



In contrast to New York as The Big Apple, Rome has been called The Big Lasagna, and it's a perfect description. Like lasagna, Rome is all about layers -- layers that could easily stand on their own, and yet being together in the same pot has made the entire dish more interesting.



Rome rests in the middle of the Italian peninsula, about fifteen miles inland from the west coast. Archeologists have found traces of an ancient Roman settlement that dates back to 1200 BC, but most historians like to date the beginning of "real times Roman" as the eighth century before the birth of Christ.

For me, there are five distinct layers to Rome: the first is made up of the ruins and restorations of ancient Rome. Stuff that's been at the bottom of the pot for over two-thousand years.

Next, comes the remains of early Christian Rome: buildings that started out as Pagan temples and ended up as some of the earliest Christian churches. Works of art that tell the great stories of Christianity.

The third layer is Renaissance Rome -- the extraordinary rebirth of culture that took Europe out of the Middle Ages. This was the time of Michelangelo, and Raphael.

Then came a period known as the Baroque. The word "baroque" comes from the Portuguese and means "uneven stone." The movement grew as part of the reaction to the Protestant Reformation. It was designed to restore the power of Rome and the Catholic church. In Rome itself, some of the greatest examples of the Baroque Period are the works of Bernini.

And finally, I see an ingredient that's not so much a layer as it is a light dusting on top. Sometimes it's like grated cheese ... a little bit salty and demanding. Other times it's quite sweet and light like powdered sugar.

It got started in the mid-fifties and is called La Dolce Vita, which means "the sweet life," and it's a reference to the lifestyle that was developing in Rome.

In order to understand why a particular dish tastes the way it does, it's very helpful to have a recipe. The first ingredient in this Big Lasagna recipe is Ancient Rome.



The Forum was the political, religious, and commercial center of ancient Rome. As I wandered through the ruins, my guidebook told me of the great structures that stood here some 2,000 years ago. The Forum was built under the direction of Julius Caesar. That pile of broken stones... that was the spot where triumphant generals stood when they returned home. That clump of weeds... the very location of the magnificent House of the Vestal Virgins. And those columns... the Temple of Saturn. I can see it all in my mind's eye. With my regular glasses, however, the place looks like it needs some serious attention.

Next, the quintessential visual symbol of Rome: The Colosseum. It was built as a stadium in the first century and held over 50,000 spectators. It was the center for the contests between the gladiators. At one point in its history, the building became a source of marble for the local construction companies and it was stripped of its facade. Some ruins are more ruined than others.



That is The Pantheon. It is probably in better shape than any other ancient Roman building. It was built in 27 BC as a temple to all the Roman gods. Kind of a mutual fund

approach to pagan religion. You spread your veneration over a large group of deities and you reduce your risk of missing out on the powerful one. The Pantheon seems to have survived the centuries because it was turned into a church in the 600s. It's set on the lowest point in Rome and was subject to regular flooding. If you look up you will see the dome of the structure which is bigger than the one on St. Peter's. The hole in the center is the only source of light. Unfortunately it is also the source of water whenever it rains.

THE BIG LASAGNA

To continue along with the idea of the layers of Rome, a perfect example of how the Renaissance layer was placed on top of everything that went before, is the



Capitoline Hill. It was originally the site of a pair of pre-Christian temples honoring Jupiter and Juno. But in 1538 it became the home of Michelangelo's Piazza del Campidoglio. You approach the plaza by walking up a long, gently inclined ramp -- perfect for a grand imperial entrance to Rome, which was Michelangelo's purpose. When the Holy Roman Emperor Charles V was coming to town he would be greeted by two statues of Castor and Pollux, the twin heroes of classical mythology. And in the center of the Campidoglio, he would be confronted by a magnificent statue of Marcus Aurelius, set on an impressive pedestal. The statue is no longer there, but the pedestal is -- proving once again that even when the politician is gone, his platform remains. On two sides of the piazza are museums storing ancient Roman artifacts. The third building is the Senatorial Palace, which to this day is used by the local

government of Rome for the storage of ancient ideas on how the city should be governed.

To explore the next layer of the lasagna of Rome, the Baroque, I turned to Ilaria Barberini. She is the descendent of a powerful Roman family that included Pope Urban VIII, the man who commissioned the Barberini Palace and the Piazza Barberini. The family crest is illustrated with three bees as a symbol of how hard the Barberini work. Ilaria is certainly a perfect example. She's part of a cultural association called Citta Nascosta, which means "the hidden city." It's made up of a group of instructors who are specialists in guiding people to the most famous parts of Rome, as well as the more unusual areas. She's taking me to see a perfect example of the Baroque style that consumed Rome during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.

ILARIA BARBERINI CITTA NASCOSTA

This is Palazzo Colonna that was first built at the time of Pope Martino Quinto who was Pope in Rome from 1417 until 1431. The palace was then rebuilt in 1730. This is the gallery which was created to collect paintings and furniture. The gallery was created because they needed to show the power and the importance and the prestige of the family and it was a very typical thing that powerful families used to do in 1600s and 1700s. And it was easy for the families connected to the Pope, or connected with the Pope, to buy important artistic treasures.

And so, we can start and see the rooms that lead to the great ballroom which is the big room -- a very beautiful one.

So in this room, as in all the other rooms, it's full of beautiful paintings, but this is a particular painting. It's very famous and important. And this painting is very famous because it gives you the idea of reality. You really can feel, you know, the bread, the man that is eating, the beans... It's called the Mangia Fagioli in Italian, that means "the bean eater."



This is the new style of the 1600s. It's realism --

naturalism. We can see the bread, the red wine, the man that's sitting. We feel immediacy, reality. And we can also see the difference with that painting that it belongs to the end of the fifteenth century. Very stylized and unrealistic.



We are entering now the big ballroom, the real gallery and it's amazing. They say that it's even bigger than the one that is in Versailles. And here we can find one of the best examples of

Roman Baroque. We have all the elements. We have the colored marbles, we have those kind of living frescos very rich in action. And so we see the will to glorify the power of the family, to give importance to the family. And then we have all those golden stuccos and all the statues around the gallery and the paintings.

The room was built to collect paintings actually at the middle of the 1600s. But they also danced in it, they had big balls.

THE SWEET LIFE

The enormously grand style of the Baroque period grew out of a reaction to the Protestant Reformation. Four-hundred years later, as a reaction to the poverty and darkness of the Second World War, Rome came up with La Dolce Vita.

But instead of being presented in the traditional Roman art forms of painting, sculpture and architecture, La Dolce Vita was brought to us in film.

The master of the form was Fellini, and during the 1950's he showed us what was happening in Rome as wealth and power returned to the city. But the sweet life was also captured by still photographers.

The most famous streets for shopping in Rome are at the base of the Spanish Steps... the international fashion houses... the great Italian tailors... the jewelry makers. And although there are plenty of restaurants



in the area, it can be tough to find good food at a good price. A notable exception is the restaurant Il Cantinone, on the Via Vittoria. Charming... unpretentious...



inexpensive. It's run by the brothers Zucca, and it serves the specialties of the island of Sardinia -- like Carta de Musica, thin crisp bread named after the ancient paper on which music was printed, or tiny Sardinian pasta in a tomato sauce, ravioli stuffed with cheese and vegetables, grilled squid, grilled cheese with honey, and a knockout selection of Sardinian cookies.

Another favorite spot for me in Rome is the restaurant Piperno. It was originally opened in 1860 by Pacifico Piperno, a master chef whose specialty was Jewish cooking. At the time, this area was the center of the Jewish Ghetto. These days, the restaurant has an excellent table of appetizers, but my favorite meal at Piperno begins with artichokes cooked in what is called "the Jewish style," followed by a bowl of chickpea and pasta soup. And to finish off, an espresso laced with Romana Sambuca and a dollop of whipped cream.

Da Vincenzo is a neighborhood restaurant, virtually unknown to tourists, and even to many Romans who don't live or work in this particular neighborhood. It's one of the few restaurants in Rome that still caters to the old tradition of Gnocchi Thursday. Gnocchi is a pasta made from potatoes and flour, and for some reason, that I have been unable to discover, there are a group of restaurants that make it every Thursday. Also worth



trying at Da' Vincenzo is a sautéed veal dish called saltimbocca, which means "jump in your mouth." And for dessert, panna cotta, a custard flan which, in this case, is served with fresh berries. I recommend this place to you, but I don't want you to tell anybody else about it, okay?

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VIA SISTINA 67/69

ROME 00187 ITALY

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FIELD OF FLOWERS

The Campo de' Fiori is in the southern part of Rome's historic district. Campo de' Fiori means "field of flowers," and during



the Middle Ages that's what was here. But by the 1500s the district had become the heart of Rome. In the center of the square is the statue of Giordano Bruno, who was executed in the year 1600.

At the time, the official word from the church was that the earth was the center of the universe and everything in the sky moved around us. It was an ego thing. Poor Bruno, he was only interested in the scientific aspects of the universe and really wasn't getting the macho message from the monks. His experiments led him to the belief that, in fact, the sun was the center of the universe and the earth actually moved around the sun. Well, let me tell you, this was an unacceptable belief. And worse than just believing it, Bruno was going around and telling that to other people. Clearly, this man was a

heretic. And the monks burned him at the stake.

Today his statue is at the center of the Campo and one of Rome's great markets moves around him.

In most ancient societies everybody ate and drank pretty much the same things. Of course the rich had a lot more of whatever it was than the poor. But in



ancient Rome, perhaps for the first time, that began to change. Because the Roman Empire was so huge

and in contact with so many different parts of the world, the people of ancient Rome who had the money were able to choose from an extraordinary variety of foods. Foods that were just not available to people who didn't have the money. But they were not just interested in variety, they were fascinated by quality. And they would spend an enormous amount of time, money and effort getting the best of everything.

When Marcus Apicius heard that the shrimp off the coast of Libya were superior to those available in Rome, he outfitted a ship and sailed off to check it out. When he got there and found that the shrimp were no better than what he was already using, he turned around and headed back without making a purchase.

And that desire for the "best of class" is still very much part of the attitude of the modern Roman food lover. One of the first things that you learn as a traveling eater is that almost every town has a special interest in certain foods. Those same foods may be available in other cities but not at the



same level of quality. And not subject to the same level of interest on the part of the local public. In New York they would be bagels, pastrami, steak and cheesecake. In Paris it would be pastry, wine, and chocolate. Here in Rome, it's bread, particularly in the form of pizza, ice cream, and coffee.

The place to try "best of class" bread and pizza is the Antico Forno at the edge of Campo de' Fiori. For ice cream it's Gioletti. And for the best thick chocolate ice cream with a whipped cream

Rome, Italy

topping... the Tartuffo at Tre Scalini in the Piazza Navona. And almost everyone seems to agree that the best cup of espresso is at Santo Eustachio.

THE DIGESTIF

When the ancient Romans first started making wine, their feel for the craft, in terms of taste, was not very good. But the good feeling that they got from drinking it kept them highly interested. To help the flavor along, they often mixed their wine with honey, or herbs and spices, or all of the above. One result is that the ancient Romans developed a taste for beverages that were sweet and had an herbal flavor.

Much of the time their herbal drinks were considered more in the area of medicine, than in gastronomy, but that was often the case with wines and spirits that had been given an herbal flavor. Over the centuries one of the spirits with an herbal flavor that had a medical claim to fame and was very popular, was the digestif, something you drank after dinner to help you with your digestion. And one of the most popular flavors was based on anise, a flavor that many people associate with licorice.

The ancient Egyptians knew about anise, and so did the ancient Greeks. The ancient Romans often ended their banquets with anise-flavored cakes, pointing out



that anise was a valuable aid to good digestion. Roman weddings usually included an anise cake for dessert. Even today, candied almonds with an anise flavored coating are part of weddings in France and Italy. One scholarly source tells us that at the end of an ancient Roman battle, the generals would give anise flavored candies to their successful troops. Now, that doesn't strike me as a really great gift after a battle, but maybe there were little prizes in the boxes. You know, you never know about these things. The point is that for thousands of years people have associated the flavor of anise with



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spirits, good luck, good fortune, the end of a good battle or the end of a good meal.

At this point, the Romans have distilled all of that into a drink called Romana Sambuca. They drink it after dinner. They put it into espresso. Sometimes they even top off the coffee with whipped cream, ending up with a sweet anise-flavored drink that they call Caffè Romana.

For thousands of years, people have believed that certain plants had vital forces and critical energies. The more unusual the shape and color of the plant, the more powerful these energies. And the way to get to these force fields was to capture the aroma of the plant... and the way to do that was to burn the plant and capture the smoke... in Latin it was called per fumus... in English we call it perfume. And one of the most powerful forces came from the anise plant.

An after-dinner drink and a little aromatherapy, all at the same time. What a combination!

NATURAL SPRINGS

Water... soaring up from beneath the earth. A spring has always had a mystical quality, offering an opportunity to be cleansed and rejuvenated. It's an ancient and universal symbol of life and rebirth.

For thousands of years, a natural spring was considered to be a sacred place. The perfect spot to build a shrine. And for good reason. The idea of pure water as a life-giving force is not only poetic... it's practical. People can live for a couple of months without food... but a couple of weeks without water and life begins to disappear. So when someone came across fresh, clear, pure water just coming up out of the earth, they knew that they had reached a special place and they honored it.

Ancient civilizations, including the Greeks, planted gardens and built shrines around their springs. When the builders started to use basins and reservoirs to display and transport the waters, the springs became fountains. The Romans developed a purely decorative form of fountain that eventually ended up as a monumental sculpture. The early Christians placed fountains in their basilica as a symbol and a source of purification. During the Middle Ages, the fountains moved into the courtyards of the monasteries. But it was in Italy, during the Renaissance, that the fountain took on a form that was dominated by staggering, immense, virtually gargantuan sculpture. And Rome is the place with the most extraordinary examples of this art.

The Piazza Navona takes its long, narrow shape from an ancient Roman stadium that once stood here. There are three fountains in the Piazza Navona, but the most important one is the Fountain of the Rivers. It was designed by Bernini, who was a great architect of the Baroque period. The work was finished in 1651, and represents four rivers from four corners of the world: the Danube from Europe, the Ganges from Asia, the



Rio de la Plata for the Americas, and the Nile for Africa. The head of the Nile is covered to show that the source of the Nile was not known at the time the fountain was built.

When Bernini designed this fountain he was in competition with another architect of the time named Borromini. Borromini designed the front of the St. Agnese Church which is right in front of Bernini's fountain.

Tourist guides like to tell you that the statues of the Nile and the Plata are holding up their hands in a defensive position in order to protect themselves from the Borromini building -- which they expect to fall on them!

The truth of the matter is that the church was built a few years after the fountain, but maybe Bernini had seen the plans and knew what was coming. At any rate, their rivalry is still in evidence.

The most famous fountain in Rome is probably the Trevi Fountain. During the year 19 BC, thirteen miles of canal were built to bring water into the city, and this is the spot where the water arrived. The figure in the center represents the ocean, and he is being drawn across the waters by two sea horses and two sea gods. In the 1959 film, *La Dolce Vita*, Anita Ekberg took a little dip in these waters, and the place became even more famous.

During the middle of the 1600's Pope Urban VIII began building a fountain here. He used money that he collected from a tax on wine, which proved to be extraordinarily unpopular. He ended up being accused of trying to turn wine into water. He had to give up the tax and his plans for the fountains. It did get built, however, about a hundred years later by a local sculptor named Nicola Salvi. Local folklore has it that if you stand in front of the fountain, facing away, and throw a coin over your shoulder into the fountain, you will someday return to Rome and your wish will be granted.

