

Siena, the backstreets and gastronomy

Sieneese cuisine speaks for the character and customs of the city's inhabitants. It is straightforward and unpretentious, focusing on flavors that are intense but simple. Culinary harmony is achieved by skillfully combining a range of different ingredients that mirror the grace and colors of the landscape. Since Etruscan and Roman times local cooks have developed a variety of tasty dishes that are both substantial and measured. During the Middle Ages, however, this reliable fare was enlivened with introduction of precious spices that culminated in typical Sieneese sweetmeats such as *panforte* and the *ricciarelli* almond cookies. To this day a keynote of all cooking in the area is still the quality of the ingredients and the use of aromatic herbs that abound in the surrounding countryside, especially wild tarragon and calamin. For many such ingredients, especially the beans and pulses,

PASTA RIBBONS WITH HARE SAUCE
AND SIENESE VEGETABLE SOUP



long, slow cooking is an essential part of the process, which in its turn should culminate in leisurely eating. While the Extra Virgin olive oil produced in the area has acquired renown much further afield, the excellence of the meat from locally-raised Chianina cattle will come to many as a toothsome surprise. In recent years cooks and gourmets have rediscovered a particular breed of pig, once common on the Chianti hillsides and the Montagnola mound just west of Siena. Known as the Cinta Senese, or Sieneese Saddleback, this creature features in Ambrogio Lorenzetti's portrayal of "Good Government", painted between 1335 and 1340 in what is now the city's Museo Civico. The fresco itself describes how well managed farmland should look, and it is heartening to see that modernity has not cancelled out good husbandry of this sort. For all its simplicity, Sieneese cuisine can actually

EWES' MILK CHEESE



THE CINTA SENESE BREED OF PIG IN AMBROGIO LORENZETTI'S PORTRAYAL OF "GOOD GOVERNMENT"

boast a number of historical honors. It was the Sieneese who first saw fit to supply the storerooms of King Frederic II's ships with preserved meat: lean pork first seasoned with pepper and garlic and then smoked. Moreover

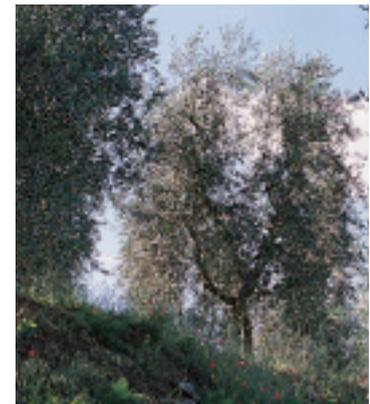
FESTIVE SWEETMEATS



Caterina de' Medici chose a number of Sieneese cooks to take with her to the French court when she married the future King Henri d'Orléan. Today there are plenty of typical trattorias, restaurants and wine-bars where you can taste the time-honored dishes that are still an essential part of Sieneese life. To leave without sampling the *crostini di milza* (toast topped with a meaty sauce made from spleen), the *zuppa di fagioli* (bean soup), the *pappardelle con la lepre* (pasta ribbons with hare sauce), the pan-cooked whole chicken or pigeon

known as *arrosto morto* or the succulent Chianina beef is almost tantamount to racing through without stopping to admire the city's art and architecture. So take your time and enjoy these dishes with some superb local wines. Located in the center of a region that boasts 5 of the superior DOCG wines and 12 that claim a DOC appellation, Siena is rightly considered the wine capital of Italy. *Dulcis in fundo*, indulge yourself with the local sweetmeats. Happily for visitors, the *Ricciarelli*, *panforte* and *cavallucci* made with almond paste, spices and candied fruits that were once only found at Christmas are now produced throughout the year. Tempting aromas waft into the streets to herald the delights to be found in the bakeries and pastry shops, where *Pan coi Santi* (spicy raisin bread) and the *Schiacciata di Pasqua* are still made according to traditional recipes.

OLIVE TREES



1 VIA DI DIACCETO

The name of this road derives from the *diaccere* or *ghiaccere*, which were the pits dug out of the tufa stone so that compacted snow could be stored in them to provide ice during the warmer months. The bridge known as the Ponte di Diacceto dates back to 1175 and offers a magnificent view of the great Basilica of San Domenico. The sign visible on the building on the left is that of the ancient inn of La Scala, which provided hospitality for many illustrious travelers.



VIA DELLA GALLUZZA

2 VICOLO DELLE CARROZZE

From Via Diacceto you can reach this narrow street, flanked by ancient houses, arches and galleries. Now considered one of Siena's most characteristic alleys, it once harbored murderers, witnessed "ugly and dishonest things" and was rightly deemed dangerous.

3 VIA DELLA GALLUZZA

Given the proximity of the public abattoirs at the end of Fontebranda, this street became the location for the main chicken and pigeon market, from which its name derives. The arches connecting the houses on either side of the road are a typical feature: there are seven of them in the upper section alone. A maze of alleys surrounds Via della Galluzza, including the narrow Vicolo della Macina, which means grindstone. This refers to the many workshops in the vicinity that specialized in grinding substances such as oak apples and myrtle for the dyers who colored fabrics and hides. In the 12th century, the area between Vicolo della Macina and Vicolo del Forcone (this latter street was named after what was once a fork in the road) comprised the Castellare degli Ildebrandi or Brandi, the family stronghold that probably accounts for the ancient name of Fontebranda, by which the whole district is now known.

4 VICOLO DEL TIRATOIO

This lane is at the end of Via della Galluzza, beside St. Catherine's Sanctuary.

It was where the most important Wool Guild was located, not least because it was here that the dyers and fullers "finished" the cloths, thus making them precious.

5 VIA DELLA FONTE

The street leads to a little square whence one flight of steps leads up to Casato di Sotto, while the other descends to the 14th century Fonte del Casato, once known as the Fonte Serena, possibly because it was far from the thoroughfare and thus quieter than other public spaces. At the bottom of the Casato di Sotto steps you will find Vicolo della Fonte, which will take you to Piazzetta dei Falegnami (the name derives from the carpenters' workshops that were once located here) and on to Via G. Duprè.

6 PIAZZA DEL MERCATO

Once unpaved and full of trees, the old market square was originally used for the cattle market, known as the Foro Boario. In more recent times, relatively speaking, it became a general produce market, with facilities for flower and vegetable stands and chicken and rabbit vendors, for whom the awning was built in 1886. The fact that this roof slightly resembles a tortoise explains why it still goes by the name of the tartarugone (*tartaruga* means tortoise in Italian; so a *tartarugone* is



VICOLO DELLE CARROZZE

indeed a big tortoise). The market also attracted peddlers known as *treccoloni* or *trecconi*, who hawked thread, buttons and assorted knick-knacks for women from a box hung around their necks. Such itinerant vendors also sold their wares out in the countryside, where they were able to supplement their income by arranging marriages and acting as mediators in small commercial deals. Piazza del Mercato affords a fine view of the elegant loggias at the back of the Palazzo Pubblico. This prospect was once the main facade of the building housing

the city Council, which stored its precious salt reserves down below.

7 ORTO DEI PECCI

This little vale is named after the family that once owned the whole district. Despite the development of the city on all sides, it is still an oasis of kitchen gardens and orchards. In 1323 the Borgo Nuovo or New Borough began to grow around the parish church, attracting numerous inhabitants. To reach the Orto dei Pecci you should cross



VICOLO DEL TIRATOIO

Via di Porta Giustizia, so named because from 1298 prisoners sentenced to death were led along here to the gallows on Poggio delle Forche, a mile or so beyond the city walls. This explains why you will also find Via dei Malcontenti (the road of the wretched) below Piazza del Mercato.