

Sampling Basilicata in New York

Michele Scicolone (January 24, 2010)



Dancing with Lidia and Tasting the Fine Foods and Wines of Basilicata

A few weeks ago, I was watching an episode about Basilicata on television on "[Lidia's Italy](#) [2]". Host Lidia Bastianich spoke about the earthy flavors of the rustic food produced in this Southern Italian region and its excellent wines as she demonstrated some tempting recipes. When the scene switched to a party at a home in Basilicata, I was not at all surprised to see Lidia dancing with an old friend and proud supporter of the region, Francesco Luisi.

For a long time, Franco as we call him, has been promoting the region of his birth and encouraging those of us who enjoy Italian cuisine and culture to explore this little known region. Basilicata, once called Lucania, is a small mountainous region in southern Italy with coasts on both the Tyrrhenian and Ionian Seas. Matera, a popular tourist destination and the site of the ancient sassi quarter where people once lived in caves carved into the hills, is a Unesco World Heritage site. Basilicata has a long agricultural history and among the many fine products it produces are bread, pasta, wine,



olive oil, cheeses, peppers and legumes.

Franco's efforts, as well as those of many others, were rewarded recently when representatives of the region came to New York to introduce the food and wine of Basilicata to the American market.

To celebrate, a dinner was held at Manhattan's [Felidia Restaurant](#) [3]. The hosts were Lidia Bastianich, who in addition to being a tv host is the restaurant's owner and the author of many cookbooks, and Lou Di Palo, the 4th generation proprietor of the family-owned Italian specialty food store, [Di Palo's Fine Foods](#) [4]. The menu was prepared by 3 chefs from the [Unione Regionale Cuochi Lucani](#) [5], Mario De Muro, Rocco Christiano Pozzulo and Francesca Rondinella.

After a sampling plate of an assortment of the sheep and goat's milk cheeses of the region paired with local honey, pickled vegetables, and extra virgin olive oil, we enjoyed little cavatelli pasta cooked with Sarconi beans. According to our hosts, more than 20 varieties of beans, which range in color from creamy white to yellow to a beautiful speckled wine and cream combination, are grown around the town of Sarconi. The beans are remarkably flavorful, tender, and creamy and were paired perfectly with the hard wheat cavatelli pasta typical of Basilicata.

The next course was strascinati, another hard wheat pasta shaped into large flat ovals, which are made by dragging them (hence the name) over a grooved surface. The delightfully chewy pasta was paired with dried Senise peppers, bread crumbs, and cacioricotta Lucano. The salty, creamy goat cheese accented the sweet and slightly smoky flavor of the peppers. Throughout the meal, we snacked on "cruschi", deep fried crunchy pieces of the same peppers that would make a great substitute for potato and other chips.

Though I had planned to just have a taste of the next course, a Sformatino of Canestrato di Moliterno con Crema di Pomodoro, I could not resist eating the whole thing. The little flan of Canestrato di Moliterno, a firm cheese made from sheep and cow's milk, was blended with eggs, baked like a souffle, and served with sweet, smooth tomato sauce.

Our final course was a small cake flavored with Lucanian honey in a sauce of pistachios from Sigliano with a caramelized fig from Pisticci.

Throughout the meal we sampled many of the famous wines of Basilicata including a spumante made in the metodo classico from primitivo grapes, and a memorable dessert wine. We were privileged to meet the proud producers of many of the outstanding products we tasted who were on hand to answer questions and provide information and tell us anecdotes about their region.

The following day, Lou Di Palo, whose family hails from Basilicata, hosted a special food show and tasting at his family's store which was open to consumers, press and retailers alike. Di Palo's and many other fine food stores are now featuring many of these fine products from Basilicata.

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