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Interior Design: Derek Frost Associates



Not since the intrepid package-tourists of the early Sixties came back from Italy with a taste for spaghetti, has pasta enjoyed such a vogue as it does today. But now we're far more discriminating about it. More and more supermarkets, countrywide, sell fresh pasta – as opposed to dried – with fresh sauces. Nathalie Hambro reports on an exciting new type of shop, and tells you how to prepare pasta perfectly. Photograph by James Mortimer

PASTA, PRESTO!

PASTA PASTA is a very stylish new shop in London's Pimlico Road selling . . . well, pasta, of course, but all manner of other Italianate goodies too.

The idea comes from New York, where fresh pasta has been very much in fashion for the past five years, and where residents of Manhattan can buy their *linguine*, their *lasagne*, or what they will, from a chain of attractive food stores. But the expertise comes from the home of pasta, Italy – where Pasta Pasta proprietor, antiques dealer Robin Gage, and one of his three partners, Derek Jones, went to buy a pasta

machine and to learn the business.

Their shop must be one of the prettiest in London, and conveniently adjoins Robin Gage's antique shop. Customers are dazzled by mirrored walls and ceilings, which give double reflections of giant vases of flowers. An elaborate composition of breads in baskets dominates the window. Other wares are displayed on a refrigerated marble counter. Shallow wooden trays show a selection of pastas of all shapes, sizes and colours – ribbons, bootlaces, twists, shells, plump cushions. You can take your pick of *linguine*, *fettucine*, *lasagne*, *tortellini* and *ravioli* filled with spinach and ricotta cheese, or with veal, chicken and herbs. The egg pasta is made in three dough flavours – plain, tomato, spinach. And there is *pasta integrale* for wholefood faddists.

Also on display are pasta salads and sauces like mushroom and pars-

ley, *vongole* (clams), *pesto Genovese* (with basil, garlic and pine nuts), and tomato sauces, the most delicious to my taste being *putanesca*, with tuna fish, anchovy, olive and capers – though I'd be happy to see fewer tomato-based sauces and more of the sophisticated sauces from the North of Italy like the walnut and parsley one below.

They sell a range of Italian *charcuteries* (*brasaola*, *coppe di testa* and *prosciutto San Danielle*, which is superior to Parma), and cheeses (*mozarella di buffalo*, Ramano cheese, parmesan). Another treat is their home-made version of *paneforte* (a traditional cake from Sienna, made with honey, nuts and crystallised fruits) with cocoa powder added to it.

Go there, too, for continental coffee, mineral water, oriental wok oil, fennel vinegar, and superlative sorbets from La Maison des Sorbets.

The basement of the shop is a hive of industry, with the *tortellini* and *ravioli* machine working away, cutting small parcels of dough, filling them, sealing them and turning them out, four at a time on to trays. Busy people stir simmering sauces or experiment with new fillings.

If the venture is a success, other branches will be opened, and the antique shop next door is to be converted into a restaurant in the same



style, selling pasta dishes, sauces and salads – freshly made on the premises, of course. A meal there will cost around £5 a head.

And for entertaining at home, pasta can be the easiest, cheapest – and most appreciated – dish to serve. Any of our recipes would be ideal for an informal, or even quite formal, dinner party.

HINTS ON COOKING PASTA

Pasta should be cooked by im-

mersion in plenty of boiling salted water. The addition of a teaspoon of oil will prevent it from sticking together when drained. It is at its best slightly firm to the teeth (*al dente*), so do not overcook it. Dried varieties should take about seven minutes, from the moment when the water begins to boil again after immersing the pasta. The length of time for fresh pasta depends on its size and thickness – from, say, 30

seconds (for *capelli*) to 1½ minutes for *lasagne*. *Tortellini* take about eight minutes. Never cover the pan.

It is important to warm the serving dish or bowl. The same applies for the sauce if it is an uncooked one like those described left. So warm it in the serving dish, at the side of the stove. Pasta should either be eaten at once or, if there are leftovers, these may be delicious eaten cold, as a salad, straight from the

refrigerator. To cold pasta one can add strips of *salami*, *coppa* or bacon, or chopped vegetables which have been swiftly steamed or sautéed such as broccoli, fennel, okra or French beans.

When available, a generous quantity of chopped fresh herbs like parsley, coriander, dill, tarragon and chives make a simple and excellent sauce with just a little fresh butter or the best olive oil.