

# Sicilian sojourn

CHEF/FOOD EDUCATOR DOMINIQUE RIZZO RECOUNTS THE DIVINE FAMILY MEMORIES THAT INSPIRED HER TO WRITE HER DEBUT COOKBOOK, *MY TASTE OF SICILY*.

Words **Dominique Rizzo**



When I was three years old, my father took the family (my mother, older brother, baby brother and me) on our first trip to his homeland of Sicily. My earliest memories of this beautifully rustic land are of my zio's (uncle's) farm: I remember gathering freshly laid eggs as chickens and rabbits ran freely around; orchards filled with plump lemons and oranges; grapes hanging from the vines like jewels; Zio Fifo entering the house with a lamb hung over his huge shoulders; and Zia Maria carrying a basket of home-grown vegetables (I was inquisitive about what they were, and how they would be used).

Exploring that farm as a young child was the most wonderful introduction to cooking that a budding chef could have. It was a peasant way of life, real and natural.

My zio used every part of the animal. I watched with amazement as he cut the pigs for the bleed and I was fascinated by how he coiled pork sausages around themselves and pierced them with sticks ready for grilling. As we all sat down to enjoy slow-roasted pork, knowing where the meat came from was never something that turned me away from eating it.

As I got older and our trips to Italy continued, I became aware of how special these eating extravaganzas were. I tasted all sorts of exotic and mysterious foods that I had never seen before – tripe, goat's head, pig's trotters and intestines, rabbit, wild fennel, broad beans, prickly pears, fresh pastas, grains, breads and all kinds of cheeses. I loved it all.

## FROM WATCHING TO DOING

I soon joined my zias and my nonna in the kitchen. I would be the one sitting on a rickety stool, cleaning the garden snails, peeling the vegetables and washing the wild greens freshly picked from the adjoining gardens. Later, I rolled the polpetta (meatballs) and stirred the pasta. It was through these experiences that I developed my passion for Sicilian food. I honoured the simple versatility that it offered; I loved the palette of colours and flavours that gave me seemingly endless choices on the plate. This was where my love affair started, and because of this, the recipes of my Italian family are some of my most cherished.

## RECIPES FROM LIFE

So when it came to writing a book, I had to think about which recipes I really wished to share. I decided to include the recipes that encapsulated the inspiring moments of my life: the family recipes



that encouraged me to travel and explore my heritage; the recipes that influenced my cooking and changed my direction as a chef; and the recipes that truly fuelled my passion for the simple pleasures of cooking and eating.

I thought about the Sicilian flavours that I wanted people to savour, the textures I wanted them to experience. And I thought about the joy of preparing a meal for family and friends, and the celebrations I wanted people to have.

The recipes use such simple techniques that often you wonder if there is more to be done. But the sheer joy of Sicilian cooking – soul-food cooking – is that it is what it is, without the fuss, foams and frozen powders. It is the honest, delicious food of a beautiful land and its people.



## OUT NOW

Recipes and image from *My Taste of Sicily* by Dominique Rizzo, Penguin Lantern (\$39.95).



“Zucchini flowers have a gorgeous, subtle flavour but if you want to bulk it out a bit, you can always add some sliced cooked zucchini, pumpkin or squash.”

## Dominique's zucchini flower frittata

Serves 4

**15 zucchini (courgette) flowers, cleaned**  
**1 tbsp salt**  
**¼ cup (60ml) olive oil**  
**3 spring onions, thinly sliced**  
**6 eggs**  
**¼ cup (20g) grated parmesan**  
**Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper**  
**Baby herbs, to garnish (optional)**

1. Gently open the zucchini flowers and remove the stamen (the orange stalk in the centre of the flower). Trim off the base of the flower if the stalk is too long.
2. Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil, then add the salt. Blanch the zucchini flowers for 30 seconds, then drain and set aside.
3. Heat the olive oil in a large frying pan over medium heat and saute the spring onion for 1 minute or until softened. Transfer to a large bowl. Add the eggs and parmesan and whisk to combine.

## + Wine

+ Try a crisp glass of Pinot Grigio with the frittata. We suggest the Chain of Ponds Adelaide Hills Amelia's Letter 2011 with its restrained, slightly nutty nose through to the beautifully textured palate and crunchy acidity. Its layers of subtle, varietal flavour should pair well here.

Season with salt and pepper and stir in the zucchini flowers. Pour into the hot pan and, using a wooden spoon, bring the cooked egg mixture from the edge of the pan into the centre until most of the egg is cooked, about 3 minutes. Serve hot, garnished with baby herbs if you like.

**Wine match:** Chain of Ponds Amelia's Letter Pinot Grigio 2011