

FOOD & WINE

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italy's best recipes

12 classic Italian dishes
you need to try now

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25 must-have
Italian ingredients +
simple ways to use them



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A-Z guide to Italian wines

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Italy's Top Cooking Schools

America's elite travel advisers reveal the Italian cooking schools where they send their fussiest food-obsessed clients.

by *jen murphy*



Cucina con Vista's Elena Mattei shows students how to make pear cake.

TEN YEARS AGO, ANY AMERICAN TOURIST WHO WANTED TO TAKE AN Italian cooking-school vacation headed straight for Tuscany. But as Americans have grown savvier about regional Italian food, they have become more interested in taking classes all over Italy, and more schools are opening to meet the demand—not just in farmhouse kitchens, but also at hotels and wineries with state-of-the-art facilities. We've noticed some other promising trends, like insidery field trips to artisanal food producers, customizable classes and intensive multiweek programs. Picking the right cooking class, then, is now more fun—and more challenging—than ever. To get the inside scoop, F&W went to 11 elite, Italy-focused travel advisers and asked them which schools their picky clients love most. Here, the new and classic programs that came out on top.

tuscany

Florence: Cucina con Vista

TEACHER Chef Elena Mattei, a Florence native, ran a restaurant before opening the school in 2001.

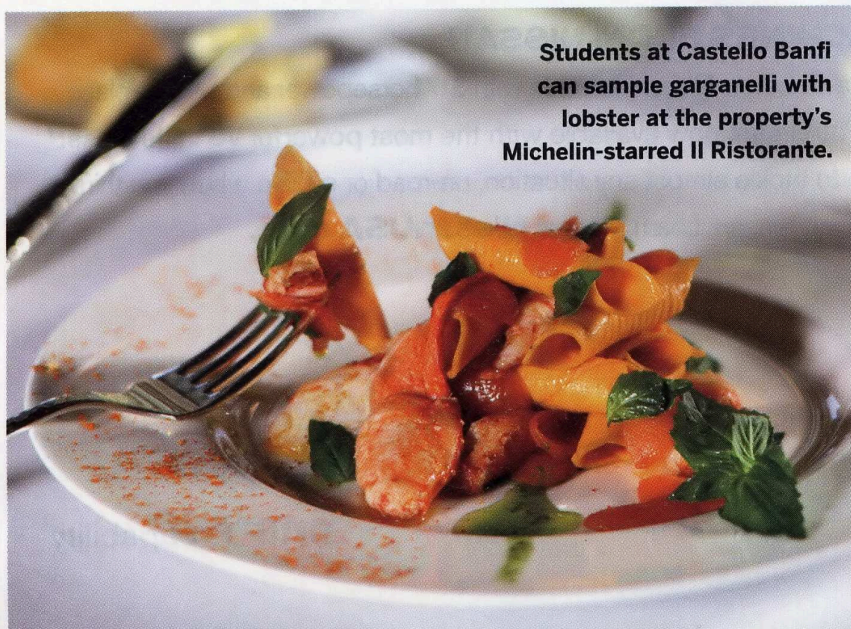
SETTING A farmhouse in the hills, with a professional kitchen and its own vineyards and olive groves.

CLASSES Hands-on classes of up to four students focus on classic Tuscan dishes—what Mattei refers to as “grandmother’s cooking”—such as *crostini alla fiorentina con fegatini* (chicken liver pâté on toast) and *polpettone al pomodoro* (meatballs with tomato sauce).

FIELD TRIPS Wine tours through Chianti; trips to Sant’Ambrogio market to try Florentine specialties, such as *lampredotto* (tripe).

RECOMMENDED BY Pamela O’Shea, Custom Italy; customitaly.com.

One- to four-day classes year-round, by request. From \$270 to \$1,025; 011-39-055-632-348 or cucinaconvista.it.



Students at Castello Banfi can sample garganelli with lobster at the property's Michelin-starred Il Ristorante.

TRAVEL cooking schools

lazio

Rome: Diane Seed's Roman Kitchen

TEACHER British cookbook author Diane Seed has lived in Rome for 30 years and has been teaching cooking classes since 1990.

SETTING Diane's house, the Doria Pamphili palace, in Piazza Venezia, Rome's historic center.

CLASSES Hands-on sessions for up to 12 students include many dishes with Roman roots, like fried pumpkin flowers stuffed with mozzarella and anchovies. Seed talks about the social history of Italian food and explains why so many Jewish dishes were absorbed into Roman cuisine. She is also known for giving exceptional seminars on olive oil.

FIELD TRIPS Visits to Campo dei Fiori, Rome's central food market, and insidery food destinations like Viola, a *salumeria* that sells excellent pig's trotters and other specialties.

RECOMMENDED BY Steve Barofsky, Crystal Tours; crystal-tours.com. Christene Kieffer, Cartolina Tours Inc; cartolinatours.com.

One-, two-, three- and five-day classes year-round (except in August). From \$270 for a single day to \$1,350 for five days; dianeseed.com.

campania

Ravello: Mamma Agata Cooking School

TEACHER Amato "Mamma" Agata, owner of this 13-year-old school, has cooked for celebrities like Elizabeth Taylor and Jacqueline Kennedy.

SETTING Mamma Agata's home kitchen overlooks the town of Ravello. Students eat lunch on her outdoor terrace, which has spectacular views of the Amalfi Coast.

CLASSES Groups of 10 or less learn to make homestyle southern Italian

dishes, including *penne all'arrabiata* and Mamma Agata's lemon cake (which she'll tell you was a favorite of Humphrey Bogart's) in three-hour cooking sessions that include both hands-on and demonstration portions. Students also learn how to use Mamma Agata's homegrown organic lemons to make limoncello, another one of her specialties.

RECOMMENDED BY Deborah Hyte, ALTOUR; altour.com.

Classes year-round by request. From \$250 a day; 011-39-089-857-019 or mammaagata.com.

sicily

Vallelunga: Casa Vecchie

TEACHER Respected cookbook author Anna Tasca Lanza has taught in Sicily for more than 15 years.

SETTING Regaleali, the Tasca family's 1,200-acre wine estate and working farm on the west side of the island, near Palermo. Guests stay in converted farmhouses with great views of the 4,000 olive and fruit trees.

CLASSES Tasca Lanza holds intensive courses for up to 12 and one-day classes for up to 40 in her blue-and-white tiled kitchen. Students watch cooking demonstrations and participate in hands-on sessions to learn how to prepare traditional Sicilian sauces and famed local specialties like *caponata* (a sweet-and-sour eggplant dish) and *pasta con le sarde* (pasta with sardines).

FIELD TRIPS Guests shop at markets in the village of Vallelunga, tour the family winery and observe as shepherds hand-press ricotta.

RECOMMENDED BY Peter Friedman, Unique Travel of Palm Beach, Inc.; uniquestrav.com.

One-, two-, three- and five-day classes from September to November and March to May. From \$200 to \$3,366, including accommodations; absoluteitalia.com.