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## CELEBRATING THE TOMATO AND TOSCANINI

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Rimini, April 1, 2007

Think *cucina italiana* and you'll immediately have visions of *gelato*, pizza, pasta, and tomatoes. In fact, the tomato was featured at the 2007 *Festival della cucina italiana*, held at the *Mostra italiana alimentare* in Rimini from February 10-13. During the Festival 14 illustrious chefs: Ettore Bocchia (Villa Serbelloni, Bellagio); Gino Angelini (Osteria Angelini, Los Angeles); Luca Angelini (Palazzo Albergati, Bologna); Silver Succi (Ristorante I Tre Re,, Poggio Berni); Maurizio Urso (Ristorante Il Podere, Siracusa); Genuino Del Duca (Enoteca Del Duca, Volterra); Isidoro Consolini (Ristorante Al Caval, Torre del Benaco); Antonio Mellino (Ristorante Quattro Passi, Massalubrense); Claudio Sadler (Ristorante Sadler, Milano); Raffaele Liuzzi (Locanda Liuzzi, Cattolica); Vincenzo Cammerucci (Ristorante Lido Lido, Cesenatico); Pietro Leemann (Ristorante Joia, Milano); Luigi Pomata (Ristorante Da Nicola, Carloforte), and Lucio Pompili (Ristorante Symposium, Cartoceto) each cooked with live ongoing explanations a three-course meal with the tomato as its main ingredient for the enthusiastic onlookers.

### When at MIA

MIA's huge four pavilions were like a Grand Tour of everything connected to Italian/European food and beverages, from tractors and delivery vans, to frozen food, to food products for the allergic, to Europe's small beer brewers, and to Italy's vast assortment of mineral waters. The ideal place for buyers' to make contacts, one pavilion was (always is) devoted to Italian products organized by region. All interested parties including non-professional Epicurean travelers should contact [infovisitatori@riminifiera.it](mailto:infovisitatori@riminifiera.it).

A favorite summer venue of young people, Rimini, the birthplace of film director Federico Fellini, is a small city, founded by the Emperor Augustus on the Adriatic coast. It's famous for well-organized and friendly hospitality, reasonable prices, and an endless choice of entertainment. Should you attend 2008's MIA, February 23-26, 2008, after hours for superb fish feasts I can recommend first-hand: *Lo Squero* (Lungomare Tintori 7, 011-39-0541-27676) and *Da Oberdan* (Via Destra del Porto, 011-39-0541-55002). For a good night's sleep: a *bijou* Liberty villa, *Hotel Esedra* (Viale



At the awards ceremony of the 7th Festival della cucina italiana from left to right, Angelo Agnelli, the owner of the prestigious company which has been making Italy's best aluminium pots for the past 100 years and houses a cookingware museum in Bergamo; Bruno Gambacorta, the inventor of "Eat Parade", the first news program on Italy State television devoted to eno-gastronomy; actor Riccardo Rossi, the emcee of this year's Festival; Elsa Mazzolini, the publisher of *La Madia Travelfood*, one of the sponsors of this year's Festival, but the inventor of this Italian food festival in 2000; and Gianfranco Vissani, the controversial world famous chef Gianfranco Vissani. photo by La Madia Travelfood

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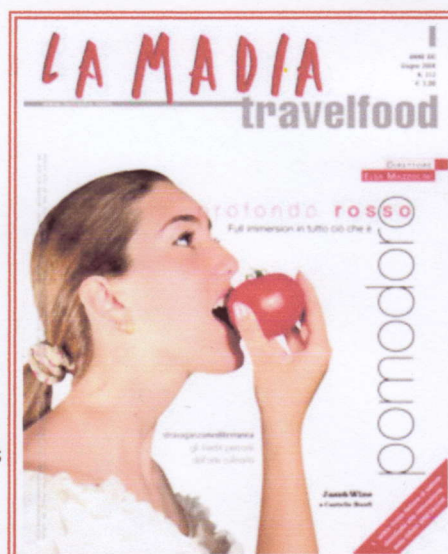
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A cover of *La Madia Travelfood*, the Italian monthly and sponsor of the annual Festival della cucina italiana. photo by La Madia Travelfood

Caio Duilio 3, 011-39-0541-23421, e-mail: [info@esedrahotel.com](mailto:info@esedrahotel.com)).

### Museo del Pomodoro

In 2008 il Museo del Pomodoro or Tomato Museum will open in Collecchio, only 11 kilometers from Parma at the Corte di Giarola. Since November 2003 three other food museums have opened near Parma, appropriately chosen as the European Food Safety Authority: *il Museo del Parmigiano* in Soragna (see my article, "Parmesan: An Edible Work of Art, *Epicurean-Traveler.com*, April 2004), and *il Museo del Prosciutto* (see my article, "Prosciutto with a Capital P, *Epicurean-Traveler.com*, October 2006), and *il Museo del Salame Felino* in Langhirano.



photo by Scott Clemens

To whet your appetite for the Tomato Museum's displays, here's a little historical background. The tomato originated either in Peru or Mexico. At first it was considered a weed which infested the cultivation of corn. We also know that for at least three thousand years before the arrival of the Spanish explorers, the Aztecs ate tomatoes.

Depending on whom you talk to, the arrival of the tomato in Europe dates to Columbus or to the Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés (1485-1547), one of whom brought back from the New World samples of a small yellow species. I tend to favor Columbus because in 1992 the Vatican issued a splendid series of five stamps to celebrate the 500th anniversary of America's discovery by Columbus. The stamps showed botanical illustrations by Georg Dionysus Ehret from the *Phytanthoza iconographia*, published in Regensburg, Germany, between 1737-45 and now in the Vatican Library: cactus, cocoa,

peppers, pineapple and tomatoes, none of which had appealed to the Spanish palate in 1492.

This exotic fruit had been first mentioned in print in an agricultural treatise by Olivier De Serres (1539-1619), a botanist at the French Court who described it as "a curiosity, an ornamental plant." A century or so later Antonio Latini (1642-1696), a nobleman from the Italian region Le Marche, mentioned it in his *Scalco alla moderna* (Naples, 1694), a gastronomic treatise, in a recipe for vegetable stew.

The first recipe with red tomatoes belongs to a cookbook, *Panonto toscano* (1705) by Francesco Gaudenzio (1648-1733), a cook for the Jesuits, even if the botanist-gastronome Vincenzo Corrado (1734-1836) in his *Cuoco galante* (Naples, 1773) continued to champion tomatoes the color of saffron.

In 1781 a French refugee introduced the tomato from Santo Domingo via Philadelphia to the newly-founded USA, where it was first cultivated at Monticello, like rice and grapes, by none other than the President Thomas Jefferson. Fifteen years later, in 1796 to be exact, after many failed attempts, Charles Nicolas Appert (1749-1841), a pastry chef in Rue de Quincampoix in Paris, successfully made the first tomato preserves in glass bottles.



Charles Nicolas Appert

During the 19th century the tomato's popularity spread like wildfire. During a trip to Naples in 1835 Alexandre Dumas (1802-1870), author of *The Three Musketeers* and *The Count of Monte Cristo*, fell in love with pizza garnished with olive oil, garlic, tiny fish, and tomato, and only four years later Ippolito Cavalcanti (1787-1859), Duke of Bonvicino, is the first to describe (in Neapolitan dialect) the tomato sauce-spaghetti connection.

The introduction of industrial tomato preserves from Parma dates to 1878 at the Universal Exposition held in Paris. Today Parma boasts eleven companies, which annually use 10,000 tons of tomatoes to make preserves — over 20% of Italy's national consumption.

To prepare for your visit to the Museum, click on [www.museidelcibo.it](http://www.museidelcibo.it), then *museo del pomodoro*, product and bibliography. Another stop to make in Collecchio is for a meal at elegant Villa Maria Luigia, once the summer residence of Napoleon's first wife. (Via Galaverna 28, 011-39-0521-805489, closed Wednesday evening and Thursday). You can even check out the menu on their

website: [www.ristorantevillamaria.luigia.it](http://www.ristorantevillamaria.luigia.it).

To conveniently visit all four food museums, I would stay at their hub in Parma; again I can recommend either the Sina Hotels' very central Palace Hotel Maria Luigia, (Via Mentana 140, tel. 011-39-0521-281032) or the super-elegant Sofitel Grand Hotel De La Ville (Largo Pietro Calamandrei 11, tel. 011-39-0521-0304), until recently part of the Barilla pasta factory.



photos by Scott Clemens

Music-lovers, don't forget that 2007 is the 50th anniversary of Parma's native son, world-famous conductor, Arturo Toscanini's death. The city has planned numerous special events to celebrate the conductor's life, all listed on the city tourist board's website: <http://www.turismo.comune.parma.it>. The *gran finale* is the "Requiem", by Verdi, another native-son, on Saturday, November 17 at 8 PM, conducted by Daniel Barenboim, but go first to Toscanini's newly-restored birthplace and museum, Via R. Tanzi 13, Tuesday-Sunday 9 AM-1 PM, 2-6 PM, closed Monday, tel. 011-39-0521-285499, <http://www.museotoscanini.it>

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