

Leonie Palmer has the amazing story behind Matt Golinski's third placing in a culinary competition in Italy

in focus

The Italian caper

RICKY Ricardo's chef Matt Golinski recently took out a remarkable third place in the City of Bologna's first culinary competition, in which foreign chefs made the traditional regional dish, tagliatelle al ragu Bolognese (hand-made fettuccine with Bolognese sauce, to those of us less endowed of an Italian heritage).

Francesca Grillo, a wonderful ambassador of both Noosa and Bologna, and sensational cook to boot, grasped with typical Italian enthusiasm an opportunity that was presented to her to unite her great love of food with her two most favourite places in the world.

Francesca's brief was to attend this inaugural festival with a chef well-versed in Mediterranean, if not Italian cuisine, who would be prepared, at short notice, to travel to Bologna to compete against 11 other chefs from around the world, for the express purpose of cooking exactly the same recipe at the same time.

Now Matt was already a pretty dab hand at pasta making, but with a countdown of two weeks before showtime, it was necessary to perfect the pasta as well as the traditional Bolognese sauce. Francesca introduced Matt to the finer nuances of traditional pasta making, then roll and knead and cut pasta he did, day and night for two weeks.

Arriving in Bologna, Matt was introduced to Francesca's family in the kitchen (of course) with a glass of their home-made wine, then treated to a quick inspection of the vegetable garden, the hen house and the vineyard. After a quick shower, it was down to some serious final preparation with the real things - a massive wooden board and a rolling pin just over one metre in length!

Some pasta later, came a rowdy Italian family lunch around the wooden kitchen table, then naturally dinner at a traditional trattoria, sampling, you guessed it . . . tagliatelle al ragu.

Day two found Matt in the family kitchen surrounded by lasagne sheets and tagliatelle ribbons. Intrigued by his ability to cut pasta ribbons, Francesca's mother asked Matt to cut some very fine tagliolini, and as he quickly transformed a pasta sheet into countless threads, as thin as an angel's hair, she fixed him with a glassy stare and admonished Francesca: "Don't you ever bring into my kitchen again an Australian, with a Polish name who can prepare pasta better than me!"

Lots of laughter and food followed, and they were off to meet the other chefs. Chefs from America, Australia, Canada, Japan, Argentina, Russia and Germany made up the polite, but understandably tense team of contestants, ready to share a two-and-a-half-day food marathon.

Dining that evening on a terrace overlooking the hills and a fabulous sunset, all was apparent tranquillity . . .

Eight o'clock in the morning, all vestiges of calm had dissipated - the contestants were sweating in the summer heat, ready for action. Six to a room, our contestants got down to it, with an endless parade of dignitaries watching, talking, pointing, they produced nine small tasting plates and a presentation dish of tagliatelle al ragu Bolognese.

Meanwhile, Francesca was outside, transmitting live by telephone to ABC Coast FM, right here on the coast. Great work, team Noosa!

Finally the dishes were ready, out came the 12 "apostles", bearing their presentation plate for the jury, followed by nine impeccably turned out waiters carrying their tasting dishes. Francesca, interview done, was on hand to experience this extraordinary presentation of 12 different interpretations of exactly the same dish, a dish so symbolic of her native culture.

After many photographs, the obligatory glasses of fizzy Pignoletto and of course a great deal of feasting, Matt and Francesca were off to the supermarket for a few cold beers.

There was another wonderful dinner of tiny tortellini, truffles, and porcini mushrooms that evening in an underground vault of a 14th Century noble palace, and so to bed.

Next morning, all assembled for a "hands-on" pasta making class (no kidding), preparing tortellini and tortelloni for their lunch. An afternoon stroll through the city, some sweet and tasty wild strawberries, and off to the gala dinner, with finally, the announcement of the award winners!

With the relieved cry of "one more meal to go", Francesca and Matt set off for the Council Palace in the main city square. A thousand guests, including the 12 "apostles" gathered at sumptuously laid white tables for a final feast. Then the chefs donned their uniforms for the presentation. The tension was palpable, especially for Francesca, as Matt appeared to be lost and the announcements had commenced. He finally appeared and mounted the stage in time to hear . . . first place goes to Nagasako Masanori, of Japan; second place to Rosario Del Nero, of Boston, USA; and third place to Matthew Golinski, of Australia.

With a fair amount of celebratory imbibing, it was time for a couple of hours' nap and an early trip to the airport for the 30-hour journey home. Matt's prize was a great, big Bolognese salami, which stayed no doubt to be enjoyed around that wonderful kitchen table at the Grillo residence.



Leonie Palmer