



Barilla's cookery library

Food for thought

PARMA
A pasta-maker gets a taste for books

TIME presses relentlessly onward, especially at this time of year, but some traditions hold firm. Roast turkey, potatoes and Brussels sprouts were served to guests at the Pensione Bozzola in Milan on Christmas Day in 1938. The small record of that meal, its print and floral decoration now faded, is one of a collection of menus that Barilla, the world's biggest pasta-maker, has brought together in its library in Parma, Italy's gastronomic capital.

For nearly 90 years until production ceased in 1999, a factory made pasta where the library now stands, in a square near the city's centre. Machinery was stripped out, the factory demolished, the site developed

to a design by Renzo Piano, a leading Italian architect, and the Academia Barilla opened in 2004, its basement housing the library. The ground floor holds a theatre, lecture hall and kitchens where the arts of Italian cooking are taught to aspiring professional chefs, well-to-do food-lovers from around the world, and teams of managers encouraged to bond over chopping blocks and mixing bowls. The library of over 8,500 cookery books in more than ten languages, nearly 5,000 menus and scores of old prints showing food in various phases of preparation serves students and teachers alike.

Academia Barilla's many American students head first for books on American cooking, says Giancarlo Gonizzi, the librarian who classified its contents along the lines of the Dewey decimal system to help users find their way around. "The White

House Cookbook", published in 1964, is among the system's "sixes"—thematic cookery—and so is a book on eating in Alcatraz. The library's oldest volume, "De Partibus Aedium", from 1516, is catalogued in the "nines"—gastronomic history, culture and tradition—where an illustrated account of a magnificent feast offered by King James II to Pope Innocent XI, published in 1688, too can be found. Also in this section is "La Cucina Futurista: Un Pranzo che Evitò un Suicidio" ("Futuristic Cooking: A Lunch that Prevented a Suicide"), published in 1932, with illustrations of dishes that anticipate how today's chefs take account of shape and colour when positioning each piece of food on the plate.

The library's nucleus came from Barilla's own library and a collection put together over 30 years by Giorgio Orlandini, an expert on Italian cooking. As well as adding new books, the library buys from antiquarian booksellers and at auction, although Mr Gonizzi says the prices asked can sometimes be hard to digest.

The library has the largest collection of works on cookery open to the public in Italy; unsurprisingly, the sections dealing with food technology and Italian cooking are very well stocked. The library is popular and widely used. Under an agreement with Parma's city authorities it is open one day a week and students of food science at Parma's university are regular visitors. To make itself easier to use, the library has begun digitising its contents and plans to make them available online. Who knows how food will be prepared 50 or 100 years from now? Paolo Barilla, deputy chairman of the pasta-maker, insists that a library that tells us about what and how we cooked in the past will keep the present alive in the future. ■