

Parma meets Sonoma: Tortelli d'Erbetta goes to the RRV

Nestled in the heart of Emilia-Romagna, my Italian roots meander through the mountains of Alto Val Taro in the province of Parma. Here, Tortelli d'Erbetta is not just a dish; it's a celebration of local flavors and traditions served in every restaurant. Traditionally crafted with a mix of ricotta and Parmigiano Reggiano, these delectable parcels incorporate bitter greens—typically Swiss chard—and a pinch of nutmeg. Each tortelli is then lovingly bathed in melted butter and then "dried" with Parmigiano Reggiano, creating a dish that's as comforting as it is exquisite.



Why does this bring together Parma and Sonoma? Well, I recently began working for the wonderful family-owned Balleto Vineyards in the Russian River Valley. Every year, the wineries of the Russian River Valley host the Pinot Forum, where 60 buyers and trade members from around the world gather for a two-day deep dive into all things related to Russian River Valley wines. Each winery hosts four of these guests, and part of the hosting includes a dinner on the evening before the event begins. Our winemaker, Anthony Beckman, asked if I would be willing to make pasta for the dinner. I enthusiastically agreed, but then came the challenge: deciding what to

make. After some thought, I chose to infuse the meal with a piece of my heritage. Ultimately, we decided that each member of the team would also contribute to the dinner, making it truly spectacular!

Tortelli d'Erbetta, a cherished staple of Parma in the Emilia-Romagna region, reflects the rich culinary history of Northern Italy. This dish, with its roots deep in local tradition, is typically made during the feast of San Giovanni on June 24th, celebrating the summer solstice with a meal that heralds the bounty of the season. The filling, a blend of ricotta and Parmigiano Reggiano cheeses mixed with Swiss chard, symbolizes the harmonious balance of dairy farming and vegetable gardening that characterizes the region's agrarian culture. A pinch of nutmeg adds a subtle layer of complexity to this simple yet flavorful dish. Over the centuries, Tortelli d'Erbetta has become synonymous with Parma's gastronomic heritage, embodying the community's attachment to their land and the seasonal rhythms of their surroundings.

Despite its few ingredients, never underestimate the delightful complexity that Tortelli d'Erbetta brings to the table. This dish is a testament to the power of simplicity in Italian cuisine, where each component is chosen with care and purpose. The creamy ricotta blends seamlessly with the sharp tang of Parmigiano Reggiano, while the Swiss chard introduces a subtle earthiness that's beautifully lifted by a whisper of nutmeg. All bathed in butter and Parmigiano for that final decadent touch. The simplicity of the ingredients not only allows each flavor to shine but also makes this dish delightfully easy to prepare, offering a gourmet experience without the fuss.

So, roll up your sleeves, and remember my important tips from first pasta post.

- ☞ Flour matters: I only use "00" past flour for making ravioli. You can find it in some supermarkets or online.
- ☞ Invest in a scale: A scale is a must for making consistent pasta fresca. They are inexpensive.
- ☞ Hand-knead the dough: The dough needs to be stiff before resting, and a machine probably won't work well.
- ☞ Rolling the dough: You can use a rolling pin, but an old-fashioned hand crank machine works best.

The Pasta:

- 600 g imported "00" Flour
- 6 large eggs (room temp.)
- Rimacinata Semolina flour for dusting.

The Filling:

- 665 g Swiss Chard (1.25 lbs.)
- 2 lbs. ricotta con latte (900 g)
- 12 oz. basket ricotta (340 g)
- or • 145 g grated Parmigiano Reggiano
- pinch of nutmeg and salt & pepper q.b.

The Sauce:

- 6 Tbs. good quality butter
- Lots of grated Parmigiano Reggiano cheese

Make the Pasta Dough:

- Mound the "00" flour on your work surface. Create a well in the center and crack the eggs into it.
- Using a fork, gently incorporate the flour into the eggs in a circular motion.

- Once the mixture is firm enough to prevent the eggs from spilling out, use a dough scraper to continue combining.
- Knead by hand for 5-10 minutes until the dough is smooth and elastic. Wrap it up and let it rest for at least 30 minutes.

Make the Filling:

- Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Separate the green leaves of the Swiss chard from the stems and boil them for about 10 minutes.
- In a food processor, pulse the ricotta until creamy. Note: You can use one type of ricotta if that's what you have available.
- Drain the chard and squeeze out all excess water, then pulse in the food processor until finely chopped.
- In a bowl, combine the chard with both types of ricotta. Add a liberal pinch of nutmeg and season with salt and pepper to taste. Remember, the pasta dough doesn't contain salt, so season generously.

Make the tortelli – the fun part!

- Divide the dough into 6 pieces. Keep the pieces you are not working with covered, so they don't dry out.
- Starting with the widest setting, gradually roll the dough through each number until it reaches the second to thinnest setting on your pasta machine. For the machine I used that was #7, Dust with semolina flour as needed to prevent sticking. You should be able to see your hand through it.
- I use a pastry bag to pipe my filling, but you use a spoon if you prefer. Cut the strip in half lengthwise, pipe filling along one strip. Cover with the other strip and press dough around the filling to remove as much air as possible (a small wooden dowel works great for this).
- Cut with a pastry wheel and transfer in a single layer to a sheet dusted with
- semolina.



Putting it all together:

- Bring a large pot of salted water to a boil. Drop the tortelli in and cook for about 2 1/2 minutes.
- While the tortelli is cooking, heat butter in a large sauté pan or a wok works well.
- Add the tortelli to the sauté pan and continue to cook tossing in the sauce for a about a minute more.
- Transfer to a serving bowl and served topped with lots of grated Parmigiano Reggiano. In this region they say that you bath the tortelli in butter and dry them in Parmigiano Reggiano cheese.

Wine Pairing for this Dish

Pairing Balletto Vineyards Sexton Hill Chardonnay with tortelli was a sublime match that beautifully enhanced the flavors of both the wine and the dish. The rich, creamy notes of the Chardonnay, characterized by subtle hints of apple and a smooth, oaky undertone, perfectly complemented the fresh ricotta and Parmigiano Reggiano in the tortelli. The Swiss chard brought a mild, earthy component that is elevated by the wine's crisp finish, while the nutmeg added a hint of spice that echoed the complexity of the Chardonnay. The buttery richness of the sauce melded with the buttery notes of the wine, creating a harmonious blend that made each bite and sip a delightful experience. This pairing not only highlights the heritage and the craft of Italian cooking but also showcases the versatility of Sonoma's Chardonnay in enhancing a sophisticated, herbaceous dish like Tortelli d'Erbetta.



Nestled in the picturesque Russian River Valley of Sonoma County, Balletto Vineyards is a testament to the rich heritage and vibrant future of California winemaking. Owned and meticulously cared for by the Balletto family, the vineyard prides itself on its commitment to sustainable agriculture and artisanal craftsmanship. The estate spans over 850 acres, with only the top 7% of grapes from their estate vineyards being selected to produce the wines.

Beyond their acclaimed wines, Balletto Vineyards stands out for its remarkable dedication to community and recreation, epitomized by their "Field of Dreams." This regulation-sized baseball field, nestled amidst the vineyards, was built by John Balletto at the request of his vineyard workers who wanted a place to play baseball for the local league. The field is not just a symbol commitment; it also serves as a venue for local charities and community events, reinforcing the Balletto family's belief in giving back to the soil and the community that supports them. This unique feature adds a charming dimension to the vineyard, making a visit to Balletto Vineyards a memorable experience.