



## THE TASTE OF AUTUMN

Marina O'Loughlin meets the "pasta grannies" taking Instagram by storm, seasonal treats from Bruton's new wizard, Claridge's Manhattan superchef *Daniel Humm* and *Mary Berry's* kitchen secrets. Pages 37-71

**5**

### INDIA KNIGHT

How to do Christmas on your terms, guilt-free. If it means ripping up the family rule book, now's the time to do it



**7**

### JOSH GLANCY

We millennials blame the baby-boomers for all the ills of the world. Have we judged them too harshly?

**8**

### THE INTERVIEW: ANDY MURRAY

The comeback king of tennis talks to *James Palmer* about fitness, family and baby No 3



**12**

### I LEFT MY HUSBAND AND KIDS

A mother who walked out on her family to be with her true love writes about why all the trauma was worth it

**18**

### THE FALL OF THE WALL

Thirty years ago this week, people power toppled the Berlin Wall, transforming Europe. *Peter Millar* was there



**26**

### TOYBOYS AND TIARAS

Helena Bonham Carter tells *Krissi Murison* about playing "difficult, demanding" Princess Margaret in *The Crown*

## Life

### 72 RELATIVE VALUES

*Daisy May* and *Charlie Cooper*, the sibling stars of the BBC hit comedy *This Country*

### 74 TOUGH LOVE, MAN TROUBLE

*Emma Barnett* reassures a man worried that he's over-endowed. Why *Matt Rudd* runs only for fun



### 76 HOW IT FEELS TO ...

...rise from bin man to professor, by *Lee Elliot Major*

### 78 DRIVING

*Jeremy Clarkson* falls out of love with a hybrid Volvo

### 86 A LIFE IN THE DAY

*Sara Davies* from *Dragons' Den*



They've become a social media sensation, but Italy's pasta grannies have a mission — to keep traditional cookery alive. *Marina O'Loughlin* went to watch them in action

# Just like Nonna used to make

Photographs by Carlos Bevilacqua

I am not sure when I first came across the online sensation Pasta Grannies, but it was instant infatuation, the creaky Italian voices and soothing slap-slap of the pasta the perfect antidote to a world currently doing a strong impression of global self-harm. It's a pure thing, no snark or condescension. You know that ASMR phenomenon? Autonomous meridian sensory response, where people watch videos of whispers, or tapping, or pages being turned in books, said to cause a sensation frequently described as a "brain orgasm"? I think Pasta Grannies is mine: I could watch these women for lost minute after lost minute. The short vignettes feel almost like eavesdropping on lives.

Perhaps it's because I used to watch my mother making ravioli, putting aside whole days for the process, long sheets of dough spooling out of her little pasta machine, or helped her drape skeins of yellow tagliatelle to dry all over the kitchen, that I'm mesmerised by the Pasta Grannies. I'm not alone, though: more than 430,000 YouTube subscribers and 200,000 Instagram followers are hooked on mini films of old Italian women — the oldest, Letizia, is 100 — making the pasta dishes taught to them by their mothers and their own grandmothers.

Pasta Grannies, the concept, is the baby of Vicky Bennison, an

engaging former international development consultant with a shock of wild hair, more used to dealing with management unrest in Turkmenistan or amorous builders in Siberia than extended Italian family life. She started writing about food as an escape — a series of guides called *The Taste of a Place*, and as co-author of chef Jose Pizarro's first book.

After relocating to Italy's Le Marche region, and while writing about a wine-making family, she was invited into their home and presented with a multicourse feast that included "plump, ricotta-filled ravioli with a simple sauce made from warmed-through diced fresh tomatoes, shredded basil and grassy olive oil". Every dish was cooked by the family matriarch, grandmother Maria. The germ of an idea was born. The first official Pasta Granny was the grandmother of the manager of Bennison's local supermarket — another Maria, now aged 87.

The project mushroomed after being featured in *Business Insider* (the piece got nearly 60m views) and on YouTube's *Creator on the Rise* list, the latter prompting an upswing in the dubious joys of commenters: remarks about hairs on chins from a demographic not familiar with women untouched by severe filtering. Bennison says she wanted "to create a kind of Noah's Ark of pasta-making techniques". Her aim to "travel all

Clockwise from top left: **Betta, 84**, from Savio, on the Emilia-Romagna coast; **Betta and Fanina, 87**. Their friend **Lucia, 93**, rolls dough for strozzapreti; a seafood sauce with langoustines and prawns; **Romana, 85**, from Montegelli, makes tortelli; fresh tagliatelle; the finished strozzapreti; eggs for the tagliatelle dough

across Italy, meeting the brilliant women who ran households and cook for their families. I would collect their recipes, preserving the individual methods and regional differences so they wouldn't be lost to time." It's almost folk history — as someone pointed out to me on Twitter, a John Lomax for pasta. There's now a book, *Pasta Grannies*, which is my excuse to see if I can tag along for a glimpse of the magic.

Our destination is Bologna and its environs, a blessing to the food-obsessed — Bologna isn't known as "La Grassa" (the fat) for nothing. We set off with the videographer Andrea Savorani Neri and "granny finder" Livia de Giovanni. Livia tells me her sources are many: town councils, the festivals of food that occur in even the tiniest hamlets and word of mouth, from hotel receptionists to cafe owners. Every Italian thinks their grandmother's cooking is the best, so there's rarely any shortage. They're a sensational double act: Livia has an extraordinary talent for putting the women at ease, and handsome Andrea gently flirts with them. It's cheering to see that, even in your eighties, a spot of light flirting doesn't go amiss.

Our first visit is to 85-year-old Romana, in Montegelli. Home is in the working mill, Molino Pransani, in the family for generations, which specialises in heritage grains and is run by son Stefano. But, ➔





Left and below: **Marisa Tosi, 87, from Faenza, demonstrates how to make perfect ribbons of tagliatelle**

given tastes of it: Vicky and me teaspoons, Andrea virtually a shovelful. Briefly boiled in salty water, the square parcels are dressed in chopped tomatoes from the garden, basil and oil. The dish is ambrosial, I tell Romana. "Eh," she shakes her head, amused by my enthusiasm. She wonders if the Queen might see the video.

An argument breaks out between Livia and Andrea as to how cappelletti are made — "Squares of dough!" "No, circles!" Romana calmly twists off a tiny piece and in seconds has crafted a perfect dumpling. From a square, as it happens. Son-in-law Umberto tells me the difference between Emilia and Romagna is that the Romagnoli are more friendly and hospitable than their neighbours to the west. As more sangiovese bio is opened and piadine are stuffed with aged local prosciutto and milky, elastic squacquerone cheese, I believe him.

Next day, we pull up outside a building in the garden of another villa in Savio, a small village near Cervia, a region famous for its "sweet" salt. It looks like a garage, but is titled Taverna Gibo and is the family's separate entertaining kitchen. (I love this idea.) The low, beamed room is decorated with old agricultural equipment, perhaps from the ruined tobacco factory at the back of the house. The whole village seems to have turned out to watch 93-year-old Lucia Portolani and her "young" friends, Fanina (Ofelia Giunchedi, 87) and Betta (Elisabetta Saragoni, 84), make strozzapreti — priest-stranglers: fat, twisted snakelets of pasta dressed with a sauce of fish from the nearby sea, its ozoney tang

evident in the garden's air. Vicky laughs: "Sometimes there's an increasing crescendo of chaos. We just have to sit back and hope there's a film at the end of it."

Lucia started making pasta aged five, smacked by her mother if it wasn't up to her standards. She's initially reluctant to take centre stage but, after watching the others, insists on doing it her way. Queen Bee has arrived: hers is the right way, she says, adding parmesan to her dough to make it rich and supple — one of the only times I've seen Italians allowing fish and cheese together in pasta. It's fascinating to watch the women blossom and unfurl as the cameras hang on their every word.

Cuttlefish, then fat, pink prawns and langoustines and, finally, fingernail-sized clams are added to a shallow pan shimmering with oil and gently caramelising garlic. Meanwhile, good prosecco is popped open. I leave my glass unattended for a moment and it's upended into the fish sauce. "It's too salty," announces one female observer as we pile into the food, nose possibly out of joint at not having been invited to participate. God, it's good: the just-chewy squiggles of pasta, the sweet seafood, the honk of garlic, the brine. We say our goodbyes, refuse offers of the overproof rum that has now been plonked on the table and Betta leaves as she arrived, by bike. It's a Monday lunchtime.

**L**ess of a party at our next destination, a council-run social club in Borgo, a sleepy suburb of Faenza. The walls are papered with flyers for card tournaments, dances, self-defence classes and — this one makes me smile — a paella evening. One outlines why we're here: pasta-making classes, €50 for five evenings, where disappearing skills are taught, everything from the basic sfoglia to stuffed pasta, passatelli (my new favourite thing: pneumatic pici-like tubes of dough made with parmesan and breadcrumbs) and tight rings of cappelletti. The money goes straight back into funding the *centro sociale*.

Marisa Tosi, 87, tiny and intent, is teaching simple tagliatelle today, to be dunked into brodo at the end of the class. Students are

### HOW TO MAKE PASTA DOUGH

The correct methods for making egg pasta dough and durum wheat pasta are lengthy but straightforward. You can find them on The Sunday Times website at [thesundaytimes.co.uk/magazine](http://thesundaytimes.co.uk/magazine)

elegant in her knitted grey dress and statement necklace, her hair freshly done, Romana is cooking in her daughter Paola's house a few hundred yards away, set in gardens of quince and apples and cherries, the *orto* — vegetable patch — the source of much of what the family eats. She's making tortelli — the Romagnolo version of ravioli — stuffed with two kinds of formaggio di fossa, cheese aged in pits till it's properly, tongue-nippily piquant. She rolls out the sfoglia (dough sheet, the flour from their mill, of course) quickly and expertly, and stuffs it with a filling made from the pungent cheese, adding parmesan, ricotta and a final quick grating of lemon peel to lift the whole thing to another level of sheer deliciousness. We're





every age, from Italy and overseas. Lots of young blokes, too — “And they’re single!” Rosalba, Marisa’s pal, tells me. “They go out dancing after the class.” She says that it has to be the grandmothers who do the teaching as the mothers were the first generation too busy going out to work, resorting increasingly to ready-made pasta. So the boys go back from class and cook for their mamas? Rosalba cackles, creasing up at the idea. Students file out, carrying the floury golden tangles of tagliatelle in crimped cardboard trays, knowledge passed to a new generation.

What stays with me most about all of this is not, surprisingly, the food — ravishing though it is — but the women. Indomitable, funny, quietly in charge. I find myself experiencing a strange, unsettling emotion in their company and can’t at first put my finger on what it is. Eventually I recognise it as envy: envy for the calm and continuity of their lives, untouched by the garbage that clogs up my jittery urban mind, envy for the lives they lead, filled with love and warmth and wonderful food pulled from the ground nearby. The fluent, elegant way they wield their super-long rolling pins (or *mattarelli*), born of decades of practice, their warmth as they invite us to “*fare un buon pranzo*” when the cooking is finished, their hospitality to this bunch of nosy strangers who have invaded their homes. I feel privileged to be allowed to be a part of it, even briefly.

They’d think I was being ridiculous: preparing and cooking these dishes is just business as usual for them. Romana makes lunch every day for her family, her son taking a break from the mill. During filming, I worry to her that this must be a lot of work. She dismisses me: “I’m used to it.” Some have gone on to repeat the experience or, like Velia, 87, and her cappelletti, to appear on Italian TV. But then, having had enough of the limelight, they go back to doing what they’ve always done, being who they’ve always been. Inspirational.

At one point, the photographer says to Betta in true snapper fashion, “Smile! You’re beautiful!” “We’re beautiful,” she scoffs, “because we’re still alive.” And how, Signora. And how.

**USEFUL PASTA-MAKING TOOLS**

**Digital scale**

It makes life much easier, says Vicky Bannison, and you can be more precise

**Bench scraper**

Our nanna often had wonderful cast-iron ones, called *raschiotti*, that were made by their local blacksmith. Alas, they are not produced any more and you will have to search the antique markets to find a genuine one

**Large, straight-bladed knife**

For chopping the *sfoglia*

**Ordinary cutlery knife**

With a serrated edge, for making *orecchiette*

**Grooved wooden paddle**

For making *cavatelli*

**Ferro**

A square-sided 30cm iron or wooden rod for making *maccheroni*.

Originally, *ginesta* twig or reeds were used, then umbrella spokes.

Square sides (as opposed to the smooth sides of, say, a knitting needle) help prevent the dough from sticking to the rod

**Recipes from**

**Pasta Grannies: The Secrets of Italy’s Best Home Cooks by Vicky Bannison (Hardie Grant £20)**



**Pasqualina and Maria’s tagliatelle with tomato and anchovy sauce**

**SERVES**  
5-6 people

**INGREDIENTS**  
*For the pasta*  
500g finely ground semolina flour

*For the sauce*  
50ml extra-virgin olive oil  
2 cloves of garlic, left whole  
1 dried chilli pepper, left whole  
1 tbsp chopped parsley  
60g anchovies, drained weight  
A glass of white wine  
400g tin of whole tomatoes  
500g tomato passata  
25g fresh basil leaves

*For the dressing*  
Olive oil  
100g breadcrumbs  
50g finely chopped walnuts  
2 tbsp chopped parsley

01 Make the pasta dough with 250ml water, as described online

(see opposite). While it rests, make the sauce.

02 Warm the oil in a sauté pan over a moderate heat and add the whole garlic cloves, chilli pepper, parsley and anchovies. Let these ingredients get to know each other over the next 5 minutes so that the anchovies dissolve and you have a mush at the bottom of your pan. Splash in the wine and let it evaporate — the fumes should cease to smell alcoholic.

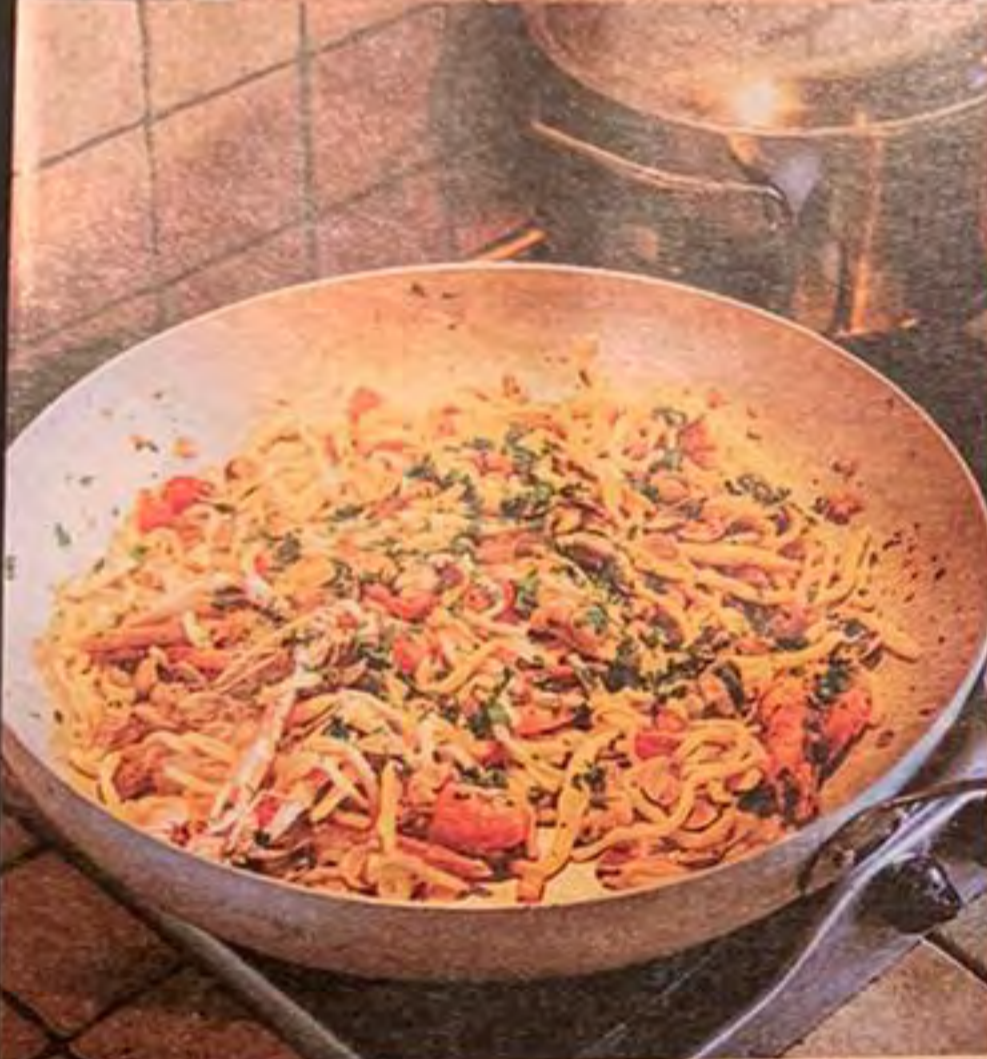
03 Stir in the tinned tomatoes and passata. Add the whole basil leaves. Taste, and season if you think the sauce needs salt. Leave it to reduce for 10 minutes or so.

04 To make the dressing, take a large frying pan, add a small puddle of olive oil and heat it over a high heat for a couple of minutes until it starts to shimmer.

05 Add the breadcrumbs and fry them, stirring constantly, until they turn crunchy and golden. This will probably take longer than you think it should.

06 Shovel everything into a shallow bowl — the crumbs will cool quicker — and, once cold, mix in the walnuts and parsley. ➔➔







**VICKY  
BENNISON'S  
PASTA  
NOTES**

How much should I allow for a serving?

For egg pasta the rule of thumb is one egg and 100g flour per person, for a generous main-course portion. When it comes to ravioli and other filled pasta, estimate 150g of the finished pasta per person. For pasta made with semolina flour and water, again allow 100g flour per person for a main course

Can I use shop-bought dried pasta instead with these recipes?

Yes, of course. But remember dried pasta is always made with semolina flour, so if you're swapping it in a recipe that calls for egg pasta, it will give the dish a different mouth-feel. Most of us don't worry about this but, as an aside, do try, just once, to make lasagna with homemade pasta not the ready-to-cook sheets — it is so much nicer.

Dried pasta is not necessarily an inferior product to fresh pasta — the key is to find good-quality dried pasta, and price is a good indicator (unless the packaging is very fancy). Look for the words "extruded through bronze dies" and "dried at low temperatures"



**07** To make the pasta, roll out the dough so it's about 1mm-2mm thick; be consistent, so the pasta strands all cook evenly. The fastest and prettiest method is to take a pastry cutter (for a frilled edge) and cut 1cm wide ribbons.

**08** Bring water to the boil in a large saucepan, add a couple of teaspoons of salt, and return the water to the boil. Add the pasta all at once, give it a stir, and cook for a couple of minutes. Nibble a strand to test, then drain.

**09** Remove the garlic cloves, chilli and basil from the sauce. In a large serving bowl, layer the ingredients: breadcrumb dressing, pasta and sauce, repeating as necessary. Eat immediately.

## Claudia's tortelli d'erbetta

**SERVES**  
4 people

**INGREDIENTS**

*For the pasta*  
400g 00 flour  
4 eggs  
Semolina flour, for dusting

*For the filling*  
170g Swiss chard leaves, stems removed  
550g ricotta, drained weight  
60g parmigiano reggiano, grated  
¼ nutmeg, freshly grated

*To serve*  
50g unsalted butter  
50g parmigiano reggiano, grated

**01** Make the pasta dough as described online (see panel on page 46). Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil and cook the Swiss chard leaves for 3-4 minutes until wilted, then scoop them out into a sieve and rinse under cold water. Squeeze out as much excess water as possible; you should be left with about 150g cooked greens. Chop the chard quite finely.

**02** In a large mixing bowl, combine the chopped chard leaves, ricotta and parmesan. Grate in plenty of nutmeg and season to taste. ➔



**VICKY BENNISON'S PASTA NOTES**

What's the best way to cook pasta?

It doesn't make any difference whether you add the salt to cold water or to boiling, but with the latter you must ensure the water returns to the boil before adding your pasta. Use non-iodised, coarse sea salt and allow a generous tablespoon for 4 litres water, or 10g per litre, but I'm not sure most folk go to the trouble of measuring it like this. You do not need to add oil — it's an expensive ingredient that you don't want to pour down the sink. And it doesn't stop pasta from sticking; stir the pasta gently instead

How do you know when it's done?

Nibble a piece; how long it takes to cook will depend on the size you've made your pasta shapes. Once the water has returned to the boil, allow 2-3 minutes for ribbon pasta such as tagliatelle (less if it's extra thin like tagliolini), and 4-5 minutes for filled pasta. For semolina pasta, expect to cook it for at least 5 minutes. Some cooks like to add a little of the pasta cooking water to make the finished dish more "saucey". This is a matter of judgment — it is by no means routine in the kitchens I have visited

**03** Divide the dough into quarters and roll one piece into a long strip about 10cm wide, dusting with semolina flour to prevent it sticking. Cover the pieces of dough you are not using to prevent them drying out.

**04** Dot walnut-sized spoonfuls of the filling in a line down one long edge of each strip, roughly 2cm from the edge, leaving about 5cm between them. Fold each strip over lengthways to cover the fillings and line up the edges.

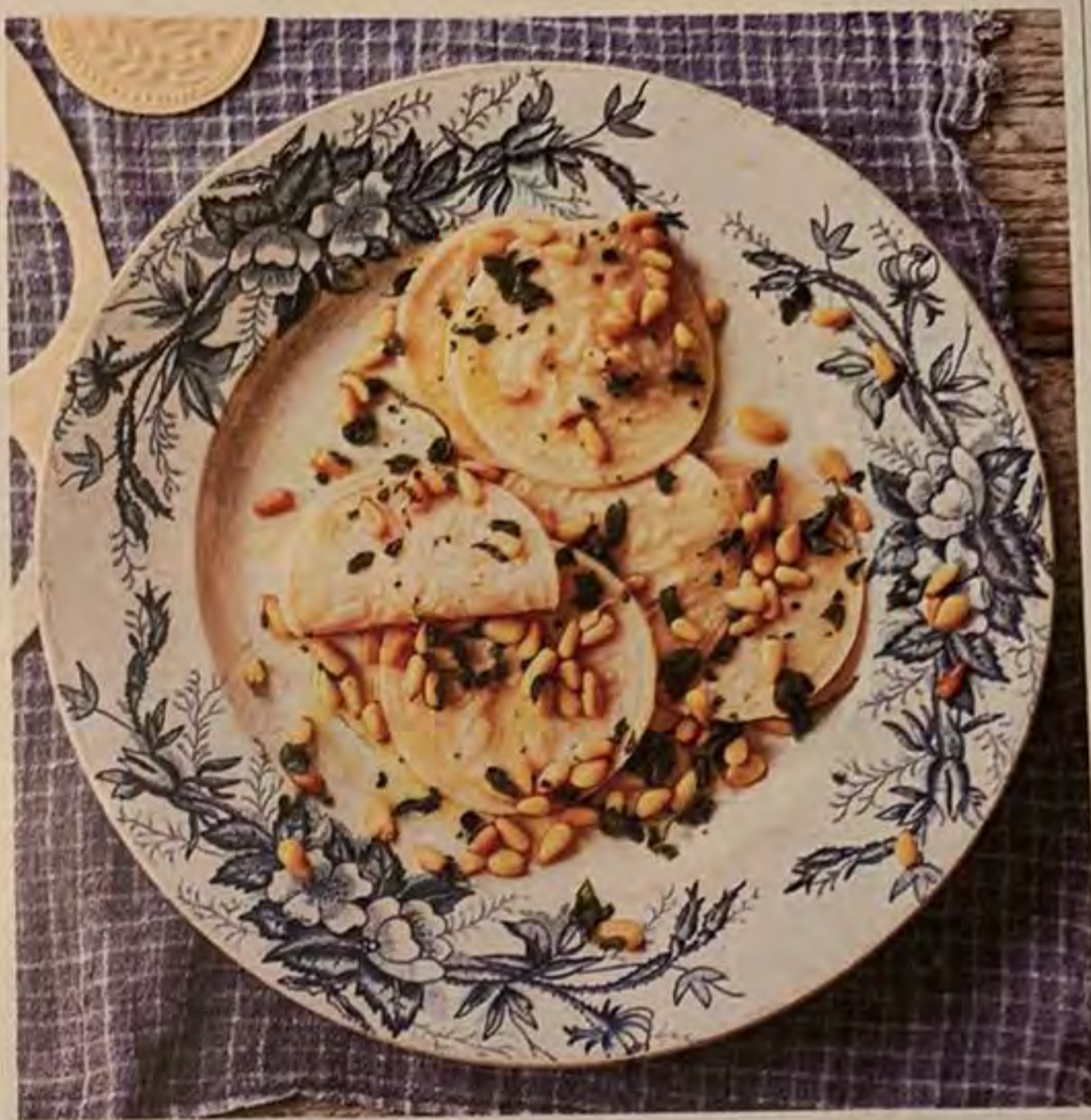
**05** Working from the middle outwards, use your hands to press the pasta down carefully around each bit of filling to seal it, making sure to push out any trapped air. Using a knife or a pasta cutter, trim the top (unfolded) edge and two sides around each bit of filling, leaving a border of dough (a scant 1cm) around each one. Repeat these steps until you've used up all the filling. If you have any leftover scraps of pasta, keep them to use in soups.

**06** Bring a large pot of salted water to a simmer and cook the tortelli for about 5 minutes — they will float to the surface and puff up slightly. You may need to do this in batches.

**07** While they're cooking, melt the butter in a sauté pan. Use a slotted spoon to lift the cooked tortelli from the water and into the pan with the butter, swirling them gently so that the butter and pasta water start to emulsify. Plate them up with spoonfuls of butter, and scatter over generous amounts of parmigiano reggiano.

## Franco and Alessandra's corzetti with fresh marjoram

Corzetti are typical of Liguria. The stamps and the resulting pasta have been in existence since the Renaissance, when the aristocracy had their coat of arms engraved on them. If you don't have a stamp, you can use a small glass or biscuit cutter — the discs won't look as pretty but they will taste the same.



**SERVES**  
6 people

**INGREDIENTS**

*For the pasta*  
600g 0 flour or plain flour  
5 egg yolks, beaten  
150ml dry white wine (enough to bring the dough together)

*For the dressing*  
100ml Ligurian extra-virgin olive oil or other grassy-tasting olive oil  
120g Italian pine nuts  
25g fresh marjoram leaves  
2 cloves of garlic, left whole

**01** Tip the flour onto a pasta board or into a bowl and make a well in the middle. Add the beaten egg yolks. Use a fork to mix the flour into the eggs and then gradually pour in the wine. Bring the dough together, dapping up any stray bits of flour.

**02** Knead until it is smooth and silky. This will take about 10 minutes. Cover the dough with a tea towel (or put it in a lidded bowl) and leave it to rest for at least 15 minutes.

**03** Keeping the board, rolling pin and dough well floured, roll out

the dough until it is about the same thickness as a foil-wrapped chocolate coin, roughly 3mm.

**04** If you have a stamp, use the cup end of the cylinder block to stamp out the circles in the dough with a twisting motion — it's the same as cutting scone or biscuit dough. Then place the disc on the engraved end of the block and press down with the handle. The result will be a double-sided embossed corzetto. Repeat until you have used all the dough.

**05** Bring a large pan of water to a rolling boil, add a teaspoon of salt, return the water to the boil and shovel in the pasta. Cook for 4 minutes, until the pasta tastes cooked and feels firm and not soggy to bite. Drain.

**06** While the pasta is cooking, warm the oil in a small pan and add the pine nuts, fresh marjoram and whole garlic cloves. Leave them to bathe in gentle bubbles for 4 minutes. Keep a close eye on the pan, as you don't want the pine nuts to burn, but they can turn a little golden.

**07** Remove the garlic cloves and pour the dressing over the pasta. Eat immediately ■