

The Puglia Streetwalker Pasta

Source: The Splendid Table (www.splendidtable.org)

From *The Italian Country Table*, by Lynne Rossetto Kasper.

Vibrant and spicy, this is Puglia's uncooked version of puttanesca, or streetwalker's pasta. Every time I mix together this sauce of fresh tomatoes, garlic, olives, herbs, capers, cheese & chiles, I imagine the same story: A Puglia farmer makes his once-in-a-lifetime trip across the Italian peninsula to Naples, like our cowboys going to the big city. There he tastes Naples' Pasta of the Streetwalker. He goes home & tells his wife about it, but probably not where he ate it. She starts making it, but can't resist adding the Puglia touch of wild arugula. This is my picturesque way of saying if you love puttanesca, you'll love this pasta. It's an example of how pungent ingredients like olives and capers, raw onion & chiles can call out each facet of the tomato's complicated flavors. By the way, note how a little tomato paste deepens the character of an uncooked sauce.

Cook to Cook: The sauce can wait several hours, lightly covered, at room temperature. Do not refrigerate it. Wild arugula (also called wall rocket; botanically *Diplotaxis muralis*) has small, fleshy leaves & tastes peppery, clean & sharp, quite different from the more familiar cultivated arugula, which can become medicinal & bitter when too mature. Substitute either young arugula or the inner leaves of curly endive or mesclun.

- * About 4 C ice cubes
- * 1/2 medium onion, thinly sliced
- * 1 tightly packed TBS fresh basil leaves
- * 1 tightly packed tsp each fresh marjoram & Italian parsley leaves
- * 1 clove garlic
- * Generous pinch hot red pepper flakes
- * 1/4 tsp salt
- * 2 oil-packed anchovy fillets, rinsed (optional)
- * 1/3 C (Puglia, Liguria, or Nicoise) black olives, pitted & coarsely chopped
- * about 3 lbs richly flavored tomatoes, unpeeled, cut in 1/2" cubes
- * 1 tsp red wine vinegar
- * 1/2 cup crumbled cheese (Pecorino Ricotta Salata from Puglia, Cacio Romano, Ricotta Salata from Sicily, or domestic Vella Dry Jack or Stella Fontinella)
- * 2 TBS fruity extra-virgin olive oil
- * 1 TBS tomato paste
- * Freshly ground black pepper (optional)
- * 3/4 lb orecchiette pasta
- * 6 qts boiling salted water
- * 1/3 tightly packed C wild arugula or young arugula, mesclun, or tender, curly endive leaves, chopped

DIRECTIONS:

1. Put half the ice cubes in a medium bowl - add onion & top with rest of cubes. Cover with cold water. Refrigerate 20-30 minutes. Drain. (Chilling the onion in ice water renders it crisp & mild)
2. Mince together herbs, garlic & hot pepper with the salt. Turn into a big serving bowl. Add anchovies, olives, tomatoes, vinegar, cheese & oil - blend in tomato paste. Taste for seasoning, adding a little freshly ground black pepper if needed.

3. Cook pasta in fiercely boiling water, stirring often, till there's no raw flour taste. Orecchiette cooks to a chewier consistency than most pastas. Drain in a colander.
4. Put pasta pot back over medium-high heat. Spoon most of the sauce's liquid into pot. Stir in drained pasta & cook a few minutes, or till liquid is absorbed. Turn pasta into the sauce and add drained onion & fresh greens. Taste for seasoning, toss & serve.

Wine Suggestion: A red Copertino, Rosso del Salento, or Salice Salentino from Puglia.

Serves: 6-8 as a first course OR 4-6 as a main dish