Holidays are the time to revel in tradition and nothing is more traditionally Italian than a bountiful meal shared with family and friends. This holiday season we asked Laura Pensiero, culinary consultant, cookbook author and owner of Gigi Trattoria in Rhinebeck, New York and Roberto Mosconi, Gigi Chef de Cuisine, to help us celebrate with a festive menu created especially for Primo readers.

Like the authentic trattorie of Italy, Gigi Trattoria is an informal eatery serving up delicious seasonal dishes in a warm, welcoming atmosphere. Pensiero describes the innovative menu as “Hudson Valley Mediterranean,” meaning Chef Mosconi cooks as he would in Italy, utilizing fresh local ingredients homegrown in the Gigi garden and gathered from the many farms and specialty producers that have put the historic Hudson Valley on America’s culinary map.

Chef Mosconi is well-acquainted with the lush beauty and abundance of the Hudson River Valley. He spent childhood summers at the family home in Pine Plains. It was there that his grandmothers instructed him in the fine art of Italian cooking and first taught him to make handmade pasta.

Mosconi’s family immigrated from Emiglia Romagna, considered by many to be the gastronomic star of Italy. The region is noted not only for its rich butter and cream based cuisine, a variety of pastas or minestre including delicately flavored and filled tortellini, but also for its hearty polenta and risotto dishes, not to mention prosciutto and balsamic vinegar.

“My grandmothers were great cooks,” Mosconi says.

Mosconi refined his inherited talent at the French Culinary Institute in New York and graduated in 1990. He was sous chef at Peter Luongo’s Mad 61 and chef at the prestigious Coco Pazzo.

In the spirit of the holiday season, we bring you Chef Mosconi’s spectacular recipes. We’re sure they’ll inspire you to prepare a memorable meal and to linger at the table with family and friends.

For more information on Gigi Trattoria, Laura Pensiero and Chef Roberto Mosconi visit: www.gigitrattoria.com Additional information on Rhinebeck, New York and the Hudson Valley is available online at: http://rhinebeckchamber.com
Merluzzo Agrodolce di Venezia
Sweet and Sour Cod Venetian Style

Makes 6 to 8 appetizer-size servings

Saor
1/2 cup olive oil
3 tablespoons butter
2 large red onion, thinly sliced
3 bay leaves
1 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
1/2 cup red currants (or golden raisins)
1/4 cup honey
2 tablespoons sugar
1/3 cup pine nuts

Prepare the Saor, heat the butter and 1/4 cup of the olive oil in a medium skillet until hot and bubbly. Add the onions and bay leaves and cook over medium heat, stirring often, until very soft, about 8 minutes; the onions should not brown. Add the vinegar, currants, honey and sugar and cook another 2 to 3 minutes, or until the vinegar is reduced by about half. Stir in the pine nuts. Set aside to cool.

Prepare the cod, heat the remaining olive oil in a large sauté pan (preferably nonstick) over medium-high heat. Season the fish with salt and pepper, dredge it in the flour, shaking off any excess, and place filet side down in the pan. Cook until golden brown, about 3 minutes, then turn filets and cook until the fish is just cooked through, 3 to 5 minutes.

Fill a casserole dish with alternate layers of cod and the soar marinade. The top layer should be the marinade.

Cover and let rest, refrigerated, for 1-2 days. Serve at room temperature.

Pasticcio di Risotto con Tre Formaggi e Prosciutto al Forno
Baked Three Cheese Risotto with Prosciutto

Makes 6 servings

2 ounces grated locatelli Romano
2 ounces prosciutto, diced*
2 ounces grated Parmesan cheese
2 ounces grated ricotta salata
2 cups cooked Carnaroli, or Vialone Nano rice (arborio may be substituted)
3 teaspoons butter
1/3 cup unseasoned bread crumbs
1 teaspoon fresh chopped thyme leaves
1/2 cups fresh tomato sauce, hot*

* For a vegetarian version of this recipe, omit the prosciutto.

* Simple tomato sauce recipes are available in most Italian cookbooks.
Preheat oven to 375 degrees F.

In a small mixing bowl whisk together the cream, eggs, orange zest, black pepper, cinnamon and nutmeg.

Place the rice in a large mixing bowl, and gently work in the cream mixture. Add the Parmesan, ricotta salata, locatelli Romano and prosciutto. Season with salt and stir to combine.

Lightly butter 6 1-cup ramekins or soufflé dishes or custard cups. Mix the bread crumbs with the parsley and thyme, then transfer to a ramekin. Swirl to evenly coat; tap the excess into the next ramekin, and repeat until all dishes are coated. Fill the cups to three-quarters from the top. Arrange ramekins in a baking pan just large enough to hold them.

Pour enough hot water into pan to come halfway up sides of dishes. Bake for 30 minutes or until the Pasticcios are set in the center and lightly browned; let cool 15 minutes. Spoon about 1/4 cup of tomato sauce on the bottom of each dinner plate. Unmold the Pasticcio onto the sauce and serve.
L’Anatra Arrosta alle Pere Balsamiche
Whole Roasted Duck with Pear Balsamic Sauce

The duck is delicious served with Spaetzle, Creamy Polenta or Mashed Potatoes.

**Makes 8 servings**

- 2 5-pound Moscovy ducks
- 1 medium onion, halved
- 4 bay leaves
- 4 sprigs thyme
- 4 sprigs rosemary
- 1 whole head of garlic cut in half

**Balsamic Pear Sauce**
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 pears, peeled, cored and diced
- 1 celery stalk, diced
- 3 shallots, minced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1/3 cup good quality balsamic vinegar
- 1/2 cup Valpolicella or Nebbiolo wine
- 1 quart demi glace*
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- salt and freshly ground black pepper

**Note:** Most gourmet shops including Williams-Sonoma sell demi glace. Or you may try More Than Gourmet at http://www.morethangourmet.com/

**Preheat oven** to 275 degrees F.

**To prepare the duck,** rinse and dry, pulling off any loose fat. Sprinkle the skin and inside the cavity generously with salt and pepper. Place an onion half in each cavity along with the bay leaves, thyme, rosemary and garlic. Cut off any excess fat from the openings of the ducks carcass. Fold the wings under the ducks. Pierce the skin all over with a sharp knife tip; be careful not to puncture the meat. Place the ducks, skin side down, on a rack over a roasting pan. Pour 1 cup of water in the bottom of the pan to prevent fat drippings from burning. Roast for three hours; after the first hour, baste with the drippings every 25 minutes or so. Turn oven temperature up to 350 degrees F and continue cooking until crispy and brown, another 20 to 30 minutes.

**While the ducks cook,** prepare the Balsamic Pear Sauce. Heat the butter in medium saucepan over medium-high heat. When bubbly, add the pears, celery, shallots, and garlic. Cook, stirring often, until the pears begin to brown, about 5 minutes (be careful not to burn the garlic). Add the balsamic vinegar and cook until reduced to a tablespoon or two. Add the red wine and cook until reduced by half. Add the demi glace and simmer, stirring here and there for 45 minutes, until slightly thickened and the pears and vegetables have dissolved into the sauce. Adjust seasoning with sugar, salt and pepper. Keep the sauce warm until you’re ready to serve the duck.

Carve the ducks dividing first into quarters, then half the breast and leg pieces. Place one breast half and one leg half on each serving plate. Drizzle with the Pear Balsamic Sauce and serve.

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Brulée di Zucca
Pumpkin Maple Brulée

**Makes 6 servings**

- 5 large eggs
- 6 tablespoons sugar, plus 6 teaspoons to brulée
- 3/4 cup cream
- 2 cup cooked pumpkin puree (fresh or canned)

**Preheat oven to 325°F.**

Whisk together all ingredients except for 6 teaspoons of the sugar. Divide pumpkin mixture among six three-quarter cup soufflé dishes or custard cups. Arrange dishes in 13x9x2-inch baking pan. Pour enough hot water into pan to come halfway up sides of dishes. Bake custards until almost set in center, about 35 minutes. Remove custards from water; refrigerate overnight.

Preheat broiler. Sprinkle 1 teaspoon sugar atop each custard. Place dishes on small baking sheet. Broil until sugar just starts to caramelize, rotating sheet for even browning, about 2 minutes. Refrigerate custards until topping hardens, at least 30 minutes.
Gigi Biscotti

Makes 36 cookies

2-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 cup chopped almonds
1/2 cup pistachio nuts
1 cup sugar
1/2 cup (1/2 stick) butter, softened
Grated zest of 1 lemon
4 large eggs

Preheat oven to 350 degrees F. Grease and flour two baking sheets or line them with parchment paper, and set aside.

In a medium size bowl, sift together the flour, baking powder and salt. Stir in the almonds and pistachio nuts.

Place the sugar and butter in another bowl and beat with an electric mixer until pale and creamy. Alternately, beat on medium speed in the work bowl of a standing mixer. With the mixer running, add the lemon zest and the eggs, one by one, until smooth. Reduce the mixing speed to low and beat in the dry ingredients until just incorporated. Scoop one quarter of the dough out onto one of the prepared baking sheets. Shape the dough into a log about 10 inches long x 2 inches wide x 3/4 inches thick. Repeat this procedure with the other three quarters of the dough. Place two logs 2 inches apart on each prepared baking sheet. Bake until the logs are light golden brown and firm to the touch, about 25 minutes. Remove from the oven and allow to cool slightly on the baking sheets. Reduce the oven temperature to 325 degrees F. Lift each log off of the baking sheet and transfer to a cutting board. Use a serrated knife to cut each log on the bias at 1-inch intervals. Lay the cookies, cut side down, on the baking sheets.

Return the biscotti to the oven and bake until lightly browned and dry, about 5 minutes. Turn them over and continue baking until lightly brown on the other side, about 5 minutes. Transfer to a wire rack to cool completely. Store in an airtight container for up to 1 week or the freezer for up to 1 month.

The holiday magic of Rhinebeck at night.

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