

VENETO (Map #5)

Venice, as a seafood haven, exalts razor-shell clams called cannolicchi, granseole (Adriatic crabs) and risotto nero (blackened with cuttlefish ink). But the Venetians also dine on the earthly likes of risi e bisi (rice and peas), fegato alla veneziana (liver with onions) and Carpaccio. That raw beef dish seems to have originated in the canal city, as did the chocolate covered dessert called tiramisù. The Veneto's rich and varied diet reflects an enviable balance of sources. The plains supply grain, Vialone Nano rice for risotto, corn for polenta and livestock. The Alpine slopes provide game, wild mushrooms, air-dried prosciutto and the cheeses of Asiago and Montasio. Delicacies include pastissada (beef stew with potato gnocchi), Vicenza's bigoli con l'anara (thick spaghetti with duck ragout), Treviso's sopa coada (pigeon and vegetable soup) and Padua's pasta e fasioi (pasta and bean soup).

FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA (Map #6)

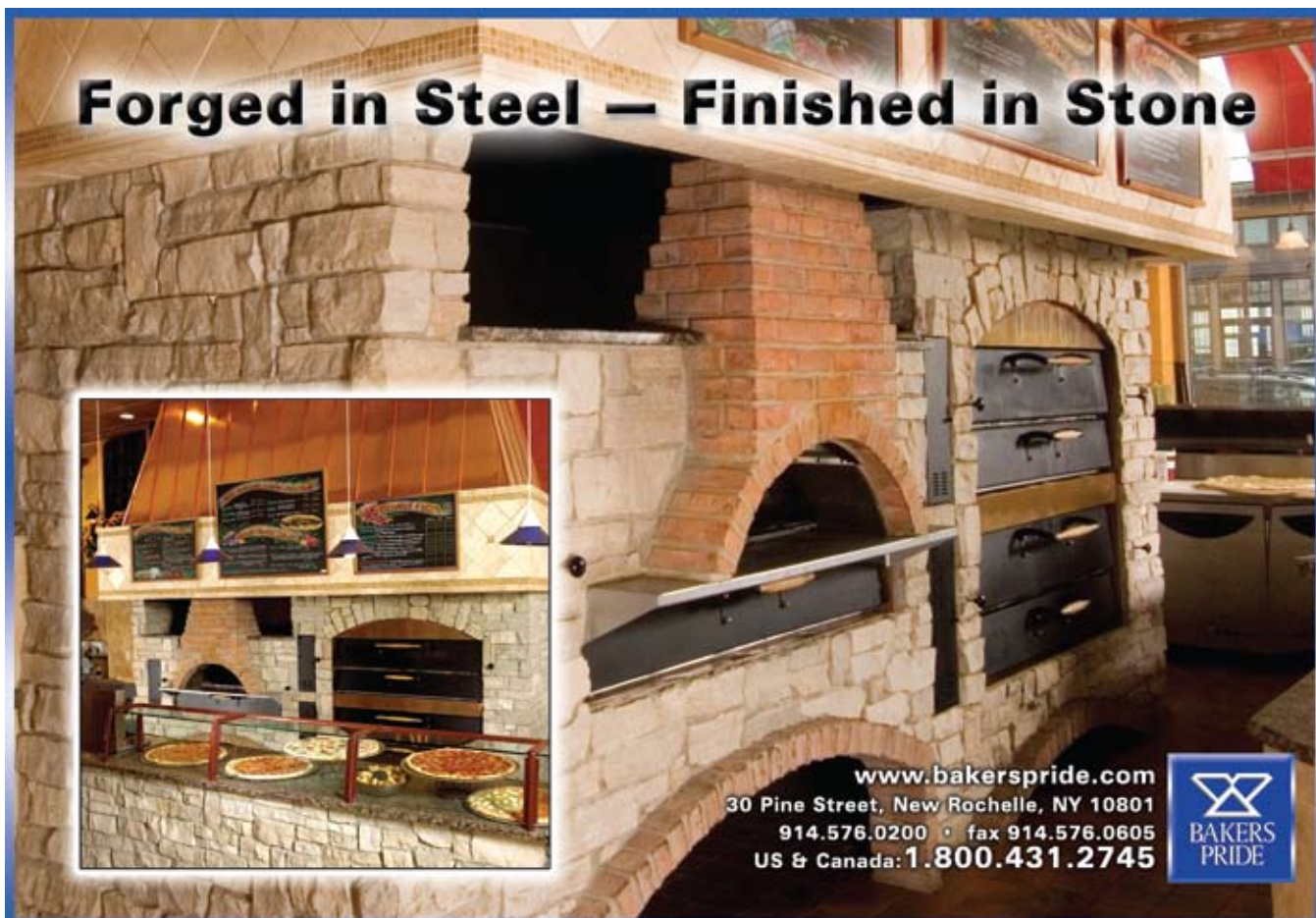
In Italy's northeast corner, the country fare of Friuli (the Alpine area to the north) contrasts with the more delicate diet of Venezia Giulia (the Adriatic coast taking in Trieste). Friulians grill meats and sausages at the open hearth fogolar and savor such curiosities as jota (liquid polenta with pork and cabbage), frico (crunchy fried cheese), cialzons (sweet-sour pasta packets) and muset con la brovada (pork rind with

turnips steeped in grape pressings). The hills render Montasio cheese and the exquisite Prosciutto of San Daniele. Coastal dwellers favor pasta and seafood: prawns, squid, scallops, spider crabs called granzevola and the tangy chowder called boreto alla gradese. Menus also echo the tangs of Austrian and Slavic neighbors with the likes of gulasch and the apple strudel called strucolo.

TRENTINO-ALTO ADIGE (Map #4)


Amid the towering Dolomites of this northernmost region, Italian and Germanic cultures mingle. In Alto Adige (or Südtirol, the German-speaking province of Bolzano), Tyrolean customs prevail in wursts, potatoes, rye bread and soups. In Trentino (the province of Trento to the south), Venetian traditions of pasta, polenta and gnocchi take on Alpine accents with butter, cheese, game and a dazzling array of wild mushrooms. Trentino's best include blood sausages called biroidi and buckwheat cakes called smacafam served with sausage and cheese. Alto Adige makes fine smoked bacon called speck and loaves of deliciously dark Schwarzbrot. Still, in these days of cultural exchange the South Tyroleans may dine on pizza or spaghetti just as readily as the Trentini eat Knödel (liver dumplings) or kraut. With those qualities in mind, Trentino-Alto Adige makes an excellent closing argument in any well constructed case for the unmatched diversity of cucina italiana.

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