

WHEN IN ROME ...

DINING IN THE ETERNAL CITY

by Liza B. Zimmerman

The truth isn't for the squeamish: "The ancient Romans vomited to get rid of the heavy food, not because they wanted to eat again," explains Alberto Ciarla, owner of **Alberto Ciarla** (Piazza di San Cosimato 40. Tel. 011/39/6/5818668). Things have certainly changed over the past two thousand years in Rome.

The region of Lazio, where Rome is situated, is a pastoral area. Its cuisine is based on the products of the shepherd: lamb and a variety of sheep's milk cheeses are central. Fresh vegetables like artichokes, peas, chicory and fava beans line the stalls of the city's many markets, of which Campo dei Fiori is the most famous, vying for space with a stunning variety of locally grown herbs and greens. These make their way into most of Rome's dishes and are essential to its flavorful cuisine.

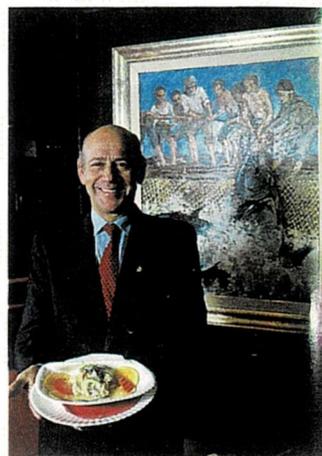
A culinary tradition that has weathered the centuries is that of the Roman Jews, who have lived in Rome for over two thousand years. The Jews are reputed by some to be the only real Romans left: "Everyone else is from outside the city," asserts Ciarla, whose Trastevere restaurant is known for fish and



Left: The entrance to Da Giggetto, one of the city's best spots to sample traditional Jewish-Roman cuisine.

Right: Alberto Ciarla (photo by F. Scalfari/AGF '90) proudly presenting one of his restaurant's signature dishes.

Below: Checchino dal 1887's Ninetta, Elio, and Francesco Mariani (photo by G. De Camillis).



seafood specialties like smoked sturgeon and swordfish.

The neighborhood where the Jews were forced to live from the mid-sixteenth century through the end of World War II is still called the Ghetto, and it is heir to a distinct cuisine. Claudio Ceccarelli's **Da Giggetto** (Via del Portico d'Ottavia 21/A. Tel. 011/39/6/6861105) is one of the Ghetto's oldest restaurants, where traditional dishes like *carciofi alla giudia* (Jewish-style artichokes), fried cod, and fried zucchini blossoms can be savored.

Another cornerstone of Roman cuisine is that of the *quinto quarto* (literally, the fifth fourth, this refers to an animal's internal organs, said to account for about a quarter of its weight). Tradition-

ally, Romans working at the Testaccio slaughterhouse were paid in part with the animals' internal organs, which they then brought to be prepared in the neighborhood trattorie, giving rise to a whole range of new dishes. Elio Mariani, whose **Checchino dal 1887**

(Via di Monte Testaccio 30. Tel. 011/39/6/5746318) has specialized in the cuisine of the *quinto quarto* for over a century, offers succulent *rigatoni with pajata* (lamb intestines) and *coda alla vaccinara* (oxtail stew). The slaughterhouse's recent move to the suburbs hasn't

put a damper on Checchino's success: Romans still flock to Testaccio for a taste of some of their city's unique specialties.

Roman cuisine has changed over the centuries, and it is still evolving. The tendency now is towards a lighter cuisine, with shorter cooking times, smaller portions, and olive oil replacing other cooking fats. Yet no matter how much it changes, the cuisine of this ancient city remains eternally Roman.

