

Brodetto *Seafood Stew*

If you look on a topographical map of central Italy, you'll see the Apennines (Appennini), a string of mountains that forms the sturdy and well-articulated spine of Italy, splitting the country in two. On the eastern side, the Cortona side, the mountain range gives to wide fertile plains that end in the waters of the Tyrrhenian, the Tuscan part of the Mediterranean Sea. There's no such landscape on the western side of the Apennines, where the mountains and the sea have a more intimate relationship. Part of the reason the Marche region hasn't been as explored as much as Tuscany is because of mountains, everywhere, making it more difficult to get around. Naturally, the *marchigiani* turn toward the sea for their food. Up and down the Adriatic coast, you'll find everyone who has a stockpot has a recipe for *brodetto*.

If Cole Porter had been Italian, he might have written, "You say *brodetto*, I say *buridda*, you say *cioppino* and I say *cacciucco* . . ." Fish stew by any other name definitely sounds better. Italian for seafood is *frutti di mare*, fruits of the sea or seafruits. Even the Italian word for fish, *pesce*, two syllables, makes the word palatable and musical.

Naturally, a number of regions have their own names for *brodetto*, all made differently. There's *cioppino*, which is all over San Francisco, but I've never seen it in Italy, although it's said to have originated in Liguria, where they eat *buridda*; on the Tuscan coast you'd eat *Cacciucco alla Livornese*.

What Ed suggests: Simply buy what's fresh that day. If the recipe calls for hake and there's no hake, and the flounder looks good, then buy flounder. Traditionally, cooks used thirteen different kinds of seafood.

Serves 6

2 shallots, minced
1/4 cup extra- virgin olive oil
4 garlic cloves, minced
3 or 4 strands of saffron
Salt and pepper
2 cups cherry tomatoes, halved
2 cups white wine
1/2 pound cod, cut into 1-inch pieces
1 pound shrimp, peeled
1/2 pound small scallops
1/2 pound flounder, cut into 1-inch pieces
1/2 cup parsley, chopped

Sauté the shallots in the oil for 2 or 3 minutes, then add the garlic. Continue sautéing, then add the saffron, salt, pepper, and tomatoes. After another 5 minutes, add the wine and bring to a boil. Lower heat to a simmer and cook for 5 minutes.

Raise heat to medium and add the cod, which takes a little longer than the other seafood, and cook for 3 minutes, then add the shrimp, scallops, and flounder. Cover and cook on low for 15 minutes. Add parsley just before serving.

Serve in a bowl on a piece of good toasted bread, or over spaghetti.

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