

She speaks very little English, but if anyone asks her about a primarily American dish like spaghetti and meatballs, no interpreter is needed to convey her strident derision. "She does not do any compromise," her son said. "She's a little bit conservative."

In Italy, regional traditions are tantamount to religion. A bowl of tagliatelle may be prepared one way in a certain village, and another way in a village five miles away, and each village may see the other's methods as gastronomic heresy.

Colman Andrews, the editorial director of a Web site called The Daily Meal and the author of a new book, "The Country Cooking of Italy," said: "If you talk to people in Italy, especially the older generation, and you suggest, 'Oh, have you ever tried making lasagna with goat cheese instead of ricotta?' they'll look at you like you're crazy. They'll say, 'We've spent hundreds of years perfecting this recipe, and why would you want to mess with it?'"

Evan Kleiman, a Los Angeles chef and the author of six books about Italian food, acknowledges that when it comes to recipes, the traditionalists have a point, although Mr. Galeano's approach strikes her as unusual.

"I completely believe in slavish devotion to culinary tradition," she said. "But to say that his mother is the only one capable of executing that recipe, that is another conversation. A lot of people say that the thing that keeps Italy stymied economically is that thing of people not wanting to move away from their mom's pasta."



AT WORK Top, Caterina Schenardi at her station at Gradisca. Center, rolling tagliatelle; Ms. Schenardi's pink shoes. Above, discussing pasta with her son, Massimo Galeano, the restaurant's owner; her tiny "Venus's navel" tortellini.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY EVAN SUNG FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Over the years, other New York restaurants have experimented with the Import Mama From Italy strategy. Enoteca Maria, a restaurant on Staten Island, has a rotating team of Italian "nonnas" who do the cooking. At I Trulli, on East 27th Street, Dora Marzovilla, the Apulia-born mother of the restaurateur Nicola Marzovilla, has made the fresh pasta, focaccia and panzerotti since 1994.

Ultimately, such arrangements seem to be less about regional provincialism

than about deeper currents of attachment. "I just think it's really interesting because of what it reveals in the Italian psyche, which is a very complex one in its linkage to food — and to mothers," Ms. Kleiman said.

To the casual observer, Ms. Schenardi's dutiful slicing and rolling and kneading at that front table at Gradisca might seem like an act of forced labor: mommy martyrdom taken to a new extreme. "We used to joke that she has a

ball and chain under the table, and she cannot really move," Mr. Galeano said.

Spend a few hours in her orbit, though, and it becomes clear that she's having a blast. Back in Bologna, much of her day is devoted to cooking one meal after another for her husband. In New York, she's the main attraction at a hopping West Village dining spot, with notables like Sarah Jessica Parker and Al Gore occasionally floating up to her table to pay homage.

"She likes the attention," said Lia

whisk or spoon, break the meat into fine shreds. Serve, if desired, tagliatelle or other pasta.

Yield: 4 first-course servings.

Ronnen, an executive editor at Random House and a close friend of Ms. Schenardi's.

And perhaps the freedom to break from cooking one evening started joking about the banal words and phrases she'd point of absorbing. And "Thank you," "Good morning, Rick's" — with that one, she'd utter an angelic sound that picked the lofty tones of a choir on day mornings she goes to St. Patrick's Cathedral.

Then Ms. Schenardi broke into a "Port Authority bus," she said. "Taj Mahal. Bally." After chattering, she usually catches a bus to Atlantic City.

She raised a hand and then the pantomime her preference for gambling: the slot machine profano," she said.

Those days off are rare, there is any evidence that Ms. Schenardi's culinary strategy at Gradisca tapped into a deeply rooted need, it's the reaction from when they fail to find Ms. Schenardi at the front table.

"People are sorry when I'm not there," she said through a translator. "They're always saying, 'mama, where's mama?'"

FOOD STUFF

Florence Fabricant

Eli's Bread Is at the Station

The departures and arrivals have come quickly this fall for Grand Central Terminal's shops and vendors. Now Eli Zabar has opened a bakery, Eli's Bread, in the Grand Central Market space previously occupied mainly by Corrado Bread and Pastry. Everything sold at Eli's Bread is made at Mr. Zabar's bakery on the Upper East Side; construction of a kitchen one floor above the market is expected to be done in a few weeks, and all the breads, breakfast pastries and coffee cakes for Eli's Bread will be baked there.

"That way we can deliver fresh bread to the market several times a day," Mr. Zabar said. Fancy pastries will still be made uptown. Among the highlights at Eli's Bread is what Mr. Zabar calls the Grand Central baguette, a handmade bread sold plain or with a liberal scattering of green or black olives in the dough. It's the same as the Amagansett baguette he sells in the Hamptons in summer.

Eli's Bread, Grand Central Market, 43rd Street and Lexington Avenue; handmade Grand Central baguettes are \$2.49 plain, \$3.49 with olives; regular baguettes, \$2.49; muffins, \$2.95; sticky buns, \$1.95 for small and \$2.95 for large; Christmas stollen, \$29.95; and gingerbread houses, \$65 and \$110.



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Give a Gift, Help a Charity

Looking for a gift that will please more than just the recipient? This year there are teas, calendars and a grab bag of Brooklyn-made treats that benefit charitable groups.

Ajiri tea, from a cooperative of small growers in the Kisii region of western Kenya, can be brewed strong without tannic bitterness.

That's because only the top few leaves are harvested, explained Sara Holby of Upper Black Eddy, Pa., who founded the company with her mother, Ann Funkhouser, and Nicholas Miyogo of Kenya. The tea comes in boxes, hand-decorated by Kenyan women, of 16 tea bags or 3 1/2 ounces of loose tea; sales support the education of orphans in Kenya. In Manhattan, tea bags cost \$10 at the Sensuous Bean, and \$14 (\$15 for loose tea) at the Tea and Honey Store. In Brooklyn, bags and loose tea are \$9.95 at Blue Apron Foods in Park Slope. They are also sold at



ajiritea.com, which has a list of stores.

New York Food Calendar 2012 has alluring photos by Battman, a food photographer, of dishes from restaurants including Le Bernardin, Daniel and Peasant, to benefit scholarships at the French Culinary Institute. It is \$15.99 at Kitchen Arts and Letters, in Manhattan, and nyfoodcalendar.com. The Amazing New York Food Trucks 2012 Calendar, with photos and information for a dozen trucks (in-



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cluding Luke's Lobster, Coolhaus and Mobile), is \$15 plus shipping from newyorkstreetfood.com, with \$1 of going to the Street Vendor Project, which provides services and support to street vendors. Give Brooklyn is a burlap bag of foods from the borough, including Bloody Mary Mix, Salvatore Bklyn and Early Bird Granola. It is \$75 from earlybirdfoods.com/category/product/20-percent-donated-to-food-pantries-first-in-red-hook-brooklyn-and-park-kitchen-ny-c.



Tired of Hanukkah Gelt? Try a Chocolate Menorah

Michel Cluizel, the French chocolatier, has introduced a line of chocolates and pastries made under kosher supervision in a New Jersey plant. For Hanukkah, he has come up with a pareve chocolate menorah that allows you to observe the tradition in reverse, eating one candle each night instead of adding one.



RUTH FREMSON/THE NEW YORK TIMES

The central candle, or shamus, which is used to kindle the others, is fitted with a small container of almond oil so it can actually be lighted.

The kosher menorah, in dark chocolate, is about six inches wide and four inches high, \$35 at Michel Cluizel, 584 Fifth Avenue (47th Street), (646) 415-9126.