

River Cafe

Italian Kitchen

Rose Gray and Ruth Rogers

All the recipes from the television series

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River Cafe
Italian Kitchen
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The food we cook in *The Italian Kitchen*, like the food we cook in the River Cafe, is inspired by the seasons – late spring and early summer in series one and autumn and early winter in series two.

We want you to be as excited as we are by the variety of vegetables and other produce which are particular to these seasons and learn as we did to use basil in the summer when the flavour is pungent, make polenta in the autumn when the maize has just been milled, and cook fennel in the winter before the bulbs start to shoot and into tough stalks.

All the recipes we cook in the programmes can be cooked at home. We demonstrate the techniques we use in the restaurant, and work with alternative equipment – griddle pans instead of the char-grill and domestic ovens at high heat instead of the wood oven. In every programme there are simple recipes with few ingredients that can be prepared quickly such as Spaghetti al Limone as well as demanding ones such as Bollito Misto – but all the recipes represent what is, to us, the essence of Italian food.

The photographs in this book are of the people who make the Parmesan, find the truffles, produce the wine and press the olives. Their care and precision, their passion and knowledge inspire us. We want, through this book, and the television series, to inspire you to cook these recipes, to get

pleasure from using such special ingredients and to feel more confident and knowledgeable about cooking Italian food, the food we love most.

Soups

Summer Ribollita

Tuscan Bread, Tomato and Basil Soup

Chestnut, Pumpkin and Farro Soup

Chicken Broth

Fish Broth

Asparagus Broth with Grilled Crostini

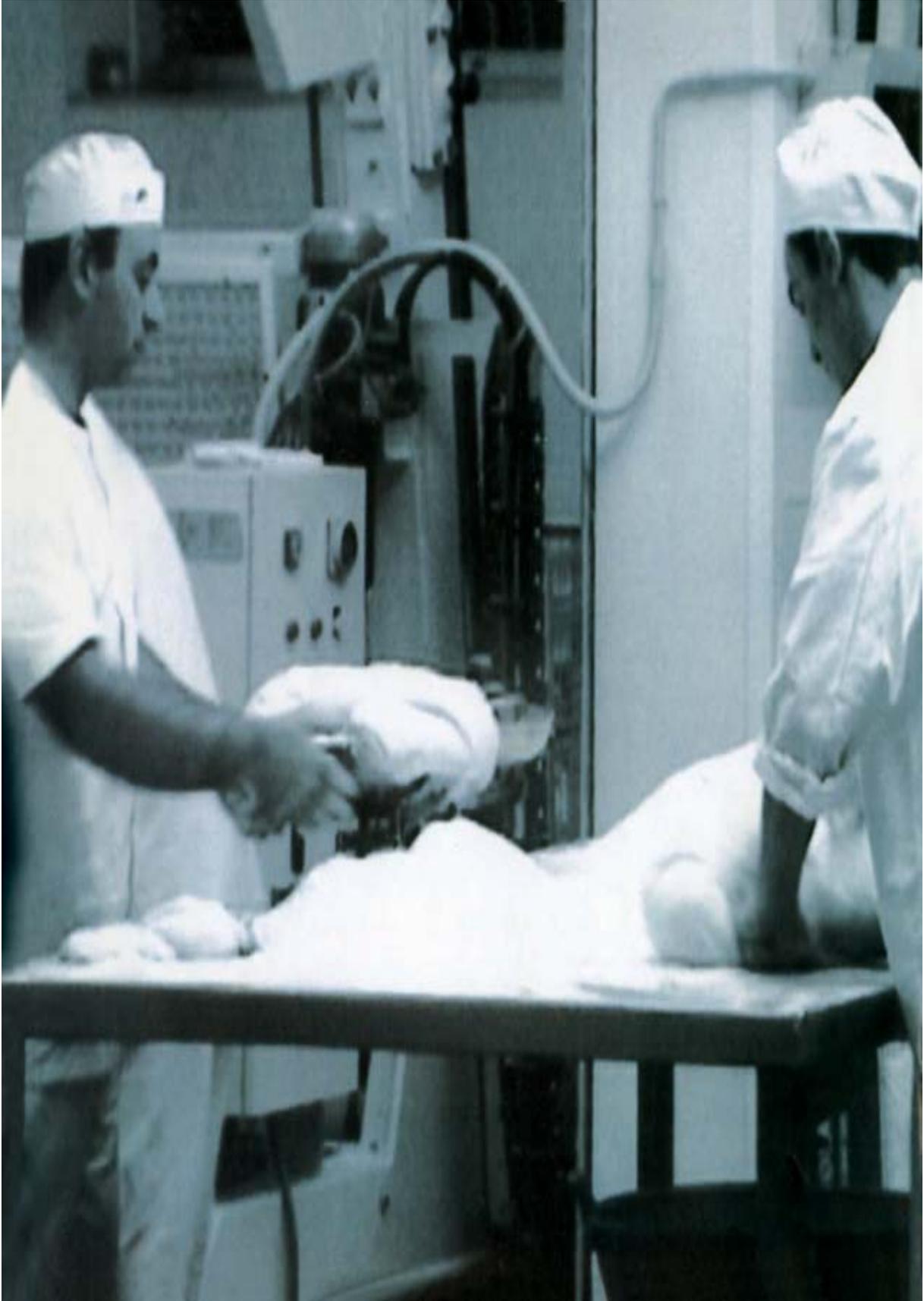
Risi Bisi Verde

Cannellini Bean and Parsley Soup

Spicy Mussel Soup

Chickpea and Porcini Soup

Acquacotta di Ricotta



The Italian soups we cook have been chosen not only because they are the ones we like most but because they convey our approach to cooking so well. They are robust and thick and are often served as an alternative to risotto or pasta.

We have picked soups that reflect both the different regions and seasons. Broth soups from North Italy, like Risi Bisi Verde, a soupy risotto made only in the early summer with peas, spinach, rice and Parmesan; bread soups like Summer Ribollita, thickened with fresh cannellini beans and seasoned with summer herbs; and the famous very, very simple Pappa al Pomodoro which has only four ingredients and is so regional that you would hardly find it outside Tuscany. From Puglia in the south of Italy we chose to make our favourite fish soup – Spicy Mussel Soup – the key ingredients being tomatoes and fiery chilli.

In the autumn series we show you how to make Pumpkin, Chestnut and Farro Soup. These ingredients are all harvested, and are at their best, from October to December. In Tuscany, in the first week of November, the pressing of the new season's olive oil starts. This oil has a very special, intensely peppery flavour and gives us the perfect reason to make Cannellini Bean and Parsley Soup.

We hope that making these soups with their distinctive characteristics will inspire you to adopt our approach to ingredients, choosing them with real care and preparing them in a precise and exciting way.

Summer Ribollita ([see here](#))

The word 'ribollita' means 're-boiled', and traditionally was applied to leftover minestrone which was reheated on the second day and served with added bread. The classic ribollita is made with dried beans and cavolo nero, a winter vegetable. Our summer ribollita uses fresh cannellini beans, Swiss chard and summer herbs.

The soffritto forms the base of the soup. Onions, celery, chard stalks and herbs are cooked together gently for the soffritto which is particularly

important to the taste as there is no stock to enrich the flavour. The best extra virgin olive oil is an essential ingredient.

Tuscan Bread, Tomato and Basil Soup ([see here](#))

This simple, thick soup is found only in Tuscany, where there are almost as many local versions as there are local cooks. Every small trattoria will have Pappa al Pomodoro on the menu, especially in late summer when tomatoes and basil are at their best. Our version relies on really ripe and flavourful tomatoes (although good-quality tinned can be substituted), the pungency of fresh basil, summer garlic and extra virgin olive oil. The bread used must have strength, and should ideally be a sourdough bread such as ciabatta or Pugliese, both of which are made with olive oil.

Chestnut, Pumpkin and Farro Soup ([see here](#))

Made only in October and November (when chestnuts and pumpkins are in season) this is a typical River Cafe soup. The flavour comes from the chestnuts which are very sweet, and the pumpkin which is roasted to concentrate the taste. The first two ingredients are soft and floury, so the farro, which is soaked and cooked separately, is added to give texture.

Chicken Broth ([see here](#))

The best chickens to use when making stocks are free-range boilers. This stock should taste of chicken rather than vegetables and herbs; simply use carrots, onions and celery, keeping both the chicken and the vegetables whole. It is cooked for less time than the more traditional methods in order to achieve a lighter stock.

Fish Broth ([see here](#))

Use turbot bones and halibut and monkfish trimmings to make this fish stock. Put them with herbs and vegetables which complement fish – for example, bay, fennel and fennel seeds, chillies and parsley stalks. White wine or dry vermouth adds perfume and depth to the stock. Cook the ingredients gently for only 20 minutes.

Asparagus Broth with Grilled Crostini ([see here](#))

‘Zuppa di poveri’ (‘soup of the poor’) was one of the first soups we cooked in the River Cafe when we made it with purple sprouting broccoli. This version uses wild asparagus or thin sprue. The basis of the soup is a good chicken stock – very much part of the Italian kitchen– with toasted bread and grated Parmesan which melts into the broth.

Risi Bisi Verde ([see here](#))

Risi bisi is the risotto traditionally cooked in Venice when the new peas come into season. This recipe has the addition of spinach and mint which go well with peas. Looking a dramatic bright green, the recipe is a cross between a thick soup and a soupy risotto.

Cannellini Bean and Parsley Soup ([see here](#))

This is a favourite Italian way of using beans. It is incredibly simple with only three basic ingredients: parsley, garlic and beans. It should be seasoned well before pouring on fine, peppery Tuscan oil.

Spicy Mussel Soup ([see here](#))

This Neapolitan recipe is made with generous amounts of mussels, chillies, anchovies and tomatoes to create a dense, hot, peppery soup.

Chickpea and Porcini Soup ([see here](#))

Chickpeas vary in size; use the largest ones you can find. More importantly, ask for the new season’s chickpeas – the ones harvested in August and September. The skins of old chickpeas become tough, the flavour fades, and they will take almost twice as long to cook.

Acquacotta di Ricotta ([see here](#))

‘Acquacotta’ means ‘cooked water’ in Italian. These soups are made with toasted bread, vegetables and water rather than stock. This version combines the flavours of potatoes, cannellini beans and ricotta with the sharp taste of bitter greens. This is a wonderful soup to enjoy with the new season’s spicy green olive oil.



Summer Ribollita

1000 g (18 oz) fresh borlotti or cannellini beans (podded weight)
extra virgin olive oil
young onions, red or white, peeled and chopped
head celery, plus leaves, stalks chopped
head fresh garlic, peeled and sliced
1000 g (18 oz) Swiss chard stalks and leaves, stalks sliced into large matchsticks
bunch fresh basil, leaves picked from the stalks
bunch fresh mint, leaves picked from the stalks
bunch fresh marjoram, leaves picked from the stalks
bunch fresh flat-leaf parsley, leaves picked from the stalks
4.5 kg (10 lb) fresh ripe plum tomatoes, skinned, seeded and chopped
sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
bunch fresh borage (optional)
1000 g (10 oz) fresh spinach, tough stalks removed
loaves ciabatta bread, stale if possible, crusts removed
fresh red chilli

for eight

Prepare the beans as described [here](#).

In a large, heavy pan heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil, then add the onion and celery stalks. Stir and cook gently until they are soft and brown. Add the garlic and chard stalks and continue to cook. When the garlic begins to colour, add half the basil, mint, marjoram, parsley and celery leaves. Gently fry and stir together to combine the herbs, then add the chopped tomatoes. Season and simmer for 30 minutes: the tomatoes should reduce with the vegetables.

Separately, in another large saucepan full of boiling water with plenty of salt, blanch the borage and chard leaves and then the spinach. Drain, keeping the blanching water, and roughly chop. Add the leaves to the vegetable and tomato mixture along with the cooked beans. Tear up the ciabatta into 3–5 cm (1–2 in) lengths and add to the soup. Pour over some of the blanching water to moisten the bread, and stir in the remaining herbs. Check for seasoning, then add salt and pepper to taste and 3 tablespoons of olive oil. The consistency should be very thick.

Remove the seeds and fibres from the inside of the red chilli by cutting it in half and scraping with a teaspoon. Chop the chilli roughly, then place in a small bowl and add 2 tablespoons of the extra virgin olive oil. Dribble this chilli sauce over each bowl before serving.

Tuscan Bread, Tomato and Basil Soup

garlic cloves, peeled and cut into slivers

75 ml (6 fl oz) olive oil

kg (9 lb) ripe sweet tomatoes, skinned and seeded, or 2 kg (4.1/2 lb) tinned plum tomatoes, drained of most of their juices

aldon salt and freshly ground black pepper

00 ml (1 pint) cold water

loaves stale ciabatta or other sourdough bread

large bunch fresh basil, leaves picked from stalks

ltra virgin olive oil

or ten

Put the garlic and the olive oil into a heavy saucepan and cook gently for a few minutes. Just before the garlic turns brown, add all the tomatoes. Simmer for 30 minutes, stirring occasionally, until the tomatoes become concentrated. Season with salt and pepper, then add the water and bring to the boil.

Cut most of the crust off the bread and pull into pieces. Put the bread into the tomato mixture and stir until the bread absorbs the liquid, adding more boiling water if it is too thick.

Remove from the heat and allow to cool slightly. If the basil leaves are large, tear into pieces. Stir into the soup with 120–175 ml (4–6 fl oz) of the extra virgin olive oil. Let the soup sit before serving to allow the bread to absorb the flavour of the basil and oil. Add more of the extra virgin olive oil to each bowl.

