



A HEALTHY CONTRAST

Alessandro Boglione is head chef of Al Castello, Castle of Grinzane Cavour, located in one of the most evocative settings of the Langhe, between Alba and Bra, with a panoramic view over the surrounding vineyards.

Everything is the contrary of everything: such is Alessandro Boglione. Head chef of the restaurant Al Castello of Grinzane Cavour, the conflicting but successful way in which he moves between life and work has placed him firmly on the stage of quality Italian cuisine, obtaining the coveted Michelin star a little more than a year after opening the restaurant. He himself struggles to understand himself: he loves meat but prefers to cook fish; he worked for years in the family bakery but does not eat sweets. This list of contradictions – interesting, funny, even strange – are the basis of his knowledge and the strength of his identity. These "contrasts" are his hallmark, forging a strong identity. Alessandro is a chef who knows where he is going and who has turned a passion into his life, working hard, always humble and respectful of all those who work and have worked with him. These traits came out during our interview with him in the magnificent mansion that houses the restaurant. The Castle of Grinzane is located in one of the most evocative spots of the Langhe, five kilometres from Alba, and built around the central tower dating to the first half of the eleventh century; it can be admired in all its beauty thanks to the 1960 restoration for

the centenary celebrations of the unification of Italy. A quadrilateral with a high tower, it houses the Enoteca Regionale Piemontese Cavour, the first in the region, the Museum with memorabilia of Cavour (Camillo Benso di Cavour lived there from 1832 to 1849, promoting innovations in agriculture and wine-making) and the Museum of Ethnography. Located in this impressive manor house is Boglione's restaurant and adjoining cafeteria. If the latter is the ideal place for a quick snack, a drink or a coffee complete with view over the endless vineyards, the warm and refined atmosphere of the restaurant is perfect for an unforgettable gastronomic experience.

How would you define your cooking?

"Healthy madness" which has its origins in the passion that has always accompanied my choices, and that goes back to 1987 when at the end of middle school, I opted for the hotel and catering school. Looking back, I can say that I was lucky not to start with the big names, but with people who conveyed a certain 'sensitivity' towards their work, and the importance of the human factor.

Your cooking is local yet innovative: how do these two factors merge?

By finding a balance which is arrived at through various factors: what you aim to express, the context in which it is expressed, and the potential customer who interprets it.

You worked for two years as pastry chef at the Cafe Converso of Bra: how did this start?

Pastry is the biggest of challenges. I do not eat sweets, not that I do not like them, I just do not eat them because for me everything is centred on savoury tastes. The project was started by my father, which my brother Federico and I picked up in 1999. We modernised and invested lots of energy, with excellent results. I left to follow my passion for savoury tastes, although I still collaborate with him. Pastry drives me mad because it is an exact science and I am an "instinctive bungler": two aspects that can not live side by side.

To what extent has pastry making influenced your cooking?

I often make non-sweet sweets, using savoury products in desserts, sometimes for fun, or just to arouse curiosity in the client. For example, I like using our homemade artichoke jam with certain cheeses or sweets; I also love using saffron. I was already doing this more than ten years ago, when between '99 and 2000, I presented at the Salone del Gusto in Turin a line of chocolates with herbs and saffron with white chocolate.

How do you create your dessert menu?

It is a separate menu with an identity of its own. It is a small list of offerings that follows the seasons: nature is the driving force behind our choices. The spring menu, for example, includes a combination of white chocolate with liquorice mousse and banana cream; a semifreddo of ricotta with charred berries and cocoa bean crunch; two revisited classical desserts, such as profiteroles with coffee filling and rosemary glaze; and the lemon zuccotto with almonds and caramel gelato.

How does a menu materialise?

From everything and anything: it is the instinct that originates from anything, be it a dinner with friends, a magazine, a trade show, a moment of solitude.

Is there a method you follow when preparing a menu?

The composition of a dish should never exceed the number of fingers on one hand. It is a hard and fast rule that governs any recipe: the raw material is accompanied by a maximum of 3 or 4 ingredients required to enhance it. The moment you realize that a dish is too "messy", I begin removing until I find simplicity. The more the years pass, the more this work of removing becomes perfected in the search for simplicity.

What sweet ingredient do you prefer to work with?

I am crazy about marron glacé.

What about your favourite savoury ingredient?

Meat, or even better poultry, even though I love working with fish because of its quick cooking.

What essential aspects do you believe are essential at the restaurant?

The final coffee, too often neglected, which can ruin a whole meal, and the napkin, i.e. the fibre and the feeling that this leaves on the



Boglione with his staff.

lips when you wipe them. Ours are made of a flax and cotton material that give a pleasant feel.

What is the future of cuisine?

A move towards the simplification of supply and of prices. I am lucky to have been the last to arrive in a land with a high concentration of restaurants managed by big names. Before opening, I looked around analyzing the situation and asked: "This is the market, so how do I carve out a small slice for myself?" By keeping an eye on prices.

What are your future projects?

To look ahead and continue to grow together with the staff, which is my added value. Everything that came from the Michelin star on is all thanks to them.

Monica Onnis

Rump in hazelnut crust baked polenta and steamed spinach



rump	g	150
bread crumbs, tablespoons toasted and chopped	no	4
hazelnuts, tablespoon	no	1
spinach	g	50
maize flour	g	100
water	as needed	

egg whites, flour, starch, seed oil, extra virgin olive oil, salt and pepper

Cook the polenta flour in boiling salted water, keeping it medium soft. Bake for 40 minutes, and then pour into a greased baking pan. When cool cut into cubes and brown them in the oven or under the grill, making sure they do not become too dry. Mix flour and starch in one dish. In another dish mix the chopped hazelnuts and bread crumbs. Beat the egg whites and continue with the classic breadcrumb coating, then take the rump and place it in a little flour and starch, dip it in the egg white and finish with the breadcrumbs and hazelnuts.

Fry the rump in plenty of hot vegetable oil. Finish in the oven for 4 minutes at 200°C until medium-rare. Blanch the spinach in a hot pan with salt and pepper. Place it in the centre of the plate and arrange the cubes of polenta. Scallop the rump and place it next to the spinach and polenta. Season with oil, salt and pepper.

Hazelnut mousse with dried oranges

sugar	g	600
water	g	400
egg whites	g	200
hazelnut paste	g	350
cream	l	1.5
orange	l	1
caramelized hazelnuts	g	100

In an aluminium pan, bring to 121°C 200 g of water and 400 g of sugar, making sure that the flame is not too high, thus avoiding burning the edge. Separately, whip the egg whites and drizzle in the sugar syrup until completely cool, resulting in an Italian meringue. Whip cream until the mixture begins to rise. Pour into a bowl and add the hazelnut paste, working with a movement from the top down, very gently. Finally, add the meringue repeating the same movement as before. Be very careful not to work the two mixtures for too long, which would otherwise break them. Place in a plastic container and refrigerate.

Dried oranges

Make syrup with 200 g of water and 200 g of sugar. Put the syrup on the stove until the sugar is completely dissolved and allow to cool. Slice an orange in very thin slices; soak the slices in the syrup, drain and lay them on Silpat. Dry them at 90°C for about 2 hours.

Assembly

Place a generous tablespoon of mousse gently in the cups. Add a handful of caramelized hazelnuts and stick in two or three slices of dried oranges.



Star anise gelato soufflé almond sponge with candied grapes

Soufflé

milk	g	250	
cream	g	600	
eggs	no	3	
sugar	g	100	
star anise			
Sambuca liqueur	no	1	shot
almond strips	g	50	

black grapes, caramel sugar

Make an infusion with 250 g of cream, milk and star anise. Separately mix three eggs with sugar without whisking them, and add them to the infusion. Bake at 73°C and add the shot of Sambuca. Cool, then strain and add 350 g of liquid cream, stirring until creamy and smooth. Pour into a siphon and load with two charges of gas. Allow to cool completely for about 1 hour.

Almond sponge

egg yolks	no	2
whole eggs	no	3
almond paste	g	100
sugar	g	150

butter	g	50
flour	g	90
starch	g	50
yeast	g	8

Crumble the almond paste into the cutter with 75 g of sugar, being careful not to let it warm up. Melt the butter in a frying pan while maintaining a low temperature. Beat eggs and egg yolks with an additional 75 g of sugar. When they are well beaten, add the almond paste gently. Drizzle in the butter, stirring gently, add flour, starch and yeast, previously sifted, and stir from bottom to top. Place in a plate with edge already lined with baking paper. Bake for 30 minutes at 180°C with the valve closed.

Assembly

Cut the cake into strips to create the base for one-portion moulds. Siphon the mixture to fill the mould, then freeze in freezer or chiller. Heat sugar in a pan and let it brown, then remove from heat and sauté the grapes until evenly covered in caramel; allow to cool. Meanwhile take a mould from the freezer, detach it and lay in the centre of the dish. Place grapes on top and finish with toasted almonds in strips. Wait a few minutes before serving.

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