

BUONA DOMENICA

Spaghetti alla Claudia Cardinale (a.k.a. Bombshell Spaghetti)

If the name Claudia Cardinale is familiar to you, it's likely because you are a person of a certain age, or possibly a Fellini or Visconti fan or maybe a Sergio Leone fan (or all of the above). Cardinale, a Tunisian-born Italian-French actress, had her heyday during the era of bombshell actresses, in the company of Sofia Loren, Brigitte Bardot, and Gina Lollobrigida. Among the movies Cardinale starred in were *Rocco and His Brothers*, and *The Leopard*, both directed by Luchino Visconti; Federico Fellini's fantastically indulgent *8 1/2*; and Leone's *Once Upon a Time in the West*.

How her recipe for spaghetti ended up in my mother's recipe files I can't really say, but I have a hunch it's thanks to my mom's oldest sister, Gilda, who kept tabs on the movie stars of that era through the various Italian gossip magazines she read, *Gente* and *Oggi* being two of them. The recipe is hand-written in blue pen on a piece of Italian ruled paper that looks like it might have been torn from a notebook. And although the handwriting looks a bit like my mom's, it also doesn't look like my mom's, which makes me think it might be Gilda's.

Maybe it was published in one of those magazines and she copied it down. The title of the recipe caught my attention, of course, but so did the recipe itself. It's old-fashioned, rich and simple, essentially spaghetti tossed with melted butter, julienned *prosciutto cotto* (ham), herbs, and lots of grated Parmigiano cheese.

Is it Claudia Cardinale's recipe? I have no idea. I googled "Spaghetti alla Claudia Cardinale" and came up with no recipe, though but I did find alluring photos of her circa 1960-something enjoying a nice dish of spaghetti. Ms. Cardinale's IMDB bio states that in a 1965 interview she told a reporter that "she liked a dry martini before dinner, caviar for hors d'oeuvres, lobsters or oysters for seafood, or a steak alla Fiorentina. When it came to wine, her preference was for a rich, red wine."

It seems to me this pasta dish—simple, indulgent—is in keeping with her tastes. (The original recipe in my mom's recipe box is short on detail, so I've added some for clarity.)

Makes 4 servings

INGREDIENTS

Salt for the pasta water

100 g (3 1/2 ounces) butter

100 g (3 1/2 ounces) thinly sliced prosciutto cotto (see NOTE)

Handful (about 1/4 packed cup) fresh flat-leaf parsley leaves
5 to 6 fresh basil leaves
500 g (1 pound) spaghetti
Freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano cheese

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Bring a large pot of water to a rolling boil and salt it generously.
2. While the water is heating, make the sauce: Melt the butter in a large skillet set over low heat. Slice the prosciutto cotto into thin strips (julienne). Finely chop the parsley and basil leaves. When the butter is melted and just beginning to sizzle, stir in the prosciutto cotto and chopped herbs and cook just until warmed through. Turn off the heat and cover to keep warm.
3. Cook the spaghetti according to the manufacturer's instructions until very al dente (slightly underdone). Turn the heat back on under the butter sauce and, using a pasta fork or tongs, transfer the spaghetti to the skillet, along with a splash of the pasta water. Toss the spaghetti in the butter sauce until well coated and glossy.
4. Transfer the pasta to a warmed serving dish and sprinkle liberally with Parmigiano cheese. Toss once more and serve, with more cheese on the side.

NOTE: Prosciutto cotto is simply cooked ham, typically seasoned with rosemary, sage, thyme, and garlic. Parmacotto is a brand name to look for. If you can't find it, substitute a high-quality American ham from your favorite deli. I've used thinly sliced Virginia ham and smoked New England ham, with excellent results.