



the
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scene

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Meals *con Amore*

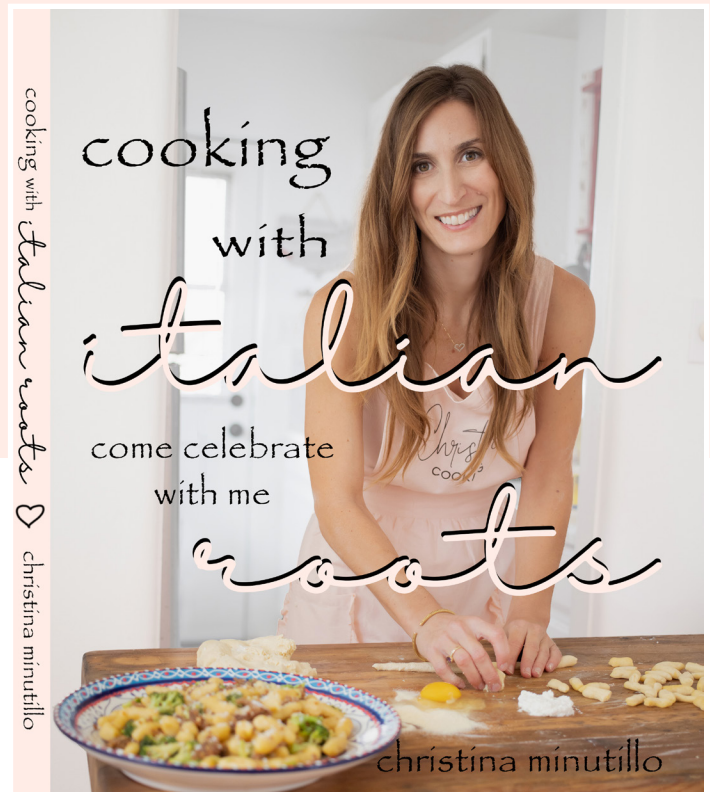
Manhattan Beach resident Christina Minutillo offers tried-and-true Italian recipes, beautiful photography, and treasured family stories in her book *Cooking with Italian Roots*.

By Maureen Kingsley

Growing up within the embrace of a big, close-knit, extended Italian-American family in Connecticut that valued delicious food and celebratory gatherings, cookbook author and South Bay resident Christina Minutillo developed an interest in cooking and hosting early on. She learned mainly from her beloved grandmother, Mimi, who—having learned from her own mother, originally from Naples—created and served up such hearty and comforting Italian staples as stuffed shells, *pizzelles* (mini pizzas), and meatballs with sauce. These dishes and other treasured family recipes fill the pages of Christina’s book *Cooking With Italian Roots: Come Celebrate With Me*, published this year and available online and at select brick-and-mortar locations.

Formally educated in fashion design and employed full-time by an action-sports company, Christina is a self-taught writer, photographer, and publisher who is not afraid to take risks and venture into the unknown. After living in New York City for a few years following her graduation from Syracuse University, Christina quit her job and “bought a one-way ticket to Los Angeles” at the age of 26 after having visited the city annually for many years and feeling at home there. “I came out west right as the recession of 2008 hit,” Christina says. “I stayed with a college friend in La Crescenta at first,” she says, and she eventually found her way to the South Bay, which she loved instantly and which has remained her home ever since.

A couple years after settling into her life here in the South Bay, Christina—perhaps channelling her grandmother—started hosting friends at her home for a celebratory annual Easter gathering, replete with many of the traditional Italian dishes that had filled her family’s dining table as a child. At these Easter events, her small home, she describes, would be packed with happy guests and beautiful, comforting dishes,



including stuffed shells, cantaloupe and prosciutto, antipasti, and more. Every year the guest list would grow, as would the menu, and—excluding the time of the pandemic—Christina has continued to host this event annually, which set the stage for the creation of her cookbook.

Cookbook Origins

November 2019 found Christina sitting at the Thanksgiving table with a couple of cousins and one cousin’s wife when talk turned to the idea of Christina creating a cookbook of her favorite Italian-American recipes. Christina took to the idea and started brainstorming concepts related to her favorite dishes, her grandmother’s legendary holiday spreads back in Connecticut, and more.

Then, of course, the novel-coronavirus pandemic hit the United States, and Christina found herself with more time at home to devote to the nascent cookbook concept. Working with her photographer friend, Sue Bryce, who advised her to start photographing dishes in natural light, Christina did so, shooting on an iPhone at both her home and in her cousin’s backyard, drawing on her design and creative background to arrange decor, props, and flowers for each shoot. Sue shot all of the portrait photography.

Combining her recipes and food photography with personal narrative and family photos, Christina gradually built a cookbook. “It flowed and came together,” she says, and, working with her aunt on several rounds of editing, Christina’s labor of love, *Cooking With Italian Roots: Come Celebrate With Me*, was published and launched in June of this year.

What’s Inside

Organized according to holiday menus that Christina’s extended family enjoyed at her great-grandmother’s house throughout the year during Christina’s upbringing, *Cooking With Italian Roots* offers a mix of hearty main dishes, including eggplant parmigiana, stuffed filet of sole, linguine with white clam sauce, stuffed shells Florentine, and rack of lamb, along with flavorful sides that incorporate fresh produce, such as melon, green beans, and salad greens. A generous selection of sweets is provided as well, including *zeppole*, *tiramisu*, and several traditional Italian cookies. Christina includes thoughtful notes and guidance with every recipe, which those unfamiliar with Italian cooking will likely find helpful and reassuring.

Many of the main dishes also feature a suggested wine pairing from Certified Sommelier Christina Murphy to round out and enhance the meal.

“People tell me they find this cookbook relatable,” Christina says. Its focus on family and tradition, paired with an unpretentious writing style and lots of enthusiastic guidance from the author, make it a welcome addition to a busy home cook’s collection. Describing both the experience of trying new recipes and creating an original piece of work such as her cookbook, she adds, “You never know what you are capable of and what you can do until you try.”

Visit christinaminutillo.com to learn more, to purchase her cookbook, and to explore her other published book, *Her Sunset Views*.

Look for some of Christina’s favorite recipes in future issues of *The El Segundo Scene*.

