



Northern FLAVOURS

Milan's family-run *trattorie* sit alongside bustling restaurants serving creative fare

Text Kiki Deere

Milan, Italy's leading financial and commercial centre, lies in western Lombardy, a region with distinctive culinary variations thanks to its diverse geography. Heavily influenced by the region's Swiss neighbours, the cuisine is based on maize, rice, beef and butter, and has more in common with Austrian and central European fare than southern Italian cuisine.

Lombardy stretches from the Alps on the Swiss border south to the fertile Po Valley, the heart of Italy's rice production. Short-grain rice forms the basis of a number of soups and *risottos*, such as the saffron-infused *risotto alla Milanese*, Milan's most famous dish. Cold winters mean hearty minestrone soups and meat stews accompanied by *polenta* (boiled cornmeal) feature heavily on the menu. Another favourite is *ossobuco*, a Milanese speciality of veal shanks traditionally served with *risotto*. The region is also renowned for its cheeses, including tangy Gorgonzola, Parmesan-like Grana Padano and creamy Taleggio cheese.

The rustic dishes of the Alpine foothills are often referred to as *piatti poveri* (peasant food). Skilled and inventive cooks expertly combine inexpensive ingredients to create dishes that contrast sharply with the sophisticated recipes and eating establishments of Milan, the country's capital of fashion and design.

Young professionals in fine crisp attire unwind over an *aperitivo* to stimulate the appetite. Buffets of cold cuts, cheeses, freshly-baked *focaccia* bread, pastas and *risottos* are laid out in cafés and bars, and included in the price of a drink. Here is a look at what's trending now in Italy's international city:

RITA

Trendy bars and restaurants line Milan's Navigli area, home to a series of canals that once connected the city to Genoa, now running only to the small town of Pavia. Tucked away on a little side street just off the Naviglio Grande is Rita,

1
The cosy interior of
Langosteria 10

2
Grilled seafood at
Langosteria 10



which buzzes with customers in the early evening. Young Milanese flock here for the excellent *aperitivo* – unlike in most bars and cafés where a large buffet of food is laid out for a couple of hours, small appetisers are prepared for each customer at Rita, ensuring every dish is always freshly made. Served between 6.30pm and 10pm, *aperitivo* here also consists of nibbles including dips and raw vegetables such as carrots, cucumbers and peppers, as well as olives, pickles and mini pizzas. Also on offer are *niçoise* with beetroot *carpaccio* served with grapefruit and orange, aubergine hummus with fried shrimp, and *melanzane parmigiana*, a vegetarian bake with aubergines, tomato and *burrata*, a creamy mozzarella-style cheese from southern Italy. While the popular *aperitivo* prepared with top-quality ingredients is Rita's real draw, the



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main courses are also worth a try – there's lamb with yoghurt, avocado and mint, as well as tuna steak and veggie burgers with red cabbage and tofu.

LA DOGANA DEL BUONGUSTO

The rustic interior of this cosy basement restaurant features wooden ceilings and cavernous bare brick walls decorated with still-life paintings. It's run by charismatic Niccolò Silini, a half-Italian, half-Finnish 25-year-old whose father runs a bakery nearby that provides the restaurant with freshly baked bread and *focaccia*.

The ground-floor wine bar offers a selection of 350 Italian labels rigorously selected both from small organic producers and larger, more established wineries. Bold, hearty reds from northern Italy are enjoyed with cold-cut platters of *salami*, wild boar and deer *prosciutto*. "Our cuisine is truly unique," says

1 A refreshing drink topped with tarragon leaves at Rita

2 Rita bustles at *aperitivo* time when customers spill onto the streets

3 Rita's creamy *Melanzane Parmigiana*, a vegetarian dish of aubergines, tomatoes and mozzarella

4 Freshly baked bread and *focaccia* at La Dogana del Buongusto

5 The cavernous interior of La Dogana del Buongusto

6 La Dogana's fish *antipasto*

7 Tuna *tartare* at Langosteria 10

8 Langosteria 10's Enrico Buonocore with Chef Denis Pedron



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Niccolò. His Finnish roots are reflected in a few dishes, with a smattering of Scandinavian favourites such as smoked fish and reindeer. But the cuisine remains mostly Italian. Mediterranean dishes are lovingly prepared with a twist – *testaroli*, a crepe-like pasta enjoyed in the coastal region of Liguria and usually made with pesto, is prepared here with saffron, speck and asparagus, ingredients traditionally used in northern Italian cuisine. The seasonal menu also includes Milanese favourites such as *cotoletta alla Milanese*, a breaded veal cutlet very similar to *Wiener schnitzel*, whose recipe is said to have been passed on from Marshal Radetzky to Emperor Franz Joseph during Austria's occupation of Lombardy. An authentic Milanese *cotoletta* is made with a cut from the loin of milk-fed veal, whose meat is exceptionally tender. The menu also includes a 30-centimetre meat *brochette* served with roasted potatoes, a speciality from the nearby Alps. ladoganadelbuongusto.it

LANGOSTERIA 10 BISTROT & BAR

Hailed as one of the city's best seafood restaurants, Langosteria 10 features individually furnished rooms decorated with maritime ornaments, including an upturned skiff from the coastal region of Liguria. Following the restaurant's huge success, its creative mastermind Enrico Buonocore opened Langosteria 10 Bistrot & Bottega, a more laidback, informal version of Langosteria 10. "Langosteria 10 Bistrot & Bottega is reminiscent of a

Parisian bistro but with an international outlook," says Enrico. The interior is decorated in light hues, and natural light floods in through windows overlooking the quiet Via Bobbio. Guests can dine at small tables or sit at the raw fish bar that gives a glimpse into an open kitchen where chefs are seen hard at work. Besides raw fish, shellfish and oysters, the menu also includes cured meats and *escargots*. The wine list focuses on light wines that complement the seafood, and there are craft beers as well as sparkling wines. A take-away menu is scribbled daily on the blackboard, and some of the products used are available for purchase, including Cantabrian anchovies and extra virgin olive oil. langosteria10bistrot.it



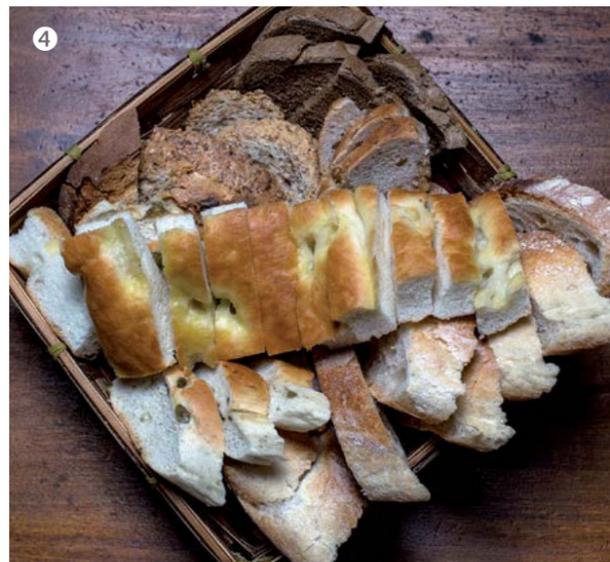
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1 Chef at Drogheria Milanese using a cast iron skillet to cook a simple breakfast

2 The retro interior of Drogheria Milanese

3 Drogheria makes most dishes in half portions—like the mini pizza—so that customers can try more than one dish

DROGHERIA MILANESE

With a number of other highly successful dining establishments to his name, restaurateur Andrea Meoni opened Drogheria Milanese in a former grocer's shop (*drogheria* is Italian for grocer's).

The trendy interior of this bistro-style restaurant features low-hanging light bulbs and original 1960s vintage pieces, while jars of preserves and Italian produce – all available for purchase – line the walls. The atmosphere is easy-going and laidback; customers help themselves to cutlery that's casually placed in wooden boxes on the tables. The clientele seated at the bar interact with the restaurant staff, while the long sharing table encourages people to strike up conversations with strangers, lending the place an informal feel. The restaurant is fuelled by simple, high-quality produce, with base ingredients such as butter, oil and eggs. Andrea decided to make most dishes available in half- portions in order to give his customers the chance to try more than one dish. The menu features Mediterranean and international dishes, including *gnocchi* (potato dumplings), *risotto* and burgers. Meat lovers should not miss the steak *tartare* made with *fassone*, a tender breed of beef from neighbouring Piedmont that's renowned for its rich juicy flavour.

drogheriamilanese.it ■

