



THE  
ATHENÆUM  
PALL MALL LONDON

## WINE DINNER

**Elizabeth David: Italian Food**

**Monday 30<sup>th</sup> May 2022, 7pm**



# MENU AND WINES

Aperitivo: Carpano Vermut (SB)



## Antipasti

Fagioli Toscani al Tonno ~ *A classic Tuscan dish of borlotti beans, tuna and red onions, dressed with parsley and oil.*

Firriato Etna DOC Cavanera Ripa di Scorciovacca 2017 (VP)

Cantina Terlan Pinot Bianco Reserva Vorberg 2017 (DL)



## Primo Piatto

Fettucine al Burro ~ *An elementally simple pasta dish: fettucine with melted butter, black pepper and grated parmesan.*

Barberani Orvieto Classico Superiore Luigi e Giovanna 2015 (DL)

Zuani Vino Bianco Collio 2020 (NA)



## **Secondo Piatto**

Stufato all vino rosso ~ *Beef braised in red wine with garlic and rosemary.*

La Ca'Nova, Barbaresco Montefico 2015 (FL)

Castiglione del Bosco Brunello di Montalcino 2010 (MH)



## **Formaggio**

Asiago ~ *A cow's milk cheese from the Veneto. When young, it is rich, soft and creamy, as it matures, it becomes hard, dry and strong.*

Masi Contasera Amarone Classico 2015 (KB)

Nino Negri Sfursat Cinque Stelle 2005 (DL)



## **Dolce**

Pesche in Vino Bianco ~ *A favourite of Elizabeth David: a slice of peach in white wine. Her advice? Eat the peach and drink the wine!*

Isola e Olena Vin Santo 1993 (SH)

Donnafugata Ben Ryé Passito di Pantelleria 2016 (DL)

Mangia bene !

## ELIZABETH DAVID *Italian Food*

“*The angels in Paradise eat nothing but vermicelli al pomodoro*”. The Duke of Bovino, Mayor of Naples.

The publication of *Italian Food* in 1954 (the same year as *Lucky Jim* and *Lord of the Flies*) marked Elizabeth David’s transition from being a passionate and elegant detective-reporter to becoming a serious food scholar. Although scholarship did nothing to dim her campaigning spirit.

In the Summer of 1951, she left Provence to make her last visit to her mentor Norman Douglas on Capri. At this stage, the author of *Venus in the Kitchen* had become very eccentric in his habits, choosing to eat nothing but the white of boiled eggs. She left for a tour of the Italian Riviera and never saw him again: Douglas died the following year.

Following the success of 1952’s *French Country Cooking*, Mrs David decided to address Italy. Soho had its collection of immigrant shops, but knowledge of Italian food was limited. An American visitor to Frascati on Oxford Street in 1928 noted only that it had an exciting revolving door.

Generously, her publisher, John Lehmann offered an advance of £300 and she was on her way, staying Rome’s Palazzo Doria (where she discovered that the *alimentari* sold chick peas ready soaked) before travelling to Capri to lay a pot of basil on Douglas’ grave.

Now began a gastronomic Grand Tour. She found *panforte* in Siena, *finocchina* in Florence, *mascarpone* in Milan, artichoke salad and *mostarda di Cremona*. Moving onto Liguria, there were *moscardini* in Santa Margherita and in Genoa she decided that *trenette al pesto* was Italy’s very best pasta dish. Umbria revealed to her the secret’s of its *porchetta*. There was Parmesan and Parma and truffle in Turin.

In Venice, instead of getting up early for the four o'clock start at the Rialto market, she stayed up all night carousing with an old friend. And it was here in the market that she met the Communist painter, Renato Guttuso. Already an admirer of his gutsy still-lives, she immediately commissioned him to illustrate the book she was researching and persuaded Lehmann to pay the artist £60.

Back in England, the recipes were tested and written during the bleakest post-War years, depending on supplies from Soho and farm produce from Kent. Just as *Mediterranean Food* had been written in a cold, damp Herefordshire hotel, the glorious *Italian Food* was written when butter, cheese and meat were still rationed. It is a feat of desire and imagination as much as scholarship, gastronomy or literature.

On publication in 1954, the traveller Freya Stark said Elizabeth David “may be counted among the benefactors of humanity”. Even the grouchy Evelyn Waugh said it was the book he most enjoyed that year.

*Italian Food* sold out in three weeks.

It, naturally, remains highly readable since Mrs David writes beautifully. And it is even very useful in the practical sense (although there can sometimes be a patrician vagueness about measurements and techniques). Still, there have been thousands of Italian cookbooks published since, but none better.

Next in this country's growing awareness of Italian food, wine and culture: Enzo Apicella designing Mario and Franco's Terrazza on Romilly Street, Germano Facetti radicalising the design of the Penguin books which sustained so much of sixties culture and in 1964....Peter Boizot opening Pizza Express. Gucci and Prada came only later.

Children today assume pasta and pizza are national dishes. Meat and two veg seems archaic. Cappuccino is everybody's second

language. Prosecco rivals bitter in popularity. It is impossible to think of a more influential cookbook than Elizabeth David's *Italian Food*.

