

# PASTA master

Readers of *The Foodtown Magazine* have a special opportunity to learn about Italian cuisine from Barilla masterchef Luca Ciano.

Text: Sarah Beresford



## Pasta masterclasses

Foodtown Magazine readers can learn the essentials of cooking pasta in an exclusive demonstration class delivered by Barilla chef Luca Ciano in Auckland.

To register go to The Foodtown Magazine website, [www.nzchef.co.nz](http://www.nzchef.co.nz) and click on <http://tinyurl.com/nzchefbarilla>. Class numbers are limited, so apply early to avoid disappointment.

Wednesday, August 3: 7-9pm,

Thursday, August 4: 10am-midday,

Friday, August 5: 10am-midday and 2-4pm,

Saturday, August 6: 10am-midday and 2-4pm.

Classes will be held at the Auckland Seafood School's cooking theatre located at The Auckland Fish Market, 22-32 Jellicoe Street, Freemans Bay.

Chef Luca Ciano has combined his two passions in life and managed to make a living out of them in the process. He says it sounds like a bit of a cliché, but it was inevitable that he would become a chef. "I grew up watching my mother and grandmother in the kitchen. My family was so into food that it seemed natural that I would become a chef. I couldn't believe it when I realised that you could actually make a living out of cooking," he says, laughing. "My other great love is travelling and, as soon as I was 18, I headed to the UK and I've been on the move ever since."

A native of Milan, in Italy, Luca has spent the past four years sharing his knowledge and love of Italian cuisine and gastronomy in his role as the masterchef for Barilla pasta and sauces in Australia.

"I helped to launch the Barilla cooking school in Annandale in Sydney. It's a state-of-the-art facility and we hold cooking classes there – everything from sit-down dinners to cocktail parties. It is very hands-on. We have a maximum of 16 people in each class and they replicate the dishes that I am demonstrating and then eat what we've cooked at the end of the class. Every month we feature a different Italian regional cuisine. People learn about the produce and unique dishes of each region and we cook a three-course meal."

Luca loves sharing his love and knowledge of Italian cuisine and it's a bonus that his role offers him an opportunity to travel around Australia and to New Zealand and Asia. He first went to Australia 10 years ago. "I was living in the UK and was fed up with the grey skies and rain. I decided to go somewhere hot and sunny and Sydney was hosting the Olympics at the time so it was easy for me to get work, as they needed more chefs."

After working at the Sheraton on Park for a year he moved back to the UK. "I took a souvenir back with me – my wife," he says, laughing. "We moved back and forth between Italy and the UK for years but now we have been based in Australia for the past four years."

He worked in a Michelin-starred restaurant and ran a catering firm in Italy and when he returned to Sydney was head chef at the Westin, but now much prefers the flexibility of not running a kitchen on a daily basis.

"We've had a lot of celebrity chefs through the cooking school and filmed episodes of *MasterChef* and many other television shows there. I go to food shows and give cooking demonstrations round Australia and overseas. It's wonderful to interact with a lot of different chefs so I get a lot more inspiration than if I was stuck in a kitchen 24/7. It's also good to confront my own style of doing demonstrations by looking at how other chefs do them."

His role with Barilla will be changing over the next few months as he takes on a consultancy with the company and launches his own consultancy business.

"Barilla was established 135 years ago in Italy and it's still a family business – the fourth generation is now running the company. They are the most popular brand of pasta and sauces in Italy, the US and Europe. The family decided they wanted to give something back to the community, so they started the Academy Barilla in Parma, in Italy. It's an amazing facility where they hold cooking classes and chefs from around the world come to train for six to eight weeks so that they can teach what we call the Barilla module. I am going to be flying round the world helping to train chefs so they can teach at Barilla cooking schools like the one in Sydney. The company is really committed to showing people how to improve their well-being by eating better and more healthily."

Luca is coming to New Zealand in August to deliver Barilla masterclasses exclusively to readers of *The Foodtown Magazine*. "It's going to be cold and wintry so I'll be doing some classic dishes from the Tuscan region – beautiful soups and rich, warm pasta dishes.

"I really love sharing my experience and passion for Italian cuisine with other people. I try to put myself in people's houses in my mind when I do my classes. You want recipes that are doable, not too 'cheffy' or full of expensive ingredients. I take a lot of pride in showing people the basics, the right route to credible Italian cooking and the difference when you do things the way they should be done."

## Luca's golden rules for cooking pasta: (He stresses these are not negotiable!)

1. Cook the pasta in boiling water – and make sure you're generous with how much water you put in the pot so the pasta does not stick together. A general rule is to allow a litre of water for every 100g of pasta.
2. Always salt the water. "This is not up for discussion," Luca insists. A general guideline is to use 7g salt for every 100g of pasta. "The salt brings out the flavour in the pasta."
3. Never add oil to the water. "Oil is lighter than water so it doesn't mix. It doesn't do anything other than make things worse. The oil will coat the pasta, which means that the pasta will not absorb the sauce as well as it does if you cook it in plain, salted water."
4. Do not "wash" the pasta after cooking it. "All you're doing is washing away a layer of starch that is vital for the pasta and sauce to bind together really well."

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with LUCA CIANO  
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