

NIKO ROMITO: cooking philosophy

Abruzzo runs deep in Romito's work, but what used to be a quite literal "presence" (through an updating of the local gastronomic tradition, with early dishes that were at the same time contemporary and reassuring) has gradually shifted, an emancipation of sorts: "I still draw from my territory for the best products but today for me Abruzzo mostly represents an ideal: it stands for focus, respect and truth - applied to the ingredient."

Romito works from the ingredient, trying to awaken its intrinsic power rather than add it. "I don't want the ingredient to get lost, but rather explode on the palate with all its vitality. This is why my dishes lend themselves quite well to photography, but their full power is expressed only upon tasting." This he explained in "10 Lezioni di Cucina", the 2015 manifesto (written with Laura Lazzaroni and published by Giunti editore) in which he explained his cooking philosophy, dedicated to all aspiring chefs.

In the book he details the pillars of his approach: "simplicity" is listed as the fundamental value. "My food is often described as simple," he writes: "This is very true, in the sense that it is not complicated, which is not to say that it is without significant complexity. In cooking, complexity can be advantageous; complication never. By virtue of this simplicity, or rather linearity, or essentiality, my food can be appreciated at the intuitive level, without having to be decoded. It is no accident that my recipes are enjoyed by both those with gastronomic training and those without."

Balance is also crucial to Romito's cooking philosophy. When attempting to rely on an extremely limited number of ingredients in order to focus on radical essentiality, the slightest misalignment will emphasize eventual mistakes. Put simply, when there's no overabundance of flavors on the plate, all is laid bare. Romito's dishes are the result of tireless research, in a millimetric balance.

As he continues his development, his search for the “apparent simplicity” is becoming one with the pursuit of lightness, and health. “I want to provide our customers with lightness rather than weigh them down, ensuring that after a good number of courses they feel good, their palates still capable of perceiving flavors and their digestion uncompromised,” says Romito. “The ‘lightness quotient’ of my dishes, however, is not the result of calculation. I don’t create food that is balanced from the nutritional standpoint to satisfy a moral imperative of healthy eating, sacrosanct though it be. (...) The techniques I use lead me naturally to create dishes that are neither sweet nor fatty nor infantile. (...) My cooking is light and balanced because only in this way can it express the ingredients to the maximum.”

Romito never stops researching and studying: it’s his nature. 2016 has brought an addition to the kitchen of the restaurant Reale: an upgraded Bread Lab. Bread is another pillar of Romito’s cuisine: in all its primordial elegance, “the easiest most difficult thing to make, and the best way to judge the philosophy of any chef”. As a consequence of a long and deep research on bread and sourdoughs Romito developed a brand new offer in Rome: Spazio Pane e Caffè, where the menu is designed following the fil rouge of bread in all its simplicity.

A state of the art laboratory adjacent to the main kitchen, where new lines of research (on meat and vegetables, fermentation and pressure cooking) are in full effect - and where a set of 11 new dishes was born in 2017.

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