

A black bicycle is parked on a terracotta-tiled patio. The front basket is filled with fresh green herbs, and the rear basket is filled with bread, tomatoes, and other vegetables. The bicycle is positioned in front of a large, leafy rose bush with pink flowers. In the background, there is a green lawn, a brick wall, and several tall, thin cypress trees under a clear blue sky.

Tuscan Memories in the kitchen

edited by
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Villa Rosa dei Venti

March 21, 2018, it is the first day of spring and I am once again seated on the short wall encircling the flowerbed under the acacia. The intoxicating scent of rosemary in bloom is just as it was twenty years ago.

Yes, just as I did twenty years ago, I find myself in the garden of Villa Rosa dei Venti, only this time I am not writing my dissertation for my political science degree, but my second cookbook. Now, the Villa behind me is ready for a new season, ready for new guests. It has come a long way from the construction site it once was. Nevertheless, if I look out on to the horizon in front of me everything is the same: fields of green wheat that look like an extension of our garden, the town of Foiano della Chiana in the distance and its impressive, white tower that is always visible over the hill. A bit further away, is Lucignano, which is guarded by Saint Francis' tree of life and, in the distance, the dark green cypress trees that signal the end of the lighter green fields.

If I stop and look out on the horizon, it seems like nothing has changed. I soon realize though that there is no longer my dad's tractor working in our fields, there is no longer his laughter, his jokes or his optimism. There is, however, a ringing iPhone and my mom telling me that my 14-month-old nephew Elia has said his first clear word ("tata" meaning "nanny"). The clock is ticking too fast, in 2 hours I

have to pick up my daughter from school; she is in her final year of middle school. There is Stefano, too, who has just finished pruning the apple trees and asks if we could have a coffee together.

The views do not change. Or rather, they do not change as quickly as situations, feelings, sensations and moods.

Twenty years ago, much like today, all our lives were in flux. I was graduating and my whole family was starting a new venture, hoping to restore the Villa to its best so that they could welcome anyone and everyone who wanted to and still wants to discover the hospitality that a very ordinary Tuscan family has to offer.

Nowadays, it is more or less the same, only with new people, with our new families; my husband, my sister-in-law, my daughter and my nephews. I will be honest, a few tears are rolling down my cheeks while I am writing this but... that's life! "Non c'è fine, non c'è inizio, c'è solo l'infinita passione per la vita" (F. Fellini) which means "there isn't an end, there isn't a beginning, just an infinite passion for life", and that's exactly what my dad was full of.

When I wrote *Cooking Secrets of a Tuscan Family* in 2008, I did not think that it would be my first book; just that it would be "the Cookbook" of Rosa dei Venti. I never could have imagined that I would be writing



APPETIZERS

Fried squash blossoms

Fiori di zucca fritti

When I go to the garden early in the morning to collect the products that nature gives us, I can see the beautiful zucchini plant luxuriant with all of its orange flowers, it reminds me of those summer mornings when I was little and I went with my grandmother to pick the flowers and then fry them for lunch. In the early morning they were all open, it was a sight to see! This year during the Christmas holidays I went to New York with my family. Camille – a friend of ours who had been here about 11 years ago – found out that we were in the US and immediately invited us to her home, where we met her mother and father. We were really pleased to see her again and the first thing she said was: “Do you remember when your mother cooked the freshly picked zucchini flowers? Mamma mia they were so good!” So you absolutely have to try them! You will never forget them!

INGREDIENTS

- 12 squash blossoms
- 1 cup flour
- 2 eggs
- Salt
- 1 cup of Villa Rosa dei Venti EVOO

PREPARATION

Inspect blossoms and gently rinse. Remove the inner pistil of flower, taking care not to break the blossoms.

Heat oil in pan. Meanwhile, in a bowl beat the eggs and add a little salt. Put flour in a shallow dish. When flowers are still wet, lightly coat with flour on both sides. Dredge flowers in the beaten eggs. Then place in hot olive oil. Turn till golden on both sides. Carefully, set fried blossoms on paper towels to blot oil. Serve hot.

Lamb ribs with artichokes

Costolette di agnello ai carciofi

As far as I can remember, I have never had an Easter meal without lamb. When I was a child my grandfather Ezio went to the other farmers and booked a little lamb for Easter. In return he gave them rabbits, chickens or a leg of veal when he killed “la Chianina”. The lamb at Easter was mostly a religious tradition very practiced in the countryside. Now, with the new generations many things are changing and we are losing the sense of belonging to a place and the traditions of our countryside are increasingly disappearing. Fortunately, there are those like us who offer typical Tuscan cooking classes for their guests and so keeping the memory alive...

Lamb is great served with spinach and garlic or artichokes as side dishes.

INGREDIENTS

- 10 lamb ribs
- 4 artichokes
- 5 tbsps EVOO
- Rosemary
- Salt
- Black pepper

PREPARATION

In a pan add Extra Virgin Olive Oil, two cloves of garlic and rosemary. When the Evoo is hot add the lamb ribs, salt and black pepper. Leave to cook until the color turns golden on both sides. Meanwhile, in another pan add Evoo, garlic and artichokes cut into 4 parts. Cook them until they are tender. When the lamb and the artichokes are ready serve them together.

