

A medieval Italian village, a taste of the past



NECEE REGIS FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

La Mela Verde shop owner Beatrice Guaducci makes pasta, breads, and more in Brisighella, Italy.

By Necee Regis | GLOBE CORRESPONDENT MAY 31, 2016

BRISIGHELLA, Italy — In the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy, the medieval village of [Brisighella](#) takes the concept of locally grown products to heart. After a taxi driver in nearby Ravenna touted an ice cream shop here, I scheduled time for a breakfast-cone detour en route to the airport in Bologna. I had no name for the shop, and only sketchy directions: “Walk up the hill near the park.” The town is small, population about 3,700, with a castle dating back to the 14th century. How hard could it be to find an ice cream shop?

Wandering the quiet stone streets on a weekday morning, I was easily distracted — you might also say seduced — by the visual and aromatic delights presented by storefront shops with doors flung wide. The season was fall, and La Mela Verde vegetable and fruit market overflowed with varieties of tomatoes, plums, apples, and pears. There was *abbondanza*, a rosy-red acidic apple; *angeleno*, a sugary-sweet plum; and the round *pera volpina*, a small pear with the coloring of a Bosc. The shopkeeper handed me *sorba*, a crabapple-size fruit, and encouraged me to try. It had a tannic wine flavor, unlike any other fruit I have tasted, and she explained the shop sells what villagers call “forgotten fruits,” or “ancient fruits,” meaning things typical of the region that are rarely grown anymore. She then pointed me in the direction of a farmers’ co-op selling local olive oil and wine.

Terra di Brisighella, a co-op of approximately 300 olive and 500 vine growers, operates a shop and tasting bar in a brightly lit contemporary space where carts for gypsum workers used to be stored during Renaissance times. The town is built on gypsum, a material I was told creates a Mediterranean microclimate suitable for planting grapes and olives.

I settled in at the tasting bar and sampled three varieties of oil. The colors were bright shades of green with flavors that ranged from grassy to spicy to one with an artichoke finish. (Artichokes are also grown in the area.) Wines were equally impressive — the region grows local *albana*, *trebbiano*, and *sangiovese* grapes, as well as *chardonnay*, *cabernet sauvignon*, and *merlot* — and I lamented that my small suitcase was already jammed full.



The wine merchant sent me to Arte Del Matterello, a bakery helmed by Beatrice Guaducci, a woman who makes traditional breads, pastas, and desserts featuring medieval recipes as well as those passed down from her mother. I walked two steps up to the unimposing doorway and stepped inside. The smells! Pungent, yeasty aromas mixed with sweet scents of fruit. The top shelf of a glass case — spanning the width of the tiny shop — offered baked savory and sweet selections; the lower was filled with trays of golden stuffed pasta in various sizes and shapes. Behind the counter, a wood bookcase was repurposed as shelving for loaves of bread. In the midst of it all, Guaducci stood, smiling, her hair tucked in her white baker’s cap.

Through another customer who spoke English, I was able to chat with Guaducci. She opened the shop 25 years ago, after getting a degree in business, and began cooking the recipes learned from her mother.

“I was born in Brisighella. I love the town. I knew that people would appreciate the old flavors and quality, the typical ways of production and fresh pasta,” she said.

I was given a tour of the day’s offerings: tortellini stuffed with ricotta, spinach, and Parmesan; “dirty pasta” (whole wheat) stuffed with soft cheese, eggs, and nutmeg; spoja lorda, small square pasta cushions stuffed with cheese, to be served in meat broth; torta di pane, medieval bread with apricot marmalade, almonds, pine nuts, and raisins; torta di marroni, chestnut cake; migliaccio, lemony ricotta cake; castagnaccio, dense cake made with chestnut flour; and seasonal strudel with pera volpina, the fruit I had seen in La Mela Verde market.



After stuffing me with bites of pastry, Guaducci pulled me into the minuscule kitchen to show what she was making that morning — tortellini with potato filling. It was there I discovered the secret of the gold-colored pasta: eggs.

“I use 10 eggs to 1 kilo of flour to make the dough. With a pinch of salt. No oil, no water, no milk.”

Guaducci offers a pasta-making class for two in her kitchen, including a meal after preparation (50 euro). A translator can be arranged for another fee.

After leaving the bakery, I raced to catch my flight. I never did locate the ice cream shop. What I found instead was a town that preserves and celebrates long-forgotten products and flavors of the region. I can't wait to return.

Necce Regis can be reached at necceeregis@gmail.com.