

## 10. APERITIVO

### A CELEBRATION OF THE ITALIAN HAPPY HOUR

By Sara Hauman & Jordan Mackay

The decadent, irresistible, and soul-satisfying food of Emilia-Romagna may inspire you to make noise. After a particularly satisfying meal, you might want to belt out an aria a la tenor Luciano Pavarotti, who grew up in the region. Or you may feel like exclaiming the names of Emilia-Romagna's most representative products in your best New York accent: Proshoot! Parm! Baloney!

Emilia-Romagna is the source of so much iconic Italian food, and Prosciutto di Parma, Parmigiano Reggiano, and Mortadella Bologna are but the tip of the tortellini. It's the home base of balsamic vinegar, the launchpad of lasagna, and the root source of meaty red sauce, aka ragù Bolognese. And this area is the source not just of iconic foodstuffs. Most of Italy's quintessential automotive companies are here: Ferrari, Lamborghini, Maserati, and Ducati. For some reason, Italy's New Wave cinematic heavyweights all grew up here: Bertolucci, Fellini, Antonioni, and Pasolini. Home to the world's oldest university, the University of Bologna (established in 1088), this mid-sized northern region wields an influence that is disproportionately huge.

The region's narrow profile stretches almost entirely across the entire northern Italian "leg," following the course of the Po river as it winds its way east to the Adriatic Sea. While Emilia-Romagna is mountainous across its long border with northern Tuscany, a good half of the region is composed of the excellent river valley soils that make Emilia-Romagna one of Italy's leading producers of wheat and an important source of pork, beef, and chicken. Put those together and you have all you need to fashion vast amounts of lasagna, tagliatelle al ragù, and tortellini in brodo.

## 10. APERITIVO

While politically and economically regarded as a single region, Emilia and Romagna are, in fact, distinct zones and have different histories and personalities. To the north and west is Emilia, named for the ancient Roman road Via Aemilia that connected its main cities of Piacenza, Parma, Reggio Emilia, Modena, and Ferrara. The Romagna side to the east boasts the regional capital of Bologna and a coastline that ushers a little seafood and buoyancy into the otherwise rich, hearty cuisine.

Despite its roster of rich primi and secondi, Emilia-Romagna also specializes in the aperitivo hour, offering platters of its delectable cheeses and meats, accompanied by bread, gnocco fritto (deep-fried dough pillows), nuts, and all manner of delicious items designed to accompany a preprandial spritz or glass of wine.

Speaking of drinking.... For all its riches in the food department, Emilia-Romagna has a surprisingly modest profile when it comes to wine. Its most celebrated offering, Lambrusco, may be the world's perfect companion to cured meats, but it is also a wine whose renown has faded a bit since its late 1970s heyday when "Riunite on ice. That's nice." became a refrain eternally etched in the brain of anyone with a television. Nevertheless, if you're unfamiliar with the pleasures of a frothy, effervescent, slightly off-dry red wine with salty, meaty ham and salumi, this menu's cheese and meat board is the perfect time to change that.

Beyond Lambrusco, a specialty of Emilia, Romagna's Sangiovese has garnered praise in recent years. Once a wan, washed-out afterthought, Sangiovese di Romagna finds itself transformed in the hands of some new, younger producers who are coaxing a complex, distinctive wine off the rolling inland hills of the Adriatic coast.

White wine is always an inspired choice with cured meats and cheeses, but Emilia-Romagna's offerings are from obscure grapes such as Pignoletto and Albana, so you're best sticking with whites from nearby regions like Verdicchio from the Marche or Soave from the Veneto. As always, the salty, mineral whites from Massican also make for a refreshing and complementary companion.

## 10. **APERITIVO**

### ABOUT OUR AUTHORS

Chef Sara Hauman's career is sprinkled with culinary accolades: Eater Young Gun, Zagat 30 under 30, and Bravo Top Chef contestant. Having cooked in kitchens from Spain's famed Asador Etxebarri to San Francisco's Octavia, she now resides in Portland, OR.

Jordan Mackay is a James Beard award-winning writer covering wine, spirits, and food. He has written for the New York Times, San Francisco Chronicle, and Food & Wine magazine. Jordan has penned countless books including Secrets of the Sommeliers, The Atlas of Taste, Franklin Barbecue, Franklin Steak, and the Maison Premiere Almanac.



## 10. **APERITIVO**

### THE EMILIA-ROMAGNA HAPPY HOUR

Cheese, Cured Meats, and Sputino: Curating simple pre-dinner snacks.

1. Cheese
2. Cured Meats
3. Pickles
4. Fruit
5. Nuts
6. Jam
7. Lettuces
8. Pane (Bread) - Recipes included



## 10. APERITIVO

### THE EMILIA-ROMAGNA HAPPY HOUR


**CHEESE:** Parmigiano Reggiano is a staple of Emilia-Romagna and is known as the “King of Cheeses.” A hard, aged cow’s milk cheese, it has a nutty, savory flavor and a lovely crystalline crunch. Parmigiano Reggiano is perfect for grating over pasta dishes but also crumbles into beautifully bite-sized nuggets that pair well with a variety of cured meats and fruit.

**Pecorino Romano:** While not originally from Emilia-Romagna, this cheese is a popular addition to Italian cheese boards. It is a hard, salty cheese made from sheep’s milk with a sharp, tangy flavor that enhances any selection of spicy salami or prosciutto but is also delicious on its own with a glass of red wine.

**CURED MEAT:** Recognized around the world for its delicate flavor and silky texture, Prosciutto di Parma is one of the most famous cured meats from Emilia-Romagna. It is made from the hind legs of specially raised pigs and aged for at least 12 months to develop its complex salty-sweet flavor. Prosciutto di Parma is the perfect companion to Parmigiano-Reggiano but also pairs well with cheeses and fruit (try it wrapped around a slice of ripe cantaloupe).

**Mortadella:** Another classic cured meat from Emilia-Romagna is Mortadella, a type of sausage made from finely ground pork seasoned with spices like black pepper and myrtle berries. It has a smooth and satiny texture and is often sliced thin into delicate sheets. Mortadella pairs well with Pecorino Romano or other sharp cheeses and is also delicious on its own with some crusty bread.

The above iconic products of the Emilia-Romagna region have also become staple Italian exports. They all have an uncommon abundance of umami, the fifth taste, that ephemeral sense of deliciousness that arises with the aging and fermentation of proteins.



## 10. **APERITIVO**

### THE EMILIA-ROMAGNA HAPPY HOUR

Finish your meat and cheese board with a selection of sweet, savory, and salty snacks:

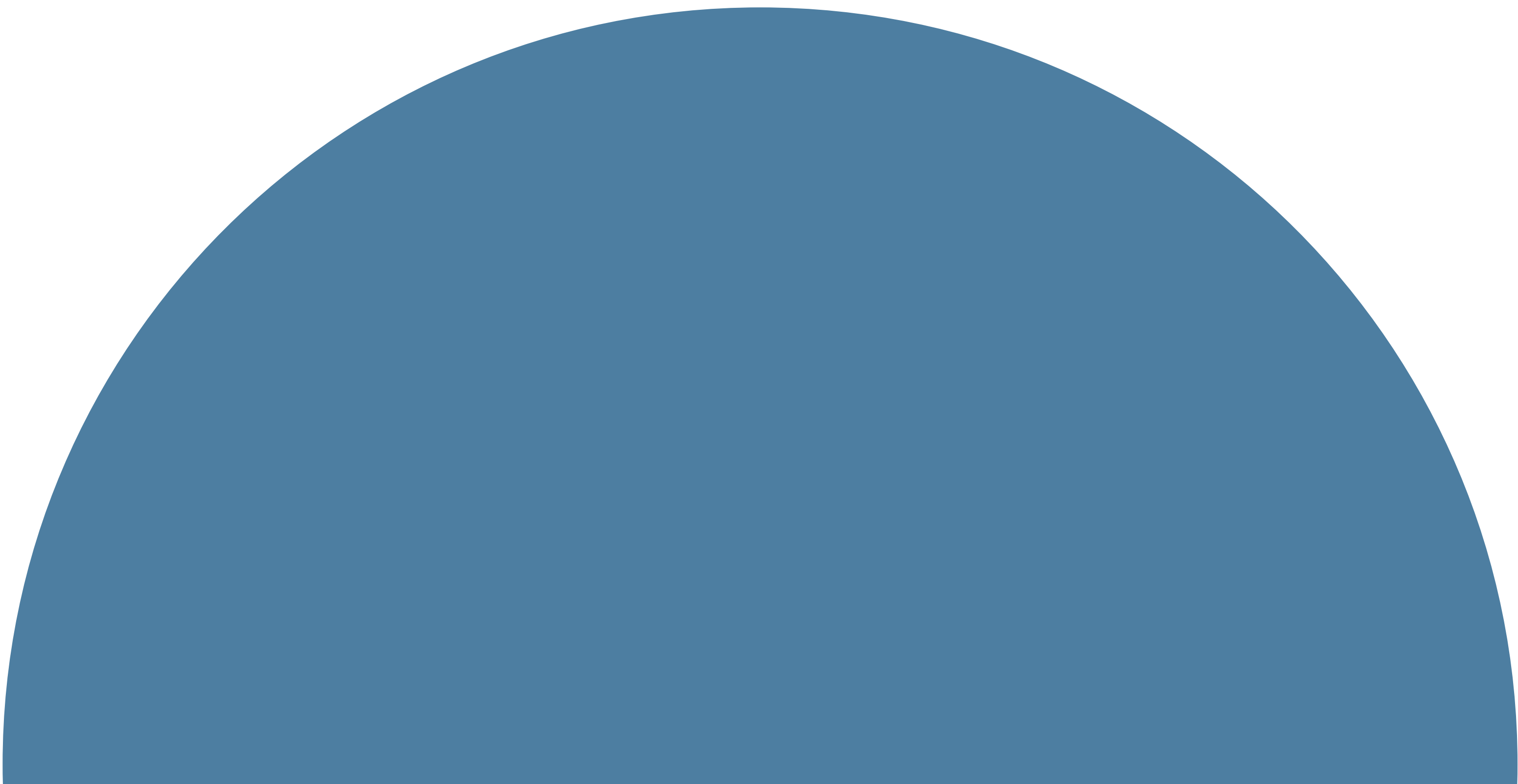
**PICKLES:** Adding pickles to a meat and cheese board balances out the richness of the cheese and cured meats. The zippy acidity of the pickles serves as a palate cleanser, preparing your taste buds for the next bite. Plus, pickles are simply delicious and add a nice tangy flavor to the spread.

**FRUIT:** To contrast the meats and cheeses' savory flavors, add some in-season fruit to your Italian meat and cheese board. Apples, pears, berries, and stone fruits all work well, giving the spread a hint of sweetness. Citrus fruits are also a great addition, as their acidity helps to cut through the richness of the meats and cheeses.

**NUTS:** Roasted nuts perfectly complement many meat and cheese pairings. Almonds, walnuts, and hazelnuts are all great options, adding a satisfying crunch to the spread. Plus, they offer a savory and nutty flavor that pairs well with wine.

**JAM:** Don't underestimate the power of a good jam when putting together a snacks board. Sweet and savory jams like fig, quince, or citrus marmalade can perfectly balance the salty and creamy flavors of the meat and cheese. They add a layer of complexity to the spread and are sure to impress your guests.

**LETTUCES:** Adding crisp and sturdy lettuces like endive or radicchio can provide a fresh and crunchy element to your meat and cheese board. This is also a great way to accommodate gluten-free guests and balance out the richness of the other components. Drizzle with some high-quality olive oil or balsamic vinegar for added flavor.



## 10. APERITIVO

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**PANE:** Coppia Ferrarese, a sourdough bread that makes a perfect vehicle for the delicacies of your aperitivo snack board.

Follow up any meal with mistocchine, a rare and ancient street food from Emilia-Romagna. This semi-sweet dessert is made from flour obtained from the chestnut trees ubiquitous throughout the region and is often served with a honeyed mixture of dried fruits and nuts.

### COPPIA FERRARESE

Makes 4 loaves

Ingredients for the starter:

- $\frac{3}{4}$  tsp. instant yeast
- 3 Tbsp warm water
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup bread flour

Preparation:

1. Mix the ingredients together until it becomes a sticky dough.
2. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature overnight.

Ingredients for the dough:

- $\frac{1}{2}$  cup starter
- 4 cups bread flour
- 1 tsp. instant yeast
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup cold water, plus 3 Tbsp
- 3 Tbsp butter, softened
- 5 tsp. olive oil
- 1  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp. salt
- 1 tsp. honey

## 10. APERITIVO

### COPPIA FERRARESE

Makes 4 loaves

Preparation:

1. Add all the ingredients, except for the 3 Tbsp of water, to the bowl of a stand mixer. Using the dough hook, knead the dough on medium speed for 15-20 minutes. This is a dry dough and will take some time to come together. During the last few minutes of kneading, sprinkle in the remaining 3 Tbsp of water as needed. If the dough is too dry it will not rise properly so take care to add just enough water to allow for a little more elasticity in the dough and a smooth texture.
2. Once kneaded, lightly grease a bowl and cover with plastic. Let the dough rise in a warm place for 45 minutes.
3. Next, cut the dough into 8 equal pieces.
4. Flatten and roll these dough pieces on the widest setting of a pasta roller, folding and feeding the dough through until it becomes smooth and silky in texture. This will take up to 15 passes through the pasta roller. Once the desired texture of the dough is achieved, run the strips through the pasta roller, decreasing the width by 1 size each consecutive time until you reach the second thinnest setting. Your dough strips should be approximately 2 ½ - 3" wide by 24" long.
5. Begin rolling the dough strips toward yourself lengthwise to create a spiral pattern similar to a croissant, leaving a 1" tail at the end of each strip. Two strips will create one loaf.
6. Bring the rolled strips together by the 1" tails. Fold this tail over onto itself, then rip in half securing each ripped edge to a different side of the loaf to secure in place.
7. Repeat this process until you have four star-shaped loaves.




## 10. **APERITIVO**

### COPPIA FERRARESE

Makes 4 loaves

Preparation (continued):

8. Place the loaves on an ungreased baking sheet. Two loaves will fit on a large sized baking tray.
  9. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let rise again in a warm place for about an hour and a half or until they have almost doubled in size.
  10. Preheat your oven to 400F. If you have a convection oven, use the fan to help to create a crispy exterior. Bake your loaves one tray at a time on the middle rack for about 20 minutes, rotating the baking tray halfway through cooking.
  11. The loaves are done when they are golden brown and sound hollow when tapped from the bottom.
  12. Cool the Coppia Ferrarese on a rack, then serve.
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## 10. **APERITIVO**

### SWEET MISTOCCHINE

Makes about ten 3-inch pancakes

Ingredients:

- 1 1/3 cups chestnut flour
- 1/3 cup plus 2 Tbsp whole milk
- Dried fruits
- Toasted nuts
- Chestnut honey
- Ricotta

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### SWEET MISTOCCHINE

Makes about ten 3-inch pancakes

Preparation:

1. In a medium bowl, whisk the chestnut flour to break up any clumps.
2. Create a well in the middle of the flour and add in 1 cup whole milk.
3. Begin to stir together the flour and the milk with a fork or wooden spoon. You may need to add a couple tablespoons more milk to bring the dough together.
4. Once the mistocchine dough holds its shape, transfer it to a lightly (chestnut) floured surface.
5. Continue to knead the dough until it is smooth and is not sticky, but also not so dry that it is cracking easily.
6. Using a rolling pin, roll the dough to a thickness of no more than 1/4".
7. Cut out the desired shape (a circle) and size (3") of your mistocchine and place on a lightly greased non-stick pan. You can bring the trim of the cutouts back together and re-roll the mistocchine dough as many times as you like since it is naturally gluten-free and you run no risk of making the dough tough by doing so.
8. Once you have rolled out all your mistocchine, cook them on medium heat until both sides are golden brown. This will take about 2-3 minutes per side.

To serve:

- Mix together your favorite combination of toasted nuts and dried fruits. Spoon enough chestnut honey over the fruit and nut mixture so that when you mix it together the fruit and nuts hold together loosely.
  - Lay your mistocchine on a serving plate and then dollop ricotta on each one.
  - Spoon the honeyed fruits and nuts over the top and enjoy while still warm.
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