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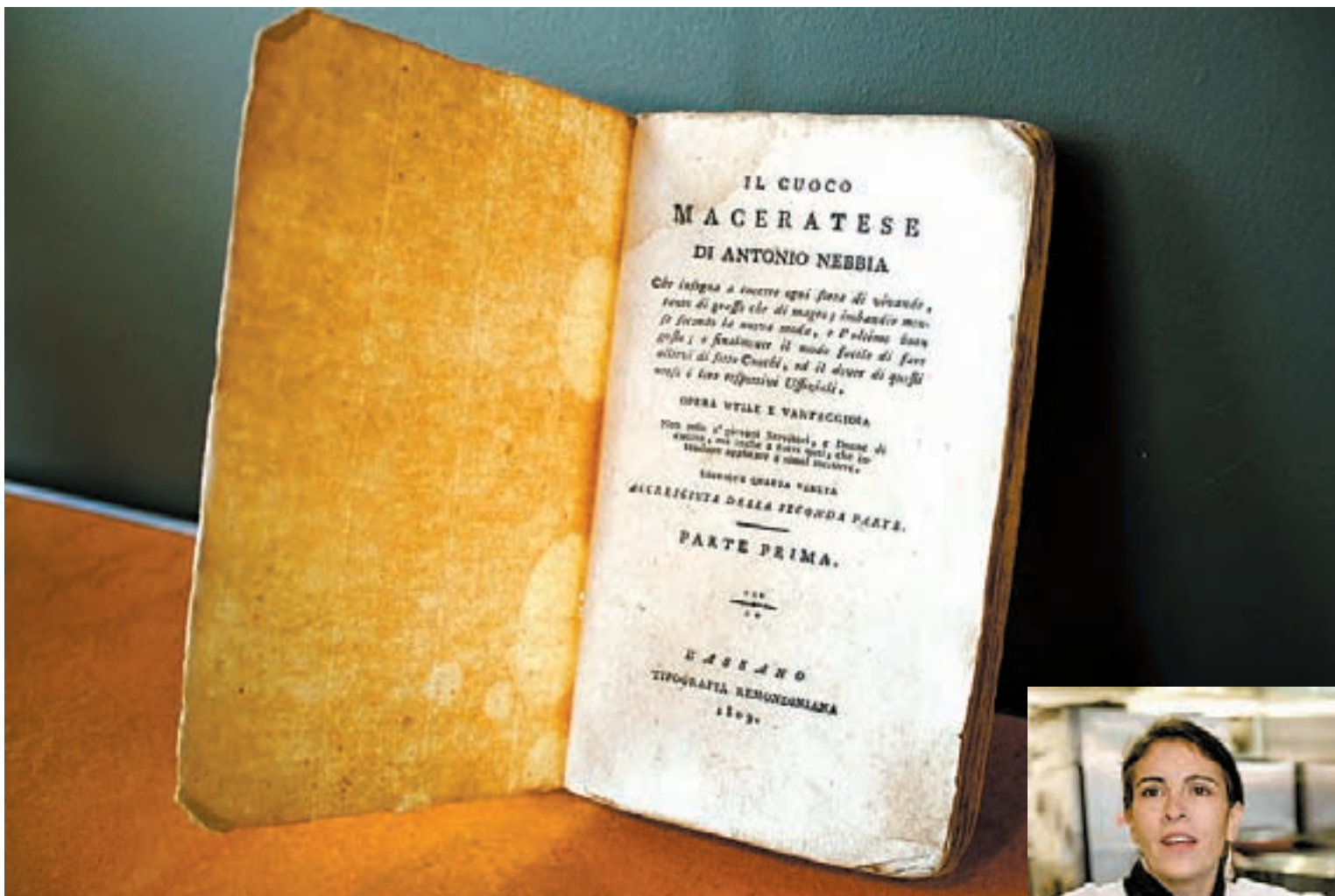
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Rare Book Found Cookbook Reveals History and Food



1809 EDITION OF 'IL CUOCO MACERATESE'

Elisabetta Gaggi was a passionate cook who would sometimes take an entire day to make her special pizza or one of her many other culinary delights. Elisabetta also had a collection of several thousand cookbooks. One of these cookbooks has turned out to be a rare edition and a treasure trove of information. When Elisabetta passed away in 2008, her niece, Stefania Toscano, traveled to Italy to sort and pack her aunt's belongings. In her rush to pack up and send the items back to her home in Oregon, she never spotted this particular book until she returned home. Sorting through one of the many boxes of her aunt's cookbooks, Stefania noticed one which was coverless

and wrapped in plastic, with black Italian writing on a fragile front page. Stefania, who co-owns the Italian restaurant Taste Unique with her husband in Portland, took a closer look at the book and found it was an 1809 edition of *Il Cuoco Maceratese* (*The Chef From Macerata*) by Antonio Nebbia.

Stefania took the book to the library of Reed College where they confirmed the rarity of the book, one of the first cookbooks ever written in Italy. A database of over 42,000 libraries worldwide was searched and the librarians found only three identical copies, with only one other edition in the United States.

Stefania and her husband then began to review the con-

tents and found a treasure trove of culinary information. She and her husband are both students of history and have combined their passion for food with their love of history. They are well known for hosting themed regional Italian dinners, one of which honored Catherine de Medici. As they looked for new ideas for other themed dinners, Stefania and her husband found the book offered much more than just a collection of recipes. There was history in the recipes themselves. Nicola Camerlenghi, an Italian born assistant professor of art history, read through the book and came up with some very interesting insights. According to Camerlenghi, who also is interested in me-

ing this period shows that the region was experiencing a growing economic prosperity and an emergence of an upper middle class. This upper middle class would have had the resources to hire personal cooks and they would need information to prepare the family meals. Nebbia also recommended using butter over lard and pig fat. What is somewhat strange is there is no mention of tomatoes or potatoes. Although recipes for pasta with tomatoes were first recorded around 1790, and potatoes were brought to Europe in 1773, both had not become widely popular when Nebbia published his book.

Nebbia didn't just write recipes but also notes on rules for organizing the kitchen as



STEFANIA TOSCANO in her very popular Oregon Italian restaurant.

dieval architecture and gastronomy, the fact that recipes were even written down dur-

he also gave suggestions for good health and thrift. To this end he included recipes that

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In the Heart of the Delaware Valley

Delaware County Accordionist Plays in the Key of Success

The list of show business personalities born and bred in the Delaware Valley is long and varied. Most of these personalities have long since headed north to New York or out to the West Coast. Among those who remained in the area is an accordionist who over the years has achieved fame. A modest gentleman, Mike Martino started his career at the early age of 11.

Mike, a native of South Philadelphia, today resides in Drexel Hill, where he is generally seen taking a daily stroll along the streets of the neighborhood. If you don't recognize his name it's because Mike doesn't perform frequently in this area but spends most of his time touring throughout the country in nightclubs, theaters and conventions. Along the way he has performed on TV and with many stars including Pat



MIKE MARTINO

Cooper, Charlie Graci, and Al Alberts of the Four Aces.

Mike was recognized in 1994 in the Who's Who East. In the same year he was given the distinct honor of being one of only three persons amongst thousands nominated to be included in the Who's Who in America for Performing Arts, a publication limited to those individuals who have demon-

strated outstanding achievement in their fields of endeavor. As an honoree he joined individuals such as Frank Sinatra, Liza Minnelli, Billy Joel and Barbra Streisand.

In film he authored, directed, produced and starred in the movie *Forever Fifties*. He also wrote the film's theme song of the same name and a ballad "That First September" which was featured in the film. His television works include his own the "Mike Martino Show" on suburban cable's Channel 31 and appearances on Channel 6's "Al Albert's Showcase" and Channel 3's "Stella's Holiday Specials." When called upon to do a benefit, Mike was always there.

For his achievements and charity work, Mike has received citations from the townships of Upper Darby and Drexel Hill, the Pennsylvania State Senate, and the Senate of the United States.

Mike is still performing and in his spare time does private coaching and workshops on the accordion. He has often said, "I want to show the accordion as a mainstream and entertaining instrument as opposed to a folk instrument used only for small groups and ethnic events."

For further information on Mike or his tour schedule, please contact him at 610-789-5753.

Rare Book Found

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helped cooks use all the parts of an animal. He wrote tips on sanitation, calling for use of pure, fresh fowl with removal of the feathers. Camerlenghi notes that in the 1600s it was a common practice to cook a bird and then put the feathers back on before serving. Nebbia also wrote to "filter milk with a piece of fabric to make sure there aren't any hairs from the cow." He also advised to "wash everything and push people out the kitchen if they're sick!" Common sense today but not as much in the 1800s.

Nebbia's instructions (which didn't have ingredient lists but did call for specific measurements) had an order to them. "He is trying to bring cooking out of this sort of trial and error age," Camerlenghi noted.

Perhaps the most interesting information from the book it gives us an idea of what people were eating in late 18th century Italy. There are recipes for simple preparations of meat and fish, first courses of pasta and gnocchi (made without potatoes) and rice dishes. He writes about the technique of soaking rice in cold water prior to sautéing it, which is a notable contribution to the refinement of risotto Milanese. Some of the recipes are still popular today while others have simply disappeared. One of these was *Piatto di Sellari di Vigilia con salsa di Tarantello*, a pan sauté of tuna, boiled celery, a sprinkling of cinnamon and nutmeg along with flour and water. Stefania decided to try out the recipe and found it worked quite well. "The combination sounds humble today,



Stefania Toscano in front of a photo of her Aunt Elisabetta, owner of the rare cookbook, to the right, her mom (center) and her other aunt.

but celery was considered an aphrodisiac," said Toscano during an interview. She liked the dish so much she made it for a private dinner.

One of the most striking recipes was for a type of lasagna called "*princisgrass*," said to be so named because it was rich enough for a prince. It called for thick sheets of pasta layered with white sauce, shaved truffles and prosciutto. In this recipe the pasta is made with butter and is so full of flavor it barely needs a sauce.

Toscano has called her find "the grandfather of all Italian cookbooks," and treasures it not just for its connection to her aunt but also for all the fascinating insights it has brought to light.

Editor's Note: This story was based on a feature article by Portland's Oregonian Food Day staff writer Leslie Cole.

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