



THE *Pornanino* OLIVE OIL NEWSLETTER

No. 7, January 2008

Happy New Year, everybody, and may 2008 be the best we've ever had. Who's to say it won't be, so let's look ahead with confidence and hope. Don't you just love winter? And spring is just a few months away and then glorious summer and another mellow autumn waiting in the wings. It will be a great year, perhaps even a momentous year – hopefully in a positive way. Just remember to keep things light, won't you. Attitude is so important. Happy New Year, dear ones! May your fondest dream come true.

Pure.
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Extra Virgin
Olive Oil

Quite
simply,
the best.

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here ...



Franco's olive grove diary



Do come in, but please be quiet. They are all resting after the hectic olive picking, pressing and bottling business, not to speak of the exhausting tour de force of the festive season (the world being the same all over). [Read more](#)

Green gold indeed!

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Chianti, how boring

A few very good reasons for visiting Chianti that will convince even the jaded souls who have seen enough quaint medieval villages to last them a lifetime, thank you very much. [Read more](#)

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It's test time again! Have we managed to turn you into a full-fledged, five star and a half olive oil virtuoso yet? Try your hand at our wickedly tricky questions and find out. [Read more](#)

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Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes



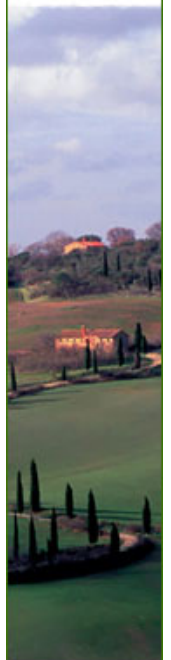
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casserole and the other is pure indulgence. Traditionally only made from All Saints Day to Easter, *farinata* is a humble homage to winter (and a great appetizer). [Read more](#)

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Talk to us! Here's our email address oliveoil@chiantionline.com

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Franco's olive grove diary

Do come in, but please be quiet. They are all resting after the hectic olive picking, pressing and bottling business, not to speak of the exhausting tour de force of the festive season (the world being the same all over).

What a lovely month January is when you live in the country. Of course it's rather on the quiet side, with frost in the air and darkness creeping back as soon as the weak winter sun has taken his bow, after a token appearance. With nature sleeping all around, this is really the only break a respectable farmer is fully entitled to enjoy. After all, Franco had three fireplaces built in his home for the express purpose of lounging in front of them come winter, with a pile of books and a handy supply of bread slices for *bruschetta*.

What he probably hadn't bargained for while designing his fireplaces is that the R&R season is actually quite short, besides coming right after the most awfully busy time of the year. That means it takes the first half of January to realize the nightmare's over, and by the time you've gotten comfortable with the concept of being on holiday it's time to get back to work.

Oh well, you really can't complain when you have the privilege of living in wonderful Chianti and doing something you love, can you. Nope, you most definitely can't.

So what do you think of the new oil? Have you tasted it yet? Franco is quite satisfied (not bad, he acknowledges, but with a glint in his eye that says he's actually rather proud of it ...). We have to thank the heavens for sending us a good year weather-wise, and largely free of the extremes we are coming to fear world-wide.

For a natural product like ours this is really of paramount importance, because it takes perfect olives to get perfect oil the way we make it. This year the olives were just great, and since it was altogether mild all year we harvested them a little earlier than usual – in the first half of November. It

was the usual scramble, although mercifully sunny and pleasantly warm, which is good as we get more enthusiastic friends volunteering to lend a hand! As you know we hand-pick every single fruit to make sure none are bruised or left lying around on the ground to get muddy and mouldy. Although the bulk of the harvesting is carried out by professionals, amateurs are more than welcome to tackle the time-consuming minor groves and scattered trees Franco and his family would otherwise have to see to themselves.

Then came the usual rush to get the harvest pressed within days, as fresh as possible, and bottled in time to ship to each and every one of you in time for Christmas! This year we turned out something like 6,000 bottles in less than a week and it was all done by hand (think bottling, sealing, wiping the glass clean of oily smears, sticking the labels on and boxing). The last hurdle, and no one's favourite for sure, is the huge amount of paperwork required to get the olive oil across the ocean to all of your homes! When we waved the DHL's last van goodbye with its precious cargo, there was a collective sigh of relief you could have heard your side of the Atlantic. It was the beginning of December.

You know how it is when you have accomplished something really difficult, working against time to reach an important goal and you've made it. You feel so elated and excited you can't relax, which is actually a boon when there's Christmas decorations to put up, and presents to be found, relatives to visit, dinner parties to attend (and host) - all wonderful things, but so exhausting!

January on the other hand is such a lovely month, don't you agree? Quiet, grey and boring. So relaxing.



Green gold indeed!

So expensive. The price of olive oil has skyrocketed because of the weak dollar, but it was never cheap. And it seems appropriate to wonder if one can spend that kind of money on salad dressing ...

As a country where retail prices almost doubled since the euro was introduced, a few years ago, we are sadly familiar with the shock of finding that things that were part of our everyday lives have become luxuries overnight. And since the income of most Italians didn't double along with the prices, we have learnt to prioritise, save, skimp - and occasionally splurge to keep our spirits up.

Therefore we really sympathize with those of you who say olive oil has gotten so expensive they can't afford it anymore. Of course the villain in the case is the US dollar, whose exchange rate against the euro has reached a record low - in December it took nearly 1.40 US dollars to buy 1 euro, down from a heady high of 1.20 euros per greenback just six years ago. A weak currency is welcome news for exports, but it does make imported goods more expensive.

Unfortunately there's not much we can do there, apart from trying our utmost best to keep costs as low as possible, which we are already doing in spite of rising fuel prices and a whole string of other increases besides. Our price per bottle has actually gone down a little, in euro terms, thanks to improved shipping procedures. Could we do more? Well yes, of course we could. Would our olive oil be just as good? No, it would not.

We could buy our olives instead of growing them ourselves, as the big companies do, perhaps even abroad where they are cheaper. Or we could stop picking them by hand, which is labor-intensive and an extremely expensive specialized job. If we let our olives ripen completely and fall off of their own accord it would make harvesting quicker and

would yield a greater amount of oil. We could stop cold-pressing in our own mill, as we do, which is an extravagant luxury. We could do all these things quite legitimately without breaking any law.

But the quality of our olive oil would not be the same. What would be the point of having it cost less? We are committed to quality, as you know, and will not cut corners, because that would mean betraying the trust of our friends and betraying our mission. Which we are not prepared to do.

It's not just a matter of tasting good, although that's not a minor point at all. You could probably make do with any of the respectable commercial brands to be found in your local supermarket, at a fraction of the cost, like millions of people drink cheap table wine. But olive oil is much more than salad dressing. It's a living and breathing natural concentrate of vitamins and precious compounds that help us live longer and healthier - goodies which are destroyed by the industrial processing commercial brands necessarily undergo.

When the ancients dubbed olive oil "green gold", two thousand years ago, they were referring to its value, not its price. The genuine article is worth every dollar it costs. And you can trust us when we say that our first cold pressed extra virgin olive oil is the real thing, pure and simple and natural as it should be.

If you are still unconvinced, though, look at it this way. How much are a bottle of fine wine or a box of signature chocolates going to cost you? And they're bad for your health too! How about some nice PORNANINO olive oil instead?

Chianti, how boring

A few very good reasons for visiting Chianti that will convince even the jaded souls who have seen enough quaint medieval villages to last them a lifetime, thank you very much.



serene, laid-back lifestyle. And quite a number of quaint medieval villages of course.

As a result Chianti is extremely foreign visitor-friendly. First timers won't be disappointed by the taste of history hovering around the little cobble streets, not to mention the al fresco dining and wining, the cooking schools and *cantine* (wineries), the stone farms perched high above the vineyards and olive groves. Returning guests sometimes find it a little *too much* – so quaint and folksy. Even slightly, though ever-so-tastefully, touristy. Chiantishire is country chic at its best, and worst.

Once you've done the mandatory round of the major sights (you know, the churches, museums, palaces and such) you do have a choice. You can either go with the flow of the guided tour crowd, or you can do some adventuring of your own. For this you'll need to rent a car, otherwise you're stuck and depending where you are staying you could be stranded in the tiniest of quaint (and boring) villages, or in the middle of nowhere and miles from the nearest shop.

Assuming you've done your homework and seen the sights, now you'll want to unwind and enjoy life at Chianti's snail pace. This is good, particularly with a good supply of wine and interesting local food you will have bought yourself in the course of the day's outing – otherwise

where's the fun? Do choose your accommodation carefully. You'll be spending some quality time there, so you want it to be comfortable and pleasant. Self-catering might be best and there's no dearth of offer ranging from the basic to the unashamedly luxurious. Although you're likely to want to try as many irresistible little restaurants as you can, some hands-on cooking in your own kitchen might be a nice way of connecting with Italian culture (food is SO important to us!).

Now you have a car and a wonderful place to stay it's time to get control of your holiday – buy a map of central Italy and get ready to explore. No matter where you are based, you'll find there are many interesting places within easy driving distance of the Chianti. Head for the neighboring region of Umbria and the holy pilgrimage site of Assisi, with its stunning art, and have a look at nearby Spello, Gubbio and Perugia. Spend a pleasant day by Lake Trasimeno, and if you don't mind wandering further afield the town of Urbino (east of Florence) is a fairy-tale renaissance jewel absolutely worth a visit. Lucca, north of Florence, is a charming place; not so Pisa, where there is nothing at all apart from the famous leaning tower. Get a good guidebook and the sky's the limit (or rather the sea, since central Italy is quite narrow ...).

Although Italy is jam-packed with attractions, perhaps you can put aside a day for shopping. Tuscany is home of several famous leather goods and clothes designers (Gucci and Prada come to mind, among the others), most of whom have factory outlet stores around Florence in the industrial area of the Arno river valley. Check your guidebook or ask the locals for tips. There are wonderful bargains to be made!

Outside of the Chianti area you'll find that most Italians are not really fluent in English, but don't let this intimidate you. Just relax, polish your sense of humor and don't worry. You'll do fine and make us all proud when you tell your jaded traveler friends how much fun you had in Chianti.

Olive oil test part 3

It's test time again! Have we managed to turn you into a full-fledged, five star and a half olive oil virtuoso yet? Try your hand at our wickedly tricky questions and find out.

Olive oil tastes wonderful, but it's so thick I'm sure it must be more fattening than other shortenings. I only use it as a treat from time to time.

Goodness, this is WRONG! In terms of calories there is no difference whatsoever between seed oils, olive oil, butter or any other fat – they all contribute 9 calories per gram. But thanks to its distinctive flavor and body you can actually use less olive oil than you would any of its blander cousins. Also remember that it gets more fluid when heated, so you'll need less than you might think when cooking, as well.

Well, if you really care about your waistline you ought to buy light olive oil.

Nope, a lean fat has yet to be invented. The pale, bland liquid that's marketed as "light" olive oil is in fact a watered-down version of the genuine article that's only light in taste. You'll get the same calories for half the flavor, and it's most likely a blend with other far less respectable oils. In our opinion it's best left on the shelf - if it doesn't taste like olive oil, and it's been tampered with, why bother.

Really, you're carping on about olive oil as if it were champagne! Aren't you overemphasizing the issue? I think this must be just a passing fad.

You have a point there. Olive oil is very much in demand right now, and quite fashionable in the right circles, which means there's a fair amount of purple prose about it around. As far as we are concerned this is what we do with passion and loving care, so you'll excuse us for being enthusiastic! To us olive oil is just like champagne, a gift from nature to be savoured and treasured. But, unlike champagne, it's good for the whole body, not just the taste buds. Oh, and it won't give you a hangover either ...

Ok, you have convinced me. From now on I'll only use olive oil

We are sorry to say that it would be wrong. You certainly ought to privilege olive oil, and are encouraged to by the World Health Organization and other leading authorities, but a well-balanced diet should contain a little of everything – including saturated fats like butter, although in moderation. Just avoid hydrogenated fats.

And of course I'll only buy PORNANINO first cold pressed extra virgin olive oil, because it's the best

How kind of you to say so. We can guarantee that our PORNANINO olive oil is among the very best because it's lovingly made as it should be, which is unfortunately increasingly rare these days as it takes effort and won't make you rich ... But we can't honestly claim to be the only ones. If you love olive oil you really should look around and shop for different flavors. Whether you try olive oil from other Italian regions, from France or Spain or California, do make sure that you know the producers. Olive oil is a very slippery business.

To tell good quality olive oil from bad you just have to look at it

Wish it were so easy, but it's not. You can't tell good from bad by just looking at it, and should not be able to anyway, as it's supposed to be bottled in dark glass to keep it away from light. First rule, therefore, is never buy olive oil that is bottled in a clear container (or plastic of any hue). Second rule is look at the label and check that it says "first cold pressed extra virgin olive oil", as it's the purest, highest grade. Even then beware: if it's cheap it can't be the real thing, but being expensive is no guarantee either. The only way to tell is taste.

Next time we'll talk about scams.

All about **YOU**

If you live in the Chicago area here's an invitation for you!



Bear Necessities
PEDIATRIC CANCER FOUNDATION

The invitation is meant for those of you who reside in the Chicago area, but the underlying message is so important we would like to draw everybody's attention to it.

There's a charity called Bear Necessities which provides care and support US-wide to the young patients of paediatric cancer units and their families, and we can all imagine the trial they have to go through as they struggle to cope with such a painful situation.

Bear Necessities is doing such a splendid job that its founder and president, Kathleen Casey, was named Chicagoan of the year 2007 by the Chicago Magazine.

And now here's the invitation: on February 23 Bear Necessities will be holding their 15th Anniversary Bear Tie Crystal Ball at The Field Museum, Chicago. It's both a celebration and a fund-raiser, and guaranteed to be loads of fun.

Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil will be there as co-sponsor of the event and we hope all of our friends based in the Chicago area will join us!

Please mark the date in red ink – **February 23, Bear Tie Crystal Ball at the Field Museum in Chicago**. For further information and to reserve please contact the Bear Necessities Pediatric Cancer Foundation's office at 312-836-2327 ext. 23 or email: office@bearnecessities.org

Even if you are unable to join us at the Ball you can still help the Bear Necessities' wonderful mission.

To find out how, please take a minute to check their website at www.bearnecessities.org

Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

We've chosen two very different dishes this time: one's a wholesome, warming chicken casserole and the other is pure indulgence. Traditionally only made from All Saints Day to Easter, *farinata* is a humble homage to winter (and a great appetizer).

Pollo in Potacchio (serves 4)

- 1 chicken (about 1 ¾ lb)
- 2 onions, medium sized (about ½ lb)
- 2 large sprigs of rosemary
- ½ cup dry white wine
- 4 tomatoes, medium sized (about 2 lb)
- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil

Cut the chicken into even-sized chunks – you should get 8 to 10 in all. Remove the skin if you want a leaner dish, otherwise leave it.

Chop the onions and rosemary and cook with the extra virgin olive oil in a heavy pan or casserole until the onion is tender and golden. Remove the onion, put in the chicken, and brown it thoroughly all over.

Wash the tomatoes, peel, deseed and chop roughly.

When the chicken is well browned, put the onion back into the pan, season with salt and freshly ground pepper and douse with the white wine. Let evaporate over a high heat, then turn it down and add the tomatoes. Cook over a low heat with a lid on for about 45 minutes, or until the meat is cooked through.

If the sauce looks too thin reduce it by boiling fast.



Farinata (makes a 10x15 in tin)

- 7 oz chickpea flour (or try besan flour in Asian shops)
- 1 ½ cup water
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- 3 tablespoons flat-leaf parsley
- 1 teaspoon salt
- freshly ground pepper

Sift the chickpea flour in a bowl. Mix in the chopped parsley, salt, extra virgin olive oil and the water, a little at a time, beating with a wooden spoon to obtain a smooth, rather thin batter. Season with salt and freshly ground pepper and let stand for 30 minutes.

Set the oven to fairly hot, around 400°F. When the oven temperature is right, thoroughly grease a baking tin with plenty of extra virgin olive oil, pour the farinata mix into it (note it should be no more than a quarter of an inch thick) and bake for about 25 minutes or until it's golden on top and the edges look crispy. Cut into squares and serve immediately as an appetizer, with a glass of wine.

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