



Brunetti's Cookbook

Roberta Pianaro , Donna Leon

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Among their many pleasures, Donna Leon's Commissario Guido Brunetti novels have long been celebrated for their mouth-watering descriptions of food. Multicourse lunches at home with Paola and the children, snacks grabbed at a bar with a glass of wine or two, a quick sandwich during a busy day, or a working lunch at a neighborhood trattoria in the course of an investigation have all delighted Brunetti, as well as Leon's readers and reviewers. And then there's the coffee, the pastries, the wine, and the grappa.

In *Brunetti's Cookbook*, Donna Leon's best friend and favorite cook brings to life these fabulous Venetian meals. Eggplant crostini, orrechiette with asparagus, pumpkin ravioli, roasted artichokes, baked branzino, pork ragu with porcini—these are just a few of the over ninety recipes for antipasti, primi, secondi, and dolci. The recipes are joined by excerpts from the novels, four-color illustrations, and six original essays by Donna Leon on food and life in Venice. Charming, insightful, and full of personality, they are the perfect addition to this long awaited book.

Brunetti's Cookbook Details

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Kathy says

Having read all of Donna Leon's Brunetti detective books, this was a lot of fun. She always puts in her novels great descriptions of the meals he eats, either at work or with his family. This book has excerpts from the book with the food and then the corresponding recipes so you can try them at home. It was very enjoyable

Homerun2 says

Lovely read. The cookbook part is interesting, and certainly makes you want to travel to Italy, but I don't know that I will ever make a recipe from it. To me, the best parts of this book were the wonderful Excerpts from various Brunetti novels, all involving a family meal interchange. Absolutely worth a read.

Soa Reyes says

What a composite book - culture, Brunetti, Venice, and food, good recipes that work.

Connie Burchfield says

A clever compiling of recipes from all the mouth- watering dishes so lovingly prepared and served by Guido's Paola complete with book excerpts. This is a great way for the new- to Commissaire Brunetti series to get a "taste" of Donna Leon. Her writing is at its best at the dinner table and/or over lunch as she describes the conversation between the generations. Though compiled by Donna's dear friend Roberto Pianaro, there are inserts by Brunetti's creator addressing what cooking meant in her Irish-German household. Recipe provided by her mother for peas is hilarious but not unlike those of her generation. Ms. Leon blames her unimaginative cooking skills on her Irish grandmother who provided direction or lack of it in the kitchen to her mother.

Quotations from philosophers abound:

" Paola's disapproval of what she considered their children's profligacy had caught his attention. With no preparation, he asked out loud, ' Aren't you ashamed that you pay all of your attention to acquiring as much money as you can, without giving any thought to truth and understanding and perfection of your soul?' Surprised Paola asked, "Where did all that come from?" "Plato" Brunetti said and began to eat his cake. "The perfect compliment to philosophy pear cake with cream. " from Willful Behaviour. (Perfection!) Another excerpt over a very special lunch from the same source finally answers my ongoing question as to how Paola can make such elaborate lunches ie four course meals with dessert and teach at the university as well: "It's a good thing you have to go to the university three mornings a week and can't do this to us every day." ..she had bought an entire sea bass and baked it with fresh artichokes, lemon juice and rosemary. With it she served a platter the size of an inner tube filled with tiny roast potatoes, also lightly sprinkled with rosemary.

Then, to clear the palate, a salad of rucola and radicchio. They finished with baked apples."

Delightful interchange "What Chiara tried to cook: Ravioli con funghi" from A Noble Radiance"Chiara was in the kitchen, muttering dark threats at the pieces of ravioli which refused to maintain the shape into which she squeezed them. 'If it's necessary, we can always go over to Gianni's for pizza.' says Brunetti only to be reprimanded by Paola. 'No matter what she does to those poor ravioli, we are going to eat every one she puts on our plates, and you are going to ask for seconds. It's the first dinner she's cooked, all by herself, and it's going to be wonderful.' 'What about Raffi? How are you going to get him to eat it?' 'Don't you think he loves his little sister? All right. I promised him ten thousand lire if he eats everything.'

Beth says

I received this book as a gift because I love Dona Leon's mysteries set in Venice and the descriptions of meals that Leon provides in the mysteries. We were going to Venice, so I read all the narrative parts of the cookbook, and they certainly enriched our trip to Venice where we stayed not far from the questura featured in the mysteries.

Loraine says

This is indeed a cookbook! Vegetarians, beware . . . Venetians are omnivores, and do love meat dishes; however, Robera Pianaro has compiled an excellent collection of Venetian recipes that tells the story of dining in Venice, whether it be in the Brunetti family's dining room or a trattoria somewhere in Venice. This is a wonderful companion to the Commissario Brunetti series, because food plays such an important role in Leon's telling of Brunetti's life solving crime, usually murders, in the watery world of Venice. The recipes are simplicity themselves. Excerpts from the Brunetti series are scattered throughout the cookbook, as well as other original observations by Leon. Pianaro and Leon are fast friends, as well.

Sandy Weir says

What a beautiful book. I loved the variety and the insertion of selections from Brunetti novels where the actual recipe was mentioned (nice idea). One little thing kept me from giving this 5 stars.... Needed pictures of the finished dishes (in case one would attempt to make these... good supporting guideline with the directions). Well planned, other than that, and researched.

Janet says

I loved this cookbook - and I don't cook much. The pasta recipes are great - I made the one with the green olives and pasta - yummy. It is a very pretty book and if you are a Donna Leon fan, you will like how the recipes are linked to her books. This is one cookbook I want to buy - and I don't buy cookbooks for myself!

Trish says

The concept of this book was intriguing--a cookbook that gives us recipes for some of the fictional Paola Brunetti's culinary concoctions from the Donna Leon series of books set in Venice. The recipes are not meant to be exotic, and to residents of that watery city by the sea, I don't suppose they are. But to inland residents of America they seem unattainable. Partly this may be because the ingredients must be absolutely fresh. There are not many ingredients in these simple home-made meals, so perfection in taste comes from exquisite ingredients. In the summer, this book might make an interesting addition to one's repertoire. In the winter, one can only dream.

Jan Polep says

Okay, I didn't really read anything but the recipes and copied a few for my resident chef to try. Good Italian cooking!

GraceAnne says

Passages in Donna Leon's Venetian mysteries talk about food the way Italians talk about food: a time for family, for pleasure, and for sharing. The sections and recipes are usually preceded by a passage from one of the Brunetti books where he is enjoying the foods delineated, and that's lovely. So is Donna Leon's introduction, which explains how the book came to be.

One might question (or at least, I did) the recipes that included bouillon cubes and canned beans, but I suppose it is possible.

My favorite quote, from the introduction on p11:

"Italian life is filled with food: people talk about it constantly, spend a great deal of time shopping for it and preparing it, and devote a joyous amount of time to eating it. One has but to pay close attention to them when they talk about food, or when they cook and eat, to begin to understand how fundamental it is to the living of a happy life and how vital it is to Italian culture."

Mangia, mangia, ti fa bene.

Negin says

Donna Leon's Brunetti books are fabulous when it comes to food descriptions. If you're anything like me, and have started to crave some good Italian food while reading them, this is an enjoyable read. It was written by Donna Leon's best friend and talented cook, Roberta (Biba) Pianaro. They have been friends and Leon has eaten at Biba and her husband's home for more than thirty years.

The other day I decided that I will no longer review a cookbook without trying out at least one recipe. I can't believe that I didn't make this rule for myself earlier! What was I thinking? I mean honestly, I don't think that it's right to review a cookbook without trying out at least one recipe! Well, I made an entire meal from the recipes here the other night and everyone was happy.

First we had Chickpea Balls for the antipasti (appetizer).

Our main course was Lamp Chops with Tomatoes and Basmati Rice.

I was meant to cook the lamb chops with the tomato sauce, but I chose to make them separately, since some family members can't handle the ingredients in the tomato sauce. It was interesting that the excerpt for this recipe was a story about a Persian friend. "What better for a Persian friend than lamb chops?" Donna Leon lived in Iran (my birthplace) for a while, and left around the same time that so many had to leave.

For dessert, we had Oven-Baked Apples with Confectioner's Custard and Cream. They were delicious, but the picture isn't appealing at all.

Now, as far as cookbooks go, this book is okay, just not the best. The layout is not as organized as I like cookbooks to be. Also, there are a few recipes that contain ingredients which aren't available where I live, and may be unavailable to others also. Mind you, this is not only a cookbook. There are excerpts from the Brunetti books, as well as essays with insights into Venetian life.

Some of my favorite quotes:

"Italian life is filled with food: people talk about it constantly, spend a great deal of time shopping for it and preparing it, and devote a joyous amount of time to eating it. One has but to pay close attention to them when they talk about food, or when they cook and eat, to begin to understand how fundamental it is to the living of a happy life and how vital it is to Italian culture."

"One of the first things that was said to me when I came to Italy forty years ago, speaking not a word of the language, was 'Mangia, mangia, ti fa bene.' Eat, eat, it's good for you."

Kay says

One of the reasons I read Donna Leon books is to imagine myself in Venice. Reading this book makes you wish to be transported but also makes you understand how the world has affected daily life in Venice. I liked the "culinary stories". The recipes were interesting but I really read it for the allusions to the Brunetti books and the stories of life in Italy.

Kirsten says

I normally don't really read cookbooks but this one I had to read. I love Donna Leon's Commissario Brunetti mysteries and have always been intrigued and enticed by the descriptions of the food and drink in these books.

This cookbook was set up very nicely, along with the recipes there were vignettes from different Brunetti novels as well as little anecdotes from the chef/cook who compiled the book. I just wish I was brave enough to prepare any of these wonderful meals.

Joan says

After reading this cookbook, I want to move to Italy.
