

recipes CHEF LUCA CIANO
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the pasta preacher

As executive chef at Barilla, Luca Ciano is not only an enthusiastic pasta expert but also a proud ambassador of Italian cuisine

Flying in from Australia, Executive Chef Luca Ciano of Barilla proves tireless at his job – setting up cooking schools throughout the Asia Pacific region and teaching classes about the Italian pasta brand's products and how to cook pasta. But more importantly, says Ciano, "Even before my role as a pasta chef, I see myself as an Italian food ambassador. It's not just talking about pasta and how to cook it, it's sharing what Italian food is all about – our stories and our products."

Sharing at the newly-opened Barilla school in Singapore, Ciano says, "To think of Italian food as just pizza and pasta is very limited and unfair. Italian food is as varied as its 20 beautiful regions, each diverse in terms of climate, heritage and cuisine."

The pride and passion Ciano has for his native fare is clear in the way he peppers his anecdotes

with interesting factoids: "The best basil in all of Italy can be found in Liguria"; "Sicily is known for their tomatoes and their ricotta"; "In Italy, there are over 350 shapes and types of pasta alone, enough to eat a different pasta every day for a year without repeating any".


He counts being able to work for Barilla, an Italian institution with a history of over 135 years, as the opportunity of a lifetime. "Everybody in Italy grows up eating Barilla pasta. The fact that I represent the most authentic and responsible food company in Italy – it's like playing for the national team," he shares with pride.

culinary roots

It's not surprising to learn that Milan-born Ciano grew up in a family that has always been passionate about food. Ciano started "playing chef" in the kitchen at age 7, under

the tutelage of his mother and grandmother. After years of "pretending to be doing something in the kitchen", his mother challenged him to take his passion seriously and Ciano enrolled in cooking college, where the training was hard and intense. "They give you a real experience of what being a chef really is like: long hours away from family, and when people party, you are there to cook for them and let them party," he says.

But he also admits that it was this vigorous training that has gotten him where he is today. His passion has rewarded him with an international career that includes stints at the famous two-Michelin-starred restaurant Il Luogo di Aimo e Nadia in Milan, London's Millennium Gloucester Hotel, Relais & Chateaux in Bermuda, and in Australia



"I'm not saying this just because I work for Barilla, but pasta has got to be my favourite type of Italian dish. The combinations that you can achieve – the textures, the shapes and the sauces – just make pasta all the more exciting."

at the Sheraton on the Park Sydney, The Westin Sydney, and Cypress Lakes Resort in Hunter Valley. Now, at 35, Ciano is a chef consultant based in Sydney, representing several Italian brands and chef associations.

One of the many feathers in Ciano's cap, thanks to these partnerships, is his certification as an olive oil taster. "It's such a key ingredient in Italian cuisine," he says. "In my view, it should be extra virgin olive oil all your life. It's healthy, low in saturated fat, rich in vitamins, and its high smoking point means you can easily cook with it and take in the flavour and healthy nutrition."

classic or complex

Although he champions authentic Italian cuisine, Ciano is not pedantic about it. "I'm happy with a simple but excellent spaghetti with fresh basil, tomato, and parmigiano reggiano." He does note that other countries will have their own take on pasta: "Singaporeans seem to like their pasta with very strong flavours, and I respect that. The important thing is to cook it right!"



**penne rigate
"alla norma"
with eggplant
and ricotta
sauce**

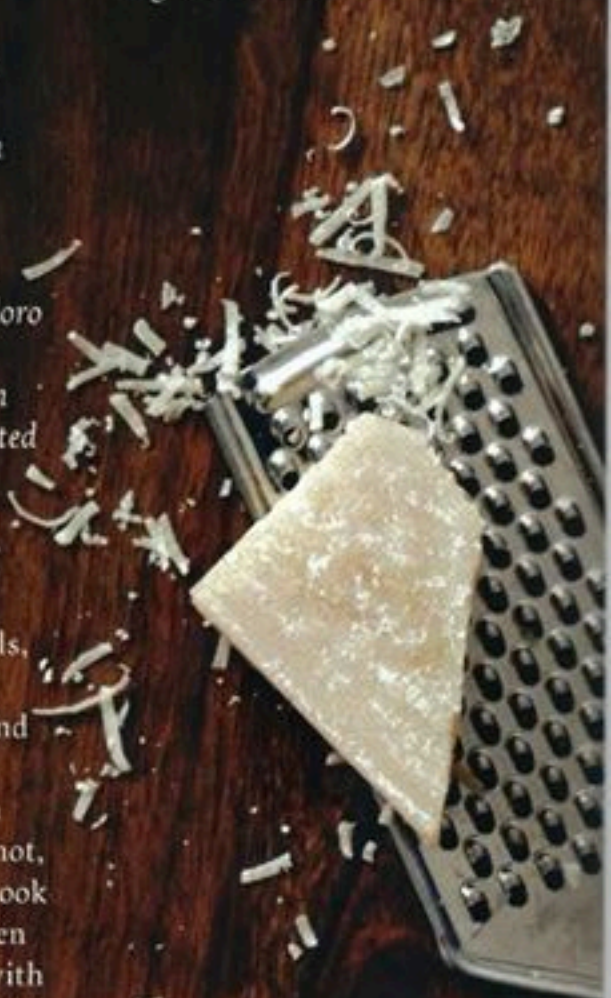
*Sea salt and pepper
to taste
350g Barilla penne
rigate
1/3 cup extra virgin
olive oil
1 eggplant, diced
into 1cm cubes
1 jar Barilla pomodoro
and ricotta sauce
10 basil leaves, torn
60g parmesan, grated*

- 1** In a large pot, bring about 3.5L of water to the boil. Once the water boils, add salt and pasta. Stir occasionally and cook for 11min.
- 2** Heat olive oil in a frying pan. When hot, add eggplant and cook until soft and golden in colour. Season with salt and pepper.
- 3** Add Barilla pomodoro and ricotta sauce and bring to a simmer.

4 Drain pasta when it reaches the desired doneness. Toss it in the frying pan with a little cooking water to allow it to finish cooking in the pan.

5 Once the pasta has absorbed all the liquid, add basil and parmesan and mix well.

6 Serve with fresh basil and a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.



10 commandments for cooking pasta

- A personal serving of pasta is generally 80-100g (dry weight).
- The general rule of thumb when cooking pasta is to have 1 litre of water to every 100g of pasta and 7g of salt.
- Do not add oil to the water while boiling pasta. It will coat the pasta and prevent it from absorbing any flavours when mixed with the sauce.
- Stir pasta occasionally as it cooks. This, not oil, will prevent it from sticking.
- Pasta should be cooked al dente, which means "to the tooth" – slightly firm to the bite. Nutrients are released into the water during cooking, so the longer you boil pasta, the less nutrition it retains.
- Do not rinse pasta with water after cooking. This washes away its light starch coating, which is needed to hold the pasta sauce.
- Always have your sauce prepared and ready before your pasta finishes cooking in the boiling water.
- Pasta cooks by absorption, so right after draining your pasta from the water, finish cooking it by tossing it in the sauce, allowing it to absorb the flavours.
- Use a wooden spoon instead of a metal one to mix pasta and sauce, so as not to break the pasta while mixing.
- Toss pasta with pesto, a cold emulsion, away from heat. Excessive heat causes pesto to separate.

bavette with prawns, pesto genovese, potatoes and green beans

sea salt and pepper to taste

350g Barilla bavette

1/3 cup extra virgin olive oil

1 garlic clove, crushed

1 shallot, thinly sliced

16 prawns, peeled and deveined

150g potato, peeled and sliced to 0.5cm thickness

150g green beans, sliced

1 jar Barilla pesto genovese

- 1 In a large pot, bring about 3.5L of water to the boil. Once the water boils, add salt and pasta. Cook for 8min.
- 2 In a large frying pan, cook garlic and shallot in a little oil. Once golden, add the prawns. Season and gently cook for a few minutes. Remove from heat and set aside.
- 3 About 4-5min before draining the pasta, add the potatoes and green beans to the pasta pot.
- 4 Set aside a little cooking water from the pasta pot. Drain

the pasta, potatoes and beans, and add them to the frying pan to finish the cooking process.

- 5 Once the prawns are cooked and any excess liquid has been absorbed, remove from

heat and add the pesto genovese. Mix well to coat pasta evenly.

- 6 Divide pasta between four bowls and serve immediately with a drizzle of extra virgin olive oil.

