

★ Veneto: Recipes from an Italian Country Kitchen

Valeria Necchio

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In this cookbook worth savoring, entrancing cooking instructions involve lots of snappiness, whooshing, and wine.

Tourist-trodden Venice may be the star attraction of Italy's Veneto region, but for native food writer Valeria Necchio, the rustic landscape of the surrounding agricultural districts is more alluring. *Veneto* showcases the food bounty and distinctive tastes of these hinterlands, while doling out a generous portion of the author's food memories and family stories.

Necchio describes herself as "the sort of food fanatic who ... moves to a tiny village to study gastronomy." Her book neatly divides prose and one hundred recipes between the traditional foods of her youth, the more sophisticated but still Venetocentric cooking of her adulthood, and a delightful third section that offers up distinctive pickles and jams, and other ways to preserve seasonal abundance.

The book presents traditional Veneto cooking as rustic and homey, emphasizing simple, slow preparations that coax the fullest flavors from favorite local ingredients like artichokes, rabbit, radicchio, borlotti beans, and even polenta. Veneto residents especially like bitter, herbal, and sweet-and-sour tastes (see the tempting recipe for Fried Marinated Pumpkin with Onion, Pine Nuts, and Raisins), as well as desserts that are not overly sweet. Pasta, risotto, and seafood dishes also feature heavily in these pages.

Necchio's recipes for such regional delights don't call for laundry lists of ingredients nor masterful kitchen techniques, though the recipes often fill up a page or two or more with her extensive notes doling out culinary history, family lore, memories, recipe variations, and tips for procuring and prepping ingredients. Informative, evocative asides take on a dreamy, timeless quality when paired with her many light-infused color photographs.

The apotheosis of her talents comes in her presentation of Wild Hop Risotto. Necchio describes tramping through the woods with her Uncle Renato to find bruscandoli, the essential ingredient for this iconic springtime dish redolent of musk, resin, and the wild. Then she layers on exquisite shots of the curling bruscandoli tendrils and her entrancing cooking instructions that involve lots of snappiness, whooshing, and wine.

Veneto is a great book to savor and to cook from. It should send many off to Veneto, or to scour up some wild hop shoots, or at the very least, off to the kitchen to cook up something wonderful.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (November/December 2017)

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