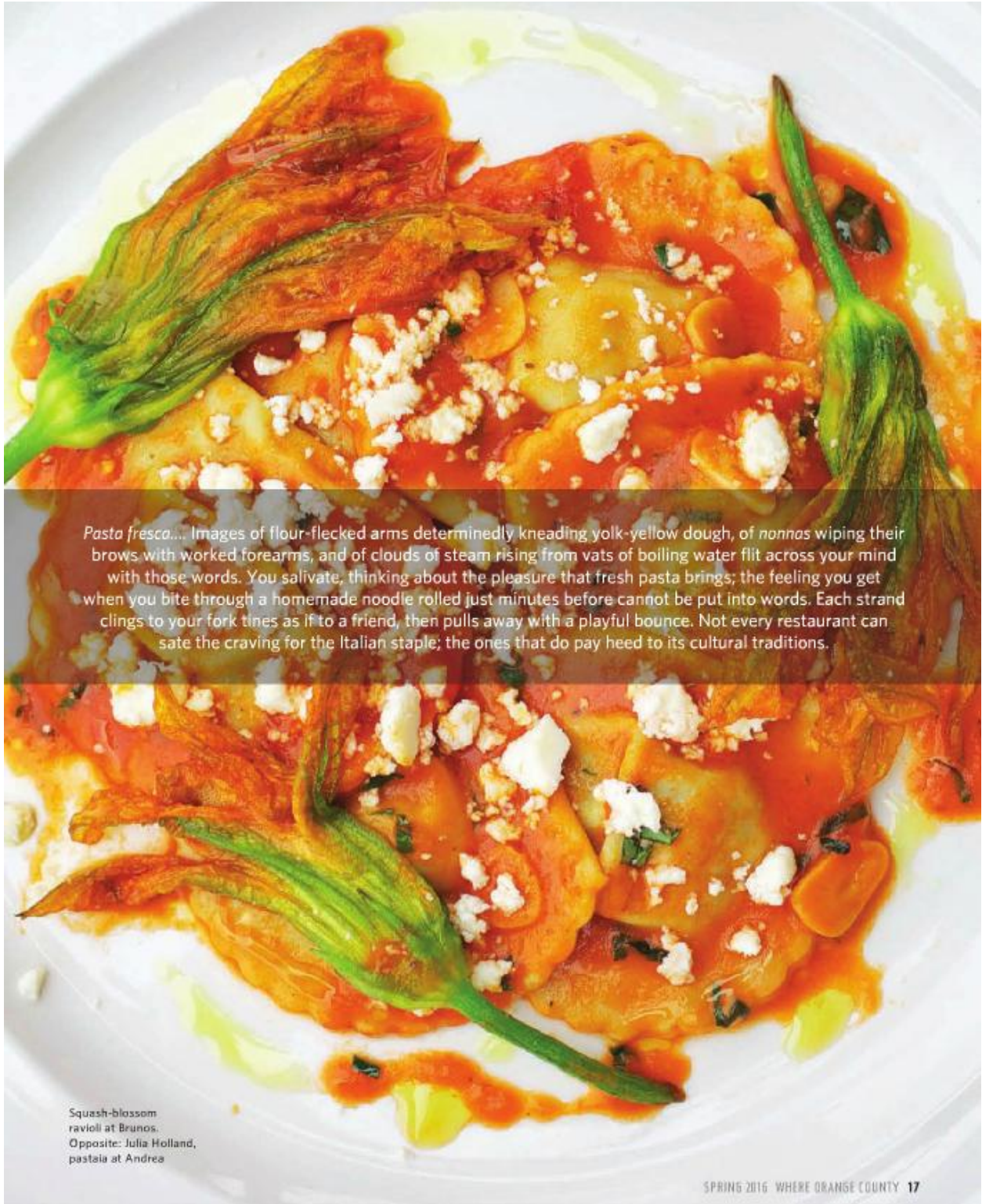


# FLOUR + EGGS + LOVE

Two ingredients, give or take. Some mix flour with water, others prefer flour with egg. But everyone's end goal is the magic that is fresh pasta.

By MINERVA THAI



*Pasta fresca...* Images of flour-flecked arms determinedly kneading yolk-yellow dough, of *nonnas* wiping their brows with worked forearms, and of clouds of steam rising from vats of boiling water flit across your mind with those words. You salivate, thinking about the pleasure that fresh pasta brings; the feeling you get when you bite through a homemade noodle rolled just minutes before cannot be put into words. Each strand clings to your fork tines as if to a friend, then pulls away with a playful bounce. Not every restaurant can sate the craving for the Italian staple; the ones that do pay heed to its cultural traditions.

Squash-blossom ravioli at Brunos.  
Opposite: Julia Holland, pastaia at Andrea



**T**WO POUNDS OF flour plus three dozen humanely farm-produced egg yolks make up the recipe for fresh pasta at **Antonello Ristorante**. The iconic

Italian mainstay, at South Coast Village in Santa Ana, has been serving made-from-scratch Italian fare in a welcoming and romantic atmosphere since 1979. The rooms are adorned with photographs of owner Antonio Cagnolo's life in Italy; among them, a family vineyard triptych graces its enoteca's walls.

Though the menu spans the various cuisines of Italy's 21 regions, what ties them together at Antonello is the commitment to fresh pasta and ingredients.

Native to Cagnolo's hometown and named for its technique, Ravioli del Plin pays tribute to his childhood in Piedmont. Pushing one's thumb into each raviolo makes an impression that is then filled with a mix of roasted veal, Swiss chard, Parmesan and eggs. The savory morsels that result are both delicate and comforting. Mamma Pina is Cagnolo's mother's specialty, short-rib-stuffed miniature ravioli in a Bolognese sauce. The restaurant's gnocchi are unbelievably soft and light, made from ricotta and served with shallots, sweet basil, Fontina cheese and San Marzano tomatoes.

Made daily, the pasta is integral to the restaurant's sense of authenticity. But there are other regional specialties that also should not be missed, among them branzino; risotto prepared tableside in a wheel of pecorino; and some 20 desserts made in-house—try the spumoni!

**Brunos Italian Kitchen** in Brea is similarly guided by family traditions, these from the heart of Venice. Chef Peter Serantoni presents a dining experience amid exposed brick, dark wood and paintings of gondolas, to which is added knowledgeable service. Both the food and beverage menus benefit from his dedication to authenticity.

To open the palate—and to do as Italians do—begin with an aperitivo. At Brunos, that means a Classic Venetian Spritz, made with pinot grigio, Aperol, orange and olives. All of the cocktails are based on Italian classics. The Milano Manhattan is enhanced by amarena cherries, the Lambosco Martini by blackberries. Among bubbles, opt for the

865 Spritz if you're fond of ginger or the Amalfi Spritz if you prefer basil and citrus.

Pasta made in-house daily, the restaurant's centerpiece, uses the finest of flours—additive-free, natural Caputo "00"—and the freshness makes all the difference.

The popular Pappardelle Bruno finds perfectly braised short ribs and savory roasted mushrooms hugging silky, wide noodles. Each forkful of the entrée seems to conjure feelings of familial warmth—it's what you'd imagine an Italian grandmother might make to comfort you on a bad day. Lasagna al Forno features delicate pasta layers bathed in housemade Bolognese and béchamel. The heartier Bucatini di Cinghiale features wild-boar sausage.

Round out the evening with the Budino, a dreamy pudding layered with chocolate ganache and crushed hazelnuts. Prefer a digestivo? Don't miss the housemade limoncello, which offers notes of Tahitian vanilla bean and toasted fennel in every sip.

Not many restaurants can boast a full-time pastaia (pasta chef) on the premises, but that is just one of the distinctive features of **Andrea Ristorante** at the sumptuous Pelican Hill Resort in Newport Coast.

The other remarkable show of dedication to fresh pasta daily? A 9-by-9-foot dedicated pasta room, equipped with a pasta roller/extruder imported from Rome, where Julia Holland hand-makes more than two dozen types of pasta daily.

Chef Marco Criscuolo insists that his pasta be made in-house. Growing up in Italy, he was surrounded by his mother's and grandmother's fresh, seasonal cooking and homemade pastas, and he hopes that some of the warmth and love he felt in their kitchen will be transmitted to his diners here.

Though the dishes the chef serves here are based on traditional recipes, they are enhanced by his culinary experiences working around the world and the inspiration he derives from the Michelin-starred chefs invited to cook at the restaurant during the property's annual autumnal festivities.

Criscuolo's exquisite Egg Yolk Ravioli San Domenico features oversized ravioli stuffed with a brilliant orange yolk, served amid spinach ricotta and drizzled with brown butter. Shaved white truffle is optional when in season. The sheets of pasta that envelop the molten-gold filling are as luxurious as the setting.

Another draw is Holland's handmade



gnocchi, each little dumpling smooth and delicate and presented with a sublime Bolognese sauce and luscious burrata.

Pair these or any of the other specialties—such as creamy risotto mixed tableside in a wheel of Parmigiano-Reggiano—with one of the 2,000-plus, mostly Italian wines. Tack on a breathtaking Pacific Ocean view for an unforgettable experience.

**Old Vine Café** owner/chef Mark McDonald, who studied and trained in Italy, has been making fresh pasta daily since the restaurant opened, far preferring the sleek texture of fresh pasta to the al dente consistency of dried pasta. Classics such as pappardelle, tagliatelle, gnocchi, orecchiette and cavatelli offer a range of shapes and surfaces that affect his choice of sauce and ingredients.

Old Vine Café makes its pasta with egg yolks rather than with water, producing richer and heartier pasta, which he then



Tagliatelle al pomodoro at Old Vine Café. Opposite: Making ravioli at Il Garage, top, and gnacchi at Antonello.

complements with regional ingredients. If a dish derives from southern Italy, for instance, McDonald adds only cheeses and produce native to the region.

The beef tenderloin Stroganoff is not a traditional Italian dish but can be considered northern Italian, as beef is raised in the north. Served over housemade tagliatelle and drizzled with a creamed demi glace, the entrée is both hearty and tender and, above all, comforting. Copious amounts of fresh shiitake mushrooms contribute an umami component that also primes the palate for the restaurant's distinctive wines.

The lighter tagliatelle al pomodoro is tossed in a tangy, sweet pomodoro sauce and heavily snowed with aged pecorino Romano. The texture of each gently springy tagliatelle noodle shows why many seek out fresh pasta.

Another staple appeals to fans of more rustic pasta dishes: handmade pappardelle resting in a pork sausage pomodoro ragu

and topped with fresh English peas and Parmigiano-Reggiano. Thick, wide noodles of pappardelle stand up to the weight of the ragu and the savory sausage; the peas lend a welcome pop and textural variance.

Every beautiful pasta deserves a beautiful wine; every staff member at Old Vine is well-versed in pairing.

If the idea of Italy and Italian food suggests an air of romance for you, you'll appreciate **Il Garage** in Stanton. That it's in a small garage seems only to add to the ambiance; the garage is open, so it feels alfresco. Open for dinner by reservation only, it overlooks an immaculate garden whose daily harvests drive the ever-changing menu. Red-and-white checkered tablecloths over just a handful of wooden tables lend an air of intimacy, luring guests hoping for a charming evening to themselves.

More than 20 types of pastas are made

here to accompany the various vegetables plucked from the garden beds, though depending on the recipe, chef David Slay might determine that a dry pasta is more appropriate. And though most dishes derive from the seasonal bounty, there are popular mainstays.

Lasagna al Forno finds nine layers of thin, fresh noodles stacked with beef Bolognese, Grana Padano and béchamel, baked for six to seven hours and served piping hot. The dish retains the meatiness that lasagna lovers seek, but the housemade noodles help make the typically heavy dish somewhat lighter.

Il Garage's rigatoni primavera is highly dependent on what the garden produces; the harvest is tossed with a light pesto sauce and those very locally grown ingredients for a particularly healthful and farm-fresh-delicious dish.

You'll find Il Garage hidden behind its highly acclaimed sibling, ParkAve. 🍷