



Cooking with Viola Buitoni

Italy by Ingredient: Bottarga 3/30/2021

I was 7 when first tasted bottarga. I remember the intense odor of the maroon, heart shaped mysteries hanging in a wire mesh cabinet in the courtyard of my mother's favorite fishmonger on the Southern Tuscan coast. I can see her hand sliding over them to finally settle on the one she thought worthiest of our tiny palates in training. The spaghetti that night was glistening with olive oil and rust-colored freckles and it tasted unlike anything I had tried before. It was like the sea, like salt and wind, like the inside of shells, like I imagined Hans Christian Andersen's Little Mermaid to taste if I could eat that tale. To this day, when I eat bottarga, an ingredient that I have by now made thoroughly mine in cooking, I am swept away to that moment.

But what is bottarga? Bottarga is the whole roe sac of a fish that is salt cured, pressed and air-dried. In Sardinia it is typically mullet, as it is in the small hyperlocal production in the town of Orbetello, Tuscany where I first encountered it. In Sicily bottarga is made with tuna roe.

In my eating adventures I have had the good luck of tasting amberjack roe bottarga. I have even made my own mini ones from local herrings and large ones from mullet sacks I found in North Carolina on a visit to my mother-in-law.

Bottarga has enjoyed more and more well deserved notoriety through the years, and now-a-days it is easy to find, both on line and in specialty stores. Not all bottarga is created equal though. While the majority is still transformed in Sardinia and Sicily, the raw material often comes from other seas. The few still exclusively local productions create a superior bottarga whose cost can be at once prohibitive and worth every penny.

There are many culinary uses for bottarga. The dishes I am presenting today are a pasta that comes from my childhood home and an unusual main dish I created for a special presentation at the Culinary Institute of America in 2018.



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Spaghetti con bottarga di tonno di Sicilia e limone Meyer

Spaghetti with Sicilian tuna bottarga and Meyer lemon

for 4 people

4 ounces Sicilian tuna bottarga
1 Meyer lemon
1/2 cup flat parsley leaves
red chili flakes to taste
1/2 cup extra virgin olive oil + some for finishing
1/2 tablespoon salt
12 ounces spaghetti

Shred the bottarga paper thin and arrange it in a bowl in 1 layer. Add 1/2 tablespoon of grated lemon zest and sprinkle with a few drops of juice.

Finely chop the parsley and dust all over the bottarga. Season with red chili flakes to taste.

Douse with the olive oil and let sit. This step can be done several hour in advance.

Cook the spaghetti al dente in 2 quarts of boiling water seasoned with 1/2 tablespoon of salt.

Fish them out of the pot with tongs and add to the bowl. Toss well to evenly distribute the bottarga and coat with oil.

Serve right away.

The dressing can sit for several hours. In our summer home, my aunt Milla would prepare it in the morning in between coffee and a cigarette. When we got home from the beach it was ready to welcome the spaghetti and quickly quell the hunger of a hoard of sun-drenched and salt-kissed children.



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Filetto di maiale con carciofi e bottarga Oro di Cabras

Pork tenderloin with artichokes and Sardinian Oro di Cabras mullet bottarga

1 pork tenderloin
salt as needed
1 lemon
3 medium size artichokes
1 small shallot
4 marjoram sprigs
1/2 cup olive oil
1 cup dry white wine
Sardinian Oro di Cabras mullet bottarga
freshly ground black pepper

Season the loin generously with salt and leave on the counter to come to room temperature.

Cut the lemon in half and squeeze it in a bowl of cold water. Drop the squeezed lemon halves in the water.

Pick up the first artichoke and remove the outer leaves until about 2/3 of the outer circle of leaves are a lighter, somewhat yellowish green. Slice off the darker top tip of the leaves, being mindful of the thorns. Pare the outer part of the bottom and peel the stems. Finally, slice off a very thin layer from the bottom of the stem. This procedure is called turning, as for each phase of it, your knife will circle around the artichoke.

Cut the turned artichoke in half and remove the choke if necessary – the choke is that hay-like fuzz that is often, but not always, in the middle of an artichoke. Slice each half thinly lengthwise and drop in the lemon water to prevent oxidization.

Repeat the procedure with all the artichokes.

Rub your hands and fingers with the lemon halves all over to remove the bitterness. Wash them well with soap and water.

Mince the shallot and 1 sprig of marjoram leaves with a generous pinch of salt until they turn into a paste. Soften the mince in a skillet with 2 tablespoons of olive oil over low heat, stirring often so it doesn't burn. Drain the artichokes from the water and spin them to shake off excess water.



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Raise the heat to medium high under the skillet and toss in the artichokes. Season with salt and pepper and continue to sauté swirling the skillet around until the artichokes are tender, about 20 minutes. If they stick, add a bit of warm water.
Heat the oven to 400° F. Pat dry the pork tenderloin.

Heat 3 tablespoons of olive oil in an oven proof sauté pan over medium heat. Add the pork loin and brown it lightly on all sides. Raise the heat to high and deglaze with the white wine.

When the wine no longer makes you wince with acidity, but rather caresses you with sweetness, add 2 whole sprigs of marjoram and transfer the pan to the hot oven. Cook the loin until it reaches an internal temperature of 140° F, it should take 10 minutes at most.

Use an oven mitt to remove the pan from the oven and place the pork on a rack to cool. When you put the pan in the sink, please leave the mitt around it to be sure that everybody is aware of its temperature.

Grate the bottarga into a bowl. Whisk in some olive oil to make a dressing. Season with freshly ground black pepper to taste.

By now, the pork loin should be juicy, ever so slightly pink in the center and a perfect warm room temperature. Slice it thinly at a slant and arrange it on a warm platter in concentric circles. Top with the warm artichokes, and drizzle the bottarga dressing over everything and garnish with the remaining marjoram sprig.

Serve at room temperature.



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SHOPPING LIST

Produce

- 3 medium size artichokes
- 1 Meyer lemon
- 1 lemon
- 1 small shallot
- parsley
- marjoram sprigs

Protein

- 4 ounces Sicilian tuna bottarga
- Sardinian Oro di Cabras mullet bottarga
- 1 pork tenderloin

Miscellaneous

- 12 ounces spaghetti
- extra virgin olive oil
- 1 cup dry white wine
- salt
- red chili flakes
- black pepper

Shopping note: if you need information on sourcing ingredients, feel free to contact Viola directly at viola@violabuitoni.com

EQUIPMENT LIST

- well washed hands
- 2 to 3 kitchen rags
- cutting board
- chef's knife
- paring knife
- 5 to 6 medium and small bowls for prepping
- 1 large bowl for refuse
- salad spinner
- 1 skillet
- 1 oven proof skillet or sauté pan
- 1 pasta pot
- 1 shallow serving bowl
- 1 serving platter
- wooden spoons



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- tongs
- small whisk
- oven mitt
- shredder or shaver
- small ladle
- tasting spoons

PREPPING LIST

- print recipes
- pull all ingredients and divide according to recipe
- wash all produce
- pull equipment