

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

Born at Alba in *Piemonte*, Oscar Farinetti is *the* maverick entrepreneur of Italian food and cuisine. In January 2007 he founded “EATALY,” opening his first marketplace store of top-quality, exclusively Italian food and wine plus enogastronomic-related products in an abandoned *Carpano* Vermouth factory in Turin. A decade later outside Bologna, he added to his “empire” the agri-food theme park “FICO,” an acronym for *Fabbrica Italiana Con-tadina* or the Italian Farmers’ Production Center.

According to the company’s website there are 40 some “EATALY” stores around the world, with about half in Italy: in Turin, Alba, Bari, Bologna, Chieri, Florence, Forlì, Genova, Piacenza, Pinerolo, Trieste and Rome.

In Rome’s store, previously an abandoned air terminal and now the biggest “EATALY” venue in the world at 170,000 square feet, there are 22,000 different products on sale. Outside Italy, “EATALY” is located in Australia, Brazil, Denmark, Germany, Qatar, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Sweden, Turkey, the UAE, and the United States. Its American venues are in Boston, Chicago, Dallas, Hollywood, Los Vegas, and two in Manhattan. In 2019, “EATALY” opened in Paris and Toronto; other locations in the planning stages will be in Abu Dhabi, Brussels, Hong Kong, Johannesburg, Lausanne, London, Mexico City, Philadelphia, Rio de Janeiro, San Francisco, Singapore, and Washington, D.C.

The recipient in 2013 of the “America Award” from the Italy-USA Foundation, Farinetti, who in 2015 resigned as CEO in favor of his son Nicola, is also the author of several books, publishing one almost every year since 2008. They’re about his family, businesses, philosophy of life, wine, and food. Speaking of food, since October 1, 2016, he’s collaborated with “Slow Food,” which is also the publisher of his latest volume entitled *Serend!pity*, published last May during lockdown.

In the foreword, Farinetti explains the reason for his choice of title and the volume’s organization: “*Serend!pity* is so-named because originally it signified important discoveries which happened by chance when the research was aimed at discovering something else. Over the years it’s evolved to mean happy unexpected events.” *Serend!pity* contains 50 short stories about foods or drinks discovered 1) because of a production mistake: Coca Cola or Gorgonzola; 2) of those

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discovered while trying to fix a mistake: panettone, Russian salad and Guinness beer, and 3) of food products: pepperoncino and the ice cream cone, or dishes like *risotto alla Milanese* which have unexpected histories.

Subscribers to *Inside the Vatican* will remember my story, “*Who Invented Cappuccino?*” in the October 2017 issue, telling how this iconic Italian drink was first concocted during the late 1600s in Vienna, not in Italy, either by the Italian monk Marco D’Aviano or by the Polish spy Jerzy Franciszek Kulczycki.

In *Serend!ty*, Farinetti recounts the Polish origins of a second Italian gastronomic icon: *Babà al rhum*. (So it’s not Neapolitan, as we’ve always thought.) He quotes two different versions told to him by Gennaro Esposito, the jolly owner/chef of a superb restaurant with two Michelin stars, “*Torre del Saracino*” in the town of Vico Equense on the Amalfi Coast.

It seems that Stanislaw I (1677-1766), twice King of Poland as well as the Grand Duke of Lithuania, Duke of Lorraine, and Count of the Holy Roman Empire, who lived in exile in France from 1709 on, loved *babka*, then a kind of nougat made with saffron and candied fruit. He loved it so much that when it dried out, he fell into a depression so soaked his *babka* in madeira. Esposito’s second version recounts that Stanislaw was once so depressed that his *babka* had grown so hard and stale that he threw it across the room, hitting and breaking a bottle of madeira that doused it. A third version, not Esposito’s, recounts that Stanislaw was obliged to soak his *babka* because he had few and quite rotted teeth.

The story continues that, when Maria, Stanislaw’s daughter, married the French King Louis XV, she took with her to Versailles her father’s Polish pastry chef Nicolas Stohrer. Replacing madeira with rum, Stohrer’s recipe became such a success that a generation later, when Archduchess Marie-Caroline of Austria, sister of ill-fated French Queen Marie-Antoinette, married the Bourbon King Ferdinand IV, she brought with her Stohrer’s recipe to Naples. For the most special *babà* in Paris go to: *Stohrer, Le Train Bleu, Arnaud Nicholas*, and *Bistrot Paul Bert*: in Naples: *Antico Forno Atanasio, Pasticceria Bellavia, Pasticceria Capriccio di Salvatore Capparelli, Pasticceria Carraturo, Scarturchio*, and *Gran Caffè Gambrinus*. ○

Oscar Farinetti; the cover of *Serend!pity*; *babà* at *Gran Caffè Gambrinus* in Naples; portrait of King Stanislaw I; *La Pâtisserie Stohrer* in Paris

