

WINE TRAVEL FOOD

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ELICHE



FUSILLI



ROTELLE

Pasta Greats

Rome's Best of Everything

Guide to Prosecco

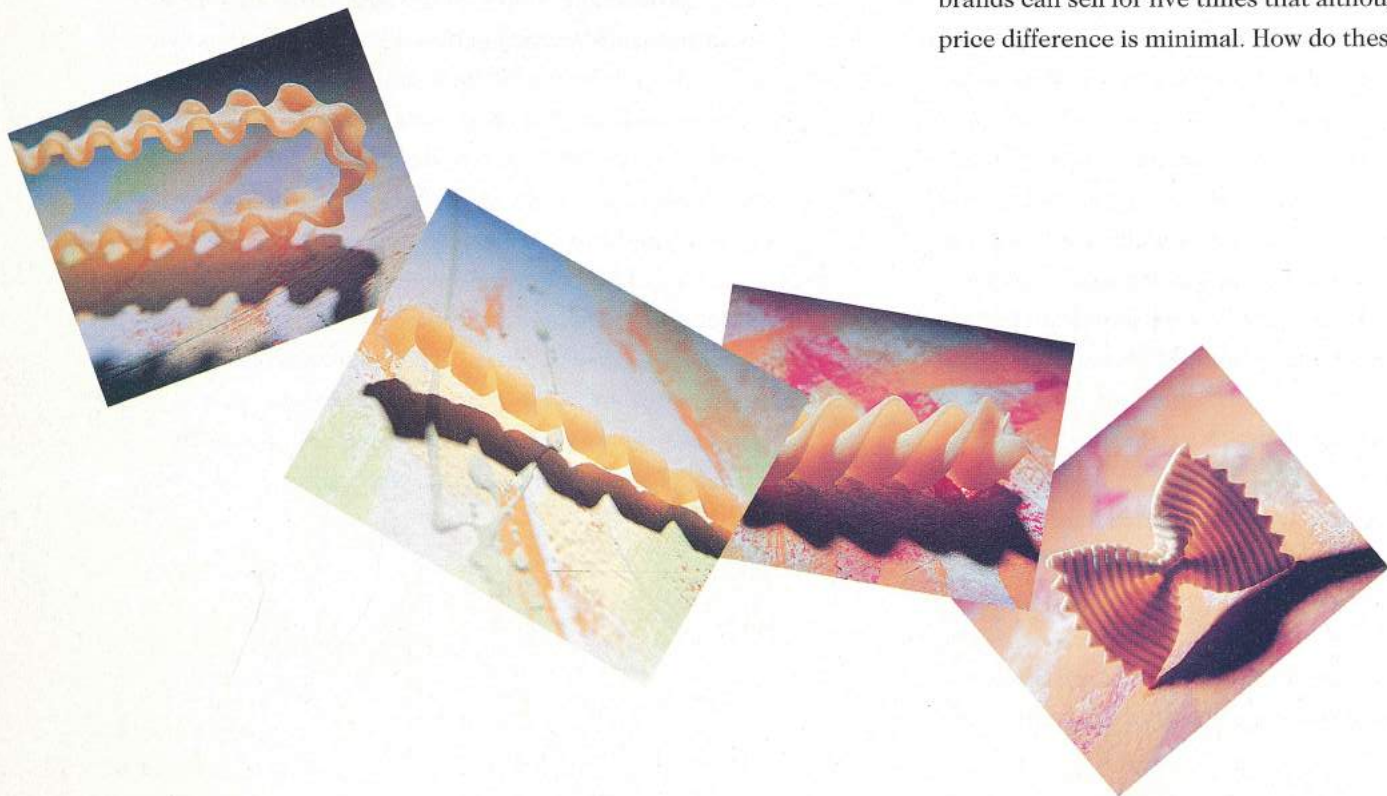


Minor League Heroes

BY MARA NOCILLA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARCO VIGANÒ

When you wander into Italian food shops, the brands and packaging of major pasta producers are familiar, and the biggest names (Barilla, Agnesi, Del Verde, Divella, De Cecco, La Molisana and Voiello) look and taste comfortingly the same everywhere in the world. They should: these companies account for 90% of pasta advertising in Italy and carefully cultivate their images. But there are 175 pasta-making firms in Italy and alongside the giants are many micro-companies who, to survive, must offer consumers something special. That something special can cost much more than the standard brands. In Italy, a half-kilo box of ordinary pasta is priced at about a dollar, while top artisanal brands can sell for five times that although, often, the price difference is minimal. How do these small





companies stay in business? What do they offer that allows them to compete with name brands that can afford to seek out the best wheat in the world, do blind-tasting to measure pasta consistency after cooking, and constantly carry out an array of tests to determine such arcane qualities as gluten elasticity?

Loyal customers are willing to pay for the distinctive taste and texture of higher-priced artisanal pasta. They find that it maintains its shape and pleasant chewiness when cooked and has a more pronounced wheaty flavor. The surface of the best pasta absorbs seasonings well. Pasta and sauce become one.

In earlier issues (#7, #19) we looked into the most important artisanal pasta producers, Rustichella d'Abruzzo, Cocco, Latini, Martelli, Cavalieri, and Benagiano. Their packages are frequently available in gourmet food shops around the United States. Here we introduce you to others, less well known but greatly respected.

The best of the small artisanal pasta producers work slowly, at rhythms that are a tenth of the speed of the big firms. Extrusion and drying can last up to five days for some formats. Production is small, the durum wheat flour used is top quality, packaging is often by hand, and distribution limited. Advertising is non-existent. "The secret of our survival is sending our pasta to the right shops," Attilio Cervo, executive with the Maione group, explains. "The consumer we are aiming at isn't worried

about a euro more or less." Giovanni Fabbri makes the same point. "We have to distribute our pasta ourselves," and since he doesn't buy ads, go to food fairs or have salesmen doing the rounds, his business depends on word of mouth.

Some of these small manufacturers, such as Rossi Favorita d'Abruzzo or P.M.C., can't turn out enough pasta to meet the demand for their product. A few count on a knowledgeable foreign market. Antonio Rossi, from Pianella, says, "Northern European and Americans don't mind spending more for a special product." Other companies such as Labbate, Arte&Pasta, Rossi, Cara Nonna and Sbiroli also focus on selling abroad. Here's an overview of some of the best. Otherwise, how would you know about them?



Tuscany

Vecchio Mulino Togni
via Fontanella, 711
San Filippo (Lucca)
tel. 0583/440594
www.vecchiomolinotogni.it
e-mail:
info@vecchiomolinotogni.it

A wide variety of unusual pasta forms and flavors that includes "chestnuts" made with chestnut flour, bunches of "grapes" colored with red wine. Also, of course, traditional pasta much sought after for its rough surface.

Antico Pastificio Morelli 1860
via San Francesco, 8
San Romano (Pisa)
tel. 0571/459032
fax 0571/450556
www.pastamorelli.it
e-mail: morelli@pastamorelli.it

Morelli pasta comes with many flavorings (octopus ink - *nero di seppia* - and salmon among them) and is made with a variety of cereals (farro, soy, corn, bran) besides the classic durum wheat. Among their products, an original line of pasta with wheat germ added.

Fabbri - Artigiani Pastai dal 1893
p.zza Emilio Landi, 17
Strada in Chianti (Firenze)
tel. 055/858013
fax 055/858413
www.pastafabbri.it
e-mail: info@pastafabbri.it

This Tuscan firm specializes in spaghettoni, a format that takes 16-18 minutes to cook. The result is a miracle of texture and consistency. The secret to all the shapes in Fabbri's top line is slow-moving machinery that is 50 years old and long, natural drying. Mostly sold locally in Chianti and Florence. Look for it during a visit.

Abruzzo

Pastificio Maiella di Domenico Di Crescenzo e C.
via Sant'Eufemia, 28
Fara Filiorum Petri (Chieti)
tel. 0871/70100
e-mail:
pastamaiella@tiscalinet.it

The most important form made by this family of pasta manufacturers is *maccheroni alla chitarra*. Their top line, made with bronze dies and slow, low-temperature drying, is called *Questa Pasta*. The Di Crescenzo family have been making pasta for four generations although the firm itself is only half a century old.

Rossi - Favorita d'Abruzzo
c.da San Martino
Pianella (Pescara)
tel. e fax 085/971720
e-mail: rossipasta@inwind.it

This company, founded in 1897, sells the classic Abruzzese *pasta alla chitarra*, a square-edged spaghetti, in a trademark elegant green paper package. Owner Antonio Rossi attributes the excellence of his product to bronze dies and slow drying that allows the pasta to remain elastic during cooking and not break.

Masciarelli
via dei Piceni, 33
Pratola Peligna (Aquila)
tel. 0864/273137

Established in 1867, this may be Italy's oldest pasta company. Masciarelli produces 13 different types of spaghetti alla chitarra—longer, shorter, flavored—but all with the trademark square cross-section. Owner Raffaele Masciarelli buys durum wheat in Puglia ("good flavor") and adds a little gluten-rich wheat from Canada.

Campania

Cooperativa dei Giovani Pastai Arte & Pasta
via Brancaccio, 75/a
Boscoreale (Napoli)
tel. 081/8594976
fax 081/8593959
www.artepasta.it
e-mail: info@artepasta.it

This young cooperative, only 10 years old, has made its *candele* a must-have for restaurateurs. The secret is no secret: a mixture of wheat from Tuscany and Puglia grown in mineral-rich zones, bronze dies and slow drying. A wide choice of shapes popular in the region. Look for it while traveling around Naples.

Premiato Pastificio Vicidomini dal 1812
via Luigi Guerrasio, 69
Castel San Giorgio (Salerno)
tel. e fax 081/951156

This firm traces its history back to 1812. Their *candele* are particularly famous—"we're the only ones that make them so perfectly," Luigi Vicidomini asserts. A challenge to manage in the plate, the *candele* share the stage with spaghetti, fusilli, rigatoni and about 200 other forms.

Di Nola
via Pasquale Nastro, 67
Gragnano (Napoli)
tel. 081/8013566
www.pastificiodinola.com

At least a century old, Di Nola was recently purchased by the Maione group. The company makes 27 forms, but their specialty is fusilli, individually hand-made by twisting a single strand of spaghetti around a knitting needle. The pasta is then dried in wooden boxes. Excellent spaghettoni have a yeasty, bread-like taste and retain their firm texture when cooked.

Puglia

P.M.C.
via Due Macelli, 5
Alberobello (Bari)
tel. 080/4323294
fax 080/4323874
www.trullinet.com

In business since 1986, P.M.C. concentrates on popular Pugliese shapes: *fricelli*, *orecchiette*, *cavatellucci*, and *maritati*. The pasta, made mainly with specially ground local flour, has a full flavor and a satisfyingly meaty texture. The two women proprietors have found machinery specially designed to produce results similar to handmade pasta; the indentation in the *orecchiette*, for example, is rough-hewn like that made by a cook's finger.

Labbate
c.da Grotta dell'Acqua
Monopoli (Bari)
tel. e fax 080/747815-747822
www.pastalabbate.media.it
e-mail:
pastalabbate@mail.media.it
e-mail:
pastalabbate@pastalabbate.it

Founded in 1960, Labbate makes traditional Pugliese shapes such as *orecchiette*, *cavatelli* and *fusilli* as well as forms popular all over the world, such as spaghetti, penne and rigatoni. The firm uses Italian and Canadian wheat (30%), bronze *trafile* and slow, low-temperature drying.

Minor
League
Heroes

Sbiroli

via Conversano, 40
Putignano (Bari)
tel. e fax 080/4911013

A family firm, established in 1890 and now run by the founder's descendents. Thirty different types of long pasta, ranging from the familiar spaghetti to broad pappardelle. Seventy versions of short pasta, including orecchiette, rigatoni, penne. Drying is still done on old-fashioned racks. One of the few companies with foreign distribution.

P.A.P. - Cara Nonna

via L. Cannelonga zona P.I.P.
San Severo (Foggia)
tel. e fax 0882/333496
www.caranonna.it

e-mail:
ufficiocommerciale@caranonna.it

The most popular form here is spaghettoni, but Cara Nonna turns out both local Pugliese forms and popular Italian ones—in all, 115 types. We like their plain white line, but they also produce egg pasta and vegetable-flavored types. Although founded in 1989, the firm uses traditional techniques such as bronze dies and slow-drying. One of the few artisanal manufacturers that exports.

Sardinia

Tanda & Spada - Badde Alba

S.S. 131 bis - Zona industriale
Thiesi (Sassari)
tel. 079/886805
www.consorzioichnos.com
www.sapores.com

e-mail: baddealba@tiscalinet.it

Production of typical Sardinian shapes (*fregola*, *malloreddus* and *ferretti*) as well as the classics, spaghettoni, penne, and others. Whole wheat and organic pasta too. Two main lines, the standard one, Tanda & Spada, and the top line, called Badde Alba and made mainly with Sardinian flour. Sold in the United States.



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