



# DINING WITH ROSALBA

*An education in nine courses, plus wine*

**P**uglia's cuisine has two sources. On the coast, the table is dominated by Mediterranean seafood: whitefish such as sea bass and swordfish; shellfish, including mussels and urchins; and anchovies. In the interior, the menu changes and the prices plummet. There are hearty pastas, baked dishes such as eggplant parmigiana and zucchini with cheese in a terra-cotta dish, and plates of earthy snails. Grilled rabbit, beef, and pork are also staples. *Burrata*, an extra-creamy mozzarella that's particular to the region, comes with figs and prosciutto.

Few places do traditional countryside dishes better than Il Frantoio, one of a new breed of working farms that double as gastronomic B&Bs. It has become famous for its nine-course meals, served three times a week and hosted by Rosalba Ciannamea and her husband, Armando Balestrazzi, who pairs the dishes with his favorite local wines. On the night I dined there, Armando chose a rosé from Salento (Puglia is one of the few Italian regions to produce a decent rosé) to accompany the thin sheets of whole-wheat pasta layered with peppers. Just-cut wild chicory, fennel, and chard with apple and olives from the adjoining orchard were served in a crispy pecorino basket, and a medley of purple and white eggplant was topped with a sweet-and-sour *scapecce* sauce. Homemade noodles with zucchini flowers came in a saffron sauce—a vegetarian version of spaghetti carbonara.

My favorite wine was the award-winning 2002 Torre Testa, from Salento, which came with the light pork *involtini* and grassy but delicate *polpette* (meatballs). The wine is the product of an ancient grape, *susu maniello*, lost for two hundred years and rediscovered only recently in a nature reserve on the coast. A delicious wild salad turned out to be made from weeds that grow beneath the olive trees. This is *cucina povera*, a cuisine whose dishes include anything that's available—especially during the most fruitful months, when even seasonal flowers and leaves are added, often to great effect. As Armando put it, "The suffering of the Pugliese was the mother of invention."

—O. C.