

Gourmet

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ON A DIFFERENT ROLL

SMOLJANCI, CROATIA We arrived in the village to find a fireside dinner awaiting us at **Stancija 1904**, the 104-year-old villa owned by Draženka (“Dada”) and Rolf Moll. The couple turned out to be the perfect hosts, and learning to cook Istrian food with Dada was so comfortable that it felt like gearing up for a family feast, as if every day was Thanksgiving. One afternoon, she showed us how to shape the local pasta, *fuži*, rolling up the squares of dough around a very small dowel to produce penne-like tubes. Dada made it look easy. It wasn’t, but she laughed and told us to keep going. Tagging along with her to the provisioners in nearby Pula, my fellow student and I repeatedly helped make all the decisions about what to have for dinner, gleefully loading up at the fishmonger’s, the bakery, and the produce market. On the trip back to the estate, we stopped by a farm where Dada buys her goat cheese and eggs and had a quick look at the black-and-white-spotted goats that

provide the milk for the cheese. The owner offered us a glass of her homemade wine and sent us away with the last of the season’s peaches. On other day trips, we visited lovely villages like **Grožnjan**, which has become something of an art colony. Dinners were accompanied by wines made from the local grapes Malvazia and Teran, which perfectly matched the rustic cuisine. (011-44-118-961-1554; mycroatia.co.uk; \$3,102, double occupancy, for seven nights, including most meals) —*Alexis Touchet*

WHAT I LEARNED In addition to rolling out *fuži* (which took a couple of tries), how to make delicious bread with rosemary sprigs rolled inside, to be discarded before eating. **BIGGEST SURPRISE** Black truffles grow everywhere in the fall and are used in everything. Pairing them with cream or butter really draws out their flavor. **BEFORE YOU GO** Dada’s classes are tailor-made. Once you know the size of your group (maximum ten), discuss your preferences in detail with My Croatia, her U.K. booking agent.



In the village of Grožnjan, Istrian Boscarin oxen (which are almost never eaten) do most of the heavy lifting; gnocchi with truffle cream.

ISTRIAN GNOCCHI WITH TRUFFLE CREAM

Adapted from Draženka Moll, Stancija 1904, Smoljanci, Croatia

SERVES 4 TO 6 (FIRST COURSE)

ACTIVE TIME: 1½ HR START TO FINISH: 1¼ HR

Dada was as patient as she was precise in demonstrating how to make makaruni (Istrian gnocchi). We tried our best to mimic her nimble hands as she expertly kneaded and rolled the dough. It isn’t easy, but it’s so satisfying once you get the hang of it. And you will.

- 1½ cups all-purpose flour
 - 1 large egg
 - 1½ teaspoons salt
 - 1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil
 - ¼ to ⅓ cup water
 - ⅔ cup heavy cream
 - 4 teaspoons truffle butter (see Shopping List, page 206)
 - 1 oz grated Parmigiano-Reggiano (½ cup)
- ACCOMPANIMENT:** grated Parmigiano-Reggiano

- ▶ Sift flour in a mound on a wooden board or work surface and make a well in center. Add egg, salt, oil, and ¼ cup water to well and mix with a fork, gathering flour gradually into egg mixture to form a dough. If it seems dry, add water (up to 2 tablespoons). Knead on a lightly floured surface, incorporating just enough flour to keep dough from sticking, until smooth and elastic, 8 to 10 minutes.
- ▶ Quarter dough. Working with 1 piece at a time (keep remainder covered with plastic wrap), roll dough between your palms into a 6-inch log, then cut crosswise into about 26 (⅛-inch-thick) pieces. Roll each piece between your palms into a 3-inch-long log that is ¼ inch thick in center, tapering to ⅛ inch thick at ends. Transfer to a flour-dusted kitchen towel (not terry cloth).
- ▶ Cook gnocchi in a pasta pot of boiling salted water (2 tablespoons salt for 6 quarts water) until cooked through, 15 to 18 minutes.
- ▶ Meanwhile, heat cream with truffle butter and ¼ teaspoon each of salt and pepper in a 12-inch heavy skillet over medium heat until hot. ▶ Drain pasta and add to cream mixture along with cheese, then toss over medium-high heat until coated.

COOKS’ NOTE: Gnocchi can be formed (but not cooked) 1 hour ahead and kept, covered with a kitchen towel, at room temperature.