

Seventy-four-year-old Giovanni Marsico slides a peel into the cavernous brick dome of his oven, half-turning each of the 100 loaves inside to ensure even baking. Each peel weighs 2kg and forms part of his 3am to 3pm six-days-a-week routine (cake and biscuit mixtures first, then bread dough). When Giovanni needs a break, he calls on his father, Rocco, 104, to take the helm of *l'antico fornace* (the ancient furnace), a century-old family tradition in Santeramo, Puglia.

Villagers gravitate here not only to have their dough – individually identified by a shape of pasta on top – baked by such expert hands, but also to gossip around the woodfired oven. The additional din this afternoon comes from the nascent chefs of Fifteen Cornwall, the Jamie Oliver-inspired restaurant near Newquay that trains youngsters from disadvantaged backgrounds. Aged between 16 and 24, some of the students have never left England before, let alone flown; now the predominantly tattooed trainees are being cornered by the locals while on a five-day Italian food pilgrimage.

A gaggle of old and young women armed with wicker baskets and swarthy men whose foreheads are lined like walnuts are regaling them with tales of how southern Italy is better than the north (the weather), how this bakery has been the fulcrum of many generations (the quality of both baking and gossip), and why they expect longevity here (the food). 'I sleep by the fire so that the warmth keeps away any aches,' Marsico senior says, 'and I keep away dementia by eating a lot of fava and chicory.' (A local dish, it turns out, that is served relentlessly when chicory is in season during spring and autumn.)

These ingredients may form a menu known as 'poor man's recipes', but for the locals they are integral to a healthy diet that follows a colour-coded regimen: green (vegetables) on Mondays and Wednesdays; red (tomatoes and pasta, traditionally shaped as orecchiette – little ears) on Tuesdays and Thursdays; white (fish) on Fridays; brown on Saturdays (boiled meat or stews) and Sundays (leg, rump or side of a horse, which is usually served as a roll).

Puglia's rigidity with food is not sitting comfortably with the trainees, whose tastebuds are unaccustomed to the bitter undercurrent of chicory, which they have been learning how to prepare – or the abundance of olives and mushrooms for that



FIFTEEN GO MAD IN

The heel of Italy, with its rustic, peasant food, is the perfect training they sampled the varied delights of chicory purée, sheep in clay pot

Above the students of Fifteen Cornwall in Puglia. **Left** two generations of bakers, Rocco, 104, and Giovanni Marsico, 74, from the town of Santeramo



PUGLIA

ground for the students of Jamie Oliver's Fifteen Cornwall restaurant. **Lucy Hyslop** joined them as and horsemeat rolls. Photographs by **Giacomo Bretzel**

Braciolette di carne di cavallo

Horsemeat roll serves 4

500g raw horsemeat slices (or thin slices of beef)

50g parmesan, freshly grated

4 cloves of garlic, finely chopped

handful of parsley, chopped

1 tsp chilli powder

1 onion, finely chopped

extra-virgin olive oil

200g fresh tomatoes, diced

40ml dry white wine

Flatten out the slices of meat, season with salt and pepper, then sprinkle each with grated parmesan, garlic, parsley and chilli. Roll each slice up, and secure well with toothpicks or a string.

Brown the onion in olive oil and then add the rolls and the wine and simmer until the sauce has reduced by half. Add the tomatoes, and continue cooking on a medium heat for about two hours. If necessary, add salted water to prevent the sauce becoming too thick.

Hamish Anderson's wine choice 2004

Sainsbury's Taste the Difference Chianti

Classico, Italy £7.59. This great-value Chianti, from the fine 2004 vintage, has enough weight to take on this sauce and a lip-smacking, sour cherry character to counter the acidity of the tomatoes.



matter. But for Neil Haydock, the head chef at Fifteen Cornwall, this is essential training. 'It's good for them to expand their palates and know how it should taste,' he says. 'Besides, if it's bitter, then it reminds people of the bad times; if it's chewy, it ensures the brain is connected to the whole experience as well as the stomach.'

Outside the kitchen the trainees confine themselves to street talk ('well wicked', 'shut it down'), but when they swap their shellsuits and baseball caps for chef's whites, they swiftly turn from surly teenagers into engaged adults. Questions about their lives may elicit one-word answers, but ask about food and they are gastronomic dictionaries: describing dark olive oils as 'gutsy' and 'peppery'; comparing the bresaola they use at Fifteen with the one here (theirs is less fatty); recounting the six different temperatures at which a balsamic vinegar can be served. They are keen to learn new techniques too: throwing pizza dough, handling a peel, stretching out mozzarella on a spatula.

It is a transformation, as their mentor Jamie

'I sleep by the fire so the warmth keeps away any aches, and I keep away dementia by eating a lot of fava and chicory'

Horsemeat (above left) and chicory (above right) are popular local dishes, as the students (below) discovered



Cicorielle e purea di fave

Chicory and fava bean purée serves 4

500g dried shelled fava beans, soaked in water overnight

1 onion (or spring onion), finely chopped

1kg wild chicory

100ml extra-virgin olive oil

Wash the soaked fava beans thoroughly, removing any loose skins, and cook with enough water to cover them in a lidded pan on a very low heat for about two hours. When the beans are nearly cooked, brown the onion in a frying-pan and add a pinch of salt. Drain the beans and add the fried onion, stirring energetically with a wooden spoon to make a smooth purée.

Rinse the chicory repeatedly. Boil in water for a few minutes, then drain and season with salt and pepper. Serve hot with the fava purée, drizzled with extra-virgin olive oil.

'Oh my days, you can really see that the Italians put so much love into their food'

Pecora alla rezzaule

Sheep in a clay pot serves 6

700g shallots

700g small tomatoes, chopped

150g wild fennel

3 or 4 cardoncelli (a wild herb growing on the Murgia Hills). Alternative: 3 or 4 globe artichoke stems

1 chicory, roughly chopped

2 potatoes, cut into slices

100g peas

1 carrot, roughly chopped

1 small red pepper, roughly chopped

100g flaked ewe's milk cheese

2 celery stalks, roughly chopped

3kg lamb, roughly chopped

Preheat the oven to 190C/gas mark 5. Combine all the vegetables, herbs, cheese and seasoning in a bowl. Place alternate layers of the lamb and the vegetable mix in a large clay pot or casserole. Cover and bake for three hours (traditionally this would have been cooked in a wood-fired oven).

Wine choice 2005 Primitivo, A Mano, Puglia, Italy £5.99 Noel Young (01223-844744; nywines.co.uk). Puglia produces huge amounts of variable wine. When they are good like this rich, brambly Primitivo they make great partners to slow-cooked meat dishes.

Oliver observes, that is the essence of the Fifteen charity. 'We're a pretty volatile bunch outside the kitchen,' says 20-year-old trainee Sam Lounds, who talks freely about his conviction for selling drugs. 'But inside we're well laidback.'

Even the horsemeat common in this area (it finds its way into almost everything, including pizza) doesn't upset them. 'Look at it,' Fallon Vinnicombe, 17, says, tearing it apart with her fingers. 'It's a soft meat that stays together like a pork ragu. It's good – better than a lot of bad meat back home.' Each student has his own take on *carne di cavallo*: for 21-year-old Michael Mallett it is beef stew; Kieran Venner, 19, thinks it's a dead ringer for well-done lamb; while Lounds says it is like zebra, although I am sure he is playing to the crowd. A farmer's dish, *pecora alla rezzaule* (sheep in clay pot), prompts spontaneous applause from the students. 'Bellissimo,' Damon Murray, 21, says. 'Totally mouthwatering. See how it flakes off the bone. I'm in danger of becoming too healthy out here.'

Lampasciuni, which are commonly described by locals as wild onions but are really wild hyacinth bulbs, have an unsettling resemblance to boiled eyeballs – they are better when smothered in sauce, it is agreed. There is universal enthusiasm for the day spent foraging for edible weeds – a crucial component of both Fifteen's own recipes in Cornwall and a typical peasants' breakfast ('poor man's feast') in Puglia. Pointy wild rocket, oregano, rosemary, chicory, asparagus and *cardoncelli* (a thistle-like leaf that spawns a nutty eponymous mushroom after it dies) are gathered. Tomatoes and figs growing in the fields belonging to a Santeramo farmer, Francesco Caponio, are





eaten with seasoned, salty sheep's and cow's cheeses, olives soaked in brine and a chewy bread that lasts 15 days (an original recipe designed for shepherds away from home) that contributes to instant bruschetta.

All of this is punctuated with 10-minute-old ricotta and *mostaccioli* (or 'little moustaches', probably named after the mark the *vincotto* – caramelised grape juice with which both desserts are served – leaves on your lips), quinces, fig jam and a glass of Primitivo wine, made from punchy, full-bodied grapes from long-established Puglia vineyards. Little goes to waste here; even the sour-tasting cloudy residue from making the ricotta doubles as a laxative.

Back in a kitchen in the town centre of Altamura, Tonia Fuggetta instructs the students in the art of making hundreds of torrone nougat and nutty 'confetti' sweets for wedding parties. For the latter, it's all about the right consistency of the pure sugar boiling on the stove ('not too thick, not too runny'), of pouring in the chopped almonds, whose strength of flavour almost induces sneezing ('bashed with a rolling-pin – not too uniform'), to make a mixture which is then rolled out on a bed of chopped nuts ('quickly, before the sugar hardens'). Each one is wrapped in foil, then crepe paper to form a cracker – 'So that we can explode,' Fuggetta adds.

'Oh my days, you can really see that the Italians put so much love into their food,' Venner says, as he asks another student to take a picture of him hugging Fuggetta. 'I've put on a stone in weight during this trip. But, hey, if they put it down for me, it's rude not to eat, innit?'

01637-861000; fifteencornwall.co.uk

Clockwise from far left Tonia Fuggetta makes confetti sweets; mostaccioli; the Fifteen students watch as Fuggetta works; sheep in a clay pot

Mostaccioli little moustaches

makes roughly 30 large individual 'cakes'

1 litre vincotto (caramelised grape or fig juice)
500g plain flour and 500g re-milled semolina flour
100g grated chocolate
1 tbspc sugarless cocoa powder
150g caster sugar
100g baked almonds, ground
grated peel of 1 orange and 1 lemon
125ml extra-virgin olive oil
150ml milk
1 tsp baking powder
5 cloves, crushed

Preheat the oven to 200C/gas mark 6. Gently heat the vincotto in a saucepan for a few minutes, then pour it into a large mixing bowl. Add all the remaining ingredients and mix together well. If the mix is too soft, add some extra flour. On a baking tray covered with greaseproof paper and dusted with flour, spoon out individual round 'cakes' and bake in the oven for 10-15 minutes.

Wine choice 2005 Essensia Orange Muscat, Andrew Quady, California, USA

Majestic Wine. £7.49 (half-bottle). Muscat does a fine job at matching up to chocolate. This rich, decadent wine not only copes with the chocolate, but its notes of marmalade and orange blossom also pick up on the grated citrus fruits in the dish.