

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

With their seemingly endless types of preparation — *espresso*, *cappuccino*, *caffé decaffinato* (decaf), *caffé lungo* (an *espresso* brewed with extra water), *caffé corto* or *ristretto* (extra strong), *caffé doppio* (double), *caffé Americano* (American-style or an *espresso* with hot water added to the already-made *espresso*), *caffé macchiato* (with a splash of milk), *caffé corretto* (with a splash of liquor), *caffé marocchino* (with chocolate), to name the most common — Rome hosts over 8,000 coffee bars. However, it's generally agreed that two, on opposite sides of the Pantheon, *Caffé Sant'Eustachio* (closed Wednesday) and *Tazza D'Oro: La Casa del Caffé* (closed Sunday), serve the Eternal City's best coffee. They are both family-owned, always packed with clients, and roast their own blends, making them *torrefazioni*, or coffee roasters as well as bars.

Caffé Sant'Eustachio was founded in 1938 and has been in the Ricci family ever since. Its present owners, Raimondo and Riccardo Ricci, who took over in 1999, are brothers. Their house specialty is *gran caffè*, a creamy, frothed-up, double espresso already sweetened, as are all the other many varieties of coffees they serve unless you indicate otherwise.

"A lady from New York," Raimondo likes to recount, "said she bought our beans. She was desperate to duplicate our coffee at home, but hadn't succeeded. I just shrugged and told her a secret is a secret."

Although Raimondo has a shield around his roasting machines, so you can't see the exact mixtures of beans, he admits that they're 100% Arabica. They're roasted in a wood-burning coffee roaster the old-fashioned way, in small amounts, for 15 to 20 minutes at low heat.

Tables outside are a relatively recent addition to this tiny bar, which is named for the church it faces. In the floor of its entrance is a mosaic of a white stag with a cross between its antlers, taken from the legend of St. Eustace, who was born in the late first century. Placidus, his given name, was captain of the guards for the Emperor Trajan and a war-hero as a commander of a Roman legion in Asia Minor. His favorite pastime

was hunting, and one day a white stag with a cross of radiant light appeared before him in the forest near Tivoli just outside Rome. He was so moved that he, his beautiful wife, and their two sons all converted to Christianity. Placidus changed his name to Eustace, which means "very stable" or "fruitful grain" in Greek.

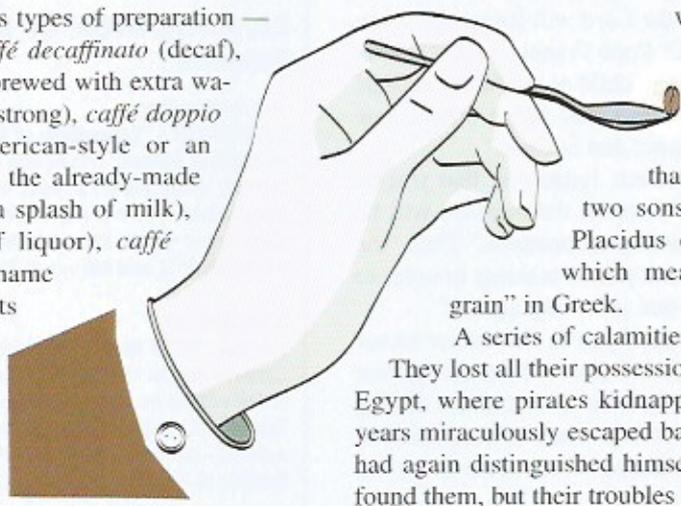
A series of calamities soon followed to test his faith. They lost all their possessions and had to abandon Rome for Egypt, where pirates kidnapped his family, who after many years miraculously escaped back to Rome. Here Eustace, who had again distinguished himself as a war-hero in Asia Minor, found them, but their troubles were not over. When the Emperor Hadrian, who'd succeeded Trajan, discovered they were Christians, he ordered Eustace to offer sacrifice to a pagan god. When he refused, Hadrian ordered that the whole family be tortured and then roasted to death inside a bronze statue of a

bull. The patron saint of hunters, trappers, torture victims, and firefighters, Eustace's feast day is September 20.

There have been many attempts by the press, in particular American travel journalists, to fuel a rivalry between *Sant'Eustachio* and *Tazza D'Oro*. "There's never been competition between us," *Tazza D'Oro's* owner Natalia Fiochetto told me. "We're a *torrefazione*. Our bar intentionally has no chairs. It exists to advertise our coffee, which you can order online at www.torrefazioneetazzadoro.com. *Sant'Eustachio* is mainly a bar and stays open until 1 AM. We keep store hours."

Tazza D'Oro or "Golden Cup" was founded in 1946 by Signora Fiochetto's grandfather Mario after he'd visited some coffee plantations in Jamaica and Brazil. Instead of the stag, its logo, designed by a Fellow at the American Academy in Rome on the Janiculum Hill, is *La Seminatrice* or "Sower of Seeds," a tall, sensual black lady scattering coffee beans around the world.

After your coffee or the typically Roman summer treat, *granita di caffè* (cold coffee over crushed ice, with layers of whipped cream), don't leave without a bottle of *Tazza D'Oro's* very own coffee liquor, "*Aroma di Roma*"...○



Stefano Navarini illustration

CAFFÉ SANT'EUSTACHIO AND TAZZA D'ORO ROME'S BEST COFFEE!

