



Shaved Artichoke Salad with Shrimp, p.22



Mauro Stoppa (right) with one of his crew aboard Eolo on the Venetian Lagoon.

# MAURO'S VENICE

To experience the essence of this city and its food traditions, we turn to captain, chef, tour guide and native son **MAURO STOPPA**

By **MARGARITA GOKUN SILVER**



sardines, also fried. We dig in as prosecco fizzes into our glasses to accompany this prelude to lunch and Eolo sets off to our first stop.

For 21 years Stoppa has been taking people out on the water. “I was 30 when I decided I wanted to spend part of my life on a boat,” he says. It took over a decade of selling agricultural equipment and another few years of planning, but in 1998 Stoppa bought the 52-year-old bragozzo. After renovating it and adding a kitchen, he launched it into the lagoon. “I wanted to find something nearest to my soul,” he says. His soul was in the lagoon.

At first glance Stoppa appears overly serious, cross even. He stoops to work in the cramped galley with its just-under-six-foot ceiling. Wearing matching lagoon-green uniforms, his crew of three prepare our lunch—I spy purple artichokes, herbs I don’t recognize, and a whole sea bass being readied for the oven. Stoppa is pouring olive oil over it when I ask to take his picture. He smiles a shy grin and I see that he isn’t cross at all. He’s serious, all right—it takes focus and concentration to whip up multi-course meals in a kitchen that seems smaller than its chef—but he’s also a softie when it comes to the things he loves. Get him to talk about the lagoon and why he takes visitors into its depths and he is all smiles, all the time.

When he began his cruises, the existing tours shuttled large groups just to the islands of Burano and Torcello, and called it “seeing the lagoon.” For Stoppa that was neither true nor enough. He wanted to share what life was like on the

Water is everywhere. Calm and charcoal-green, it’s in front of me, it’s behind me, it’s to my right and left. Being surrounded by water is a quintessential Venetian experience. But I’m unnerved that it’s also raining. The sky is a Dali-esque collection of gray cotton balls, some dustier than others, all extending as far as the eye can see.

On my fourth trip to the Sere-nissima, as Venice used to be known, I came to take a cruise of sorts, one that endeavors to celebrate the city’s unique ecosystem. Invited by Mauro Stoppa, an impassioned guide and a gifted chef, I’ll spend the next three days traversing the Venetian Lagoon—a shallow, saltwater embayment off the Adriatic Sea—in a bragozzo, a two-masted, 55-foot-long trawler. Now, crossing the gangway I wonder how the seven of us guests (plus crew!) will fare confined in its tiny cabin.

On Eolo, named after Aeolus, the Greek god of winds, fresh-cut tulips adorn a tarpaulin that covers the deck; and delicious smells escape the galley below. To welcome us Stoppa makes battered and deep-fried white and green asparagus along with herb-and-garlic-crust-



Mauro Stoppa’s boat can ferry guests to hidden parts of Venice, such as fish farms that have operated unchanged for centuries.

lagoon’s waters. “Eolo [is] a way to see the hidden parts, to move slowly, to be relaxed,” he says. Fomenting visitors’ connection with the lagoon is Stoppa’s ultimate goal.

Gastronomy plays a major role in that connection. “The meals on board are joined with the experience,” he says. “They come from the [lagoon] ingredients.” To source them Stoppa works closely with local fishermen, hunters and farmers. His dishes are always seasonal. The seafood, game and vegetables are local, some even from his own garden on the island of Vignole where Eolo docks when not cruising.

Because of Eolo’s intimate size there are no cabins for overnight stays so Stoppa only serves lunch. Instead we stay in boutique hotels and dine at restaurants he vets personally. Sometimes he joins but often he stays behind fine-tuning the next day’s menu. Some of Stoppa’s recipes—like for bicciolani, Venetian butter cookies—come from his mother, but most are just “classic Italian.” “Italian cuisine is simple,” he says. “[With] good ingredients you don’t have to work hard to give good results.” Stoppa cooks, organizes and sometimes even drives the boat during the cruise. Eolo’s been his primary residence since 2005 and his passengers are his guests. “If you have someone in your home, you try to create a [welcoming] atmosphere,” he says.

It’s a sentiment we feel keenly, rain and tight quarters notwithstanding. Stoppa’s crew are warm and gracious and his meals evoke five-star luxury and yet feel artisanal.

When the sun comes out on our third day, we eat on deck for the first time. Looking over the teal water I savor Stoppa’s first offering, a salad of shaved raw artichoke and sautéed shrimp, and realize I needn’t have worried about the rain. “The lagoon gives the soul a good change,” Stoppa says. The Eolo experience, rain or shine, amplifies that change.

**MARGARITA GOKUN SILVER**  
is a freelance writer who covers food and culture. She lives in Madrid.



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**Herb-Crusted Sea Bass**

ACTIVE: 25 min TOTAL: 1 hr 25 min  
 This whole fish smothered with herbs and buttery breadcrumbs is simple enough to let the flavor of the seafood shine through. If cleaning and prepping the fish isn't your thing, most fish counters at larger markets will do it for you. On Eolo, Mauro Stoppa serves the fish with roasted potatoes and Lemony Samphire (page 22.)

- 1 3-pound whole black bass or sea bass, cleaned, head and tail intact
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh tarragon
- ¾ teaspoon salt, divided
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- ⅓ cup dry white wine
- 1 tablespoon butter
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1½ cups whole-wheat breadcrumbs
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh basil
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh marjoram or oregano
- 3 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley

1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
2. Sprinkle the inside of the fish cavity with tarragon and ¼ teaspoon salt.
3. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a roasting pan over medium-low heat. Add the fish and pour in wine. Bake until the fish is opaque in the center, 40 to 50 minutes.
4. Meanwhile, heat the remaining 1 tablespoon oil, butter and garlic in a large skillet over medium heat. Add breadcrumbs, basil, marjoram (or oregano), parsley and the remaining ½ teaspoon salt. Cook, stirring often, until the breadcrumbs are toasted, 3 to 4 minutes.
5. Score the skin of the fish near the gills and carefully pull it off toward the tail. (Discard the skin.) Spread the breadcrumb mixture over the fish, pressing gently. Return the fish to the oven and bake for 5 minutes.

SERVES 6: 4 oz. fish each  
 Cal 288 Fat 13g (sat 3g) Chol 65mg Carbs 10g  
 Total sugars 1g (added 0g) Protein 29g Fiber 2g  
 Sodium 499mg Potassium 401mg.

**Rabbit Saor**

ACTIVE: 35 min TOTAL: 2¾ hrs  
 Here rabbit (or chicken) is cooked in the style of Sarde in Saor, a classic dish where sardines are fried in olive oil, mixed with onions and raisins sautéed in the same flavorful oil and then finished with a jolt of vinegar. Juniper berries add a woody essence.

- 1 rabbit (about 3 pounds), skinned and cut into 6 pieces, or 3 pounds bone-in, skinless chicken thighs
- ½ cup passito or other white dessert wine plus 2 tablespoons, divided
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 5 medium white onions, thinly sliced



Rabbit Saor



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Fried Asparagus & Squash Blossoms, p.22

- 8 juniper berries
- 1½ teaspoons salt, divided
- ⅓ cup white-wine vinegar
- ¼ teaspoon ground white pepper, divided
- ⅓ cup pine nuts
- ⅓ cup raisins
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 6 cups greens, such as arugula, mâche, lamb's lettuce, spinach or watercress

1. Place rabbit (or chicken) in a large pot and add just enough water to cover the meat. Add ½ cup wine, cover and bring to a simmer over high heat. Reduce heat to maintain a simmer, covered, until the meat is very tender, about 2 hours for rabbit or 30 minutes for chicken.
2. Meanwhile, heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add onions, juniper

berries and ½ teaspoon salt. Cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, 18 to 20 minutes. Stir in vinegar. Cover the pan and set aside.

3. Transfer the rabbit (or chicken) to a clean cutting board. Using two forks, shred the meat into large pieces. (Discard bones.) Transfer to a medium bowl and add the remaining 2 tablespoons wine, 1 tablespoon oil, ¾ teaspoon salt and ⅓ teaspoon white pepper. Stir in the onion mixture, pine nuts and raisins.
4. Whisk lemon juice with the remaining 2 tablespoons oil, ¼ teaspoon salt and ⅓ teaspoon white pepper in a medium bowl. Add greens and toss to coat. Serve the salad with the meat.

SERVES 6: 1½ cups meat & ⅔ cup salad each  
 Cal 509 Fat 27g (sat 5g) Chol 124mg Carbs 18g  
 Total sugars 10g (added 0g) Protein 47g  
 Fiber 3g Sodium 664mg Potassium 914mg.

### Lemony Samphire

**ACTIVE:** 5 min **TOTAL:** 10 min  
*Called sea beans in the U.S., samphire is crunchy seaweed that adds crunch and brininess to dishes and can be eaten raw or cooked. Look for it in gourmet markets or fish markets or order online at melissas.com. (Photo: page 20.)*

- 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
- 8 ounces samphire (sea beans)
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

Heat oil in a large skillet over high heat. Add samphire and cook, stirring occasionally, until tender, about 5 minutes. Stir in lemon juice.

**SERVES 6:** ½ cup each  
**Cal 39 Fat 3g (sat 0g) Chol 0mg Carbs 4g**  
**Total sugars 0g (added 0g) Protein 1g Fiber 0g**  
**Sodium 329mg Potassium 22mg.**

### Shaved Artichoke Salad with Shrimp

**ACTIVE:** 55 min **TOTAL:** 55 min  
*Venice was built on saltwater marshes in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and many local crops like the city's Sant'Erasmus artichokes, have a delicate taste of the sea. For this salad artichokes are sliced thin—a great use for a mandolin if you have one—and served raw. When paired with the sweet-salty shrimp the combo evokes the flavors of the lagoon. For tender and tasty results, buy the smallest, freshest artichokes you can find. (Photo: page 16.)*

- 1 lemon, halved
- 12 small to medium artichokes
- 4 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, divided
- 2 tablespoons torn fresh mint leaves
- Pinch of salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper, divided
- ½ pound large shrimp (26-30 per pound), peeled and deveined

**1.** Squeeze a lemon half into a bowl of cold water. Cut stems from artichokes and discard. Working with one artichoke at a time, pull off all the leaves and soft purple petals and discard. Using a sharp paring knife, trim any remaining green parts from the heart. Rub with the cut side of the remaining lemon half. Scoop out the fuzzy choke with a melon baller or spoon. Rub again with the lemon half. Place the artichoke heart in the lemon water to prevent discoloration while you trim the rest.  
**2.** Very thinly slice the artichoke hearts and immediately toss them in a bowl with 2 tablespoons oil, mint, salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper.  
**3.** Heat the remaining 2 tablespoons oil in a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add shrimp and the remaining ¼ teaspoon pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the shrimp are pink, 3 to 4 minutes.

**4.** Serve the shrimp with the artichokes and garnished with more mint, if desired.  
**SERVES 4:** 1 cup each  
**Cal 243 Fat 14g (sat 2g) Chol 68mg Carbs 18g**  
**Total sugars 2g (added 0g) Protein 14g**  
**Fiber 9g Sodium 237mg Potassium 737mg.**

### Risi e Bisi

**ACTIVE:** 1¼ hrs **TOTAL:** 1¼ hrs  
*This risotto-like combo of rice and peas is made with a very cool technique that infuses the dish with one of the great tastes of spring. Once Stoppa has shelled the peas he steeps the pods in water with onion to make a delicate broth to cook the rice in. (Photo: page 21.)*

- 1¼ pounds fresh English peas in pods
- 1 medium yellow onion, chopped
- 8 cups water
- ½ cup passito or other white dessert wine
- ½ cup raisins
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 1 small white onion, thinly sliced
- 1½ cups arborio or carnaroli rice
- 2 tablespoons dry white wine
- 1¼ teaspoons salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground white pepper

**1.** Shell peas, reserving the pods. Place the pods, yellow onion and water in a large pot. Bring to a simmer. Reduce heat to maintain a simmer and cook for 25 minutes. Pour the broth through a strainer into a large saucepan (discard the solids). You should have 6 cups. Keep the broth hot over low heat.  
**2.** Combine passito (or other dessert wine) and raisins in a medium bowl. Set aside.  
**3.** Heat oil in a large skillet over medium heat. Add white onion and cook, stirring often, until lightly browned, about 4 minutes. Add the shelled peas and cook for 1 minute. Cover and cook until the peas are tender, about 3 minutes more. Add rice and stir to coat with oil. Add dry white wine and cook, stirring, until evaporated, about 15 seconds. Add ½ cup of the reserved pea broth and cook over medium-low heat, stirring frequently, until most of the liquid has been absorbed. Continue to cook, adding the hot broth ½ cup at a time and stirring frequently after each addition, until most of the liquid is absorbed. The risotto is done when you've used all the hot liquid and the rice is creamy and just tender, 25 to 35 minutes total.  
**4.** Stir in the reserved raisins and wine; season with salt and white pepper.  
**SERVES 8:** 1 cup each  
**Cal 221 Fat 4g (sat 1g) Chol 0mg Carbs 39g**  
**Total sugars 7g (added 0g) Protein 5g Fiber 3g**  
**Sodium 373mg Potassium 160mg.**

### Fried Asparagus & Squash Blossoms

**ACTIVE:** 45 min **TOTAL:** 2 hrs  
*Fritto misto, mixed fried foods, is a typical Italian nibble. Mauro fries robinia (black locust) flowers that grow in the region, but we've adapted the recipe using easier-to-find squash blossoms. Be sure to salt the asparagus and blossoms as soon as they're out of the oil so that the crystals will stick to the food. (Photo: page 21.)*

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
- 1½ cups seltzer water
- 15 white and/or green asparagus spears, trimmed
- 1¼ cups extra-virgin olive oil
- 1¼ cups canola oil
- 15 squash blossoms, stems trimmed to ¾ inch
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt

**1.** Place flour in a medium bowl. Gradually whisk in seltzer water until smooth. Cover and refrigerate for 1 hour.  
**2.** Meanwhile, bring a large pot of water to a boil. Place a large bowl of ice water by the stove. Plunge asparagus into the boiling water and cook for 1 minute. Lift it out with tongs or a slotted spoon and transfer to the ice water. Drain the asparagus and pat dry.  
**3.** Combine olive oil and canola oil in a large skillet; heat over medium heat to 350°F. Whisk the batter, then, working in batches, dip the asparagus and squash blossoms in the batter. Carefully transfer to the hot oil and fry until crisp and golden, 1 to 2 minutes per side, adjusting the heat as necessary to maintain the temperature. Transfer to a baking sheet lined with paper towels. Sprinkle with salt.  
**SERVES 5:** 3 asparagus spears & 3 blossoms each  
**Cal 351 Fat 36g (sat 4g) Chol 0mg Carbs 7g**  
**Total sugars 1g (added 0g) Protein 2g Fiber 1g**  
**Sodium 193mg Potassium 115mg.**

### Bicciolani

**ACTIVE:** 25 min **TOTAL:** 6 hrs 40 min (including 6 hrs chilling time)  
**TO MAKE AHEAD:** Refrigerate dough (Step 1) overnight. Store cookies airtight for up to 1 week.  
**EQUIPMENT:** Parchment paper  
*The intense blend of spices in these cookies is a tip of the hat to Venice's history as a conduit for the spice trade between Europe and the Far East.*

- ½ cup all-purpose flour
- ½ cup white whole-wheat flour
- 5 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 3 tablespoons cornmeal
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- Pinch of ground cloves
- Pinch of ground coriander
- Pinch of ground mace



Bicciolani

ILLUSTRATIONS BY HEATHER GATELY; STYLING: NORA SINGLEY (FOOD); PAIGE HICKS (PHOTOS)

- Pinch of ground white pepper
- Pinch of salt
- 4 large egg yolks
- ½ cup (1 stick) cold unsalted butter, cubed
- ½ teaspoon vanilla extract

**1.** Whisk all-purpose flour, whole-wheat flour, sugar, cornmeal, cinnamon, cloves, coriander, mace, white pepper and salt in a large bowl. Add egg yolks, butter and vanilla. Blend the ingredients with your fingertips until the dough comes together. Shape the dough into a 7-by-1½-inch log and wrap in plastic wrap. Refrigerate for 6 hours or up to 3 days.  
**2.** Position racks in middle and upper third of

oven; preheat to 350°F. Let the dough stand at room temperature while the oven preheats. Line 2 baking sheets with parchment paper.  
**3.** Slice the dough into ¾-inch-thick rounds and place at least 1 inch apart on the prepared pans. Bake the cookies, switching the pans between racks and rotating from back to front halfway through, until lightly browned around the edges and firm in the center, 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer the cookies to a rack to cool.  
**MAKES:** about 40 cookies (per cookie)  
**Cal 45 Fat 3g (sat 2g) Chol 25mg Carbs 4g**  
**Total sugars 2g (added 2g) Protein 1g Fiber 0g**  
**Sodium 5mg Potassium 8mg.**



## When in Venice

### CRUISE

To plan a voyage on **Eolo** with Mauro Stoppa visit [cruisingvenice.com](http://cruisingvenice.com).

### STAY

The **Ca Maria Adele** ([camariaadele.it](http://camariaadele.it)) is a small boutique hotel set in a 16<sup>th</sup>-century palazzo in Dorsoduro, an area known for its artsy vibe, nightlife and smaller tourist crowds. Or check into the **Palazzo Ca'Nova** ([canova-venezia.com](http://canova-venezia.com)), part of a Grand Canal palace that's been owned by one family for almost two centuries.

### EAT

For local fare try the Fritto Misto or Venetian-style calf's liver and onions at **Antiche Carampane** ([antichecarampane.com](http://antichecarampane.com)). **Pasticceria Rizzardini**, a traditional wood-paneled bakery, offers the sweets that have captivated Venice since 1742.

### DRINK

Wine in the Veneto region is an important part of the food culture as well as a booming economic anchor. While the area is well known for prosecco and pinot grigio, also look out for Valpolicella, Amarone, Soave, Bardolino, trebbiano, pinot bianco and verdicchio.

**Passito** wines are made in the Veneto with grapes that are sun-dried before they are fermented. This centuries-old method yields sweeter, more concentrated results. Mauro Stoppa pays homage to this ancient tradition by using passito in his cooking. These wines can be hard to find in the U.S., but vin de vaille from Tablas Creek Vineyard in Paso Robles, California, is a good substitute.

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