

'Su Filindeu,' the World's Most Ancient Pasta Comes to New York

Laura Pace (December 11, 2019)



In the wild and mystical isle of Sardinia, they are known as the “Threads of God” because of their shape, which recalls the threads of a loom. They are however strands of handmade pasta, crafted according to an ancient sardinian tradition that has long been passed down from mother to daughter. A secret art that is slowly disappearing, one that the chef from Nuoro, Roberto Ruiiu, has decided to bring to this side of the Atlantic.

It takes ancient gestures to create su Filindeu, “the threads of God,” hidden deep in the Sardinian hinterland, in Nuoro, behind a long and secret tradition that for over 300 years has been passed down from mother to daughter. Mothers had the duty to educate their daughters in this meticulous art that is part of the area’s cutlural and culinary heritage. Threads so thin that they seem almost impalbable, light to the taste because they are made only with semolina, water, and artistry.



Today, merely 150 women are left to guard this pasta weaving art, and only two of them actually acquired it directly from their mothers. A few years ago, faced with such a small number, the gallurian association "matriarch cuisine" decided to allow the transmission of su Filindeu through men as well as women. Among the few chosen men was Roberto Ruiiu, a chef from Nuoro, whose passion for Sardinian cuisine dates back to his teenage years, when he started working the stove while his friends played soccer.

"I was sixteen years old when I decided that I wanted to be a chef. Nobody believed me. Today, knowing that I am one of the few men in the world elected to preserve the craft of a unique pasta like su Filindeu makes me extremely proud, not only as a chef, but also as a Sardinian," says Ruiiu, whose job allows him to travel across the world.

Manhattan is of course among his many destinations. One day, Roberto decided to introduce Americans and the many tourists who pass through the Big Apple to the Threads of God. "The first time I came to New York and presented su Filindeu, everyone was mesmerized by this pasta that is virtually unknown in Italy, not to mention in the rest of the world. Making it is not an easy task," the chef explains. "It requires expert knowledge of this particular type of pasta. You have to feel it in your hands, you have to understand, but more importantly love it."

The recipe, according to this maestro of Nuorese cuisine, whose passion for fresh pasta brought him to experiment with a wide range of sardinian pasta traditions, cannot be simply explained and replicated. "How could anyone explain the knowledge and passion behind a tradition as ancient as su Filindeu?"

Among the many people - some more renowned than others - who unsuccessfully tried to replicate this handmade craft, one stood out to Roberto. "I will always remember this man from Texas who asked me how he could buy some to take home. He wanted to place them alongside his paintings, as works of art. He left me speechless. He was right, su Filindeu really is a work of art."

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