

THE VINSON VIEW

Quality maniac and master shopper Nick Vinson on the who, what, when, where and why



HOW TO BE PICKY LIKE AN ITALIAN

Cheese

Good Parmesan comes from the milk of *Vacche Rosse* (red cows). They produce a third less milk than the more commonly used Holstein breed, which were introduced to industrialise the cheese production process.

Olive oil

Almost everyone I know presses their own olive oil, which is tinned or bottled and frequently shared, as production often exceeds family use. The late Sergio Loro Piana used to serve up to five different varieties with one meal to ensure perfect pairing.

Flowers

A bottle of wine is not the customary gift when invited to dinner in Italy. Flowers should be sent earlier in the day so your host or hostess has time to put them in a vase.

House shoes

If you visit Giorgio Armani at his mountain home in St Moritz, a pair of velvet slippers in your size will be ready at the front door when you arrive. Your boots will be returned to you (cleaned) on departure.

01 Taste buddies

Picky Nicky chews the fat with like-minded epicures

I have been working with Italians for nearly three decades and it's been the catalyst for fine-tuning my quality maniac tendencies. Back in 1988, I met fashion designer Alberto Aspesi at his factory north of Milan. He insisted I try some *mozzarella di bufala* because it was a Tuesday. This was the day he had the fresh buffalo milk cheese flown up by plane from Naples, and he said there was no point in eating it on any other day of the week. It should also never be refrigerated, so best not to bother with restaurants who must follow tedious health and safety rules.

Some time later I was chatting with Pier Luigi Loro Piana about the joys of vicuña and discovered a fellow quality maniac (I have him to thank for my strapline above). This is, after all, the man who, along with his late brother Sergio, brought the world 100 per cent cashmere carpeting.

In January this year I had lunch with Romeo Sozzi, the founder of furniture company Promemoria and the new owner of Bottega Ghianda. I was researching a story on the Italian woodwork experts (see page 190) and flew in to take a tour of the Ghianda workshops, but first Sozzi invited me to lunch in his special kitchen above the factory. While we decided what to eat, he insisted I try a pinot noir he had discovered while on holiday in the Alto

Adige region, where it was served in fine-stemmed, big-bowled glasses from Zalto's Denk'Art collection, so he had to buy them, too. So far so good. I am in the Murray Moss camp. I prefer my wine in a generously-sized glass designed by Josef Hoffmann for Lobmeyr (preferably from the 'Patrician' set). Moss once said of Lobmeyr: 'When you go from a normal glass to this, it modifies your behaviour. You become more graceful!'

Sozzi, however, did not stop at stemware, which seduced him, he told me, the minute 'the wine danced in the glass as I turned the stem in my hand'. Due to the large bowl and smaller rim, it needed to be washed in a special dishwasher (one of the UC series by Winterhalter, which has a flexible, pressure-adjusting system for fine glass), so he bought that too, along with a treatment machine to ensure the water was clear enough. At this point I realised I was not being picky enough and still had a lot to learn.

After lunch I was offered panettone, which Sozzi gives to clients at Christmas. My husband Álvaro and I also order it as gifts, from Pasticceria Stefania in Florence, and we rewrap it too, as does Sozzi, but I learnt he starts working on his panettone in July, when bakers are invited in with their trials for him to taste. Supposedly, raisin length is key – the longer the better for a good chew. I have so much to learn. ★



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Local hero

I avoid industrially produced tomatoes when making sauces. Instead I use Paolo Petrilli's, grown on his Puglian farm, then hand-picked and bottled. paolopetrilli.it



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Choc a block

A fine case of less but better. Bocconcini are hand-cut squares of chocolate-covered ice cream, invented by gelateria Dai Dai on the Tuscan coast. gelateriadaidai.it