

## Zuppe: Soups From the Kitchen of the American Academy in Rome

(March 30, 2012)

i-italy.org



As I remove the dark outer leaves of 4 medium size artichokes and try to follow at my best ability the recipe for Minestra Verdissima (Very Green Spring Vegetable Soup) I focus on what Mona Talbott writes in her latest cookbook Zuppe: Soups From the Kitchen of the American Academy in Rome <>

r />

“Minestra

Verdissima is a promise of the greatly anticipated Roman spring. The added effort that goes into making this soup – shelling peas, peeling favas and cleaning artichokes – rewards you with a bowl of vital spring,” she writes... I feel that spring is coming and I open the windows to let the breeze of the last day of march get into my New York apartment. This book, its recipes and Annie Schlechter's mouth watering pictures make me day-dream. “My favorite season in Rome is spring. I love the delicacy of the peas and favas and the new wild greens,” Mona Talbott herself told me.

Zuppe is the second in a series of small hardcover cookbooks (Biscotti is the first), each on a single subject, which bring together favorite dishes served at the American Academy in Rome's communal table. Each features an essential subject in the repertoire of the RSFP's eco-gastronomic vision. Proceeds from the sale of Zuppe support the Rome Sustainable Food Project of the American Academy in Rome.

The American Academy in Rome is a private institution supported by donations from individuals, foundations and corporations, and the membership of colleges, universities, arts and cultural organizations, as well as by grants from the National Endowment for the Arts, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the United States Department of Education. Founded in 1894, it “is a center for independent study and advanced research in the arts and humanities. For more than 116 years the Academy has offered support, time and an inspiring environment to some of America's most gifted artists and scholars. Each year, through a national juried competition, the Academy offers up to thirty Rome Prize fellowships in architecture, design, historic preservation and conservation, landscape architecture, literature, musical composition, visual arts, and in humanistic approaches to ancient studies, medieval studies, Renaissance and early modern studies, and modern Italian studies.”

The Rome Sustainable Food Project is a program “devoted to providing organic, local and sustainable meals for the

community of the American Academy in Rome, has launched a delicious revolution to rethink institutional dining. Headed by chef Mona Talbott, a Chez Panisse alum, and guided by Alice Waters, the menus have given rise to a new, authentic cuisine, inspired by la cucina romana, Chez Panisse and those working in the AAR kitchen.”

“The delicious soups in this book have nourished us here at the American Academy in Rome for over five years, serving often as the opening of wide-ranging conversations. Somehow Mona Talbott has accomplished the most difficult of feats: creating dishes that, though they offer a sense of being “at home,” never lack a sense of culinary innovation and excitement. Local ingredients, seasonal approaches, and no unnecessary additives: all add up to a book in which the reader will find a soup for every season. I hope you enjoy these soups as much as we have done. The Rome Sustainable Food Project, under the direction of Mona Talbott, has changed our lives for the better at the American Academy in Rome, and we are delighted to share the results with you. Buon appetito!” Christopher Celenza, the current director of the American Academy in Rome, wrote.

The book is divided into the four seasons, “beginning with autumn, to reflect how each year at the Academy begins every September with the arrival of the new class of Fellows. The recipes are grouped according to the Roman seasons, although many vegetables cross over from summer to fall and winter to spring. Our soups depend on the delicious flavor of seasonal vegetables, and are full of beans, greens and grains – ingredients that are the foundation of a traditional Mediterranean diet. These fifty recipes can be made in large or small quantities and can be set aside to be re-heated in haste. Wholesome, egalitarian and economical, soup is the perfect food for our modern lives,” the author writes in her introduction.

“The recipes that are selected to be in the book were chosen because they represented the kinds of soups we made on a daily basis at the AAR. The recipes are mostly simple to prepare and depend on the quality of ingredients. We only have a few special occasion soups that take hours to prepare. The daily soup is simple and show the best of roman cooking and agriculture,” she answers to my question on how she picked the recipes that ended up in the book. The fifty recipes featured in the book draw from the four traditional categories of Italian soups: those made with water (aqua cotta), with stock (brodo), with cream (veloute), and soups for the evening meal.

Why soup? “Soup is the defining dish of the AAR kitchen. It is a humble and nourishing dish that feeds many people economically. And it requires a level of engagement. One must lift the lid of the soup pot and look inside to see what deliciousness is forthcoming. It isn't as sexy or eye catching as a plate of pasta.”

Pasta will be the focus of Mona's next book. “It is such an important part of the the daily kitchen of the AAR and the iconic dish of Italian food culture. We serve so many variations based on seasonal ingredients and always with a mind to the fact we are feeding the same group of people day in and day out. We try and keep the food healthy and balanced,” she reveals.

Zuppe: Soups From the Kitchen of the American Academy in Rome will be on sale starting April 3. It features 50 recipes by Mona Talbott and photographs by Annie Schlechter.