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BON APPÉTIT

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ISLANDS OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

DELICIOUS FOOD IN MAGICAL SETTINGS



ON CAPRI:
SPAGHETTI WITH CLAMS,
PARSLEY AND LEMON

CEPHALONIA • DJERBA • PANTELLERIA • MINORCA • CYPRUS

CORSICA • SARDINIA • GIGLIO • ELBA • OSLUK • CORFU • MALTA

• KYTHERA • SAMOS • SYROS • FILICUDI • ISCHIA •

SICILY

pastries range from classic favorites like cassata to innovative desserts that successfully use vegetables in place of fruit.

Such modern twists are not unusual in twenty-first-century Sicily. "Modern Sicilian cuisine bridges the gap between the future and the past," points out Ciccio Sultano, the talented young chef and owner of Ristorante Duomo in the ancient town of Ragusa Ibla. Sultano has built an inspired cuisine around the area's uniquely flavorful ingredients, like cherry tomatoes, pistachios, bitter almonds and the delicate long-stemmed pears from Mount Etna. "There are excellent wild foods, too," he says, "from the herbs that have chosen to grow here—fennel, mint, thyme and oregano—to the game, mushrooms, wild berries and chestnuts."

My final stop, the pretty fishing port of Syracuse on the east coast, is a good place to find the varieties of Mediterranean fish that star in so much of the island's cucina. Swordfish—traditionally caught in the Strait of Messina—and tuna are often accompanied by tomatoes, as well as raisins and pine nuts, mint and garlic, or capers and olives. Sardinies, red mullet and inky squid are popular, abundant and affordable. They are best when cooked with delicate Sicilian extra-virgin olive oil—never butter—and eaten with chewy fresh bread.

From the port, I walk across the bridge to the tiny, beautiful island of Ortigia, where the city center is located. Its creamy-pink streets are full of restaurants, shops and wonderful architecture, like the baroque cathedral, which was built on the site of a Greek temple to Athena and houses a medieval church within it. The piazza here is a great place to sit, have a glass of the local wine and watch the *passaggiata*, the parade of couples and families out for an evening stroll.

And it's a great place to reflect on Sicily's ancient allure. Here, in this city, are some of the best of the Greek archaeological ruins—Syracuse was one of the most important cities in the western world for more than a thousand years. Those ruins are now surrounded by a modern city and, beyond that, by orange and lemon groves that fill the Sicilian air with their exquisite perfume.



MARSALA MASTER: MARCO DE BARTOLI (RIGHT) WITH HIS SONS RENATO (CENTER) AND SEBASTIANO.

MARSALA

One of Sicily's great gifts to the world is Marsala, a fortified wine that was born in the vineyards near the city of the same name. Marsala, which ranges in style from dry to sweet, can be served as an aperitif or as an after-dinner drink, and it is often used in cooking.

While Florio is the best-known producer of Marsala, Marco De Bartoli is a smaller producer who is often credited with bringing Marsala back into the spotlight.

"Traditional Marsala is a great wine," De Bartoli says. "But it has been cheapened by manufacturing processes that have nothing to do with its origins." De Bartoli produces several classic Marsalas, but he is most famous for the *Vecchio Samperi*, a new-style "Marsala" (though it cannot be labeled as such) made without added liquor and aged in wood barrels for as long as 20 years.

{RECIPE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 154}

10 minutes. Cover and simmer 10 minutes. Transfer mixture to processor. Blend to chunky puree; return to pot. Mix in 2 bottles clam juice to make tomato broth.

Combine mussels, clams and wine in another large pot. Cover and cook over high heat until mussels and clams open, about 8 minutes. Using tongs, transfer mussels and clams to bowl (discard any that do not open). Strain cooking liquid into tomato broth.

Place couscous in large bowl. Bring $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups water, 3 cups tomato broth and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup oil to boil in medium saucepan. Mix into couscous. Cover; let stand until liquid is absorbed, about 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Cover; let

stand until ready to serve.

Meanwhile, mix thyme and bay leaves into remaining tomato broth in pot and bring to boil over medium-high heat. Add fish. Cover and simmer 4 minutes. Add shrimp; cover and simmer until seafood is opaque in center, about 4 minutes. Turn off heat. Add reserved mussels and clams. Cover; let stand 2 minutes.

Mound couscous on platter. Top with seafood. Spoon some tomato broth over to moisten. Sprinkle with parsley. Mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup tomato broth and hot chili paste in small dish. Serve couscous, passing chili mixture and remaining broth separately.

Sambal oelek is available in Asian markets and some supermarkets. ➤