



*art of  
venetian  
cooking*

*The Seguso family has  
been creating some of  
Venice's most beautiful  
glassware for 600  
years. And as a dinner  
at their 19th-century  
villa reveals, their  
cooking is as  
exquisite as their  
designs.*

BY SONALI RAO

PHOTOGRAPHS BY SIMON WATSON



The Segusos are known for Renaissance-style glass (such as the chandelier in their dining room) as well as modern pieces, like this Boreale design, OPPOSITE.



*The Segusos even withstood an assault from Napoleon, who urged them*

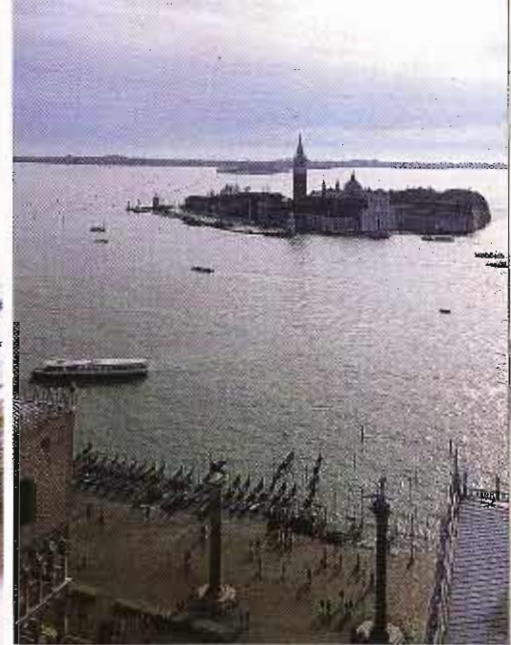
Venice is synonymous with glass—and the Segusos deserve at least some of the credit. The family's glassmaking history there dates as far back as 1397; the Segusos even withstood an assault from Napoleon, who urged them to give up their ships in exchange for noble titles. (They refused.) Already renowned for their Renaissance-style pieces, the Segusos became famed, in the 1950s, for their modern designs. Giampaolo Segnso, the 60-year-old patriarch of the family business, Segnso Viro, still innovates, and his sons Gianluca, GianAndrea and Pierpaolo and daughter Maria Ginlia share his vision.

## RECIPES

1. venetian spaghetti with sardines
2. **sweet shrimp with creamy semolina**
3. risi e bisi with pancetta
4. **baked polenta with parmesan**
5. roasted sea bass with potatoes and olives
6. **veal stew with rosemary and lemon**
7. barley soup with porcini mushrooms
8. **roasted radicchio**
9. homey borlotti bean stew
10. **crispy apple and pine nut fritters**

That vision of the future owes much to the past. Murano, a group of five small islands just north of Venice, was the center of glassmaking in Europe for centuries. Starting in 1291 the Venetian government quarantined glassmakers there, both to guard their craft and to protect the rest of the city from the risk of fire posed by the blazing furnaces. As they produced mirrors, chandeliers, tableware and other decorative items, the artisans developed and perfected techniques for making crystalline glass (*cristallo*), opaque glass (*smalto*), multicolored glass (*millefiori*) and glass with copper-colored flakes (*avventurina*). While curlicue fantasies, overwrought light fixtures and tacky figurines abound in Murano these days, the Segusos have remained true to their craft. The family rose to particular prominence during the 1950s thanks to Giampaolo's father, Archimede, a master glassblower. Combining Renaissance techniques and new methods with such lyrical-sounding names as *vetro massello* and *merletto*, he created designs that still look modern today.

Gianluca, who lives in New York City and runs Seguso Viro's business in the United States, recalls spending boyhood summers on Murano working alongside his grandfather and later with other master glassblowers. "Each of us has gotten our hands dirty in the factory," he says of himself and his brothers. (His sister, still in school, plans to join the business on the marketing end.) Today his brothers and their father sketch designs for



*to surrender their ships in exchange for noble titles. They refused.*

the company's line of contemporary glassware in a studio above the factory floor. Once a design is completed, a team of three or four master blowers, each with a different specialized skill, executes it. The production of each design in Seguso Viro's new 101 collection is limited to 101 pieces, each numbered and signed.

Glassmaking is one Seguso passion; cooking is another. Meals in the family's 19th-century villa on the island of Lido take place at a table set with antique lace, Meissen china and fanciful Seguso stemware paired with everyday Seguso water glasses. Daniela, Giampaolo's wife, uses generations-old Venetian recipes; Marika, who is married to Gianluca and runs a New York City catering company called *Acquolina* (short for *acquolina in bocca*—mouthwatering), isn't afraid to tinker a little, tweaking some of the old dishes to update them. For the meal on these pages, the two cooks collaborate.

Marika starts with *risi e bisi*, a traditional Venetian stew of rice and peas, adding pancetta because "it gives the dish a wonderful rich and smoky flavor," she says. "The Venetians take their fish seriously," she also observes, irreverently sprinkling rosemary and thyme—typical Tuscan flavorings—on a whole fish with potatoes,

## A SEGUSO IN NEW YORK

When **Marika Seguso** teamed up with her mother-in-law to create the menu here, it wasn't an unusual task. Almost two years ago, she and partners Adam Sikora, Yolanda Garretti and Frank Minieri founded **Acquolina** (212-994-9300), a catering business in New York City with such fashionable clients as **Giorgio Armani** and **Dolce & Gabbana**. Her recipes won over the F&W staff—unanimously—because they're delicious yet unbelievably easy.

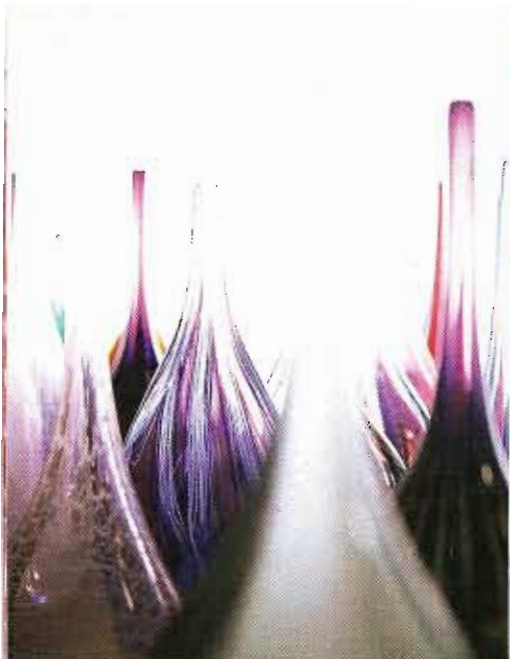
tomatoes and olives. "This is not a Venetian tradition, but the flavors of the herbs marry well with the tomatoes and the olives, so it works." As for the spaghetti with sardines, "It tastes so creamy and flavorful you can't believe only a cup of milk and a little butter goes into it," she says. Daniela steps in at dessert with her apple and piue nut fritters, which she remembers eating piping hot and coated with powdered sugar during Carnevale. "This is my grandmother's recipe," she says. The Segusos' sense of family history, it's clear, is as timeless as their glassware.

**ABOVE:** Seguso pieces include a '50s *composizione diagonale* bowl by Archimede Seguso and an ice bucket produced for Tiffany in the '60s. When the Segusos (pictured here in the factory—from left, Pierpaolo, GianAndrea, Giampaolo, Maria Giulia and Gianluca) cross the lagoon to return home for dinner, they might have veal stew with polenta served on Meissen china.



In the same way that the Segusos add modern colors to Renaissance-style stemware, OPPOSITE, Marika Seguso updates old recipes—here, by adding Tuscan herbs to a Venetian-style fish.





*Daniela Seguso uses generations-old Venetian recipes; Marika Seguso,*

### **Venetian Spaghetti with Sardines**

TOTAL: 40 MIN

6 SERVINGS

- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 medium onions, finely chopped
- One 4-ounce can olive-oil-packed sardines (120 grams)—drained, boned and finely chopped
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 cup whole milk

Salt and freshly ground pepper

1 pound spaghetti

1. In a large, deep skillet, melt the butter in the olive oil over low heat. Add the onions and cook, stirring occasionally, until softened and golden, about 20 minutes. Add the sardines and water and cook, stirring, until hot, about 2 minutes. Add the milk and simmer until the sardines dissolve into a thick sauce, about 6 minutes. Season with salt and pepper.
2. Meanwhile, in a large pot of boiling salted water, cook the spaghetti until al dente. Drain and add the spaghetti

to the skillet. Toss the spaghetti with the sauce and season with salt. Transfer to bowls and serve at once with freshly ground pepper.

**WINE** A fresh, crisp, dry white from the Veneto region has enough acidity to highlight the sardines in this pasta. Consider the 2001 Pieropan Soave Classico Superiore or the 2001 Anselmi San Vincenzo.

### **Sweet Shrimp with Creamy Semolina**

TOTAL: 40 MIN

6 SERVINGS

The creamy semolina here is thick and hearty like polenta, but much faster and easier to make.

- 2 pounds small shrimp
- 1 quart water
- 1 cup semolina flour (6 ounces)
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter

Salt

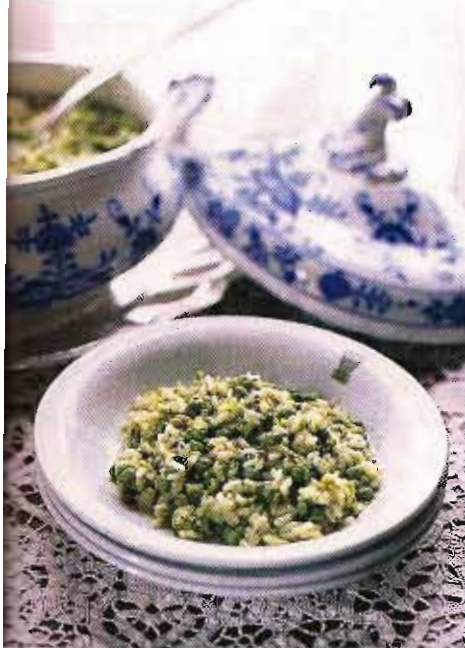
- 2 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 small garlic cloves, minced

- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped flat-leaf parsley

Freshly ground pepper  
Fruity extra-virgin olive oil,  
for serving

1. Bring a medium saucepan of salted water to a boil. Add the shrimp and cook until opaque, about 2 minutes. Drain and let cool slightly, then peel the shrimp and transfer to a bowl.
2. In a medium saucepan, bring the water to a boil over moderate heat. Slowly whisk in the semolina flour until smooth. Reduce the heat to low and whisk the semolina until thickened, about 4 minutes. Remove from the heat. Whisk in the butter and season the semolina with salt.
3. Toss the shrimp with the extra-virgin olive oil, the garlic and the parsley and season with salt and pepper. Spoon the semolina into shallow bowls. Top with the shrimp and serve at once, passing the fruity extra-virgin olive oil for drizzling at the table.

ABOVE: Long-necked vases from the Time of Giraffe (far left) and Capo North (far right) collections. Meals at the Seguso home are equally artful. Marika, shown planning a menu with her mother-in-law Daniela, prepares *risi e bisi* and roasted radicchio.



who runs a New York catering company, isn't afraid to tinker a little.

**WINE** The mild semolina and shrimp call for an aromatic Pinot Bianco. Try the 2001 Elena Walch Kastelaz from Alto Adige or the 2001 Schiopetto from Friuli.

### Risi e Bisi with Pancetta

ACTIVE: 15 MIN; TOTAL: 50 MIN

6 SERVINGS

*Risi e bisi* (rice and peas) is a famous Venetian dish. The proportions are what make it so unusual—as cooks there put it, for each grain of rice there should be a pea. Marika Seguso prepares this like a traditional risotto, slowly adding stock and stirring constantly. This is a short-cut version.

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
  - 1 medium onion, finely chopped
  - 2 ounces pancetta, coarsely chopped (½ cup)
  - ¼ cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
  - 2½ quarts light chicken stock
  - Two 10-ounce packages frozen peas
  - 1 pound arborio or vialone nano rice
  - 1 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for serving
  - 2 tablespoons unsalted butter
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

1. In a medium enameled cast-iron casserole, heat the olive oil until shimmering. Add the onion and cook over low heat until softened, about 7 minutes. Add the pancetta and 2 tablespoons of the parsley and cook for 5 minutes. Add the stock, peas and rice and bring to a simmer over moderately high heat.

2. Cover and cook over moderately low heat until the rice is tender and most of the liquid is absorbed, about 20 minutes. Stir in the 1 cup of Parmesan, the butter and the remaining 2 tablespoons of parsley and season with salt and pepper. Ladle the rice and peas into shallow bowls and serve at once, passing more Parmesan at the table.

**MAKE AHEAD** The *risi e bisi* can be refrigerated overnight. Reheat gently, adding more stock as necessary to achieve a stewlike consistency.

**WINE** A creamy, round white with zingy minerals and spice will contrast with the clean flavors here. Look for a Tocai Friulano from Friuli-Venezia Giulia, such as the 2001 Doro Princic or the 2000 Ronco del Gnemiz.

### Baked Polenta with Parmesan

TOTAL: 1 HR 40 MIN

6 SERVINGS

True polenta can take up to an hour to make and requires constant stirring. This oven-baked version yields the same rich result but with much less effort.

- 2 quarts water
- Kosher salt
- 2½ cups stone-ground cornmeal
- 6 tablespoons unsalted butter
- ½ cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese, plus more for serving

Freshly ground pepper

Preheat the oven to 450°. In a medium ovenproof saucepan, bring the water to a boil over high heat. Add 2 teaspoons of salt and reduce to a gentle simmer. Slowly whisk in the cornmeal until smooth and bring to a simmer, whisking constantly, over low heat; cover and transfer to the oven. Bake for 1½ hours, stirring vigorously every 15 minutes, until thick and no longer gritty. Stir in the butter and ½ cup of Parmesan cheese, season with salt and pepper and serve, passing more Parmesan at the table.

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