

Untold Italy Episode 113 - Spring Dishes from Tuscany

This is the Untold Italy Travel podcast, and you're listening to episode number 113.

Ciao a tutti and Benvenuti to Untold Italy, the travel podcast, where you go to the towns and villages, mountains and lakes, hills and coastlines of Bella Italia. Each week your host Katy Clarke takes you on a journey in search of magical landscapes of history, culture, wine, gelato, and, of course, a whole lot of pasta. If you're dreaming of Italy and planning future adventures there, you've come to the right place.

Katy

Hi Everyone, hope you're all safe and well. This episode is starting off a little differently than I'd planned so bear with me for a few moments because I just can't ignore the awful atrocities happening in the Ukraine. One of the amazing things about recording a podcast is that we're able to reach people all over the world and so I know we have listeners in the Ukraine. And I want to let you know that I, my team and our listeners are absolutely appalled by the invasion of your country and the impact to your people.

War and violence should never be an option. Fundamentally, 99% of people in this world want to live peaceful lives spent dedicated to their family, friends, and community. We want to see the world and have adventures and when we're no longer able to travel, recount memories of those adventures past. We're not interested in power grabs or expanding borders and we want the violence to stop.

The theme of today's podcast is about Spring and renewal and I hope and wish with all my heart that we see better days ahead very soon for Ukraine. I'm sure that our Ukrainian listeners are way too preoccupied to listen to our podcast about travel in Italy but if you are, know that I stand with you, am sending love and praying for a quick resolution to this and all conflicts around the world.

Today's guest is someone who I have admired for a very long time. She's a proud Tuscan and one of the original digital creators shall we say, with over 13 years of experience building blogs and online content. Giulia Scarpaleggia is a food writer, cookbook author, food photographer, cooking class instructor and fellow podcaster. Together with her husband Tommaso she runs Juls Kitchen - an online destination where you can immerse yourself in the seasonal produce and dishes of Tuscany and the Cooking with an Italian accent podcast. And I can't wait for you to meet her.

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Katy

Benvenuta Giulia, welcome to the Untold Italy podcast.

Giulia

Thank you so much. I'm so happy to be here today.

Katy

Oh, I am so excited to have you on the show today, Giulia. I've been an avid follower of your highly prolific work for some time now. I think you've been going for 13 years is it something like that?

Giulia

13 years!

Katy

Wow. That's incredible. And I can't wait for our listeners to learn all about you. Would you mind sharing your story with them, where you live, your background, and what you do?

Giulia

Sure. So I live in Tuscany, in the countryside in between Siena and Florence. I live in a farmhouse. This used to be my grandmother's house where she was born, where my father was born. And I was born here as well. I mean, I was born in the hospital. They were born here in this house, as they used to do in the past times. My grandmother, she still lives here on the ground floor. I live on the first floor of this house with my husband and my daughter. And my parents, they live next door, so it's a big Italian family. I'm a food writer, cookbook author. I teach cooking classes. I used to teach cooking classes before pandemic. And I hope we will start again in spring. I work with my husband, so Tommaso is the photographer and the tech guy behind the blog, the newsletter, the podcast and everything. So we develop recipes for magazines. We take photos. Basically, we write and we cook.

Katy

Yeah, it's really amazing. And you're so prolific. And the quality of your work is really amazing. And for someone who's a creator myself, I really appreciate all the work and effort that you and Tommaso go into making all your creations. They are so beautiful. Now, another reason I love your content is because we get a really special look into life in Tuscany and your growing family and your big extended family, too. And I think one of my favorite stories that you shared recently is a story about your daughter's pear tree, because I think it really speaks to a real strong connection between seasons and nature and the lives that we run as humans. Would you mind sharing that with our listeners?

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Giulia

Sure. In the beginning, that was my grandmother's pear tree, because her surname is Peri, like Pera. It's very similar. So that's the family name of my grandmother. And we have this very old pear tree in the garden. Every year this tree will produce a lot of pears, but they were inedible. We try to put them on the side in a box to let them ripen - nothing. So we would bring them to the pigs, to the neighbor's pigs. It was good food for them. But two years ago, so it was September 2020 when I gave birth to my daughter. My father collected all the pears, as always, just to bring them to the neighbor. But they start to ripen this is like a miracle, probably - because we ate those pears for the first year in decades and the pears were delicious. This is, I think, a very old tree, like local heirloom variety. So it's not a classical pear you would expect supermarkets or markets, but they were delicious - grainy, very sweet, a little bit tart, so delicious pears. So from that year, we started collecting those pears. And this year, for the first time, I collected the pears with Livia, with my daughter, because the first pears were ripened when she was born and now one year after we collected the pears together, we put them in a box and we let them mature in a room. And so it's a little miracle, like her life is a miracle. These pears are a miracle. So it was very touching. A very touching moment.

Katy

Yeah. It really spoke to me as a mother and just someone who's really interested in food and nature and why this pear tree has just suddenly bloomed into life at the same time as your daughter. It's a beautiful story.

Giulia

And it has beautiful flowers now in spring, but no good pears for years, and now they're so good.

Katy

Did it flower before when it was producing fruit that wasn't very good?

Giulia

Yeah. Beautiful flowers. That's why every year we try to eat the pears, because the flowers were so promising. No, they were not good.

Katy

And how about the pigs? Did they miss out last year when you were able to eat the pears?

Giulia

I think so. Like a bucket of pears.

Katy

Oh, dear. Poor pigs.

Giulia

Yeah.

Katy

So, Giulia, we're recording this in winter, but it will soon be spring. And I know so many people are excited to come back to Italy and Tuscany after such a long time. And they all want to know what to eat because as we're learning and we don't have in some of our cultures a strong relationship with the land and food and produce, as you do in Italy - but we're learning more and more that eating is connected to the season and what produce is available. And I couldn't think of anyone better to share what's happening in Tuscany in spring and what dishes they should try when they're there. So can you share maybe just about what spring means as a season in Italy?

Giulia

Yeah, sure. So it's green. So the countryside turns green, like blooming and the market stalls, they turn green. So after the winter, after the crates of oranges and lemons and mandarins, we have the sweet peas, fava beans, asparagus artichokes. Artichokes are winter and spring vegetables. So I eat them throughout those two seasons. And then we have another very typical local vegetable. It's called agretti or barba di frate, which is monk's beard. They're very local in Tuscany, actually, I discovered them a few years ago, so maybe they came back again into the market. They are delicious. They taste almost like spinach. They have the texture of chives, like succulents. They are delicious steamed or stirfried. You can make a pasta with them, a side dish with them. They're very unique. What I want to say, though, is that if you visit Tuscany and you just rely on the food you eat in a restaurant, you might not have these incredible array of vegetables, the vegetable options in restaurants, unless you go to very special restaurants, that they have a farm to table approach. But in traditional austerias, where you have the traditional, very good food of Tuscany - vegetables, they have always a side room. So you might have spinach, you might have a salad. But if you have the chance to visit a market, maybe if you are in an apartment or you have a small kitchen, you can use that's when you can really enjoy the vegetables of spring in Tuscany, because you can find all the fresh vegetables at the market. And it is when you can really cook these vegetables in the best, freshest way. And I think one of the best ways to enjoy all these vegetables is a recipe from Lucca called Garmugia. So it's very local to Lucca. I live in between Sienna and Florence, and here you don't find Garmugia. So I had that for the first time in Lucca. Here it's very difficult to find it. That's why it's good to know the recipe so that you can make it when you find the vegetables. And Garmugia is the perfect example of micro-seasonality, because you have the vegetables from Garmugia - there are fava beans, peas, asparagus and artichokes. They are together on the market stalls just for a short period

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of time, maybe a few weeks. So it's when you want to make Garmugia. And it's similar to the Roman vinarola. So you have the spring vegetables together, but you have also ground meat in Garmugia and fried bread. So it's a very filling, comforting soup. They say it's a recipe that belongs to the 18th century. But the first recipe appeared in our cookbook in the 1965. So it's not cucina povera. It's not one of the recipes for the peasant people because you have the meat, you have good spring vegetables. So they say this was for women who just gave birth or to people who had to recover because it's very nurturing as a soup. And it's delicious. It's a very good, comforting soup full of spring vegetables and pancetta, some ground beef, fried bread on top. So it's fantastic for spring, really. It's delicious.

Katy

It sounds very hearty and tasty delicious. And Lucca is such a lovely place, too. It's one of my favorite places in Tuscany. And would you find that in a restaurant, maybe in Lucca or not really or would you have to sort of...

Giulia

Yes.

Katy

You would.

Giulia

Yes, you can find restaurants I'm thinking about Il Mecenate there. I don't know. It's one of my favorite restaurants in Lucca. I know they make this soup. I found one of the recipes online. If you are in Lucca in spring and you go to Il Mecenate, probably you will try Garmugia there.

Katy

Another good reason to go to Lucca i don't need a reason. In your part of Tuscany, do they have markets every week or is it like a special day that each town has their market that you could visit?

Giulia

Yeah, especially this small town. I live in Colle Val d'Elsa, we are in the country is out of Colle Val d'Elsa. Colle Val d'Elsa is a small town. We have the big market on Fridays. Big market means it's traffic day on Friday because everyone from the countryside will gather in town to shop to buy vegetables, fruit and vegetables. To go to the doctor. To meet people. So it's a busy day in town. But then we have also a tiny market on Wednesday in a neighborhood near where I live, where you just find some fresh vegetables and some cheese. And I actually prefer that market because it's tiny. But you have the best stalls for the vegetables, a very good stall for cheese. It's close to the butcher. So you can really shop for the week in a

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parking lot. It's a parking lot, they turn into a market square. There's more towns, they have markets once a week. But if you go to bigger towns like Florence or Livorno, they have open markets there every day. But in my town, you have the market once a week.

Katy

If you are visiting the area, how would you find out about the markets? Or is it something maybe that you need to ask where you're staying?

Giulia

Probably you can ask where you're staying because here it's quiet. You know where the market is. Also in the surrounding towns, because of course, if you want to go to the market and it's Tuesday, you go to Poggibonsi, it's Wednesday, you have a small market in Gracciano where I live, or you go to Siena. So if you ask where you're staying, they will tell you where the markets are?

Katy

I think so, because they're not published online.

Giulia

Unless you search on the town hall website, which is usually not user friendly at all. Our last cookbook is about Tuscan markets and that was an experience. It was very difficult to find when the market was and where it was in other towns, because of course, I know about the Valle d'Elsa area where I live, I know about Florence, but we were researching about Maremma and it's like 2 hours drive from here. I know for you 2 hours is not a lot, but for us, 2 hours is like a travel. So we drove for 2 hours believing that we would reach a market and the town was empty, so there was no one there. So it's not easy to find when the market is, unless you ask to someone living there or hotel you're staying in, or maybe a bar, a cafe, you can ask when there's the market. It's difficult to understand it from official websites.

Katy

Yeah, I can imagine. I do lots of online research myself, but I think that it's one of those things where Italy is a different beast to our country. Here if it's not online, it doesn't exist. It's a totally different thing. So tell us a little bit more about your cookbook, Giulia. It sounds amazing. I'd love to hear some more about some of the favorite markets that you discovered around Tuscany.

Giulia

So I realized that the market experience was always the best experience during my cooking classes. And so I thought that it could be very interesting to have a cookbook about Tuscan markets. We start to research and we basically travel to Tuscany from Garfagnana in the

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Northern part of Tuscany, down to Maremma. And we found all different kinds of markets. So you find the weekly markets that we were just talking about. We found open markets, the markets that are there throughout the week, big markets, like in Florence and in Livorno, and then the farmers markets organized by the local producers. Every market was interesting. You can find very local produce there that maybe are not. In the nearby town, for example, I always mention is a honey from the seaside. And we found that it was in Lucca. Yes, it was in Lucca, but the honey comes from the nearby coast where there are pine trees. And this honey has all the taste of the plants that grow on the coast. And you can really smell the sea in that honey. And it's fantastic, especially with cheese and with savory ingredients. So not just bread with honey, but maybe with some pecorino. That's delicious to dress a salad. We found local breads, local cheese, charcuteries, and also recipes, because of course, I went to those markets. My husband (at that time was my boyfriend), he was taking pictures and I was just asking questions and questions to have recipes. And we found very good recipes by local recipes. People were always supportive and happy to share the recipes. So that was very interesting journey.

Katy

Yeah, I think I come from a country that's pretty big and we do have diversity here, obviously, but it's like, it's micro diversity in Tuscany. So, you're not so far away, like 30, 50 km away, and you'll get something completely different, right?

Giulia

Yeah, exactly. For example, I live about 1 hour and 15 minutes from the coast, but here, fresh fish is very difficult to find. My grandmother, she always tells me that fish was on Friday, but fish was salted cod, baccalà, and nothing else. And even now, unless you know where to go to buy the good fresh fish, it's difficult to find fresh fish here - 1 hour from the coast. Then you go to the coast and you have the most amazing fish and you have the recipe to cook there. We met an old man and he brought us on his ship and he cooked fish for us and he gave us the recipes when we were in Viareggio So that was exciting. But yes, 20 km or 50 km apart, and you find different ingredients, different recipes, different traditions. It's incredible.

Katy

Yeah. And that's why I think Italy and Tuscany is so exciting, because you can have all these different experiences. They've got little similarities. But seeing those contrast, it's such a beautiful thing. It really is. Okay. Now tell us some more about these dishes, because I'm starting to get a bit hungry now. These spring dishes.

Giulia

So spring dishes, back to the spring dishes. So I said Garmugia then with the Monk's beard, with the Agretti, I really like to make a savory pie with ricotta and eggs, because ricotta and eggs are two ingredients that are very typical of spring. This is when they start to making

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cheese again. So you have the fresh ricotta. And after the winter break, you start having fresh eggs again. So our tickets are on strike at the moment. We don't have fresh eggs. We have seven chickens, but they make, like two eggs a day now. But then from spring, we'll have, again, seven eggs a day. So many of the spring recipes, they include eggs and risotto as ingredients. So, for example, in Liguria, you have, Torta Pasqualina where it's a savory pie with spinach or foraged herbs, they have very local cheese similar to the ricotta, a little bit more sour and then eggs inside. So here I make a similar recipe with agretti with Monk spirit, with eggs and ricotta. So local, sheep ricotta. And it's delicious. It's very fresh, easy to make, and then to even freeze. And then you can just have a few slices for dinner already, just reheat that. So it's something that we like to eat. And then my daughter Livia is learning to eat as well. This is a very good recipe with Agretti, and I like to use Aggretti also to make pasta. So Aggretti are very thin and long. So they're very nice with spaghetti because they mix very well and add anchovies, fried breadcrumbs. And if you really want to go the extra mile some Burrata or stracciatella, the creamy cheese. And that's like a meal on its own with pasta, vegetables and cheese. So it's delicious.

Katy

So it's a vegetable, is it?

Giulia

Yeah. The vegetables, like Monk's beard, they look like chives or seaweeds, but they grow on salty soils. So they have these very unique flavors, similar to spinach, but not as bitter.

Katy

So is it as thin as chives?

Giulia

Thin as chives? You might think that it's chives. They look like chives.

Katy

But it's totally different flavor.

Giulia

Yeah. Not like onion, but more like spinach.

Katy

Interesting. Wow. And does that just grow wild in the countryside? Is that something you can just go and get?

Giulia

No, I think they grow that in specific areas because it needs salty water.

Katy

Okay. It does sound delicious, though. I love spinach. It's just one of those vegetables that you just know all the goodness is going into. So I think I would like Agretti.

Giulia

It just takes forever to clean them because you have to just imagine how thin one strand is. You have to remove every single root from the it takes forever. But I think this is very common to spring vegetables. So if you think about shelling peas or the fava beans cleaning the artichokes, the Agretti, it's very meditative cooking in spring. If you think about how quick it is to cook in summer, it's like a tomato and that's it, spring takes more time.

Katy

Yeah, of course. But I think it's quite therapeutic, isn't it? Sometimes just doing the repetitive shelling the peas or washing the Agretti, it's like you have to slow down a little bit. You have to take your time and make sure because no one wants a bit of dirt in their pie.

Giulia

Exactly. Then what else?

Katy

Yeah. Tell me what else.

Giulia

Carciofi. Carciofi ritti - the upstanding artichokes, how we cook artichokes here in this area in Tuscany. So we just removed the harder leaves outside of the artichokes, the other layers. Then you open the artichoke almost like a flower. And then you stuff the artichoke with garlic, parsley and pancetta. And then you put one artichoke next to the other standing in a saucepan. And then you add olive oil and water, more garlic and mint. And the very interesting thing is how they cook, because since there's water and olive oil first, the water thins the artichokes. When the water is all gone, you are left with the olive oil. It's going to fry the artichokes, the outside of the artichokes. So you got this delicious crisp on the outside, soft artichokes on the inside with all the filling, and they're incredibly good.

Katy

That's just a beautiful way to cook things, just slowly. Does it take a long time to cook?

Giulia

Yeah, at least 40 minutes, depending on how many artichokes you are crowding into the pan, but takes some time.

Katy

And would you find that in a restaurant?

Giulia

Maybe you can find these kind of artichokes? Maybe, yeah.

Katy

Would you mind more likely to find that if you're staying in an agriturismo?

Giulia

Probably, yeah.

Katy

And that's why we always recommend people to try and stay at least one agriturismo when they're in Italy, even if it's their first visit, because you have a just a completely different experience of life. And you get to try these amazing dishes that you may not get to try at a restaurant because I think you've made a really good point. What people serve at a restaurant, particularly an Italian restaurant. Maybe they're not creating their restaurant for visitors - they might be creating it for Italian, so if you think about when we go out to eat, what we like to eat is something different at a restaurant than what we like to eat at home. And I think if you want to really try those delicious local dishes, then yes, stay at an agriturismo and you can really get to try them. So I think this sounds good. Is it Carciofi Ritti?

Giulia

Yeah, that was great.

Katy

I do think everything tastes better with pancetta. We have a saying here in Australia, everything tastes better with bacon, but I think it sounds better when we say everything tastes better with pancetta.

Giulia

I agree.

Katy

But, I mean, when we were chatting before we started the interview, I was saying to you, like, I think people have this misconception that Tuscan food is very meat-based. So they think of the Bistecca alla fiorentina and the boar stew and all of that. But there's so many amazing vegetable dishes that you can try when you're in Tuscany. And I think it's really important to people, especially if you're vegetarian - you'll probably have some of the best eating of your life when you're in Italy, if you just branch out a little bit and try.

Giulia

Yeah, there are many options.

Katy

for sure. So tell us tell us some of the other ones. I want to hear about these fritters. I love fritters.

Giulia

These can be the opening of the meal or the closing of the meal. So one of the things I really like when spring comes is to forage for elderflowers, or we call this Acacia, but it's Robinia flowers. They look like popcorn, these flowers. So you recognize them because it's a huge tree with popcorn like flowers. And you can fry these flowers and just dip them in batter with beer, water and flour. This is how I make the batter. You fry them and then you can sprinkle them with salt and you have a nice appetizer, or you can drizzle them with honey and that's the most delicious dessert. I really like the Acacia Robinia flowers because they really taste like honey. They make a very good honey from them. So if you drizzle them with their honey, you can get busy with them. They are delicious. You have to hurry up when you see them. You have to pick them and fry them because sudden rain and they're gone.

Katy

That's so interesting. So what it sounds like is there isn't really four seasons. There's like these all these micro seasons. There's Robidea season. You got to jump on them, which is really fascinating because my children have been learning about the Indigenous culture here in Australia and they have many different seasons, many more than what we describe in Western culture. At the moment we're in the very, very hot season. But I mean, I just think this is just so fascinating and we talk about on this podcast about having experiences in Italy. And like, if you find this thing, you just try it. Absolutely. Because this might be your one and only chance to try this amazing little dish. Beautiful. Do they have a *sagre* for that particular season? I love a *sagre*.

Giulia

I've never seen a *sagre* for elderflowers. I would go there! Elderflowers is like my favorite smell - really. Like elderflowers syrup is something I love. I love to fry them. I just love to smell them when I pass by when I walk and I found elderflowers, I had to pick them and smell them. And I remember last year, Livia was seven months old/eight months old. And I picked a flower that looked like an umbrella. And I gave her the flower to smell. I turned them. Look at her again as she was eating the flowers like popcorn. She's my daughter. She's my daughter.

Katy

Like mother, like daughter. Cute. I love it.

Giulia

Yeah. Very short season, but it's better to enjoy as long as they last.

Katy

Oh, absolutely. And you also mentioned the fresh fava beans. And I think beans get a bit of a bad rap here. I lived a long time in the UK and I don't know what they do to beans over there, but it's not a very nice thing, but putting it in a can with just tomato sauce. I think trying these fresh beans when you're in Italy is just a completely different experience.

Giulia

Fresh fava beans, they really belong to the Tuscan spring. Every time we have a picnic, it could be Easter Monday, it could be the 1st May where we always have picnics - you bring some fresh fava beans, you bring some pecorino and then some salami. And that's the perfect combination for Tuscan spring picnic. The fava beans, they are slightly bitter and they are very good with cheese, with a milky pecorino and with salami as well. The fava beans - thinking about how therapeutic it is to clean all the spring vegetables, think about fava beans. You have to shell them. And then if you want to have the sweet fava beans, you have to remove also the outer peel of the beans. So it takes forever, but then you are left with the most delicate fava beans, tasting like green and spring. They are incredibly delicious. And the sour beans that we find in Tuscany are fresh fava beans. In the south of Italy, they often eat dry fava beans. That's when they turn from being a vegetable to a legume. And in Apuglia, so my husband's family, his mother's family is from Puglia and then they have the mashed fava beans, dry fava beans with chicory on top. It's an incredibly delicious, vegan, gluten free dish, so it's very inclusive. It's for everyone. It's delicious. But those are dried fava beans. In Tuscany, we tend to eat the fresh fava beans.

Katy

So I didn't mention the *sagre*, but *sagre*, I think sometimes we think of it as a summer activity and maybe around harvest. But are there any springtime?

Giulia

Yes, there are. I'm thinking about maybe end of spring, beginning of summer - cherries here. There are many sagra for cherries. Artichokes - I'm sure there are artichoke sagra here in Tuscany. Almost about everything. Like in my neighboring town, there's a frog festival - frog sagra. Cause they fried frogs and they eat frogs. Maybe one of the only towns left in the whole Italy doing this but yeah.

Katy

Nice. Interesting. I knew the French were into their frogs, but I had no idea that happened in Tuscany. Interesting.

Giulia

Yeah.

Katy

But it's also Easter time and I know there's a lot of special foods that happen at Easter and there's some local cake, isn't there, that's so delicious that people like to eat at Easter?

Giulia

Yeah. There's this cake. It's called Sportellina in San_Gimignano, where my mom is from. And it's called schiacciata here in Colle Val d'Elsa and in Siena. So if you think about Schiacciata, you might think about Focaccia so a flat bread. In this case, this is called Schiacciata because you are Schiacciata - breaking many eggs, because I told you, spring is when you start having the fresh cheese again and the eggs again. So this is a rich bread made with a lot of eggs, some sugar, orange zest. Then you have any seeds, mint liqueur, another local liquor. So it's very aromatic, like a dome cake. It takes forever to make it. So I make it, of course, for Easter once a year. But for us, it's very typical. It's Easter for us. And you can have a slice of this Schiacciata as a dessert with some sweet wine, some Vin Santo or with some chocolate eggs, because every time for Easter you have the chocolate eggs. And this Schiacciata is very good with a piece of chocolate egg fondant or dark chocolate.

Katy

Oh, my goodness. That just sounds amazing. Chocolate and cake.

Giulia

Excellent.

Katy

And would you be able to find that at a pasticceria or is there something...

Giulia

Yes, in bakeries, especially in bakeries, you can find it. Everyone has a favorite bakery where to go to buy it. I know about Siena. For example, there's a bakery, it's called il Magnifico. Forno il Magnifico. They have a queue outside when they start selling the because they make a very good Schiacciata. So you have to stay outside for quite some time, but then you will find the best.

Katy

Oh, my goodness, that sounds amazing. They've got some lovely bakeries in Siena, haven't they? I do remember that very well. It's just sort of like you could probably go on a bakery hop all around.

Giulia

Yeah, it's a good thing.

Katy

You get a lot of exercise walking around the steep little streets there. So speaking about your area of Tuscany, and it is a very popular area for people to visit. Everyone loves Siena, San gimignano, Volterra. It's like people love your area of Tuscany. But is there a really - a town that really sort of has embraced the food culture? Is there somewhere where you can go where you just think there's several restaurants there where you go, wow, this is where we can go to try local dishes.

Giulia

My town Colle Val d'Elsa, so it's not too touristic. They are not promoting themselves, so I have to do this for them, basically.

Katy

Doing a great job!

Giulia

There's a medieval town of Colle Val d'Elsa and there's the new town. For example, the market I was mentioning is in the new town, not in the medieval town. But this town has so many good restaurants. It's like incredible. You can find from the very good Neopolitan Pizzeria to a very traditional local trattoria, to a restaurant where you have a farm-to-table approach. And then also in the surroundings, you have incredible restaurants. One of my favorite restaurants is in Abbadia Isola, so it's like ten minutes from Colle Val d'Elsa. Even less, it's on the Via Francigena and it's an incredible trattoria/osteria, but with a very modern

approach. It's called Futura Osteria. They have very local ingredients. So the meat comes from Colle Val d'Elsa, not from Tuscany, from Colle Val d'Elsa - from the same town. They have the most simple dishes like Spaghetti Pomodoro, but their tomato sauce is outstanding. Or for example, I had there one of my favorite desserts, which is like toasted bread with some roast peaches, vanilla ice cream and Extra Virgin olive oil. Just think about the combination. It's clever, smart, unusual, but, well, I got goosebumps just thinking about this. They have incredible dishes. You can eat outside, right on the Via Francigena- so you'll see there's a church nearby, you see people walking all the pilgrims. You see there's a big field and there's Monteriggioni there on the distance. It's a beautiful place to be there. So visit Colle Val d'Elsa, stay in Colle Val d'Elsa and then you'll have an incredible food experience with restaurants there and in the surrounding town.

Katy

Oh, my goodness. You should be like the personal tourism officer. Is there a really particularly nice agriturismo that's around there that you'd recommend?

Giulia

Yes, our friends where I bring the pears for the pigs in Mensanello, they have an agriturismo. It is actually a working farm with rooms that you can rent or even apartments. They have a restaurant, they have a swimming pool, they make wine, they make Extra Virgin olive oil. They make beer because the owner is passionate about artisanal beer. They call it the farm beer. It's a very quiet place, very rustic, very authentic, because they really work there. They are a farm and an agriturismo. The best kind of agriturismo because they are actually working farming the land. And it's right in the middle of everything you want to visit and restaurants you want to try. This is where we got married also. So I love them.

Katy

It's very special to you. Yeah, beautiful. It does sound like a very special part of the world. And you did mention wine and so obviously you're in Chianti region. Is that the main wine that you're drinking or is there something else?

Giulia

I have to say that I'm not a great wine drinker. I love tea. I know it's very unusual. I don't drink wine. I sip wine - I'm trying to learn to appreciate wine. There are a few wines I really like. Our friends at Il Querceto, for example, in Castellina, they have a white wine, and the name of the white wine is Livia, just like my daughter, because the niece of the owner is Livia. So they have the specific vineyard for Livia producing white wine. And I really love that wine. Yeah.

Katy

But I think this is really important as well. This is what I try and uncover on this podcast as well. It's like if you don't like something, don't do it. You know what I mean? Totally don't think that there's a list of things that you have to do and just follow your heart, follow what you like and what you want to do. And the magic will happen, let me tell you. It will. You'll find it in Italy?

Giulia

Exactly. When I visit a vineyard, for example, since I do not appreciate wine, I always try to taste the Extra Virginia oil because they often also produce extra Virgin olive oil. And I love extra Virgin olive oil. So you can have great experiences. If you do a wine tasting, you can ask they often have also outstanding extra Virgin olive oil or Vin Santo. The sweet dessert wine is something I really like. So that's something I like to try when I visit a vineyard, for example.

Katy

Yeah, that's such a great tip, I think, or advice we like to say these days, hack because people think, oh, no, I don't drink wine. but even going to a winery is actually quite to experience the countryside and the culture. And I think it's not as you're saying, it's not just 100% about wine. It's about olive oil. It's about the seasons. And obviously, we don't just drink wine in Italy. We eat with wine. So it's a very important thing, too. Wow, this is amazing. I'm so hungry now and it's nearly my breakfast time. But I'm also ready for a trip to Tuscany. So while everyone waits for their next trip, how can they follow you Giulia and learn your delicious recipes? And stay in touch with Jul's Kitchen.

Giulia

So you can find me on Instagram as Juls Kitchen on the blog - julskitchen.com. And you will find the blog in Italian and in English. So if you want to practice your Italian, you can find everything in double language Italian and in English. Then we have a podcast which is at the moment on a pause, but it's 'Cooking with Italian Accent' because I speak English with a strong Italian accent. And then you can find us on our newsletter, which is a platform we really love because it's a very intimate way of connecting with people and it's Letters from Tuscany on substack. And again, that's in Italian and in English.

Katy

Well, like I said, you're very, very prolific. And I really can't stress enough that if anyone wants to know more about Tuscan cuisine and how to cook the local recipes of the region, then make sure to follow Giulia on all her channels. And I'm actually going to go out and get your book because that does sound amazing, too. And congratulations to both you and Tommaso - I know you just produced so many beautiful images and videos and I know it's just such a great team effort and there's so many tips for visiting Tuscany too. So if anyone's really enamored of Tuscany, which I know many of you are, then just get lost in Giulia's website. You might not come out for days! Giulia, thank you so much for joining us on Untold Italy.

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Giulia

Thank you so much.

Katy

Grazie - I hope you come back soon. We'd love to hear about - maybe summer. That would be good, too.

Giulia

Thank you. It's been a pleasure.

Katy

I hope you enjoyed this little peek into the rhythm of life and seasonal dishes of Tuscany that Giulia shared. The story of Livia's pear tree is so special and reminds me that often it is the simplest things that are most important. If you're headed to Tuscany this spring or next, I hope you're able to try these dishes and visit some of the places Giulia mentioned.

Giulia also has a special subscriber-only newsletter called Letters from Tuscany where twice a week she shares seasonal recipes, menu ideas, stories, and travel tips. It's like a food magazine that drops right into your inbox. This past month I was inspired to make her pasta alla puttanesca which is such a tasty dish that heroes black olives and capers. Giulia is very kindly offering Untold Italy listeners a 15% discount off annual subscriptions to Letters from Tuscany. It's normally \$US 40 for the year but it's reduced to \$34 for you. You can find all the details at untolditaly.com/julskitchen

We've also popped that link into the show notes along with all the places and dishes Giulia mentioned at untolditaly.com/113

Thanks to all our wonderful listeners for your ongoing support of Untold Italy. I hope you enjoyed today's show. That's all for today. Next week we're exploring a region that is responsible for some of Italy's best-loved cheeses, fast cars, and pasta!

So until then, it's "ciao for now"