrella of la dolce vita, the sweet life, and it's one of the things that tourists in Italy fall in love of and that, even after all these years, I become enamored of all over again on each visit. When I'm in Italy, I can't wait for four or five o'clock to roll around so that I can step into a bar, take a seat at a marbled café table, and have a quick snack and a drink and—yes—an occasional cigarette. (Hey, when in Rome . . .) If you have a constant urge to check your smartphone or e-mail, nothing will help it melt away like this ritual.

In Italy, many of the dishes featured in this chapter and the one that follows it (Salads and First Courses) would be categorized as antipasti, which means "before the meal (pasto)." It's generally considered imperative to have a mix, or misto, of appetizers. Regarding numbers: Though rarely discussed, it's generally assumed that three is the minimum, and four or five is the maximum. A good rule of thumb is that whatever comfortably fits on the table alongside your drink or bottle of wine without crowding it is the right amount.

Zucchine alla Scapece

Marinated Fried Zucchini

Serves 4

This is the Italian version of the more well-known Spanish preparation escabeche, in which fish is fried, then marinated in a puckery mixture. The marinade includes white wine vinegar, herbs (mint is the traditional choice in the dish's home region of Campania, but you needn't be bound by it), and garlic. Because the zucchini is hot when the marinade is introduced, it drinks in those flavors, which offer an acidic, zesty counterpoint to the crispy fried exterior, a contrast that softens into harmony as the zucchini is refrigerated for several hours. (If you like, to help ensure a crispy crust, toss the zucchini with a tablespoon of all-purpose flour before frying.)

Note the zucchini must marinate for at least 6 hours before serving.

A few cups of canola oil or other neutral oil, for deep-frying

3 green zucchini, about 10 ounces each, sliced crosswise into ¼-inch rounds

Kosher salt

Freshly ground black pepper

⅓ cup white wine vinegar

¼ cup thinly sliced fresh herb leaves, such as mint or basil, or a combination

1 garlic clove, thinly sliced

¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes

Extra virgin olive oil, for serving

4 lemon wedges, for serving

Set a large heavy saucepan over medium-high heat. Pour in enough oil to reach 1 inch up the sides of the pan, clip a deep-fry thermometer to the side of the pan, and heat over medium heat to 350°F (see below). Line a large plate with paper towels.

Add the zucchini to the oil, in batches, and fry, occasionally stirring them gently with a slotted spoon, until lightly golden, about 3 minutes. Use the slotted spoon to transfer the zucchini to the paper towels. Season immediately with salt and pepper and let drain. Be sure to allow the oil to return to 350°F between batches.

Transfer the zucchini slices to a heatproof vessel, such as a glass baking dish large enough to hold the slices in a thin layer. Immediately drizzle the vinegar over them, then scatter the herbs, garlic slices, and red pepper flakes over the zucchini. Let cool, then cover loosely with plastic wrap and marinate in the refrigerator for at least 6 hours, or overnight, but no longer than 24 hours, or the zucchini will begin to break down.

To serve, use a slotted spoon to transfer the zucchini to a small serving bowl. Drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and serve with the lemon wedges alongside for squeezing over individual portions.

Variations This is a versatile recipe. To approximate the sweet-and-sour Sicilian version, for example, dissolve a little sugar in the vinegar before drizzling it over the zucchini. In the summer, change things up by grilling rather than frying the zucchini; the contrast between the char of the grill and the marinade will be different but just as compelling. You can also make this with other summer vegetables, such as eggplant or yellow squash, or a combination. And it’s equally at home as a side dish; it’s especially good alongside grilled fish.

No Thermometer?

If you don’t have a deep-fry thermometer, you can check to see if the oil is hot enough for frying by flicking a scant drop of water into it. If it sizzles on contact, the oil is hot enough. You can also dip the handle of a wooden spoon into the oil; if the oil is hot enough, the moisture in the wood will cause the oil to sizzle around the handle.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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