



Q & A with Chef Luciano Schipano

Introduce yourself and tell us about your background.

My name is Luciano Schipano. I am an Italian chef with a Calabrese background, and I am proud to bring the spices, flavours, and cultures from the South of Italy. I started cooking when I was seven years old, so my entire life I've had a spoon in my hand, cooking for myself and sharing my passion for using simple, seasonal fresh ingredients. That is what keeps me motivated - to go back in history and rediscover recipes from the past.

Where does your culinary inspiration come from?

I was first inspired by the simplicity of my grandfather's cooking. He'd open the pantry, get a little bit of this and that, and in half an hour have dinner ready. But what mostly pushed me into the kitchen was my mother. She was always cooking while whistling or singing. That showed me happiness and I always say I want to be happy as my mother. So, simplicity and being happy in the kitchen, sharing the space with other people. That is what inspired me the most.

Tell us about Slow Food Toronto and its mission.

I've been at Slow Food Toronto for the last five years. We want to get the message out to farmer's markets around Toronto to people who care about eating good food, paying a fair price, and eating clean. Our mission is to reconnect farmers with the citizens of Ontario and try to promote the farmers' market as a place where people can go and buy products for their families. We also promote cooking clubs for kids. I've had the opportunity to volunteer in elementary schools and teach kids how to make simple healthy snacks instead of buying processed and frozen food.

Talk about your partnership with Villa Charities, for our two new culinary series – Villa Cucina and A Taste of Italy.

Being at Villa Charities is something I am really excited about. I am happy as an Italian to collaborate with Villa Charities because they have always brought me a great deal of joy. It's the 'house of Italians.' To be there, sharing my passion and knowledge with the young, the elders and with all the people who recognize themselves as a part of Villa Charities is a source of pride for me.

Villa Cucina is a class we have every week, where you can cook along with the chefs who I collaborate with. It's a moment that you can experience and feel like you're cooking, eating

and drinking like an Italian for a couple of hours each week. We created this program because we wanted to bring Villa Charities a little bit of flair while going back to the authenticity of Italy. I tell everybody that Toronto has a lot of Italians, and a lot of people who want to be Italian, so it's just great that we started this collaboration with Villa Charities for patrons to have an authentic Italian experience.

The Taste of Italy series is just that. In creating the menu for the series, I was able to research special ingredients that we don't taste every day and celebrate Italy through food and wine. It is a monthly series, so every month we want people to come and taste something different and talk about Italy from the North to the South. It's about being united through food and wine, celebrating diversity, celebrating different ingredients, and tasting good food.

What will the participants be learning at the Villa Cucina series? Do you require any prior cooking experience?

Anyone can attend a cooking class with us. We start from the basics, so you don't need to know how to cook. We will try to inspire you and share the same love and passion that I have for cooking. So, I invite everyone to join us for a little bit of fun and to meet new people. We make everybody comfortable around the pan, the dish and a glass of wine make the magic happen.

How are Italian food and Italian culture connected?

Oh, it is directly connected! You cannot separate the culture from food. Food talks to us about history, geography, traditions, and even religion because a lot of food is traditionally attached. Every food, every recipe that we cook has a history, and has something to tell us.

Describe the ideal authentic Italian dish

That's a good question, but I'll repeat what I said before, which is that Italian food is not complicated. It's not sophisticated, and it's not processed but it's seasonal. If you have a tomato salad or just a tomato that you cut in half with a little bit of salt, olive oil, a piece of bread and some mozzarella - that is the taste of Italy. So, it's whatever is fresh or whatever is available. Pasta con Pomodoro, penne with the tomato sauce - that is Italy. Making fresh pasta every Sunday with Nonna. That's what represents Italy at its best - the simplicity and the seasonality of food.

In your opinion, what is your favourite pasta?

Well, I tell everybody that Italians don't like pasta. Italians actually like sauces. And that's why we do the Scarpetta with a piece of bread that we clean the plate with. And because we love sauces so much, we invented so many different shapes of pasta because every pasta has its own sauce.

Personally, my favourite pasta is rigatoni or paccheri. That's my favourite shape of pasta, with just a simple tomato sauce and basil and a little bit of Pecorino cheese. Not Parmigiano, but Pecorino because I like the sharpness. And since I am Calabrese, I need a little bit of spice, so I'd probably add a nice pepperoncino to my plate of pasta.

Anything else you would like to add about Villa Cucina or Taste of Italy?

I am looking forward to cooking for Italians and non-Italians! So, if you want to feel like an Italian for a night, you should just join us for the Taste of Italy at Ristorante Boccaccio.