

# CampbellPatch



Flavors of Campbell

By **Linda Covella** 5:00am

ARTS

## Recipes From a Queen

This Sunday, cookbook author Valentina Cirasola will sign copies of her new book *Sins of a Queen: Italian Appetizers and Desserts*.

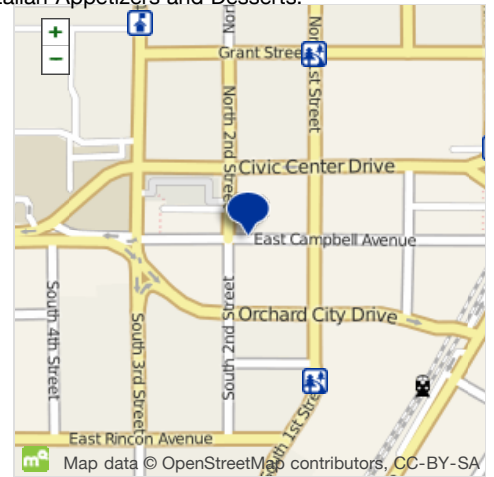
*Valentina Cirasola is a woman of many creative talents—architectural, furniture and landscape design, as well as cooking. Lucky for us, her cooking expertise is showcased in her cookbooks, and she will be signing and discussing her latest one, Sins of a Queen: Italian Appetizers and Desserts, at The Olive Bar (<http://campbell.patch.com/listings/the-olive-bar>) in downtown Campbell on Sunday, Jan. 16 at 10 a.m.*

*Born and raised in the Puglia region of Southern Italy, Cirasola made the Bay Area her home 13 years ago. She brings her love of the Italian culture to all her ventures.*

*Here, we get more insight into Cirasola's background and her passion for cooking. We end the discussion with a recipe chosen by Cirasola from her wonderful new cookbook.*



PHOTOS (3)



**Campbell Patch:** Do you miss your native country, and do you return often?

**Valentina Cirasola:** I do miss my native country and Puglia in particular because my family is all there; I am by myself in the United States. I miss my country because of a life style and the quality of the Italian social life, the well known “dolce vita,” only Italians are master at it.

However, in the States I found other opportunities which changed my life and which I would have never had if I had stayed in Italy. I am very happy here too, weather is good, people have been good to me. I have made many dreams come...I return to Italy once a year to soak in my native culture and to visit family and friends.

**Patch:** How do you bring your design and artistic flare into your recipes and cooking?

**Cirasola:** If as a designer I can balance beauty, harmony, comfort, color and style in people's home, as a cookbook author I can balance aromas, taste, flavors, calories and costs for the dining table as well. Cooking is my passion. I have a high knowledge of food and a few decades of experience in cooking...

Growing up in my Italian family it was expected to learn the art of cooking by only watching...After I moved away from the family I had the first opportunity of cooking for myself out of necessity. Then, as if by miracle, it was as if all those years watching, eating and tasting translated to doing. I recalled the perfection how every dish was supposed to look and taste. Food had a memory in my palate!

**Patch:** What does the name of your book *Sins of a Queen* refer to?

**Cirasola:** I am the queen of my kitchen and I do have my seven food sins. (You can read about Cirasola's food sins and other personal anecdotes in her cookbook.) Also I wanted to show the readers that it is not necessary to be a chef to cook good food, but it's simply enough to eat what “makes you feel good food” to feel like a queen. Food that makes us feel good will shine through our faces and attitude.

**Patch:** Are the recipes in your new book original, traditional, from friends and family, a combination?

**Cirasola:** Yes, the recipes of both books are traditional and original Southern Italian, a few come from the North, not to leave anybody out, but the books mainly cover Southern specialties. Some recipes came from my father's writing. He also loved cooking and, like me, wrote a long collection of recipes with the intent of publishing them, but he never did. I feel I need to honor him in his dream and his effort. The first book contains my grandmother's specialties.

**Patch:** Your cookbook focuses on Southern Italian cuisine. What differentiates this cooking from the cooking of other parts of Italy?

**Cirasola:** Southern Italian cuisine is lighter than the Northern Italian cuisine due to warmer weather. Southern cooking is based on fresh vegetables, fish, small animals like lamb, and citrus fruit. We use no butter and no creams, mostly tomato-based sauces and garlic/wine sauces.

**Patch:** You say you have a passion for slow food. How do you define slow food?

**Cirasola:** Cooking for me is the most relaxed of all my daily activities and I don't consider it a chore, because cooking and eating my food makes me feel and look good.

I cook every day at home, except when I have an invitation to go out. My menu is planned weekly so it is easy to follow and shop for it with my busy working schedule. When I start cooking, I put on my favorite classical or jazz music, I pour a glass of wine and everything flows. Then 30 to 45 minutes later, I have made a three-course meal, some will be consumed on the spot, some the next day for lunch, or will go saved in the freezer for those days "I am in the curves" and not much time to cook, but at least good food is ready and I don't have to buy pre-made food.

**Patch:** Can the appetizers in your book be scaled up to create a full meal?

**Cirasola:** Of course they can. Appetizers can be scaled up to turn them into meal-size portions and full meals can be scaled down to create appetizers. My food is versatile.

**Patch:** The dessert recipes focus mainly on fruit. Did you purposely choose recipes for the health-conscious cook?

**Cirasola:** Yes and no. Anyone who has ever tried Italian desserts will know that Italians don't like very, very sweet desserts, overloaded with sugar. So in that way, Italian desserts naturally help people who are health-conscious. I was also extra careful in making my selection of desserts, because I wanted busy people to eat good easy recipes and nothing they could not fit in their schedule.

*We'll look forward to hearing more from Cirasola this Sunday. Now, for that recipe!*

## Orecchiette Pasta Farm Style

Serves 4

### Ingredients:

- 1 lb. of di orecchiette pasta (whole wheat OK)
- grated Parmigiano cheese
- 3 oz. of ricotta salata (salty ricotta), or feta cheese
- 1 pack of red cherry tomatoes cubed
- 1 pack of red small pear yellow tomatoes cubed
- 3 cloves of chopped garlic
- a hand full of basil leaves, oregano and Italian parsley
- salt and black pepper to taste
- extra-virgin olive oil
- a hand full of breadcrumbs

### Directions:

- Wash and chop all the ingredients, place them in a large mixing bowl, except breadcrumbs, they will be added last.
- Macerate all the ingredients together to marry the flavors for at least 30 minutes. The ingredients will be raw.
- In a pot bring salted water to a boil.
- Cook the pasta very "al dente." Reserve 1 cup of the cooking water.
- Drain the water. Add the hot pasta to the rest of the ingredients, one cup of cooking water, mix well and rest it for about five minutes to let the pasta get a little softer and the ingredients come together.
- Add another hand full of Parmigiano cheese and a handful of breadcrumbs with a swirl of olive oil. Adjust seasoning.

**What's your favorite Italian appetizer or dessert? Tell us in the comments.**

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