

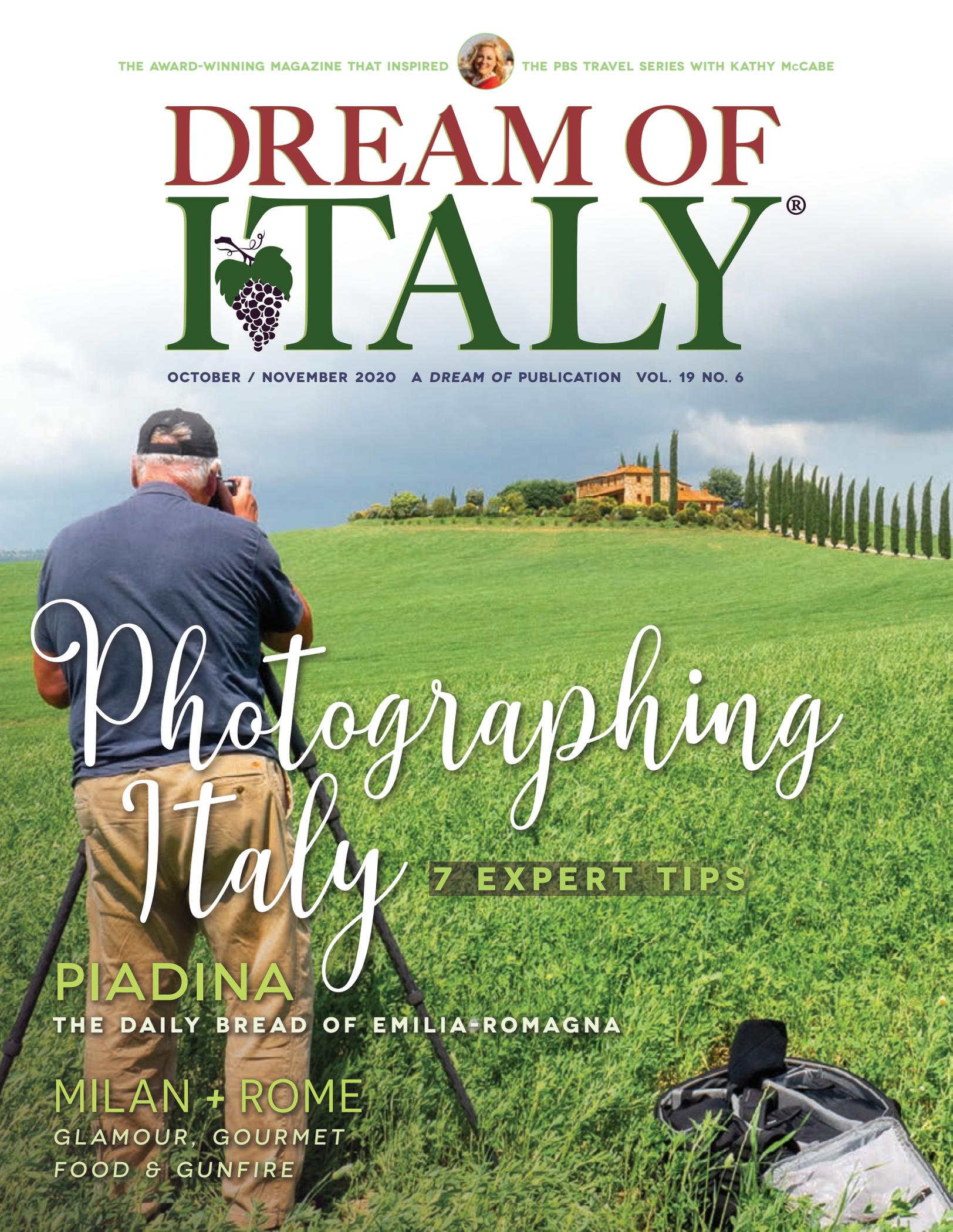
THE AWARD-WINNING MAGAZINE THAT INSPIRED



THE PBS TRAVEL SERIES WITH KATHY MCCABE

DREAM OF ITALY®

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Photographing Italy

7 EXPERT TIPS

PIADINA

THE DAILY BREAD OF EMILIA-ROMAGNA

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GLAMOUR, GOURMET
FOOD & GUNFIRE



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Editor's Note



Welcome to the new look of *Dream of Italy*!

I'm thrilled to finally redesign the award-winning travel newsletter I founded 18 years ago into a glossy magazine. This has been on my to-do list for many years. Our travel advice and written content is top-notch, but I've long felt our print visuals weren't fully bringing Italy to our readers, especially in the way that the *Dream of Italy* TV series does. Now I can breathe a sigh of relief that our magazine matches the TV show in its color and vitality.

The new *Dream of Italy* will feature stunning photography, so it is no mistake that the topic of our feature story in this redesigned issue is about how to take better photos of Italy. I met the article's author Jeff Curto while filming the *Dream of Italy: Tuscan Sun Special* in Cortona. That's where he lives part-time (something we all dream of) teaching photography.

This issue features not just one, but two, articles by the incomparable Mary Gray. Mary is Mississippi-born, American expat who lives in Florence. She's a fantastic and lyrical writer and a perennial student of Italian culture, recently earning a M.A. in Italian Studies from Middlebury College.

Mary and I share a deep appreciation for the region of *Emilia-Romagna* which is an incredible culinary destination. She shares the significance of their daily bread, *Piadina*, as well as a recipe. When Mary and I were brainstorming about story ideas, I asked her for something that might be a good read at this time when we can't travel. The result is the article *Glamour, Gourmet Food and ... Gunfire?* I think you will find it as fascinating as I did.

I always welcome your feedback, questions and comments, so feel free to reach out to me at kathy@dreamofitaly.com

During this strange time in the world, please hold tight to the thought that no matter what, we always have Italy!

Kathy McCabe

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7 ways to photograph Italy

LIKE A PRO

by Jeff Curto



Jeff Curto, who holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography from Illinois Wesleyan University and a Master of Fine Arts in Photography from Bennington College in Vermont, has been holding photography workshops in Italy since 2009. For more information, visit www.photographitaly.com



Anyone who has been to Italy knows how visually seductive it is. If you're carrying a camera (*and with every mobile phone equipped with a high-quality camera, who isn't?*) Italy becomes even more alluring, compelling you to make photographs of nearly everything you see.

But why is it that when you look at photographs of Italy, you will mindlessly scroll through dozens of pictures of famous sights, but you'll stop and longingly gaze at a photograph of a fruit vendor in *Cortona* or the pattern of light and shadow on the ancient wall surrounding *Lucca*? It's because the best travel photographs create a sense of connection to place.

I'm a professional photographer and college photography professor who first began photographing in Italy in 1989. Since then, through a combination of personal fine art photographic projects, leading photography workshops and teaching for the University of Georgia's

Studies Abroad program in *Cortona*, I've been fortunate to return to Italy at least once a year, often for months at a time.

Below are seven skills, habits and considerations that I've developed during 30 years of taking pictures in Italy and teaching photography here. Whether your camera is a mobile phone or the latest sophisticated photographic machine, I want to help you make the most of your photography during your Italian adventures. With a little bit of thought and care, you can return home from Italy with photographs that are your own very personal travel memories.



#1 SLOW DOWN

If there is one piece of advice I can give to any traveler, anywhere, it's this—slow down. Don't try to see—and photograph—everything all at once. Instead, immerse yourself in the experience of being in the place and think of what most interests you about it.

Is it the vine on the building, the boy playing ball in the piazza or the old men exchanging political views over an espresso? Taking the time to notice and photograph the nuance of a scene is a key to making an effective photograph of it. The deeper you go into detail in a location, the more powerful your photographs will be.

As an example, I had been walking and photographing all day in the perfect Medieval Tuscan hill town of Siena, when I wandered past this courtyard—one I had never seen before. The entire space was painted yellow and bathed in golden, late-afternoon sunlight, so it gave off an almost unreal glow. I walked in and spent a blissful hour photographing the light, the shadows and the details in the space. In the end, this image of the dark entry gate and the honeyed space beyond conveyed my feelings about the space.

#2 SIMPLIFY YOUR COMPOSITION



Let's face it: no photographer can convey the beauty of Italy in one photograph. Instead, try to narrow your field of view to a few essential elements that convey your impression of the experience of being there.

Wandering through a riotous visually overwhelming market in *Siracusa*, I came across these gorgeous *Pachino pomodoro* and focused my camera in on them, isolating them from the other vegetables on offer and creating a simple but visually interesting pattern of the fruit and the vines. Making more thoughtful photographs rather than trying to capture everything in sight can transform your photographs into personal statements about the place.



#3 INCLUDE CONTEXT

Once you've found the elements that interest you, provide the viewer of your photographs with context so that they can understand more about the person, place or thing you're showing them.

For example, the picture-perfect town of *Montemerano*, deep in the heart of Tuscany's *Maremma* is a warren of

narrow streets and dark *vicoli*. When I burst from the darkness out into this gorgeous little *piazza*, I knew I wanted to celebrate its warm, inviting quality, so framing the scene in the archway helped provide context to understand how I felt as I encountered that space.

#4 TELL A STORY

All humans are fascinated by story. We crave something that tells us about ourselves by hearing a tale about others. A single picture can tell a story by getting the viewer to think about what might be happening in a scene. It's best to begin this strategy by describing to yourself—out loud—what story you see in the scene and then take a photograph that translates that verbal story into a visual one.

As I came downhill into the *centro* of Cortona, I saw this quintessential Italian *piazza* scene. I stood and described the scene to myself—people chatting, the final moments of the sunset, the couples walking hand-in-hand, the monument to Italy's revolutionary hero, *Giuseppe Garibaldi* . . . and realized that including all of those elements in my photograph would tell the story of that *piazza* (and, in so many ways, most Italian *piazze*) in an effective way.

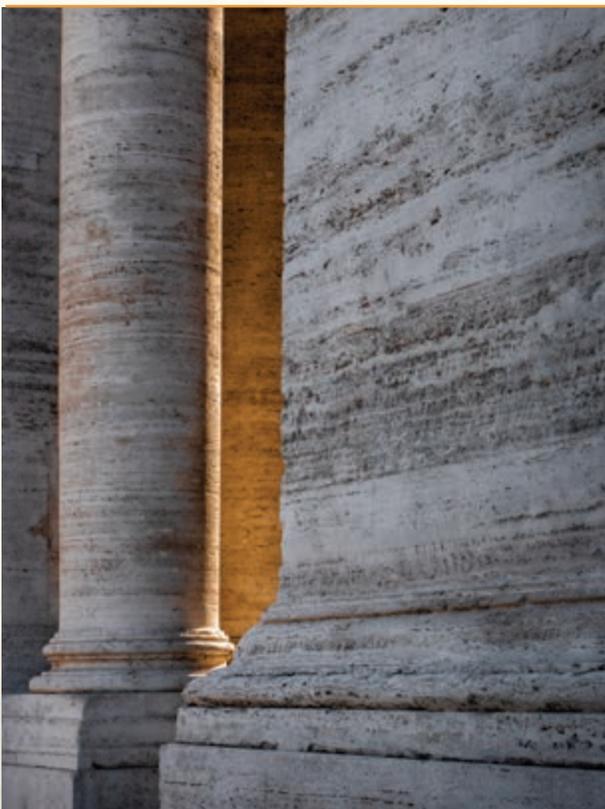


#5 PAY ATTENTION TO LIGHT

The quality, direction and quantity of light are so elemental to making pictures with a camera that the medium's 19th-century inventors used the Greek words *photos* and *graphos*—"light writing" to create the word *photography*. Often, a scene that's boring at midday will come alive when late afternoon sunlight dances across textured surfaces, resulting in a photograph that conveys the essence of the place.

For that reason, many photographers will revisit favorite spots throughout the day, looking at (and perhaps even planning ahead for) the most evocative light. Morning light can be especially beautiful and usually comes with the added benefit of being a time when few others are out, even in the most popular locations.

It was morning light that motivated me to make this photograph on Rome's *Piazza del Campidoglio*. The rising sun was casting a beautiful honeyed hue into the space behind the massive, *Michelangelo*-designed *Travertine* columns. By looking through into that warm space, the photograph celebrates the beginning of a new day.





#6 MAKE PORTRAITS



I believe that one of the reasons so many people travel again and again to Italy is the warmth and kindness of its people. Whenever possible, I try to make portraits of these new Italian friends, even if I've only known them for a few minutes. Of course it's important to ask permission to make a photograph of someone, and even without knowing any Italian, it's possible to gesture to your camera and then to the subject to gain that consent.

As a further act of respect for your subject, go beyond the "selfie" and make the event a formal one, taking a few photographs and showing them to your subject on your

camera or phone. Best of all, agree to send a copy of the images to them via email or text so they can share in that experience with you.

In Cortona, the *fruttavendolo* Roberto picks out the best peaches for me—two to eat today, and two that will be perfectly ripe tomorrow. He happily stood outside his shop and posed for me. In Sicily's *Ortigia*, when I asked *pescivendolo* Angelo to take a break from slicing steaks of *peschspada* (swordfish) so I could make his portrait, he struck this beautifully heroic pose.

#7 GET LOST

At any given moment, there are thousands of people taking photographs of the Colosseum, each elbowing their way into the "best" position for a picture that would be easily found through a Google image search. Walk a few blocks away, though, and you'll find yourself off the beaten track, with fantastic Italian sights, sounds and smells around every corner. This phenomenon plays out in any Italian city and town and it is in these places that you can find—and photograph—an Italy that many tourists don't allow themselves to see.

This scene, in a beautiful little *vicolo* in Siena, is only about a 5-minute walk from the bustle of that city's popular (and populated!) *Campo*, but I was the only one standing there, marveling at the Italian predisposition toward making even the most mundane spaces beautiful. Immerse yourself in the out-of-the-way places and use your camera to tell your own story about what Italy means to you. 🍷



by Mary Gray

GLAMOUR, *gourmet food and...* GUNFIRE?



Picture an Italy on high alert. Dread isn't quite what's afoot, exactly, but in the major cities—Milan and Rome, in particular—people look suspect.

Bodies are quick to stiffen in public spaces. Sirens cry out late into the night; *carabinieri* eyes linger on residents a little bit longer than they're accustomed to or comfortable with. And glitzy, expensive restaurants with densely seated clients don't exactly feel like the safest places to gather.

No, this is not the virus-strained Italy of early 2020, when streets, squares, and interactions felt similarly charged, but a typical urban weeknight at the loaded height of the *Anni di Piombo*. The "Years of Lead", as translated, were a period of Italian social and political unrest stretching from the late 1960s to the late 1980s.

Down was up and right was left; in political terms, radicalized groups on both sides spiked fear and carried out bombings (*Piazza Fontana*) and assassinations (policeman *Antonio Annaruma* was an early victim).

No one would ever call nervousness urban Italians' default state, yet it underpinned that time and wormed its way into both mundane and beloved metropolitan rituals—dining out, waiting in line, walking through busy *piazze*. VIPs and politicians, therefore, were never

not looking over their shoulders—even during something as simple as a meal out.

High-end restaurants had to cater to the occasional paranoia of their high-profile clients if they were to keep them. Everyday tension in the "Years of Lead" arguably reached its apex in 1978, in the months immediately following the kidnapping of Prime Minister *Aldo Moro* and leading up to the discovery of his body. (Moro was the de facto leader of the right-of-center Christian Democrats, and had been abducted at the hands of guerrilla far-left terrorist group the Red Brigades.)

Journalist Teri Agins has noted how top-tier locales in Milan (serving well-heeled socialites) and Rome (serving politicians) would discreetly seat A-list guests in kitchens, as Red Brigades fears ran rampant. "Many rich people and politicians didn't like to dine in restaurants, fearing they'd be gunned down, *Godfather*-style, over a plate of pasta," Agins writes in her book *The End of Fashion*.

"So several fine Italian eateries allowed their most special clients to dine incognito. Restaurant kitchens thus

became the height of inverse chic in Italy, where danger could be not only exclusive, but glamorous.”

Elizabeth Guider, an American journalist who was based in Rome at the time of the *Caso Moro*—and is, disclosure, this writer’s aunt—remembers the day-to-day jitters and “distinctly recall[s] police cars zooming around day and night—mostly uselessly.” Still, most everyone in Rome ate out “often,” by her estimation.

Active in the *Movimento per la Liberazione delle Donne*



(the women’s liberation movement), she and her Roman radical-but-not-Red-Brigades beau frequented the restaurants around their respective movements’ offices—eateries not far from *Palazzo Montecitorio*, seat of the Italian Chamber of Deputies.

Said eateries were humble spots that Guider and her fellow activists and freelancer friends could afford, and less likely to host bigwigs being hunted. But “if major politicians were on edge, the restaurant right in front of the *Hotel Raphael*, where the socialist leader *Bettino Craxi* lived, might have been one where such politicians ate *in cucina*,” Guider writes.

She recalls occasionally spotting Moro’s longtime political rival, *Giulio Andreotti*, dining with his entourage in restaurants around the Pantheon: “Everyone was encouraged during those months in 1978 to notice anything strange going on in their neighborhood. . . . Italians love to be SEEN, so for politicians to hide themselves meant things had to be pretty bad.”

What was once about hiding out of necessity became about hiding for the thrill of it. Agins noted in an email exchange that she only discovered “kitchen dining” in its 1990s iteration, when the Italian- and international-style set revived the practice as a way of buttering

up journalists during fashion weeks, or as a means of secluding the era’s supermodels who tired of dodging *paparazzi* and fans.

“Restaurants did it on the spur of the moment, and only at exclusive places. But it was widely shared [in Milan] that insiders and socialite types ate in the kitchens



COURTESY OF BIFFI

(top left) Aldo Moro; Biffi Galleria then (left) and now (above)

back at the height of the Red Brigades activity,” she writes, citing the famed *Bice Milano* on *via Borgospesso* as one location where such dinners went down.

But it was the sleek *Biffi Galleria*, a bedrock of Milan’s *Galleria Vittorio Emanuele* shopping mall since 1867, that became a 1990s hotspot for glamorized, fashion-y tributes to the heavy past. With a façade and an interior mood left largely untouched since the 1970s, *Biffi* made the perfect setting for exclusive mid-90s parties that cast a nostalgic light on the Moro “wartime” months.

Designer Zoran, in particular, regularly reserved tables in what he called the “chicest place in the restaurant”—the kitchen. Agins recalls joining Zoran and her journalist colleagues at these danger-glam dinners between 1995 and 1997.

The elusive 1970s practice of kitchen dining speaks, perhaps, to an Italian commitment to finding moments of delight amid danger; or, likely for some, delighting in the danger itself. And its unexpected 1990s revival raises questions about what rituals and memories will re-emerge two decades from now as trends. With the benefit of hindsight, how will Italians reinterpret these similarly “leaden” times? 🍷



Mary Gray is a Florence-based writer and journalist. Her first book, *Rental Diaries*, was recently published by The Florentine Press. For more information, visit www.verymarygray.com



Piadina

EMILIA-ROMAGNA'S DAILY BREAD by Mary Gray

My technical first encounter with the *piadina* tradition happened in a way that would make any red-blooded *romagnolo* wag his finger—and possibly tell me, rightfully so, that it didn't really count. I was in Piedmont, of all places—specifically, just a few feet from Turin's National Museum of Cinema—and going about lunch the way one should *never* go about lunch when exploring a new region.

Which is to say, hurriedly, and hungrily, and after spending too much time on my feet in a museum. I don't remember many of that convenience-driven meal's specifics, beyond the guilt I felt in doing *Emilia-Romagna*, the flatbread's true home terroir, a grave disservice.

My first *real* (or at least memorable) encounter with *piadina*, then, was several years later at an outdoor birthday party in rural *Emilia-Romagna*—a much more appropriate setting for one's introduction, even in the midst of a pandemic-tainted summer.

We'd made the three-hour, impossibly snaky drive from Florence to the countryside *Be&B Nido d'Ape* ("Honeycomb Hotel", sweetly enough). The rustic cabins

were just a few miles outside sleepy *Cesena*, where one 2015 viral YouTube video is the most exciting thing that's happened in at least a few decades.

Save for the *piadina* spread we found at this party: flatbreads stuffed with grilled eggplant and summery vegetables, flatbreads exploding with soft *squacquerone* cheese and spicy sausages, all arranged just sloppily enough on antique trays, matronly lace tablecloths tucked unselfconsciously beneath them.

Piadina, at least in its homeland of *Emilia-Romagna*, is less a flatbread than a ubiquitous utensil, present at any party table, any *antipasto* spread, worth their salt. Strictly for illustrative purposes, the closest approximation



Adele of Casina del Bosco at work in the kitchen



Experimenting with fillings



Roast beef, Rimini style

found in your standard US supermarket is a tortilla (a comparison that would enrage that imagined *romagnolo* of my introduction).

The two foods, after all, are emblematic of completely divergent cultures and traditions. And while you won't find Mexican-adjacent fillings in the *piadine* crafted by the staunchest *romagnolo* purists, there are "that-makes-sense" stuffings to be tasted in various corners of the Boot—speck, say, in *Alto Adige*, rather than *Parma prosciutto* like at the party.

Given the easy, quick-bite quality of the flatbread, finding *piadina* outposts in less obvious locations, or street food stands offering glitzier, more contemporary cuts, is now to be expected all over Italy.

Still, shortcuts or alternative recipes for the flatbread itself are less readily accepted than local twists on fillings. Like nearly all Italian goods with deep territorial roots, the *piadina romagnola* has a consortium dedicated to protecting its image and integrity in the wider world, establishing the standards required for producers to maintain a Protected Geographical Indication label.

A sort of Platonic *piadina* ideal, then, exists, but occasional and subtle differences are to be found even within *Emilia-Romagna*. Historically, for example, *piadine* eaten in *Rimini* are thinner and a bit crisper than their counterparts in *Forlì* and *Ravenna*. But what generally distinguishes the traditional recipe from other riffs on it served around Italy is its use of lard, very often made from the *Mora Romagnola*, a regional, rare breed of brownish-black pigs.



The *Consorzio Piadina Romagnola*, headquartered in *Rimini*, attributes the flatbread's name to the 19th-century poet *Giovanni Pascoli*, who Italianized the word *piè*, taken from the *Romagnolo* dialect, and dubbed it the region's "national bread." But *piadina* predated *Pascoli*, in form if not in name. Its origins likely go back to at least Etruscan times, although *Pascoli* noted that the first traceable reference to it in literature is found in the seventh canto of Virgil's *Aeneid*.

Different iterations on this round, not-quite-bread evolved with the centuries, but during medieval times, residents of what is today the *Emilia-Romagna* territory began preparing it with "poor grains" rather than wheat to avoid incurring high taxes by landowners. This gained it a reputation as a sort of B-side bread, a last-ditch alternative to more robust fuel.

That's a far cry from its modern image as a homemade delicacy in its own right, which began to take shape after World War II, according to the consortium's official take. Later, in the 1970s, more artisanal forms of *piadina* production began to take place, paving the way for it to be seen as a gourmet good.

And numerous *Emilia-Romagna* restaurants today are working to effectively fuse their culinary nostalgia and territorial pride with their recognition of today's consumer tastes. *Aris Guidi*, a co-owner of the family business *Casina del Bosco* in his hometown *Rimini*, says

RECIPE

Traditional Emilia-Romagna-Style Piadina

Makes 5 *piadine*

Ingredients

4 cups of super fine flour
4 generous tablespoons lard
2 pinches of baking soda
1 ½ teaspoons of salt

Directions

- Place the flour on a spacious flat kneading surface and create a small crater in the middle, filling it up with the lard. You will want to knead the *piadina* from the inside, gradually incorporating the flour into the lard and adding the other ingredients with a little warm water.
- Knead the dough for about ten minutes, letting your shoulders do most of the labor. Then divide the dough into five sections.
- Flatten out each dough chunk with a rolling pin into discs around 8 inches in diameter.
- To cook, use a cast iron skillet on high heat, letting it warm up and adding a bit of oil or a touch more lard, letting it sizzle.
- Cook each *piadina* one by one, rotating it every 40 or so seconds until golden brown; prick with a fork as you go to keep too many air bubbles from forming.
- To keep the batch warm ahead of serving, place on a cookie sheet in an oven heated to 200 degrees Fahrenheit.

Not sure what to use as filling? If you're hoping to recreate one of the most typical regional fillings, use *prosciutto crudo*, *arugula* and *squacquerone* cheese (or, more likely, a local grocery store substitute of *ricotta* or *stracchino*. Just no cream cheese, please).



Recipe adapted from the Mariette di Casa Artusi version

that in recent years they've toed this fine line by focusing more on sourcing both flours and fillings from around the area, while also trying to up the "foodie ante" for the new generation and to attract tourists.

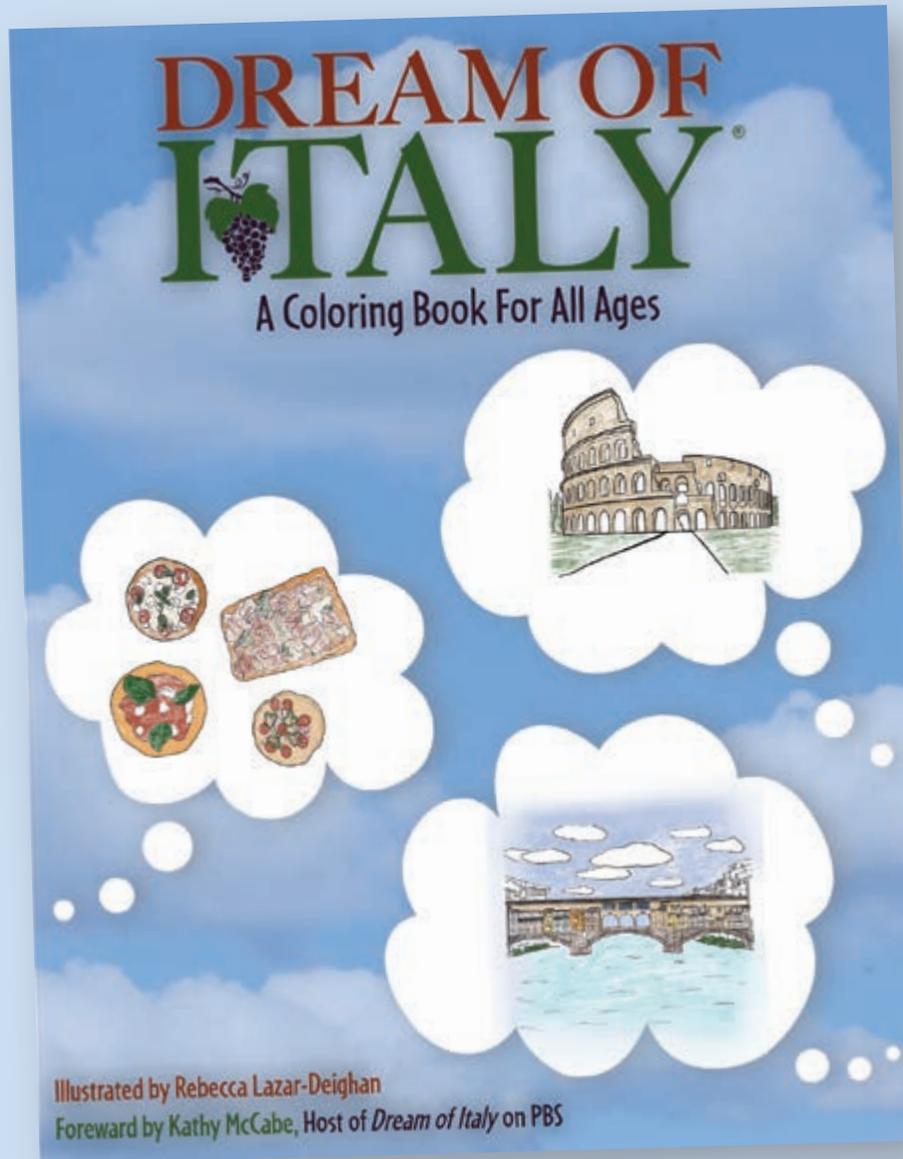
Ultimately, though, creating a bit more hype and intrigue around their offerings is about keeping the traditions going. "Other regions and cities adapt their fillings to reflect the tastes and products of their own territories, while putting a contemporary spin on things," he says. "But in the end, people who come to *Emilia-Romagna*, well, they should expect to taste our products and flavors. And more than anything, to taste our hospitality, our way of doing things, our sense of humor."

Guidi's words take me back to that first real taste of *piadina* at the "Honeycomb Hotel" party. By the time we'd

tucked into the flatbread spread, my definition of comfort food—previously dependent upon personal memories, of which I possessed none involving *piadine*—had expanded. I could chalk it up to the way the summer light was landing on the too-tall grass, or to the wine buzz.

Maybe it was the way those of us at the party who'd only met that evening fell into the removed-yet-relaxed rapport of holiday-only relatives, or childhood friends who catch up once in a while. Likely all those factors played a part in making the food more flavorful and comforting, in provoking strange nostalgia for a place I'd only just arrived. In matters of taste, it's fruitless to try to break down the proportional relevance of wine, wistful thoughts, and easy company. But keeping an eye on the flour-to-lard ratio when trying to recreate those tastes, that's key. 🌿

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A thought on Italy

First of all, let's get one thing straight. Your Italy and our *Italia* are not the same thing. Italy is a soft drug peddled in predictable packages, such as hills in the sunset, olive groves, lemon trees, white wine, and raven-haired girls. *Italia*, on the other hand, is a maze. It's alluring, but complicated. It's the kind of place that can have you fuming and then purring in the space of a hundred meters, or in the course of ten minutes. Italy is the only workshop in the world that can turn out both Botticellis and Berlusconis. —**BEPPE SEVERGNINI, ITALIAN COMMENTATOR**

