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## Q&A with Culinary Expert Katie Parla

Indagare's **Marley Lynch** spoke to the Rome-based foodie, oenophile and cookbook author about the Eternal City's dining scene, as well as her favorite culinary destinations around the world.



Clockwise from top: pasta at Metamorfofi; Katie sampling freshly baked focaccia; wine offerings at Metamorfofi



**K**atie Parla has an enviable job: She eats her way around the Italian capital in order to educate others about the city's venerable culinary culture. An American journalist and Indagare's Rome contributor, Parla recently compiled her delicious findings into a cookbook. *Tasting Rome*, a celebration of the city's vast dining and drinking options, celebrates the city's cuisine far beyond Caprese salads and classic trattorias (although she has nothing against those). Here, Indagare chats with Katie about her favorite spots in Rome and how to avoid the dreaded tourist-trap restaurant.

**What initially brought you to Rome?**

I moved to Rome in 2003 after graduating from Yale with a degree in art history. I had decided years earlier, during a high school trip to Italy, that I would move to Rome when I grew up. I don't think my family thought I would actually follow through, but the decision to move remains the only life plan I have ever deliberately executed. The moment I landed, I was intent to learn everything I could about the city, its people and its culture, so I moved in with Italian university students, lived in

a peripheral neighborhood, avoided ex-pats and immersed myself in a side of Rome that visitors—and even some residents—never see.

**Was there a meal that made you fall in love with Rome?**

It goes all the way back to my fateful high school trip when I discovered gelato. Is that a meal? Probably not, but the whole gelato category left a huge impression. After the gelato novelty wore off, I stayed in Rome mainly because of my desire to know what Romans eat and why and how the local food culture developed.

**What is your favorite spot for a delicious lunch? How about a big night out?**

I love visiting **Armando al Pantheon** (*Salita dei Crescenzi 31*), a historic trattoria near the Pantheon. The dishes are simple and classic and the owners are incredibly hospitable. On date night, it's all about **Metamorfosi** (*Via Giovanni Antonelli, 30*). The cuisine is contemporary European and the dishes are fun and refined.

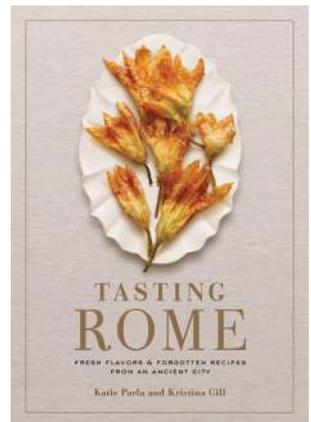
**Where are your favorite spots to experience Rome's flourishing craft cocktail movement?**

For Roman Cocktail Culture 101, visit the **Jerry Thomas**

**Speakeasy** (*Vicolo Cellini, 30*). The faux speakeasy opened in 2009 and changed the way people in the Italian capital think about cocktails. The next stops would be **Caffè Propaganda** (*Via Claudia 15*) and **Co.So.** (*Via Braccio da Montone 80*) for a deeper dive into the variety of cocktails in the city. **Ma Che Siete Venuti a Fa'** (*Via di Benedetta 25*) transformed the craft brewery landscape in town and **Open Baladin** (*Via degli Specchi 6*) is a great place to sample Italian craft brews.

**If you had to leave Rome, where would you have your last meal?**

It would have to be **Cesare al Casaletto** (*Via del Casaletto 45*) and I would invite my family and friends and everyone who contributed to *Tasting Rome*. We would eat the menu,





## First Look: Hotel Palazzo Dama

As Indagare's Rome contributor, Katie Parla reports on the city's hottest boutique hotel.

Hotel Palazzo Dama, an Art Nouveau villa hotel near the Piazza del Popolo and the Villa Borghese opened earlier this year after a renovation that rejuvenated the Palazzo and reclaimed its noble roots. The refurbishment drew on a handful of original fixtures, which are further enriched by modern additions. The hotel's 30 rooms and suites are decorated in a palate of royal blue and beige and accented with antiques Girardi has collected in travels. The restaurant, bar and ground-floor communal areas are similarly embellished (the outdoor pool, tiled in turquoise hues, sits amidst citrus and olive trees).

**Who Should Go:** Those seeking tranquil outdoor spaces and poolside relaxation while rubbing elbows with the wealthy Romans who treat the property like a private clubhouse. [Read our review.](#)



Clockwise from left: Jerry Thomas Speakeasy; a salad and the bread at Metamorfofi

starting with all the fried starters and followed by pasta, entrées, vegetable side dishes and lots of wine!

### What are some of your other favorite culinary regions?

I love pizza, so Naples is one of my top culinary destinations. My favorite spots there are **La Notizia** (*Via Michelangelo da Caravaggio*; 39-081-714-2155) and **Da Attilio** (*Via Pignasecca 17*; 39-081-552-0479). Campania's Alto Casertano region, which is home to gorgeous heirloom produce, historic cheese factories and possibly the world's best pizzeria (**Pepe**

**in Grani**; *Vicolo S. Giovanni Battista 3*; 39-0823-862718), tops my list of favorite regions. I also love Palermo's street food and the rustic fare of Abruzzo's sub-regions.

### What are some favorite offbeat menu picks one shouldn't miss in Rome?

There are a lot of Roman classics that remain off the radar of visitors. *Rigatoni con la pajata* (pasta with suckling calf intestines) is incredibly Roman and should be on every (adventurous) diner's hit list. Also, don't skip the vegetables, which are found in the



contorno section of the menu. Some are so seasonal that they never make it onto the printed menu, so you have to ask for them (things like *vignarola*, a stew of peas, favas, artichokes, and lettuce, are in season from March to early May).

**What are your tips for distinguishing great restaurants when wandering through a touristy neighborhood?**

The odds are if you're in a touristy neighborhood there are nothing but duds. Your best bet is to leave the historical centers and eat in lesser-known areas instead.

**Coming from the U.S., how did your appreciation for Italian food change after you moved to Rome?**

I grew up in an Italian-American family and, like most people who are part of that culture, I thought I was Italian. When I began visiting Italy, however, it quickly became clear that while I may have Italian blood, I had an American food experience. There is no such thing as Italian food. Instead, there are regional cuisines, and they barely resemble the things Americans consider Italian.

**What was the most surprising thing you learned when researching *Tasting Rome*?**

I had a hunch, but it's shocking how many restaurants pass off cheap imported artichokes for the prized local variety.

[Read Indagare's Rome destination report](#) as well as our picks for the city's top tables at [indagare.com](#).

**Lightning Round**

**Favorite wine to drink with a plate of cured meats:**

Vej Metodo Classico from Podere Pradarolo.

**Cacio e pepe or carbonara?** Cacio e pepe.

**Best cooking hack:**

Salt meat in advance.

**Guilty-pleasure snack:**

Haribo gummy bears. I know they're poison, but I need them.

**Most addictive Roman street food:**

The brisket sandwich at

**Mordi e Vai's.** (*Nuovo Mercato Comunale di Testaccio*/Via Beniamino Franklin 12/E)

**Most craved (non-Italian) cuisine:** Southeast Anatolian or any other regional Turkish cuisine.

**Real-life foodie hero:**

Andrew Zimmern.

**Most treasured souvenir:**

Austrian Riesling from the 1980s purchased for a song on a trip to the Wachau.

*Tasting Rome: Fresh Flavors and Forgotten Recipes from an Ancient City* by *Katie Parla and Kristina Gill* (2016), *Clarkson Potter*, is available on [amazon.com](#).