FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Cooking

Italian Intermezzo: Recipes by Celebrated Italian Chefs Romantic Italian Music
Sharon O'Connor
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In this fifteenth volume of her cookbook-paired-with-a-compact-disc series, O’Connor, a musician, cook, and founder of the San Francisco String Quartet invites readers to peek into twenty-one Italian restaurant kitchens in Italy and the United States. She then woos them with Italian art, Italian music, and poetry from the likes of Henry James, Robert Browning, and E.M. Forster.

The book begins with notes on the artists, musicians, writers, and composers. Each of the restaurants has its own section beginning with a description of it, and a story about its owners and chef. O’Connor describes Villa San Michele in Fiesole, Italy: “Designated as a monument by Italy’s National Trust and surrounded by a protected forest of cypress, cedars, and olives, Villa San Michele nestles in the hills of Fiesole overlooking the city of Florence. Its magnificent colonnaded faÃ§ade was designed by none other then Michelangelo, and the building is located near the hill where Leonardo da Vinci experimented with flying.”

O’Connor prefaces recipes of restaurant Valentino in Santa Monica with a painting of Young Bacchus by Caravaggio from the Uffizi. Underneath it is a poem by Francesco Redi from Bacchus on Beverages. She tells the story of the Northridge earthquake of 1994 and how Valentino’s owner Piero Selvaggio, who has one of the world’s great wine cellars, lost 30,000 bottles of precious, hard-to-find wines. So well loved was he that the Italian wine producers came together and replaced what he had lost.

Most of the recipes are simple and elegant, perfect for a novice. Some require a skilled cook. The instruction and recipe writing are clear and thorough enough that cooks with lesser skills aren’t left wandering. O’Connor soothes away culinary worries with expert food photography and lively music.

While the cook plays Funiculi, Funicula she could mince garlic for Sea Bass in Crazy Water or stir the Risotto with Scampi. O Sole Mio could accompany a cook as he assembles the green butter sauce for Pumpkin Cappellacci or Pasta with Rabbit Sauce. The preparation of

Little Agnolotti Stuffed with Pheasant would go more smoothly with a Tarantella. The sweet rendition of Santa Lucia might aid digestion and enhance a dessert of Warm Zabaglione Scented with Orange-Muscat Liqueur or Venetian Tiramisu with Vanilla Sauce.

Readers should be forewarned. This book is infectious. All of the recipes in this collection are winners. Paging through this book they will find themselves with Italian fever which has as its symptoms a wild hunger and longing for Italy. Thankfully, Italian music and food seem to alleviate these symptoms. This book and compact disc will give readers not only the disease but also provides the cure.

Nancy K. Allen