



# Sicilian without the secrets

## **My Taste of Sicily**

**Dominique Rizzo**

**Lantern**

**Reviewed by John McGrath**

Women, in particular, love detectives.

The stranger, the grumpier, the better. As long as they nail the perp.

This only applies in print and on the TV of course. You would have to poll The Force to find out about reality.

Inspector Montalbano, the scourge of Sicily, didn't mind a snack or even a barrage of courses in the interest of a triumphant investigation. His author, Andrea Camilleri, deserved a few bundles of lire under the table courtesy of the Sicilian Tourist Association. Most of his books and television programs happened when Sicily was trying its best to give justice a bad name.

So it is fitting that an Inspector Montalbano favourite, arancini, appears in the book's first course, "Salads, Starters and Soups".

Arancini, little oranges, have made a huge leap from Sicily to everywhere and have been hurt. Grievously. Tough luck for a dish that has been around for a thousand years. Maybe it had its birth when the Saracens popped in and ate saffron rice wrapped around

morsels of meat and trimmings at the table. Frederick II supposedly wrapped them in breadcrumbs and had them fried sometime in the thirteenth century. In twenty-first century Australia arancini are made by the boatload, filled with any available slops, stuck in the cool room to dry out the bog standard rice, and served to order.

Arancini have been around long enough to be flexible but beautiful classic recipes, like the one Dominique Rizzo favours, made with a risotto rice like shortest-grained *Vialone Nano* with chicken or vegetable stock and pecorino are best. The filling is minced veal with seasoned tomato passata. The coating is made with seasoned plain flour, eggs and breadcrumbs. Up to the second readers will see this as a chance to use some of their precious supply of Panko, the Japanese breadcrumb that has stormed the food world.

Dominique Rizzo, a Sicilian bred Australian, has written a book of Sicilian recipes which is light on reminiscences and heavy on methodology. Which is just what you want if you want to cook those impossibly simple dishes that you just cannot crack. Like bean soup. Ask Nonna what is in the bowl: "Beans" and "You have to cook

them slowly."

Is Nonna a total sweetie who "Just throws things in the saucepan?" Or is she a secretive old biddy, so stingy she will go to the grave with her precious recipes?

Dominique got me between the eyes with a broad bean, artichoke and pea soup – all in season right now.

Glossing over the rest of the book including *Zio Mario* (Uncle Mario) and his sausages, which look staggeringly good, I'll go straight to "Dolci e Dessert".

Sicily is most famous for sweet things and Dominique leads off with two cassatas and an admonishment to "ensure that the ricotta is well drained". No endearing anecdote about *Zio Mario*. Straight to the Big Secret.

Cassatas are creeping onto menus here. I have not had a decent commercial effort yet. Follow these recipes and wipe out the emerging competition. Arancini turn up again filled with spiced chocolate. The feast of Saint Lucia on December 13 is arancini feast day too.

Having trouble stoking up your cooking mojo? *My Taste of Sicily* will inspire you to strap on the apron.

