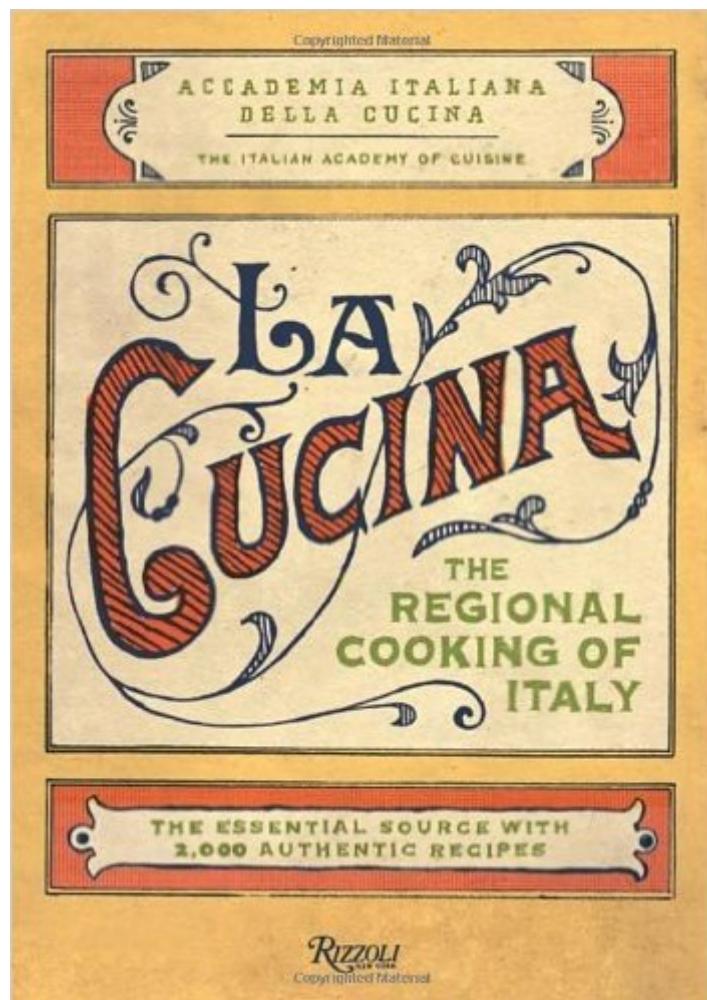


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La Cucina: The Regional Cooking Of Italy



Synopsis

Fifty years ago, a group of Italian scholars gathered to discuss a problem: how to preserve traditional Italian cooking. They formed the Italian Academy of Cuisine to document classic recipes from every region. The academy's more than seven thousand associates spread out to villages everywhere, interviewing grandmothers and farmers at their stoves, transcribing their recipes, many of which had never been documented before. This is the culmination of that research, an astounding feat: 2,000 recipes that represent the patrimony of Italian country cooking. Each recipe is labeled with its region of origin, and it's not just the ingredients but also the techniques that change with the geography. Sprinkled throughout are historical recipes that provide fascinating views into the folk culture of the past. There are no fancy flourishes here, and no shortcuts; this is true salt-of-the-earth cooking. The book is an excellent everyday source for easily achievable recipes, with such simple dishes as White Bean and Escarole Soup, Polenta with Tomato Sauce, and Chicken with Lemon and Capers. For ease of use there are four different indexes. *La Cucina* is an essential reference for every cook's library.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I hadn't really paid much attention to this book -- all the copies I'd seen were sold shrink-wrapped, and I'm not keen on dropping lots of money on a book I'm not at least somewhat familiar with. "La Cucina" hadn't gotten a lot of press, but it's certainly difficult to miss on the shelf, so when I did finally get around to flipping through an unwrapped copy, I was sold on the spot. There is nothing wrong with The Silver Spoon or La Marcella -- the Silver Spoon is bare-bones textwise but

has astonishingly beautiful photography, and "Essentials" is more or less the Italian equivalent of *Mastering the Art of French Cooking*. But both of those books focus largely on the commonalities of Italian cuisine; as any aficionado of Italian food knows, Italian cooking is highly regionalized, varying drastically from the Arab and Greek influences of southern Italy to the powerful flavors of central Italy (especially Rome, Tuscany, and Emilia-Romagna) to the Germanic, Slavic, and French influences of northern Italy. It's reasonably easy to find good books on the individual regions, but efforts such as the usually reliable *Claudia Roden's the Food of Italy: Region by Region* tend to fall flat by virtue of having to cover everything at once. Along comes the *Accademia Italiana della Cucina*, which pulled out all the stops and let the chips fall where they may -- the resulting book is, by its own admission, the size of a phone book, but is a remarkable collection of family and local recipes, some so obscure that their names only exist in dialect. Although most of the classics are here, this is surprisingly not a straightforward Italian recipe reference; rather, it's a scrapbook that complements a more regimented book like the ones mentioned above. And it is very scrapbooky -- quite a few recipes are given in multiple variations, usually demonstrating regional differences in well-known dishes. The organization is strange, but makes sense... after a while. The two indexes are organized by region and ingredient, but only give English language names; if you happen to know the dish by the Italian name, however, the book is organized quite simply, by arranging the dishes in alphabetical order by their names in either standard Italian or (in a great many cases) dialect. It takes a while to get used to but manages to be consistently workable without a great deal of pain. The book is devoid of pictures, all the better to pack in more unusual and tasty recipes, and the layout is contemporary without being quirky or annoying (very much, in fact, like a Workman book without all the clutter). This is not a remotely inexpensive book, and you may balk at buying it in combination with one of the books I mentioned above, but it's great either by itself or in combination with those others. If it's just the basics you're after, this will probably be overkill and might leave you a little high and dry on the common things, but if you're all about the obscure and unusual, this is an excellent choice.

This book is similar to *The Silver Spoon* including a vast array of recipes (over 900 pages!) but *La Cucina* provides the history and background of most recipes, along with a tag telling you from where in Italy the recipe originated. There are also anecdotes about traditions and uses of the foods peppered throughout the book. Italy is a small country, but the cuisine is very different depending on the different regions. And there is a mind-boggling array of recipes here. I was in search of a particular cookie I had been given to sample by my Italian language teacher...I have looked

everywhere for it without success. I did find it here. What I also like, in comparison to The Silver Spoon is that the recipes here are much more descriptive. There are no photographs, so you'll need to use your imagination. But the selection of recipes is very impressive.

This is sort of an encyclopedia of Italian local cooking, very useful to consult for ideas and traditional recipes. The stated purpose is to record local traditional recipes, regardless of how they might translate into modern or American tastes or practices. The recipe instructions are cursory, as is the practice in Italian cookbooks, so this book is probably more appropriate for experienced cooks. There are no photos or illustrations. It is very comprehensive and has many recipes from regions less familiar to USA cooks, such as Le Marche or Basilicata. Ingredients which are traditional are specified, even when they are unusual or unavailable in the US. Recommended highly as a supplement to a library of Italian cookbooks.

While I am not 100% satisfied, this is a great concoction of recipes organized in a new way. What I'm missing is at least some yummy images (there is absolutely none of any kind) and an alphabetical index in addition to the 2 provided. As is, there is an index by region and another by main ingredient, but if you're after just something Italian, you can't simply go to an index in an alphabetical order. I'm in a process of compiling my own as it is going to be invaluable. As a big plus, with a ton of recipes there is no BS included, just plain, concise description of ingredients and how it goes together. But it also means that this is not for a beginning cook, yet I think everyone can count on finding a cooking inspiration here. I love the fresh layout as well. This is just about as different as it gets in cookbooks..... As a side note: another reviewer cannot find classic "bolognese sauce" I can't either, which only adds to my above point of the need for an alphabetical index. I actually don't think there is "bolognese" in this one. While considered by many a classic, it has been the most bastardized meat sauce in culinary history. As such it may no longer fall within the fine Italian cuisine category. I'm just guessing here, but truth be told someone ought to go to jail for letting this sauce become a sour point of Italian cuisine

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