

fresh mozzarella: An Old & New Tradition

Even when we opened back in '82 it's safe to say that when most any American thought of mozzarella they imagined the kind of rather dried out rubbery stuff that gets shredded onto one of those chain-produced pizzas. I don't have formal data, but I feel fairly good about guessing that the only people who knew mozzarella to be more than that back then were, a) Americans who'd actually been to Italy and paid close attention to eating traditional foods and b) Italian Americans from the core immigrant communities.

On a personal level I can still remember my shock twenty years ago at learning that the stuff I'd always been told was mozzarella, basically, wasn't. I'd already been cooking for a living when I went to Italy for the first time—somewhere in the mid-80s if I remember right—and saw these soft white balls of what they were calling mozzarella floating in milky liquid. I really didn't know what to make of it. But it only took one trip to realize that the cheese I'd grown up with, the one we'd shred up to toss onto pizzas (or one of my childhood favorites, English Muffin pizzas), had little to do with what the Italians called "mozzarella."

Mozzarella in Italy is a cheese that you eat within a day or so of manufacture. When you cut it the cheese should ooze milky white liquid. Eat it drizzled with the best olive oil, then sprinkled with little more than sea salt, and freshly ground black pepper and laid next to roasted peppers or really good tomatoes from the market.

While it would be easy and understandable to take that mozzarella for granted, I've tried to keep my focus and my appreciation high; to take note every time I slice into a round, creamy hand made ball of it; to see each plate of sliced mozzarella and red and yellow sliced tomatoes (at my house, usually set against a nice pool of green-gold olive oil) as a bit of the sunrise that it looks like; to remind me when this country turned to a new, healthier, more traditionally, full-flavored culinary approach. I figure the more intently I hold to that appreciation, the more I remember how much more rewarding it is to make, sell, serve and savor that food, the more likely we are to stay with it, the lower the likelihood that we'll ever slide back to the way it was when I grew up. Historians will be able to look back on the late 70s and early 80s and see the dawning of the "new" culinary age in which we continue to live, to enjoy and to eat mindfully well every day.

Ari

We make our mozzarella by hand, every day using fresh curd from the folks at Bel Gioioso!



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