



# Winedog Speaks

## It's All In The Sauce

It's actually a bit colder today and almost feels like winter for a change. What better time of year is there than a cold winter's day to cook something from the old days, what we often describe as comfort foods. These change according to our individual backgrounds but over the years I've noticed that no matter who's comfort food we are talking about, if you appreciate food with soul, you will enjoy whatever is coming off the stove.

Food has always been an important part of my life and over the years I've enjoyed homemade chicken and dumplings from Kentucky, arroz con pollo in Cuban Miami, chicken matzo ball soup in Jewish Miami, roast pig and spaetzle in Germany, turnip greens with pot licker and hoe cakes in North Carolina, Slovakian liver and dumplings soup, Cassoulet in Burgundy, and many more local comfort foods. One of the most satisfying experiences I've ever had was with an old Sicilian couple I visited in Naples (Florida) who insisted they were going to feed me like family.

This was the first time I ever watched how traditional Italian tomato sauce is made and enjoyed the wonderful fragrance a house takes on as the big pot bubbles away in the kitchen for hours. More recently, I've enjoyed incredible homemade sauces created from old family recipes by family friends Ann Antenucci of Big Tree Plantation and Brigid Adams. Both have deep roots in great Italian cooking and it shows in their results. There are actually some pretty good sauces available from the market in jars but I cannot stress strongly enough how amazing slow cooked sauce from hand-selected ingredients is and how much more it offers than pre-made sauces. The results of taking the time to do it right will spoil you and your family forever. Here's my take on home-made sauce which has been modified over the years as I've tasted and appreciated other versions:

### **Old World Tomato Sauce**

(Enough for 2 pounds of pasta or 8 to 10 hungry diners)

During warmer months when you can use top quality tomatoes, this sauce is best made with blanched garden tomatoes. From what I saw



recently at the market, go with canned tomatoes during the winter for your best results. I'm embarrassed for the grocers as they try to pawn those things off at \$3.99 a pound!

You'll need:

- 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 medium onions, diced
- 2 tablespoons anchovy paste (optional but highly recommended)
- 8 cloves garlic, crushed with the flat of a knife and then thinly sliced
- 1½ cups diced fresh basil
- 1 cup red wine, quality should be good enough to drink
- 2 tablespoons turbinado (raw) sugar
- Sea salt and fresh ground pepper to taste
- 2 (28 ounce) cans crushed or diced tomatoes
- 2 teaspoons fresh lemon juice

Using a top quality, heavy bottom stew pot, heat your olive oil over medium heat and add your onions. Sauté the onions long enough for them to turn soft and translucent, about 10 to 12 minutes. Add your garlic, anchovy paste, and fresh basil and continue to cook, covered, for about 5 minutes. Remove your lid.

Add your wine, ½ cup water and your canned tomatoes. Stir well, season with salt & pepper if needed, stir again and set your temperature to simmer, leaving the pot uncovered. I like to simmer my sauce for about 3 hours, stirring it from time to time and making sure that the sauce is not burning on the bottom. (This is a great reason to invest in an excellent stewing pot!) The longer you simmer your sauce, the richer it will be and the more intense the flavor.

About 5 minutes before you remove your sauce from the heat add your lemon juice and check to see if it needs salt or pepper to correct the taste.

Some love to turn their sauce into a Neapolitan Sauce. All you need to do is add about two-dozen sliced ripe olives and 3 tablespoons of capers just before you finish up your sauce. You may also add chopped fresh Italian flat leaf parsley, about ½ to ¾ cup, right at the finish if you wish. It is a traditional garnish, very attractive and it compliments the flavor.

I did want to mention a few things about one of the key parts of a traditional pasta dish with tomato sauce and that is the cheeses you may be using and how they can affect the overall flavor of the dish. First, I would recommend that you pick up a well-made grater of either the box style or a rotary hand model, which allows you to protect your knuckles and turn a simple crank. Freshly grated cheese has more fragrance and taste and a texture that really enhances your dish.

When talking about popular Italian grating or *grana* cheeses, the first that comes to mind for most Americans is Parmesan, which can actually be *Grana Padano* labeled as Parmesan in the USA and significantly less flavorful than true *Parmigiano Reggiano*.

Watch for the whole name on the cheese you purchase to be sure you're getting the genuine item. Real Parmesan is produced solely from summer milk from designated regions in northern and central Italy. It has a rich, buttery flavor with a touch of piquant in the finish.

My personal favorite for grating over pasta is *Pecorino Romano* produced from sheep's milk in a designated central region of Italy. It has as much or more flavor as the true Parmigiano with an additional piquant kick. Like most great sheep's milk cheeses it has a tendency to be a tad saltier than cow's milk varieties and I would factor that in if you're going to use it when seasoning your sauce.



There are so many terrific red and white wines in Italy I think most people could limit their wine cellar to just Italy and they would do very nicely. I think as we enjoy simple, hand-crafted Italian foods it only seems right to enjoy a simple, inexpensive red wine that will do well with lots of Italian dishes. I've recommended to many friends a well-made Montepulciano d'Abruzzo in the past and only heard rave reviews back from them. The Abruzzo grape produces a flavorful, soft red with just the right balance of fruit, earth and tannins to go beautifully with foods. There are numerous good, sound producers of this red wine and some of my favorites include Farnese, Canaletto and Baron Cornacchia.

Always be sure to let us know if you need help finding the wines we recommend or if you have questions or comments on the foods we present. We love to hear from you and can be reached at 888-288-0668. Our website, [www.winedog.com](http://www.winedog.com), offers a full archive of the recipes we've offered over the years and much more wine and food information. We can always be reached by email if you are a little phone shy on the website. Hope you have a great week. Cheers!

*Jerry Allison, a native of Warren County in Southwestern Ohio, has been in the fine wine and fine dining field for 29 years in the South Florida and Chicago markets. He writes a weekly syndicated column, manages a fine wine business and is the executive chef for Winedog Fine Wines and Catering Services. You can visit his column archive at [www.winedog.com](http://www.winedog.com) and take your comments and questions directly to him at 888-288-0668 or email him at [winedog@winedog.com](mailto:winedog@winedog.com). He has resided with his wife and two sons since 1999 in the country outside of Morrow, Ohio.*



