

Italian

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And the Parmesan cheese? "That region (Trevise) seemed to have the creamiest, most blended form of parmesan I every tasted," he said. "Ah, spoken like a chef in love."

Simplicity

Hoffa loved the wood-burning stoves that are an essential part of many Italian kitchens. The counter-level grills are fed coals from the central fireplace. When the coals are ready, Italian cooks simply shovel some over to the grill.

"It's insane, man, I'm telling you, it's insane," he said about the taste of food cooked over wood rather than coals. "Wood heat doesn't give food that overwhelming smoke flavor. It gives you more of the natural taste of food. There is no masking the flavor of fish."

Italians use few electric appliances but lots of those little silver, double-chamber espresso makers that sit directly on stove burners. "They keep two or three going at the same time," said Hoffa, his fingers imitating the percolating action. "They just don't make coffee for someone, they make it the right way."

And non-stick pots? Hardly ever used, not even for risotto, he said. "It's not the pot that

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cooks, it's the cook who uses the pot."

"I think Chef Hoffa was just impressed that we go out in the vineyard, grab something and come and cook something," said Rena.

An Italian kitchen

In her book, *Ciao Italia - Bringing Italy Home*, author Mary Ann Esposito says the basic necessities for a well-stocked Italian pantry are dried pastas, extra virgin olive oil, anchovies, onions, fresh garlic, good plum tomatoes, capers, and wine vinegars.

Hoffa would make one addition: fresh lemons. "The juice helps balance flavors," he said, especially for fish.

Although Italians prefer their

olive oil straight, it can be infused with garlic and herbs, like cracked pepper, red pepper flakes or sage. Just make sure you infuse properly, said Hoffa. Heat the olive oil over low heat for approximately 10 minutes. This will flavor the oil as well as prevent the added ingredients from forming mildew when the oil is stored.

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Hoffa, whose wife Diane is the pastry assistant at Confection-ately Yours in Livonia, has been

Recipes

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In a separate bowl, whip the eggs with remaining sugar for two minutes. The mixture should be moderately thick.

Place the bowl over a mild hot water bath and continue whipping. The mixture should increase by about two-thirds in volume. It should have a thick consistency. It will be slightly warm.

Allow the mixture to cool. Then, fold it into the whipped cream. In a thin stream, fold in espresso. Pour into desired mold. Cover in the freezer overnight. Serve with your favorite baciotti.



Pasta lovers: Chef Jeff Hoffa (left), Cafe Cortina owners Rena Tonon and Adrian Tonon, and Elenora Tonon strike a pose in the kitchen during their visit to Italy. Elenora Tonon lives in Italy.

passionate about cooking since he first helped his mother make spaghetti sauce at age 15. He can't imagine life without pots and pans, pasta and pesto.

And he can no longer imagine making ravioli without the very fine flour he brought back from Italy.

"It makes my ravioli taste like velvet," he said.

Kitchen Kapers

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Scientists are just discovering the cancer-fighting benefits of garlic, something the Chinese have known for thousands of years. Folks in Gilroy, Calif. are so fond of garlic that they hold a festival in its honor the last weekend of July. Visit www.gilroygarlicfestival.com to learn some fun facts about garlic.

For instance, did you know Louis Pasteur found that garlic killed bacteria, and in World War II, it was used as an antiseptic for wounds?

Garlic is good. Good for you and good for me. So let's enjoy,

but if you're worrying about offending people, enjoy it in moderation.

OK, I'll use less garlic next time. Yep, only one clove. I promise. Honest...no, wait. Two cloves max. No more. That's it. I promise.....

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Wine

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creamy texture and balanced oak accent.

■ 1998 Cinnabar Santa Cruz Mountains Saratoga Vineyard Pinot Noir \$38 competes well in a flight of red Burgundies. Bright cherry fruit is accented by forest floor aromas and smoky oak. Brown spices perk up a broad spectrum of palate flavors that are completed by the right touch of toasted oak.

■ 1997 Cinnabar Santa Cruz Mountains Saratoga Vineyard Cabernet Sauvignon \$35 is a big, well-structured, powerful wine.

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full of blackberry, tobacco leaf, coffee, anise and chocolate accents. Taste one bottle now and cellar the rest of the case. It

is a stunning accompaniment to roast rack of lamb with French-style flagoleto beans.

The Healds are Troy residents who write about wine, spirits, food, and dining for the *Observer & Eccentric! Newspapers*. To leave them a voice mail message, dial (734) 953-2047, mailbox 1884#.



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