

*Patience
makes perfect*

PASTA



Cavazzone, a beautiful farm now run as a restaurant and hotel.



Simple, yet so delicious. These are words often spoken by Scandinavians about the homemade filled pasta dishes served in trattorias all around Italy. But if you make pasta from scratch the way mamma used to make it, is it really that simple?

By Åsa Lundqvist Photos by Anna Hällams

One thing that isn't so simple is ensuring that there are no pockets of air between the pasta dough and the filling. For this, you need to learn the proper way to roll it out. Use three fingers – ring finger, middle finger and index finger around the pasta to press the two sheets of pasta gently but firmly together.

You use your middle finger to ensure that there are no sneaky air pockets left inside. If you miss any, it's a massive failure. Your small pasta pillows will explode when you poach them. They actually use the word explode, as this is incredibly important and verging on

'If your pasta pillows explode, you're left with a soggy mess'

the sacred. If your pasta pillows do explode, you're left with a soggy mess of oozing filling and strips of pasta. Not a meal with aesthetic appeal.

Pasta is surprisingly fragile. Not the easiest thing to appreciate when you pick up a pack of dried pasta in a food store.

We're at a beautiful farm called Cavazzone, just outside the village of Reggio Emilia, some 70km northwest of Bologna. In its heyday in the late 19th century, it was a very large farm with plenty of land and livestock, run by an entrepreneur with a great vision who ensured the farm had a good reputation.

At that time, local aristocrats frequently came here and for many years, Cavazzone was the natural meeting place in the district.

It's still a much-appreciated meeting place for the →



Spoon in the filling working quickly and nimbly.



town. And since 2001, the farm has been run as a restaurant and small hotel.

This transformation is the work of the Sidoli family who live close by. The eight rooms are comfortable with a rural charm. The restaurant looks a bit like a movie set with the added bonus that guests can help prepare their own meals. That's why we're here – to learn the noble art of pasta making.

We start with the dough. Luciano the chef, who teaches the cooking course, nimbly mixes the ingredients flour, eggs and olive oil. After leaving the dough to rest in the fridge, we come to the difficult stage: rolling it out.

We use a kitchen appliance that is completely new to me – a pasta machine. You feed in the dough with one hand and catch it with the other. It's harder than it looks. After a couple of runs, the pasta is thin enough. You should be able to see the worktop surface through it, we're told.

With the thin dough sitting there on the old well-used worktop, you need to work quickly. Too slow and the dough becomes dry. Spoon in the filling, carefully noting how much you spoon in and how close together the fillings are. Fold together, remembering your finger hold with the slight but ever so important pressure that ensures that the pasta sheets stay together and no air gets in. Finally, cut your filled pasta into individual pillows. Fast and straight, the pillows should be as equally sized as possible. →

'We use a kitchen appliance that is completely new to me – a pasta machine'



Feeding the dough into the pasta machine is tricky.

Emilia Romagna region

- The capital of the region is Bologna.
- The region stretches from the Adriatic Sea in northern Italy almost all the way across to the Mediterranean coast.
- One of the richest and most densely populated regions in Italy.
- Food plays a very important and central role here.
- The region is famous for Parmesano Reggiano and it is the protected designation of origin for Parmesan cheese.
- It is also famous for its Parma ham and Balsamico di Modena, considered the finest balsamic vinegar.
- Other famous towns include Parma, Reggio nell'Emilia, Modena, Rimini, Ferrara and Ravenna.
- Farming is important for the economy.
- One of the most famous wines from Emilia-Romagna is Lambrusco.



Parmesano Reggiano



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We're not as nimble fingered as we need to be so a lot of the pasta dough goes to waste since it dries quickly and loses its elasticity.

Everything looks so easy when Luciano rolls, spoons and cuts. He's very patient and almost silent, probably because he barely speaks a word of English.

But even an amateur like me finds it incredibly easy to make the first pasta shape, tortelli. However, when we progress to cappelletti, filled pasta the size of a thumb nail and shaped like a little hat, the pressure starts to build.

To get the perfect shape, you need to fold and then wind the pasta around your little finger. A quick glance at Luciano's deft fingers teaches you that small hands are no advantage – it's practice, practice and practice that makes perfect.

After loads of laughter, far too much pasta dough that's gone dry and plenty of interesting pasta shapes, we've produced enough for a decent lunch. Two types of filled pasta served with salad and grilled vegetables. Plenty of Parmesan cheese and naturally drizzled with balsamic vinegar from the farm. Could a meal be any simpler or more delicious? o



'Even an amateur like me finds it easy to make the first pasta shape'

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Balsamico di Modena

To be classed as genuine, Balsamico di Modena must originate in the Emilia Romagna region and be made from local grape varieties: Lambrusco di Modena (red), Trebbiano di Modena (green) and Trebbiano di Spagna (white).

Three grades of vinegar

→ **Red label:** Vinegar aged between 12 and 20 years and the youngest. Goes well with meat and fish in small drops.

→ **Silver label:** An older variant aged from 20 to 25 years. Slightly sweeter and more concentrated taste and somewhat more viscous. Fantastic with cheese or drizzle a few drops on a Parmesan-rich risotto.

→ **Gold label:** The oldest, most expensive and in the opinion of many, the finest. Minimum age 25 years, often much older. Sweeter than the others, but still with a refreshing acidity. Goes well with a mature Gorgonzola or other blue cheeses. A delicate drop or two is also delicious on vanilla ice cream or warm summer strawberries.