

PILU *at* HOME

Giovanni Pilu, chef and co-owner of Sydney beach-side restaurant Pilu at Freshwater, is so proud of his island heritage he considers himself “Sardinian first, Italian second”. In sharing this excerpt from his first book, *A Sardinian Cookbook*, Pilu invites you to enjoy the food of his childhood, from cicones pasta with pork to fried pastry loops with honey.

Recipes **Giovanni Pilu** Words **Roberta Muir** Photography **Anson Smart**

Fried pastry loops
with honey (recipe p170)

Roast suckling pig with
scented apple sauce
(recipe p167)





Ciciones pasta with pork sausage sauce

“When people think of Sardinia they think of the blue waters of the Costa Smeralda. But that’s not the real Sardinia,” says Giovanni Pilu, chef and co-owner of Sardinian restaurant Pilu at Freshwater. “Traditionally Sardinians lived in the interior as shepherds, hunters and farmers.”

Pilu grew up in Sotza, Sardinia; it was a childhood filled with fond food memories. “I remember picking quinces from the garden for an after-school snack,” he says. “After school we’d also go and help my grandfather milk his two cows – the extended family shared the work and the milk – and we’d drink it warm and frothy straight from the bucket.”

Pilu, who moved here in 1992 after falling in love with an Australian, Marilyn Annecchini (now his wife and business partner), is the greatest cheerleader for his island’s cuisine and revels in the melting pot of influences found in Sardinian cooking. “Fregola – our couscous-like pasta – shows the Arabic influence, and we’ve made crema Catalana ever since the Catalans invaded Alghero in the 1300s,” says Pilu. “And in Carloforte, which was settled by Ligurian fishermen, they make pesto.” Despite many invasions over the centuries, the Sardinians remain a proud and independent people. “We’re Sardinian first and Italian second,” says Pilu. “For a long time Sardinia was considered a bit of a backwater, but now there’s a real revival of the traditional culture.”

Pilu gained experience in the kitchens of Sardinia’s resorts before moving to Australia. In 1997 he opened Cala

Luna restaurant in Mosman, but it was the opening of Pilu at Freshwater on Sydney’s northern beaches in 2004 that drew real attention. Since then he has been wooing patrons with his Sardinian dishes of suckling pig, snapper with white wine and green olives, and seadas – fried pastry filled with ricotta. In 2006 he introduced a Sardinian wine list and Sardinian dégustation menu to the fold, and in 2011 he began developing a range of Sardinian-style salumi and Australian-made bottarga (the dried grey mullet roe that is Sardinia’s definitive seasoning).

In 2010, I visited Sardinia with him to research his first cookbook, visiting his family friends who still make pecorino in copper cauldrons and keep bees in hives crafted from the local cork trees. We visited farm guesthouses where the only menu choice is “meat or fish?” and took part in the annual festival for his village’s patron saint where animals are roasted whole over open fires and people eat at tables set under the trees.

Pilu has captured this wholesome way of life and approach to food in his cookbook. “My cooking in the restaurant is Sardinian, but with a more modern approach. For the book I tried to capture the more traditional Sardinia – rustic dishes that I grew up with such as gallina in brodo [chicken in broth] and my mum’s potato and onion salad. What doesn’t change is using what’s seasonal – what’s around and at its best at the time. That’s the cornerstone of Sardinian cooking and the philosophy I follow for the restaurant and for the book.”

“Cicio means ‘fat’, and these fat little pasta shapes are halfway between **GNOCCHI AND MALLOREDDUS**. Saffron is used in a lot of Sardinian dishes, but more commonly in the south.”

Roast suckling pig with scented apple sauce

Porchetto arrosto con salsa alle mele

“Porchetto (pronounced por-chet-o) is a suckling pig, no larger than 10kg. A classic Sardinian dish, this was on the menu of my first restaurant, Cala Luna, where I only cooked a few traditional dishes. While it’s sometimes served with a drizzle of bitter honey, apple sauce isn’t a traditional accompaniment, but I served it this way at Cala Luna due to popular demand. At Pilu at Freshwater, where it has become my most popular dish, I serve it with pickled apple slices, orange mustard fruit and salsa verde. Raw vegetable salad also makes a good accompaniment. It’s important to cover the skin well with salt to draw out the moisture and make it crisp, as the skin is too fine to score the way you do with a larger pig. Sardinia is a big producer of cork, and this dish is traditionally served on slightly concave cork platters and garnished with myrtle leaves, as in the photo on page 165.”

Serves 8 (pictured p165)

- ½ suckling pig (see note)
- Extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling
- Rosemary leaves, for garnishing
- Scented apple sauce**
- 50 gm butter
- 6 Granny Smith apples, cored, sliced
- 55 gm (¼ cup) caster sugar
- ¼ tsp each ground cinnamon and ground cloves
- 30 ml Cinzano bianco

1 Remove pig from fridge 1-2 hours before cooking. Cover and set aside in a cool place to come to room temperature.

2 Preheat oven to 110C. Place pig, skin-side up, on a rack on a large baking tray. Drizzle with a little oil, rubbing it in, and cover skin generously with fine sea salt, rubbing it in thoroughly, then leave until skin becomes moist (about 15 minutes). Cook on the middle shelf of the oven for 30 minutes, then increase temperature to 150C and cook for a further 1 hour 20 minutes. Open oven door and reduce temperature to 120C, leaving door open for about 5 minutes to help temperature to drop. Close door and cook until the meat comes away from the bone on the back leg (40 minutes or so).

3 Meanwhile, for scented apple sauce, melt butter in a saucepan and add apple. Cover and cook over medium heat for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in sugar, cinnamon, cloves and Cinzano and boil for 1 minute. Reduce heat to low, cover and cook, stirring occasionally, until apple is soft but still chunky (20-30 minutes). Place in a serving bowl, cover and set aside.

4 Remove pig from oven and increase temperature to 220C. Cover pig loosely with foil and set aside for at least 15 minutes.

Take off foil and, using a clean, dry cloth, brush off all the salt. Clean the roasting rack and place pig, skin-side up, back on the rack on the baking tray. Return to oven until skin is crisp (about 30 minutes).

5 Place pig on a clean chopping board and, using a cleaver or poultry shears, cut into about 25 large chunks. Arrange on a serving platter, garnish with rosemary and serve with scented apple sauce on the side.

Note Most butchers are reluctant to sell half a suckling pig (so you may be best to freeze the other half or share with a friend); Vic’s Premium Quality Meat in Sydney sells half piglets and air-freights around Australia (see stockists p233). You’ll need to order a 7-8kg pig, halved lengthways, with the head and trotters removed.

Ciciones pasta with pork sausage sauce

Ciciones alla Campidanese

“Cicio means ‘fat’, and these fat little pasta shapes are halfway between gnocchi and malloreddus. Saffron is used in a lot of Sardinian dishes, but more commonly in the south than the north, where I come from. Here I make an exception and use it to give the pasta dough a lovely golden colour. Campidanese means ‘from the Campidano area’, the plains of southern Sardinia where a lot of vegetables are grown, especially tomatoes; this sauce is typical of that region.”

Serves 4 as a first course

- “00” flour, for dusting
- 60 ml (¼ cup) extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 1 small onion, finely diced
- 1 small carrot, finely diced
- 1 stalk celery heart, finely diced
- 250 gm Italian-style pork sausages, skins removed
- 1 tbsp tomato paste
- ¼ tsp saffron threads (see note)
- 2 fresh bay leaves
- 1 rosemary sprig
- 400 gm canned peeled tomatoes, drained, squashed
- 5 basil leaves, torn
- 80 gm aged Pecorino Sardo, grated
- Fresh saffron pasta dough**
- 2½ saffron threads (see note)
- 180 gm semolina flour, plus extra for dusting

1 For fresh saffron pasta dough, combine saffron and 30ml warm water in a bowl to soak (3-4 minutes). Sift flour and a pinch of fine sea salt into the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a dough hook. With the machine running, pour in saffron water and 20ml warm water and mix until absorbed. Start adding more warm water a little at a time until you

have a firm dough (about 50ml water, but you may not need it all; towards the end it doesn’t take much extra water for the dough to become too soft). Tip the dough onto a clean, lightly floured work bench and knead with the heels of your hands until smooth and elastic (5 minutes). Roll into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap and refrigerate (1 hour).

2 Place pasta dough on a clean, dry work bench and, using the palms of your hands, roll it into logs about 1cm wide. If dough starts to stick to the bench, dust bench very lightly with a little flour; if it starts to slip on the bench rather than roll, put a drop of water on your hands. Cut pasta logs into small pieces about the size of a chickpea. Sprinkle with flour and set aside.

3 Heat a large frying pan over medium heat, add oil and, when hot, add onion, carrot and celery and cook until soft and slightly coloured. Add sausage meat, spread it out evenly in the pan and cook, without stirring, for 5 minutes. Then, using a wooden spoon to break it up, turn the meat over and cook the other side for a few minutes, until browned all over. Stir in tomato paste, saffron, bay leaves and rosemary and cook for a further minute. Add tomatoes, basil and 250ml water and bring to the boil. Reduce heat and simmer, stirring occasionally and crushing the meat slightly, until the sauce is quite thick (about 45 minutes; if it dries out too much, add a little more water). Season to taste.

4 Bring a large saucepan of water to the boil, add fine sea salt, then pasta and boil until tender (about 10-12 minutes from the time the water returns to the boil). Drain well, reserving some of the cooking water. Toss the pecorino through the pasta, a little at a time, then add the sauce and toss to coat well (1-2 minutes). If it seems a bit dry, add a couple of tablespoons of reserved cooking water and stir it through well, adding a little more if necessary to give a glossy appearance. Drizzle with olive oil and serve immediately.

Note Saffron was likely introduced to Sardinia by the Phoenicians around 700 BC and has long been used to colour, scent and flavour pastas, ragùs and desserts. Sardinian saffron, grown in the province of Medio Campidano around San Gavino Monreale, is highly regarded and was granted Protected Designation of Origin status by the European Union in 2009. If you can’t buy Sardinian saffron, make sure you buy saffron threads – not powder, which can too easily be adulterated. Good saffron is expensive, but just a pinch gives great results.>

Flatbread stack with tomato sauce and poached eggs

Pane frattau

"This delicious dish using pane carasau is a quick, substantial one-dish meal for hungry shepherds or farmworkers. Typically, they would go out early in the morning and come back about 9.30 for a hearty breakfast that went into the centre of the table for everyone to share. I remember going hunting, leaving at 4.30am after just a coffee and a grappa, then stopping a couple of hours later for a big breakfast like this – followed by a late lunch after the hunting. In a couple of towns they use a sugo di carne (a ragù) instead of the passata to create a richer dish, and I like to add a little basil or parsley. (If your bunch of basil has any flowers, keep them to sprinkle over the pane frattau as a garnish.) I think this makes a great brunch dish."

Serves 4

- 4 eggs
- 8 sheets Sardinian flatbread (see note)
- 2 tbsp finely sliced basil leaves
- 150 gm aged Pecorino Sardo, grated
- Extra-virgin olive oil, for drizzling
- Mutton stock (brodo di pecora)**
- 1 kg mutton bones, chopped (ask your butcher to do this)
- 1½ carrots, roughly chopped
- ½ large onion, roughly chopped
- 1 celery stalk, roughly chopped
- 3 Roma tomatoes, quartered
- 2 tsp tomato paste
- 3 fresh bay leaves
- ½ bunch flat-leaf parsley, torn
- 10 black peppercorns

Passata

- 20 ml extra-virgin olive oil
- ¼ onion, finely diced
- 1 garlic clove, finely diced
- 1 kg very ripe tomatoes, chopped
- 3 basil sprigs, leaves picked, torn



Flatbread stack with tomato sauce and poached eggs

"Pane carasau is a thin, crisp double-baked bread **UNIQUE TO SARDINIA**. It's usually made by bakers these days, though some people still cook it in their own woodfired ovens at home."

tablespoons of water to loosen it up. Pass the tomato sauce through a mouli (see note), discarding skins and seeds. Store covered and refrigerated for a couple of days, or pack into sterilised jars and store in a cool, dark place for several months.

3 Place passata in a saucepan and bring to the simmer. Keep warm over low heat.
4 Combine 1 litre stock (freeze remainder for another use) and 1 tsp sea salt flakes in a small saucepan and bring to the simmer. Crack an egg into a cup and carefully slide it into the simmering stock. Repeat with a second egg. Cook eggs for 3 minutes then remove, using a slotted spoon, and place on paper towel to drain. Repeat with the remaining eggs.

5 Transfer stock to a large, tall saucepan over low heat. Using tongs, dip a sheet of Sardinian flatbread in and out of the hot

stock to just soften it. Place on a platter and spread about 4 tbsp of the passata over the top. Scatter about 1 tsp of the basil and 3 tbsp of the pecorino on top of this. Dip another sheet of Sardinian flatbread in the hot stock, place it on top of the pecorino, top with more passata, basil and pecorino and continue the layering, finishing with a final layer of pecorino and a scattering of basil. Cut the stack into quarters, top each quarter with a poached egg, then place on plates. Drizzle with oil and serve.

Note Sardinian flatbread, pane carasau, is a thin, crisp double-baked bread unique to Sardinia. It's available from Icnussa Imports, Lario International, Simon Johnson (where it may be labelled carta di musica) and Pilu at Freshwater (see stockists p233), and select other Italian delicatessens. When you're

softening the bread, don't worry if some of the sheets break – just reassemble them in the stack. Passata is difficult to make without a mouli, but you could pass it through a sieve, pressing down with a ladle to extract as much liquid as possible. (Do not use a blender or food processor as it will pulverise the tomato seeds and spoil the flavour and colour.) When you drop the egg into the stock to poach it, the weight of the yolk pulls it down and the lighter white wraps up around the yolk enclosing it – in Italian this is called "in camicia" ("in a shirt").

Snapper with white wine, green olives and parsley

Dentice alla vernaccia

"In Sardinia we traditionally cook fish whole. I think it has more flavour cooked this way, it looks beautiful sitting on a platter in the centre of the table, and it is not as tricky to serve as you might imagine: just use a tablespoon and fork to break off sections of the fish where it has been scored. When all the fish from one side has been eaten, grasp the head and peel it back towards the tail to remove the skeleton, exposing the flesh on the other side. Snapper is a good fish to eat whole, because there aren't many small bones, just lots of lovely moist, sweet flesh. The cheek meat on a large fish like this is a delicacy; when I serve this at home, my son Martino and daughter Sofia always fight over the cheeks. Green beans with garlic and mint dressing makes a perfect accompaniment."

Serves 6

- 1 3kg snapper, gilled, gutted and scaled
- 250 ml (1 cup) extra-virgin olive oil
- 500 ml (2 cups) fish stock
- 4 garlic cloves, finely sliced
- 30 Bosane olives, cheeks cut from the pit (see note)
- 500 ml (2 cups) Vernaccia di Oristano (see note)
- 150 gm butter, diced
- Small handful finely sliced flat-leaf parsley leaves

- 1 Remove snapper from fridge 30-40 minutes before cooking. Cover and set aside in a cool place to come to room temperature.
- 2 Using a pair of kitchen scissors, trim fins and tail. Thoroughly rinse belly cavity, removing any blood, then pat dry inside and out. Score snapper on one side, making 5 or 6 diagonal cuts just through to the bone. Sprinkle both sides of the fish generously with sea salt flakes, patting it into the skin.
- 3 Preheat oven to 220C. Heat a large heavy-based roasting tin on the stovetop over medium heat. Pour in oil and, when hot, carefully place fish in tin, scored-side down. Cook until skin is crisp (about 6 minutes), then turn and cook for a further 4 minutes.
- 4 Meanwhile, place stock in a small saucepan and bring to the boil. Remove from heat and cover to keep warm.
- 5 Scatter garlic and olives over fish, add wine and bring to the boil. Add hot fish stock,

cover tightly with a double layer of foil and cook in oven, basting frequently, until fish is cooked through (about 25 minutes). Check the flesh where the fish is scored: the flesh near the bone at the thickest part of the fish should be white. Remove from oven, place fish on a platter, then cover loosely with foil and set aside in a warm place while you make the sauce. Place roasting tin on stovetop over high heat, bring cooking juices to the boil and boil until reduced by a third. Whisk in the butter. Stir in parsley and spoon sauce over the fish. Serve hot.

Note Bosane olives are large green olives from Bosa, a small town on the west coast of Sardinia. If they're unavailable, use Sicilian green olives. Vernaccia di Oristano is a white wine made from an indigenous Sardinian grape. If it's unavailable, use another dry white wine.>



Snapper with white wine, green olives and parsley

“These free-form tarts are called **FORMAGELLE** in Italian and pardulas in another Sardinian dialect, but in my dialect they’re casadinas and we traditionally make them for Easter.”

Fried pastry loops with honey

Origliettas

“My cousin Rina is the expert at making these pastries, which are meant to be biscuity without being soggy. They can be fried then stored in an airtight container for up to four days before being dipped in honey and eaten. Traditionally they’re served stacked up in a big mound – make sure they’re completely cold before stacking them or they’ll stick together. Lard would traditionally have been used in the dough and also to fry the pastries, because that’s what was available, but butter or duck fat work just as well in the dough.”

Makes about 30 (pictured p164)

- 125 gm “00” flour, plus extra for dusting
- 125 gm bread flour
- 10 egg yolks, lightly beaten
- 1 tsp melted duck fat, lard or butter
- Vegetable oil, for shallow-frying
- 400 gm honey

1 Sift both flours and a pinch of fine sea salt into the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a dough hook. With the machine running, pour in three-quarters of the egg yolk and mix until absorbed, then mix in the duck fat, lard or butter. If the mixture is still too dry to form a dough, start adding remaining yolk, a little at a time, to form a rough dough. You may not need it all; towards the end, it doesn’t take much extra liquid for the dough to become too soft. Tip the dough onto a clean, lightly floured work bench and knead with the heels of your hands until smooth and elastic (about 5 minutes). Roll into a ball, wrap in plastic wrap and set aside for 30 minutes.

2 Cut dough into two pieces and flatten one slightly, re-wrapping the other one in plastic wrap to prevent it drying out. Pass the flattened dough through a pasta machine on the widest setting, then fold in half and pass through the machine again. Repeat twice. Reduce the setting on the machine a notch and pass the dough through. Repeat twice more, reducing the setting each time; dust the dough lightly with flour if it starts to stick. Turn the setting on the pasta machine back to the widest one, fold dough sheet in thirds and pass through the machine again. Pass the dough through twice more, reducing the setting each time. Fold sheet in thirds again, rotate 90 degrees, turn the setting back to the widest and pass through the machine six times, reducing the setting each time. When the dough gets too long to handle, cut it in half and continue with each half separately. By now, the pastry should be about 2mm thick and fine enough that you can see your hand through it. Repeat with remaining dough.

3 Lay a sheet of pastry on a lightly floured work bench and, using a wheel pastry cutter, cut into strips 1cm wide and at least 40cm

long. Stand a strip on its side and fold the end to form a loop, squeezing the end to hold it in place; if the pastry won’t stick, wet your finger with water and dab it on the pastry. Fold the pastry back in the opposite direction to form another loop. Continue folding and squeezing. Place on a lightly floured tray. Repeat with remaining pastry.

4 Meanwhile, pour a 2cm depth of vegetable oil into a frying pan and heat to 160C (if you don’t have a thermometer, test the temperature of the oil by dipping the handle of a wooden spoon into it – when bubbles form around the spoon, the oil is hot enough). Place several pastries in the hot oil, being careful not to overcrowd the pan; they’ll puff up almost immediately. Fry on one side until lightly golden (about 30 seconds), then turn using an egg lifter and a fork and fry the other side for another 30 seconds. Drain on paper towel and repeat with remaining pastries.

5 When pastries are cool, line several trays with baking paper. Heat honey in a medium-sized saucepan until almost boiling, then reduce heat to its lowest setting. Carefully lower a pastry into the honey and, using an egg lifter and a fork, gently turn it over, then lift it out and place on a tray to cool. Repeat with remaining pastries and serve.

Ricotta and pecorino tarts

Casadinas

“These free-form tarts are called formagelle in Italian and pardulas in another Sardinian dialect, but in my dialect they’re casadinas and we traditionally make them for Easter. If you have a pasta machine, use it to roll the dough as thinly as possible; if you don’t, use a rolling pin. This recipe makes quite a few: it can easily be halved, but the tarts will keep well for a week covered and refrigerated – just warm them through in a 100C oven for 10 minutes or so before serving.”

Makes about 40

- 100 gm sultanas
 - 350 gm well-drained ricotta
 - 150 gm young Pecorino Sardo, freshly grated
 - 60 gm fine semolina, sieved
 - ¼ tsp saffron threads (see note p167)
 - 3 eggs, lightly beaten
 - 100 gm caster sugar
 - Finely grated rind of 1 lemon and 1 orange
- Casadinas dough**
- 400 gm “00” flour, plus extra for dusting
 - 2 eggwhites, lightly beaten
 - 25 gm butter, melted

1 Cover sultanas with warm water and set aside to reconstitute (about 30 minutes), drain and pat dry.

2 For casadinas dough, sift flour and a pinch of fine sea salt into the bowl of an electric

mixer fitted with a dough hook. With the machine running, pour in the eggwhites then 150ml of water and mix until absorbed. Mix in butter, then start adding water, a little at a time, to form a firm dough (about 100ml; you may not need it all – towards the end it doesn’t take much extra water for the dough to become too soft). Tip dough onto a lightly floured work bench and knead with the heels of your hands until smooth and elastic (about 5 minutes). Wrap in plastic wrap and set aside for about 1 hour.

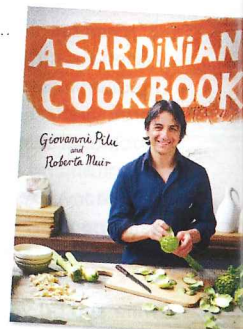
3 Meanwhile, push ricotta through a fine sieve into a mixing bowl. Stir in pecorino, semolina, sultanas, saffron and a pinch of fine sea salt. Add beaten egg, one-third at a time, mixing well between additions. Stir in sugar, then lemon and orange rind, and mix well.

4 Cut the dough in half and, using a rolling pin on a lightly floured work bench, flatten slightly. Cover one piece of dough with a tea towel to prevent it drying out. Pass the other piece through a pasta machine on the widest setting, then fold in half and pass again. Repeat once. Reduce the setting by a notch and pass the dough through the machine three more times, reducing the setting by a notch each time, dusting lightly with a little flour if it starts to stick. It should end up about 2mm thick. Whenever the dough gets too long to handle, cut it in half and continue with each half separately, keeping any dough that isn’t being rolled under the tea towel. Repeat with remaining dough.

5 Preheat oven to 150C and line two baking trays with baking paper. Lay a sheet of pastry out on a lightly floured work bench and cut out discs with a 9cm round cutter. Place discs on a tea towel and cover with another tea towel. Cover leftover pastry with a tea towel. Repeat with remaining pastry, then re-roll off-cuts to make more discs. Place a heaped teaspoon of filling in the centre of a disc and gently press it down to flatten a little. Fold the sides of the disc up, pinching and pleating them to form sides around the filling. Using an egg lifter, carefully place the filled tart on one of the prepared baking trays. Cover with a tea towel and repeat with remaining pastry and filling.

6 Place trays in oven and cook for 20 minutes, then swap the positions of the trays and cook until the filling is well browned (a further 20 minutes or so). Remove from oven and set aside to cool. Serve just warm.*

A Sardinian Cookbook by Giovanni Pilu and Roberta Muir is published by Lantern, \$49.99, hbk. This extract has been reproduced with minor GT style changes.



Ricotta and pecorino tarts