

essentials of classic italian cooking

by marcella hazan

Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking by Marcella Hazan is a culinary cornerstone that has shaped the way many people approach Italian cuisine. First published in 1992, this cookbook combines the rich traditions of Italian cooking with Hazan's own insights and experiences. It provides not just recipes, but also a deep understanding of the ingredients, techniques, and philosophies that define Italian cooking. Hazan's work is a celebration of simplicity, quality, and the joy of preparing food that brings people together.

The Author: Marcella Hazan's Legacy

Marcella Hazan (1924-2013) is often regarded as the mother of Italian cooking in America. Born in Venice, she brought her expertise to the United States in the 1950s. Hazan's passion for Italian cuisine was rooted in her upbringing, where she learned to cook traditional dishes using fresh, local ingredients. Her approach to cooking emphasized the importance of high-quality ingredients, proper techniques, and respect for the culinary traditions of her homeland.

Key Contributions:

1. Authenticity: Hazan's recipes reflect genuine Italian cooking, steering away from Americanized versions.
2. Education: She taught many through her cookbooks and cooking classes, helping to demystify Italian cooking for a broader audience.
3. Simplicity: Her philosophy revolves around the idea that great food can be made with few, high-quality ingredients.

Core Principles of Italian Cooking

In Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking, Hazan establishes several principles that serve as a foundation for Italian cuisine. Understanding these principles is essential for anyone looking to master the art of cooking Italian dishes.

1. Quality over Quantity

Hazan is a firm believer that the quality of ingredients is paramount. She emphasizes using fresh, seasonal produce, high-quality meats, and authentic Italian pantry staples. The following are key components that she insists

upon:

- Olive Oil: Use extra virgin olive oil for its flavor and health benefits.
- Tomatoes: Fresh, vine-ripened tomatoes or high-quality canned tomatoes are essential for sauces.
- Cheese: Parmigiano-Reggiano and other authentic cheeses should be used to enhance flavors.

2. Techniques Matter

Mastering fundamental cooking techniques is crucial in Italian cooking. Hazan breaks down various methods that are commonly used:

- Sautéing: A foundational technique for building flavor in sauces and dishes.
- Simmering: Essential for developing rich flavors in sauces, especially those made with tomatoes.
- Roasting: A method that enhances the natural sweetness of vegetables and meats.

3. Regional Diversity

Italian cuisine is not monolithic; it varies widely from region to region. Hazan highlights how to appreciate and incorporate regional differences into her recipes. For example:

- Northern Italy: Known for creamy sauces, risottos, and polenta.
- Southern Italy: Characterized by tomato-based dishes, olive oil, and seafood.

Key Recipes from Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking

Hazan's cookbook is filled with iconic recipes that showcase her principles of cooking. Below are some standout dishes that have become classics:

1. Tomato Sauce

One of the cornerstones of Italian cooking is a good tomato sauce. Hazan's recipe is simple yet profound, requiring only three ingredients:

- Canned tomatoes (preferably San Marzano)

- Onion
- Butter

Instructions:

1. Combine the tomatoes, a halved onion, and a generous amount of butter in a saucepan.
2. Simmer uncovered for about 45 minutes, stirring occasionally.
3. Remove the onion before serving.

This sauce is the basis for numerous Italian dishes and exemplifies Hazan's philosophy of simplicity.

2. Risotto alla Milanese

Risotto is a staple of Northern Italian cuisine, and Hazan's version incorporates saffron for its distinct flavor and color.

Ingredients:

- Arborio rice
- Chicken or vegetable broth
- Saffron
- Parmesan cheese
- Onion
- White wine

Instructions:

1. Sauté chopped onion in butter until soft.
2. Add the rice and toast for a few minutes.
3. Gradually add broth, stirring continuously until creamy.
4. Finish with saffron and Parmesan cheese.

3. Osso Buco

This braised veal dish is a celebration of rich flavors and is perfect for special occasions.

Ingredients:

- Veal shanks
- Carrots, onions, and celery (sofrito)
- White wine
- Broth
- Tomatoes

Instructions:

1. Brown the veal shanks in a heavy pot.
2. Add the sofrito and sauté until soft.
3. Add white wine, allowing it to evaporate, then add broth and tomatoes.

4. Simmer until the meat is tender.

Cooking Philosophy and Techniques

Hazan's approach to cooking is rooted in her love for the craft. Her philosophy can be encapsulated in several key ideas:

1. Respect for Tradition

Hazan stresses the importance of respecting traditional recipes while also allowing for personal adaptations. She encourages cooks to understand the origins and cultural significance of the dishes they prepare.

2. The Joy of Cooking

Cooking should be a pleasurable experience. Hazan's writing conveys her enthusiasm for the kitchen, and she invites home cooks to share that joy with others. Creating meals is not just about sustenance; it is about nurturing relationships and traditions.

3. The Importance of Sharing

Food is meant to be shared. Hazan emphasizes the communal aspect of Italian dining, where meals are a time to gather with family and friends. She encourages cooks to prepare larger quantities of food to share during gatherings.

Conclusion: A Lasting Impact

Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking by Marcella Hazan is more than just a cookbook; it is a testament to the beauty of Italian cuisine and the joy of cooking. Hazan's insights into ingredients, techniques, and the philosophy behind Italian cooking have influenced countless home cooks and professional chefs alike. Her emphasis on quality, simplicity, and respect for tradition has made her recipes timeless.

For anyone looking to deepen their understanding of Italian cooking, this book is an indispensable resource. Hazan's legacy continues to inspire new generations to explore the rich flavors and traditions of Italy. Whether you're a novice cook or an experienced chef, the essentials of classic Italian cooking remain relevant, offering a path to creating delicious,

heartfelt meals that can be shared and enjoyed.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the core principles of Italian cooking highlighted in 'Essentials of Classic Italian Cooking'?

The core principles include using high-quality ingredients, simplicity in preparation, and a focus on traditional techniques that emphasize the natural flavors of the food.

How does Marcella Hazan differentiate between Italian regional cooking styles in her book?

Hazan discusses various regional dishes, highlighting how local ingredients and historical influences shape the distinct flavors and cooking methods of each area in Italy.

What makes Marcella Hazan's recipes accessible for home cooks?

Her recipes are designed to be straightforward, with clear instructions and an emphasis on using easily obtainable ingredients, making authentic Italian cooking approachable for all skill levels.

Can you name a few essential techniques that Marcella Hazan teaches in her book?

Some essential techniques include proper pasta making, the art of sauce preparation, and methods for braising and roasting meats, all of which are fundamental to Italian cuisine.

What role does seasonality play in the cooking philosophy presented by Hazan?

Hazan emphasizes the importance of cooking with seasonal ingredients, encouraging cooks to adapt recipes based on what is fresh and available, which enhances flavor and supports sustainability.

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