



SAVOR(Y) CHOCOLATE FOR

Valentine's Day

My Poppo was a first-generation American, his parents having immigrated from Abruzzo, Italy, in the early 1900s. According to family members, Italian chefs, and others with good taste, the best Italian cooks hail from Abruzzo, mid-way up the back of “the boot” on the Adriatic Sea.

Consider some traditional Abruzzese fare: pasta alla chitarra (the hand rolled egg pasta with square edges created by a wire-strung guitar-like tool), ravioli dolci (the large ravioli filled not just with ricotta but also lemon, sugar, cinnamon, and a hint of chocolate); and torrone (the soft nougat flavored with cocoa and honey). All simple yet delicious.

Perhaps the most noteworthy element of Abruzzese cuisine is the combination of sweet and savory elements, like in the ravioli dolci. During this month of Valentine chocolates, I plan to draw from my Abruzzese heritage and let sweet play a supporting role in my pasta dish. No need for a ravioli cutter, as this recipe is for a relatively quick (under one hour as Valentine’s Day is on a weeknight) pasta with chocolate ragu.

The quantities below are intended for two but can be adjusted. In terms of the wine, I recommend a Montepulciano d’Abruzzo. We’ll stay local as this red’s dark fruit flavors, like black plum and cherry, will counterbalance the acidity of the tomatoes.

Pasta with Chocolate Ragu

Ingredients:

- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 16 ounces ground pork
- ½ cup dry red Italian wine (preferably Montepulciano d’Abruzzo)
- 28 ounces tomato purée
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- Sea salt
- Fresh ground pepper
- 3 tablespoons bittersweet chocolate, chopped or shredded
- 2 teaspoons sugar
- 1/8 teaspoon cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon Ancho chili powder
- ½ pound “twirly” pasta, such as linguine
- Grated Parmesan cheese
- Red pepper flakes

In a large (3 to 6 quart) sauté pan, heat the olive oil on low. Add the pork and break up with a wooden spoon or spatula. Brown the pork for a few minutes, then add the wine and turn the heat up to medium. When the wine comes to a slow boil, turn the heat back to low and simmer until reduced by about half. Add the tomato purée, tomato paste, salt, and black pepper to taste. Stir and cook for about 20 minutes on simmer.

Bring a large pot of water to a boil and cook the pasta according to package instructions. While the pasta is boiling, add the chocolate, sugar, cinnamon, and Ancho chili powder to the sauce. As you stir, note the rich, velvety texture of the sauce and its lovely, deep chestnut shade.

Use tongs to transfer the pasta to the sauce in the sauté pan and toss. Serve in pasta bowls with the grated cheese and red pepper flakes. 🍴



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