

Molecular Cuisine

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Everywhere you go, ice cream is made the same way. It's a combination of milk (often cream combined with fresh milk), a sweetening agent, either sugar or honey, and sometimes solid additions such as nuts or pieces of fruit. The cream is then frozen and served cold, either by itself or with a slice of cake.

Well, we found a place where ice cream is made in a totally different way. Award winning chef Ettore Bocchia of Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni in Bellagio prepares it, right at your table at Mistral, the hotel's most informal restaurant, with nitrogen. Liquid, vanilla flavored cream is slowly poured into a metal bowl as liquid nitrogen is added. After only a few minutes of quick whisking, ice cream magically appears. We are indeed talking about magic as the entire action looks to be out of a fairy tale where from a smoky cauldron the chef/magician concocts a savory potion. Chef Bocchia serves his ice cream on top of apple-flavored jelly in a martini glass. It's a rather alternative way for such a classic location.

Bellagio, an oasis of tranquility, has been a favored vacationing destination for centuries.

The only 5-star luxury hotel in Bellagio is characterized by a discreet touch of exclusiveness. Overlooking the foothills of the Alps on the shore of the majestic Lake Como, the Grand Hotel Villa Serbelloni offers a unique mix of the magical romance of its historic salons as well as a complete range of the most up-to-date services. This spectacular place, adored by the most demanding and refined guests, dates from 1850, and was originally intended as a holiday villa. Two wings were added in 1873 and the Grand Hotel became the spot where all the aristocracy wanted to be for a quiet rest away from daily life or for sumptuous balls and ceremonies. For generations, since 1918 to be exact, the Grand Hotel has belonged to the Bucher family, which runs and manages it in the highest professional standards. The first-born male is the one who inherits the grand enterprise.

The Grand Hotel welcomes two restaurants: La Terrazza, set on the large terrace overlooking the lake, offers traditional cuisine accompanied by live music (for dinner only).

Mistral, located at ground level close to the swimming pool, specializes in molecular gastronomy, which has earned chef Ettore Bocchia, who overlooks both restaurants, one Michelin Star. True, the name may seem intimidating but there is nothing weird about molecular cuisine. "We are interacting with the food's molecules," explains Ettore, "so there is no other way to call it." Over 30 years ago the Hungarian scientist and gastronomist Nicholas Kurti, now recognized as the pioneer of molecular cuisine, started the first studies and experiments on low temperatures, trying to discover new technical frontiers and gastronomic opportunities.

Mr. Kurti is known for saying, "We know almost everything about the temperature of the atmosphere on Venus. What a shame that we know so little about the temperature of a soufflé!" Indeed molecular cuisine revises all traditional cooking methods to create new tastes that complement rather than overpower each other. "There are some scientific passages," Ettore explains, "that allow you to know what happens inside a pot in order to optimize each and every ingredient." In Italy, molecular cuisine was introduced 13 years ago by Dejenne, a physicist who won the Nobel Prize for the classification of soft substances. "I have been studying with Davide Cassi, professor of physics of matter at the University of Parma, for 4 years, differently from my colleagues who work with chemists. Basically our cuisine is molecular because we have applied scientific concepts to food using traditional products but in an unconventional way. We have developed new ways of cooking for example with sugar, that we use to fry."

At the moment, Italy, Spain, France, and England are at the forefront of this type of cuisine that is slowly reaching the United States. In Italy there is a real manifesto of rules, the first one being that each innovation must improve, not destroy, and respect traditional Italian gastronomy.

The molecular menu offered at Mistral features Sicilian red prawns with guacamole ice cream, coconut cream and starch vegetable waffles, Celery starch dumplings with Italian caviar, and turbot baked in sugar (in order to prevent it from getting sweet it must be wrapped in leeks) served with a leek sauce and vegetables. Cooking this way to create new flavors can improve the quality of food not only on a gastronomic level but also on a nutritional one. Can we say that molecular cuisine is healthier?

"Yes, we can," Chef Bocchia affirms, "The dishes on our menu have 40% less of calories. Scientific knowledge allows you to apply any necessity to what you prepare, so if you want it to be healthy, then it will be that way. Molecular cuisine amplifies the horizons of knowledge to determine how much and how well you need to eat. I believe that in a place like this, besides the luxury and the appeal to serve something a bit avant garde, it's important to serve something that is fresh and nutritious.

Ingredients of the highest quality are at the heart of Ettore's molecular cuisine, a cuisine focused on highlighting the flavors and values of each selected piece. "I cannot work without the basic elements of Mediterranean gastronomy," Ettore explains, "There are some basic flavors and aromas in my cooking that come from the recipes of my very Italian childhood." Indeed his studies concentrate on an in-depth analysis of the most characteristic elements of Italian cuisine: pasta, fish and vegetables.



“Because 60% of my guests are American I want to offer them a truly unique experience of Italian flavors at their best,” he continues. The hotel offers Ettore the opportunity to continue experimenting and presenting new and unique menus by traveling to foreign countries to study their culinary trends, by attending seminars, and by meeting personally with small producers of high quality products. As Mr. Bucher point out, “The grand Hotel continues to offer the highest quality Mediterranean and international cuisine, but the challenge is to keep improving on all fronts, and molecular cuisine is a challenge of the future.”

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