



THE *Pornanino* OLIVE OIL NEWSLETTER

No. 3, January 2007

Happy new year, dearest friends! Hopefully you did survive the holiday season with your goodwill still in place, and are now looking forward to a wonderful, thrilling 2007. May it bring peace and contentment all over poor battered planet Earth – they're both sorely needed. But on with the

third issue of the *Pornanino Olive Oil Newsletter!* We've made it through another hectic harvest, the new oil is just great (YOU told us!) and now it's time to relax and enjoy country life as it should be – lazy, sleepy, slow ...If you want to get in touch with us you can email us as usual at newsletter@chiantionline.com. You know that old comfy armchair in front of the fireplace? We'll be there, waiting to hear from you!

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Pornanino
Extra Virgin
Olive Oil

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simply,
the best.

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here ...



Franco's olive grove diary



A king-sized entry to tell you everything about the harvest, the pressing and how your precious new oil had to be saved

from the clutches of US Customs – within hours of delivery deadlines!

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Italy's history is so long and eventful that cutting it short is next to impossible. Tuscany's is just as bad but we'll make the effort, perhaps focusing on the town of Siena. Tough job all the same but you do have time, don't you?

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The countdown has started. There are admittedly a few dozen minor details still screaming for attention, but in essence the program of the 2007 US Tour is done. Want a sneak preview?

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Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes



When the going gets cold outside, the tough get a hot soup! These country recipes are designed to provide all the

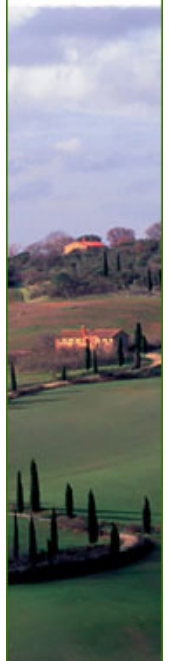
energy you need to split wood and shovel snow – with some to spare!

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Editor and copy: Francesca Boggio Robutti

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Franco's olive grove diary

A king-sized entry to tell you everything about the harvest, the pressing and how your precious new oil had to be saved from the clutches of US Customs – within hours of delivery deadlines!

This year we really can't complain. Climate conditions have been good throughout the growing season, down to the very end. Just imagine, it's been the mildest autumn in decades, and more or less dry to boot. We actually harvested in our shirt sleeves most of the time, which is a nice change from the chilly damp fog that's usually part and parcel of the season.

It was good news for the pickers, of course, but actually of paramount importance for the quality of the new oil. You might perhaps remember the golden rule of olive oil making: perfect oil comes from perfect fruit. Growing healthy olives is useless if you're rough on them when the time comes to get them off the tree. Imagine growing picture-perfect apples and leaving them to drop to the ground and rot until you come round to picking them up! Well, that's what some olive growers do. Of course raking up the fallen fruit is much quicker than hand-picking the lot, and therefore cheaper; it makes sound commercial sense. Just don't expect to coax good oil out of them.

Harvest time is hectic by definition, because time is of the essence. At least this year Franco didn't have to worry about the weather acting up to spoil the action – not too much, that is, as you have to make the decision BEFORE knowing that everything will be ok. But angels were smiling down on Tuscany this autumn, or the clouds had won a free holiday somewhere else, and not a drop of rain fell on our precious crop.

What this means is that Franco was in no hurry and could choose the perfect time to pick his olives – slightly unripe, so that oxidation hasn't set in yet. And dry, which is a guarantee against mould and rotting. Even under such perfect conditions Franco is careful to store his olives well layered no more than a few inches thick on wire-mesh trays with plenty of air swishing through, in a cool, dim place. So much care for a crop that's going to be crushed in just a few days' time? Yes, definitely. That's how you make top quality olive oil.

One drawback of picking unripe olives is that you have to pull hard to detach them – they're not going to fall into your hand smiling. The business of harvesting is best left to the care of professionals, who are fast, thorough and experienced enough to work Franco's 4,000-odd

olive trees in a matter of days. It's very hard work, of course, but it pays well – the cost of hand-picking is one of the reasons why top quality olive oil is so expensive. And also one of the reasons why it's top quality ...

While the professionals whiz through the main groves, Franco and his family usually see to the smaller ones scattered along the slopes close to home. This year, much to Franco's granddaughters' relief, there were more than the usual share of helping hands, and extra eager to pitch in. Guess who came to the rescue? Four American couples straight from Madison, WI, who made the harvest in PORNANINO the highlight of their autumn getaway.



We had so much fun, you have no idea! The merry group were brought to us by our long-time friends Terry and Debra Hart,

who have come to Chianti many times on their own and this year decided to share the experience with some friends. The pictures here were taken by them, and you'll find more plus a diary of their trip on Terry's website at <http://web.mac.com/terencehart>. Thank you guys – you did a great job!

As you know olives have to be picked and crushed fast, before the natural oxidation process has had a chance to spoil the flavor, shelf-life and vitamin content of the oil. Oxidation is quicker when the olives are ripe, wet and bruised, but even under perfect conditions (unripe, dry fruit carefully laid out in well-aired layers) pressing should not be delayed more than a few days. The race is not over yet.

As soon as all the olives have been harvested they are ready to be pressed, which sounds easy but is not. A few years back Franco decided to set up his own oil press, so as to be in control of the whole process. He didn't want to risk having his olives mixed with somebody else's, or his oil spoilt by mishandling as sometimes happens at public oil mills at the height of the season.

Now, to get oil out of olives there are basically two methods: you either do it mechanically, i.e. by crushing alone; or you squeeze it out to the last drop using heat and chemical solvents, i.e. you get more with less trouble. If we are talking extra virgin olive oil, then the law forbids the use of heat and solvents. Beware of plain "olive oil", however, because it can be a blend of processed and unprocessed oils.

Franco's is a traditional-style press, a wonderful yet simple machine that has changed little over the millennia.



First the olives are slowly ground to a thick paste by a heavy stone wheel. The paste is then spread onto woven mats

called "fiscoli", that are stacked 6 feet high and pressed for about 45 minutes. The thick liquid that comes out contains water and impurities that will be decanted away and what remains is oil. Freshly pressed oil is characteristically sharp and pungent, but it will mellow in time.

Working together with son-in-law Matteo, Franco took less than a day to press the whole olive harvest. Yet they were barely halfway through –

they still had to bottle, seal and package the December orders! With little more than a couple of weeks to have it all ready, it's usually a hysterical scramble and this year was no exception! But there's method underneath the apparent madness, as Franco's wife Lia and daughter Francesca always manage to rise to the occasion. Do you know how many bottles they turned out last November? Too many to count, they say.

On to Franco's annual nightmare – shipping! There is so much paperwork involved that, even discounting heightened security, there's always something amiss to trip you up, what with customs, the FDA and the likes. And as often as not it's someone else's mistake! So this time Franco followed his precious new oil to the US to personally oversee the forwarding to all of you, in time for Christmas as promised. And thank heavens he did, because you risked not getting your olive oil!! It was the shippers who bungled it this time ...

Well, mission accomplished and high time for a well deserved holiday until another growing season comes round. Are you enjoying the new oil? We hope you are. Franco did his utmost best to come as close to perfection as humanely possible. At the very least what you got is the genuine article – olive juice, and nothing else. Except for a lot of loving care.

101 things you can do with olive oil (and counting)

How many uses does olive oil have, apart from the obvious of course? More than 101, for sure, but since we can't list them all here's a sample, as a reminder of what a wonderful thing olive oil is.

Let's say you unearthed the odd extra virgin olive oil bottle at the bottom of a cupboard you never open, a leftover of the dark time before you converted to the Pornanino nectar. Throwing it away would be wasteful, yet now you've tasted the real thing you (hopefully) can't go back to the bland mass-produced variety. So what are you to do with it?

Not to worry. Mediterranean peoples have had a few millennia to find out just how versatile olive oil is even out of the kitchen, and the list of the wonders you can do with it (besides bruschetta) is very, very long. Of course it was compiled back in the olden times when competition from drugs, cosmetics and the likes was close to nil, so don't expect miracles. On the other hand you could be pleasantly surprised by the effectiveness of some recipes.

We have selected only a few among the simplest and better-known ones – feel free to try them as they're all pretty harmless, unless you know you might be allergic (olive oil is, or should be, an all-natural vegetal product). Just don't sue us if they don't work out for you!

Olive oil makes your skin and hair beautiful

It actually makes very great sense since olive oil is supremely skin and hair compatible. Whatever brand you're using, make sure it's extra virgin and cold-pressed. For best results you should really treat yourself to Pornanino's.

- Apply directly on dry spots or stretch marks to hydrate. If you emulsion it with a little water you'll get a thicker ointment.
- Excellent as a body lotion; rub it all over after bathing or showering.
- Mix some with good-quality mud face mask, leave for 5-10 minutes and rinse.
- Mix 1 teaspoon of olive oil, 1 egg yolk and 1 teaspoon of honey for a highly moisturizing and nourishing face mask.
- Helps balance oily skin; apply it straight.

- Mix with chamomile infusion for a soothing lotion.
- Apply it straight on reddened or sun-burned skin; don't use in case of second or third degree burns.
- Use it straight on reddened, rough hands.
- Soak brittle nails in warm olive oil to strengthen; add a few drops of lemon juice for cuticles.
- Massage it straight on your scalp, leave for half an hour and rinse off with a mild shampoo to remove dry dandruff and strengthen hair.
- Make a deeply nourishing and moisturizing hair conditioning mask by combining olive oil and 1 egg yolk; add lemon juice for extra shine.

Olive oil loves your body

- Massage tired, aching muscles with warm olive oil to relax and ease pain.
- Pour a few drops of warm olive oil into ears to clear wax.
- Tradition maintains that peering into an olive oil bottle will get rid of styes (!!)
- 1 tablespoon olive oil first thing in the morning will help your inner plumbing work properly (bowels, stomach and liver).

Handy in a crisis

- Out of candles during a black-out? Light an oil lamp! That's how the Romans went about at night.
- A tick got you: douse with enough olive oil to smother, let stand for 15 minutes and you'll easily remove the dead bug.
- Reported to work with hair lice as well, although smothering every single louse might be trickier.
- olive oil-based soap is great for removing greasy stains!

Olive oil test – part 2

Did you make your homework over the past few months? Mm, let's see how you cope with the Olive Oil Test Part 2. We made the quizzes a little harder this time, but we're sure you'll make us proud.

Of course with a little practice you can tell if olive oil is good simply by looking at it

Wrong! There's no way you can tell. Just as you can't judge a book by its cover (or a monk by its robe, as we say in Italy), color is no indication of quality. Whether it's pale gold or deep green, or any shade in between, depends on growing conditions, climate and variety. Quite respectable unfiltered oils can be cloudy and form deposits, and still be very good products. Clear, light-colored oils are not necessarily inferior to rustic-looking greenish-gold, thick ones. New oil actually tends to mellow in both taste and color as it matures. To cap it all, just consider that professionals never look at the oil they are tasting to avoid being swayed by ultimately irrelevant details – such as how it looks.

I've heard of olive oil tastings. Sounds a little far-fetched but might be interesting

Right. It may be a bit of a fad, granted, but more and more connoisseurs are starting to think of olive oil in terms that had so far been reserved for wines. Hence the increasing popularity of olive oil appreciation seminars where you get to taste and learn to discriminate between olive oils, just as you would during a wine tasting session (barring the color bit, of course). It does make sense after all, since they're both natural products whose final characteristics depend on soil, climate conditions, production techniques and skilful blending of different varieties, each with its own individual flavor. There is no such thing as "standard" olive oil, just as there is no "standard" wine unless we're talking about cheap industrial production. So it would actually be both fun and interesting to get a chance to taste the difference between olive oils coming from different regions, different blends and different pressing methods.

My doctor says I should lose weight, so I guess olive oil is not for me

Oh no! That would be a terrible mistake. But we're sure you got this one right, and you'll excuse us for repeating something we've said before. Our body needs fatty acids, so by all means reduce your intake but never cut them off altogether! Current recommendations say that 30% of daily calorie intake should come from fats. Fats come in three major categories: saturated (mainly solid, animal origin such as butter and lard); polyunsaturated (that's seed oils) and monounsaturated (chiefly olive oil and canola). Their calorie content is roughly the same, and that's where similarities end. We'll say more about this in the next issue, but for the time being just believe us – olive oil is the healthiest, particularly if you're on a diet. You'll need less, because it's tastier. And you'll be helping your body work like a well oiled machine!

Italian olive oil is the best in the world; I only buy it if it says "Italian" on the label

Wish it were true. Italian olive oil-making tradition is unrivalled worldwide, and it's a fact that Italy is the world's leading producer of olive oil. Some of it is indeed the best in the world. A less publicized fact, however, is that the Peninsula itself does not produce enough olives to feed its own mills, so that most large commercial brands actually purchase olives all over the Mediterranean, and sometimes bottle a blend of foreign olive oils as Italian oil. So don't be fooled by the vague claim that a bottle "comes from" or was "imported from" or even "bottled in". Check the label for guarantees that the olives were grown, harvested and pressed in Italy. Thanks to recently passed European legislation, Tuscan olive oil can now boast a PDO designation if it does indeed originate from Tuscany. It must be said, however, that use of the PDO designation even among bona-fide producers is not widespread yet.

Weird and wicked – a brief history of Tuscany

Italy's history is so long and eventful that cutting it short is next to impossible. Tuscany's is just as bad but we'll make the effort, perhaps focusing on the town of Siena. Tough job all the same but you do have time, don't you?

Tuscans will excuse us for calling them names, and might well be secretly flattered because they are actually rather proud of their reputation as Italy's *enfants terribles*. Notorious for their wicked wit, headstrong individuality and pugnaciousness, they have provided many of Italy's most controversial (and successful) comedians. But then Tuscany has been so defiantly left-wing all along that one might legitimately wonder whether it chose to be "red" (that equates with communist in Italy) just to spite the overwhelmingly moderate majority.

Weird and wicked are not the first adjectives that would spring to mind when contemplating the breathtaking art of Florence, or the essential sophistication of Chianti, are they? Well then, let's have a look at the history of the place and see if we can find any clues to the contrariness, and genius, of Tuscans.

Now, to put things in perspective, imagine that the whole of Italy is slightly larger than Arizona; Tuscany accounts for 23,000 sq km out of 323,000. It has a population slightly exceeding 3.5 million, living in 287 towns (not counting villages). The main administrative centres are Florence, Arezzo, Grosseto, Livorno, Lucca, Massa-Carrara, Pisa, Pistoia, Prato and Siena. It's crowded in there, you'll agree!

The story begins in earnest with the Etruscans, a mysterious population we know little about who were based right in Tuscany, starting about 3 millennia ago. They were brilliant artisans and merchants, but apparently not keen on statesmanship, as they organized in a loose network of independent cities engaged in lively, occasionally bloody, competition. The Etruscans waned just as mysteriously as they had waxed, swallowed by the rising star of the Romans.

The wily Romans knew better than impose their rule by force; they conquered the Tuscan cities and let them be, as quarrelsome as ever but endowed with a handful of trade-mark Roman

roads that came in handy later on, when the Romans were wiped out by waves of barbarians coming from the heart of Europe. Being conveniently located along the main route to Rome, by then the hub of Christianity, Tuscany prospered during the Middle Ages as pilgrims, traders, diplomats and sundry grandes coming from all corners of Europe passed through on their way to the Holy See.

Traffic was brisk, as you can imagine considering that the Church was one of the political superpowers of the time. Also, wandering off the high road was not advisable, what with the Moorish pirates haunting the Mediterranean coast and brigands on the prowl. Sitting astride the main throughfare Siena, for one, mushroomed into a full-fledged city by catering to the travellers' needs – it boasted shops, stores, inns, stables, a hospital, hostels for pilgrims, money-changers, and eventually the first bank in the world (Monte dei Paschi, founded in 1472 and still there).

With all those business opportunities walking around, guess what the Tuscan cities did? Why, they competed, and squabbled and took opposite sides (out of spite) whenever the Pope fell out with the Emperor, which was not that uncommon. Some grew rich and powerful, while others succumbed and some very sturdy seeds of discord were planted – the hatred between Pisa and Lucca, for instance, is still very real today!

One side effect, though, was to fill the place with art, as towns and their citizens alike vied to show the world who was best. Up went palaces, town halls and lavishly decorated churches (can't do less than the neighbours, can we) – as well as defensive walls and buttresses, to fend off the attacks of the envious. Times were a-changing, though. Enter Florence and a family of upstarts called Medici.

I knew it couldn't be done. Space has run out and we've barely reached the Renaissance! Oh well, to be continued next time...



2007 Pornanino Olive Oil Tour - the finishing touches

The countdown has started. There are admittedly a few dozen minor details still screaming for attention, but in essence the program of the 2007 US Tour is done. And here is a sneak preview.

It rather looks like the 2007 Tour could be even more fun than usual. Just look at the venues: Franco will have the honor of speaking in front of two quite distinguished audiences at Southern New Hampshire University and Fitchburg State College. He's so excited (and nervous) at the prospect! Then the program gets downright frivolous, with lots of wonderful food and ample space for chatting and socializing, which is something Italians are very good at, you will agree.

So if you live within a reasonable distance and would like to say hello to Franco in person, as well as listen to some sound advice about olive oil, do join us at one of the forthcoming seminars! We'll be looking forward to seeing you. And for those who won't be attending, we'll tell you all about the Tour in the next issue of the Newsletter. Stay tuned!

April 18th – olive oil seminar
Southern New Hampshire University
Manchester, NH
For info call (603)629-4611

April 20th – olive oil seminar
Fitchburg State College
Fitchburg, MA
For info call (978)665-3085

April 22nd – Tuscan dinner and olive oil seminar
Cooking Naturally
Colorado Springs, CO
For info call (719)527-9356

April 23rd – cocktail party and olive oil seminar
Walters Bistro
Colorado Springs, CO
For info call (719)630-0201

April 24th – appetizer & wine and olive oil seminar
Mollica's Italian Market and Deli
Colorado Springs, CO
For info call (719)598-1088

April 25th – Tuscan dinner and olive oil seminar
Plate World Cuisine
Briar Village Point, CO
For info call (719)475-8000

A NOTE FROM YOUR EDITOR

Just wanted to let you know that **I'm starting a tiny B&B in the heart of Milan** – a *gorgeous* penthouse suite opening onto a rooftop garden, barely 5 minutes' walking from some of the world's most glamorous shopping. And I'll be personally overseeing it. So if you're planning to visit Milan do come – I'm sure you'd love it! Have a look at my [website](#), and please tell your friends ... Thank you and hope to see you!

Francesca

Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

When the going gets cold outside, the tough get a hot soup! These country recipes are designed to provide all the energy you need to split wood and shovel snow – with some to spare!

Chickpea velouté (serves 4)

11 oz dry chickpeas

3 oz each of onion, carrot and celery, finely chopped

2 garlic cloves

2 sprigs rosemary

1 ¾ pints of stock, or water and 1 ½ stock cubes

freshly ground pepper

Pornanino extra virgin olive oil

Soak the chickpeas overnight in a large bowl with plenty of cold water.

Finely chop the onion, carrot and celery and cook together with the garlic cloves and two sprigs of rosemary in 2 tablespoons of olive oil until they are tender and slightly golden. Add the chickpeas and toss for a further 2 minutes, then pour in 2 pints of stock (or water and 1 stock cube) and let simmer over a very low heat, covered with a lid, for 2 ½ hours or until the chickpeas are very tender. Remove the rosemary and process the soup in a blender until it's smooth. Taste and if necessary season with salt; add some water if it's too thick. Finish off with freshly ground pepper and a drizzle of Pornanino extra virgin olive oil just before serving.



Bean soup (serves 4)

11 oz dried beans, preferably of the cannellini variety

¼ cup Pornanino extra virgin olive oil

4 garlic cloves

1 large sprig of rosemary

1 teaspoon tomato purée

5 oz pasta, any kind provided it's small-sized

Soak the dried beans overnight. The traditional Tuscan beans, called cannellini, are small and whitish. If you can't find them any other variety will do.

Drain, rinse briefly under running water and bring to the boil covered in cold water in a large saucepan. As soon as they get to the boil drain, rinse again and put back in the saucepan, covering with fresh water. Bring back to the boil and simmer for 1 ¼ hours, or until they're cooked through. Process in the blender together with as much of their cooking liquid as is necessary, add the tomato purée, salt and freshly ground pepper.

In a small saucepan cook the garlic cloves and rosemary in the extra virgin olive oil until the garlic turns golden. Remove the garlic and pour the flavoured oil into the bean soup. Reheat, and when it comes to the boil add the pasta (any kind, provided it's small-sized; even broken down spaghetti will do). Cook for 10 to 15 minutes, depending on the kind of pasta you're using. Serve hot, warm or cold, with a drizzle of Pornanino extra virgin olive oil.

Tell us if you like our recipes! Is there a recipe you'd like Grandma Lia to work out for you? [Let us know](#)