



Get ready, set ... GO!

Welcome back, dear olive oil friends, and yes - it's that time of the year again. You know, the one when nature's gifts are magically transformed into olive oil. Magically but not effortlessly, alas! It's going to be the usual madhouse around here in a few weeks' time, but frankly who cares? Nature's magic is bound to be a little messy. And come December, when the olives will have been picked, turned into green gold and bottled, we'll have a double reason to celebrate: **the new oil and Pornanino turning 30!** Wow, three decades are a lot, and the best is yet to come. **Happy birthday Pornanino!**



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Want to watch our olives grow? Look us up on Google Earth!
Search "Pornanino" or put our Coordinates: N 43° 27.226', E 11° 20.658'

We'd love to hear from you! Here's our email address oliveoil@chiantionline.com

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Pornanino's olive grove diary

Happy birthday Pornanino! It all started back in December 1989 with the first harvest at Pornanino...



Once upon a time there was a man who had been working abroad most of his life, overseeing major construction projects in faraway places such as Libya and Algeria, as well as all over his native Italy.

Then came a point in his career when all this moving around rather lost its appeal. It would have been nice to go back home and settle down, he thought, and his wife rather agreed. There was a problem, though – after so much wandering, no particular place felt like “home” anymore.

Back to Italy, they were invited to visit some cousins who had just relocated to Chianti, which

was not quite as fashionable yet but just as charming. And they were hooked. He resigned, they scouted for a suitable property and soon enough settled down in Tuscany. Home, now, was a place called Pornanino.

Sounds like a fairy tale, right? It wasn't quite, though. Because what they had bought was a dilapidated, sprawling 96 acre estate in the middle of nowhere and in urgent need of care. Franco (you had guessed we were talking about him, hadn't you) needn't fear that he would get bored! He definitely didn't. Once the main stone house had been rebuilt (much to wife Lia's relief), he embraced country life with a vengeance – and all the enthusiastic zeal of the city-born.

Chianti was always infamous for its stony, dry, unproductive soil where only grapes and olives could be grown. Given that wine-making is not for the amateur, Franco uprooted the straggling vineyards and replaced them with thousands of olive trees. Then he set out to teach himself as much as possible about olive groves, olive oil and the making of it. Oh, and in his spare time he restored another couple of stone outbuildings, dug out a swimming pool and attempted to start a model vegetable garden that never quite took off – too many stones, not to mention greedy wildboar and deer.

Anyway, the picture above was taken on the occasion of the first harvest, in December 1989. It was a turning point. Franco fell in love with olive oil, and soon turned what had been a quirky pastime into a small-scale business. Love morphed into obsession, prompting him to build his own in-house mill so as to make sure that each and every step of the oil making process was under his own personal supervision – he actually did it all himself, tending the olive groves, picking the olives, pressing them, bottling the oil...

Then son-in-law Matteo joined in, a reformed computer programmer who gave up city life to embrace the joys of riding a red tractor up and down the Chianti slopes. All in the name of olive oil. 30 years on, many things have changed at Pornanino. Life flows on. Yet nothing has really changed – olive oil making is as old as the world and we are still going about it as tradition demands. By hand. With the deepest love and respect. ♦

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A pressing business

It's a commonly held belief that all it takes to make olive oil is pressing the olives. Which is basically true, except that it's a little bit more complicated than that. Even without taking into account the "improvements" brought on by industrial technology.

Do you ever wonder how on earth do the bright ideas that shape the course of mankind ever spring up in somebody's mind? More to the point, who could have realized that the bitter little fruit of the



olive tree, though inedible as is, could be squeezed and the resultant liquid, once refined, could be put to a hundred uses. Not very straightforward, is it? Yet somebody must have come up with it, and pretty early on to boot. Did a clumsy forebear stumble and crash to the ground right under an olive tree? Or was it a florid archaic matron who happened to lower her powerful derriere onto a little mound of olives? However bright that seminal idea might be, though, it's a fact that tradition should not be followed blindly, or we'd be stuck forever in the same narrow rut. According to the Bible, the ancient Hebrews squeezed the berries with their hands during the exodus from Egypt, more than a thousand years before Christ. This might have been practical while traveling, but hardly efficient. No wonder the precious few drops of oil were reserved for ceremonial use, and jealously guarded by priests.

Olive oil, it was soon discovered, was far too versatile for its use to be restricted. People bent their minds to the task of improving on the handsqueezing technique, and came up with the heavy grinding millstones that have been in use for over 3,000 years. Thanks to them, olive oil soon became one of the ancient world's major commodities. Greek merchants traded it across the Mediterranean, spanning from the Black Sea to North Africa and Spain. Each city had its own distinctive jars, which served as a kind of "label" or provenance guarantee, and barbarian tribes were scornfully pitied as people who didn't know olive oil. The uncouth barbarians were indeed missing something. It has been calculated that an Athenian adult who frequented the baths was likely to consume up to 55 liters of olive oil a year - 30 l went for personal hygiene, 20 l for food preparation, 3 l for lighting, 2 l for worship and 0.5 l for medicinal use).

But there is more to making olive oil than the grinding of the fruit. When the berries have been mashed, the oil has to be extracted from them, which was initially made by pressing down hard with heavy wooden planks. This was obviously a bit crude, considering that olives only contain between 18 and 27% of their weight in oil. The next improvement was to spread out the olive paste onto mats which could be more efficiently pressed. Since even mechanical presses had their limits, at the time it was indeed customary to press the olive paste more than once, hence the origin of outdated terms like "first pressed" which no longer apply to present day olive oil. And as for separating the water from the oil, which is the third step in the process, the liquid derived from pressing was left to decant in large vats until the dregs fell to the bottom and the oil rose to the surface. Then it was skimmed with large shallow wooden spoons. The oil was stored in huge earthenware jars which could sometimes hold hundreds of kilos each. This is how things were done for a very long time, and basically this is how they are still done today by a small legion of artisans (such as us) who have kept the tradition alive. But there were some serious flaws in the old way of doing things that just screamed out to be corrected. Some of the solutions devised along the way proved to be huge gaping pitfalls paving the way for commercial exploiting.

And if you want to know which is which, and what happens next, you'll have to wait until next issue. Stay tuned! Oh, and don't forget to order your own little taste of history ...! ♦

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Bottling time!

It's bottling time indeed, in more ways than just our own! With Christmas approaching, why don't you do your own thing and give out olive oil preserves this year? Cost-effective, healthy, tasty AND flavored with lots of TLC: it's the one gift no-one could ever resist!



Christmas presents are always tricky, granted, but this year the prospect is doubly daunting, what with the downturn and general soberness. It feels somehow out of place to splurge on useless gadgets and frivolities, and frankly most of us would rather not throw away hard-earned money right now. Yet, heck, we're all entitled to cheer and celebrate in spite of the doom-sayers! Of course you know what I'm going to suggest. We always remind you that Pornanino Olive Oil presents are the perfect choice – healthy, tasty, unique and the real thing, which is not something you come by easily. Actually, you'd have to be part of our olive oil loving circle in order to grab a bottle.

So if there's someone you really care about, do consider giving them some of the best olive oil money can buy. Honestly, it's true. And don't forget our hand-made, Pornanino olive oil-based soap – it's heaven for the skin, so gentle and soothing and truly

nourishing. But let's say you're looking for a smaller present, what we Italians call pensiero - a little something to say "I thought of you". Why not make something yourself, a simple preserve that will be enhanced by the pure magic of Pornanino Olive Oil. It's really simple, you'll see.

Olive oil has been known for millennia for its rare ability to extract and retain flavours and smells – which is why it was traditionally used as a base for perfumes. The simplest kind of gift consists in making flavoured oil – all the skill it takes is choosing an attractive little glass bottle, and for once you can forget that olive oil should be shielded from light; you'll just make a small quantity anyway. So buy a clear glass container, if you like, it'll set off the play of gold and color inside. Fill the bottle with Pornanino olive oil and dip in any flavouring you like – a rosemary sprig, some garlic, hot chilli peppers, you name it. Just don't go overboard with the flavouring, as you don't want it to overpower the oil itself (it's a trick commercial producers use to mask the fact that the oil they are using is not up to par – NOT your problem at all).

Let's say you want to do something more sophisticated. Olive oil has always been the preferred medium in which to preserve vegetables, but you have to be a little careful here. Always wash the vegetables carefully, cook them with a measure of vinegar to prevent harmful bacteria from developing, and sterilize the jars to be on the safe side. You'll find a couple of really tasty, quick and easy recipes in Grandma Lia's column in the present issue. If you have access to the sort of sun-ripened tomatoes that peak between September and October, you can have fun doing tomato sauce. Just boil the tomatoes, peeled and roughly chopped, with a little chopped onion and garlic, if liked, until all the water has evaporated. Mix in a handful of fresh basil leaves and bottle while still hot. Seal, cover the jars in cold water, bring to the boil and simmer for 40 minutes. This way your sauce will keep for several months, and you'll thank heaven you made the effort when you take it out of the larder come winter!

Last but not at all least, you can make (and give) your own sauce. You'll find two different recipes at the bottom of this newsletter. Make your olive oil presents with love and care, package them attractively and you can't go wrong! Of course if you don't have the time or don't feel up to it, we'll be glad to help you make your family and friends happy. Just give them our wonderful olive oil! ♦

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Grandma Lia's olive oil recipes

The end of summer is a time traditionally spent bottling and preserving, so that the last gifts of summer won't be wasted. Roll up your sleeves and try your hand at these easy and quick traditional recipes whose rustic flair blends to perfection with the mellow season.

Parsley sauce (serves 4)

- ✓ 1 cup flat-leaf parsley
- ✓ 2 slices of bread
- ✓ 1 hard-boiled egg
- ✓ 1 tablespoon capers
- ✓ 3 preserved anchovy fillets
- ✓ 1 garlic clove (optional)
- ✓ 2 tablespoons wine vinegar
- ✓ 1/3 cup Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- ✓ freshly ground pepper



Hard boil the egg. Dip the bread slices in the vinegar, with just enough water added to soak them. Rinse, pat-dry and finely chop the parsley. Chop the capers, anchovy fillets and garlic clove, if using. You can do this in the mixer, but mind that the sauce should have a rather coarse texture; don't over process to a purée. Squeeze the liquid out of the bread slices and add them to the bowl together with the other ingredients, beating with the spoon to break them up. Mash the hard-boiled egg with a fork and add to the bowl. Season with salt and pepper and pour in Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil, stirring to incorporate it. You should get a slightly loose sauce, with the oil tending to

rise to the surface. Cover with cling-film and let rest for a few hours before serving. It might actually be best the following day. This parsley sauce typical of Piedmont is ideally suited to accompany any kind of boiled or roast meat, either hot or cold; it goes well with eggs, salads and even freshwater fish. Just don't use it for pasta...

Walnut sauce (serves 4)

- ✓ 6 oz walnuts, shelled
- ✓ 1 garlic clove
- ✓ 6 oz ricotta or cottage cheese
- ✓ 2 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese
- ✓ 1 tablespoon milk
- ✓ 3 tablespoons Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil
- ✓ 1 teaspoon fresh marjoram, chopped
- ✓ 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- ✓ freshly ground pepper



Coarsely grind the walnut kernels; for a more sophisticated texture you can process them to a fine powder – it's up to you. Either way transfer to a bowl and incorporate the ricotta or cottage cheese, the grated Parmesan cheese, nutmeg and a pinch of salt. Loosen with the milk, then pour enough Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil to make the mixture smooth and creamy, beating all the time to incorporate it. Finish off with a little freshly ground pepper and the chopped marjoram. The sauce will keep for several days if stored in an airtight container in the fridge and topped with Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil. It can be frozen. An all-time classic from Liguria, this creamy walnut sauce is best served with spinach and ricotta-filled ravioli, or fresh egg pasta such as fettuccine or tagliatelle, but it goes very well with just about any kind of pasta. To serve, loosen with 2 tablespoons of the boiling pasta water, then toss with the cooked pasta to coat evenly, adding Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil if needed. Serve with grated Parmesan cheese.

Don't risk running out of your secret ingredient, Pornanino Extra Virgin Olive Oil: [Click to order](#) ►►

Tell us if you like our recipes! Is there a recipe you'd like Grandma Lia to work out for you? [Let us know](#)