

05. PIEMONTE

NORTHERN ITALY'S FINEST

By Sara Hauman & Jordan Mackay

The name Piemonte (aka Piedmont) translates to “foot of the mountains,” at which this Italian region does indeed lie. When it comes to food and drink, however, Piemonte is at the foot of nothing. Rather, it's easy to argue that it sits at the pinnacle of all gastronomic regions. Few areas possess a fraction of the iconic products, dishes, wines, and history that makes Piemonte one of the greatest food destinations on the planet. While our modest menu only scratches the surface of Piemonte's heralded cuisine — after all, the Slow Food movement began here — it delivers many of the most significant flavors.

After Sicily, Piemonte is Italy's second largest region by area. Located in northwest Italy, Piemonte sits at the geographical juncture that connects Alpine and Mediterranean Europe. You can sip an espresso while enjoying views of craggy, snow-covered peaks and then steer your convertible down winding roads to a Ligurian beach in only a couple of hours. Surrounded on three sides by rugged mountains (the Alps to the west and north, the Apennines to the south), the massive lowland interior is given to ranges of vine-filled hills and fertile plains devoted to farming and grazing.

Piemonte also sports a powerful industrial reputation centered around its capital city, Turin, which is home to the international headquarters of Fiat and Alfa Romeo. The espresso machine was invented here, as was modern vermouth (i.e., aromatized wine). Piemonte borders Switzerland and France, perhaps explaining the Gallic sensibility in its tastes — you find as much butter as olive oil in the cooking, plenty of melted cheese, and Italy's largest market for Champagne.

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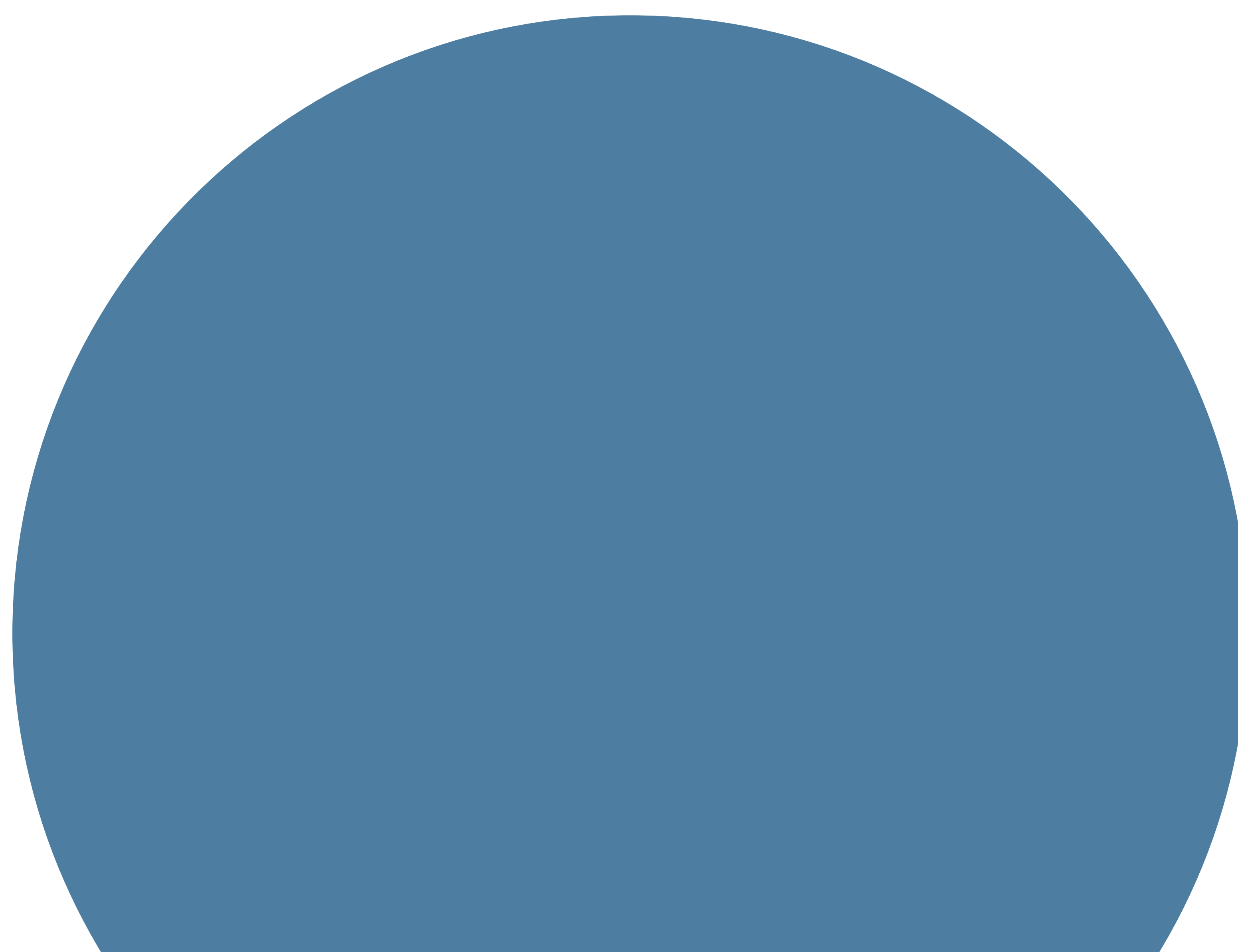
Without question, Piemonte's singular and most iconic food is the white truffle. Completely absurd yet irresistible, truffles are scarce and uniquely aromatic subterranean fungi unearthed by the trained dogs of truffle foragers. Fall and Winter are peak "truffle season," and, depending on the year's yield, prices can be obscene! To prepare the Piemonte menu offered here, you will need to procure a white truffle via a specialty food store, truffle importer, or perhaps a local restaurant willing to part with one. The truffle needn't be very big — a little goes a long way. Truffles are best when applied to rich, simple, and mildly aromatic dishes that allow the truffle's complex and captivating aromatics to dominate. Butter and cheese are practically *de rigueur*.

In our Piemonte Dinner Party menu, you will find two traditional accompaniments for your truffle — a runny egg with melted fontina cheese and a simple risotto. Truffles are always shaved raw over their companion dish, as cooking will destroy its aromatics. Shave with a dedicated truffle shaver or with a small mandoline, and watch your fingers.

Truffles are classic pairings with Piemonte's great red wines made of the Nebbiolo grape, as they grow from the same soils and share distinctly heady perfumes. But connoisseurs know that truffles shine with white wines, which provide aromatic harmony and structural support. Any wine from Massican will do perfectly, especially the Annia or Chardonnay. Beyond Nebbiolo, Piemonte's wine offerings are vast and largely centered around the towns of Alba and Asti. The latter is most famous for its sparkling wines from the floral Moscato grape, but it also produces lighter reds from Barbera, Grignolino, Freisa, and the Ruché grape. Alba is considered the source of Piemonte's finest wines, as it anchors the production of its world-class red grapes — Nebbiolo, Barbera, and Dolcetto — from the Barolo and Barbaresco regions.

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The rest of our menu summons other signature dishes of Piemonte. Fagiolini Tonnato — green beans in tuna sauce — is a lighter version of the classic dish vitello tonnato (made with thinly sliced veal). Though Piemonte is landlocked, preserved fish (also found in its famous sauce, bagna cauda) figure into its cuisine, as medieval salt routes connected the region to the Ligurian coast, leading to a considerable trade of salted fish for cherished Piemontese beef. Piedmont is also considered the world's greatest source of hazelnuts. Nutella, the famous hazelnut-chocolate spread, was invented in Alba, and here you'll find that classic combination rendered in a deliciously simple cookie. After all, Piemonte's culinary sensibilities are no different from the rest of Italy's — simple, flavorful, and pure. They're just a little bit richer.



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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 pending Maison Premiere Almanac.



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OUR PIEMONTE DINNER PARTY MENU

Serves 6-8

1. Appetizer: FAGIOLINI TONNATO
2. Starter: FONDUTA WITH POACHED EGG & WHITE TRUFFLE
3. Main Course: WHITE TRUFFLE RISOTTO
4. Dessert: BACI DI DAMA



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FAGIOLINI TONNATO

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the green beans:

- 1 lb. green beans
- Salt

Ingredients for the tonnato sauce:

- 1 7-oz. jar of tuna packed in olive oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 3 large egg yolks
- 3 anchovy filets
- 1 Lemon
- 1 Tbsp lemon juice
- 2 Tbsp capers, chopped roughly
- Parsley, chopped roughly
- Salt
- Black pepper

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Serves 6-8

Prepare the green beans:

1. Wash and trim the green beans.
2. Bring a large pot of water to a boil, at least 4 quarts
3. Add enough salt to the water that it tastes like the sea.
4. Once boiling, add in one large handful of green beans and cook for about 3 minutes, stirring occasionally.
5. The beans should still be crisp, but not quite tender.
6. Once blanched, remove the beans with a slotted spoon and transfer to a baking tray lined with a tea towel.
7. Spread the beans out into a single layer and let cool to room temperature before serving.
8. Repeat with remaining green beans.

Prepare the tonnato sauce:

1. In a blender or food processor, add the tuna and all its oil.
2. Add in the egg yolks, anchovy filets, and lemon juice.
3. Begin to blend the mixture while slowly streaming in olive oil.
4. The sauce will become thick and creamy.
5. Add a splash of cold water as needed to thin the sauce to the desired consistency — thick but pourable.
6. Transfer the tonnato to a bowl and stir in the chopped capers and parsley.
7. Season the tonnato sauce with a few pinches of salt and as much black pepper as you like.

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FAGIOLINI TONNATO

Serves 6-8

To serve:

1. Place the green beans onto a large plate.
2. Spoon over the tonnato sauce.
3. Microplane lemon zest over the top, then serve with lemon wedges.

05. PIEMONTE**FONDUTA WITH POACHED EGG & WHITE TRUFFLE**

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the fonduta:

- 1 lb. fontina cheese, grated
- 1 cup whole milk
- 4 Tbsp butter
- 6 egg yolks
- Salt

Preparation:

1. Pour the milk over the grated cheese and soak for at least 2 hours.
2. Transfer the cheese and milk mixture to a stainless-steel bowl or the top half of a double boiler and simmer over boiling water until the cheese is melted.
3. Whisk in the butter and egg yolks, and continue to cook the cheese mixture, whisking frequently until thickened.
4. Season as desired with salt.



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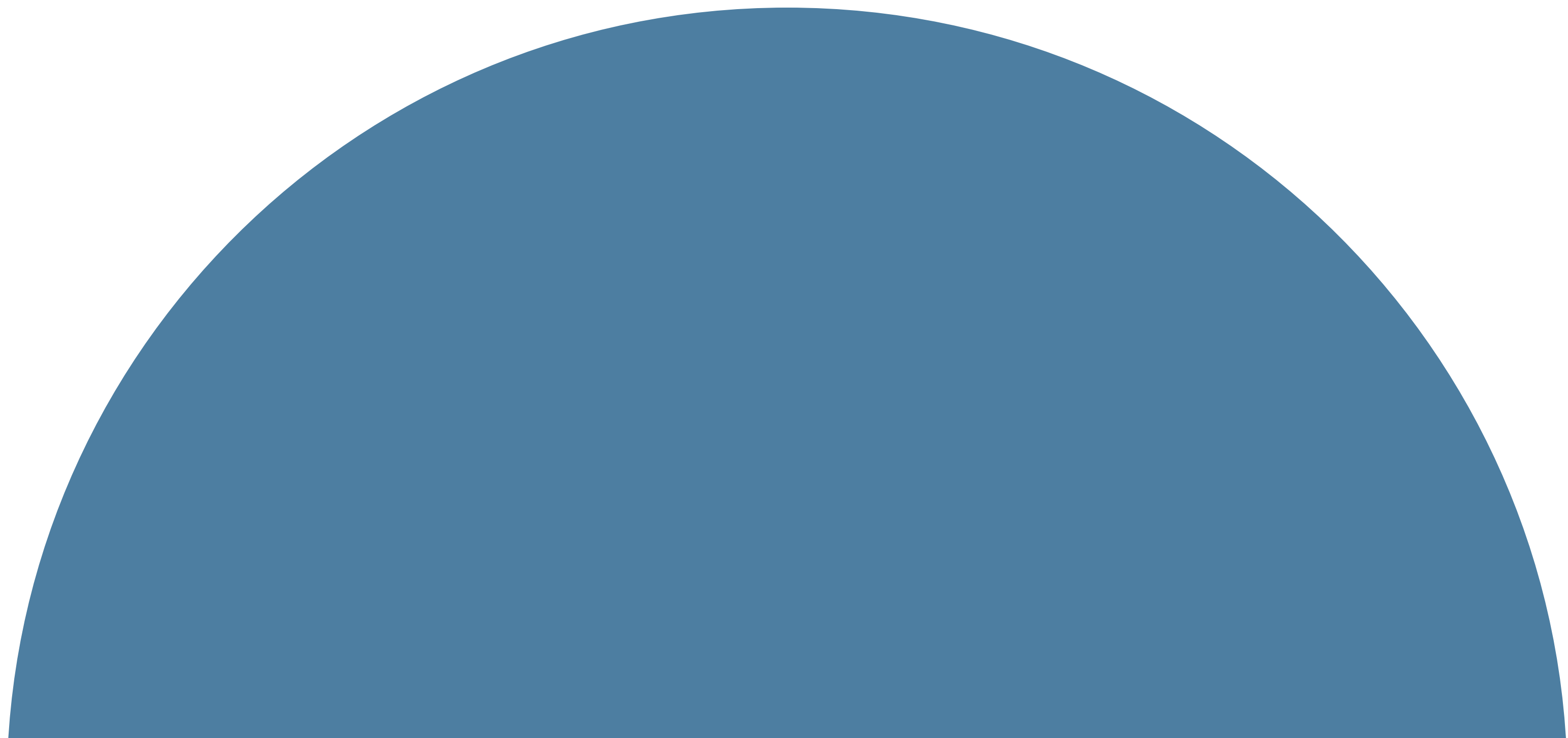
FONDUTA WITH POACHED EGG & WHITE TRUFFLE

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the poached eggs:

- 1 tsp salt
- 2 tsp white vinegar
- 8 eggs at refrigerator temperature

Preparation:

1. Fill a 2-quart sauce pot halfway full of water.
 2. Add in the salt and vinegar and bring to a simmer over medium heat.
 3. Crack one cold egg into a small cup or ramekin.
 4. Using a spoon, quickly stir the simmering water in one direction creating a whirlpool.
 5. Add the egg to the center of the whirlpool.
 6. Turn off the heat, cover the pot with a lid, and let the egg poach undisturbed for 5 minutes. Remove the egg delicately with a slotted spoon and then onto a paper towel.
 7. You can poach up to 4 eggs at a time using this method.
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FONDUTA WITH POACHED EGG & WHITE TRUFFLE

Serves 6-8

To serve:

- White truffle
- Chives, finely chopped
- Red pepper flakes
- Crusty baguette

1. Place the poached eggs onto a serving platter.
2. Drizzle the fonduta over the eggs.
3. Sprinkle with chives and / or red pepper flakes (optional).
4. Then generously shave white truffle over the top of the dish.
5. Serve with a crusty baguette to mop up all the sauce.

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WHITE TRUFFLE RISOTTO

Serves 6-8

Pantry items needed for this recipe:

- Cheesecloth
- Butcher's twine

Ingredients for the parmesan stock (makes 10 cups):

- ¼ lb. parmesan rinds
- 3 sprigs thyme
- 2 cloves garlic, smashed

Preparation:

1. Wrap the parmesan rind, thyme, and smashed garlic in cheesecloth and fasten with butcher's twine to create a pouch.
2. Fill a large pot with 12 cups of water.
3. Add in the cheesecloth package and bring the pot of water to a simmer.
4. Let the pot simmer for 45 minutes, then remove from the heat and cool.
5. Remove the cheesecloth pouch once the liquid has cooled and discard.
6. The parmesan stock can be made in advance and stored in the refrigerator for up to one week or in the freezer for up to two months.

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WHITE TRUFFLE RISOTTO

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the risotto:

- 10 cups parmesan stock
- 6 Tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- ½ large white onion, diced small
- 5 Tbsp cold butter, cubed
- 2 cups risotto rice (Carnaroli rice from northern Italy if available)
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 2 cups parmesan, grated
- Salt
- Black Pepper
- White Truffles

Preparation:

1. Bring the parmesan stock to a simmer.
2. Heat the olive oil in a 6-quart pot over medium heat.
3. Add in the diced onion and a pinch of salt and cook, stirring occasionally until the onions are soft and translucent.
4. Add in the cold butter and melt.
5. Once melted, add in the rice and stir, ensuring each grain is coated with fat.
6. Toast the rice for 3-5 minutes while continuously stirring.
7. Add the wine and allow to simmer.
8. Stir occasionally until the wine is fully evaporated.
9. Begin adding in the simmering parmesan stock to the rice ½ cup to 1 cup at a time.
10. Let the rice cook, stirring frequently.

(continued)



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Serves 6-8

Preparation (continued):

11. Allow parmesan stock to fully absorb into the rice before adding more.
12. Cook the rice until it is al dente, about 30 minutes.
13. The risotto should have more of a thick, soupy texture rather than a solid, mushy texture.
14. Once cooked, remove the pot from the heat and slowly add in the grated parmesan.
15. Season with salt and black pepper as desired.
16. Serve immediately with freshly shaved white truffles over the top.

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BACI DI DAMA

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- 1 ¼ cup hazelnuts, toasted and de-skinned
- 1 cup rice flour
- 3 ½ oz. butter, softened at room temperature
- ½ cup sugar
- ½ tsp salt
- 2 Tbsp water
- 2 oz. bittersweet chocolate

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BACI DI DAMA

Serves 6-8

Preparation:

1. Place the toasted hazelnuts in a food processor and pulse until they become a very fine texture.
 2. Transfer the hazelnuts to a bowl, then add in the rice flour and mix.
 3. Add the softened butter in pieces, along with the sugar and salt, then mix with your hands until the butter is integrated throughout the dough.
 4. Add the water and knead the dough until it holds together and becomes very smooth.
 5. Divide the dough into 3 equal portions.
 6. Roll each portion into a $\frac{3}{4}$ " log, place on a parchment lined baking sheet and then chill thoroughly in your refrigerator.
 7. Preheat the oven to 325F and prepare two baking sheets with parchment paper.
 8. Work with one chilled log of dough at a time, slice off about $\frac{1}{2}$ " piece of the log then roll it in the palm of your hands to create a ball.
 9. Place the dough ball onto the prepared baking sheet with space in between each cookie.
 10. Bake for 10-14 minutes; halfway through, rotate the baking sheets, the cookies should be golden brown on top.
 11. Remove the cookies from the baking sheet and place onto a wire rack and let cool completely.
 12. Melt the chocolate in a small, metal bowl over a pot of simmering water.
 13. Place a drop of chocolate on the flat end of one cookie and make a sandwich using the flat side of another cookie.
 14. Place the sandwich cookies on a wire rack and let the chocolate harden.
 15. Baci di Dama can be made up to a week in advance and held in an airtight container.
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