



ROSSANO BOSCOLO: CHEF, HOTELIER, TEACHER, and COLLECTOR

by Lucy Gordan | Food | 0 comments



Born in Chioggia in 1956, the second of chef/hotelier Bruno Boscolo's five sons, Rossano is a chef, pastry chef, hotelier, professor, and collector of kitchenware and cookbooks, as well as the founder/owner of "Garum": The Library/Museum of Food, inaugurated on May 26th.

What are your first memories of food?

My father's codfish prepared with onions, milk and olive oil.

Your father encouraged you to attend the Hotel School in Abano Terme, where your vocation for becoming a chef was immediately clear. After graduation, you returned home to work in the kitchen of your father's hotel, right?

Yes, even before my graduation, during the summer and school holidays, I made pizzas. After graduation I returned home to run the kitchen of my father's first of several hotels worldwide, but soon afterwards, in 1982, I left for Paris. I was the first Italian to study with Gaston Lenôtre, considered one of the greatest pastry chefs of the 20th century. Lenôtre became my mentor together with another top French pastry chef Charles Ceva, who in 1985 advised me to open Italy's first professional Academy for chefs. First located in Cavàrzere, 15 miles south-west of Venice, I soon relocated it to my father's Hotel Airone in

Chioggia and then in 2010 moved it again to its international campus in Tuscania near Rome, where it remains today. Over the years some 20,000 professional chefs have graduated from my Academies.

What are your favorite dishes to cook?

Codfish, all risotti, and then sweets, more sweets, and even more sweets, especially cake icings and decorations.

To eat?

Risotto di gozzo, a fish from the upper Adriatic.

A dish or ingredients you don't like?

Peppers and saffron. As much as I love risotto, because of saffron I never prepare *risotto alla Milanese*.

I understand your love of cooking and the joy it gives you joy to transmit this love to others; but why and when did you start to collect?

Kitchenware because I love history and because I use many of my utensils and their more modern versions in my kitchens. As for the books, when I was a student and later when I began teaching, there were no cooking shows on TV and internet didn't exist yet, so I started to buy old cookbooks because I studied from them. I had no intention of becoming a cookbook collector much less of opening a museum. I especially loved these old cookbooks because they contained a lot of curiosities and unknown historical tidbits. So I kept on buying books and more and more books. Then about 25 years ago I met Matteo Ghirighini, our librarian and Museum director. He taught me the importance of owning first editions and rare cookbooks. So slowly but surely I became a collector.

How did you meet Matteo?

Because he sold me most of Claudio Benporat's library. Benporat was a highly respected historian of Italian cuisine and the author of numerous essays and books about eno-gastronomy. But all of us who collect eventually grow old and usually our collections don't interest our children. That's why Benporat's library was sold. It contained his books, very rare manuscripts of his works and his notes. Because of this first sale, Matteo became my book scout, advisor, source, and friend.

These collections belonged to you, why did you want to open them to the public?

The foremost pleasure of all collectors, be they of paintings, sculpture, butterflies, or stamps is to show their collection to others. No one puts together a collection to keep it hidden. So I started to look for an appropriate site. At first it was at my Academy in Tuscania. However, the size of my collections, plus their high quality, especially that of my books, obliged me to find a prestigious site to display them. Tuscania was too out of the way; I needed a site in a big city where people from all over the world come. Ten years ago I owned about 1,000 books, 300 of which were first editions. Today I own 3,500 books, 2,000 of which are first

editions. Such an important collection of early printed cookbooks doesn't exist anywhere else in Europe. I know that for certain; I've researched the subject. *Garum* honors 500 years of Italian culinary history, from the Middle Ages to the present.

How did you achieve such a prestigious location?

It was a stroke of luck. Two architect/interior decorator friends, the brothers Massimo and Maurizio Papiri, who designed many Boscolo hotels, had their headquarters here. They'd reached old age; both are in their eighties. They no longer have the stamina they had to carry out their projects, organize promotions and other events. The Museum is free because we want to be able continue the Papiris' style of organizing our own private events during conventional museum hours, by that I mean 2-hour guided visits by guides of our choice with a tasting at the end; product promotions, private parties, tastings with recipes taken from our books, and seminars. That's why it's open by appointment only, at least for now.



The location's history?

It's located at Via dei Cerchi 87, near the Circus Maximus, the stadium built, according to the ancient Roman historian Livy, by the first Etruscan king of Rome, Lucius Tarquinius Priscus, for chariot-racing some 2,600 years ago.

At the bottom of the Palatine Hill where the ancient Roman emperors built their luxurious residences, according to legend, this site had been the *lupercal* or grotto where the she-wolf nursed Romulus and Remus. Then in the 4th century AD the Basilica of Santa Anastasia, the first Christian Church built inside the ancient city walls, was erected here. It seems that the Basilica was built on the ruins of an enormous building dating to the first century AD. Several centuries later, after this area had become part of the *Orti Farnesiani* (Farnese Gardens), the first private botanical gardens created in 1550 by Cardinal Alessandro Farnese, the Benedictines built their *Monastero dei padri Olivetani* here. The Order still owns the building, which, of course, had to be extensively renovated to accommodate its new activity, before renting it to *Garum*.

Why did you call the museum *Garum*?

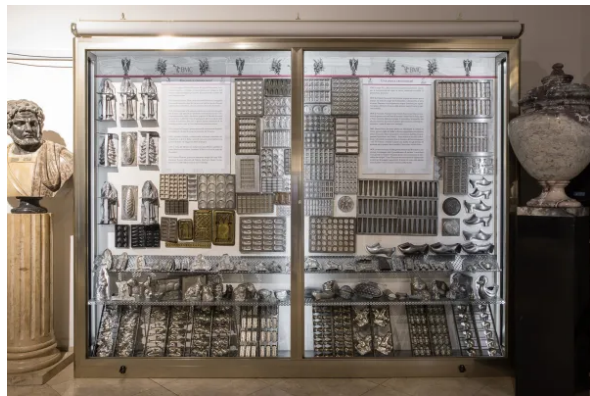
Garum is a liquid sauce made from fish entrails which the ancient Romans used as a salty dressing on their appetizers and second courses.



Speculoos

The Museum is divided into two sections; kitchenware on the ground floor and your books and the library on the first floor. How many cooking utensils do you own; how many are on display; and how are their displays organized?

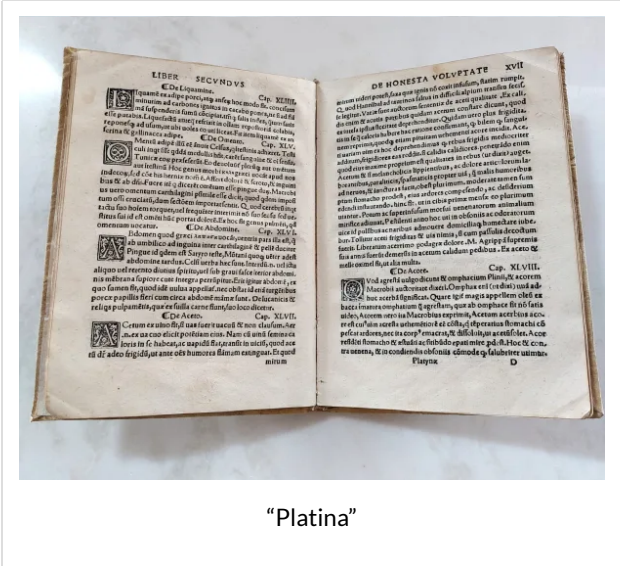
I own about 4,000 kitchen utensils dating from the Middle Ages to the present. About 1,000 are on display here, in 11 showcases: *speculoos* or wooden molds for making thin gingerbread biscuits spiced with cinnamon, cloves, and cardamom; they are typical of the Low countries for the Feast of St. Nicholas on December 6th and for Christmas. Then come the showcases for cake and chocolate molds; ovens from different periods including domestic ones from the 1950s; cooper pots and pans galore; 19th-century utensils for making pasta, bread, ice cream (even some dating from the Renaissance), various types of cheese, pastries, and various animal-shaped foie gras terrines. The most curious items are wooden bowls with covers dating to an 18th-century monastic refectory and the first “culinary” set of toys for children, made in Ravensburg, Germany, in 1898. I consider the cake and chocolate molds the stars of my collection because I bought them to use.



Chocolate molds



First culinary toy (1898)



“Platina”

What about your books?

Of my some 3,500, some 300 are displayed here. Around 90% of these are first editions. The cuisine of an historical period tells us a lot about those times and how each different period has influenced our present-day habits, attitudes, economy and politics. Cookbooks are history and anthropology books.

The stars of your book collection?

The stars of mycollection are *De honesta Voluptate ac Valetudine libri decem* compiled by Bartolomeo Sacci, better known as “Platina”, (Venice, 1517). It’s the first printed book about cuisine. “Platina” wasn’t a cook; a man-of-letters, he was the first director of the newly established Vatican Library. His book contains the recipes of Maestro Martino, the most important European chef of the 15th century.

Martino’s recipes are similar to those of the late Middle Ages, quite simple to follow, and much less elaborate than those of Renaissance courts contained in another star of my collection, *Opera*, by Bartolomeo Scappi (Venice, 1570).

Scappi was the private chef of Pope Pius V. *Opera*, my most prized possession, is the first illustrated (32 drawings) printed cookbook; for the first time cooks had access to recipes previously inaccessible outside the Papal Palace. Scappi tells us that Pope Pius V’s favorite dishes were frog-based, but not any old frog. It had to come from Bologna, because frogs from there were chubby and especially succulent. Pius’s favorite recipe was crisply fried frog’s liver fritters.”

An innovative chef, Scappi was the first to introduce ingredients from the New World. *Opera* also contains over 200 pasta recipes, many sprinkled or filled with “*cascio parmigiano*”, which Scappi said “was the best cheese in the world.”

Other highlights?



Scappi

Pellegrino Artusi's *La Scienza in cucina e l'arte di mangiare bene* first published in 1891. Filled with amusing anecdotes as well as recipes, the book is still a perennial bestseller in Italy and has been translated into Dutch, English, French, German, Polish, and Portuguese. Another is Vittorio Agnelli's *La Nuova Cucina delle specialità regionali* (Milan, 1909). Although not the first cookbook devoted to a single region's cuisine, it's the first volume to include recipes from every region of Italy. A third is Rosa Aiello's *La cucina casareccia napoletana per golosi e buongustai*, published in New York in 1940 to soothe the emigrants' nostalgia for Italy. Additional curiosities include: *De Romaniis piscibus Libellus* (A Pamphlet About Roman Fish), the first cookbook devoted to fish, is by Paolo Giovio (Basel, 1531), like "Platina" a man of letters and not a cook. He wrote this volume after being a guest at a papal dinner, where the conversation concerned the fish available on the Roman market; *Lo Scalco alla moderna* (*The Modern Steward*) by Antonio Latini, the steward of Cardinal Antonio Barberini, cardinal-nephew of Pope Urban VIII (Naples 1692) contains the first recipe for tomato sauce; and *Le Petit Cuisinier Moderne* (Paris, 1890) by Gustave Garlin, one of the great chefs of the second half of the 19th century, is the only great cookbook written in prison, while its author was serving a two-year sentence for sedition. Garlin was also the first chef to present cheese at the end of a meal. Perhaps the most ironic of my cookbooks' anecdotes is that in his *Libro della Natura delle Cose che Nustriscono* (Venice, 1576), Michele Savonarola, a doctor and the grandfather of the notoriously moralistic Dominican friar Girolamo, recommended truffles as an aphrodisiac especially for older men with young wives.



Artusi

Are you still purchasing?

Yes, our latest acquisition is a collection of some 3,500 historical menus. We have just begun to display some of them at the center of the room lined with the display cases of books. *Garum* is still a work in progress. We intend to open a restaurant and a museum shop where we will sell books, including duplicates of the rare editions in our library, new cookbooks, guidebooks, and cooking utensils.

Besides the library and museum you also have a hotel on the premises?

Yes, it has 10 rooms but is administered by the “Monastero Collection” not us:
www.monasterocollection.it.

Do you accept donations?

Yes, a lady from Florence has just given us a diary and manuscript of recipes written by her grandmother who was the founder of the city’s first cooking school for non-professionals.

Is the library open to scholars?

Yes, by appointment. We also have created a state-of-the art website in both Italian and English about our collections: www.museodellacucina.com. It contains the histories of our kitchenware, bibliographies of the books and pamphlets on display, as well as publications written by Matteo, by me and by many of my students since the 1980s.

Are there other cooking or food museums in Italy?

The only one I know of is Artusi’s home in Forlimpopoli, dedicated to his life and works. The website www.atlasoscura.com list 81 worldwide but none have libraries. The library of The New York Academy of Medicine, 1216 5th Avenue, has an enormous collection of 10,000 cookbooks, menus and pamphlets including a manuscript of the first-century ancient Roman Apicius’ *De re culinaria* which dates to the 4th century AD. I think we are the only cuisine museum with a research library.

If you hadn’t become a chef, pastry chef, professor and collector, what profession would you have chosen?

A pizza chef. As I said before, it was my first job during school holidays in my father’s hotel kitchen. I love pizza especially maninara.

Portrait photo of Boscolo, courtesy of *La Madia Travelfood*; all others courtesy of *Garum*.

City

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