

PORT KINSALE MARINA & RESORT

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Charlie's Excellent Culinary Adventure

By Charlie Santangelo

Just after Labor Day, Mary Beth Kelly and I flew to Italy to visit my sister Georgia S. Derrico and her husband Rod Porter who have a house in Tropea, which is in the toe of the boot of Italy. It's about three hours by train south of Naples and an hour north of Messina. You can see all seven of the Eolian Islands from their terrace. Those islands are part of Sicily. Mary Beth and I took a tour of the islands and got engaged on Stromboli which is the only volcano in the world which has been active for 2000 years. It's still smoking today.

Georgia and Rod are serious foodies. They don't cook at all but they love restaurants. For the past five years they have been sampling the restaurants of Tropea and the surrounding area. In the ten days we were there they made



Pictured l to r: Devon Porter, Georgia Derrico and Mary Beth Kelly

sure Mary Beth and I sampled the best of everything from tiny trattorias to grand restaurants.

I am a graduate of the New York Culinary Institute and a graduate of an Italian family and I appreciated how much these restaurateurs cared about food. Rod took pictures of me talking to the cooks he introduced me to. Just look at how intent they are.

The first night we went to Il Principe in Tropea. It's a wonderful restaurant the basement of an old palazzo with vaulted stone ceilings.

Back in the kitchen, Mimmo's wife is cooking while he's explaining to me the finer points of making Spaghetti Carbonara. It is a recipe which although very simple requires the right touch to blend the ingredients together. Here they use pan-

About the Mooring

When I returned from my adventure in Italy, I immediately longed for the fresh, simple food that I experienced. What started as a vacation turned into a quest with my chefs and I experimenting with fresh pasta, and clean simple cooking. The result is our new menu which is the culmination of four months of collaboration. Chef Andrew has taken my lead and has focused on fresh in house made pasta and simple and light sauces. Sous Chef Joey has returned from his time at the Culinary Institute of America in New York, armed with

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Pictured l to r: Charlie Santangelo, Mimmo and his wife

cetta (an Italian bacon) and will only cook it when the weather is cold since they think it's a heavy dish.

The next night we went to L'Arca which is owned by Elisabetta Epifanio and staffed by her family. Elisabetta is a very close friend of Georgia and Rod and she had a party in our honor that night. Rod and Georgia came back two Octobers ago for her son David's wedding to Anna and they've been considered family ever since. We had absolutely everything tonight – most of which was not on the menu. Rod's favorite was capretto (baby goat) with roasted potatoes. I enjoyed the different ways they cooked melanzane (eggplant). One we tasted

was polpettini di melanzane which are essentially meatless meatballs made out of eggplant. I couldn't believe they didn't contain meat but Elisabetta showed me how to make them and they don't.

Elisabetta has a mixed antipasto with pepperoni, cheese, olives, pickled mush-



L'Arca and the Epifanio Family

rooms, and 'nduja (an extremely spicy soft sausage which is a Calabrian speciality). Some of these will become staples on our menu at The Mooring.

The restaurant is tiny with no interior seating. She invited me to come back Sunday morning to help them cook and learn by doing. She told Georgia that she should come to translate since I'm just learning Italian. Georgia said no way. Charlie will be on his own. She's a woman who knows her mind. So's Georgia. Georgia won and I went to Elisabetta's by myself.

It turned out fine. We talked food and I understood everything. Her son Antonio and his wife Teresa were there. We prepared lasagna, polpettini (meatballs) and cozze areganata (mussels). We prepared both real meatballs and melanzane meatballs. Her lasagna was wonderful. It has small meatballs, small pieces of sausage and small pieces of hard-boiled egg and lots of ricotta in it. It was light as a feather. The meatballs had mozzarella in them which none of us had tried before. It was delicious. Her olive oil is "extra virgin". The difference is incredible.

We came back later that night with Georgia and Rod and ate what I had cooked. Fortunately, Massimo – Elisabetta's son in law and a doctor in the local hospital and his wife Antonella (who worked on both Georgia and Rod's Achilles Tendonitis) joined us and helped eat all the food. They missed the antipasti but were able to eat lots of meatballs and lasagna. Elisabetta pushes food on you until you are stuffed.

The next night we had Salvatore (Rod and Georgia's driver) take us up to Il Vigneto which is in Brattiro up the mountain from Tropea. Il Vigneto is an agriturismo (an official agricultural tourism) location which has rooms and produces much of what



Elisabetta Epifanio and Charlie Santangelo



it sells. They have a beautiful selection of Argentine and Italian beef which they grill in an open area just off the main dining room. Georgia and Rod rate it the second best restaurant in Calabria.

Antonio, the proprietor, looks a lot like a pirate but is a serious cook in a serious kitchen. Antonio's kitchen produces the pastas and the antipastos. His mother makes the ravioli fresh daily as well as the most delicious potato croquettes I've ever tasted. His father is responsible for the produce, much of which is grown on-site. Lovely tomatoes, eggplant and mushrooms. They also grow their own grapes and make their own wine.



Antonio in his kitchen

The next night we had Salvatore drive us down to Vibo Marina which is about a half hour away. It is an industrial port and it is ugly. There are no redeeming values in the town. But L'Approdo is one of the best restaurants **anywhere** and there is a nice small hotel at-

tached to it. The waiters are superb. They hover attentively in the restaurant, but are never supercilious like French waiters. If you buy a good red wine (anything over Euros 20) they decant it respectfully.

It's all about the fish here. Rod had the Zuppa Di Pesche. Their stuffed artichokes are Georgia's favorite. They have a unique appetizer comprised of different kinds of fish eggs. I had pasta di pesche and Branzino (an Italian sea bass). Sale e Pepe is at the other of the spectrum. It is right in the middle of the downtown of Tropea. They have no inside tables although they are one of the very few restaurants in Tropea open year around. They have a tiny but extremely well equipped kitchen with two pizza ovens which is at most 20 by 15 feet. Outside they have 8 or 9 tables under cover with heaters for the winter.



The owner, manager, pizza chef and headwaiter is Michaele Scrugli. Michaele has been running this restaurant for about ten years after having been burned out of his grocery store. He's divorced. He has six kids – all grown – but runs the restaurant with his grandson, his Rumanian girlfriend and a cook. He's a gentle bear of a man. After they brought me there he asked Rod and Georgia whether he had presented a "bella figura" – a good impression. He did.

He firmly believes he has the best pizza in Calabria and probably does. He says he has the best "farina" – flour. More importantly, he uses only mozzarella di bufala on his pizza – not mozzarella di latte. Perhaps most importantly,

he has a pizza press which allows him to produce the most “crocante” (crispy) pizza in Tropea. He believes that it’s important that when you cut a slice that the tip, when you hold the slice at the base, doesn’t sag at all. His pizza is so crisp it doesn’t sag. He also claims his pizza is dietetic but that’s not borne out by his body if he eats his product.

At the Moorings we make New York style pizza. Maybe we should make New York style and Roman style and let you choose.

Mary Beth and I took a couple of side trips where we continued our feasting. On the island of Lipari we ate at a restaurant called the Parrot. We had a delicate fish stew and linguini with clam sauce.

Salvatore drove us up into the mountains to see a famous monastery called Serra San Bruno. After the monastery we looked for lunch. We found a marvelously rustic county inn.

We found out that this was the month of the mushroom harvest so we tried porcini mushrooms prepared five different ways. We had them sliced thin and raw with slices of Parmesan cheese; marinated in olive oil; roasted and seasoned with garlic and salt; in a mushroom cream sauce, and finally with veal and cognac sauce. It was an incredible culinary feast.

I haven’t weighed myself since the trip. When you see me next at The Mooring, don’t hesitate to tell me how healthy I look.

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Michaele Scrugli’s kitchen is so small we couldn’t get a good picture. The pictures here are of his pizza press (left) and his pizza plates (right).

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new recipes for our fresh baked in house bread. Our pizza dough comes from an old Brooklyn recipe known only to a few. The sausage is ground and stuffed on premises with fresh casings purchased on Arthur Avenue in New York. The Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese is grated from imported wheels. Only extra virgin olive oil is used. Our lemon juice is found inside the yellow skin of fresh lemons.

I have taken the recipes of Elisabetta, Mimmo and Michaele and tried to copy their fresh approach to the regional cooking of Calabria. I have used all our combined 75 years of cooking to showcase the regional ingredients with an Italian flair. Taking the frugal approach to cooking of my grandmother Mary Rao and incorporating the rich sauces of my father Dr. George Santangelo has enabled me to craft a menu that incorporates some of the best of southern regional Italian cooking.

We are all very proud of the result. I hope you enjoy our endeavor and get a taste of a bit of Italy in Kinsale. Buon Appetito

The Mooring Restaurant

at Port Kinsale Marina & Resort

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