

By Tim Hoey



A Uniquely Italian Approach to Lobster

The first time I ate lobster in Italy was at a Venetian restaurant an Italian friend recommended. I was a little too enthusiastic that evening and inadvertently ordered two lobsters. Fortunately, lobster that's native to Italian waters, what we call a spiny lobster here, is smaller than its American counterpart. It didn't take long for the wonderful, simply prepared dish to win me over. I enjoyed its delicate flavor, harmonious with the sea and entirely in keeping with the Venetian setting. And yes, I did eat both of them.

In our area, home cooks can prepare a multitude of delicious lobster dishes, whether they're cooked on the barbecue or poached and served for a delightful Sunday lunch. The time bridging spring and summer, with its mild temperatures, provides appropriate opportunities to make virtually any lobster dish. And live lobster, essential to the Italian way of cooking, is readily available in local stores.

For insight into uniquely Italian ways to prepare lobster, we recently spoke with Tony Grande at Il Capriccio.

Tim: My wife and I went to the Shore recently, and I was struck by how many people wanted absolutely fresh seafood.

Tony: We've noticed the same thing at Il Capriccio and at our Mendham store, La Famiglia. From the perspective of healthy living, I'm glad our customers want fresh fish. Eating fresh fish and shellfish is good for you, much healthier than eating meat. The sea's variety is endless, and that's a real advantage for home cooks. However, you have to choose fish carefully. Unless you catch your own, you should buy seafood from a reliable fish store or restaurant.

Tim: Many people like seafood's light character. It seems connected to a life style that respects our health and our environment.

Tony: That's right. Enjoying high-quality food, as long as it's done in moderation, is vital to a healthy, harmonious way of being. In keeping with that approach, home cooks should learn how to prepare the best seafood recipes. It's the smart way to take advantage of seafood's range of flavor and useful health benefits.

Tim: Your *tagliolini con aragosta* recipe is a case in point. Its healthy approach and elegant style characterizes the Italian way to enjoy seafood.

Tony: People in this country today are more open to that style of dining. When I first came to the United States, a neighbor asked me to make lobster. He specifically asked for lobster *fra diavolo*, which is an American invention. If it's done properly, lobster *fra diavolo* is a good dish. However, my *tagliolini con aragosta* recipe more accurately presents a way of preparing lobster an Italian would understand.

Tim: Sometimes, I see people purchase very large lobsters. Is there any advantage to buying a big lobster?

Tagliolini con Aragosta Pasta with fresh lobster

Serves four

INGREDIENTS:

- Two 1 ½ lb. fresh lobsters
- 2 medium fresh red tomatoes, cut into 1/16" cubes
- 2 small shallots, finely cut
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons lightly salted butter
- 4 oz. heavy cream
- 8 oz. chicken broth
- 1 teaspoon chopped fresh parsley
- 2 oz. brandy
- 1 lb. fresh *tagliolini*
- salt & black pepper to taste

PREPARING THE DISH:

First, broil lobster for three minutes. After that, put it in an ice bath. Once cold, cut tail and claw meat into ½" cubes and set aside.

Fill a pot with water, add salt to taste, and bring it to a boil for the pasta.

Meanwhile, place a skillet on the stovetop, pour in the extra virgin olive oil and heat until the oil is slightly hot. Add shallots and cook them until lightly golden. Then put lobster in the skillet and braise with the shallots for two minutes. Remove the pan from the stovetop, pour brandy into it, and return to the stovetop. (Note: be very careful during this step, as brandy will catch on fire.) After that, add fresh tomato, stir for four minutes, then add broth. Cook for another four minutes. Put in the heavy cream, and bring it to a boil. Add salt, pepper, and parsley, then put aside.

At this point, put the fresh *tagliolini* in the pot of boiling water. Cook for six minutes, drain the pasta, then put it in the skillet with the sauce and the lobster. Add butter, mix well and serve.



Tony: No, not at all. The best—and most expensive—size is between 1 ½ to 3 ½ pounds, and provides a sensible, harmonious proportion of meat to shell. Heavier lobsters have a chewier texture, and the taste lacks smoothness.

Tim: Are there some cooking guidelines that home cooks should keep in mind?

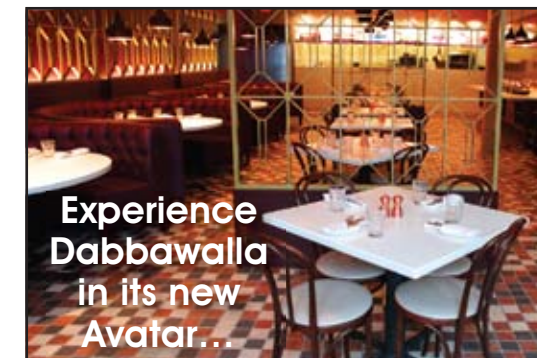
Tony: Definitely. In my *tagliolini con aragosta*, the ingredients have a natural affinity for one another, like musical elements coming together to create a beautiful song. Lobster harmonizes with brandy and tomato. You see, lobster's taste on its own is a bit on the sweet side. Brandy adds depth to the sweetness. Meanwhile, the red tomato provides just the right counterpoint to the heavy cream and butter. The result is a delicious, balanced dish.

Tim: I notice you prefer to create gentle flavors in both dishes.

Tony: I don't think spicy food is the right touch for this time of year. The idea is to connect with the season's fresh, lively spirit, while being consistent with a healthy, Italian way of eating and living.

Tim: I couldn't agree more. Thanks, Tony. I'm looking forward to making this recipe! ▲

Tony Grande, Chef/Owner, Il Capriccio



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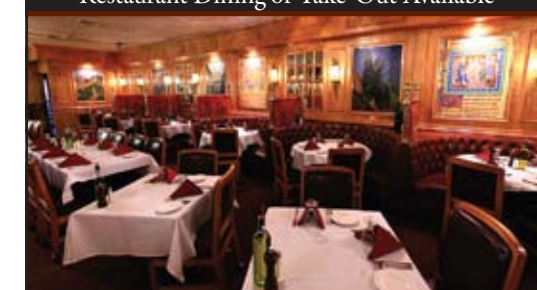
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