

THE ITALIAN-AMERICAN DINNER PARTY

By Sara Hauman & Jordan Mackay

The language of Italian-American food has its own particular deliciousness. Pronouncing slangy words like proscuit, gabagool, and motz bring as many smiles as chewing actual prosciutto, capicola, mortadella, and mozzarella. You don't have to be from Jersey to relish speaking and eating this way.

At this point in our culinary and cultural history, Italian-Americans are really just Americans. Italian-American food is in the blood of everyone who grew up in America, regardless of skin color, native language, or heritage. We all grew up eating this food, whether your generation knew Chef Boyardee as a household hero (his canned ravioli along with Campbell's Spaghetti-O's were as ubiquitous as a PB&J) or you came of age when boxed Kraft Mac & Cheese ascended in its blaze of astronaut orange. These fixes of modernity only emphasized the crazy fusion of the Old and New World embodied in Italian-American cuisine.

Over the last 100 years, America's appetite for all things Italian has only grown. Over time, we not only made its trappings our own — Bolognese became bolon-yaze, and Italian restaurants became 'red sauce joints.' Fettuccine Alfredo and turkey tetrazzini were never Italian to begin with. Manicotti (manicott!) is not even an Italian word. We Americanized pizza — not just with pineapple and bacon — but as a fast-food juggernaut.

It's not all kitsch. Americans — on the never-ending quest to uncover our roots — have also repeatedly returned to the source in search of authenticity, injecting a healthy dose of authentic Italian DNA into the Italian-American gene pool. Thus it's de rigueur for ambitious young pastaphiles to apprentice under real nonnas in Bologna, young pizzaiolos to certify in Naples, and for enterprising butchers to learn the art of salumi in Emilia-Romagna.

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But, for tonight, pull out your red-checker tablecloth. This menu celebrates Italian-American cuisine in all its DiMaggio, Sinatra, and Soprano-driven splendor. It is propelled by the notion that a big pot of red sauce will get us through anything, from heartbreak to homesickness. So, make that sauce in advance — it only gets better after 24 hours. And, yes, Italian-Americans love garlic more than real Italians, so revel in six cloves. Meatballs? They swim in the red sauce. Broccoli Rabe and Fajool? They add earthy bitterness and fiber to keep us from imbibing too much (red) sauce. And with the Chicken Parm ... don't forget the mozz!

There's only one thing to drink with this menu. Tumblers in hand (leave your fancy stems on the shelf), let us toast the winemakers and grape growers in California who preserved America's wine industry during Prohibition and revived it in the ensuing decades. Curiously, no one's succeeded in this country with classic Italian varieties like Nebbiolo and Sangiovese. But the round, plump red field blends from Italian-American winegrowing families were the backbone of the industry - true American mongrels, mixing Italian, French, and whatever else was on hand.

Of course, one of the beautiful things about red sauce and Italian-American food is that red and white wine go beautifully with it. For this meal, Massican — a California wine inspired by Italian style and made by a true Italian-American from Brooklyn who trained in Italy — would be a fitting choice on the white side. For the red, maybe search out a good blend from Sonoma or Mendocino made by a family whose last name ends in "i." Indeed, no matter your last name, we are all Italian-Americans on this night, eating our native cuisine.

**16. ITALIAN
AMERICAN**

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 recently released Maison Premiere Almanac.



**16. ITALIAN
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OUR ITALIAN AMERICAN DINNER PARTY MENU

Serves 4-6

1. RED SAUCE
2. MEATBALLS
3. BROCCOLI RABE & CANNELLINI BEANS
4. MANICOTTI
5. CHICKEN PARM



16. ITALIAN
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RED SAUCE


Makes about 1 quart

Ingredients:

- 2 28 oz. cans whole tomatoes—plum or San Marzano, crushed into small pieces by hand
- ¼ cup olive oil
- 6 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 tsp. dried oregano
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 tsp. red pepper flakes
- 1 medium carrot, peeled and cut into large chunks
- 1 medium yellow onion, peeled and cut into quarters
- 1 large bunch fresh basil
- ½ cup torn basil leaves
- Sea salt
- Freshly cracked pepper

**16. ITALIAN
AMERICAN****RED SAUCE**
(continued)

Preparation:

1. Preheat your oven to 300F.
 2. Heat oil in a heavy-bottomed, oven-proof pot or Dutch oven over medium heat.
 3. Cook the garlic, stirring frequently, about 1-2 minutes.
 4. Add dried oregano and pepper flakes and cook for another minute.
 5. Add in half of the crushed tomatoes, carrot, onion, bay leaf, and basil.
 6. Cover the pot and place in the oven, stirring every 1-1 ½ hours.
 7. Cook the red sauce for 5-6 hours, until the sauce has reduced by about half.
 8. Remove the pot from the oven, remove the basil stem, onion, carrot, and discard.
 9. Add the remaining crushed tomatoes to the sauce and stir to combine.
 10. Season generously with salt, freshly cracked pepper, and torn basil leaves.
 11. This sauce can be served immediately, refrigerated for up to 1 week, or frozen for up to 1 month.
 12. To reheat this sauce, add a few splashes of water and bring it up to temperature gently to avoid scorching the bottom.
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MEATBALLS

Serves 4-6, about 16 meatballs

Ingredients:


- ½ cup dried breadcrumbs
- ½ cup milk
- 1 large egg
- ½ cup grated parmesan cheese
- ¼ cup chopped parsley
- 2 tsp. salt
- 10 grinds freshly cracked black pepper
- ½ lb. ground beef
- ½ lb. ground pork
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- ½ cup yellow onion, grated on the large holes of a box grater

Preparation:

1. Combine the milk and breadcrumbs in a small bowl, mix thoroughly, and set aside.
2. Whisk the egg in a large bowl, then add the parmesan, parsley, salt, and pepper. Whisk to combine.
3. Add the ground beef and pork to the egg mixture, using clean hands to mix the egg into the ground meat thoroughly.
4. Add the onions, garlic, and soaked breadcrumbs to the meat mixture. Mix well with your hands to incorporate, pinching the mixture between your fingers to avoid over-kneading.
5. Form the meat into meatballs of your desired size. 2-2 ½ inches recommended.

**16. ITALIAN
AMERICAN****MEATBALLS**
(continued)

Cook the meatballs:

1. You can place the meatballs directly into warm red sauce and simmer until thoroughly cooked.
 2. Meatballs can also be placed on a baking sheet and broiled on high until browned and cooked through - registering 165F on an instant-read thermometer.
 3. Alternatively, you can heat $\frac{1}{4}$ cup olive oil in a large pan. Add the meatballs to the pan, leaving about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch between each meatball. Brown the meatballs on medium heat, turning every couple of minutes to ensure browning on all sides and cooked through.
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16. ITALIAN
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BROCCOLI RABE & CANNELLINI BEANS

Serves 4-6


Ingredients:

- 2 bunches broccoli rabe
- 2 Tbsp olive oil
- 2 oz. diced pancetta or bacon (or make this vegetarian and substitute ¼ cup olive oil)
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ½ tsp. red pepper flakes
- 1 ½ cup dry white wine
- 14 oz. canned cannellini beans, drained and rinsed
- Zest and juice of 1 lemon
- ½ cup grated parmesan cheese

**16. ITALIAN
AMERICAN****BROCCOLI RABE & CANNELLINI BEANS**

(continued)

Preparation:

1. Trim the tough parts of the stem off of the broccoli rabe.
 2. Then, roughly cut the broccoli rabe into 1-1 ½ inch pieces.
 3. In a large pot, add the olive oil and pancetta and cook on medium heat, stirring frequently, until crispy.
 4. Add in the minced garlic and red pepper flakes and cook for about 1 minute more.
 5. Add the broccoli rabe to the pot and stir to combine with the pancetta and olive oil mixture.
 6. Add in the white wine and cook the broccoli rabe, stirring occasionally, until tender and most of the liquid has evaporated.
 7. Add in the cannellini beans, stirring to combine, and heat through.
 8. Remove from the heat and stir in the lemon zest and juice.
 9. Serve immediately with grated parmesan on top.
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16. ITALIAN
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MANICOTTI

Serves 4-6

Ingredients:

- 16 manicotti shells
- 2 quarts red sauce
- 2 cups skim-milk ricotta
- 8 oz. shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup grated parmesan, divided
- 10 oz. chopped frozen spinach, defrosted and wrung dry in a kitchen towel
- 2 large eggs
- 5 grates of nutmeg
- Sea salt
- Freshly cracked black pepper

16. ITALIAN AMERICAN

MANICOTTI

(continued)

Preparation:

1. Preheat your oven to 350F.
2. Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil.
3. Cook the manicotti shells just shy of being al dente.
4. Drain the pasta, then rinse with cool water. Lay the shells out in a single layer on a baking sheet lined with a kitchen towel and set aside.
5. In a large bowl, combine the ricotta, mozzarella, ½ cup parmesan cheese, spinach, eggs, salt, pepper, and nutmeg. Mix well.
6. Place the mixture into a large Ziplock bag and cut off a small piece of the corner of the bag. You can also use a piping bag if you have one on hand.
7. Spread ½ of the red sauce into a large baking dish and spread evenly. Using your Ziplock or piping bag, fill each manicotti shells with the cheese mixture, then place in a single layer, side by side, into the baking dish on top of the red sauce.
8. Once all the shells have been filled, pour the rest of the red sauce over the top and sprinkle evenly with the remaining grated parmesan cheese.
9. Bake in the oven for 35-40 minutes or until golden brown and bubbly.
10. Cool for about 15 minutes, then serve.

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CHICKEN PARM

Serves 6

Ingredients:

- 6 boneless, skinless chicken breasts, pounded thin
- Sea salt
- Freshly ground black pepper
- 2 cups flour
- 4 eggs, lightly beaten
- 2-3 cups panko breadcrumbs
- 1 cup grated parmesan, plus more for sprinkling
- 1 ½ cups vegetable oil
- 1-quart red sauce
- 1 lb. fresh mozzarella
- Torn basil leaves

16. ITALIAN AMERICAN

CHICKEN PARM (continued)

Preparation:

1. Preheat your oven to 400F.
 2. Season the chicken breasts with salt and pepper on both sides.
 3. Add the flour to a large bowl with a few generous pinches of salt and grinds of black pepper.
 4. In a separate bowl, add the eggs and season with a few pinches of salt and grinds of black pepper.
 5. In a third large bowl, combine the breadcrumbs and grated parmesan cheese.
 6. Coat each chicken breast in flour and then shake off the excess.
 7. Then, dip each chicken breast into the egg mixture. Remove, then transfer immediately to the breadcrumbs.
 8. Make sure each chicken breast is thoroughly coated in breadcrumbs. Feel free to submerge the chicken breasts in the breadcrumbs for at least 3-5 minutes to ensure they are fully coated.
 9. Heat the oil in a large pan on medium heat.
 10. Just before the oil begins to smoke, add in the breaded chicken breasts, making sure not to overcrowd the pan.
 11. Cook each side until golden brown, then transfer to a large baking dish.
 12. Top each chicken breast with about 1/4 cup of the red sauce and a couple of slices of mozzarella cheese.
 13. Bake for about 5-7 minutes in the oven until the cheese has melted and the chicken is cooked through.
 14. Remove from the oven and garnish with more grated parmesan cheese and torn basil leaves.
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