 Seasonal cook


Photo: Quentin Jones

# American beauty

Italian migrants adapted dishes to suit bigger appetites and busy lifestyles, writes STEVE MANFREDI.

**T**o say Italian is a well-travelled cuisine is stating the obvious but late last year, when I was researching spaghetti and meatballs, I was astonished to find just how deeply influential Italian migrants and their cuisine have been on American food.

Italian panini spawned many of America's toasted sandwiches. In most of Boston, Italian sandwiches are known as "submarine sandwiches" or "subs", according to the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Food and Drink in America*. Older people and those across the harbour in East Boston call them "spuckies", possibly derived from a pointed roll called a spuccadella.

Of all the ethnic groups in the US, the dictionary states, Italian migrants have clung most tenaciously to their food traditions. By any measure – restaurant meals, supermarket sales, cookbooks published – theirs is the most popular ethnic cuisine.

Yes, spaghetti and meatballs is an American

dish. As is veal parmigiana. The evolution of these dishes from their Italian roots is a fascinating story.

Tagliatelle with a meat ragu is traditional around the Italian city of Bologna. Americans, who ate more quickly and with fewer courses, expected more meat than the Italians served. Migrant restaurateurs adapted by adding more meat, sometimes in the pasta and sometimes beside it. "Thus," the dictionary says, "was born spaghetti and meatballs and the unfortunate, limp side-dish pasta with meat entree."

Spaghetti and meatballs may not exist in Italy outside tourist restaurants and hotels but it is an example of a dish that has adapted to suit a place and culture. Isn't that what cuisine is?

Done well, these hybrid dishes can be as valid and satisfying as the most traditional fare.

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## BUCATINI ALL'AMERICANA (SPAGHETTI AND MEATBALLS)

The best pork fat for this recipe is the sort that makes sausages and salami so succulent, usually back or belly fat. Ask your butcher what's available. Bucatini is a hollow but thick spaghetti-like pasta. I think a long, thick pasta works better with meatballs.

500g lean pork shoulder  
100g pork fat  
100g mortadella  
100g day-old bread, crusts removed  
½ cup milk  
1 tsp thyme, finely chopped  
1 tsp sage, finely chopped  
2 tsp parsley, finely chopped  
2 tsp minced garlic  
1 tsp ground nutmeg  
100g grated parmesan, plus extra to serve  
1 egg  
Salt and pepper  
Plain flour  
80g bucatini per person

Mince the pork, pork fat and mortadella using an electric or hand mincer. Soak bread in milk until absorbed. Add bread, minus any milk that's not absorbed, to the mince, along with herbs, garlic, nutmeg, parmesan and egg. Mix well with lightly floured hands. Add salt and pepper to taste. A good way to taste for seasoning is to fry a small patty with olive oil. With your hands lightly floured, roll mixture into meatballs about 2.5cm wide. Poach in lightly simmering tomato salsa (see below) for 15-20 minutes. Any leftover meatballs can be frozen. Cook bucatini until al dente and serve tossed gently with meatballs and grated parmesan to taste.


**Serves 6-8 (pictured)**

**Wine** Quality chilled lambrusco or chilled light-to-medium-bodied pinot noir.

## TOMATO SALSA FOR MEATBALLS

4 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
1 medium onion, finely diced  
2 cloves garlic, peeled and minced  
1 small leek, trimmed and cut into fine half-rounds  
1 stick celery from the heart, finely chopped  
650g Italian tinned tomatoes, mashed  
1 tsp fennel seeds  
Salt and pepper

Heat the olive oil in a pan and gently fry the onion, garlic, leek and celery until transparent. Add tomato and fennel seeds. Season with a few pinches of salt and some pepper. Stir well and simmer until sauce thickens and most of the water has evaporated.  
**Makes 500ml**

 Full bottle

## QUAFFING LA LINEA TEMPRANILLO ROSE 2011, \$21

La Linea has been producing some excellent tempranillo lately, which is not surprising given winemaker Peter Leske's fondness for the variety. He also makes a ripper rosé with fruit sourced from the Adelaide Hills. I love the rose petal and strawberry and cream fragrance but this definitely has a tempranillo character, too, with Redskins lollies and spice. It's really juicy and fresh with crunch acidity that makes it a refreshing summer rosé best enjoyed chilled by the sea with fish and chips.



## TRYING PEPPER TREE ALLUVIUS SEMILLON 2011, \$32

Pepper Tree's smart winemaking is led by the talented, affable and much-lauded Jim Chitto. Alluvius is Pepper Tree's top Hunter semillon. While it will age beautifully for 10 years or more, as a young wine it is drinking superbly – fleshy and round on the palate yet with plenty of crisp, refreshing acidity. In the mix there's lemon zest and pith, as well as lemongrass. It goes down a treat, a perfect partner to grilled flathead tails covered in panko and parmesan crumbs and a side of shoestring chips.



## CELEBRATING PRIMO ESTATE JOSEPH SPARKLING RED NON-VINTAGE, \$70

There's no question Joseph sparkling non-vintage is one of Australia's finest. It's an ingenious blend of its top wines, including Moda cabernet merlot and Primo Estate shiraz, resulting in an utterly complex, deep and rich sparkling full of fruit cake, chocolate, cedary spice, red and black berries, creamy mousse and plenty of bead when freshly poured. It's plush on the palate with ripe, sweet tannins and a persistent long finish. A magnificent sparkling red.  
**Jane Faulkner**

