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Hotel Plaza e de Russie in Viareggio – Cooking Class in a Michelin-Starred Restaurant

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Hotel Plaza e de Russie: Clowning around in a Renowned Tuscan Kitchen

Viareggio, [Tuscany](#): Filling and rolling out three different flavors of pasta looked easy when Luca Landi was doing it. Landi is the chef of Lunasia, the Michelin-starred restaurant of Viareggio's [Hotel Plaza e de Russie](#), and was conducting a cooking class for a group of non-professional foodies. His recipe this day was Burlaravioli di polpo (ravioli Burlamacco, i.e., Carnevale style, with octopus, an original dish created to honor [Viareggio's famed Carnevale](#)).

Ravioli? Already not so easy. You have to knead that pasta dough, roll it out to just the right thickness (or, as Landi did, run it through a pasta machine that does this job for you), fill it with just the right amount of stuffing, cover with a top layer of pasta, cut it just so, and pinch top and bottom to seal in the stuffing.

To make the process more challenging, the chef had decided to create his ravioli "diamonds" in three colors and flavors – "white" (with milk in the pasta), red with tomato and beets, and black with squid ink. Red, white, and black are the colors of Burlamacco, the clown symbol of Viareggio's Carnevale. That part had happened before our class started, but Landi assured us it wasn't difficult. The important thing was to make sure that these changeable ingredients were added in the same quantity so that the pasta would be uniform in consistency when cooked.



The filling was also not for the faint of heart. Not because octopus is off-putting to a serious amateur chef (to a rank amateur it might be), but because one has to cook the octopus meat in white wine, marjoram, and sage until it is tender, then process it with Parmesan and mascarpone. Landi confided to us that “Just as the French have their butter and cream, we Italians have our olive oil and mascarpone.” The filling can be prepared the day before the ravioli assembly.

The accompanying sauce for the dish was also a challenge. Landi had decided to dress his ravioli with local razor clams (coltellacci) and seasonal vegetables. The mollusks require cooking in hot olive oil, marjoram, and white wine, then shelling delicately to eliminate their intestines before combining with the cooked ravioli.

The best part about the class was the end, when everyone got to sample the finished dish and pronounce it “amazing”. We

knew enough about Viareggio to understand that this recipe tapped many of the elements typical of the region and of its chef-interpreter. Viareggio is a seaside resort in Tuscany, so seafood predominates in its many excellent restaurants. The emphasis is on locally-grown products, so seasonal vegetables and area herbs receive star billing. Vegetable soups with herb seasonings are held in high esteem, and the terrace of Lunasia has its own herb garden with two dozen or so different herbs and seasonings to enliven Landi’s creations.



What was not apparent in the cooking class – but is evident at Lunasia – is Landi’s talent for gelato (ice cream). He won the Coppa Mondiale di Gelato (ice cream’s World Cup) in 2009 for his non-dessert frozen creations, and some of these can be savored in his restaurant. For example, one appetizer is an extraordinary grissino al riccio con gelato d’Artemisia (sea urchin grissini with absinthe ice cream). Another, unsampled during my visit, is gelato di gambero e avocado (shrimp and avocado ice cream).

Naturally, he can do sweet gelato with ease. Calore Latino (Latin heat) is a chocolate square with hibiscus, for which pollen gelato provides a counterpoint.



Another passion of Landi's is bread. The 42-year-old chef offers two rounds of bread selections during an evening meal at Lunasia: three unleavened (think cracker-like breads) and three leavened (punctuated with olives, nuts, tomatoes, or whatever the market beckons that day).

That fish are a star attraction at Lunasia does not relegate meat to a secondary role. Our meal one evening included as the main course *maialino di latte con mela verde, topnambur e malto*, milk-fed piglet with green apple, Jerusalem artichokes, and malt. So delicious even a vegetarian might be converted.

The only thing hard to digest about our meals at Lunasia was the knowledge that we were not eating from the restaurant's "gastronomic" menu, which is reserved for high season. If the food is so spectacular on the "regular" menu, we wondered, what could possibly be improved for the gourmet version?



HOTEL PLAZA E DE RUSSIE IN VIAREGGIO INFORMATION:

Cooking classes with Luca Landi can be arranged in advance for a minimum of five people, depending on the chef's schedule. He speaks French and Spanish as well as Italian; an English-language translator is available upon request.

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COOKING CLASS IN

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Cooking Class at Hotel Plaza e de Russie – Written and photographed by [Claudia Flisi](#) for [EuropeUpClose.com](#).

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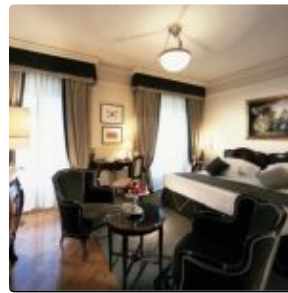
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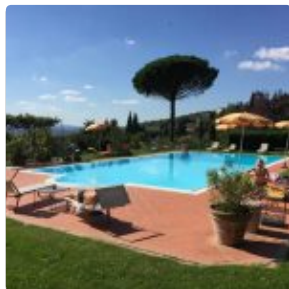
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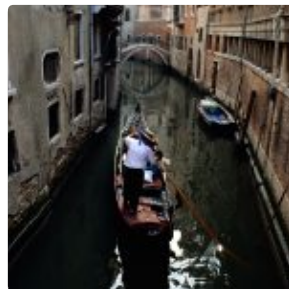
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