

Ultimate San Francisco foodie/culture guru. Covering the best food, drinks, places, and events in The City.

Discovering the wonders of Italian extra virgin olive oil



*Bottles of extra virgin olive oil from Calabria, Italy line up for tasting at Cookhouse in North Beach, SF on 9/6/13.
(photo: Matty Gilreath aka MattySF.com)*

My friend Melody Lee (aka [Gourmet Princessa](#)) recently organized an exquisite private food and beverage event in North Beach that showcased time-honored Italian extra virgin olive oil-making traditions. Over the course of the evening I happily consumed more delicious fresh extra virgin olive oil than ever before in one sitting, and also learned a great deal about its wondrous tastes and healthful benefits. (For details on Collesi Imper Ale, the delicious Italian craft beer we also sampled that night, click [here](#).)



Melody Lee (aka Gourmet Princessa) preps her Italian olive oil tasting event at Cookhouse in North Beach, SF on 9/6/13. (photo: Matty Gilreath aka MattySF.com)

Our host for the evening, Mr. Giacomo Maggiaro, is President of Agriland Italia (USA), an Italian food and wine importing/consulting company based in New York City (its parent company is headquartered in Rome, Italy). Agriland uses its extensive importing experience to help Italian food and wine producers export and sell products in the US market. Mr. Maggiaro's keynote guest speaker, Mr. Massimo Magliocchi, is the President of the Cosentina Olive Tree Growers Association of Italy, from the town of Cosenza in the [Calabria region of Southern Italy](#). Mr. Magliocchi spoke passionately in Italian (and yes, he gestured with his hands, but in a pointed, refined manner) about extra virgin olive oil. His able translator, Antonia Fraser Fujinaga (of the nearby *Instituto Italiano di Cultura di San Francisco*), relayed the details of his presentation to us in English every few minutes. Their interplay was engaging enough in and of itself, but Mr. Magliocchi's actual lecture, entitled "*The Century-Old Olive Tree: A Vital Support to Agriculture, Environment and Health*" was fascinating.



Vibrant flowers and antipasti; Melody Lee (aka Gourmet Princessa) introduces Giacomo Maggiaro of Agriland Italia at Cookhouse in North Beach, SF on

9/6/13. (photo: Matty Gilreath aka MattySF.com)

Mr. Magliocchi's Association has recently begun this campaign to educate both Calabrians and the world alike about their olive farming legacy, the benefits of olive oil, and how to properly taste and evaluate extra virgin olive oil. Calabria has been growing olive trees for thousands of years, and is currently the second largest producer of olive oil in Italy. Calabria continually wins national/international tasting awards for its high quality olive oil. Calabrians are proud of their olive oil-driven culture, and extra virgin olive oil, in particular, is a key part of their "Mediterranean diet". Mr. Magliocchi explained that studies have shown the Mediterranean diet, which includes seafood, fruits, vegetables, grains, and "healthy fats" such as olive oil (as opposed to butter), to be better for your health, especially heart health. Of course, living here in the Bay Area for nearly two decades, I was no stranger to the Mediterranean diet. However, Mr. Magliocchi expounded so enthusiastically about this golden-green oil as a vital food component that he elevated my perception of it, *permanently*.



Mr. Massimo Magliocchi, President of the Cosentina Olive Tree Growers Association of Italy, speaks at Cookhouse in North Beach, SF on 9/6/13. (photo: Matty Gilreath aka MattySF.com)

Mr. Magliocchi then led us through the basic process of a professional Italian olive oil tasting operation. We were given a first round of olive oil samples in small plastic cups, and instructed to cup them in our palms, to warm the oil. Then he asked us to smell the oil, and peruse the scents. After much anticipation, he directed us to take a sip, allowing the oil to spread completely over the tongue. Bringing the tongue to the palate, while narrowing the lips and breathing in is an optional technique called *stripping*. He encouraged us to do this several times, to be in no rush, and to evaluate the aftertastes: were they pleasant/unpleasant? I thought at first that the sample was very earthy and fresh, but after a few minutes I realized Mr. Magliocchi was telling us that this was the "bad" sample of a *non-Italian* olive oil, for comparison purposes only. Oh! There was a slight rancid note, he pointed out, from olives that were either heated and/or not stored properly during the oil pressing process. I started to recognize those aspects as I recalibrated my tastebuds.



Mr. Giacomo Maggiaro, President of Agriland Italia and Melody Lee (Gourmet Princessa) pour olive oil for tasting at Cookhouse in North Beach, SF on 9/6/13. (photo: Matty Gilreath aka MattySF.com)

Next we were given two samples of Italian extra virgin olive oil from Calabria. *Olivella*, the first oil, a blend of olives from across the Calabria region, was definitely livelier (spicy, even) than our “bad” sample. *Viride*, the second Calabrian olive oil, made solely from Mr. Magliocchi’s own orchards, had a thicker, smoother viscosity, instantly coating my lips and tongue, and *staying there* as I tried the breathing technique to further stir up and appreciate the flavors. Each of the Calabrian oils tasted fruitier (meaning more like fresh green olives) than the non-Italian oil. *Viride*’s olives were greener and higher in antioxidants, seeing as they travelled a shorter distance and were pressed sooner than the olives in *Olivella*. Mr. Magliocchi mentioned some positive attributes he looks for: fruity, bitter, and spicy (greener olives are spicier). Negative characteristics can include metallic, acidic, moldy, and the aforementioned rancid flavors, all depending on how the olives were stored and processed. The ultimate principal behind

professional olive oil tasting is that extra virgin olive oil needs to have the taste and smell of fresh healthy fruit.



Olivella/Viride extra virgin olive oil brochures; heirloom tomato and basil antipasti at Cookhouse in North Beach, SF on 9/6/13. (photo: Matty Gilreath aka MattySF.com)

Vegetable oils in America are generally something to be carefully measured, monitored, and/or reduced/avoided. I was pleasantly surprised, then, to see (and taste) the generous splashes of golden green healthy extra virgin olive oil in the two sublime dishes which were served following the presentation/tasting. Renowned Italian celebrity chef [Odette Fada](#) (seen recently on Bravo's *Top Chef Masters*) planned the course for the evening, which was then prepared by Mr. Maggiaro himself with some assistants in the kitchen. We started with a vibrant multi-colored Organic Heirloom Tomatoes and Basil Antipasti (with Olivella extra virgin olive oil, of course). Next we enjoyed a piquant Fennel and Blood Orange Salad

with Citrus (and Viride extra virgin olive oil dressing). Finally, we were treated to a lovely Gluten-Free Risotto with Mixed Vegetables, again doused with (but not overwhelmed by) Viride extra virgin olive oil. The chewy texture of the risotto (Royal Red from Tuscany, Italy) was perfect, and the simple dish was instantly addictive. I even had seconds. Delicious! (*For more pics of this event, please check out Melody's [Gourmet Princessa Facebook page](#).*)



Fennel and Blood Orange Salad with Citrus (and Viride extra virgin olive oil dressing) at Cookhouse in North Beach, SF on 9/6/13. (photo: Matty Gilreath aka MattySF.com)

The event was held at [Cookhouse](#), a fabulous private rentable space with a complete Food Network-ready professional kitchen, located above the historic Vesvio bar on Columbus Avenue in North Beach.



Fennel and Blood Orange Salad with Citrus; Gluten-Free Risotto with Mixed Vegetables (both with Viride extra virgin olive oil) at Cookhouse in North Beach, SF on 9/6/13. (photo: Matty Gilreath aka MattySF.com)

Olivella and Viride extra virgin olive oils are unfortunately not yet available



on the West Coast. You can't get these oils unless you go to Italy and *bring them back in your luggage*, something Melody has actually done! If you're not heading to Italy any time soon, please feel free to [contact Melody](#) for any limited availability (via Agriland in NYC). Melody is planning more of these special Gourmet Princessa food and beverage events, so I recommend following her on Facebook so you won't miss out. Hope to see you at the next one!

Ciao,

Matty



This entry was posted in Beer, Food Gifts, Food/Cooking Seminars, Italian, North Beach, Uncategorized and tagged Beer, Collesì, Cookhouse, EVOO, Food/Beer Pairings, Gluten-Free Options, Gourmet Princessa, Italian, Mediterranean diet, North Beach, Olive oil on

3 thoughts on "Discovering the wonders of Italian extra virgin olive oil"



Jim Gilreath

September 30, 2013 at 12:23 pm

Hi Matthew:

Nice job! Classy event and coverage. Proud of you and your work.

Love,

Biggest fan #2 after Mom



mattysf Post author

September 30, 2013 at 2:14 pm

Thanks, Dad!



giovanna giubelli

January 18, 2014 at 5:40 pm

antonia fraser fujinaga:great person,great translator,and so ladylike...

