

Lombardia

A TRADITION OF FINE FOODS



Promotional campaign financed with contribution from the European Union



Federlombarda Agricoltori



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Lombardia is defined by the broad valley of the Po River – one of the few expansive lowlands on the peninsula – and by the moderating influence of Lake Garda, which allows production of olive oil at this high latitude.

In the year 1000, a group of industrious monks decided to settle in the Po River Valley. No one suspected that they would change not only Lombardia's landscape, but Italy's cuisine. The monks cleared the land, raised cows, and started producing a firm grating cheese they named Grana Padano. Today, more than one thousand years later, in that very same fertile stretch of Lombardia, Grana Padano continues to flourish.

In this age of ever-changing trends, it is hard to believe that a food born so long ago could still be thriving. Yet Grana Padano and a host of other classic ingredients from Lombardia boast a venerable, centuries-old pedigree.

Taleggio, a creamy, soft, full-fat cow's milk cheese with a truffle-scented rind, has been produced in the Val Taleggio, in

the province of Bergamo, since the 11th century. It was served at the banquet held on the occasion of Pope Clement VI's coronation in 1334, and at the wedding of Francesco Sforza to Bianca Maria Visconti in 1441. Ripened a minimum of 35 days in natural rock caves whose microflora lend it a distinct aroma, Taleggio owes its very nature to the land where it was born.

Gorgonzola is a pungent blue-veined raw cow's milk cheese whose ancestor was mentioned in the 9th-century testament of a Milanese archbishop. It was named after a village near Milan where a cattle market was once held. Like Taleggio, Grana Padano, and a dozen other Lombard cheeses, Gorgonzola has been awarded DOP status. The DOP (Denominazione di Origine Protetta, or Denomination of Protected Origin) is an appellation system, much like the

DOC system applied to wine, that denotes outstanding foods whose character is in large part defined by their place of origin. DOP status is granted only to foods (typically cheeses) whose production is strictly regulated by a consortium to ensure quality. Every step of the production process is scrutinized, and the consortium's seal of approval is stamped only on top-quality products that meet the consortium's stringent criteria. In short, the DOP appellation assures consumers that they are getting an authentic product rather than an imitation. Lombardia boasts the largest number of DOP products in Italy.

Another essential ingredient of Lombardia's cuisine is, perhaps surprisingly in this paradise of butter and cream, extra-virgin olive oil from the shores of Lake Garda, which figures prominently on the Lombardian table. Thanks to a favorable microclimate created by pre-Alpine lakes, Lake Garda's extra-virgin olive oil has the distinction of being the olive oil produced at the highest latitude in the world. Made using primarily Casaliva, Frantoio, Leccino, and Pendolino olives, Lake Garda's extra-virgin olive oil has a maximum of 0.6% acidity, a color ranging from green to yellow, and a moderately fruity scent. Its flavor is fruity, with bitter, peppery, and almond tones – just perfect when paired with fresh fish from Lake Garda.

Lombardia's luxuriant cuisine demands equally refined wines. Subdivided into three main DOC wine areas – the Oltrepò Pavese in the south, Franciacorta in the east, and Valtellina in the north – Lombardia produces more than 42 million gallons of wine annually. DOC wines account for more than a third of the production. The Franciacorta is the youngest and most exciting of the three wine-growing areas, and has earned accolades for a sparkling wine made according to the Champenoise method as well as for still red and white wines that pair beautifully with the region's distinctive foods.

Dining in Lombardia is always memorable. No matter what is on the table – a simple cheese platter or luscious risotto laced with saffron – history, tradition and magic mingle in every mouthful.

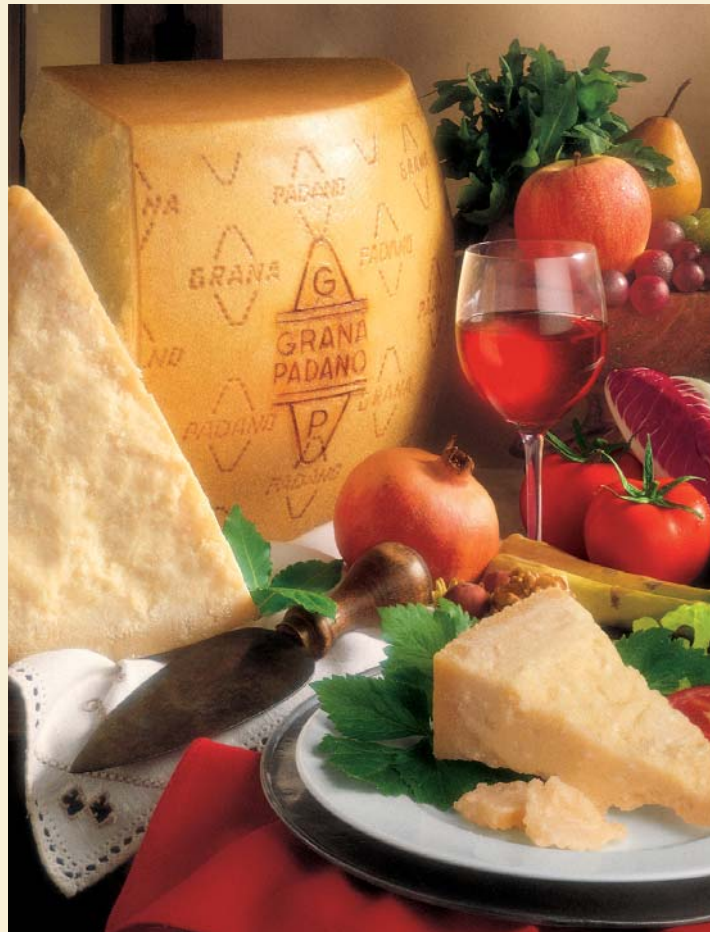


SCOTT BARROW, CORBIS, GETTY IMAGES

LOMBARDIA: CULINARY TRADITIONS AND THE DOP QUALITY GUARANTEE



Aside from cheeses, Lombardia offers a wealth of indigenous products that have also been granted DOP. Short-grained rice has been cultivated in Lombardia's Lomellina Plains since the 15th century and forms the basis for endless varieties of risotto, not to mention rice soups, fritters, savory



When the monks of the Chiaravalle Abbey decided to settle in the Po River Valley at the turn of the second millennium, the area was a swampy marshland alternating with woods — not an ideal place for cows to graze. The monks cleared the woods and started to raise cattle, and soon found themselves with more milk than they could drink. The solution? Transform the excess milk into a cheese that could be aged for months. Soon the monks’

GRANA PADANO: USED IN A THOUSAND WAYS FOR A THOUSAND YEARS

cheese, created by the sheer necessity to not waste milk, became one of Italy’s most prized culinary offerings. Four and a half centuries after its creation, Grana Padano had become a staple across Italy: in 1447, Pantaleone da Cofienza, an Italian physician and writer, described it as the most popular cheese in all of Italy.

Grana Padano earned its name because it had a compact, granular texture quite unlike that of other cheeses made in medieval Europe. Its size was also unusual, with wheels weighing upwards of 50 pounds. Just as the monks had hoped, Grana Padano could mature for months — even years — only improving over time, so sailors and merchants brought it on board ships when they traveled. Over the centuries, production spread to outlying areas of Lombardia. Today, Grana Padano is made in 27 provinces of the Po River Valley — mostly in Lombardia, where it originated, but also in Piedmont, the Veneto, Emilia-Romagna,

and Trentino. Amazingly, the production method remains very much the same as it was a thousand years ago, despite growing demand from international markets.

In August of 1954, a consortium was founded by a group of Grana Padano producers who wanted to protect the authenticity and quality of their cheese. A year later, thanks to their efforts, Grana Padano was granted DO (Denomination of Origin) status. In 1996, Grana Padano was awarded the prestigious DOP status (Denomination of Protected Origin) by the European Union. The consortium now boasts 200 producers, ripeners, and merchants of Grana Padano joined by a common goal: to preserve the rich heritage and true identity of this ancient cheese (one of Italy’s oldest), and to monitor every aspect of its production, from the fodder the cows graze on to the exact manner in which the cheese is aged. Each year, 1.7 billion quarts of milk are used to produce Grana Padano, and about 32,000 tons of Grana Padano are exported.

It takes 16 quarts of milk to make one kilogram (2.2 pounds) of Grana Padano, which explains the cheese’s intense rich flavor and rich mouth feel. Milk obtained from cows that are milked no more than twice a day is partially skimmed, allowed to rest for 10 hours, and heated in huge copper tanks. First a whey starter is added, then calf’s rennet is stirred in to help coagulate the milk. The curds are broken up into small pieces and the liquid separated from the solids. The curds are lifted out of the whey with huge cloths, cut in half, wrapped, and left to drain. A soak in salt water follows, and finally the cheese is ready to age on wooden shelves anywhere from 14 to 30 months. The longer Grana Padano ages, the saltier, drier, and more pungent it becomes. During the aging period, the cheese is turned and brushed, and the temperature and humidity in the aging rooms are carefully monitored to ensure that each wheel of Grana Padano emerges in perfect condition. After aging, the wheels average an imposing and delicious 70 pounds.

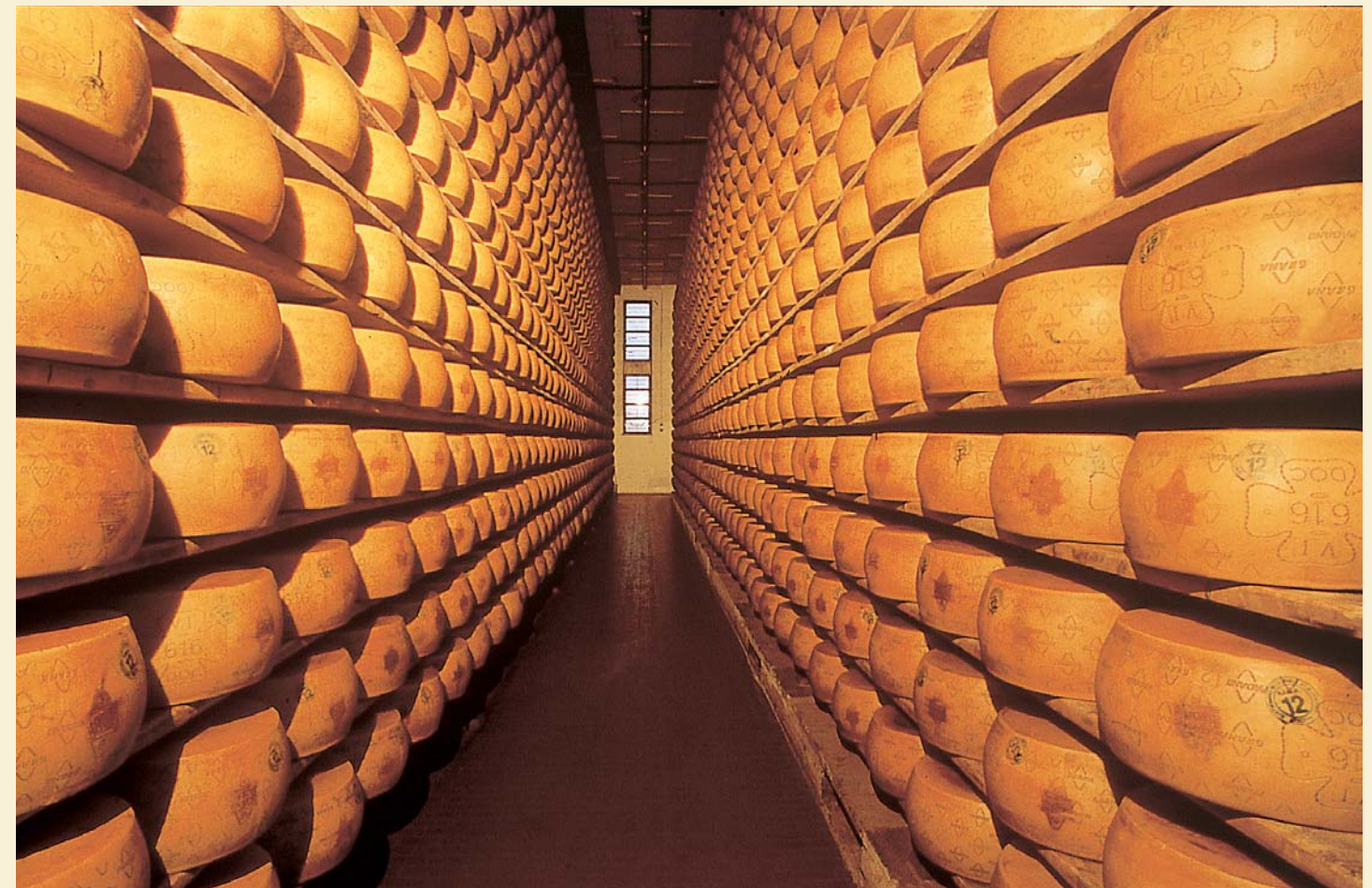
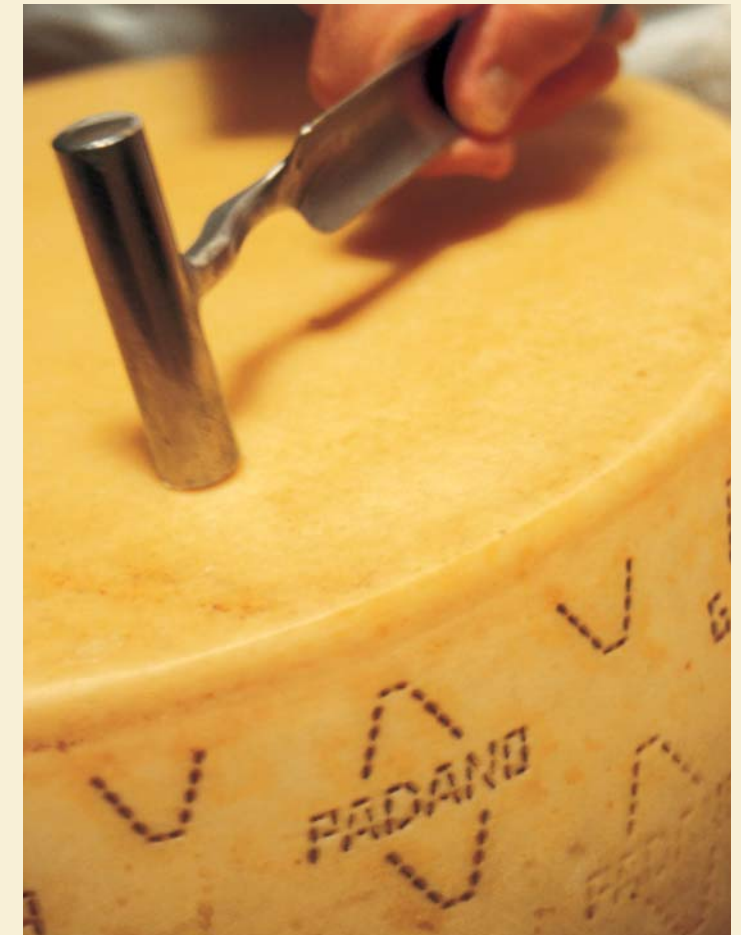
The Grana Padano Consortium employs 30 craftsmen in charge of checking each and every wheel of this classic cheese before it’s sent to the market. The experts’ tools? A small metal hammer and a needle. They begin by tapping the entire surface of each wheel with the

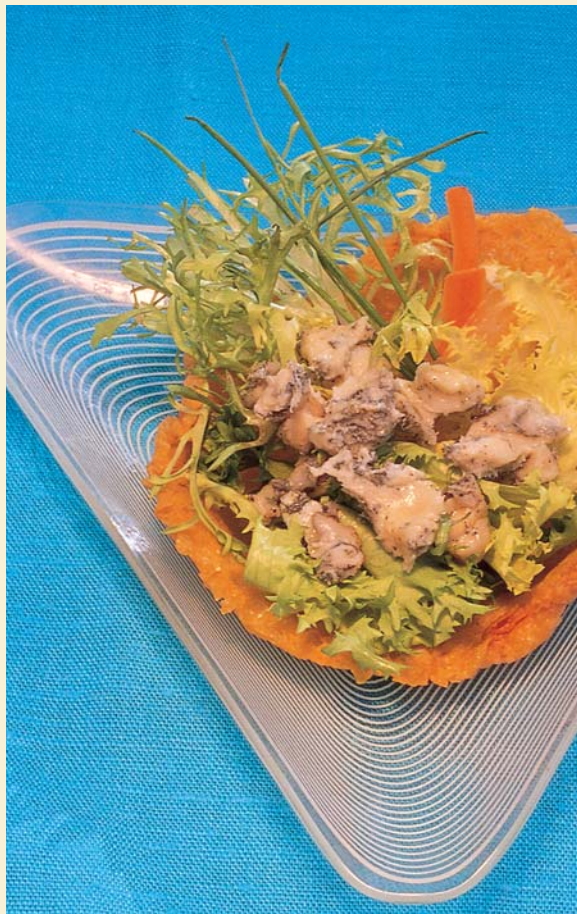
hammer in order to detect any hollow spots, which would automatically disqualify the cheese from receiving the Consortium’s seal of approval. Next, they use the needle to pierce the wheel of cheese, examining the aroma, taste, and perfume of the bits of cheese that cling to the needle. If the wheel of cheese passes these two rigorous tests, it’s official: the cheese’s golden-yellow rind is stamped with the diamond-shaped Grana Padano symbol, an assurance to consumers that the cheese they are buying is the genuine product.

Grana Padano’s nutty flavor and deep aroma are largely the result of the cows’ strictly regulated diet of fresh hay and fodder, which includes alfalfa and maize. Its granular structure makes it ideal for grating or shaving over pasta, risotto, salads, and more. And while it’s often used in cooking because it melts so beautifully, it’s also splendid savored at the table with a loaf of bread or a ripe pear for accompaniment — if any accompaniment is needed!

Look for Grana Padano with a smooth, golden-yellow rind stamped with the Consortium’s seal, and a compact, dense inner structure without holes or color striations. Wrap Grana Padano tightly in a double layer of plastic wrap and refrigerate it for up to a month; wedges can also be frozen if desired. It’s always best to grate Grana Padano just before savoring it — if you really must grate it days before you’re going to use it, freeze the shavings to better preserve the aroma.

As it has been for a millenium, today’s Grana Padano rests on wooden shelves for up to 30 months, intensifying its flavor and aroma.





SALAD OF FRISEE LETTUCE WITH CHIVES AND GORGONZOLA PRESENTED IN A GRANA PADANO CRISP

Two of Lombardia's essential cheeses mingle beautifully in one harmonious salad: rich, nutty Grana Padano and sharp, pungent, blue-veined Gorgonzola.

Pound freshly grated Grana Padano
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1/3 cup Lake Garda extra-virgin olive oil
Teaspoon salt
Teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 small head frisée lettuce, washed and dried
1 bunch chives, snipped into 1/4-inch lengths (about 1/2 cup)
Pound Gorgonzola, rind removed and crumbled

1. Make the Grana Padano crisps: Preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Line an 11-inch x 17-inch baking sheet with a silpat liner (a non-stick silicone liner; available in kitchenware shops). Sprinkle the Grana Padano on the silpat, making 4 distinct circles each measuring about 4 inches in diameter, leaving about 1 inch between the mounds. Bake in the preheated oven until the Grana melts and forms 4 lacy pancakes, about 10 minutes; the edges should be

barely golden.

2. Meanwhile, invert 4 round ramekins on a counter and place 2 spatulas near the ramekins.

3. As soon as you remove the melted Grana pancakes from the oven, drape each hot pancake over a ramekin, using the two spatulas and working quickly. When the Grana baskets have cooled to room temperature, remove each to a plate.

4. Make the salad: In a small bowl, combine the vinegar, olive oil, salt, and pepper. In another bowl, place the lettuce and chives. Toss with the vinegar mixture and adjust the salt if needed. Divide among the four Grana baskets, top with the Gorgonzola, and enjoy.

SERVES 4



BRAISED VEAL SHANKS WITH LEMON-GARLIC CONFETTI

Ossu Buco is one of Lombardia's most famous offerings: meaty veal shanks are braised with white wine—try a lovely, vivacious Garda Pinot Grigio—and aromatic vegetables until they become meltingly tender. Serve with a saffron risotto—made using Lombardia's prized Lomellina rice, of course!

4 veal shanks (1/2 pound each, preferably center-cut)
1/4 cup unbleached all-purpose flour
1/3 cup Lake Garda extra-virgin olive oil
1/4 pound pancetta, diced
1 carrot, minced
1 medium yellow onion, minced
1 celery stalk, minced
Teaspoon salt
Teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1 cup Garda Pinot Grigio
4 plum tomatoes, peeled, seeded, and diced
1 cup chicken stock (optional)
1 garlic clove, minced
1/2 cup Italian parsley leaves, minced
Grated zest of 1 lemon

1. Dredge the shanks in the flour, shaking off the excess. Heat the olive oil in a 12-inch sauté pan over a medium-high flame. Add the veal shanks and cook until lightly browned on both sides, turning once, about 5 minutes per

side. Add the pancetta, carrot, onion, and celery, season with the salt and pepper, and cook until the vegetables soften and the pancetta becomes golden, about 5 minutes.

2. Pour in the wine, stirring to dislodge any clinging bits that may have stuck to the pan, and release them into the sauce. Cook 5 minutes, then add the tomatoes, cover, and lower the heat to medium-low. Cook for 1 and 1/2 hours, or until the veal shanks are extremely tender, adding a little chicken stock if the liquid in the pan dries out.

3. Fold in the garlic, parsley, and lemon zest, and serve hot.

SERVES 4



HOLLOWED-OUT WHEEL OF GRANA PADANO FILLED WITH RISOTTO AL TALEGGIO

Serving a first course—typically risotto or pasta—in a hollowed-out wheel of Grana Padano makes a splendid presentation. To hollow out a wheel of Grana, have your cheese monger cut it in half along the width for you, scoop out the cheese from one half using a sharp knife, and use the cheese obtained for grating or enjoying at the table.

20 cups (5 quarts) chicken stock
16 tablespoons (2 sticks) unsalted butter
15 shallots, thinly sliced
5 cups Carnaroli or Arborio rice from the Lomellina Plains
1 1/4 teaspoons salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
2 cups Franciacorta Bianco
1 1/2 cups freshly grated Grana Padano
1 pound Taleggio, rind removed, cut into 1/2-inch cubes
Half-wheel of Grana Padano, hollowed-out

1. Bring the broth to a boil in a saucepan; keep hot over a low flame.

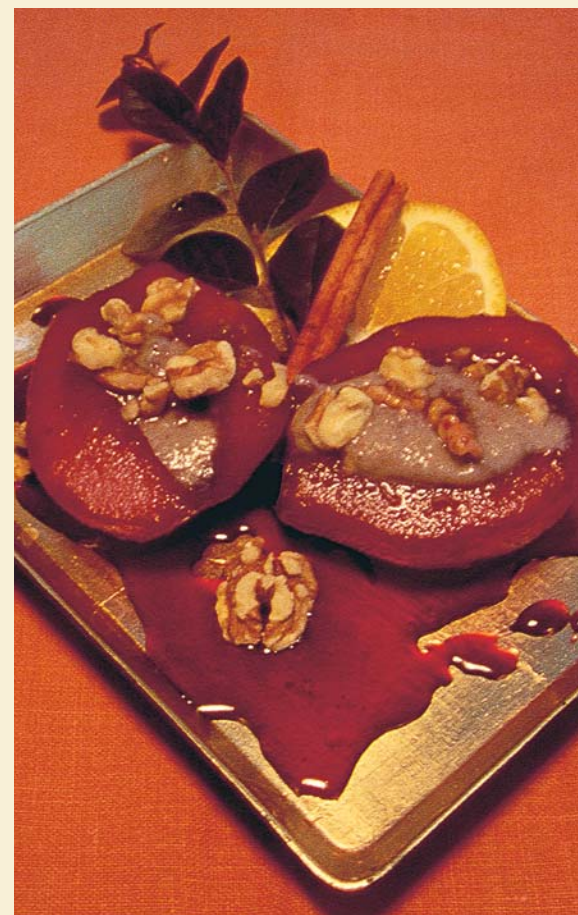
2. Meanwhile, melt 8 tablespoons (1 stick) of the butter in a wide 8-quart pan over a medium flame. Add the shallots and cook until they wilt, about 10 minutes, stirring often. Stir in the rice, mixing well with a wooden spoon; cook for 3 minutes, or until

the rice is translucent and lightly toasted, stirring all the while. Season with the salt and pepper. Deglaze with wine and cook until the wine evaporates, stirring, about 4 minutes.

3. Cook the rice by adding 1 cup of the heated broth at a time, stirring, until almost all the liquid has been absorbed before adding more. Continue until the rice is al dente, about 18 minutes; you may not need all the broth. Remove the pan from the heat and fold in the remaining 8 tablespoons (1 stick) of butter and the grated Grana; adjust the salt if needed.

4. Transfer the risotto to the hollowed-out wheel, scatter the Taleggio over the risotto and bring the wheel to the table.

SERVES 12



PEARS POACHED IN FRANCIACORTA ROSSO WITH GORGONZOLA-WALNUT MOUSSE

Select a young, creamy Gorgonzola for the mousse; it is usually labeled Dolce latte in Italian markets and cheese shops.

For the pears:

2 cups Franciacorta Rosso
1/3 cup sugar
1 cinnamon stick
1 strip orange zest
4 ripe pears, peeled, halved, and cored

For the Gorgonzola mousse:

1/2 pound young Gorgonzola, rind removed, cut into 1/2-inch pieces
1 cup walnut halves, plus 8 walnut halves for garnish
1 cup heavy cream, plus extra if needed
1/2 cup honey

1. **Make the pears:** Combine the Franciacorta, 2 cups of water, the sugar, cinnamon, and orange zest in a 3-quart pot. Bring to a gentle boil over medium heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves, and drop in the pear halves, cut side down. Cook until the pear halves are tender when pierced with a knife, turning once to cook evenly, about 15 to

25 minutes total (watch that they do not overcook, or they will fall apart).

2. **Meanwhile, make the Gorgonzola mousse:** In a food processor, combine the Gorgonzola, 1/2 cup of the walnut halves, and the cream until smooth; add more cream if needed to thin it out. The mousse should be as thick as jam. Refrigerate 30 minutes (or up to 2 days) to firm it up; this makes piping easier.

3. Using a slotted spoon, remove the pear halves from the poaching liquid; place on 8 plates, cut side up. Reduce the poaching liquid until it becomes almost syrupy in consistency, about 15 minutes over medium heat, watching that it does not caramelize or burn. Discard the cinnamon and orange zest.

SERVES 8

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Federlombarda Agricoltori

Viale Isonzo, 2720139 • Milano Italy • Tel.02/58302122 • Fax.02/58300881 • E-mail: fwdlomba@confagricoltura.it

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