

Interviews

THREE TIME OLYMPIC CHEF

Carlo Zarri ready for Beijing

Cortemilia is in the Langhe area in southern Piedmont – in the province of Cuneo just south of Asti – Alessandria and Alba

How often does one get to have lunch in the kitchen of a celebrity chef in Italy?

Carlo Zarri just completed baking the *panna cotta* for the evening dinner guests. To the left of the giant kitchen range was a small table. It was 1:30.

When asked what I would like to have for lunch, I simply raised my eyebrows, shook my shoulders back and forth, “anything, anything, whatever is easy, and quick,” I say.

Quick and easy - is how Carlo Zarri, three-time Olympic chef is accustomed to feeding thousands of people. The Olympic Games are his specialty, and now approaching his fourth, in Beijing... Carlo is ready.

I was watching Carlo's mother cleaning artichokes. With a huge, long, knife she carefully removed a few of the thistle leaves, peeled the long stem, and with the tip of the knife, plunged into the center to dig out the choke.

Paola, Carlo's wife had already finished her lunch, and was on duty at the front desk. “We never are able to sit together for a meal,” Carlo confesses, “this is how a hotel and restaurant work”.

“Steak, chicken, salad”? asks Carlo's father. “Anything”, I say again, not taking my eyes off the *carciofi* queen. It's time to sit down.

At my cozy spot at the small table, I found a grilled steak, simply prepared, drizzled with a little Ligurian extra virgin olive oil, and sea salt. A small plate appears to my right with thinly sliced, raw (*naked-nuda*) artichokes. Carlo added a sweet, syrupy, drizzle of balsamic vinegar, a little salt, my tender artichokes were properly dressed for lunch.

Carlo Zarri is Piemontese by birth. His mother is from Bergamo and was a famous ski champion and ski instructor. His father had his own restaurants for many years. Carlo and Paola have a son, Riccardo - they call him Ricky, who is ten years old. There is no doubt that this truly is a close, working, living, helping family.

He speaks Italian, German, French and English fluently, and is able to interchange whenever necessary. His love for travel, languages and detail has driven him to his incredible career.

He strives for quality rather than quantity, using fresh, local Piemontese products, concentrating on high quality food, with a lighter slant on traditional recipes, prepared with great care.

Carlo is a certified sommelier, a member of AIS (Associazione Italiana Sommeliers) the AMIRA (Associazione Maitre Italiani Ristoranti & Alberghi). Experts and sommelier's have voted Carlo's wine list as one of the best five in Italy.



He personally guides his guests to proper wine and food pairing from his list known as being among the most complete in Italy, with over 1000 varieties to choose from including many Piedmontese wines and others from all over the world.
Website:

Turin (Torino) Piedmont - 2006 Winter Olympic Games

He and his family worked for 5 years, preparing for the Olympic Winter Games, which took place in February of 2006.

Carlo was professionally involved as “Food and beverage” manager of several different programs, at the *Casa Italia* (the hospitality house of the Italian delegation), housed in the 17th century Palazzo del Valentino, the place where people went to celebrate after winning a medal. Carlo has appeared on the “Today Show” – live on NBC, presented by Lester Holt, where he prepared “*Risotto al Tartufo*” (risotto with white truffles).

Carlo and his staff of more than 450 people prepared more than 10,000 meals in 26 restaurants. “*This was a big adventure and an unforgettable experience that brought both Piemontese and Italian cucina to the fine palates of the world,*” said Carlo.

In the Turin Olympics, 80 different nations participated, with over 2,508 athletes.

Athens, Greece – 2004 Summer Olympic Games

August 2004

Carlo Zarri also worked in *Casa Italia* in Athens, where his experiences and fine attention to detail was of great value for his success in Turin.

There were 10,625 athletes, accompanied by 5,501 team officials from 201 nations.

Salt Lake City, Utah – 2002 Winter Olympic Games

February 2002

Carlo brought forty chefs from Piedmont to Salt Lake City, bringing raw materials with them to prepare everything from bread to ravioli on the spot.

2,399 athletes participated, from 77 nations

What did he prepare? His pre-race specialties for the athletes consisted of mozzarella and tomatoes, *caprese*, *ravioli al pin*, hand made pasta stuffed with meat and vegetables, a Piedmontese specialty topped with olive oil and a bit of grated *Parmigiano* cheese and, a second course of *Proscutto di Parma* thinly sliced

Wedding dinner in Budapest

Three years ago, Sophia Loren asked to meet Carlo. She wanted him to prepare a special truffle dinner for the wedding of her son, Carlo Ponti, Jr., to Andrea Meszaros in Budapest. For this special day, Sophia, lover of truffles and the great wines of Piedmont, personally requested that Carlo and his wife Paola, to organize the dinner reception for 150 people.

For the wedding, Carlo’s team arrived the day before the reception, and prepared 15 kilos (about 32 pounds) of fresh ravioli.

All the raw ingredients for the reception dinner came from the Langhe area in Piemonte except the eggs, which were bought in Budapest. In addition, three trucks full of Langhe wines traveled to Budapest.

The reception included princes, ambassadors, celebrities such as Amari, Alain Delon, the Fendi sisters, Robert Di Nero and Sabrina Ferrilli.

Book – Piedmont Sensations

Carlo has published a book titled “PIEDMONT SENSATIONS, a journey through the regions’ garden of delights,” printed in English and German as well. It includes the traditional food products of – hazelnuts from Cortemilia – cheeses, mushrooms, chestnuts, what to taste, buy, where to dine and recipes of Piemonte, along with not to miss locations to visit and stay.

Again, he has been invited to the summer Olympics in Beijing, China in August. Has already visited twice, and has his mobile truck kitchens arranged to send over, and will probably be “running for the gold himself,” and will succeed. Stai bene, Carlo.

Beijing, China –2008 Summer Olympic Games August 8 – 24, 2008

The XXIX Olympiad in Beijing will play host to 250 countries, and 10,500 athletes are expected to participate in the Games.

By Maria Battaglia