

## NIKO ROMITO

# *In the name of simplicity*

A three-star chef who creates stunning dishes from only a few ingredients.  
His secret is constant research and tons of passion

by Marta Bernasconi



Descriptions of his cooking usually include words like “simplicity” and “humble”, but the key to understanding chef Romito’s philosophy lies in the title of his biography, “Apparently Simple”. “My cuisine is based on intense research”, says the chef. “I only use a few ingredients, but in fact the process is quite complicated. Every element I use is encouraged to express itself to the full – I layer the ingredients, concentrate the flavours and use a wide variety of techniques like cooking at low or controlled temperatures, fermentation and maceration. It’s a modern approach that retains a continuity with the past. My dishes don’t require a complex superstructure to be understood, and they have recognisable flavours”. The chef attributes his style of cooking, with its small number of carefully-selected ingredients, to the region of his birth. “The Abruzzo is a land of mountains, immense high plateaus and small, beautiful villages. Silence reigns supreme, alongside the few elements that transcend it, exploding in all their beauty”. Chef Romito’s career shows the effectiveness of willpower. Shortly before finishing his degree, he left university to run the trattoria inherited from his father. He taught himself to cook, learning in the kitchen and studying hard. Only then did he start to gain experience with several master chefs. Despite this difficult start in a remote inland location, in 2013 the Reale in Castel di Sangro in the Aquila province became a gourmet restaurant with three Michelin stars, run by the chef and his sister Cristiana. “I have a special passion for broths



Niko Romito and his restaurants. The Reale was opened in 2000, and now boasts three Michelin stars. It is in a former monastery, dating from the 16th century, which is also the location of the Niko Romito Formazione school and the boutique Casadonna hotel. Then there are the Spazio restaurants, one in Rivisondoli, another in Rome and another in Milan. Seven more are planned throughout the world. In 2017 Romito began a collaboration with Bulgari Hotel & Resorts. After Beijing and Dubai, the concept will be extended to the hotels in Shanghai and Milan

*“An on-board lunch should be fun, enjoyable, elegant and light. At sea you always have a wonderfully fresh, high-quality natural resource to hand. There’s no point in creating complicated dishes, adding sauces or cooking for a long time. All you need is a few extremely high quality elements”*



and extracts”, says Romito. “One of my most typical dishes is the “Assoluto of onions, parmesan and toasted saffron”. Not a broth, because it lacks the watery element, but a concentrate of the ingredient’s quintessential nature – onions, in this case – in a liquid form. In recent years I’ve also experienced great satisfaction in working with vegetables. I wanted to transform often quite humble raw materials into prestigious dishes suitable for a Michelin-starred restaurant”. His method of presentation reflects the purity Romito seeks in his dishes “We’ve replaced tablecloths with simple linen covers that permit our guests to move freely and appreciate the antique, turned table bases. The mise en place is simple, with no frills.

I want the food to take pride of place, to capture the attention. I really like early 20th-century crockery. I love thin, white

porcelain, large plates which enclose the food like a jewel in a casket”.

The recipe Niko Romito has shared with The One is a unique expression of the aromas and flavours of the sea. Here we describe how to prepare “Ricciola (amberjack) marinated in brine with cherry tomatoes and Mediterranean herbs”. Clean and fillet a ricciola, marinate in the fridge for 24 hours in pure seawater. Slice like a carpaccio and serve with a sauce made from fresh, roughly chopped cherry tomatoes, lemon juice, oregano, capers, basil and a pinch of chili pepper.

“As an accompaniment, I recommend a Cococciola, a wine made from a native Abruzzo grape variety that’s almost unknown elsewhere. Or a Trebbiano - in my region we produce some excellent examples.” And we’re ready to toast the chef.