

Focus on stamps

The Collector's Magazine

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Festive Christmas decorations

Delicacies from Switzerland's sunny south

Show them a "tassina" (little jug) of Merlot, a hunk of mountain cheese and some mortadella, and most Swiss people automatically think of sunny Canton Ticino with its grotto taverns, good food and southern joie de vivre – hence the CHF 0.85 miniature sheet depicting Ticino specialities to mark this year's Stamp Day in Bellinzona.

Every year, southern Switzerland attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors, not least because of its tasty fare with its mixture of rustic alpine dishes and a Mediterranean food culture that was influenced by Italy's Lombardy region, making it one of the world's most varied cuisines. Its roots lie in what were once poor mountain valleys where, over a thousand years ago, people created natural "fridges" in rocky niches and caves, storing their cheese, sausages and wine in these ready-made larders. The first grotto eateries with granite tables, and later with boccia courts and simple dishes for locals, developed around 1600. These rocky bases from which Ticino's gastronomy sprang can be seen in their original state in the village of Cevio in the Maggia Valley to this day.

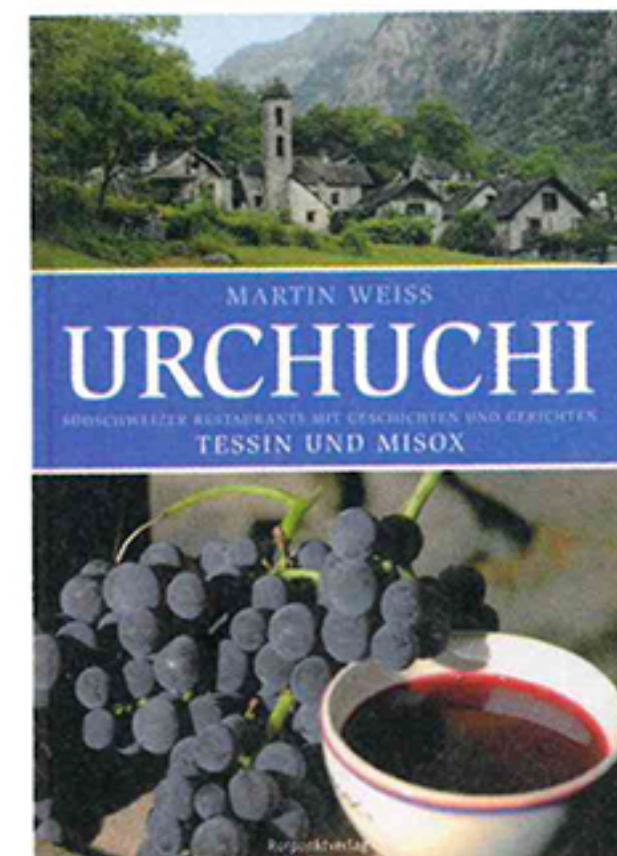
Renaissance of the predecessor of the Merlot grape

The atmosphere in these old rock cellars conjures up times long forgotten. Sitting at one of the moss-covered granite tables, you can almost hear the voices of the villagers who once ate, drank and celebrated here. All these "sottorocci"

share a close connection with the wine that used to be made much higher up the valleys where families produced their own earthy "nostrano" using an old grape variety known as "Bondola". This original rustic wine ousted by the more refined Merlot grape a century ago is currently experiencing a renaissance, just like other tasty morsels from Ticino's "cucina povera" (poor people's fare).

Old is back in fashion

So, nowadays there are plenty of "new old things" to be found in Ticino, like "scmieza", a vegetable cake from Soazza. Or the "farina bona" (browned maize flour) that people in Ticino use to prepare maize pudding, just like their grandmothers before them. Chestnuts – once the bread of the poor – have also been rediscovered, and these highly nutritious fruits are now being roasted in the old smoking houses or "grà" in the Valle di Muggio and made into chestnut soup or gnocchi (see recipe). Ticino's southernmost valley is home to "zincarlin", a pyramid-shaped cream cheese matured among the rocks of the Monte Generoso. And last but not least, there is "mais rosso" with its booming popularity. At one time, this red maize was the main variety in the upper part of Ticino, but then it disappeared only to be recultivated from old seeds just four years ago. And now



"Urchuchi Tessin"

The book "Urchuchi Tessin" provides a detailed picture of Ticino's gastronomic culture, showcasing 45 restaurants, 30 grotto taverns and more than 200 Ticino specialities as well as providing a comprehensive collection of recipes. See www.urchuchi.ch



top restaurants just can't get enough of this tasty "oldie".

Ticino's rich natural resources

The list could go on and on. As part of the process of discovering its culinary heritage, Ticino is harking back to things that are authentic and genuine. Every valley has its speciality, each of them something original that has been handed down from generation to generation. And now many of these products (like Piora cheese from the Leventina region) are in demand and are becoming increas-

ingly costly rarities. One thing brought to light by this culinary investigation of the past is that the people of Ticino love and tend their soil. Many families have their own vineyards, make their own "nocino" (walnut liqueur), distil their own grappa and send some pigs up to higher mountain pastures in summer for slaughtering in autumn.

"He who eats well, lives well"

People from Ticino can discuss the proper seasoning for "pancetta" (dry-cured pork belly) for hours on end, and the →

Ticino dish for you to try: Recipe for chestnut gnocchi

Provided by Anna Biffi, Restaurant Ul Furmighin, Sagno

For 4 people

Mix 250 g chestnut flour and 250 g wholemeal flour with some salt and four eggs. Add a few spoonfuls of lukewarm water and blend to obtain an elastic, homogeneous dough. Shape rolls about 1 cm in diameter and cut them into pieces approximately 2.5 cm thick. Cook the gnocchi in boiling salted water until they rise to the surface. Lift them out with a slotted spoon and serve with hot butter.

Ticino is known far and wide for its culinary specialities. The gastronomic experience is often enhanced by a perfect rustic-tavern setting with granite tables and attractive views. Photo: swiss-image.ch



First-day cover motif

Miniature sheet Stamp Day 2008 Bellinzona

Sales

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until 31.12.2009,
while stocks last
Post offices:
Not available

Validity

Unlimited
from 21.11.2008

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Printing

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Joh. Enschedé,
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Sizes

Stamp: 50×30 mm
Sheet: 105×70 mm

Paper

White stamp paper,
with optical brightener,
mat gummed, 110 gm²

Perforation

14:13¼

Designer

Vito Noto, Cadro (TI)

First-day cancellation

