

STARS OF ITALIAN CULINARY ARTS IN PARMA: THE ALMA AND THE BARILLA ACADEMY



The Parma Baptistry

As part of its summer meeting the AEHT Presidium met the management of the International School of Italian Culinary Arts (ALMA) in Colorno, 12 kms from Parma. Members of the Presidium were met by Mr Albino Ivardi Ganapini, President of ALMA, by Mr Gualtiero Marchesi, the Rector, and by Mr Giuseppe Magnani, public relations officer. The school is located within the walls of the Ducal Palace, the vast, sumptuous residence of members of the Farnese and Bourbon families; in the 18th century Marie-Louise of Austria made the building into one of Italy's most prestigious palaces.



The School was founded in 2004, and from the start enjoyed the support and collaboration of the famous chef, Gualtiero Marchesi, the first Italian to be awarded three Michelin stars. Each year the ALMA takes in two groups of 40 candidates for a total of 11 weeks, divided between theory classes (30%), practical sessions (70%) held in the school, and 20 weeks of practical placements in Italy's finest restaurants. On completion of the course the diplomates are awarded the title of 'Maestro di Cucina Italiana' – 'Master of Italian Culinary Arts'. The teaching staff consists of around 40 of the best chefs and pastry cooks from all regions of Italy. Mr Marchesi emphasised that there is no such thing as a single Italian culinary art, but a multitude of regional cuisines characterised by microclimates and very specific local growing conditions.



The Colorno Ducal Palace is home to the International School of Italian Culinary Arts (ALMA)

As well as its higher education programmes, the ALMA offers courses enabling professional chefs to perfect their knowledge and skills in the areas of pastry, fish, etc. As ambassador of Italian culinary heritage, the ALMA arranges (either on its own premises or abroad) tailor-made training courses or programmes, for example for hotel chains or for hotel schools throughout the world. (China, Taiwan, Japan, USA, Canada, etc.).

The AEHT plans to collaborate closely with the ALMA to enable its member schools to take advantage of this professional training opportunity which is unique in Italy.

After an exquisite meal prepared by ALMA students and eaten in the company of a hospitable and enthusiastic 'Maestro' Marchesi, the Presidium set off for the Academia Barilla in Parma, a town which has for a long time been recognised as the capital of Italian culinary arts. Parma was recently elected European Capital of Gastronomy, and has been selected to host the European Authority for Food Safety (a body created by the European Community in December 2003 with inspection and certification powers for the various

phases of food production); Parma is the location of the head office of the famous Barilla brand of foods, and has hosted the Barilla Academy for the last 18 months. The Academy is the first international centre for the promotion of Italian culinary arts, and has set as its objectives the development and promotion of Italian gastronomic tradition – true Italian cuisine - beyond the borders of Italy itself. The services of the Academy are aimed at professionals as well as at food-lovers, and include Italian specialities and a range of cookery courses.



The demonstration kitchen in the Academia Barilla lecture theatre.

Three librarians worked for over a year to assemble one of Italy's most remarkable collection of books on gastronomy. Today the Academia Barilla's gastronomy library contains more than 7,000 tomes, including editions which are unique in the whole world. A magnificent 16th century work, one of the collection's oldest books, is the pride and joy of Mr Gianluigi Zenti, Director of Administration.



Mr Zenti shows visitors a collection of articles on 'La Cucina Italiana' dating from December 1929.

Mr Lucien Ducrey, assistant to Mr Zenti, guided the Presidium through the training kitchens, tasting rooms, pastry and pizza laboratories. All the installations are brand new and represent the very latest technology. More than 1,800 people have already taken courses at the academy, and more than 5,000 people have visited the premises, among them 50-60% foreigners.



Hans Russegger, Neeme Rand, Lucien Ducrey and Adolf F. Steindl during the visit of the Academia Barilla premises

Between September 14th and 16th the European olive oil industry will come together at the centre for a three day international workshop entitled 'The Present and the Future of European Olive Oil'; the event is co-financed by the European Union and aims to promote the use of olive oil in European countries, especially those which consume little olive oil, and the new EU member countries.



While enjoying their drinks the Presidium members had the chance to discuss with the Academy's officers the possibilities of collaboration over the organisation of seminars. The AEHT hopes that shortly this Academy as well as the International School of Italian Culinary Arts (ALMA) will become members of the Association.

For the remainder of the afternoon and the following morning the Presidium held its meeting to discuss the AEHT's current issues. The agenda was long, and six hours were required to cover all the items. The decisions taken will be presented during the Antalya Annual Conference.



The Parma Rotta restaurant in Parma

In the evening the Presidium were the guests of Barilla at the Parma Rotta restaurant (Via Langhirano 158, 43100 Parma, not far from the place where the River Parma most frequently experiences flooding); they had the opportunity to taste typical dishes from the Parma region prepared by the chef Antonio di Vita: Parmesan cheese, Parma ham, Culatello di Zibello, Felino salami, black mushrooms and truffles from the region are only a few of the highlights of the delicious range of products which are characteristic of an undeniably high-quality gastronomy which members of the Presidium could savour.



Antonio Di Vita Surrounded by Members of the Presidium

Saturday afternoon was set aside for a guided tour of Parma, a resplendent town boasting several exceptional buildings. Parma is of Etruscan origin, then became a flourishing Roman colony. In the Middle Ages Parma suffered many battles and invasions on account of its wealth and its strategic position.





The Cathedral and the Baptistery

Magnificent examples of Romanesque art such as the Cathedral (dating from 1106, and at present undergoing restoration in preparation for its 900th anniversary which it will shortly be celebrating) and the Baptistery (13th century) are both witnesses to a glorious past. Other buildings are also 'worth a detour' as Michelin says: the renaissance St John the Evangelist church, embellished with frescos by Antonio Allegri (also known as Correggio); the baroque 'la Steccata' church of the Virgin, whose interior shows the genius of Francesco Mazzola (also known as Parmigianino). Parma became independent under the government of the Dukes of Farnese (1545 – 1731), and acquired other artistic and architectural masterpieces, thus creating an itinerary filled with charm and magic among the streets of the historic town centre. Don't miss it!



Fresco by Correggio



Fresco by the young Parmigianino