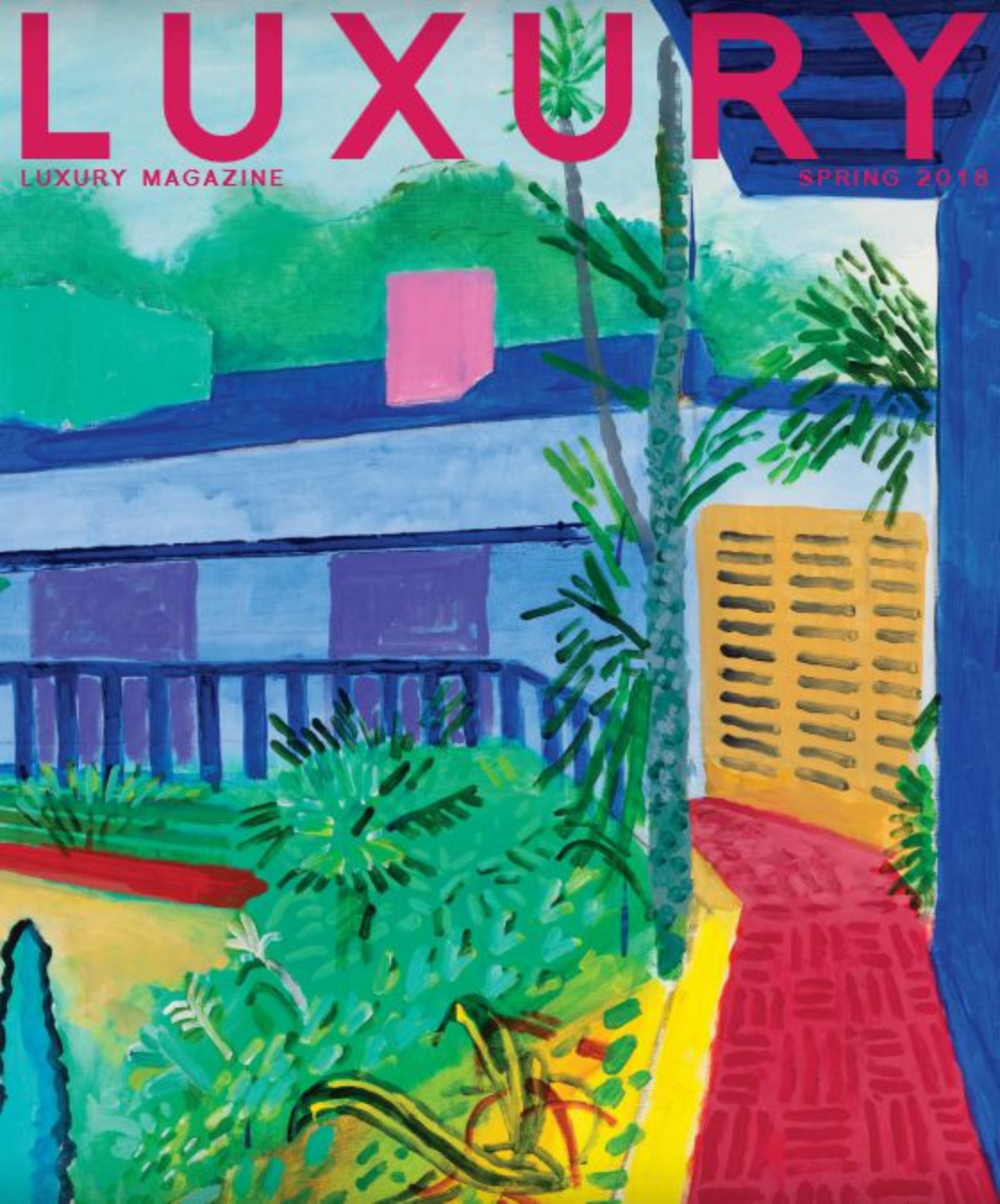



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EMILIA-ROMAGNA

Modena

Bologna

BASTA PASTA

When is tortellini just another button-shaped macaroni? Never, say the traditionalists of Emilia-Romagna, Italy. A tour of the region's food haunts puts the debate to the test.

by Gary Walther

For the tortellini grail seeker, the neighboring Italian cities of Bologna and Modena are ground zero. Their long-held Montague-Capulet relationship dates to the early Renaissance, when they skirmished and finally went to war over the day's big question: pro-Pope (Bologna) or pro-Holy Roman Emperor (Modena)?

It has been argued that either Bologna or Modena invented tortellini. Of course, that's not true. The laurel belongs to Castelfranco Veneto, a speck on the border between the two cities. In a dismal little piazza, Castelfranco Veneto has

erected a sculpture marking tortellini's creation legend: the innkeeper of the now-extinct Taverna della Corona peering through a keyhole at the goddess Venus, who had checked in with Bacchus and Mars to scope out a battle between (you guessed it) Bologna and Modena. The erotic charge led the manager to create a pasta in the shape of Venus' belly button.

Traditionally, the dish was reserved for special occasions like Christmas because the ingredients were expensive, and it is still seasonal (usually fall and winter) on restaurant menus across the Emilia-Romagna region. >

A pasta in the shape of Venus' belly button (according to folklore) has caused a centuries-long debate.



“If someone wants to honor you, they say, ‘We’re making tortellini for you,’” says Mary Beth Clark, the owner and director of Bologna’s **International Cooking School of Italian Food and Wine** (internationalcookingschool.com). “The way the pasta square is folded, the amount of filling and where it is placed on the square, the way the pasta corners are curved and sealed is all very, very specific,” says Clark. “It is in the folding that the signature shape of tortellino is formed. It is this folding that ensures a juicy filling. The filling should be a mild explosion of flavor and each tortellino should be its own entity.”

Over the centuries, Bologna and Modena have each freighted the little paunch-pasta with their own traditions. From 2014 to 2015, Bologna and Modena invented their own tortellini mondiale called the *Disfida* (meaning “duel”). The event has since been folded (no pun intended) into a larger Emilia-Romagna pasta festival, but Bologna still holds its own tortellini festival in October, where over 20 different tortellini proposals are served in tastings to the public, at the Palazzo Re Enzo on one of the most beautiful piazzas in Italy, the Piazza Maggiore. This year, according to Vincenzo Cappelletti, head of the Bologna consortium for the **Tour-tlen** (tour-tlen.it) that not only promotes but is the gatekeeper for the ingredients and the making of tortellini, 11,000 portions were served. The appetite persists.

