

Wine Spectator

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tastes

Pasta Lovers' Guide

Pasta Perfect

There's nothing dry about this art BY SAM GUGINO

... smoother, less-porous pasta that absorbs less sauce and lacks the chewiness and grainy character attributed to the artisanal kind. "Artisanal pasta feels better in the mouth," Ferrari says. "It's like unfiltered olive oil. There's more complexity."

The drying method matters even more. Industrial producers dry pasta in a few hours at temperatures that can approach 200° F, creating a baked or parboiled effect. Artisanal makers, on the other hand, dry their pasta at much cooler temperatures over a period of many hours—up to 56 hours, in the case of Rustichella d'Abruzzo. "Heat causes stress to the pasta," Cavalieri says. "Slow drying evenly distributes the gluten and creates a more homogenous pasta."

I tasted a number of artisanal and a few industrially made pastas, all dressed with olive oil, salt and pepper. My

favorite of the artisanal pastas was Benedetto Cavalieri for its excellent grain flavor and delightful chewiness. Not far behind were Latini and Pasta di Gragnano, from Campania. Both were firm, with a nutty taste. Ditto for Rustichella d'Abruzzo, Senatore Cappelli and Castellana from Apulia, all of which deserved to be in the elite group (though I didn't find the Senatore Cappelli "varietal" to be distinctive in any way). Antichi Saporì (also from Apulia), which rated just below this group, had a decent wheaty flavor and good bite.

Barilla and DeCecco would have been more than acceptable had I not tasted them alongside the others. In comparison, they lacked texture and deep grain flavor. Artisanal pastas by A.G. Ferrari (made in Campania), Contrada Monsignore (from Apulia) and Raffaello (from Le Marche) were no more interesting than the industrially made pastas.

If you want fresh pasta, but can't make it at home, you would be hard put to do better than Spinosi, from Le Marche. Though it is dried, it is made with eggs, like fresh pasta, and it cooks in a minute, literally. It's rich and silky and worth \$6.50 to \$8 for 250 grams (8.8 ounces), which can serve four people.

Speaking of servings, Italians are appalled at how much pasta we put on our plates. A pound should serve six. And lighten up on the sauce, too. "When you finish a bowl of pasta, you should be able to wipe up the remaining sauce with a scrap of bread," Jenkins says.

Cook pasta in plenty of water, a minimum of 4 quarts per pound (Plotkin recommends six). You don't need any oil—periodic, gentle stirring with a claw-shaped pasta fork will prevent sticking.

Although Plotkin puts just a pinch of salt in the cooking water (he says ...

