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# Limoncello

## LIMONCELLO DI CAPRI

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Limoncello di Capri  
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# Yellow Nectar from the Blue Isle

TEXT BY PINA AMARELLI MENGANO PHOTOGRAPHY BY RINALDI/DAGHERROTIPPO





young, though, and the Canale stills were shut down until six years ago, when Salvatore's son Massimo decided to resurrect his great-grandmother's recipe and bring back the liqueur he called Limoncello. The first batch of golden liquid went on sale on April 22, 1989 and the next day Massimo sold out.

He quickly registered both the name Limoncello (from the old dialect term "limonillo") and the recipe. He uses only sugar, alcohol, water, and an infusion of citrus zest. Massimo examines each piece of fruit for ripeness and for thickness of the rind and supervises the meticulous

**Left, Vivica in the Canale's Capri shop. Page 96, Capri gold.**

process of separating the zest from the bitter white inner part of the rind. The rest of the fruit is set aside for later use in marmalade.

Limoncello has turned into a family

**At the end** of the 19th century, the island of Capri was a favorite destination for British and German swells who came to the Blue Isle to shake off their winter blues. The ancient Phoenician staircase that climbs up from the port through steep ravines to the cliff-top village of Anacapri had recently been rendered mercifully obsolete (though no less picturesque) by the new cablecar. An enterprising islander, Maria Antonia Farace, welcomed the pale foreigners into her home, which was already populated by her swarm of children. Around that time, mother and brood posed for a family photograph that still hangs, a little yellowed now, in the office of her granddaughter.

Donna Antonia tended her guests and her citrus grove with equal care, and besides the roast chicken that only she knew how to flavor so richly, tourists sought her out for the liqueur she called "The Five Essences," a dense concentrate made from the zest and essential oils of lemon, orange, tangerine, citron, and lime. The innkeeper became an institution, and Donna Antonia was featured in an archaeologist's compendium of Capri's personalities.

In the 1920's, one of the Farace daughters married into another clan of restaurateurs (the Canale who ran the famous restaurant La Bersagliera, in Naples' Borgo Marinaro) and perpetuated the gene for hospitality. In the years after World War II, one of Donna Antonio's grandsons, Salvatore Canale, opened a bar that was popular for its home distillations, especially gin. He died

business: while Massimo handles production, his sister Vivica takes care of sales and customer relations, and the third brother, Peppino, grooms the fruit tree groves. Vivica designs the labels and the delicate, hand-painted patterns that ornament the gift packages and the ceramic flasks. It is she who has deliberately turned the store into a social center for the island, she who shepherds the flocks of tourists through the gleaming laboratory, she who doles out the samples and a steady stream of good will. Of the three siblings, Peppino has the least visible and most delicate task: cultivating the family's fastidious, climate-sensitive plants and determining the appropriate picking time.

Not one to rest on his lemons, Massimo has begun distilling laurels. Laurus, made from laurel leaves from which the berries have been picked off and discarded, and Basilicum, a heady distillation of Capri's powerfully perfumed basil leaves, are two recent additions to the Canale family repertoire. Liqueurs made from essence of watermelon and orange exist only in quantities sufficient for the three siblings and their friends, but the store stocks plenty of lemon and orange-and-lemon marmalade, as well as a luminous, honeyed pumpkin preserve.

A shiny new laboratory, cutely called "Capriccio con dolcezza di Capri" ("Capri caprice and sweetness"), turns out a dark lemon chocolate that is both tangy and rich and white chocolate bonbons tinged slightly Limoncello green. On Capri, anyway, lemon tree very pretty, and the Limoncello is sweet. ■