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EDITOR'S PICK: The Italian Farmer's Table

Those seeking mouth-watering ideas for gift-giving this year need look no further than a compelling new cookbook by two young area chefs.

The Italian Farmer's Table, by Matthew Scialabba and Melissa Pellegrino of Guilford, gives the reader a guided tour of northern

Italian family farms and their groaning tables. It's an affordable trip to Italy replete with dozens of user-friendly recipes, wine tips and descriptions of farm life — everything from the goose slaughter to pasta traditions to the making of goat cheese.

The book takes as its inspiration the *agriturismi* system, set up by the Italian government in 1985 to preserve small family farms through food tourism. Overnight guests are served food made from the farm's products and even have the option to pitch in

with chores during longer stays. The *agriturismi* have evolved with the times and are now at the forefront of organic and sustainable agriculture, becoming a "viable and economic alternative to traditional living," according to the book.

Scialabba and Pellegrino stumbled on an *agriturismi* farm on a trip to Italy and planned a four-month sojourn devoted to visiting the farms after they both graduated from culinary school.

"As chefs, we thought that a cookbook would be the perfect way to bring these farms to life," they write.

The volume is organized as

a tour through Italy's north, with each section inspired by the *agriturismi* farms in a specific province.

Dishes range from the pesto and sardines of Liguria to the Austrian-inflected pork dishes of Friuli. Most farms are represented by at least a few entrées, pastas and desserts, allowing for a full meal's worth of exploration.

At only \$19.95, *The Italian Farmer's Table* is a great gift for the foodie, pasta-lover or adventurous home cook in your life.

Buon appetito!

The Italian Farmer's Table, published November 2009 by *Three Forks/Globe Pequot Press*, 320 pps., \$19.95 (soft).

drinks and sweets are also available.

Soho New Haven, 259 Orange St., New Haven (203-745-0960). Right downtown and in an elegant space, Soho draws a diverse crowd for its top-notch Korean fare. Try the mandu dumplings and fiery-hot chicken galbi.

Midori, 3000 Whitney Ave., Hamden (203-248-3322). Big flavors in a small space are the hallmark of this Korean/fusion restaurant, tucked away in a strip mall. Best bets are soups, the fresh-tasting bibimbap and spicy bulgogi.

THAI

Thai Taste Restaurant, 1151 Chapel St., New Haven (203-776-9802). A standout on Chapel's "Thai Row," with toothsome basics like pad thai, drunken noodles and green curry.

Bangkok Gardens, 172 York St., New Haven (203-789-8718). Tasty Thai in a charming, light-filled dining area with great service. Wide ranges of classics and vegetarian options.

Rice Pot Thai Restaurant, 1027 State St., New Haven (203-772-6679). Great spot for a romantic dinner and some truly tasty Thai food. Try the impeccable fresh spring rolls, delicately flavored soups and assertive curries.

Thai Awesome, 1505 Dixwell Ave., Hamden (203-288-9888). Tangy curries and rich soups make this Thai eatery worth the drive from downtown, but leave time to find parking on this busy stretch of Dixwell

The Terrace, 1559 Dixwell Ave., Hamden (203-230-2077). The chef's French training shows in this Thai

eatery's above-average plating and seductive flavor combinations.

Ayuthai, 2279 Boston Post Road, Guilford (203-453-2988). Quality Thai in a casual setting. Excellent duck and curry plates, along with above-average papaya salad and desserts.

CHINESE/TAIWANESE

Iron Chef, 1209 Campbell Ave., West Haven (203-932-3888). Unusual Taiwanese specialties and well-executed classics shine at this student favorite.

House of Chao, 898 Whalley Ave., New Haven (203-389-6624). This Westville institution draws diners from across the region for its bright flavors and eclectic menu.

Lao Sze Chaun, 1585 Boston Post Rd., Milford (203-783-0558). You don't get much more authentic locally than this outpost of Szechwan delicacies and tasty dim sum.

East Melange Too, 142 Howe St., New Haven (203-848-3663). Affordable and authentic noodles and Cantonese classics keep this lively eatery near Yale hopping at all hours.

Great Wall of China, 67 Whitney Ave., New Haven (203-777-8886). Its location near downtown's best Asian market and an affordable, high-quality buffet attracts a multicultural clientele to this Yale-area spot.

COFFEE SHOPS

Cafe Grounded, 20 Church St, Guilford (203-453-6400).

Tasty sandwiches and coffee drinks star at this aviation-themed cafe that operates inside a quonset hut near the town's Green.

Publick Cup, 276 York St., New Haven (203-787-9929). Top-notch sandwiches, coffee drinks and teas with a creative flair and a studious vibe that befits its on-campus location. You can even order ahead online.

Kasbah Garden Cafe, 105 Howe St., New Haven (203-777-5053). Quality teas, good conversation and Moroccan treats on New Haven's best outdoor patio.

Willoughby's Coffee & Tea, 258 Church St., New Haven, (203-777-7400). Enjoy both the low-key ambiance and the region's best selection of premium roasts and rarities at this small chain. With Branford and Madison locations.

Bare Beans Coffee, 14 East Grand Ave., New Haven (203-260-1118). A funky new outpost of quality beans and drinks over the bridge in Fair Haven. Weekday mornings only for drinks; order top-quality organic, Fair Trade and eco-friendly beans online at barebeanscoffee.com.

Cafe Atlantique, 33 River St., Milford (203-882-1602). Visit this neighborhood favorite for creative caffeinated classics, bistro food and wine and a charming indoor/outdoor seating area.

FUSION CUISINE

Mickey's Restaurant & Bar, 2323 Whitney Ave., Hamden (203-288-4700). This eatery's sophisticated interior and artful blend of Israeli and Italian flavors bring big-city flair to downtown Hamden. Sip a Mickey's margarita with your Marrakech salmon and Israeli couscous.

Friend House, 538 Boston Post Rd., Orange (203-795-6888). In a plaza next to Trader Joe's, Friend House brings together stylish sushi and Chinese and Thai favorites.

Formosa, 132 Middletown Ave., North Haven (203-239-0666). Creative and beautifully presented dishes with pan-Asian panache. Don't miss the Szechwan "ravioli," tender chicken dumplings in a delicate peanut sauce, or Taiwanese seafood specialties.

Kudeta, 27 Temple St., New Haven (203 562-8844). Every major cuisine of Asia is represented on Kudeta's menu, with something for every taste in an evocative interior. Generous and inventive drinks along with good sushi and noodle dishes.

FRENCH

Union League Café, 1032 Chapel St., New Haven (203-562-4299). New Haven's most beautiful dining room

and world-class cuisine near the heart of downtown.

Le Petit Café 225 Montowese St., Branford (203-483-9791). Prix-fixe menu features beautifully prepared classics with a modern twist in a casual setting.

Caseus, 3 Whitney Ave., New Haven (203-624-3373). Quiche and onion soup with top-notch cheeses stand out at this charming bistro.

Gastronomique, 25 High Street, New Haven (203-776-7007). Classics like croque monsieur and steak tartare, plus sandwiches and burgers, expertly prepared at affordable prices. Takeout only.

AMERICAN

Bespoke, 266 College St., New Haven (203 562-4644). Cutting-edge presentation and flavor combinations take center stage at this successor to Roomba. Latin flavors are featured in the upstairs lounge, called

Sabor. Open for lunch.

Foe, 576 Main St., Branford (203-483-5896). The perfect setting for a romantic evening, Foe shines with sublime beef and pasta dishes. A black fig and cherry-glazed duck breast also showcases the chef's sure hand with poultry. Lunch and bar menu.

Sage American Grill & Oyster Bar, 100 S. Water St., New Haven (203-787-3466). The tranquil harborfront view sets off skilled seafood and raw bar selections. Excellent seasonal specials and a full bar add to the attractions of this veteran favorite.

Foster's, 56-62 Orange St., New Haven (203-859-6666). The chef himself is likely to bring over your meal at this acclaimed newcomer in Ninth Square. Comfort food with cutting-edge flair like llama burgers on toasted brioche.

Zinc, 964 Chapel St., New Haven (203-624-0507). Consistently excellent food, drinks and service in

Chef Interview

Melissa Pellegrino and Matthew Scialabba are married Connecticut natives who brought together their love of Italian food and cooking in a new cookbook, The Italian Farmer's Table. Matt currently works at Artisan Wines in Norwalk and Melissa is assistant food editor for Fine Cooking magazine. The couple, both 32, recently moved back to Guilford and started a blog on local farms and Italian cuisine: theitalianfarmerstable.com.

How did you first become interested in Italian and Italian food?

Matt: I grew up in an Italian-American family, so I was surrounded by the food. Then I went to study abroad in Italy and really fell in love with the country and its cuisine.

Melissa: I grew up in a family of great Italian cooks, and my mom owned a cooking store, so I was raised around food. After college I wanted to explore my heritage in greater depth, so I went to Italy to attend culinary school.

What was your most memorable meal on your research trip?

Hands down, La Subida in Friuli. It was one of the best meals we've ever eaten. The farm borders Slovenia, and the family who owned the farm has



both Italian and Slovenian heritage, which was highlighted through the dishes they served. The food was very elevated in execution, but rustic in character. The food of northern Italy is very interesting in this manner, because there are so many outside influences from neighboring countries: France, Austria and Slovenia.

Most memorable family on a farm?

Too hard of a question. All the families were amazing. They all welcomed us into their lives and homes and taught us their recipes, which were for the most part handed

down orally through the generations. Also it was great to see so many generations of family working together.

What advice do you have for readers thinking of taking a similar trip to Italy?

Be willing to try anything food-wise because it is often extremely delicious, and they don't like fussy eaters. And don't be afraid

of the language barrier — if you bring a hearty appetite, you'll be welcomed with open arms.

What ingredients do you think are essential for authentic Italian cooking at home?

Italian cooking is about using fresh ingredients that are local and seasonal. For example, most people associate olive oil with Italy, but in the North, where olive trees don't tend to grow, they cook with butter. Italians make do with what they have, and usually make it taste fantastic.

What are your favorite New Haven-area Italian restaurants?

L'Orcio, for best Italian food. Skappo, for most resembling an *agriturismi* family farm, because it has a nice family-style atmosphere.

What are your future plans?

To go back and research for a book on the *agriturismi* of central and southern Italy.

What are your favorite dishes to make at home?

Roast chicken, pizza, gnocchi and linguine with clam sauce.