

CARLUCCIO'S WAY

Kasha Van Sant chats to Antonio Carluccio the don of Italian cookery about life and food

Antonio Carluccio has been a much-loved and familiar face on British television screens since 1984 and has dominated the cookery stacks of many a reputable bookseller. Warm and generous, he exudes a special charm that single handedly championed the cause of rustic Italian cuisine. But I soon discover that the engaging and exceedingly 'huggable' Mr Carluccio is a philosopher as well as a cook. Sitting in the foyer of the Lanesborough Hotel I see him walk through the doors, stand promptly in front of me to enquire if I am the young lady who has come to see him. I affirm that I am and we proceed to the breakfast room where a bacon sandwich and a pot of tea is produced. I sit amongst his PR and press representatives like a third 'Charlie's Angel' whilst he nibbles and chats away. We commence with his latest venture with the BBC.

You are promoting the Southern Italian Feast DVD. Tell me more.

It is not new material it is a series that was produced from 1991 – 7. I received the prize for the best series in the world and I was very happy with that! The BBC had never done anything as spectacular as that and it's a very nice programme. Above all, what is very interesting is that we focus on the southern region, we have done two series, one about the north and one about the south.

So you're very busy then?

Extremely busy. It's my work. I love it, so I do it. I should be coming into retirement, but retirement doesn't come into my brain because retirement is death! So living is wonderful and working in doing what one likes to do, is even better. That's the point.

People enjoy your food, how do you feel about that?

Well I am proud to have done something good, and some people say that my food is some of the best in the world. When you know Italian food as I know it, you take care of researching and I worked very hard for the BBC doing the films. Usually when you talk to a chef or a cook they don't take care of others.

If you had to choose a specific dish what would it be?

It would be the vegetables that are cooked in a certain way where you say 'goodbye' to meat and fish. They are really done with



imagination, not just boiled. Not over working them too much. That is the point. I am proud to make sure that for the last 50 years I could spread the gospel of Italian food in one way or another. Because I am not a chef, I am a cook, and I did it for at least 30 years in private, just poisoning friends!

I'm sure you weren't.

But taking them as guinea pigs! I was a wine merchant before and I knew restaurants were a lot of work. It is about the love and satisfaction. Not for the amount of money that we make. For me the business of love, taking care of the customers and creating wonderful recipes, and to make sure the customers were very happy.

So what is your favourite recipe?

I would say a good risotto with some truffle and then some fish and some vegetables. Something very simple. There is also a sort of chicory accompanied by a purée of broad beans and tomato, which are stirred and stirred until they become a purée with lovely olive oil and that's it. The combination of the two is amazing.

Do people get intimidated when they have to cook for you?

They say, 'oh how can I cook for you?' I say, 'look if you want to invite me and you are worried, just produce a piece of salami, a piece of cheese and a glass of wine', the rest is the company. But those please, those ingredients are the best.

As a boy did you think you would be a chef?

I wanted to be a diamond dealer! But frankly I would like to have been an anthropologist I like so much the discovery of what human beings are and what they are up to.

They fascinate you?

It also helps me to discover how I am. In fact my biography is more for discovering who I am, not mentioning the future.

I think biographies tend to do that, as part of a therapeutic process.

Yes! By my age you have a lot to tell.

What have you learnt about yourself so far?

You are what you are. And at a certain stage in life it comes out. And that is the best point to reach in life. Self realisation. You know what you are able to do and what you are not.

I enjoy watching your programmes and notice you are very humble.

You see I don't have protection. I learnt to deal with any sort of people from delinquents to ministers. And I discovered that everybody is the same. But a human being is a human being. We have human instincts whatever they are and that is interesting.

Antonio Carluccio's Southern Italian Feast £19.56

www.carluccios.com
www.lanesborough.com

