

Carmella Fragassi

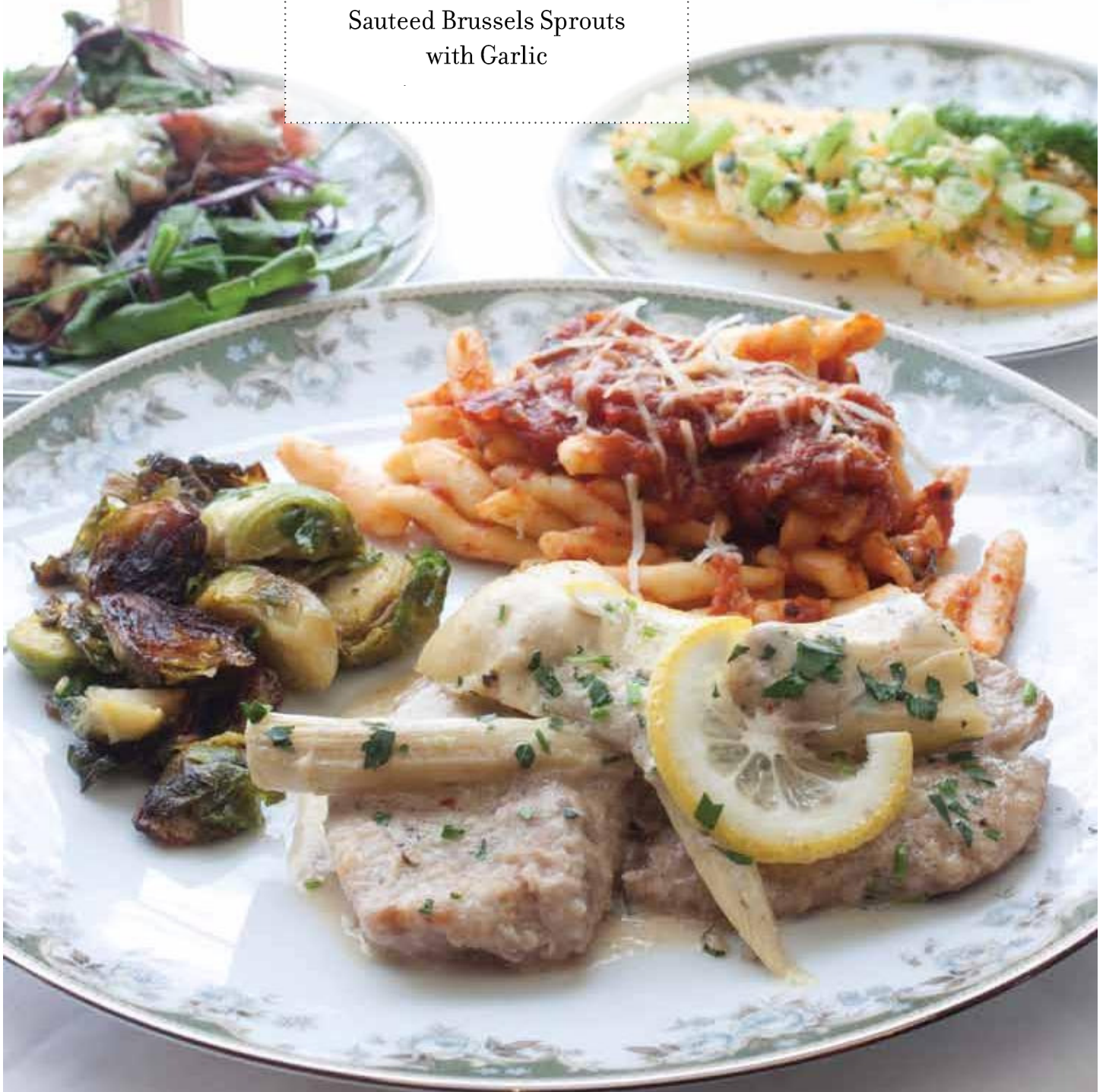
Herb- & Feta-Stuffed Scampi

Sauteed Veal Scaloppine with
Lemon Sauce & Artichokes

Italian Orange Salad

Cavatelli with Pancetta,
Tomatoes, & Hot Pepper

Sauteed Brussels Sprouts
with Garlic



Carmella Fragassi

Chef/Owner, La Campagna

Accolades: A finalist for the Gallo Family Vineyard Gold Medal Award in the Top Artisanal Food Products category three years in a row; won first-place Taste of Italy award; featured in *Cleveland Ethnic Eats*; featured in numerous publications and media, including *Feast!*, the *Plain Dealer*, *Metromix*, *Urbanspoon*, *Yelp*, and PBS TV.

Carmella has always loved to cook. And she has always had fun cooking. But it took years for Carmella to get to the point she's at now, being able to share her passion for cooking family-favorite recipes with others. Her life path had to take quite an interesting direction first.

Carmella grew up in Sheffield Lake, Ohio, part of a large extended Italian family. "Eating in my home was family art," says Carmella. "It was practiced for and by the whole family to celebrate not just the most important meal of the day but more than likely the most important event of the day."

Carmella would watch—and help—her mother, father, grandparents, aunts, and uncles prepare traditional meals using the freshest ingredients from their garden. They would also can fruits and vegetables during the harvest. "We were all creating a rich family life while at the same time maintaining a link between the generations in this sharing of a common joy," she says.

After graduating from Brookside High School in Sheffield Lake, she joined the Lorain County Administrator as an assistant clerk and personal secretary. She quickly worked her way up to executive secretary of two drug enforcement groups. After completing a couple intense government training programs, she became an undercover drug enforcement agent and crime scene photographer. During her seventeen-year tenure in law enforcement, she also obtained a degree in psychology from Heidelberg College, became a certified officer

training instructor, and taught at a number of private police academies throughout the Cleveland area.

After Carmella retired, she began to seriously consider a dream she had always had: to own her own small Italian restaurant. More of a trattoria, if you will. Just like the ones she would visit in Italy. Finally, she found a site in Westlake and did just that. The restaurant was enjoying quiet success when, only two years later, a raging fire in an adjacent business caused so much damage to her property that she had to shut it down.

Carmella was devastated. She decided to regroup and started freelancing as an investigator for a law firm. But five years later, she actively sought another restaurant site in Westlake. She soon reopened her business, at first providing only catering service and gift baskets. "But repeated requests by my customers to offer on-site dining again led to my current, intimate, seven-table restaurant concept, where I provide a strictly 'personal chef' style of service," explains Carmella. "Every single dish is made to order using only the freshest produce of the day."

Although she's not exactly taking it easy postretirement, Carmella is truly having the time of her life. Besides running the restaurant, she also teaches classes at Laurel Run Cooking School in Vermilion. And she organizes culinary tours to Italy. In fact, during her last trip, she was invited to become the exclusive distributor in the U.S. for a line of fine olive oils and wines.

"When you appreciate good food and like to cook, you always find joy in making a masterpiece," says Carmella.

In her free time, Carmella likes to read, sew, and relax at the family's rustic cabin in scenic Cook Forest, Pennsylvania.

Carmella shares a home in Sheffield Lake with Leonarda, her mother and the loving matriarch of the family.



Carmella's secret tip for last-minute entertaining? "Always keep your pantry well stocked with garlic, olive oil, pasta, canned tuna, cannellini and garbanzo beans, home-canned tomatoes and fruit, wine, coffee, and espresso. Salami, cheese, and milk are always good to have on hand, too."

Herb- & Feta-Stuffed Scampi

4 servings

A gastronomic delicacy, *scampi* is actually the Italian name for the tail portion of lobsterettes, most notably the Dublin Bay prawn. Serve as an elegant appetizer before any meal, or as a main course, if you'd like. No one will mind either way! Carmella likes to use the versatile stuffing mixture to fill other types of fish and chicken as well. A helpful side note: Use whatever greens you have on hand for the bed.

2 ounces feta cheese, preferably Lake Erie Creamery, crumbled
2 ounces mascarpone cheese (can substitute cream cheese, softened)
1½ teaspoons finely chopped fresh Italian parsley
1½ teaspoons finely chopped chives (can substitute green onion)
½ teaspoon minced garlic (½ medium-size clove)
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper
8 uncooked scampi, peeled and deveined (can substitute jumbo shrimp)
4 cups spinach leaves, rinsed thoroughly and drained
½ head red cabbage, cored and shredded
Balsamic vinegar for drizzling
Chopped fresh chives for garnish

1. Preheat the oven to 450°.
2. Combine the feta, mascarpone, parsley, chives, garlic, and salt and pepper to taste in a small bowl. (Depending on how salty your feta is, you may want to omit the salt altogether.) Using your hands, mix thoroughly.
3. Make a cut ½-inch deep along the back of each scampi to “butterfly.” Spread open. Place the filling equally onto each scampi.
4. Place the scampi on a baking sheet, cheese side up, and bake until the scampi are pink, about 5 to 6 minutes. Remove from the oven.
5. Place the spinach and cabbage on each serving plate to create a bed of greens. Arrange the cooked scampi on the greens, cheese side up. Drizzle with the balsamic vinegar and garnish with the chives to serve.



WINE PAIRINGS

Italy: Piedmont, Roero—Arneis

Italy: Tuscany—Sangiovese or “Super Tuscan” blend

Italy: Veneto—Pinot Grigio, Sauvignon Blanc, or blend

USA: California, Lodi—Pinot Noir or Sangiovese

Sauteed Veal Scaloppine with Lemon Sauce & Artichokes

4 servings

Scaloppine is the Italian term for scallops (thin, boneless slices) of meat. This version is at once delicate, flavorful, and tangy—assisted in part by the addition of marinated long-stemmed artichokes, which can easily be found jarred or canned in most grocery stores.

2 tablespoons olive oil
4 tablespoons (½ stick) unsalted butter
½ cup all-purpose flour
1 pound veal for scaloppine, sliced thin and pounded flat (can substitute chicken or pork cutlets)
2 tablespoons dry white wine or white vermouth
2 tablespoons heavy cream
2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice, plus additional for serving, optional
1 teaspoon minced garlic (1 medium-size clove)
Salt and freshly ground black pepper
8 marinated long-stemmed artichokes (can substitute good-quality jarred or canned marinated artichoke hearts, drained)
½ lemon, thinly sliced, for garnish
1 tablespoon finely chopped fresh parsley for garnish

1. Heat the oil and 2 tablespoons of the butter in a large skillet over medium-high heat. It should be quite hot. Thinly sliced veal must cook quickly or it will become leathery.

2. Spread the flour in a shallow dish or on waxed paper. Dip both sides of the scaloppine in the flour. Shake off the excess. Working in batches, place the scaloppine, no more than will fit comfortably without touching, into the skillet. If the oil is hot enough, the meat should sizzle.

3. Cook the scaloppine until they are lightly browned on one side, about 3 to 4 minutes. Turn and brown the other side, about another 3 to 4 minutes. Return all the batches to the skillet and add the wine, cream, lemon juice, garlic, and salt and pepper to taste. Simmer for 4 to 5 minutes.

4. Cut the artichokes in half lengthwise (skip if using only hearts). Add to the skillet until only warmed through, about 2 to 3 minutes.

5. Using a slotted spatula, transfer the scaloppine and artichokes to a warm platter and pour the sauce from the skillet over. Drizzle with a squeeze of lemon juice, if desired, and garnish with the lemon slices and parsley. Serve immediately, family style.

Italian Orange Salad

4 servings

This traditional southern Italian salad is a refreshing end to a hearty meal. For a beautiful holiday version, add thin slices of crunchy raw fennel (a licorice-flavored member of the parsley family) to the layers of oranges. *Delizioso!*

Extra-virgin olive oil
Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper
3 navel oranges
1 teaspoon minced garlic (1 medium-size clove)
Finely chopped fresh Italian parsley for garnish
1 scallion (green onion), chopped, for garnish, optional

1. Lightly drizzle each serving plate with some of the oil and salt and pepper to taste. Set aside.

2. Peel the oranges, removing both rind and white pith. Using a very sharp serrated knife, cut the oranges crosswise into ¼-inch-thick slices (or a little thicker if you prefer).

3. Place about 3 sliced oranges on each prepared plate. Sprinkle with some of the minced garlic and salt and pepper to taste. Drizzle with some oil. Garnish with some of the parsley and, if desired, the scallion to serve.

Cavatelli with Pancetta, Tomatoes, & Hot Pepper

4 servings

Although served as a side dish in Carmella's elegant meal, this could also be prepared as an easy weeknight meal in itself. Just add a salad and some crusty bread, and you're golden! Cavatelli—a type of pasta that's short and narrow with a rolled edge—is typically available frozen. As for pancetta (also called Italian bacon), it is usually sold rolled and can be found at Italian import stores as well as some grocery stores, most likely in the deli department.

Salt

3 tablespoons olive oil

2 tablespoons unsalted butter

1 medium-size yellow onion, finely chopped

1 (¼-inch-thick) slice rolled pancetta, cut into 1 x ½-inch strips (can substitute 4-ounce package cubed pancetta)

1½ cups canned chopped or diced (not pureed) Italian tomatoes

½ small dried hot red pepper, seeded and finely chopped (can substitute a pinch of red pepper flakes)

1 pound frozen cavatelli

3 to 4 tablespoons freshly grated Romano cheese, plus additional for optional garnish

1. Bring 4 quarts of salted water to a boil in a large pot.
2. In the meantime, heat the oil and butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until pale gold, about 5 minutes. Add the pancetta and sauté for about 1 more minute.
3. Add the tomatoes, hot red pepper, and ½ teaspoon salt. Bring to a simmer and cook, uncovered, over medium heat. The sauce is done when the tomatoes and the cooking fats separate, about 15 minutes. Take off the heat, taste for salt, and set aside.
4. Drop the cavatelli into the boiling salted water. Cook according to package directions until al dente.
5. Drain the pasta and transfer to a bowl. Add the sauce and mix. Add 3 tablespoons cheese and mix again. Taste for salt and spiciness. If you like it somewhat sharper, add a little more cheese, but not so much as to overwhelm the other flavors. If desired, garnish with extra grated cheese.

Sauteed Brussels Sprouts with Garlic

4 servings

Brussels sprouts, high in vitamins A and C, are actually a member of the cabbage family. The smaller they are, the more tender. Look for bright green color and compact heads during their peak season, which runs from late August through March.

2 to 3 cups Brussels sprouts (about 1 pound)

¼ cup olive oil

2 teaspoons finely chopped garlic (2 medium-size cloves)

1 tablespoon chopped fresh thyme

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Pancetta or bacon, cooked and crumbled, for garnish, optional

1. Cut off the stems of the Brussels sprouts. Pull off any bruised outer leaves. Cut each Brussels sprout lengthwise in half with a sharp knife.
2. Heat the oil in a skillet. Add the Brussels sprouts and garlic. Sauté for about 5 to 10 minutes, or until the sprouts are slightly tender.
3. Remove from the heat and toss with the thyme and salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to a serving bowl and garnish, if desired, with crumbled pancetta.

