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Cooking

Massimo's Italian Kitchen: Authentic One-Dish Meals from a Seasoned Chef
Massimo Capra
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The recipe for “Risi e Bisi” says that it serves four. The actual result is a creamy, risotto-ish chowder-like dish, balancing the salty roundness of pancetta with the sweetness of peas; and a heartiness that would stuff six teenage boys. Harmonious flavoring and uncomplicated recipes combine in this and the nearly ninety other recipes.

Capra, born in Cremona, Italy, is the chef-owner of Mistura and Sopra in Toronto. He is also a host of *Restaurant Makeover* on the Canadian Food Network. This is his first cookbook.

Chef Capra’s recipes are complex enough to be interesting, but clearly favor good ingredients over fancy preparation. The book is organized into soups, salads and eggs, risotto and polenta, pasta, fish, poultry, meat, vegetables and sweets. Each recipe is accompanied by an informal paragraph discussing some aspect of the dish, such as where it came from or how to pair it. The recipe for “Spaghettini with Seafood” comes with this admonition: “This recipe is a crowd-pleaser. Make sure not to overcook the spaghettini, and let the seafood speak for itself—there’s no need for heavy tomato or cream sauces.”

The recipes range from the humble, such as Chestnut Polenta, Tuscan Bread Salad, and Florentine Fried Chicken to the spectacular, as in Roasted Pheasant with Green Grapes, Squid Stewed in its Own Sauce, and Balsamic Roasted Pears with Whipped Goat Cheese. They are quickly assembled and relatively quick to cook. The rice and pea “soup” took twenty minutes to make, for example.

Directions are always direct, though it is assumed the audience has some basic understanding of cooking. For example, in “Rosa’s Veal-and-Rice Croquettes,” the instructions call for sautéeing “the garlic, onion, celery, carrot and peas until the vegetables are translucent.” Woe to the novice cook who waits to see translucent peas. As some of the ingredients, like speck, will be nearly impossible to locate at a typical grocery, a comprehensive glossary with acceptable substitutions or a sourcing guide are sorely missed.

Regardless, there is no denying these recipes are delicious and inviting. It is a perfect book for simple entertaining or for elevating the family meal to a more enticing level. As long as a cook has one pot they can bring a taste of Italy home.