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## FOOD & DRINK

# The Pastas You've Been Missing Out On...And Where to Find Them

Straight out of Italy, pastas previously unknown to American diners offer a taste of authentic regional cooking. Venture beyond the same old spaghetti with our guide to noodle shapes trending now



EXTRA-VIRGIN TERRITORY A new world of pasta shapes awaits at restaurants and markets around the country. PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, FOOD STYLING BY BRETT KURZWEIL

By Marc Reynolds aka "The Ridemaster"

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**NINE YEARS AGO**, Los Angeles chef Evan Funke was eating lunch in a medieval village in Umbria when he peered inside the restaurant's kitchen to see an elderly woman tossing fragments of leftover bread dough into boiling water. She called the pasta *strappatelle* (from *strappare*, "to tear"). The pillowy dumplings were served in a simple tomato sauce for a staff meal. "When I went back five years later, the woman had died, without recording it in any way," Mr. Funke recalled. "So, I became the custodian of this shape."

Today, Mr. Funke serves *strappatelle* as an off-menu delicacy at Felix Trattoria in Venice Beach, Calif. Since studying the art of handmade pasta a decade ago in Bologna, Mr. Funke has made regular trips back to Italy, talking his way into kitchens to collect and catalogue shapes before they disappear. In addition to familiar shapes like *tagliatelle* and *rigatoni*, Felix's *sfoglioni*, or pasta makers, craft uncommon ones, too, such as *strangolapreti*, a hand-twisted pasta from Trentino Alto Adige, and *lorighittas*, a braided ring from Sardinia.

Italy is home to hundreds of distinct pasta shapes, often specific to a region or even a single town. Only a few have traditionally dominated the pasta landscape stateside, but now American chefs are branching out, presenting a novel profusion of frills, twists and curves on restaurant menus.

Like Mr. Funke, Fabio Trabocchi, an Italian-born chef with a number of restaurants in Washington, D.C., felt compelled to do his part in preserving tradition. In 2016, he sought out one of Italy's best living hand-rolled pasta makers, Simonetta Capotondo, to train his team at Sfoglia Pasta House, where all pasta is made by hand. The bustling trattoria showcases esoterica like *scarpinocc*, a filled pasta from Lombardia modeled after wooden clogs, and *cresc' tajat*, a diamond-shape pasta from the Marche region.

Regional Italian restaurants have a relatively short history in the U.S. When Marc Vetri opened Vetri Cucina in Philadelphia, in 1998, only a handful of kitchens made food informed by a deep study of the place-based foodways of Italy—notably, Valentino in Los Angeles, Felidia in New York and Chicago's Spiaggia. Most others served Italian-American dishes of the red-sauce variety or the vaguely Tuscan "northern Italian" fare that became trendy in the 1980s. Mr. Vetri, fresh off a year and a half cooking in Italy, toted back shapes such as *casoncelli*, a stuffed pasta from Bergamo, and *pici*, a hand-rolled Tuscan noodle, for his opening menu.

Since then, the number of restaurants offering faithful representations of Italy's cuisines has surged. Aspiring chefs travel to and work in Italy; for those that stay stateside, YouTube and Instagram offer inspiration. Books such as "The Encyclopedia of Pasta," translated from the Italian in 2009, "The Geometry of Pasta" (2010) and Mr. Vetri's "Mastering Pasta" (2015) further stoked imaginations.

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 FORM & FUNCTION
 

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PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

## Clockwise from left:

- CROXETTI: Also called corzetti, this Ligurian shape dates back to the Middle Ages. The name likely comes from “corzetto,” a 14th-century Genoan coin. At Misi, in Brooklyn, Missy Robbins serves it with Italian broccoli, pine nuts and mint. (*Alta Valle Scrivia croxetti*, \$5 for 17.6 ounces, [eataly.com](http://eataly.com))
- TROFIE: Once made with potato or chestnut flour, this Ligurian shape is produced from durum wheat flour today. Typically served with pesto. (*Rustichella D’Abruzzo trofie*, \$12 for 8.8 ounces, [amazon.com](http://amazon.com))
- CRESTE DI GALLO: This coxcorn shape hails from the Marche region. At Vic’s in New York, Hillary Sterling serves it with a braised-pork sauce. (*Della Terra creste di gallo*, \$7 for 12 ounces, [dellaterrapasta.com](http://dellaterrapasta.com))
- VESUVIO: A specialty of Gragnano, south of Naples, made to resemble nearby Mt. Vesuvius. At Eataly, they suggest serving it with a tomato-pork ragù. (*Il Pastaio di Gragnano vesuvio*, \$8 for 17.6 ounces, [eataly.com](http://eataly.com))

y should be hiring someone to do it,” Mr. Andiario said. “But I love it. It’s an obsession I’ve learned to live with.” His repertoire includes *caombas*, a Sardinian pasta which resembles a dove, and *nicchi*, a pyramidal shape from Tuscany traditionally filled with breadcrumbs and Pecorino.

At Flour + Water, in San Francisco, Thomas McNaughton serves such a diversity of shapes, the restaurant created an internal encyclopedia now numbering 178 entries. *Cappellacci dei briganti*, modeled on the cone-shaped hats worn by outlaws who roamed the south of Italy in the 19th century, goes best with wintry meat sauces. *Stradette*, cornmeal noodles, are perfect for a ragù of spring leek and fava bean.

Authenticity isn’t the only goal. “The historical stuff used to be much more important to me, but now it’s just that I think a shape is cool and it’s going to hold the sauce well,” said chef Missy Robbins. For her restaurant Lilia, Ms. Robbins dug up an obscure shape called *mafaldini*, like ribbons of pappardelle with frilly edges, to carry a sauce of Parmesan and crushed pink

Anthony Andiario has spent 20 years studying the craft. At his West Chester, Penn., restaurant, Andiario, he hand forms every piece himself and shares his creations with 62,000 Instagram followers. “I realistically

## GEOMETRY LESSON



PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

## Clockwise from left:

- **MAFALDE:** Also called mafaldine, this pasta was named in honor of Princess Mafalda of Savoy. Traditionally served with light sauces that cling to its ruffles. (*Afeltra mafalde, \$8 for 17.6 ounces, eataly.com*)
- **RADIATORE:** This shape was inspired by heating fixtures. Thin, creamy sauces nestle between its fins. (*Garofalo radiatore, \$20 for 2 x 16-ounces, amazon.com*)
- **ZUCCA:** The name translates as “pumpkin.” Great at capturing a creamy sauce, or one with finely chopped vegetables. (*Sfoglino zucca, \$6 for 16 ounces, sfoglino.com*)
- **CASARECCE:** A Sicilian pasta originally made by rolling dough rectangles around a metal rod. Traditional with seafood sauces, especially swordfish. (*Whole Foods Market organic casarecce, \$2 for 16 ounces, amazon.com*)

peppercorns. At Lilia’s pasta-focused sibling, Misi, she has branched out to shapes such as *corzetti* (stamped coins) and *malloreddus* (a Sardinian version of gnocchi).



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“From a business standpoint, in New York, there’s so many Italian restaurants, we needed to differentiate ourselves,” said chef Angie Rito of Don Angie in the West Village. When she opened in 2018, she was determined to put a new spin on Italian-American cuisine. Her pasta dishes reflect this: a plate of *culurgiones*, a braided purse shape from Sardinia, repurposed with flavors of Polish pierogies; mussel-shaped *sopressini* infused with smoky pimentón, served with smoked mussels.

For pasta-mad chefs, shape ambitions are limited only by the skill and time required to execute them. Sarah Grueneberg, who makes pasta to order at Monteverde Restaurant & Pastificio in Chicago, longs to serve *capunti*, a shape resembling an open peapod that she learned on a visit to Puglia—but doesn’t think it’s possible at a restaurant serving some 200 diners a night. “There’s nothing worse than trying to execute a shape that needs more time than you can give it,” she said.

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 GOOD SHAPES
 

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PHOTO: F. MARTIN RAMIN/THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

### Clockwise from top left:

- **FUSILLI COL BUCO:** Neapolitan housewives once made this pasta by wrapping hollow bucatini around a knitting needle. Serve dressed with olive oil or a simple tomato sauce. (Rigorosa fusilli col buco, \$8 for 17.6 ounces, *Eataly locations*)
- **MALLOREDDUS:** Sardinians traditionally color this shape with saffron. Classic pairings: a hearty meat sauce or a simple tomato sauce with basil. (La Casa del Grano malloreddus, \$7 for 17.6 ounces, *eataly.com*)
- **LUMACONI:** The name translates to “big snails.” Especially common in the south of Italy, served with meat ragù or stuffed with cheese and baked. (Pastificio Di Martino lumaconi, \$2 for 16 ounces, *Whole Foods locations*)
- **FOGLIE D'ULIVO:** This shape is modeled after olive leaves. Evan Funke likes to serve it with rapini pesto. (Pastificio Pisani & Pasta foglie d'ulivo, \$4 for 17.6 ounces, *eataly.com*)

Home cooks will relate. Fortunately, a new diversity of dried pastas coming to market means that cooking with fanciful shapes doesn't require making your own. Brooklyn-born artisan brand Sfoglini, which started out in 2012 making dried pastas for restaurants, now distributes to grocery stores nationally. Five years ago Pastificio di Martino, which has made dried pasta in Gragnano, Italy, since 1912, began exporting dozens of shapes to the U.S. Buoyed by demand, this summer they will open a pasta bar in New York that stocks all 120 shapes they produce.

Eataly, the Italian marketplace with six locations in the U.S. and counting, has played a major role in the increase in imported dried pasta since crossing the Atlantic in 2010. Its stores here now sell a whopping 500 pasta products between them, across 100 brands, in addition to a fresh-pasta case featuring shapes made in house. These days, consumers would expect nothing less.

## Noodle Around

### Pasta Destinations Across the Country

#### Vetri

A Philly tasting-menu destination since 1998 with a focus on northern-Italian pastas. Now open: a Las Vegas location too. (1312 Spruce St., Philadelphia, [vetricucina.com](http://vetricucina.com))

#### Flour + Water

Since this rustic pizza-and-pasta restaurant opened in 2009, chef Thomas McNaughton has served over 100 pasta shapes. (2401 Harrison St., San Francisco, [flourandwater.com](http://flourandwater.com))

#### Andiario

Anthony Andiario makes all the pasta daily for his intimate 34-seat restaurant. (106 W. Gay St., West Chester, Penn., [andiario.com](http://andiario.com))

#### Felix Trattoria



Trofie at Felix Trattoria. PHOTO: FELIX TRATTORIA

At Evan Funke's ode to the art of pasta, diners watch as sheets of dough are rolled by hand in a glass-walled pasta room. (*1023 Abbot Kinney Blvd., Venice, Calif., felixla.com*)

## Sfoglina

Fabio Trabocchi imported Italian expert Simonetta Capotondo to train the pasta makers at his relaxed trattorias in D.C. (*Multiple locations, sfoglinadc.com*)

## Monteverde Restaurant & Pastificio

Bustling spot where the cooks roll, fill and shape pasta to order. (*1020 W. Madison St., Chicago, monteverdechicago.com*)

## Don Angie

Chef Angie Rito puts creative twists on Italian-American fare, pairing pastas like soppressini and caramelle with novel flavors like persimmon and pimentón. (*103 Greenwich Ave., New York, donangie.com*)

## Misi

Pastas make up half the menu here, including uncommon shapes like malloreddus and corzetti. (*329 Kent Ave., Brooklyn, misinewyork.com*)

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