



Marco Pasanella, his wife, Rebecca Robertson, and son, Luca, live above their wine shop.

TASTEMAKER q&a

## An American Lives the Tuscan Dream

New York City wine merchant Marco Pasanella has turned the building where he lives and works into his own tiny piece of Tuscany.

INTERVIEW BY MEGAN KRIGBAUM PHOTOGRAPHS BY BUFF STRICKLAND

## TASTEMAKER q&a

MARCO PASANELLA LOVES WINE AND FOOD SO MUCH THAT he has figured out how to surround himself with them, 24 hours a day. A successful interior designer, he opened the wine shop Pasanella and Son in Manhattan earlier this year when the commercial space below his apartment became available. He hosts wine-tasting parties in the back room and garden, cooking recipes inspired by the Italian dishes he makes for his family. Mary Taylor, who used to work in the wine department at Sotheby's, is his wine buyer, while his wife, Rebecca Robertson, sources the wineglasses and antique corkscrews the shop sells. But the place's laid-back, whimsical sensibility is Pasanella's—

like the fact that he keeps a 1967 Ferrari parked inside the store, its trunk full of bottles. How long will the car stay? "We had to move a thousand bottles to get it in," Pasanella says. "I guess I'll drive it out the next time I feel like moving a thousand bottles." Here, he describes his style.



**trunk show** Marco Pasanella parks his 1967 Ferrari inside his shop and sells wine out of the trunk. His wife finds the shop's playful accessories, like glasses from Dutch by Design (left).



## TASTEMAKER q&a



**wine extras** Pasanella and Son takes an irreverent approach to wine. The store sells etched berry glasses from Roost (\$15) that can be used for Champagne, hosts grappa tastings at which guests play the Italian card game *scopa*, and offers an eclectic variety of antique corkscrews procured on eBay ([passanellaandson.com](http://passanellaandson.com)).

### **We love your shop. What was your inspiration for it?**

We believe strongly in the connection between food and wine. We leave out recipe cards on tables in the shop for people to take home, and we give a lot of pairing suggestions. We started doing the recipes because we found out that something like 94 percent of all wine is consumed within an hour of purchase. So let's help people out.

### **How would you describe the vibe of your store?**

It's really a neighborhood shop. It feels very comfortable and very sophisticated but welcoming. There's this third-place phenomenon, where you have home, you have work and you have this other place, where people want to hang out. The shop is some people's third place. Last night, I basically had to kick people out—"Guys, you can't hang out here anymore, you've got to go home. I need to walk the dog."

### **Why did you decide to have tasting parties in the shop?**

We have a nice outdoor space, and it seemed like a great way to bring people in and have fun. We're

planning a grappa tasting with the card game *scopa*. If you hang out at the bars in Italy, the old men are drinking grappa and playing *scopa*. So we thought, if we had a grappa tasting, we'd have different grappas and play cards, too. We're also going to do a tasting party where all of the wines have a dog on the label because we have a dog and the dog-run camaraderie is very strong in the neighborhood.

### **Do you usually serve food at the tasting parties?**

Yes, but we try to make it stress-free. Brunello and *bistecca alla fiorentina* just seems to be a cool combo. Big, meaty and simple. I sometimes prepare a rib eye as a tagliata with rosemary—I'll slice the meat and serve it over a bed of arugula with olive oil and lemon juice (see recipe, p. 76). We put it out with some roasted potatoes, maybe grilled asparagus or sautéed mushrooms, or polenta even. For a women's wine night, I'll put out big bowls of salad and charcuterie, plus cheese and some great little sweets that I'll pick up somewhere.

### **What's your favorite wineglass, at home and at the store?**

Personally, I like drinking wine out of those little Picardi water glasses. For tastings in the store, we use Ravenscroft glasses that are just \$7 each. That way, if you're drinking wine, you're not freaked about the glass. You're not thinking, "Oh my God! Is that a chip?!"

### **What wine accessories do you sell at the store?**

My wife, Becky, is an eBay-aholic. She's always on the lookout for cool, wine-related accessories. Some of the best ones she's found are a little Rube Goldberg-like; they have about 100 million pieces. And the wooden corkscrews sell like crazy because they're just five bucks. We also carry these great cups from Dutch by Design (\$85 for set of four) that have an outline of a wineglass on the front. The rest of the glass is frosted, so it tricks the eye into thinking it's a regular wineglass.

### **What wines do you serve at parties?**

One that I really enjoy is a 2003 La Spinetta Barbera (\$24). It has a little rhinoceros on the label. And if

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Pasanella calls fresh pasta "miraculous—all it takes is flour, water and eggs."

we have over really thirsty friends, then we do a 2002 Abbazia Santa Anastasia Nero d'Avola (\$15) from Sicily. It's such a nice, welcoming wine—if a wine can be welcoming.

### How do you set the table?

This is actually where Becky and I diverge. I like this china that you can buy in Italy at the *agraria*—a farm-supply place. It's like buying china at the Agway. It's really gritty, made out of terra-cotta that's hand-painted with a little abstract flower design. Becky thinks it's very Farmer in the Dell and that it breaks easily—which it does. But you bought it at a farm-supply place; it's not like it's a priceless antique.

### What's your favorite floral arrangement?

We have 16-foot ceilings in our apartment—they used to raise sails on ship masts in here—so in the spring, we get cherry-blossom branches and put them in a

galvanized zinc trash can. They're huge and tall, and two big bunches of branches are just spectacularly pretty. I like to take advantage of the height and put the flowers on the floor behind the dining table, where people can still see them but don't have to look around them when they're sitting down to a meal.

### What's your favorite wine shop other than your own?

My favorite is one in Lucca, Italy, called Enoteca Vanni ([enotecavanni.com](http://enotecavanni.com)). It's the size of a small dry cleaners, and there's a sweet guy in front, and you think, Okay, no big deal. Then if you look interested, he'll say, "Would you like to go downstairs?" And underneath, there's this huge cellar with big stone arches, and there is just room after room of wines—even ones that were stunning to me, like a whole bunch of California wines from the 1960s and '70s. It's like going down Alice's rabbit hole.

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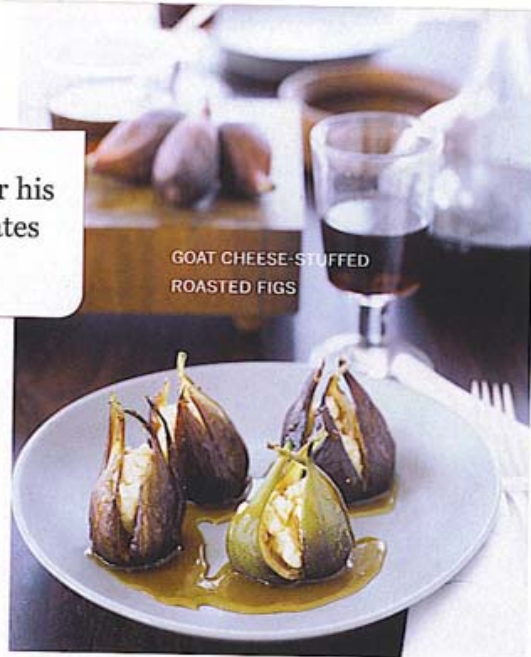
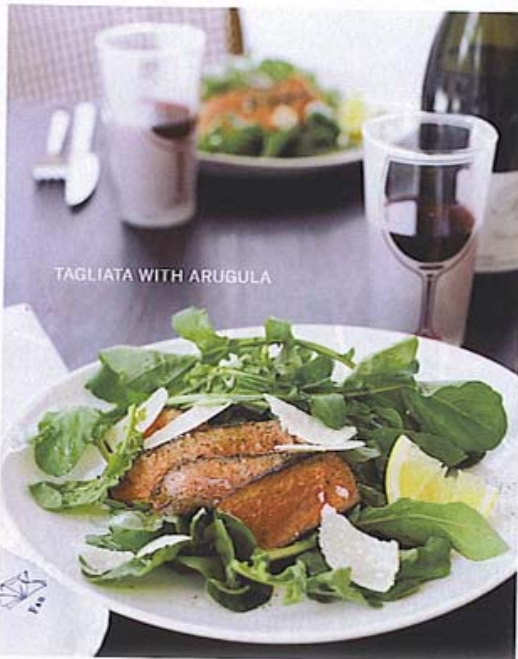
*marco's favorites* Whether he's cooking for his family or his customers, Pasanella gravitates toward strong, simple Italian flavors.

### Sage Fettuccine

ACTIVE: 30 MIN; TOTAL: 1 HR; 4 SERVINGS

2¼ cups all-purpose flour • 2 tablespoons minced sage • 2 large eggs beaten with ½ cup water • 2 tablespoons unsalted butter • 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil • salt and freshly ground pepper • 6 tablespoons freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

1. On a work surface, toss the flour with the minced sage. Make a well in the center and pour in the egg mixture. Stir with a fork, gradually incorporating all of the flour. Once the dough is too stiff to stir, knead it to work in as much of the flour as possible. Divide the dough in half, wrap in plastic and let rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.
2. Lightly flour the dough and, working with one piece at a time, run it through a pasta machine set on successively narrower notches, ending at the second-to-thinnest setting. Cut the pasta sheet into 4 pieces and drape over a rack to dry for a few minutes. Repeat with the remaining dough. Run the pasta sheets through the fettuccine cutter, lightly dusting with flour. Spread the fettuccine out on a baking sheet and let stand for 15 minutes.
3. Cook the fettuccine in boiling salted water until al dente, about 5 minutes. Drain well, reserving ¾ cup of the cooking water. Return the water to the pot and stir in the butter, olive oil and a pinch of salt and pepper. Add the fettuccine and cook over moderate heat for 2 minutes. Add the cheese, toss and serve.



**WINE** A bright, juicy Piedmont Barbera will stand up to the earthy sage and nutty Parmesan here. Pasanella drinks the licorice-inflected 2003 La Spinetta; the 2003 Marcarini Ciabot Camerano, full of raspberry flavor, is another good choice.

### Goat Cheese–Stuffed Roasted Figs

ACTIVE: 20 MIN; TOTAL: 30 MIN; MAKES 12 FIGS

Quarter 12 figs, cutting three-quarters of the way down. Stuff the figs with goat cheese. Roast in an oiled pan at 425° for 12 minutes, until softened. Serve drizzled with warmed honey.

### Tagliata with Arugula

ACTIVE: 20 MIN; TOTAL: 50 MIN; 4 SERVINGS

1 minced garlic clove • 1½ teaspoons each of chopped rosemary and sage • coarse sea salt and freshly ground pepper • 1 boneless rib eye steak, cut 2 inches thick (2¼ pounds) • Extra-virgin olive oil • 1 bunch of arugula • 1 tablespoon lemon juice • 1 cup shaved Parmigiano-Reggiano Preheat the oven to 350°. Preheat a cast-iron skillet. In a bowl, mix the garlic, rosemary, sage, 1½ teaspoons salt and ½ teaspoon of pepper. Rub the mixture all over the steak. Add 1 tablespoon of oil to the skillet. Add the steak and cook over moderate heat until browned all over. Stand the steak on its side and roast it in the oven for 20 minutes, or until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the center registers 135°. Transfer the steak to a cutting board and let rest for 10 minutes, then slice. Spread the arugula on a platter and top with the steak. Drizzle with oil and lemon juice and top with the cheese shavings.

**WINE** The Tuscan Brunello di Montalcino is a natural partner for this Tuscan steak. Two of Pasanella's favorites are the violet-scented, plummy 2000 Altesino and the more traditional 1999 Il Marroneto, full of spicy tannins. For a more affordable pick, try the smoky 2003 Collemattoni Rosso di Montalcino. ●

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