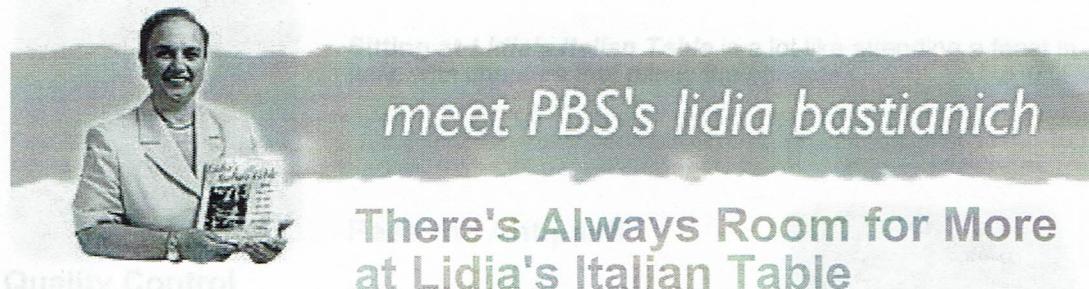


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Quality Control

## meet PBS's lidia bastianich

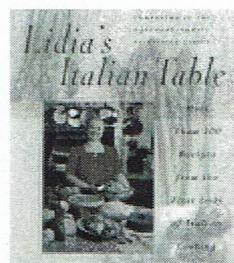
### There's Always Room for More at Lidia's Italian Table

By Missy Carducci  
 Senior Editor

Wish you had grown up in Italy surrounded by a loving family that also loved to cook? Well, you don't have to get a passport and put yourself up for adoption. Lidia Bastianich will make you feel nurtured by an Italian mom who seems to have room in her kitchen for lots of foster "kids" yearning for the kind of consummate comfort food only Italy can offer. And, after cooking your way through *Lidia's Italian Table*—the companion book for her PBS series of the same name—and seeing her in person at the store, you'll know some culinary tricks of your own to give your family a taste of Italy that's uniquely Lidia's.

She credits a "serene and secure childhood" cooking with her mother and grandmother in the northern Italian town of Pola on the Adriatic peninsula of Istria (northeast of Venice on the border of Slovenia), for laying the foundation for her growing passion for food. Now a part of Yugoslavia, that formerly war-torn region influenced Lidia's culinary development, which has led her to include unusual ingredients and dishes most Italian cookbooks never touch on. I daresay you haven't come across a recipe for Venison Ossobuco with Spaetzle—ever! And, Shrimp with Red Cabbage Salad hardly tops the list of what you'd expect from a so-called "Italian" cookbook. Likewise her Sauerkraut and Bean Soup, common in Trieste (the border city where she and her family first fled before emigrating) might raise a few eyebrows. Call it Continental fusion, or whatever label suits your fancy, but this is real food Italians from this region hold dear. Just ask Lidia, who met and married another Istrian émigré before opening up their first restaurant together featuring this hearty cuisine.

The "Old World" rules apply throughout Lidia's book, with recipes that reflect down-to-earth food that's deeply in touch with the land. Though she moved to America at 12 with her family after World War II, Lidia never lost the memories of



You'll be able to get Lidia's book in the store or, if it's

Pasta, Pasta, Anyone?

more convenient . . .  
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## Quality Control

Lidia shares her reverence for "quality and authenticity of ingredients" in a comprehensive section in the beginning of the book that introduces or underscores (depending on your experience) the wonders of:

- [Parmigiano - Reggiano](#)
- Olives and Olive Oil
- Truffles (especially white ones)
- Porcini Mushrooms
- Tomato Paste
- Hot Peppers

walking through her grandfather's olive grove and near family wheat fields that yielded flour for the daily pasta. Years of "learning trips" back to the old country have kept the passion for great ingredients kindled in youth alive in her while supplying the inspiration and know-how to open three restaurants, including the popular Felidia still in operation in midtown Manhattan.

**Sitting at *Lidia's Italian Table*** is a lot like attending a feast in Italy, with chapters that mimic the [courses](#).



## Pass the Antipasti

Start with Bruschetta, "little burnt ones" (finally, an Italian word that makes sense), made with everything from Dinosaur Kale with Tomato and Tuna to Prosciutto and Figs to Tuscan Beans and Caviar.

You get the idea. Then you can move on to such eclectic offerings as Baked Onions with Butternut Squash Filling, a tempting Tomato Tart, or Grilled (yes, grilled) Calamari Strips. Lidia's perspective on produce as the heart of good antipasto covers a little more ground than most. Her Puntarelle and Anchovy Salad (puntarelle is a "bitter, very herbal and refreshing member of the chicory family" found everywhere in Puglia) should be a revelation to most. And, she'll have you indulging in the Italian penchant for incredibly good cheese with her seductive *Frico di Montasio* on page 43, AKA—"cheese crisp." That is, you pan-fry shredded cheese and let the resulting crispy disk cool into a fill-able shape. And, fill it you will with Potato and Crabmeat, Sausage and Broccoli de Rape, and other savory mixtures. If you're starting to get the idea that Lidia lives for food and all-around hospitality, you're on the right track. Though she was raised with an abundance of food, her own grandmother constantly reminded her that you have to take what you get. To literally translate those words of gentle wisdom: "Either eat this soup or jump out of the window."

[top](#)



## Soup's On Lidia's Table

Many war-era Italians grew up making do with what was available, and the soups they passed along and inspired here are a great example of doing it extremely well. [Soup](#) has "humble roots and a noble tradition in Italian cuisine," Lidia explains. None seems more illustrative of this point than *minestra*, more of a method than a specific soup, that's "dense with vegetables, legumes, and tubers to which either rice or some sort of pasta has been added." She even offers a list of rules and finishing touches on pages 53 and 54 for you to get off to a good start.

[top](#)

## Fresh Pasta Anyone?

Exactly as you might expect, the Sundays of Lidia's youth always included pasta making. In fact, she grew up watching the wheat for the pasta flour grow in the fields near her home. Needless to say, she includes every detail of how to make pasta so you can share in that tradition. Recipes you might want to try include Tagliatelle with Porcini Mushroom Sauce—a favorite at Lidia's restaurant Felidia.

What's her formula for perfect pasta from scratch? "Figure one egg per person and about 1/2 to 2/3 of a cup of flour per egg." The only other things you'll add are salt, olive oil, and perhaps a bit of water, she explains on page 89. However, the secret to making the texture just right is in the kneading—something that will improve with time and lots of practice, Lidia assures.

[top](#)

### When is Sauce not a Sauce? When It's a Guazzetto

In case you think you've learned everything there is to know in the Italian kitchen, Lidia introduces you to *guazzetto* on page 96. It's "a slow simmering of meats with stock, tomato, and lots of seasoning . . . whatever is prepared in guazzetto, the result is always tender, flavorful meat in a velvety sauce that coats pasta wonderfully." So you can have a Garganelli with Pheasant in it or Papardelle with Quail, or better yet, she suggests, try it with the meat of your choice. "It would make me very happy to know that you have made this technique your own," she entreats—and I believe she means it!

[top](#)

### You Could Literally Spend a Lifetime with Lidia

Moving through chapters on gnocchi, risotto, polenta, meat, fish and shellfish, vegetables, and *dolci*(desserts) could take you years. But, they'd be some of your tastiest, surely. And through it all, you'll come to appreciate her somewhat international approach, but you'll never forget she's Italian at heart. That's a fact most exquisitely apparent in this *dolci* recipe sandwiched in the midst of the Chocolate Amaretto Custard and the Zabaglione: Carmelized Tomatoes! "Don't think you'd like tomatoes for dessert," Lidia queries. "I'll bet you're wrong!" Take her up on the challenge by spooning this sweet concoction over vanilla ice cream as Lidia suggests. Then, you'll be one more flavorful step closer to making Lidia's table your own.

[top](#)



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