

■ BY MOTHER MARTHA

Don't start the new year with a resolution to diet. Instead, head to your nearest bookstore or click on the internet to purchase the two recently-published must-haves for every Italophile's library and kitchen shelf.

On October 28, *Il Talismano della Felicità* by Ada Boni, the most iconic and beloved Italian cookbook ever published, was translated and published by Little, Brown and Company in English for the first time. It was first published in 1929, two years before *The Joy of Cooking*, its American counterpart.

At first a treasury of 882 regional dishes with additions at every new edition, *Il Talismano della Felicità* quickly became a quintessential wedding gift: a talisman for newlyweds — particularly the bride, of course — beginning a new life. For as Boni wrote: “There can be no true happiness if such an essential part of our daily lives as eating is neglected. Cooking is the gayest of arts and the most pleasant of sciences.”

Not surprisingly, in a recent documentary about the life of Marcella Hazan, whose several books introduced authentic Italian cuisine to Americans, her husband Victor recounted that, when she immigrated to the USA in 1955 as his young bride, she brought with her a copy of this “Bible of Italian Cuisine” to teach herself how to cook. I, too, received a copy as a wedding present; now, after 54 years, it's stained with olive oil and tomato sauce and dog-eared.

The oldest of four children, Ada Giaquinto was born in Rome on October 11, 1881, to a well-to-do family; she lived a carefree childhood on Via di Ripetta near Piazza del Popolo. By age 10, she'd developed a passion for cooking, probably thanks to her father's brother Adolfo, a well-known chef, sought-after for the private kitchens of Rome's noble families. He founded the cooking magazine *Il Messaggero della cucina* in 1903 and edited it until his death in 1937, and also wrote many cookbooks, as well as poetry and song lyrics, in Roman dialect.

Ada married Enrico Boni, the heir to a family of Roman goldsmiths, but also a sculptor, painter, photographer, critic, music lover, writer, passionate gourmet and close friend of the haute-cuisine pioneer Auguste Escoffier. More than just a soulmate, Enrico was Ada's intellectual partner and collaborator. Together, in 1915, they founded *Preziosa*, a forerunner of today's food blogs: a subscription magazine of recipes and domestic advice, sent to the Bonis by their readers or collected on their travels in all of Italy's regions, and edited to include in *Il*

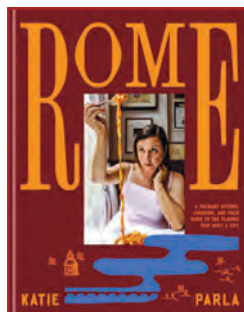
TWO MUSTS FOR THE ITALOPHILE'S BOOKSHELF



Ada Boni and the cover of the new American translation of *Il Talismano della Felicità*. Below, Michael Szczerban, the publisher who brought this work to English



book by Samin Nosrat, who first mentioned *Il Talismano* to him. For the next 13 years, he became obsessed with finding the publishing rights for this translation. Finally, he found Ada Boni's great-nephew and only descendant, Stefano Tambone, now aged 83. He lives outside Rome, owns one of the first editions of *Il Talismano*, inherited Boni's cookbook collection and some of the worn copper pots she used, and is delighted his great-aunt's book has finally been translated into English.



The cover of Katie Parla's new book about the cuisine of Rome

This new English-language edition, *The Talisman of Happiness*, will feature nearly 1,700 recipes and include American measurements, delightful illustrations (not in any of the Italian editions) and forewords by another world-famous chef, Lidia Bastianich, and by prolific cookbook author, travel writer/broadcaster/TV host and culinary tour guide, Katie Parla.

Speaking of Parla, she's a Yale-educated art historian born and bred in New Jersey, and a long-term resident of Rome and collector of Boni's *Preziosa*. Her latest book, *Rome: A Culinary History, Cookbook, and Field Guide to the Flavors that Built a City* was published in mid-November. It traces the city's food story from its Iron Age roots to the modern *trattoria* table, recounting how the empire, religion, migration and politics have shaped what Romans eat and how they eat it.

Her earlier books include *Tasting Rome: Fresh Flavors and Forgotten Recipes from an Ancient City*; *Eating & Drinking in Rome: An Insider's Guide to the City's Best Food and Drink*; *Food of the Italian South: Recipes for Classics, Disappearing and Lost Dishes*; *Food of the Italian Islands*; and *The Joy of Pizza: Everything You Need to Know*. ○