

## La Cucina Italiana, where Food is Culture

Marina Melchionda (July 08, 2010)



"La Cucina Italiana is the authority for the Italian living experience. We write about people, places, ingredients and recipes that are authentic, genuine, flavorful and unique. We celebrate the real thing." La Cucina Italiana Mission Statement finely summarizes all the reasons why we definitely suggest this magazine to our readers as a mean to take both a cultural and culinary journey through the kitchens of Italy

Many of you amateur cooks living in America must have read at least a few times [La Cucina Italiana](#) [2], a monthly magazine founded in Italy at the beginning of the XIX century and present on the US market in its English edition from several years. Some consider it a must have for all the "Americans who are Italian in their hearts and in their kitchens". We could not agree more.

Among all the magazines and journals focused on the sector of Italian products and food, we decided to write about this one in particular for one, main reason: La Cucina Italiana does not only present its readers with a list of recipes inspired by the Italian culinary tradition, but it also explains the history and tradition behind every dish or food combination, and how it is connected to its territory of origins. Every issue includes a special section dedicated to one particular product, its nutritional properties and ways of use in common household everyday cooking, with several recipes that can satisfy both the traditional and adventurous cook. In synthesis, the magazine presents not only a culinary journey through Italy, but also a cultural one.

The pictures that accompany every dish are without a doubt one of the most striking characteristics of the magazine: they present the food exactly like any Italian mother would: meticulously garnished and arranged on the serving tray so as to stimulate the appetite of those for whom they were prepared. Moreover, the simplicity of the ingredients encourages the average reader to test his culinary skills in preparing a traditional Italian meal.

“The pictures featured in our issues are the exact reproductions of the recipes that we propose. The idea is that if the readers follow our directions exactly, sure enough they will obtain that same result”, explained Lapo Niccolini, Presiden and Owner of [Quadratum S.p.A](#) [3]., La Cucina’s publishing house.

As in the best Italian tradition, the magazine is a true family business, given that the Niccolini family’s company [A&G Marco S.p.A.](#) [4]

has taken care of its distribution since its foundation in 1929. “My father finally took over the publishing house Quadratum in the early 1980s and when he passed away in 1999 I inherited it with my sister Laura and my uncle Marco Borioli”, he told us during our meeting at La Cucina’s headquarters in Midtown Manhattan.

The history behind this magazine well reflects the evolution of the Italian society and in particular the role of the Italian woman who, from the role of mothers and housewives that they had at the beginning of the century, have become businesswomen and active members of the society surrounding them. La Cucina has managed to accompany them along this long path, adapting its contents to their new lifestyles and needs and to the smaller amount of time they could spend in their kitchens. After the war period, the magazine reappeared on the newspaper stands losing its tabloid format, but keeping its logo, that looked almost the same to the one one we have today. It became a vademecum for Italian women nationwide, being able to embrace all the different regional and local culinary traditions present in the country. “The title La Cucina Italiana itself reconnects us to an idea of ‘national cuisine’, where local dishes are reinterpreted with a modern twist that makes them accessible to a wider audience of amateur cooks”.

It is almost needless to say that the contents of the Italian and the American editions of the magazine are significantly different. The editorial staff of the US edition, in fact, pays a good deal of attention to two different aspects: first, the mission of “educating” the public to the concept of “Italian authenticity”, by offering a wide overview of the country’s different local culinary traditions and peculiarities (“We bring into American everyday life what was previously considered exotic by involving our readers in stories and legends that attract them to the point that they become their own”); second, the recipes being presented to the audience which always feature not only ingredients that are easily accessible in the US, but that are finely adapted to the “last teaspoon” - to American measurements. These two characteristics from our point of view, definitely place La Cucina Italiana apart from any other Italian food publication circulating in the US.

As our conversation went on, Mr. Niccolini dwelt on the inner mission of the magazine: “Our work starts in the kitchen and then is reported black on white. We do not try to be glamorous but authentic”. The concept of authenticity at the base of La Cucina’s culinary philosophy features particular and sophisticated shades of meaning: “It is not the dish itself that is authentic, but the purpose for which it is made that must be identified as Italian. The purpose in question is that it can be prepared at home, being easy to make and appealing for every generation in the family. It is not a case that during this harsh economic crisis La Cucina has become even more popular here in the US: people tend not to eat out so often anymore and have learned the pleasure of sitting around the kitchen table”.

Making a cuisine popular also means offering people a number of different alternatives on how to mix, match, and combine the ingredients on which it is based. La Cucina Italiana’s team of chefs creates over 1,000 recipes every year and, if you do your math and multiply them for the number of years the magazine it has been in distribution in the US, you come up with an average 25,000 dishes that are all collected on its official website.

Those who feel that self-learning is not enough and aspire to become real gourmet chefs will find a solution for this too in La Cucina. “In recent years we have evolved from being only a magazine to becoming a brand that offers a wide range of products and services for all kinds of people who love spending time in the kitchen. Our culinary school is based in Milan and offers individual and group lessons, some of which are also open to children”.



The Dean of the school [Chef Fabio Zago](#) [5] has recently come to New York to give culinary lessons and test the possibility to open a US branch in the City. The experiment was so successful that it has opened a path to a possible concrete project.

Mr. Niccolini is also planning to expand the presence of the brand both on the international and on the virtual level.

“As for today our contents and thousands of recipes are distributed under license in Holland, Flemish Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg, Austria, German Switzerland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and in seventeen Middle Eastern Countries. As we are working on new forms of collaboration with English and Brazilian editors, I am also planning to enhance our presence on the web. But as we said before, we are a family business and like to play it step by step, as our goal is not only to reach a wider public, but also to maintain and possibly improve our contents”.

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