



Kathy learning to make orecchiette in Puglia

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DREAM OF ITALY®

Volume 14, Issue 5

www.dreamofitaly.com

June/July 2015

Five Highlights from Dream of Italy on TV

As you may already know, the new television travel series *Dream of Italy* is currently premiering on PBS stations around the United States. It will air and repeat for the next two years and is also available to watch online or on DVD (so there's no excuse not to watch!). This subscription newsletter — which I founded in 2002 to bring more authentic advice to Italy travelers — inspired the content and I'm the host and an executive producer of the series.



Filming in Alberobello

artisans, vintners, hunters, chefs, historians and even cowboys — living their passions. The goal: introduce travelers to “the real Italy” not usually found in guidebooks. The result: six half-hour episodes on the best of *Tuscany, Rome, Umbria, Naples/Amalfi Coast, Piedmont/Lake Iseo* and *Puglia*.

I've been to Italy more than 35 times but experiencing the country I love through filming a television series gave me a new lens (forgive the pun) on what makes

Italy so captivating and addictive. Here are five of my very personal highlights from filming:

For five weeks in the fall of 2014, our American and Italian crew traveled from Lake Iseo in the north to Puglia in the south, meeting local Italians —

continued on page 2



Parker Fitzgerald

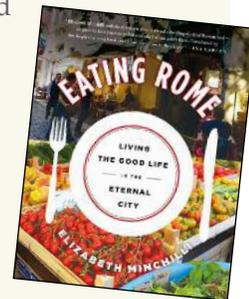
Eating Rome with Elizabeth Minchilli

One recent spring day, famed British actor Patrick Stewart sat enjoying an *al fresco* lunch in *Rome* with a companion. A woman rushed up to their table, clearly excited.

“Are you *Elizabeth Minchilli*?” she said to Stewart’s companion.

Minchilli, who reported that encounter on her Twitter feed (@eminchilli), is a star in her own right to lovers of Italian cuisine. From her beautifully designed and photographed books (*Italian Rustic* and *Restoring a Home in Italy*, for example), to her blog, *Elizabeth Minchilli in Rome* (www.elizabethminchilliinrome.com), and to her *Eat Italy* apps (available on iTunes) American-born Minchilli decodes her adopted country’s foodways with respect and enthusiasm.

Now Minchilli’s *Eating Rome: Living the Good Life in the Eternal City* (St. Martin’s Press, \$24.99) provides a delicious peek into the Eternal City’s *continued on page 4*



Find *Dream of Italy* on your local PBS station.

Just Add Love



Italy is synonymous with food. The cuisine is a wonderful entrée to the distinct culture of each corner of the Italian peninsula. I always recommend that travelers schedule at least one cooking class during their trip — better yet, a class in each region that they visit. Why? It is the perfect way to enjoy a truly Italian experience, interact with a local and learn about the geography and history — via food — of the area they are visiting.

In nearly every episode of the series, I met a local chef or food artisan who taught me the particulars of a regional specialty.



At Da Enzo in Rome

Pizzaolo Enzo Coccia was an exacting pizza-making instructor in Naples. In Umbria, *Salvatore Denaro* shared an example of *cucina povera* (the cuisine of peasants), teaching me how to make *maltagliati con ceci* (a chickpea soup with pasta).

While learning to make one of Rome's famous dishes, *cacio e pepe*, I was reminded that Italian cooking, and indeed Italian life, are full of things unseen. Brothers *Francesco* and *Roberto di Felice* invited me into the tiny kitchen of their bustling restaurant *Da Enzo* in the *Trastevere* neighborhood. My mission: to find out why Roman after Roman says Da Enzo might just make the best version of this pasta dish in all of the Eternal City.

This simple, historic dish of peasant farmers *seems* easy to make with just five ingredients — *taglioni*, *Pecorino Romano* cheese, cold water, pepper and ... Well, there's a secret ingredient that I came all the way to Rome to discover.



Kathy with Antonello Losito



Truffle hunting in Piedmont

After some cajoling, Francesco comes clean and admits that the fundamental ingredient is lots and lots of love.

That might seem like a cute answer but it couldn't be more true. When people ask me why I adore Italy so much, I tell them that visiting Italy reminds me of being a little girl in my Italian-American grandparents' home, which was always filled with the smell of food cooking and indeed, warmth and love.

Reconnecting with Old Friends

I've been traveling to Italy regularly for 20 years and while of course the country's heart-stopping vistas are well-etched in my memory, it is the Italians I have met who really stay in my mind. Locals have been the focal point of so many articles in *Dream of Italy*, but words, though powerful, can't capture everything that a television camera can. What a joy it was to return and film their unique personalities for the screen.

One of my all-time most treasured memories in Italy is truffle hunting with the *Romagnolo* brothers in Piedmont in November of 2004. If it is possible that anything could match my

passion for Italy, it is my love of dogs (they are preferred for truffle hunting in Italy as they are considered less likely to eat the truffles than pigs), and of course, rare white truffles taste mighty fine too. Put all three together and watch the magic happen.

The fact that we needed to primarily shoot the series during the month of November made it natural to devote an entire episode to Piedmont and capture a truffle hunt with the *Romagnolos*, whom I hadn't seen in ten years. What transpired is one of my favorite segments of the entire series and made me quite confident that *Natale Romagnolo* missed his calling as an actor or television host.



Puglia — Guide explains Puglia cuisine

While I revisited old friends in every episode, our time in Puglia has a special place in my heart. I was thrilled to film segments with *Antonello Losito* and *Ylenia Sambati*. They are part of a new

generation of proud Pugliese who are bringing innovative travel entrepreneurship and attention to this lesser-known region of Puglia. And what fun we had...Antonello walked with me through his hometown of *Monopoli* and introduced me to a charming retired fisherman who now crafts model boats. With Ylenia, I learned to make *orecchiette* with *Mama Giulia*, another friend I met on a previous trip to the region.



We filmed at least 12 hours



Busatti in Tuscany



Stained glass in Umbria

Dreams Come True

Filming *Dream of Italy* also gave me the opportunity to fulfill a few of my own longtime Italian dreams. I keep a mental bucket list of travel experiences and one that had yet to be crossed off was to “ride” with the Tuscan cowboys of the *Maremma*. I fell in love with this wild and wonderful part of Tuscany when I visited *Terme di Saturnia* (a luxury resort built around ancient hot springs), which I wrote about in the very first issue of *Dream of Italy* in 2002.



A Tuscan cowboy in Maremma

When our production team was brainstorming ideas for potential segments, meeting the *butteri* (cowboys) was my very first suggestion. Our associate producer worked diligently to secure permission from local authorities to film at this exquisite seaside regional park where a small team of cowboys raise cattle and horses.

The experience itself didn't disappoint. The cowboys, wearing long coats like Marlboro men, looked like they came straight out of central casting during a bygone era. The head *buttero* traded in his horse for a Jeep and our crew piled in to try to keep up

with the other cowboys on horseback and the animals. Our shoot ended with the cowboys riding into the ocean on their horses.

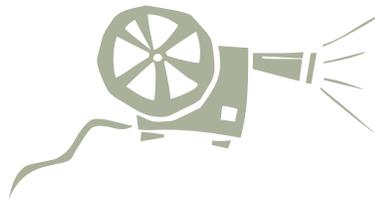
Back in the edit room, our editor selected a piece of music that sounds like it came straight out of an old western movie. I've watched the cowboy segment dozens of times but tear up every time I hear that score and watch those old-time cowboys, beautiful animals and drop dead gorgeous scenery. It was the perfect segment to end our Tuscany



episode.

Looking to the Past

We featured many artisans in the series — from the model boat builder in Puglia to a stained glass artist in Umbria. Each of course had a very personal story to tell, inevitably one of passion and devotion. Their stories were made all the more moving as many of their art forms are considered to be dying.



But perhaps this isn't true and no one made me question this thought more than the eighth generation owner of *Busatti* textiles in

Anghiari. *Giovanni Sassolini Busatti's* family has been making fine cotton and linen fabrics in the basement of a 16th-century Tuscan *palazzo* since 1842.

In his interview he expressed that the way that his products are created — a rare find in the modern world — is precisely what keeps customers coming back for more.

“Most of the production requested is
continued on page 8”

DREAM OF ITALY®

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Dream of Italy, the subscription travel newsletter covering Italian travel and culture, is published 10 times a year. Delivery by mail is \$87 in the U.S., Canada and abroad. A digital subscription (downloadable PDFs) costs \$77 per year. Subscriptions include online access to more than 115 back issues and regular e-mail updates.

Three ways to subscribe:

1. Send a check to *Dream of Italy*, P.O. Box 2025, Denver, CO 80201
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of footage for each episode.

best restaurants, markets, seasonal dishes, and customs. I spoke with Minchilli via Skype from her Roman apartment, where she lives with her husband *Domenico* and their daughters *Emma* and *Sophie*. (More on Sophie, who is following in her mother's gourmet footsteps, in a bit.)

It isn't easy to catch her, since she's often busy giving tours — or just enjoying a *cappuccino* and a *cornetto* at one of her favorite coffee bar/*pasticceria* hybrids, living *la dolce vita* so she can share it with us.

And things have changed. For decades, Minchilli says, the food scene in Rome was "very static." In the past decade, "things have really loosened up, especially laws. Young people are trying new things and having success at it. Some of these places they're opening start out somewhat undefined, and that allows them to define themselves into what customers really want."

Case in point: Minchilli's beloved **Aromaticus** (Via Urbana, 134, 39-06-4881355, www.aromaticus.it), "a place that started as a shop where you could buy fresh herbs, and now offers lunch and snacks, and even has a section for spices and seeds and garden tools."

Here are Minchilli's favorite Roman eateries that she discussed with me, along with a few nuggets from her new book to help you get the most out

of any that you try on your own next Roman Holiday.



Price is irrelevant.

While Minchilli confesses a fondness for some of Rome's old-fashioned gastronomic temples, she also recommends the tiny **Sora Margherita**, her favorite spot for *carciofi alla giudea*, at least five times in *Eating Rome*. (Piazza del Cinque Scole, 30; 39-06-6874216)



Elizabeth and her dog

Gelato rules—and it has rules, too.

Lucky Minchilli; her family moved to Rome for two years when she was twelve, so her first taste of *gelato* was early in life, and she's never forgotten the "cone filled with melon gelato that was like the sweetest, juiciest fruit I'd ever had." Today, she notes that aside from the *pizza bianca*, which must be eaten immediately, gelato is the only food or drink you will ever see a real Italian consuming on foot, on the street.

Favorite gelateria: "That sort of thing changes," cautions Minchilli, but she says her current favorite for its "creamy and rich" product is **Come il Latte**. "All of my Italian friends love the *mascarpone con biscotti* Gentilini, a sort of cream-cheese flavor with an Italian brand of crunchy cookies scattered in." (Via Silvio Spaventa, 24-26, 39-06-42903882; www.comeillatte.it)

Hippest flavors: With flavors like celery and habanero at **Claudio Torcè**, you won't get bored — and even if you don't love your choice,

remember: Italians only order small cups and cones. Toss it and try another! Just don't ask for a taste spoon; Minchilli cautions that is just not done. Another to try: *Brie con frutti di*

bosco (brie and berries). (Viale Aventino, 59; www.ilgelatodiclaudiotorce.com)

Expensive:

"**Piperno**, an elegant old restaurant in the Jewish quarter," says Minchilli, without a moment's hesitation. In the book, she shares that it was her father's favorite (they lived right above it)



Piperno

and remains her family's celebration spot. (Monte de' Cenci, 9; 39-06-68806629; www.ristorantepiperno.it)

Moderate: Trattoria Perilli, on Via Marmorata, in Testaccio, wins Minchilli's vote for best *pasta alla carbonara* — but for more adventurous eaters, she also recommends its preparation of *corellata*, or the "lamb's pluck." (Via Marmorata, 39; 39-06-5755100; www.trattoria-romana.it/da/perilli)

Low Cost: Minchilli recommends **Dar Filettaro** in the *Centro Storico* for "the best fried *baccalà* in Rome." You have to like cod, and you have to like it fried — because that's all this tiny place sells. (Largo dei Librari, 88; 39-06-6864018; www.streatit.com/dar-filettaro/)



Gelato in Rome

All photos by Elizabeth Minchilli

• **Oldie but Goodie:** **Alberto Pica** is where Minchilli had her first melon gelato, and she says “I stand by my word that they make the very best pistachio gelato I’ve ever had in my life.” But take a moment and sample their specialty: Rice-based gelatos in flavors like cinnamon, and *zabaione*. (Via della Seggiola, 12; 39-06-688-06253)

Correct coffee can include *caffè corretto*.

If you see someone sipping a cappuccino at 3 p.m., it’s an American tourist. Italians simply do not indulge in milky coffee drinks once breakfast is over, and they do not carry to-go cups of any kind of coffee, ever. A Roman seeking a caffeine lift may stop by her favorite coffee bar for a *doppio* (double espresso), or even, depending on the time of day, a *caffè corretto*, which means espresso with a shot of *grappa*.

• **Best coffee:** It has “a bit of a cult following,” says Minchilli, but she’s evidently drunk the Kool-Aid along with her espresso, since this is where she comes for a *doppio con panna*.



Roman coffee

Sant’Eustachio will tell you that they roast their own beans — but each shot is pulled behind a privacy partition, so who knows what else they put in there? (Piazza di Sant’Eustachio; 39-06-68802048; www.santeustachioilcaffe.it)

• **Best Granità di Caffè:** Imagine strong, sweet black coffee, frozen and refrozen until it’s like a sorbet, combined with the best whipped cream you’ve ever had. The only

decision you need to make at **Tazza d’Oro** is whether to order your portion with cream on bottom and top, or just one, says Minchilli. (Via degli Orfani, 84; 39-06-678-9792; www.tazzadorocoffeeshop.com)

• **Best Treat:** Although Minchilli doesn’t provide her favorite place to drink a “Shakerato,” she does provide a recipe for this Roman answer to iced coffee, and once you see how cool and elegant it looks, you’ll want one, too. It’s basically freshly brewed, sweetened espresso poured into a shaker with lots of ice and shaken hard and fast until it looks like foamy heaven and tastes even better.

Romans eat their vegetables.

Salad lovers may find Roman menus disappointing at first, until they learn that not only can delicious green salads of arugula and chicory be eaten after main courses, but that most Italian restaurants offer *contorni* (side dishes) of fresh, seasonal, cooked vegetables. Minchilli’s description of how fresh artichokes smell made my mouth water: “If you are lucky enough to wander over to one of the massive piles of green and purple globes that fill the markets in Rome during the late spring and early summer, then you’ll be enveloped in the essence of spring.”

• **Least-understood produce:** Without a doubt, *puntarelle*. A type of chicory, the inner core grows in long spokes and has to be carefully prepped (Minchilli provides some expert tips on that in her book), but the result, she swears, is magical.

• **Most versatile vegetable:** Minchilli votes for the previously mentioned artichoke, which can be steamed, fried, braised, baked, stewed...not to mention there are many different varieties, each of which has its fierce advocates and best recipes.



Delicious greens

• **Best prep tip:** Many Americans get lazy about eating vegetables simply because it takes time to prep them well. At the

best Italian markets, Minchilli says, that work is done for you! You can buy bags of vegetables for minestrone, all cleaned and peeled and sliced, ready to be thrown in your stockpot with some pasta and a rind of cheese.

It’s all about family.

Minchilli and her family still frequent Piperno, not just because they love the carbonara and the *all’amatriciana*, but because it was her father’s favorite when her family of origin lived in Rome. She celebrates her mother-in-law’s cooking in this book (even when that cooking involves her husband’s simpler, less sophisticated childhood favorites, like a mashed-potato *torta* with *mortadella*). And she has brought her daughter Sophie into the food world.

• **Favorite family restaurant:** Brunch isn’t really an Italian thing, although big Sunday lunches are — the Minchillis like the aforementioned Piperno and Perilli for those long, leisurely meals. But for the occasional brunch, Elizabeth’s

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in 10 feet of a monument.

FIVE LESSONS FROM Puglia's Pa



Can you think of a better way to spend a month in Italy than traveling around the Salento area of Puglia learning traditional pasta-making techniques from the locals?

That's what Katie Leaird — pastry cook, caterer, personal chef, food blogger and now a cook at *America's Test Kitchen*

in Boston — did last year. She summed her experience up for us in five essential lessons:

LESSON UNO:
Get your hands dirty.

Maria, a self-taught Michelin-starred chef at *Ristorante Pashà* in *Conversano*, produces all of the pasta for her restaurant with her own hands, and she showed me that the secret to her *orecchiette*, the pasta shaped like "little ears," is to literally put your own thumbprint on them.

These small pasta shapes are made with *grano arso* (smoked flour). *Maria* mixes this black flour with water, salt and a swirl of olive oil to make a sturdy but supple dough. After ample kneading, she lets the massive ball of dough rest under an overturned bowl.

Next comes a test of strength, as *Maria* chops off a segment of the dough and forcefully pushes it against the table using her whole palm. She exerts pressure down and out, manipulating the dough into a smooth rope. Next, she cuts the dough into little pieces, each about a half inch long. Placing the edge of a butter knife behind a small

pillow of dough and holding the knife perpendicular to the table, *Maria* pulls it towards her body, flattening out the dough as she scrapes.



Cappelletti or "little hats"

She drops the knife with a controlled clang, picks up the flattened dough, and carefully forms it down and around the first joint of her thumb. She proudly shows me a finished, concave, black

orecchietta.

My own "little ears" were quite a bit smaller than *Maria's* *orecchiette*, on account of my smaller hands and fingers. She taught me the meaning of making something by hand — each of us produced something slightly different. . When I formed each one over my thumb, I literally left my identity in every piece of dough.

Ristorante Pashà

Piazza Castello, 5
Conversano
(39) 080 4951079

www.ristorantepasha.com

Closed Tuesday. Reservations required.

Marta gives cooking lessons at her Kitchen Aid sponsored cooking school. See the restaurant website for details.

LESSON DUE:
Keep it simple.

Enza is Chef *Maria's* sister, the bread-baker for *Ristorante Pashà* and breadwinner for her household of six.

Quiet and thoughtful, *Enza* is a joyful soul who became my friend to the extent that one day I asked if we could meet away from work and make a pasta feast for her family.

Enza immediately makes a list of all the pasta tricks she wanted to teach me. We start with *gnocchetti*, rolling out long thin ropes of dough, pinching off tiny pieces, and scraping them along a grooved wooden *gnocchi* board until they popped off as ridged, conch-shell-shaped noodles.



Making pasta in Alezio



Maccheroni al ferro

We make *farfalle* by rolling out thin sheets of dough, which we then cut into strips with a pizza cutter, then into two-by-one-inch rectangles. Using our thumbs and index fingers, we pinch seams in the centers of the rectangles to form bow-tie noodles. We make *trofie* by rubbing dough in between the palms of our hands three or four times until they look like delicate string beans — skinny noodles, about three inches long, with tapered ends.

Her boys wander in and out of the kitchen, helping where they could, practicing English with the first American they had ever met, and eventually carrying bowls of our fresh pasta out to the apartment's balcony for an *al fresco* dinner. *Enza* teaches me how to feed a crowd with nothing more than flour, water and a couple of simple sauces.



There are at least 350 differe

sta Mamas

LESSON TRE: Pasta makers mean business.

To learn more about pasta from southern Puglia, I visited my dear friend, *Daniela*. She is the chef proprietor of *Le Macàre*, a restaurant in the tiny town of *Alezio* just west of *Gallipoli* and the Ionian Sea. Daniela arranged a tour at a local pasta factory.

The factory owner shows us behind the counter where sparkly machines mix, knead and roll out dough. Daniela and I look at each other confused, as this place is known for hand-made pasta. The owner sizes us up, evaluating whether he should trust us, and then leads us to a side door.

We climb an open-air staircase from the patio to the attic where we found the true pasta makers — half-a-dozen teenaged girls, sitting around a wooden table. Each girl faces an identical setup: one large cardboard tray for finished noodles, a sheet of dough, a steak knife and a metal skewer.

I ask questions in my broken Italian, and they respond with sheepish, but flawless, English. Their hands were in constant motion, but everything else was still; they slouch over their work like hunchbacks. When I ask if this caused any aches and pains, they sighed in unison, gesturing to their sore backs and necks.

The girls are making

maccheroni al ferro (“iron macaroni,” named after the skewers). They place a metal skewer on top of a long skinny segment of dough, lay a palm on top of the skewer, and with three staccato rolls, produce tubular noodles that are taken off the skewers to air dry. These girls showed me pastamaking through a new lens. For me, it’s a fun hobby. For them, it is a livelihood, a repetitive job that may constitute their entire work life — yet they still take pride in their craft and respect each noodle.

LESSON QUATTRO: Savor the process.

Daniela asked the farmer who supplies the restaurant’s vegetables to bring his mother in to meet me. *Anna DeSantis* still makes everything for the family’s table with her own two hands. Anna and her sister *Ada* started my lesson by dumping two kinds of flour, *semolina* and *orzo*, out on the table.

One flour mound comes alive and starts moving — bugs had gotten into the orzo! My eyes widen and Anna just laughs, one of those contagious, hearty chuckles. She sifts the creatures out of the flour and continued unfazed.

The sisters dig wells in the centers of the flour mountains and add water in slow trickles, using forks to incorporate the wet into dry. As they massage the dough, they chat and



Anna and Ada DeSantis



Orecchiette drying

laugh and look everywhere but down at what they were making.

They teach me to make *le sagne* — ribbons of dough that you twist between your palms. We made *cappelletti*, twisting semicircles of dough cut with the rim of a champagne glass, into little hat shapes. These women show me how making pasta is best done with others, while telling stories, sharing and savoring the experience with family, friends and strangers.

Le Macàre

Via Mariana Albina, 140
Alezio
(39) 0833 282192
www.lemacare.it

Reservations needed during the summer months.



LESSON CINQUE: Pass it on.

Angela Raimondi hails from Bari, the biggest city in Puglia. When I want to visit the old ladies who make orecchiette out in the streets of the “Old City,” Angela offers to be my guide after I met her at Maria’s cooking school at *Ristorante Pashà* in Bari.

As we walk along *Via dell’Arco Basso* in Bari Vecchia we are met with hard, menacing glares. Angela deftly breaks through the uninviting barrier with a

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Daniela making maccheroni



Katie making gnochetti

nt pasta shapes made in Italy.

“The future is in the past.”

—Giovanni Sassolini Busatti

the old one: high quality, shuttle looms, very slow production, very slow but well finished,” he told us.

When he needs inspiration for business or for life, Busatti looks to the past. “When I need to do something very very new, I go in Florence and I go inside *Santa Maria Novella*. I recover something that is inside me,” he shared.

“The future is in the past,” Busatti said.

Filming this series convinced me Busatti’s words have never been more true. Sure, there is room for innovation and new ideas but the key to Italy’s promising future remains in its rich, rich past. Hopefully we did justice to those snippets of age-old traditions we featured in *Dream of Italy*.

—Kathy McCabe

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- A free 45-page travel guide with details on all of the places we visited in the series.
- Purchase information for the 2-DVD set of the series.

choice might be **Lanificio**: “The space itself is beyond perfect,” she says, in a converted wool factory. (*Via di Pietralata, 159/159a; 39-06-4178-0081; www.lanificio.com*)

• Minchilli family recipe:

Meatballs: “The real lesson that I learned in watching my mother-in-law make these meatballs is the role olive oil plays in so many recipes,” writes Minchilli. “It’s not just the vehicle for softening the garlic or onion in a dish, but is one of the main ingredients that give body and texture, not to mention taste.” (The

recipe is included in the book!)

• Like Mother, Like Daughter:

Sophie Minchilli has stepped into her mother’s shoes (Italians do make the best!) and now has her own food blog, *Rome with Sophie* (www.sophieminchilli.com) and gives her own food tours, too: which include *Morning at the Market*, *Trastevere Walk* and *Evening Street Food*.

—Bethanne Patrick



Sophie Minchilli

Puglia’s Pasta Mamas *continued from page 7*

hearty greeting using her native Bari dialect, a language unrecognizable to the Italian I know. She tells the old ladies about how much I want to bring their technique back to the United States.

The women start talking all at once, faces lighting up, hands flying while telling lively stories, arms opening for welcoming hugs. Ladies poke their heads out from behind their beaded curtains to invite me into their homes.

One woman shows me the old butter knife she uses to make orecchiette. The knife has been in her family for more than 100 years. The tip is broken, and the handle has been worn down so she just wraps her hand around the exposed metal shaft. She would never consider using any other tool to make pasta.

I watch the women all afternoon making orecchiette faster than I could

imagine. In contrast to Chef Maria’s careful shaping, these women scraped bits of dough on their outdoor tables, folded them quickly over their thumbs, and popped them off into the air to

later land on drying screens.

They start to shape the next noodle while the first is still mid-air. I can hear the percussive rhythm of the knives cutting and scraping dough on wooden boards that buzzed around me in those city streets.

Meeting and working with these women in Puglia allowed me to witness the transmission of culture through the art of making pasta. I was a lucky and grateful recipient of both their hands-on lessons and their wisdom. Thank you, pasta mamas!

—Katie Leaird

Katie Leaird blogs about her pasta adventures at www.kneadpastaproject.com



Making orecchiette in Bari



Don’t ever touch the produce at an Italian market.