



FOOD FOR CHANGE

Massimo Bottura

BIG IDEAS III

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pdf: QH-02-19-262-EN-N ISBN 978-92-861-4262-8 doi: 10.2867/11720

eBook: QH-02-19-262-EN-E ISBN 978-92-861-4261-1 doi: 10.2867/79402

BIG IDEAS

Massimo Bottura is more than a Michelin star-winning chef. Together with Lara Gilmore, he also founded *Food for Soul*, a non-profit organisation seeking to reduce food waste through social inclusion and mitigate the carbon impact on our planet.

On the occasion of Expo 2015 in Milan and working in concert with Caritas Ambrosiana, Massimo Bottura opened *Refettorio Ambrosiano*, a new kind of community kitchen where chefs from around the world cooked nutritious meals for socially vulnerable guests using surplus ingredients recovered from the Expo's pavilions. The project's success led Bottura to found *Food for Soul* in 2016 aimed at replicating the model in other communities. Since then, *Refettorio Gastromotiva* in Rio de Janeiro, *Refettorio Felix* in London, *Social Tables* in Modena, Bologna and Naples, and *Refettorio Paris* in the French capital have all opened their doors. Further community kitchens are planned across the globe.

This is the ninth essay in the *Big Ideas* series created by the European Investment Bank.

The EIB has invited international thought leaders to write about the most important issues of the day. These essays are a reminder that we need new thinking to protect the environment, promote equality and improve people's lives around the globe.



FOOD FOR CHANGE

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I am an Italian chef, born and raised in Modena. The taste and the smell of my territory define who I am: balsamic vinegar runs in my blood and my bones are made of *Parmigiano Reggiano*. When I was a kid, my brothers used to chase me around the house. I found refuge under the kitchen table where my mother and grandmother rolled out pasta dough and folded *tortellini*. As the flour fell around me, I would steal a handful of raw *tortellini*, pop them into my mouth and chew for a very long time until all the flavour was drawn out. This is where appetite begins for me. One might think that this is a very singular, personal and intimate story, as if those raw *tortellini* were my very own Proustian madeleine, and mine alone. Yes, it is an intimate story, but the truth is that it is much more common than anyone would think. You might hear it over and over again, told in exactly the same way, from any Italian of any age. Every country has a particular relationship with food, and in Italy it's all about the family and grandmothers and mothers cooking our Sunday lunch. The scene evoked is pretty much the same: the women of the family gather in the kitchen to cook, but also to catch up on gossip, with the kids playing around the table, stealing a crunchy corner of a *lasagna* here, a raw *tortellino* there... Many dishes have a distinctive nostalgic flavour that drive us back to our childhood memories.



**CHILDHOOD
FLAVOURS**

CHILDHOOD FLAVOURS

Growing up, I recognised the power and the value of such memories. I learned to look at them with critical eyes, to question traditional recipes and make them my own through ideas and technique. At *Osteria Francescana*, we perceive the kitchen as if it were a laboratory or an observatory to examine and assess culinary traditions from a distance. We rewrite our culinary memories and seek new ways to make them accessible, even to those who might not share our childhood flavours. This detachment allows us to keep our traditions alive and prevent them from becoming clichés or dioramas in a museum. Our work requires a deep understanding and knowledge of the past in order to look at it critically. It is about finding the most appropriate way to express our traditions so that they have a chance to survive. It is about bringing the best of the past into the future.

One of the most valuable lessons of the Italian kitchen is to make the most of everything you have available and never to throw anything away. No crumbs or bones are ever thrown in the bin. In a certain sense, a *ragù* is nothing more than a sauce made with leftover scraps of meat or fish or vegetables. In the classic Italian cookbook *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, Pellegrino Artusi collected recipes from all over Italy – from north to south, west to east. We often say that, while Garibaldi was unifying Italy on the battlefield, Artusi did the same in kitchens across the country. The recurrence of certain ingredients is mesmerising. Just think about day-old bread. There are hundreds of recipes using breadcrumbs in soups, pastas and condiments, meat and fish dishes, and dessert cakes and flans – all made with day-old bread. In addition, the meat used to make a broth, is then re-used in hundreds of other recipes for stuffing, meatballs or pasta fillings. Vegetable trimmings, cheese rinds and, of course, bones all become the source of flavour for even more recipes that have been prepared again and again by mothers and grandmothers for centuries. The Italian *cucina povera* is something more than nose-to-tail philosophy, because it is not just about using every part of a pig or a carrot, but taking the best out of each part, at every stage of its lifespan.



One of my favourite childhood memories is the *zuppa di latte* (milk soup) that my mother would prepare for me morning and evening. Every morning over breakfast, my brothers and I fought over the biggest hardened pieces of bread from the previous night. We all wanted to soak the bread in warm milk with a splash of coffee and sugar. We called this messy affair *zuppa di latte*. Again, this tradition is not just my family's; many Italians of my generation grew up eating a similar version of this milk soup. I preferred the bread grated directly into the bowl and would ritually ask my mother to help me. Then, to my delight, I would pour in the sugar, lots of it, until my mother started yelling, "Massimooooo - that's too much sugar! Look at your spoon. It is standing up straight!" She loved to tell this story to strangers with the additional comment, "And look at him now – a famous cook!"

In the kitchen of *Osteria Francescana*, we attempted to transform this memory into something tangible, edible and, most importantly, emotional by experimenting with variations of toasted breadcrumbs, milk and sugar. The mixture went through numerous stages of blending, filtering and whipping until it turned into layers of sweetened breadcrumb cream, caramelised bread crunch and a salted bread ice cream. It tasted even better than I remembered - the toasted, caramel and salty flavours were comforting, even childish - but the layers of tonal beige were not visually inviting. Moreover, the meaning was not clear. No one cared about a bowl of bread, milk and sugar, except me. What the recipe needed was value. Flipping through an art magazine at home, a gold-plated wastepaper bin by the Swiss artist Sylvie Fleury caught my attention. The artist casts objects from popular culture in silver and gold. The ordinary suddenly became extraordinary. The message was to make the invisible visible. That was it! Back in the kitchen, we moulded melted sugars into a translucent gold-tinted sugar shell that looked like a piece of crumpled paper from the wastepaper bin. The dome was so fragile that it broke to the touch. In this way, when you ate it the golden mirage gave way to the formless soup of childhood memories. We put it on the menu and called it *Il pane è oro*, or "Bread is gold".



This is the point when the milk soup began to mean something more than a childhood memory. With this dessert, we wanted to deliver a strong message on the value of food. That recipe became the anthem under which we chanted the unsung values of recovering recipes and all those discarded, undervalued and neglected ingredients that have always played a central role in the Italian kitchen.

It is often said of a person that he or she is “beautiful inside”. A browned banana, a bruised fruit, a chunk of stale bread still has huge potential in terms of smells, flavours and texture. The responsibility of

the chef - and of all of us cooking at home - is to find that inner beauty of each product and to make the most out of it in each phase of its lifespan. Straight out of the oven, a loaf of bread is ready to be served at the table and eaten as it is, still warm and fragrant, without even waiting for the crust to stop crackling. The day after, it might be sliced and toasted to make *bruschetta*. A day more and it is perfect to be chopped and seasoned with tomatoes to make *panzanella*, or *pappa al pomodoro*. The fourth day, it can be turned into breadcrumbs for *passatelli* or for exquisite gratins. In this way, leftovers are reintroduced into the food chain with extra value.

“ **A browned banana, a bruised fruit, a chunk of stale bread still has huge potential in terms of smells, flavours and texture.**

The image shows a long, bright dining room with a high ceiling. The floor is covered in a pattern of red and yellow hexagonal tiles. Long wooden tables are arranged in rows, with clear plastic chairs. Large, white, dome-shaped pendant lights hang from the ceiling. On the right wall, there is a large mural of a red fish. The text 'REFETTORIO AMBROSIANO' is overlaid in large white letters at the bottom of the image.

REFETTORIO AMBROSIANO

REFETTORIO AMBROSIANO

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations shows us that almost one billion people are undernourished, while one third of the food we produce globally is wasted every year. Just think! Among all that wasted food there are nearly four trillion apples. How many apple tarts go to waste? The first time I came across those statistics was back in 2014 when Italy was getting ready to host the Expo 2015 world fair in Milan. The theme was “Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life”. Chefs like myself were being invited to cook, perform demonstrations, and create pop-up restaurants and gala events. I had a hard time getting my head around how all these events were addressing such a hefty and important theme; and those numbers kept whirling in my brain. If we did not do something about it now, the numbers would only get worse. I found the place where I could provide my response to the theme, my idea of an Expo pavilion in an abandoned theatre in the suburbs of Milan – among the crisscross of train tracks and urban expansion. What I had in mind was an Expo pavilion outside the trade fair district that could shed light on the invisible, on what was being overlooked and marginalised. Back then, I could never have imagined that this project would become a stage to launch a message of hope and action, nor could I have ever imagined that the project would grow into the movement it is today. Thanks to the help and involvement of many different people and organisations, we were able to restore the theatre and more importantly to transform it into a community kitchen full of art, light, beauty and life, which we called *Refettorio Ambrosiano*.



This is how some of the most influential and creative chefs from around the world found themselves in front of cheese rinds, wilted courgettes, bruised apples, browned bananas, and day-old bread. Before the construction began, I called on as many chefs, friends and colleagues as I could. One by one, I asked them if they could spare a few days from May to October to come to Milan to cook delicious and healthy meals for our guests each night.

“But please,” I begged them, “don’t bring recipes with you because they’ll be useless. Your creativity, your techniques and, most importantly, an open mind will be enough.” They only understood why I had recommended this when the food truck arrived. What we did at

Refettorio Ambrosiano, in fact, was collect surplus ingredients from the Expo pavilions and local supermarkets and transform them into delicious and healthy meals for our guests who were rough sleepers, immigrants, homeless men and women without regular access to food. Every morning boxes of surplus vegetables, fruit, mixed meats, dairy products and day-old bread would arrive. And every day a different chef had the job of creating a three-course meal from the ingredients on hand. I could tell by looking at some of their faces that not being able to work with the freshest farm-to-table ingredients was a challenge; however, every single chef took it on with curiosity and some pride too.

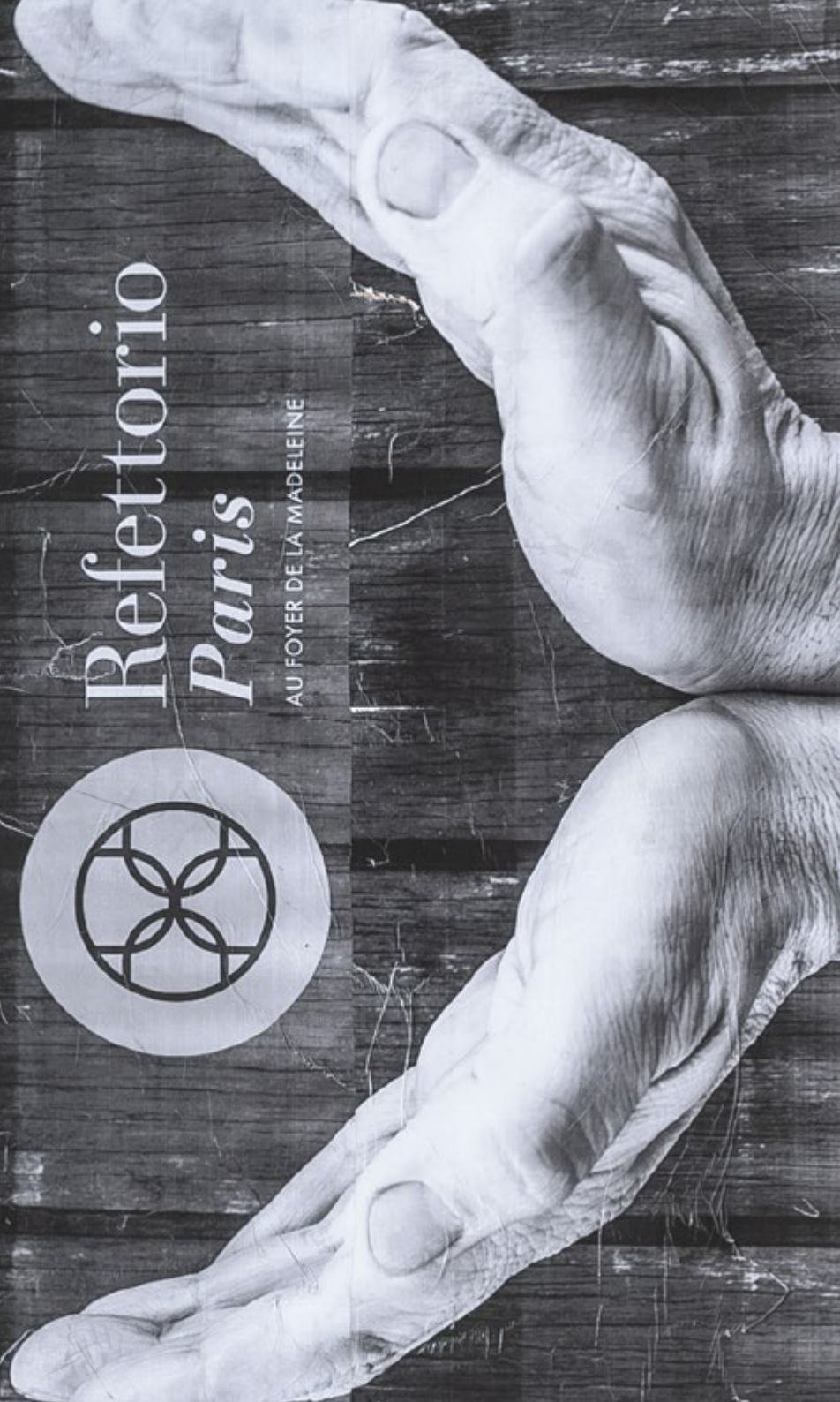
“ I could tell by looking at some of their faces that not being able to work with the freshest farm-to-table ingredients was a challenge; however, every single chef took it on with curiosity and some pride too.



We also had access to many ingredients that were perfect in shape, size and appearance, but still were destined for the dump. The quantity as well as the quality of products that were formally recognised as “waste” or surplus was truly shocking. So we just stopped talking and took action. We learned that limitations inspire creativity, allowing miracles to happen in the kitchen. What has surprised me over the past months is not the generosity of these famed chefs but just how fabulously delicious recipes created with salvaged waste can be. The most precious ingredients are time and energy. Every recipe coming out of the *Refettorio Ambrosiano* project has revolutionary potential. A *pesto* made with popcorn or breadcrumbs when there are no pine nuts in the pantry is perhaps even more delicious than the original recipe. Some of the most incredible soups have been made using every last ingredient in the refrigerator. A crate of the saddest vegetables and mixed ground meats can be turned into the most marvellous *lasagna*. We were enlightened by the genius of necessity, and brought dignity back to the table by changing the dynamics of the dining room and serving unexpected food to the most vulnerable. I wanted our guests to feel welcome. I remember the very first nights at the *Refettorio*, when the guests barely spoke to each other. In a matter of weeks, guests, volunteers and chefs were joking around. The meal became a celebration. Most importantly, we gave food a voice, and nourished a community. We confirmed what we had only imagined: that a meal can unite, revive, and renew. And during it all, we were reminded that cooking is an act of love.

Refettorio *Paris*

AU FOYER DE LA MADELEINE



To be totally honest, we had no idea of what we were doing. At *Osteria Francescana*, we dedicate as much time to seeking out the best quality ingredients as we do to preparing them. We have 12 tables there; this means that we can serve no more than 30 guests per service. With over 100 guests each evening at *Refettorio Ambrosiano*, all we could do was apply everything we had learned over the years at *Osteria Francescana* about the value of food, the power of beauty and the value of hospitality to this new endeavour. And by some miracle or the purest form of obsessive dedication, it worked. In looking for solutions to fight food waste, we found a way to have a greater social impact. This is why my wife, Lara, and I decided to found *Food for Soul*, a non-profit organisation that could sustain and empower communities in the fight against food waste and social isolation. Since our humble beginnings at Expo 2015, we have created community projects in Rio de Janeiro, London, Paris, Bologna and Modena and set our sights on many more to come. We are currently working on expanding to the United States as well as Mexico and other cities in Italy and Europe. But more than just opening other *Refettorios*, we are dreaming and working hard to change a mindset.

“ In looking for solutions to fight food waste, we found a way to have a greater social impact.



“ We have to slow down a little to think about food, because on the one hand, it belongs to our territory, to our earth, and, on the other, it will soon be in our bodies.

FOOD FOR SOUL

Food for Soul is not a charity project; *Food for Soul* is a cultural project. It aims to make visible the invisible; to look closer and more carefully at what is discarded and abandoned with different eyes; to make everyone aware of the real value of food. Everyone can avoid food waste. It's not hard. For example, if you are planning to cook a meal, keep in mind before you buy any ingredients to open your fridge first and see what's inside. Maybe there is some basil, a piece of Parmesan, a little garlic clove hiding in a dark corner. Perhaps you have some bread from the night before that can be toasted and turned into breadcrumbs, and with some good olive oil, this combination can be made into a wonderful pesto for pasta. You can make something out of anything. You can also start avoiding food waste with many other actions that not only involve your kitchen, your pantry and fridge, but also the market. Find creative ways to use what you already have, rather than always going out and buying more food. And when you do go to the market, try to buy seasonally and locally. Today, more and more people are talking about food. This is a positive shift because it means that there is space for a deeper dialogue, and hope for improving our food systems, from our everyday diet to agricultural practices at large.

As the frenetic lives we are living might not give us that much time to think about food in a more conscious way, we have to slow down a little to think about food, to be more aware of what we have in the fridge, in our pantry, and on our plates, because on the one hand, it belongs to our territory, to our earth, and, on the other, it will soon be in our bodies.



Cooking is not only about the quality of ingredients, but the quality of ideas. Today, there are over six billion people eating. This number will continue to increase over the next 25 years - not to mention over the next 50, 100 or 200 years. Every day people are making choices on what to buy and eat, and how to nourish their bodies. Our choices and our behaviour as eaters have a tremendous impact on our planet, the environment and the landscape. From this point of view, one of the most valuable steps we can take is to introduce adequate food education at school, as well as at home, and in our restaurants. Chefs can set an example by demonstrating the importance of using every part of the ingredient, from the famous “nose-to-tail” cooking when it comes to meat and fish, to also using stems, stalks, leaves and trimmings when it comes to fruit and vegetables. Chefs can show that quality is not related only to price or the external appearance of ingredients, but to how ingredients are used in the kitchen. The quality of our ideas is often more important than the quality of the ingredients.

We, chefs, have the ability as well as a great opportunity to create a ripple effect by taking on responsibilities outside our kitchens. We can be leaders and influencers in local communities, government offices and on a global platform. It is important to share, educate and be generous with our ideas because they are the motivational force behind the evolution of our kitchens, our communities and our future. If the most influential restaurants in the industry become symbols of good practices, these same good practices will reach many more restaurants, our guests and a larger audience. If everyone starts striving toward the same goal, we will be able to start a cultural revolution. By sharing a message that will have an impact on the choices of other restaurateurs and chefs as well as on our audience, we will be able to make our food system more sustainable. Animals will be farmed in smaller quantities and in better conditions. Vegetables will be wasted less. And more and more bees will thrive in our gardens.



In addition to food sustainability, today's culinary community can contribute to human sustainability. Being a chef requires hard work and a great passion to move your hands and steer your actions from the moment you wake up in the morning until you go to bed at night. It is a job that puts demands on the mind and the body. At *Osteria Francescana*, we are aware that this job is an opportunity to learn how to take care of each other. We have found that mutual respect is a better unifier than traditional hierarchies. With numerous hours per day spent together in an enclosed space and a demanding pace of work, the walls can become confining or they can become a protective house with the people inside a virtual family. And like any family, it is essential to share the same values and sense of responsibility. This is where awareness drives us: it makes us responsible for one another. And in that restaurant that we call home, we can also discover a way to express ourselves through social gestures. At the moment when you realise that you've had great opportunities in your life - this is also the moment to give something back. Human sustainability is as important as environmental and food sustainability, because it is essential to understand the importance of respecting everything that is outside us. Everything and everyone around us. Start by taking care of who's next to you, then your community, and your planet will come pretty easily.

To quote one of my favourite artists, Joseph Beuys: "We are the Revolution!"



We, chefs, artisans, farmers, sommeliers and restaurateurs, are all part of a great food revolution. We have a responsibility to ensure that food is current, local, emotional and inspirational. Food needs to be aligned with technology and the arts just as much as the natural world. I'd like to extend this call to arms to everyone: students, politicians, engineers, mothers and fathers, grandmothers and grandfathers. Making the world a better place might require time and effort. A little creativity can go a long way. But culture remains the starting point. Because culture breeds knowledge. Knowledge leads to awareness. When we become aware, we are one short step away from becoming socially responsible.

“ Culture breeds knowledge. Knowledge leads to awareness. When we become aware, we are one short step away from becoming socially responsible. ”

We can all be the voice for change. Because food is a powerful tool for change.

BIOGRAPHY

Massimo Bottura (1962) opened *Osteria Francescana* in Modena in 1995. An innovator and restaurateur for over twenty years, Bottura has consolidated his reputation as one of the world's most creative culinary figures. His internationally renowned three-Michelin-star restaurant, *Osteria Francescana*, was awarded the number one spot in the "World's 50 Best Restaurants" list in 2016 and for the second time in 2018.

In 1986, Massimo Bottura set out on his life's journey when he bought *Trattoria del Campazzo* on the outskirts of Modena. Working alongside the *rezdora* Lidia Cristoni and applying techniques learned as an apprentice to French chef Georges Coigny, he built his culinary foundations on a combination of regional Italian cooking and classical French training. In 1994, Bottura sold *Campazzo* and moved to Monte Carlo to work with Alain Ducasse at *Le Louis XV*. This experience proved invaluable for the chef and led to the opening of *Osteria Francescana* a year later in his hometown of Modena. Several years on, Bottura enjoyed another life-changing experience with Ferran Adrià at *El Bulli* during the summer of 2000.

Bottura's kitchen walks a fine line between tradition and innovation. His dishes explore the deep roots of Italian cuisine while making references to history, art and philosophy. In 2002, Bottura received his first Michelin star followed by a second in 2006. Among numerous awards, he received the prestigious "Grand Prix de l'Art" from the International Culinary Academy in Paris in 2011, and a third Michelin star, confirming the achievement of a life-long ambition. *Osteria Francescana* has ranked at the top of Italian food guides for the past five years.

Massimo Bottura has also been recognised for his commitment to fight against food waste and social isolation, calling for social responsibility among the culinary community. During the Expo 2015 world fair, the chef created an off-site project called the *Refettorio Ambrosiano*, a community kitchen where chefs from around the world joined him to transform surplus food from the exhibition into healthy meals for those in need. Motivated by the success of the project, Massimo founded the non-profit organisation *Food for Soul* together with his wife, Lara Gilmore. Since then, *Food for Soul* has established another five projects: *Refettorio Gastromotiva* in Rio de Janeiro, *Refettorio Felix* in London, *Social Tables* in Modena and Bologna, and most recently, *Refettorio Paris*.

On 6 February 2017, Massimo Bottura received a prestigious honorary Business degree from the University of Bologna. Dean Francesco Ubertini stated, "Massimo Bottura's work spans the fields of entrepreneurship, education and technique, and represents a virtuous example of the promotion of Italian culture and the 'Made in Italy' label." This was the first *laurea honoris causa* awarded to a chef in the history of the university. On 12 April 2018, the Academy of Fine Arts of Carrara also awarded Bottura a *diploma honoris causa* in Arts.

The energetic and ever curious chef lives in his beloved hometown, Modena, located in the Emilia-Romagna region of Italy with his wife, Lara Gilmore, and their two children, Alexa and Charlie.





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