



Massimiliano, His Wife Lorella, and a Bite of Sardinia

Tommaso Cartia (July 13, 2017)



Hidden somewhere in San Francisco are the culture, the traditions, and the flavors of the enchanting Island of Sardinia, home to one of the most ancient Italian ethnicities.

“Pane et casu e binu a rasu”— bread, cheese and the glass of wine always full; recites and old Sardinian saying. This immediately gives the idea of what Sardinian cuisine is all about, simplicity, genuinity, and satisfy the pleasures of the senses.

Eating at San Francisco’s [La Ciccia](#) [2] is indeed all about that as well, it gives you a chance to experience the traditional cuisine from Sardinia, home to one of the most ancient Italian ethnicities. With their cuisine, Chefs [Massimiliano Conti](#) [2] and his wife Lorella preserved the island’s distinctive style and heritage.

Two Artisans of Cooking



“We consider ourselves artisans of cooking. For us, preserving quality and tradition is fundamental. We said that we wanted to create a place where we would personally like to dine, that would have felt like home. And so, we opened La Ciccia out of our love for the beautiful region of Sardinia.” That’s what [Lorella Degan](#) [2] told us when we asked her about the decision behind the opening of her family-run restaurant. It started as a small venture and is now celebrating 11 successful years in San Francisco’s vast Italian dining scene.

Chef Massimiliano Conti, born in **Mezzo Campidano**, Cagliari, in Sardinia, felt the need to go back to his roots and to do them justice by honoring the traditions of the women in his family.

Lorella and Massimiliano feel that out of all of Italy’s traditions, Sardinia’s are less known than those of Italy’s other regions, like Sicily. This is probably due to the fact that the island is located far away from the Boot, while Sicily is only a narrow strait away. Historically, the isolation of the region meant it was less influenced culturally by other Italian traditions. That’s one of the reasons why the ancient Sardinian dialect preserved its integrity as a language. It was less “contaminated” by other Italian dialects and less involved in the formation of the unified Italian language. Dining at La Ciccia is, therefore, a fully immersive experience in the Sardinian culture.

Everything Sardinian

As Massimiliano says, “We promote Sardinian ingredients, Sardinian wines, Sardinian culture, and we try to promote a Sardinian lifestyle that helps [to] live life in a more sustainable way.”

Massimiliano and Lorella didn’t leave anything to chance and stayed true to their philosophy: “Trends come and go but traditions stay.” That’s why they decided to write the names of the menu’s dishes in ancient Sardinian and to follow a style of cuisine that is nothing but rustic and organic. They believe in the ritual of sitting together to share a meal, which is not merely a matter of just feeding the body but also of feeding the soul.

Their kitchen is indeed a soulful one, they use only raw materials and pure extra virgin oil to cook—no greasy sauces, no complex dressings. Thankfully, the Californian territory is rich with raw materials, from the freshness of the meats and the vegetables to the fish cooked fresh off the boat. The pastas are made in-house, except for the ones that are traditionally dry and imported from Italy, like the maloreddu—a Sardinian striped-shell pasta, similar to gnocchetti, often flavored with saffron. Another special pasta from the region is fregula, which consists of semolina dough that has been rolled into balls 2–3 mm in diameter and toasted in an oven, similar to cous-cous. [Fregula](#) [3] is typically prepared by simmering it in a tomato-based sauce with clams. During your discovery of Sardinia, you can’t leave La Ciccia without savoring the famous bottarga—a Mediterranean delicacy—usually a pasta dressing with salted and cured fish roe from grey mullet fish eggs. La Ciccia imports these eggs directly from Sardinia’s city of [Oristano](#) [4].

The glass always full!

Along with these typical Sardinian products, La Ciccia’s wine list is filled with some of the most exquisite wines from the region. Conti started in the food business as a sommelier, and he was the District Manager in D.C. for the [Winebow Group](#) [5], one of the most important American wine importers. With the strong belief that “the alchemy between food and wine is an experience that has to be lived in life,” a third of the restaurant’s wine list is dedicated to Sardinian spirits.

Massimiliano and Lorella select their wines mostly from local, boutique wineries. Of the 180 brands that they have, the [Vermentino di Gallura](#) [6] DOCG from Sardinia is one that stands out. This white full-bodied fresh wine is the perfect partner to accompany a good fish-based dish. Other extraordinary wines from Sardinia are the [Torbato](#) [7], a full-bodied wine with distinctive aromas and smoky notes, and the Vernaccia di Oristano, a sweet and dry wine with a curious history. It was believed that consuming ample quantities of wine produced from the Vernaccia grapes was responsible for low instances of malaria in Sardinia.

Last but not least, at La Ciccia you can experience another Sardinian quintessential elixir—the Cannonau, the king of Sardinian red wines. Cannonau is the Sardinian equivalent of the **Grenache**



grape, which is one of the island's best grapes. It is a deeply colored, full bodied red wine that routinely maintains alcohol levels around 15%. This wine is a world of spicy wonders to be discovered both in its red or rosè version. Massimiliano and Lorella represent the Sardinian spirit like no one in San Francisco and, we dare to say, in the whole United States.

Exotic & Genuine

A Sardinian Language Menu

La Ciccia's menu is as exotic and as genuine as it sounds. You will get the chance to learn a bit of the Sardinian dialect by reading it! Here are our favorite options.

Is Antipastusu e Is Inzalarasa

(Appetizers and Salads)

Inzalaredda de acciugasa e arangiu

Marinated white anchovies, oranges and onions

Prupisceddu in Umidu cun Tomatiga

Baby Octopus stew in a spicy Tomato Sauce

Is Primusu (First Courses)

Spaghittusu cun Allu Ollu e Bottariga

Fresh Spaghetti Spicy Garlic Oil Salt Cured Fish Roe

Malloreddus a sa Campidanese

Semolina Gnocchetti Pork Bagna Pecorino Sardo

In Segundusu (Main Courses)

Gamberoisi Arrustiusu cun Tomatiga Seared Prawns on a Rich Tomato Sugo

Pratisceddussu (Side Dishes)

Pani guttiau-traditional Sardinian

Flatbread baked with extra virgin olive oil and pecorino cheese

Is Druccisi (Desserts)

Truta de Arrescottu

Sardinian Ricotta and Saffron Cake Honey and Toasted Almond

[La Ciccia Restaurant](#) [2]

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