

# AM ITALIANO

It's morning in Italy, and on your way to work, you'll stop by your favorite café, known as "un bar," after the bar top at which you will drink your espresso while standing. Chairs aren't necessary, since you're drinking a single shot of espresso—just hot and small enough to be finished in two sips. Your small pastry—not too sweet or filling—is enough to hold you another couple hours, when you'll take a pause from work to meet some friends at the bar for another espresso.

Italian breakfast is quick and social, the antithesis to the drawn out American brunch we know. As Florence native Michele Baldacci, executive chef of Brooklyn's Locanda Vini e Olii puts it, "You don't want to fill up on a large breakfast and not be able to stop three times during the morning at a bar with friends."

The quintessential morning pastry of Italy is the simple "cornetto" (literally "horn.") As with a French croissant, a laminated dough is formed into a crescent shape, but the dough is lighter, with less butter and more eggs. Smaller in size and often dusted with powdered sugar, variants include *cornetti con nutella*; *cornetti con marmelata* (with apricot jam) and *cornetti con crema* (with pastry cream). Other than *cornetti* you might see a *budino di riso*, a *torta della nonna* or a *crostata*. These small, round pastries all share a common short dough, called *pasta frolla*, with a filling of rice pudding,

pastry cream or jam, respectively.

Baldacci makes his lightly sweet *torta della nonna* for dessert, although he notes, "It's definitely something you can have for breakfast, after lunch, for a snack." But while he may be known for this "grandmother's torte," his own *nonna* used to serve him a more rustic breakfast at home: *pane zucchero e vino*, stale bread soaked in red wine and sprinkled with sugar. Other versions replace wine with hot milk.

## SWEET NEW IDEAS

Some chefs let authenticity inspire their menus instead of dictating them. "It's a no-brainer if you're thinking about Italian pastries," says Executive Chef Nick Anderer at Maialino in New York City. "Eventually your mind's going to go to olive oil." About his popular olive oil muffin (\$3, recipe, [plateonline.com](http://plateonline.com)), redolent of olive oil with a citrusy nose from orange zest and orange liqueur, Anderer admits, "The goal was not authenticity. I wanted to stay true [to Italian food culture] but also keep in mind who we're serving."

While you'd never find this muffin in Italy, the recipe originated with Gerri Sarnataro, an instructor of Italian pastry at the Institute of Culinary Education. Maialino Executive Pastry Chef Rachel Binder warns to "whisk just until it comes together," or the batter will be rubbery and won't form a nice dome, and to mea-

Sweet pastries  
and strong coffee  
say buongiorno  
to breakfast  
by Maisie Wilhelm

Cornetti, Chef Instructor  
Gianni Scappin, Culinary  
Institute of America, Hyde  
Park, N.Y. RECIPE, p. 91.









**Torta della nonna, \$7, Chef/Owner**  
**Michele Baldacci, Locanda Vini e**  
**Olii, New York City. RECIPE, p. 91.**

sure the oil precisely, lest it be too greasy.

Keeping in mind the mostly American clientele frequenting the restaurant, Binder wanted to offer a porcine pastry option as well, using the prosciutto *cotto* scraps leftover from the kitchen. “We try to use every piece of everything,” she explains, so she incorporated the hammy chunks into a Southern biscuit recipe contributed by a sous chef. “The chefs saved all the bacon fat when they cooked off porchetta from their dinner menu, so she used that instead of butter for the resulting honey-glazed pork biscuits (\$4, recipe, plateonline.com).

Then there are the local specialties. “Every region has its own sweet, tiny bread in the morning,” said Gianni Scappin, an Italian who teaches advanced Italian cooking at the Culinary Institute of America and makes his own version

of a breakfast *cornetti* (recipe, p. 91). Regional specialties include *bomboloni* (also called *krapfen* in the North)—fried yeast buns filled with cream and covered in sugar; or *coda d’aragosta*, filo dough in the shape of a lobster tail, filled with orange zest pastry cream.

Italians occasionally choose a savory option, such as the *pizzetto rosso*, a small pizza round with tomato sauce. But the one dish you will never see for breakfast in Italy? “Eggs for breakfast? Never!” exclaims Baldacci. Scappin explains, “We do not have the need of a heavy meal when we wake up, because we have our beautiful lunch!”

Maisie Wilhelm’s idea of *la dolce vita* is reading newspapers at Ten Belles cafe in Paris while sipping a perfect cappuccino.



## A GUIDE TO ITALIAN COFFEE

**CAFFÈ:** single shot of espresso

**RISTRETTO:** a “narrowed” shot, made with same amount of coffee but less water

**LUNGO:** a “long” shot, made with more water

**CAPPUCCINO:** equal parts espresso, steamed milk and foam. Also called “cappuccino” and named after the Capuchin monks whose bald pates rimmed with dark hair resemble the coffee-rimmed foam in the cup

**CAFFÈ LATTE:** a shot of espresso with a lot of steamed milk. Like cappuccino and latte macchiato, never consumed after midday

**CAFFÈ MACCHIATO:** espresso “marked” with a dollop of foam and a bit of steamed milk

**LATTE MACCHIATO:** the opposite; steamed milk a splash of espresso; also what many children have with cookies for breakfast

**CAFFÈ CORRETTO:** espresso “corrected” with splash of liquor like grappa or brandy

**BICERIN:** a specialty of Turin, espresso with drinking chocolate and milk layered in a glass