



Maria Loggia sampling a tomato at "Birri & Frères" at the Jean Talon market.

At the market

by Maria Loggia

Who hasn't gone into a supermarket and selected what they thought to be quality fruits and vegetables only to discover that they were not quite as fresh as they appeared to be. For many of us, shopping for food is a chore and is simply a matter of survival... it doesn't have to be that way! I have always loved shopping, be it for clothes, shoes, and yes even ingredients. I can't help it! Food gets me excited! Discerning quality and finding it requires a small investment in time, but the rewards are gratifying. It provides a full sensory experience; smell, taste, feel, a feast for the eyes with their bright colors and shapes

I may sound a bit off to you, but there are others like me out there! We're called "foodies". People who are passionate about food and what it can create when mixed together with different ingredients in the right combinations.

This is the passion that I hope to instill in my students during classes or during the walking tours of little Italy. Italians throughout the world are known for their passion of all things good. To that end, great Italian cooking is composed of 2 parts fresh ingredients, 1 part technique, 1 part passion and of course a little wine doesn't hurt!

The Tavola Mia walking tour of little Italy is meant to be an introduction to the Italian pantry, but it is much more than that, it is meant to be an outing. Shopping for food should be thought of as an important event in our day to day lives. Even if your passions lie elsewhere, make a day of it, combine shopping with a stop in a café or even better a lunch at a favorite haunt of yours, like our stop at "Ristorante Lucca".

Some of those "other people" that have passion for food are found in the specialty shops like "Milano". Here you can source many of the ingredients that are a must for your family dinner. Owner, Mr Zaurrini has been in business for over 50 years, showcasing the best products that Italy has to offer. From imported pastas, to unctuous extra-virgin olive oils and aged balsamic vinegars. If you're looking for veal shanks to make a tantalizing osso bucco or perfectly pounded veal scalloppine, they are there for the asking. However, if you're looking for something even more special such as oxtail or rabbit, they are all available upon request. "Here, special orders don't upset us", says Mr Pino Bifarelle and Joe Caruso (Meat Counter Managers). Another Montreal landmark food store is Capitol Butchers, founded in 1957 by owner Antonio Le Donne. He offers premium products, the best meat you could find and top notch, first class service rendered by manager, Adamo Alfieri. Many of us don't use these well trained, experienced professionals, but they are a valuable resource. Chances are if you frequent the same places, you will make a friend and they will always serve the very best they have to offer and will be eager to give friendly advice in exchange for a smile. Once you know your butcher, don't be surprised if you're offered bones to make that stock that is essential in the Italian pantry.

In Italy, when selecting fresh fruits / vegetables, you need only tell the vendor how much of a particular product you need. They select the fruit / vegetables based on their knowledge and whether you will be consuming them immediately or in a couple of days. This is what they do, day in and day out, so why not trust these specialists here at home.

How many of us know what to look for when selecting artichokes? At "Chez Nino", owner Nino Marcone will not only select the best, but will show you what to look for. He'll describe the squegee sound a fresh artichoke should make when gently squeezed or how to pick that perfect watermelon.

We live in a self-serve society, however, what distinguishes smaller, owner operated shops from the large supermarket chains is their specialization and value added service that they offer.

So, as the walking tour marches through Milano to sample the freshly sliced Bresola and Cerignola olives from Puglia, then on to "Pasticceria Alati - Caserta" for a sample of the city's best cannoli Siciliani (a dessert surely served in heaven), the group is starting to get an appreciation for these specialty shops.

A quick stop at "Birri & Freres" at the Jean Talon market, where Bruno and Lino Birri offer seedlings for the novice or expert gardener. Even if you live in a small one? room

Energy, passion, an understated sense of sophistication. These words can be used to describe the art of Italian cooking... or Maria Loggia.

With her love of food comes the desire to teach others about the traditions, technique, beauty and pleasure of Italian gastronomy. Maria has been teaching students at her Tavola Mia cooking school in Hudson since 1999. She also offers culinary tours of Italy, showing people that there is an entire life-style that accompanies the world of Italian food. From choosing your first ingredient to putting that last touch to a finished dish, what happens in between is the fun part. In this issue, Maria guides you through Montreal's little Italy, showing us the places and people who can provide us with what we need to begin our Italian culinary journey.

Mario Di Flavio, Managing Editor.



Maria and her group at Milano's

apartment on the plateau, when you brush up against your small rosemary bush set in a colorful clay pot, the smell can conjure up images of delectable arrosti or pollo al mattone served with roasted garlic potatoes. Smell being the strongest of the senses, it can even take you back to another time and place in your life.

If you're Italian, you know that it was a special day when your mother (back then fathers didn't cook!) made fresh pasta! The pasta machine was harnessed to the table and the hand crank quickly started turning. Today, great fresh pasta can be purchased as well at the Jean Talon market at "Pastificio Sacchetto". Owner Mr Giancarlo Sacchetto can usually be found manning the bridge. He is a member of the slow food movement and has embraced an artisan methodology. He only produces what he can sell in his shop to his patrons and is not interested in mass production as market forces would require him to cut corners in order to be competitive.



Enjoying cannoli at Pasticceria Alati - Caserta

The Italian Pantry Some of the specialty products required in an Italian kitchen;

- Canned whole, plum tomatoes; preferably imported Italian variety without spices
- Tomato paste, imported Italian, conveniently available in tubes
- Dried pasta, selection of mass produced brands, i.e. Barilla, Delverde, and De Cecco and artisanal brands, i.e. Rustichella d'Abruzzo or Latini
- Cornmeal, for making polenta
- Extra-virgin olive oil for cooking
- Estate bottled extra-virgin olive oil for using as a condiment
- Fresh garlic
- Fresh herbs: basil, Italian parsley, rosemary, and sage
- Dried herbs: oregano, bay leaf
- Sea salt: coarse and fine
- Dried Chile peppers
- Dry legumes such as cannellini, fava, lentils
- Parmigiano Reggiano cheese, whole pieces, grate as required or enjoy in chunks
- Balsamic vinegar
- Rice : Arborio, Carnaroli, Vialone-Nano
- Capers
- Dried Porcini mushrooms
- Bread crumbs, preferably homemade or purchased from your local bakery
- Anchovies, packed in sea salt or oil
- Canned tuna, packed in olive oil
- Red wine vinegar
- Chicken stock, preferably homemade, completely defatted

Giancarlo Sacchetto explains the art of pasta making



Italian cuisine is a favorite world-wide due to its simple but varied dishes. Although the days of having a cold room filled with homemade preserves (tomato sauce, baby artichokes, eggplants, peppers, demijohns of wine, homemade cheese and yes, even capicollo) are over for most of us (I think I'm tearing!) , we can all keep these bare essentials in our pantry so that we can make and share our favorite Italian dishes with family and friends. ❖

Maria Loggia's web site www.tavolamia.com

A few of my favorite vendors

Capitol Butchers

158, Place Marché du Nord
Tel.: (514) 276-1345

Founder and owner Mr. Antonio Le Donne entrepreneur, butcher, salami and prosciutto maker and connoisseur established what is now known as Capitol Butchers in 1957 and has been serving up the finest quality meats, fresh and cured ever since. Apart from all of the other fantastic products that you can find here, he has been making his own brand of prosciutto and other cured meats for the last 19 years, selling them retail and wholesale, making Capitol Butchers a "cut" above the competition.

Milano Fruiterie

6862 St-Laurent blvd.
Tel.: (514) 273-8558

Owner Mr Vincent Zaurrini has been offering the best imported Italian fine foods for over 50 years. Wide selection of estate extra-virgin olive oils, balsamic vinegars, artisanal pastas and much, much ,more. A full service grocery store with both a meat and deli counter. A great place for foodies!

Chez Nino

192 Place du Marché du Nord
Tel.: (514) 277-8902

Mr. Nino Marcone is a specialist when it comes to fresh produce. Here, fruits and vegetables are displayed and handled like rare jewels!

Birri et Frères

Place du Marché , Jean-Talon Market
Tel.: (514) 276-3202

Owners, Bruno and Lino Birri are passionate growers. Their staff offer professional, and courteous service with a smile. All gardeners flock here to purchase seedlings to start their garden. They carry a large selection of tomatoes, eggplants, onions, peppers and herbs. You can also find fig, lemon and bay laurel trees.

Pasticceria Alati- Caserta

277 Dante Street
Tel.: (514) 271-3013

Mr Vittorio Caldarone has been baking delicious cannoli Siciliani, code d'aragoste, sfogliatelle and Italian cookies for several decades.

If you are shopping for true cannoli Siciliani look no further. He offers the best in town.

Pastificio Sacchetto

7070 Henri-Julien Street
Tel.: (514) 274-4443

Mr. Giancarlo Sacchetto is a passionate artisanal fresh pasta maker. He produces a wide selection of both filled pasta and colorful string pastas: fettuccine, tagliatelle and spaghetti. For the hurried cook, impress your guests and leave the pasta making in the capable hands of Mr. Sacchetto.

At "Chez Nino" with Nino Marcone, a man passionate about his produce.

