

02. LIGURIA

SUMMER IN LIGURIA

By Sara Hauman & Jordan Mackay

Liguria is Italy's tiara, a thin arc of territory glimmering gloriously atop its northwest Mediterranean coast. Three hundred days' worth of sun warms this coastline, the Italian Riviera, upon which stretches of sandy beach intermingle with steep coastal cliffs and cubist seaside villages, where sunglasses-clad tourists sip aperitifs while gazing out over picturesque, colorful fishing boats.

The vast majority of Ligurians live close to its famous, but narrow, seaside not just because it's lovely, but because this region is mostly mountains. The Alps and Apennines converge here, bounding directly and dramatically from the sea, offering almost no flatlands on which to build or cultivate.

The third smallest region in Italy, Liguria is anchored by Genoa, the great and historical city that dominated the seas for centuries during the Middle Ages. To the west and east, smaller towns such as Portofino, San Remo, and the quintet that comprises Cinque Terre are known for their iconic harbors.

Liguria's celebrated culinary offerings are few but significant, starting with the iridescently emerald sauce, pesto. Here, pesto is taken as seriously as tan lines on the beach. Proper pesto should be hand ground with a mortar and pestle using local products which are like totems to Ligurians. Highly perfumed Genovese basil is cultivated in the hills behind Genoa. Locals use only the baby leaves for pesto, while featuring basil in many other dishes, such as in the aioli and salad featured on the Massican menu. Pine nuts—pignoli—grow in the pine forests on Liguria's border with Tuscany and are a pesto stalwart. (Chapter 4, part one of our primer on pasta, will highlight Pesto alla Genovese with trofie pasta.)

02. LIGURIA

Holding any pesto together—and the entirety of Liguria, for that matter—is the region’s celebrated olive oil, prized for its rich, buttery, mellow flavor, and low level of bitterness. Some of the best oils are made from the Taggiasca variety, a small, dark, fruity olive that’s also great for eating. You’ll taste it in both this menu’s composed salad and braised rabbit. Furthermore, Ligurian olive oil’s light, gentle flavor makes it a natural with the local seafood, plentifully plucked from coastal waters.

The majority of Liguria is hilly and mountainous, which is why it’s also common to find dishes like the dinner party’s main course, a traditional braised rabbit. Game and foraged items like porcini and truffles constantly make their way down from the hills onto the tables at the coast.

Of course, to wash it all down you need Ligurian wine, most of which is white, befitting a culture heavy on fish, herbs, and vegetables. Liguria hosts some of Italy’s most rugged territory, with many vineyards carved painstakingly into sheer, terraced cliffs. While challenging to cultivate, the cliffside locales protect the vines from freezing northern winds while drenching them in sunlight and moderate seaborn breezes. Soils here are nutrient poor and limestone-rich, promoting zippy minerality from such grapes as Pigato and Vermentino. Red wines are only twenty-five percent of the production in Liguria, but light, spicy, native varieties like Rossese pair beautifully with olives, richer fish, and game.

Ligurian wine can be tough to find. Not a lot is produced, and wineries tend to be very small, selling most of their wine to the local market, leaving little for export. If you can’t easily find a bottle, don’t fear. With these dishes and other Ligurian inspirations, look for bright, refreshing, flavorful whites and drink them chilled on a summer night while imagining flower and herb-scented air over a gentle sea breeze.

02. **LIGURIA**

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.

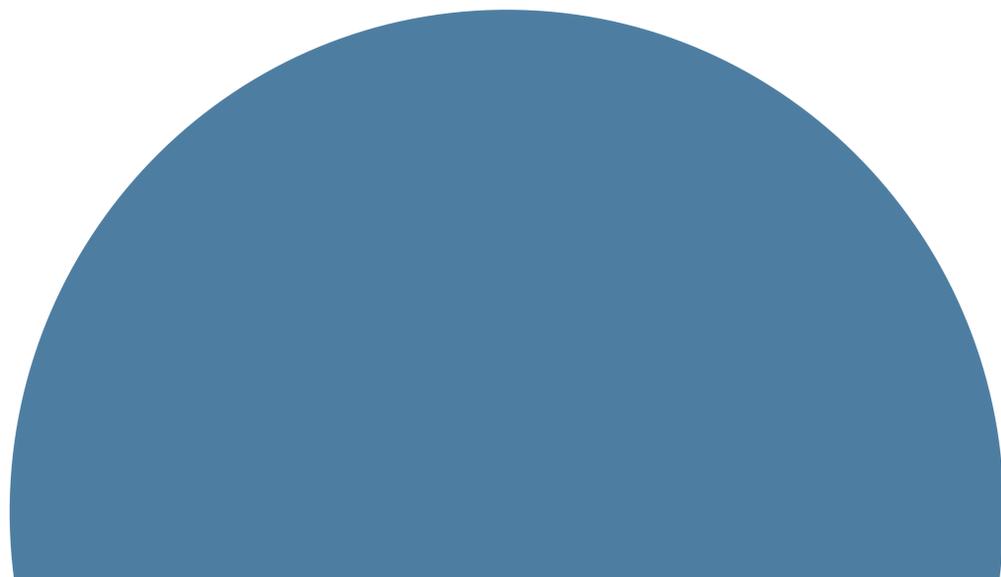


02. LIGURIA

OUR LIGURIAN DINNER PARTY MENU

Serves 6-8

1. Snacks: VEGETABLE FRITTO MISTO WITH GENOVESE AIOLI
2. Salad: CONDIGLIONE (ITALIAN NICOISE WITH TUNA VINAIGRETTE)
3. Starter: GRILLED RED PEPPER & WATERMELON GAZPACHO WITH JAMON-IBERICO-WRAPPED PRAWNS
4. Main Course: BRAISED RABBIT WITH SWEET PEPPERS



02. **LIGURIA**

VEGETABLE FRITTO MISTO WITH GENOVESE AIOLI

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- 1 lb. assorted seasonal vegetables, washed and trimmed
- 2 cups panko breadcrumbs
- 1 lemon, cut into wedges

For the batter:

- 3 oz. cornstarch
- 2 ¼ oz. all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 whole egg, beaten
- 2 oz. vodka
- 4 oz. soda water

Preparation:

1. Combine the cornstarch, flour, and salt in a small bowl. Add in the beaten egg, vodka and soda water and then whisk until just combined.
2. Let the batter rest in the freezer for about 15-20 minutes, then transfer to the refrigerator until you are ready to use it.
3. The batter can be made up to 1 hour in advance.

02. **LIGURIA**

VEGETABLE FRITTO MISTO WITH GENOVESE AIOLI

Serves 6-8

For the pesto aioli (makes 1 pint):

- 2 oz. basil leaves (about 2 ½ - 3 cups)
- 1/3 cup toasted pine nuts
- 3 garlic cloves
- 2 lemons, zested and juiced
- 1 Tbsp. water
- ½ tsp. salt
- 2 egg yolks
- 1 cup extra virgin olive oil

Preparation:

1. Place the basil leaves, pine nuts, garlic, lemon juice, lemon zest, water, and salt in the base of a small food processor or blender.
2. Pulse the mixture until well blended and homogenized.
3. Add in the 2 egg yolks.
4. Process the mixture on low speed while slowly streaming in the olive oil.
5. The mixture will emulsify and thicken.
6. Keep refrigerated for up to a week.

02. **LIGURIA**

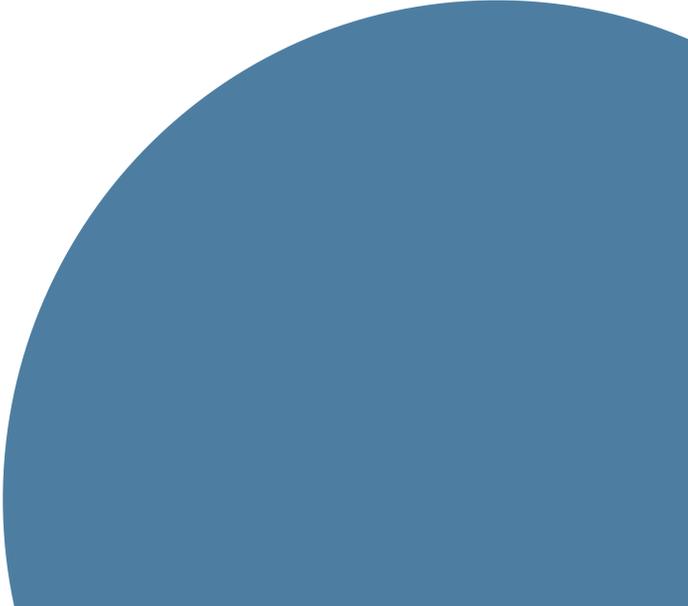
VEGETABLE FRITTO MISTO WITH GENOVESE AIOLI

Serves 6-8

Frying your vegetables:

1. If you do not have a deep fat fryer, please use a high-sided, heavy bottomed pot filled with at least 3 inches of canola, vegetable, or peanut oil.
2. Heat your fry oil to 375F.
3. Remove your batter from the refrigerator.
4. Place the panko breadcrumbs into a bowl or onto a small baking sheet.
5. When you are ready to begin frying, dip the vegetables into the wet batter and then immediately transfer to the bowl or baking sheet filled with breadcrumbs and coat the vegetables thoroughly.
6. Place the vegetables into the fryer and fry until golden brown, about 3-5 minutes.
7. Once cooked, remove the vegetables using a slotted spoon or strainer, and place the vegetables onto a baking sheet with a rack or paper towel to drain any excess oil.
8. Serve your fried vegetables with the pesto aioli and the lemon wedges.

Cooking tips:

- The batter will be cold from the refrigerator; to maintain the temperature of the frying oil, do not overcrowd the fryer with vegetables.
 - Once the vegetables are drained of any excess oil, transfer them to a separate baking sheet and place them in the oven on the lowest temperature setting.
- 

02. LIGURIA

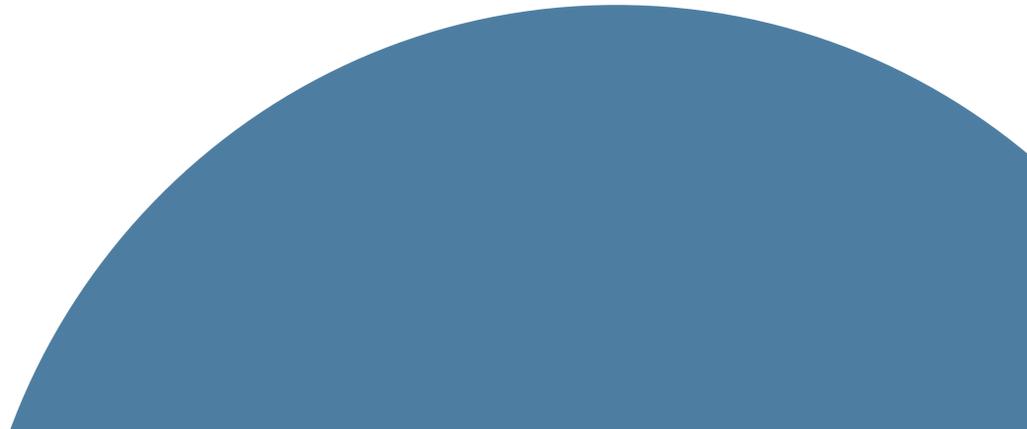
CONDIGLIONE (ITALIAN NICOISE WITH TUNA VINAIGRETTE)

Serves 6-8

Salad Ingredients:

- 2 oz. Ligurian taggiasche olives, pits removed and lightly crushed
- 4 sweet peppers, de-seeded and sliced into ¼” rings
- 8 oz. cherry tomatoes, halved
- 3-4 sprigs of basil, torn
- 10-12 oz. green beans, trimmed and blanched
- 1 lb. small waxy potatoes, cooked and chilled
- 3-4 farm fresh eggs, boiled
- 8 anchovies
- 3 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- Flaky sea salt
- Freshly cracked black pepper

Prepare the green beans:

1. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.
 2. Submerge the green beans and cook for 2-3 minutes.
 3. The green beans will not be thoroughly cooked at this point.
 4. Remove the green beans using a slotted spoon or strainer and place onto a baking sheet, spread out in one layer.
 5. Place the baking sheet into the freezer or refrigerator for 3-5 minutes to cool the green beans down quickly.
 6. Remove from the cold and reserve.
 7. Tip: These can be cooked up to, but no more than, two days in advance.
- 

02. LIGURIA

CONDIGLIONE (ITALIAN NICOISE WITH TUNA VINAIGRETTE)

Serves 6-8

Cook the potatoes:

1. Place the potatoes in a medium sized pot and cover with water.
2. Add a couple pinches of salt and bring to a gentle simmer.
3. Lower the heat so the water is steaming, but not moving, and cook the potatoes until very tender, about 45 minutes.
4. Once fully cooked, remove the potatoes from the warm water and cool them to room temperature.
5. Once cooled, cut the potatoes into halves or quarters.
6. Tip: After the potatoes are cooked, they will keep in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. If you are storing in the refrigerator, don't cut the potatoes until you are ready to serve them. They will keep their moisture and retain their texture much better if they remain whole.

Boil the eggs:

1. Submerge the eggs into boiling water for 8 minutes.
2. Remove and place into an ice bath until cool.
3. Tap the eggs lightly on a hard, flat surface and peel.
4. Rinse to remove any small bits of eggshell, then quarter or half the hard-boiled eggs.
5. Tip: Boiled eggs will keep well in your refrigerator for up to a week but keep the eggs in their shell until you plan to use them. This will reduce the naturally occurring sulfur smell that comes from boiled eggs and reduce the likelihood they will lose their egg shape.

02. **LIGURIA**

CONDIGLIONE (ITALIAN NICOISE WITH TUNA VINAIGRETTE)

Serves 6-8

Tuna vinaigrette ingredients (makes about 1 pint):

- 1 medium shallot
- 2 Tbsp. red-wine vinegar
- 1 jar (6-8 oz.) of tuna in olive oil
- 3 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 3 Tbsp. water
- 1 tsp. salt
- 15 grinds black pepper

Prepare the vinaigrette:

1. Mince one shallot and place in a small non-reactive bowl.
2. Pour the red-wine vinegar over the shallot and set aside.
3. Empty the jar of tuna and its oil into a blender or small food processor.
4. Add the extra olive oil, water, and salt to the blender or food processor.
5. Blend until smooth and well combined.
6. After the shallots have marinated in the vinegar for at least 10 minutes, combine the tuna mixture with the shallots.
7. Mix in freshly cracked black pepper and reserve.
8. Tip: This vinaigrette can be made and refrigerated up to one week in advance.

To assemble the salad:

1. In a large bowl, toss the olives, sweet peppers, cherry tomatoes, torn basil leaves, green beans, and potatoes with a pinch of flaky salt, a few grinds of freshly cracked peppercorn and the olive oil.
2. Coat the vegetables thoroughly, then arrange them on a large serving bowl or platter.
3. Drizzle as much of the tuna vinaigrette over the vegetables as desired.
4. Place the boiled egg, anchovies, and a few more torn basil leaves over the top of the salad.

02. LIGURIA

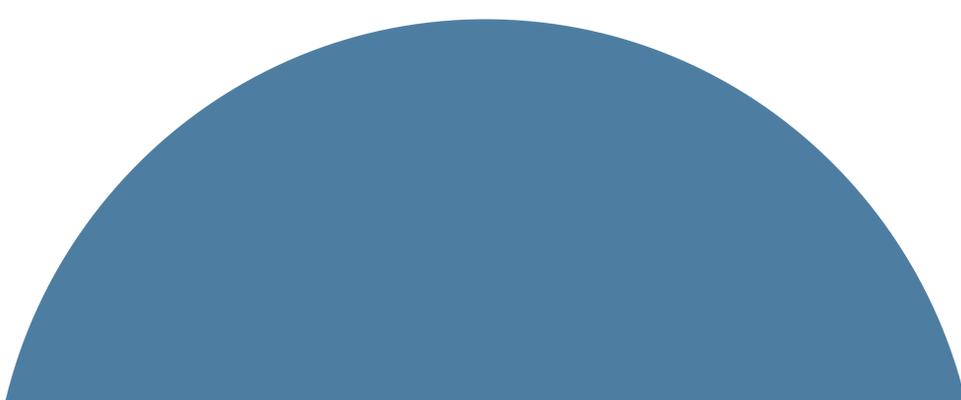
GRILLED RED PEPPER & WATERMELON GAZPACHO WITH JAMON-IBERICO-WRAPPED PRAWNS

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the grilled red pepper and watermelon gazpacho:

- 10 oz. sweet red peppers
- 1 tsp. grapeseed oil
- 1 seedless watermelon, about 5 lbs.
- 2 tsp. salt
- 1 Tbsp. red-wine vinegar

Preparation:

1. Toss the sweet red peppers in a small bowl with grapeseed oil.
 2. Place the peppers on a hot grill and char the outside of each pepper.
 3. Once charred, place the peppers back in the bowl and cover tightly with plastic wrap.
 4. Let the peppers steam for 20 minutes.
 5. Using a knife, remove the rind of the watermelon.
 6. Cut the watermelon into slabs approximately 1/2" - 3/4" thick.
 7. Reserve half the watermelon slabs.
 8. Place the other half of the watermelon slabs onto the hottest part of the grill and cook for 3-4 minutes on each side, or until you have dark grill marks.
 9. Remove the charred skin of the red peppers, the stem, and the seeds.
 10. Place the grilled peppers, reserved fresh watermelon, salt, and red-wine vinegar into a blender or food processor.
 11. Process the mixture until mixed well and homogenous.
 12. The gazpacho should have a little texture to it rather than being perfectly smooth.
- 

02. LIGURIA

GRILLED RED PEPPER & WATERMELON GAZPACHO WITH JAMON-IBERICO-WRAPPED PRAWNS

Serves 6-8

Ingredients for the prawns:

- 12-16 fresh spot prawns, heads-on
- 12-16 slices jamon iberico
- 12-16 small wooden skewers
- Grilled watermelon slabs
- Small red onion, thinly sliced
- 3 sprigs mint
- 3 sprigs basil
- Pinch of red chili flakes
- Extra virgin olive oil for finishing

Preparation:

1. Remove the body shell of each prawn, leaving the head and tail still intact.
2. Insert the skewer at the base of the tail and up through the body of the prawn until it exits through the head.
3. Wrap 1 slice of jamon iberico around each body of the prawns.
4. Grill on the hottest part of a grill, about 1½ to 2 minutes on each side.

To assemble the dish:

1. Ladle the gazpacho onto a large serving bowl or platter with a tall lip.
2. Dice the grilled watermelon into ½” - ¾” cubes and arrange on top of the gazpacho.
3. Remove the grilled prawns from the skewers and place on top of the grilled watermelon and gazpacho.
4. Arrange thinly sliced red onions, torn mint, and basil over the top of the prawns.
5. Finish the dish with a pinch of red chili flakes and a healthy drizzle of olive oil.

02. LIGURIA

BRAISED RABBIT WITH SWEET PEPPERS

Serves 6-8

Ingredients:

- 1 fresh whole rabbit, butchered*
- Salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 oz. grapeseed oil
- 1 cup medium yellow onion, diced small
- ½ cup of celery, diced small
- ½ cup of carrot, diced small
- ½ tsp. salt
- 1 cup white wine
- 1 sprig rosemary
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 oz. Ligurian taggiasche olives, pitted and crushed
- 8 oz. sweet peppers, halved and de-seeded
- 1 oz. parmesan rind
- 3 cups chicken or vegetable stock
- ¼ cup pine nuts
- 1 Tbsp. fresh oregano, chopped
- 1 loaf of crusty bread

You can butcher the whole rabbit at home, or request the following from your local purveyor:

- Seven primary parts; 2 legs, 2 arms, 2 rib cages, 1 saddle (cut into two pieces).
- Please ask the butcher to reserve the liver, kidneys, and heart from the rabbit cavity. As well as the spine, pelvic bone and any extra rabbit fat, meat, or parts. Keep these extra pieces refrigerated during the preparation until added to the braise.

02. LIGURIA

BRAISED RABBIT WITH SWEET PEPPERS

Serves 6-8

Preparation:

1. Season all parts of the rabbit with a few large pinches of salt and freshly ground black pepper.
2. Heat a large, heavy bottomed Dutch oven or braising pan, then add the grapeseed oil.
3. When the grapeseed oil begins to smoke, reduce the heat to medium and then add in the seasoned rabbit pieces.
4. Brown the rabbit pieces on both sides and then remove from the pan.
5. Once all the rabbit pieces are browned and removed, there will be a layer of residue on the bottom of the pan.
6. Add in the diced onion, carrot, celery, and salt.
7. Using a wooden spoon or heat-proof spatula, stir the vegetables every couple of minutes ensuring to scrape the residue off the bottom of the pan.
8. Once the vegetables have released most of their moisture and softened, about 8-10 minutes, add in the white wine, rosemary, and bay leaves.
9. Reduce the mixture by 1/3, and then add in the crushed olives, sweet peppers, parmesan rind, chicken stock, and pine nuts.
10. Add the browned rabbit pieces back into the large pot or braising pan, along with the spine, extra rabbit pieces, and pelvic bone.
11. The rabbit pieces should be submerged under the liquid, if not add more stock until the rabbit is fully covered.
12. Bring the liquid to a simmer, then cover, reduce the heat, and let cook slowly for 45 minutes.
13. Remove the lid and add in the rabbit liver, heart, and kidney to the braising pan.
14. Continue to simmer the rabbit without a lid for another 30-45 minutes or until the rabbit is tender enough to fall off the bone.
15. Remove the bay leaves, rosemary, and the rabbit spine and pelvic bones.
16. For a thicker sauce, remove all the rabbit parts and continue to cook the liquid down to your desired consistency.
17. Tip: This dish can be made up to three days ahead of time and then re-heated.

02. LIGURIA

BRAISED RABBIT WITH SWEET PEPPERS

Serves 6-8

To assemble the dish:

1. Arrange the braised rabbit on a large serving platter.
2. Spoon over the sweet pepper sauce.
3. Finish this dish with a healthy splash of extra virgin olive oil and fresh oregano.
4. Enjoy with a crusty baguette!