

Butcher of Panzano makes sure diners have a cow

PANZANO IN CHIANTI, Italy — In Italy, Dario Cecchini is known as the Butcher of Panzano. His macelleria, or butcher shop, is on a side street just off the main route of SR 222 as it winds through this Tuscan town of fewer than 1,000.

His shop is small but welcoming. Located on a narrow side street, the pink-and-white-striped exterior hints there is something unique and special about the macelleria. On weekends it is packed with tourists who come to see the man behind the legend. The curious even overflow into the street out front.

Sometimes opera or vintage rock from the United States plays in the store.

On a video posted on his website (dariocecchini.com, video unavailable online in U.S.), he jokes that he has been a butcher for more than 250 years. He laughs and explains that his family has been in the trade for 250 years, but he has been a butcher for only 38 years.

He doesn't speak much English, leaving wife Kim to be his translator.

Through her in the video, he explains his philosophy: You have to be a responsible person on this Earth. Part of that responsibility results in his finding a use

for every part of the animal.

Cecchini has three dining options. Dario Doc is a luncheon facility with three menus offered; think of a fast-food place with very good beef. The other two are Solociccia and the granddaddy, Officina della Bistecca. Both of those serve meals family-style at communal tables.

My group opted for Solociccia, the dinner of the whole cow.

We arrived for dinner at 7 p.m. in the house across the street from the macelleria.

We sat in one of several dining areas, had some wine, and the first appetizer, musetto al limone e brodo vero, was served. This was beef broth poured into little cups and a thinly sliced sausage derived from the muzzle and hoof of the cow.

A second appetizer appeared, a spicy beef ragu over toasted bread, which was followed by "rosemary up the bum." These balls of rump-cut ground beef were about an inch in diameter. They were lightly browned on the outside and intentionally raw inside.

Next to be served was the first main dish, roast beef. The roast was a beautiful nutmeg brown on the outside and blood



TERRY DICKOW/PHOTO FOR TRIBUNE NEWSPAPERS
Butcher and chef Dario Cecchini is a tourist draw in Panzano in Chianti, Italy.

red on the inside. This was followed by stewed beef with vegetables. After a suitable time, another dish, braised beef with rosemary seasoning, was served. All three dishes seemed to melt in the mouth.

The main courses finished, a waiter

appeared with an olive oil cake that was sweet and moist. Strong coffee was offered.

Diners were then invited back to the butcher shop for some grappa and cheese.

While Solociccia uses the whole cow, Officina della Bistecca focuses on prime cuts.

Officina della Bistecca starts off with a steak tartare dish, followed by carpaccio, a seared beef offering, then a bone-in rib-eye, followed by Panzanese steak and topped off by a T-bone or porterhouse. All this is served at communal tables, with Dario doing the cutting and entertaining in loud, robust Italian. Dinner is followed by cake, coffee and grappa.

Whichever option you choose, dining with the Butcher of Panzano is an experience not soon forgotten. And you won't need beef for a year!

Solociccia was about \$41 a person, and Officina della Bistecca was about \$69. Reservations are required. Visit the website for more information or to make reservations.

— Terry Dickow,
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