



# Guess Who's Cooking Dinner?

Instead of asking a local Italian for the best place to get Bolognese in Bologna, just make a dinner reservation at her house. **By Kevin Raub**

**HAVE YOU EVER FOUND YOURSELF WANDERING** the streets of Paris, looking for an authentic brasserie, only to find yourself aimlessly stumbling between fast-food joints and high-end haute hot spots serving an amalgam of dishes from around the world — and all you want is a life-changing steak frites? And then when you don't want French — in Beirut, Bangkok, or Hanoi, for instance — the top restaurant in town is almost always French!

It's unfortunate but true: Our world's cuisines are slowly merging into one gigantic hot pot of globalized ingredients and international traditions. That's fine if you're looking for squid-ink spaghetti dusted with star anise and spackled lemongrass. But what if you're simply looking for spaghetti? Gourmet globalization has made it a challenge to get an amazing local meal almost anywhere in the world — unless you're in someone's home, where culinary tradition lives on. But local kitchens don't exactly accept reservations from tourists. Or do they?

Sensing a culinary collapse in her own country, 71-year-old Italian sociology professor

Egeria Di Nallo, a Bologna native, teamed with the University of Bologna and the Association for the Guardianship and Exploitation of the Traditional Culinary-Gastronomic Heritage of Italy in 2004 and dreamed up a little something called Home Food. Like the name suggests, Home Food is a network of home cooks — mainly Italian women, known as *Cesarine* (“empresses”), named such as a nod to the mothers, aunts, and grandmothers who have passed on the traditional recipes of the country through the ages — who are fervently preserving the culinary traditions of one of the most gastronomically blessed places on earth.

Don't get me wrong. I'm not saying there isn't great food out there around the world; I'm just saying that there's a lot of bad food



out there too. We tourists with limited time on our gluttonous vacations aren't always the best equipped to navigate our mouths between the two. In Italy, hunting down an authentic meal that will leave your palate dancing and your memories delicious can be excruciatingly frustrating. (I recently spent a week in Bologna and Venice and didn't eat a single thing that I can recall for you here.)

Enter Home Food, whose premise is as simple as it is brilliant: Find hospitable home chefs around the country who specialize in reproducing old-world regional dishes, and then send tourists and locals alike on a cultural gastronomic tour by offering them dinner in private homes.

To say this undertaking might change the way one travels through Italy would be to call the kettle *nero*. Not only do you get an authentic local family meal; you also get to enter locals' homes — an unparalleled travel experience — and submerge yourself in their culture under the guise of a culinary coup.

"The Home Food experience is not a substitute for a restaurant; it is something different," explains Di Nallo. "First of all, it is possible to taste foods prepared completely traditionally. Restaurants, since they run businesses and have to optimize resources and time, cannot be as precise and devoted to tradition as a traditional 'lady of the house' can be. We offer the chance to experience food within a family that is willing to interact with the guests — thus enriching the food itself with the familiar taste of pure love. What's more, guests find themselves sitting at a table with unknown people, so a very important social interaction takes place."

**AT THE TIME OF THIS WRITING**, there were 250 Cesarine spread throughout all the regions of Italy. So the next time you are in Bologna, you can forgo the exhaustive search through the university town's lovely medieval streets that ends up with you on the losing end of bad Bolognese, and instead feast on salsiccia passita (traditional pork sausage) and Bolognese-style veal cutlet, a recipe that first appeared in local cookbooks in 800 AD. You can enjoy this once-in-a-lifetime meal with local wines and cheeses in an attic home just a few steps from the former residence of Giosuè

## MASTERING THE ART OF USDA PRIME STEAKS.



- |             |   |  |  |  |
|-------------|---|--|--|--|
| 1.          | <b>JACKSON'S STEAKHOUSE</b>   |  | FT. LAUDERDALE, FL   | 954.522.4450   |
| 2.          | <b>DONOVAN'S</b><br><small>America's Best STEAKS &amp; CHOPS RESTAURANT</small> |  | SAN DIEGO (DOWNTOWN)<br>LA JOLLA/UTC<br>PHOENIX, AZ                          | 619.237.9700<br>858.450.6666<br>602.955.3666                                 |
| 3.          | <b>Bob's</b><br><small>Steak &amp; Chop House<br/>Established 1995</small>      |  | DALLAS, TX<br>HOUSTON, TX<br>GRAPEVINE, TX<br>SAN FRANCISCO, CA<br>PLANO, TX | 214.528.9446<br>713.877.8325<br>817.481.5555<br>415.273.3085<br>972.608.2627 |
| 4.          | <b>RingSide STEAKHOUSE</b>  |  | PORTLAND, OR<br>PORTLAND, OR   | 503.223.1513<br>503.255.0750   |
| 5.          | <b>Charley's STEAK HOUSE</b>  |  | ORLANDO, FL<br>INT'L DRIVE, FL<br>KISSIMEE, FL<br>TAMPA, FL                  | 407.851.7130<br>407.363.0228<br>407.396.6055<br>813.353.9706                 |
| 6.<br>(tie) | <b>PRIME CHOP HOUSE</b><br><small>CHOPS-STEAKS-SEAFOOD</small>                  |  | PALM SPRINGS, CA<br>PALM DESERT, CA  | 760.320.4500<br>760.779.9888   |
| 6.<br>(tie) | <b>SPENCER'S</b><br><small>FOR STEAKS AND CHOPS</small>                         |  | SALT LAKE CITY, UT<br>SPOKANE, WA<br>SAN JOSE, CA                            | 801.238.4748<br>509.744.2372<br>408.437.2170                                 |
| 7.          | <b>Mo's</b><br><small>A Place for Steaks</small>                                |  | MILWAUKEE, WI<br>INDIANAPOLIS, IN  | 414.272.0720<br>317.624.0720   |
| 8.          | <b>NEW YORK PRIME</b><br><small>A STEAKHOUSE</small>                            |  | ATLANTA, GA<br>MYRTLE BEACH, SC  | 404.846.0644<br>843.448.8081   |
| 9.<br>(tie) | <b>POLO GRILL</b>   |  | TULSA, OK  | 918.744.4280   |
| 9.<br>(tie) | <b>BOHANNAN'S</b><br><small>GRILL-STEAKS-SEAFOOD<br/>SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS</small> |  | SAN ANTONIO, TX  | 210.472.2600   |
| 10.         | <b>HYDE PARK</b><br><small>PRIME STEAKHOUSE</small>                             |  | CLEVELAND, OH<br>COLUMBUS, OH<br>PITTSBURGH, PA                              | 216.344.2444<br>614.224.2204<br>412.222.4014                                 |

[www.primesteakhouses.com](http://www.primesteakhouses.com)



Distinguished Restaurants of North America  
[www.DRoNA.com](http://www.DRoNA.com)



Wine Spectator Best  
of Award of Excellence



Wine Spectator  
Award of Excellence

Send Comments to: Prime Time Top 10, 4369 D'Evereux Circle, Pensacola, FL 32504



# JOHN CHRISTIAN

DESIGNERS & CRAFTSMEN



**JEWELRY FOR LIFE™**  
**FOR YOUR MILESTONES**  
CHAIN & ONE BAR \$590



**NUMEROS™**  
**ANNIVERSARY DATE**  
IN ROMAN NUMERALS!  
*December 11, 1998 is XII XI MCMXCVIII*  
\$650 & \$4,400



**FAMILY CREST**  
\$790  
**MONOGRAM**  
\$590



**CONTINUOUS LIFE™**  
**CHILDREN'S**  
**NAMES & BIRTHSTONES**  
(UP TO 5 NAMES) \$590 & \$225

**3 DAY  
RUSH  
AVAILABLE**

JOIN THE J&C CLUB ONLINE AND RECEIVE A \$25 GIFT CARD!

View Our Entire Collection Online. AVAILABLE IN STERLING SILVER, PLATINUM™, GOLD & PLATINUM

**FREE CATALOGUE**

**RINGBOX.COM**

**1.888.646.6466**

## ITALY

Carducci, one of Italy's greatest poets and a 1906 Nobel Prize winner.

Each time you step into a Cesarina's home, you are embarking on a rare journey of taste that harks back to the region's traditional cuisine before it was pierced and prodded by the modern world. In the words of Home Food, you will be "avoiding flights of imagination, fusion, or contamination that have taken the foods away from their traditional form." On the Home Food website ([www.homefood.it](http://www.homefood.it)), each Cesarina's menu reads like gourmet Dante: vivid descriptions of transcendent meals bookended by historical context. You can literally swallow the past.

"Home Food has looked for and found in Italian families the people who are repositories of the ancient knowledge of our cookery and has convinced them to share their knowledge and experience with a larger circle of people whilst at the same time remaining within their own domestic environment," writes Di Nallo on her company's website.

I'm sure by now you're hungry — trust me, it's more torturous writing and researching this piece than reading it — but you are also probably wondering what kind of hit orecchiette with turnip tops (Puglia) or peasant-style tacconi (Marche) will make on your wallet. This part might be even better than the experience itself: A four-course meal, including wine, hospitality, and a priceless glimpse into the life of a local and into his or her home, will usually run between 35€ (\$55) and 45€ (\$70). Payment is made in advance, just to keep the vibe as far away from that of a traditional restaurant as possible. You must be a member of the association to participate, but those prices aren't too shabby, either: 35€ (\$55) for one year or the more tourist-friendly one-month fee of 3.50€ (\$6).

But perhaps most unbelievable of all is that in the beginning, getting people into the idea of authentic Italian meals in authentic Italian homes took some persuasion.

"We must admit that sometimes we were considered a little bit crazy," says Di Nallo. "So the first difficulty was to convince people of the validity of our project. But then, as you can now taste, we did it!" **AW**

**KEVIN RAUB** is a Los Angeles-based travel and entertainment journalist and a contributing editor to *American Way*. His work appears regularly in *Travel+Leisure* and *Town & Country*, among other publications.



  
*Chase Park Plaza*

ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI



**EXPERIENCE** *more than a St. Louis luxury hotel*



FROM THE EXQUISITE DECOR AND ENERGETIC AMBIANCE TO THE MOST CONTEMPORARY PERSONAL SERVICES AND MODERN AMENITIES, THE CHASE PARK PLAZA EXEMPLIFIES A GRACIOUS STYLE AND TIMELESS ELEGANCE IN EVERY FACET OF ITS CHARACTER.



RESERVATIONS : 877.587.2427

212 N. KINGSHIGHWAY BLVD • ST. LOUIS, MO • 63108

[CHASEPARKPLAZA.COM](http://CHASEPARKPLAZA.COM)