

IN LATE WINTER
We Ate
PEARS

A Year of Hunger and Love

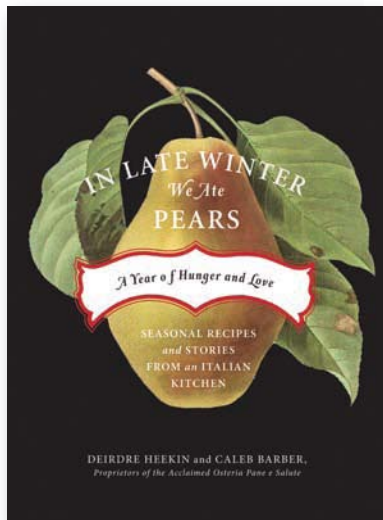
SEASONAL RECIPES
and STORIES
FROM *an* ITALIAN
KITCHEN

DEIRDRE HEEKIN and CALEB BARBER,
Proprietors of the Acclaimed Osteria Pane e Salute

IN LATE WINTER WE ATE PEARS

A Year of Hunger and Love

Deirdre Heekin and Caleb Barber



Recipes and stories from the romantic year in Italy that inspired the acclaimed Osteria Pane e Salute.

More than a cookbook, *In Late Winter We Ate Pears* is a love affair with a culture and a way of life. In vignettes taken from their year in Italy, husband and wife Caleb Barber and Deirdre Heekin offer glimpses of a young, vibrant Italy: of rolling out pizza dough in an ancient hilltown at midnight while wild dogs bay in the abandoned streets; of the fogged car windows of an ancient lovers' lane amid the olive groves outside Prato.

The recipes in *In Late Winter We Ate Pears* are every bit as delicious as the memories. Selections such as red snapper with fennel sauce, fresh figs with balsamic vinegar and mint, and frangipane and plum tart capture the essence of Italy. Following the tradition of Italian cuisine, the 80 recipes are laid out according to season, to suggest taking advantage of your freshest local ingredients.

Whether you are an experienced cook looking for authentic Italian recipes or a beginner wanting to immerse yourself in the romance of a young couple's culinary adventure, *In Late Winter We Ate Pears* provides rich sustenance in the best tradition of travel and food writing.

Cheers to Chef Barber and writer Deirdre Heekin for sharing these marvelous recipes from Osteria Pane e Salute (*Pane* translates as bread and *Salute* as health) and for sharing the story of a most inspired year spent in Italy. *In Late Winter We Ate Pears* is a testament that bread and health are the things that make a good life.

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"Just right! An inspiring and informative personal quest and a deeply felt journey into the heart and soul of Italian artisanal cuisine."

—Anthony Bourdain, author of *A Cook's Tour* and *Kitchen Confidential*



Deirdre Heekin and Caleb Barber are the proprietors and, respectively, wine director and head chef of Osteria Pane e Salute, a boutique restaurant and wine bar in Woodstock, Vermont, recently acclaimed in *Bon Appétit*, *The Boston Globe*, *Travel and Leisure*, and *Attaché*. Heekin and Barber grow most of their own produce in addition to working with local farm partners. In preparation for his role as head chef of Osteria Pane e Salute, Barber apprenticed with an artisanal baker and in a small trattoria in Tuscany.

Heekin and Barber live in Barnard, Vermont, where Heekin produces artisanal after-dinner brandies and micro-vintage garage wine for the osteria.

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In Late Winter We Ate Pears

A YEAR OF HUNGER AND LOVE

DEIRDRE HEEKIN AND CALEB BARBER



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All of us surely house within ourselves another unwritten book. This would consist of an account of ourselves as eaters, recording the development of our palates, telling over like the beads of a rosary the memories of the best meals of our lives.

CLIFTON FADIMAN, 1954

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contents

List of Recipes	ix
Preface: A Personal Note	i
A Note on Our Recipes	4
A Note on the Recipe: Add a Dash of History	7



<u>SPRING</u>	19
The Physic of Spring	21
Roman Holiday	26
At the Villa Rucellai	32
The Little World of the Past	36
Recipes	42



<u>SUMMER</u>	75
Ode	77
Mythology	85
The Charcoal Burner's Pasta	90
<i>Bon Viso</i>	95
Rock of Ages	99
Recipes	104



AUTUMN

137

Return	139
In Mantova	142
Bread and Wine	147
In the Manner of	152
Singing Carmen in the Town Hall	157
Recipes	160



WINTER

191

Our Ancient Winter	193
Farewell to the Flesh	196
In Late Winter We Ate Pears	202
<i>Come Lo Sento Io</i>	206
If You Look on a Map	211
Recipes	218



BREAD

251

Bread: A Season unto Itself	253
A Note on the Bread Recipes	257
Recipes	258
Appendix: <i>Affettati</i>	271
Acknowledgments	273
Index	275



list of recipes



SPRING

Antipasti

<i>Asparagi alla Milanese</i> (Asparagus with Fried Eggs)	42
<i>Crostini con le Fave</i> (Crostini with Fava Bean Spread)	44
<i>Insalata di Carciofi</i> (Arugula Salad with Artichokes and <i>Parmigiano</i>)	45

Primi

<i>Carabaccia</i> (Potato and Onion Soup with Fresh Peas)	47
<i>Penne con Asparagi</i> (Penne with Asparagus)	49
<i>Risotto al Limone</i> (Risotto with Lemon)	51
<i>Pasta e Porri</i> (Pasta with Leeks and <i>Parmigiano</i>)	53

Secondi

<i>Costolette d'Agnello con Caprino</i> (Lamb Chops with Fresh Goat Cheese)	55
<i>Pollo Arrosto</i> (Tuscan-Style Roasted Chicken)	57
<i>Arista di Maiale al' Mercato</i> (Market-Style Roasted Pork)	59
<i>Sarde Fresche in Padella</i> (Sautéed Fresh Sardines)	61

Contorni

<i>Piselli con Prosciutto</i> (Peas and Prosciutto)	63
<i>Spinaci Saporiti</i> (Sautéed Spinach)	64
<i>Scarola con Olio e Aceto</i> (Escarole with Oil and Vinegar)	66

Dolci

<i>Zaletti</i> (Crunchy Cornmeal Cookies from the Veneto)	67
<i>Ciambelline</i> (Almond Butter Cookies with Anise)	69
<i>Budino di Ricotta alla Cioccolata</i> (Chocolate-Ricotta Pudding)	71



SUMMER

Antipasti

<i>Pomodori Tonnati</i> (Fresh Tomatoes in Tuna Mayonnaise)	104
<i>Fichi Freschi con Aceto Balsamico</i> (Fresh Figs with Balsamic Vinegar and Mint)	106
<i>Melanzana con la Ricotta</i> (Eggplant with Ricotta)	107

Primi

<i>Pasta con Peperoni Gialli</i> (Pasta with Yellow Pepper Sauce)	108
<i>Risotto della Contadina</i> (Fresh Garden Risotto)	110
<i>Tajarin</i> (Piemontese Fresh Egg Pasta)	112
<i>Sugo di Verde di Zucchine</i> (Green Zucchini Sauce)	114
<i>Spaghetti alla Carbonara</i> (Spaghetti with <i>Pancetta</i> , Egg, and Cheese)	115

Secondi

<i>La Pizza Toscana</i> (Tuscan Pizza)	117
<i>Sugo per la Pizza</i> (Pizza Sauce)	121
<i>La Pizza: Funghi Trifolati</i> (Mushroom Pizza with Garlic and Parsley)	122
<i>Calzone Farcito Bene</i> (A Well-Stuffed Calzone)	123

<i>Spigola al Forno con Rosmarino</i>	
(Oven-Roasted Bass with Rosemary)	125
<i>Petto di Pollo in Padella</i> (Sautéed Chicken Breast)	127
<i>Salsa Verde</i> (Green Sauce for Chicken, Meat, or Fish)	128

Contorni

<i>Fagiolini Verdi</i> (Green Beans in Olive Oil and Lemon)	129
<i>Zucca Gialla in Saor</i> (Yellow Squash in Red Wine and Mint Sauce)	130

Dolci

<i>Tartina di Frutta</i> (Fresh Berry and Peach Tart)	132
<i>Panna Cotta con Frutti di Bosco</i>	
(Cooked Creams with Fresh Berries)	133
<i>Pesche al Vino Rosso</i> (Peaches in Red Wine)	134



AUTUMN

Antipasti

<i>Crostini alla Vecchia Maniera</i> (Chicken Liver Crostini)	160
<i>Cavolo con Sugo di Acciughe</i> (Cabbage Salad with Anchovy Dressing)	162
<i>Peperoni con Bagna Cauda</i>	
(Peppers with Garlic-Anchovy Sauce)	164

Primi

<i>Iota</i> (Bean Soup from the Alto Adige)	166
<i>Tortelli di Zucca</i> (Squash Ravioli)	168
<i>Spaghetti con Broccoletti</i> (Spaghetti with Broccoli Florets)	171
<i>Risotto ai Funghi Porcini</i> (Porcini Mushroom Risotto)	173

Secondi

<i>La Trota all' Erbe Fresche</i> (Trout with Fresh Herbs)	175
<i>Pagello col Sugo di Finocchio</i> (Red Snapper with Fennel Sauce)	177
<i>Salsicce con l'Uva</i> (Sausages with Black Grapes)	179
<i>Tacchino al Limone</i> (Turkey Cutlets with Lemon)	181

Contorni

<i>Melanzana e Zucchine in Padella</i> (Sautéed Eggplant and Zucchini)	183
<i>Bietole in Padella</i> (Sautéed Beets)	184

Dolci

<i>Le Pere con Parmigiano</i> (Pears and Parmigiano)	185
<i>Torta di Mele</i> (Apple Cake)	186
<i>Sbrisolona da Valeria</i> (Valeria's Crumb Cake)	188



WINTER

Antipasti

<i>Cannellini alla Salvia</i> (Cannellini Salad with Fresh Sage)	218
<i>Bocconcini con Speck</i> (Mozzarella with Speck)	220

Primi

<i>Zuppa Valdostana</i> (Soup of the Valle d'Aosta)	221
<i>Pasta con Sugo all'Arista di Maiale</i> (Pasta with Roasted Pork Sauce)	223
<i>Penne con Spinaci, Pignoli ed Uvette</i> (Penne with Spinach, Pine Nuts, and Raisins)	225
<i>Risotto alla Milanese</i> (Risotto with Saffron)	227
<i>Pasta con Radicchio e Pancetta</i> (Pasta with Radicchio and Pancetta)	229

Secondi

<i>Salmone al Pepe Verde</i> (Salmon with Green Peppercorns)	231
<i>Stracotto al Vino Rosso</i> (Beef Braised in Red Wine)	233
<i>Petto di Pollo Farcito alla Valdostana</i> (Sautéed Chicken Breast Stuffed with Fontina)	235
<i>Polpettine al Arancio e Menta</i> (Meatballs with Orange and Mint)	237

Contorni

<i>Patate Arroste al Forno</i> (Oven-Roasted Potatoes)	239
<i>Radicchio di Treviso in Padella</i> (Sautéed Radicchio)	240
<i>Cavolo in Padella</i> (Pan-Braised Cabbage)	241

Dolci

<i>Pere in Caramello al Pernod</i> (Pears in Pernod Caramel)	242
<i>Tartine con Frangipane e Prugne Fresche</i> (Frangipane and Plum Tart)	244
<i>Tiramisú, o Semifreddo al Caffè</i> (Espresso and Mascarpone Trifle)	247



BREAD

<i>Pane Casareccio</i> (Home-Style Bread)	258
<i>Pane Tipo Altamura o Materese</i> (Traditional Bread of Altamura or Matera)	262
<i>Pane al Lievito Naturale</i> (Naturally Leavened Bread)	266
Variations on the Bread Recipes	269

Appendix

<i>Affettati</i> (Cold Cuts)	271
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preface: a personal note

THE DAY AFTER WE GOT MARRIED, my husband Caleb and I flew on one-way tickets and moved to Italy. While Caleb had been to Europe, been to Italy, I had never crossed the Atlantic before, and I was no seasoned traveler. At twenty-five, we were embarking on an unusual yearlong honeymoon, settling in a small town southeast of Florence.

We went to Italy looking for the romance and history of a place. We were searching for adventure, a sensibility captured like an old-fashioned snapshot. I imagined a moment of suspension where we'd see ourselves staring into the camera as if it might have been sixty years ago—the look on our faces so distant and youthful—thinking that the expression in our eyes and mouths said, “This is the time of our lives,” but knowing with the passage of time that what we really felt was hunger.

Our time spent living in, leaving, and returning to Italy follows a map laid out by that hunger, the known and lesser known roads that took us to kitchens warmed by wood-fired ovens where we learned to roast chestnuts; to tables set with linen and somebody's best—but well-loved, used, and so chipped—china; to cantinas in old abandoned abbeys to drink red wine; and to eat from the hands of Generosity herself. In following the way of hunger, we began to understand how commingled it is with basic wants: for love, for warmth, for hope, for transformation. How hard to isolate one experience and say, “Oh, yes, it was that which changed me forever.” But I do know that

on our way to Italy, our experiences took us from a known world and disassembled our assumptions, and it was the food of Italy that put us back together, that taught us a new way to study, to love, to eat and drink, to be ourselves.

Hunger pushes you from place to place. At each watering hole you hope to be satisfied. Hunger is like traveling, and traveling is inherently about searching for something outside ourselves and letting it work its way in; it's about the length of a journey and what happens when you stay somewhere for a while. These elements of hunger are the reasons why Caleb and I opened a bakery and restaurant in Vermont that we named *Pane e Salute*, which means "bread and health," a toast to the essence of living. Our bakery has grown into an *osteria*, and this word is crucial. *Osteria* encompasses all we hope to offer at our table; it is a place of hospitality, a place where you can get a dish of handmade pasta, a bowl of soup, a glass of wine or beer. In the Middle Ages, *osteria* was defined as an inn, a tavern where you could eat a warm meal, be warmed by wine, and find a warm bed. While now it is more loosely defined (we offer two of the three), the sensibility of the word remains the same, stemming from its Latinate root "to host."

We returned to the States from Italy informed by our hunger. After reestablishing our lives here, we wanted to feed and refresh our own memory, our nostalgia for the Italian way of life that had affected us so. We wanted to return the hospitality and generosity we found in Italy in order to honor our hosts, and we wanted to offer those same things to others here. These are still our wants.

Without knowing it, shortly after arriving in Italy that first time together, we were already learning the lesson that ultimately led us to cook and feed people in the manner of Italy: When at the table, all else is suspended. This was the moment of suspension we'd sought, that sense of time delayed. Caleb and I paused at a trattoria near Lago Trasimeno with two friends and their family. And here was that illusive snapshot: we made a convivial crew, laughing at slightly bawdy jokes and listening to a captivating lecture on the painter Signorelli. We delighted in our food, the ability of our cooks, the generosity of our hosts. Caleb and I were there and not there; we were learning to be ghosts; we'd exited our previous lives and stepped into the

world of central Italy. How had we somehow appeared at this table with this family eating together near the end of a long, hot summer? We didn't belong through nature, we were related to no one. The odds against us sitting there—of even making this move to another country—were so improbable, so steep, we felt like apparitions.

In my partial memory of this scene, the earthy colors somehow seem to have washed over into blue-green and white. As if we sat next to the sea, light refracting all over and around us, during that meal, the lines of our bodies turn, fading in and out, but we are arriving there, like a slowly accumulating yet flickering transmission of information, emotion, matter, and exhaustion, until we are finally present at the table. Aside from the shapes of our faces and the flurry of a hand in the air or a finger tracing the rim of a wineglass, there is a certain veracity in all our expressions: the concerns, trepidations, and loves spinning in our heads are gone for those few hours. We could do only one thing: take the day in through the aperture of our mouths.

In the end, this is a book about romance—a place, cuisine, art, and history—and a book about the *other* side of romance: the hard work, the ruthlessness of progress, and the choices born out of the contrast between context and content, choices that are defining the reality of living in Italy today. It is a fierce reality of people who must work, for all the same reasons we all must work, but also because theirs is a culture built on centuries of hard work. This is a book about preservation.

This book is also a true collaboration. Caleb and I have taken this journey together: in work, in love, and in adventure. In our efforts to share our experiences, we have included both our perspectives here, and as a result the book is divided into two first-person narratives. My voice informs the essays; Caleb's the recipes.

So, this is a book about the food we've eaten in Italy, about a risotto made with saffron and *parmigiano*, about a biscotto made with anise and almonds taken with a small glass of sweet wine. About leaving home, about finding a place to stay, this is a book born out of desire or parts of desire: hunger and love.



a note on our recipes

AS DEIRDRE AND I have been developing this book, we have come to understand that its purpose is an extension of the mission at our restaurant and bakery: to communicate the style of life we learned in Italy. We are still learning.

Our restaurant has become a way to preserve not only part of our past, but a larger historical past that is still important to the present: Italy. So much of the Western world can be illuminated and explained by what you will find in Italy, especially when it comes to art.

We met a winemaker, Massimo Martinelli, from the Piemonte who has written a book called *Il Barolo Come lo Sento Io*. Although the title of the English version has been translated as *Barolo and How I Know It*, the original *sentio* comes from the verb *sentire*, meaning “to sense.” We believe cooking is an art form like any other: you learn the techniques, you learn what those techniques feel like, and then you learn by intuition, instinct, repetition, and your senses. This is an Italian philosophy we have observed in action countless times. This is how we approach the preparation and eating of food, and it is a method of success we’ve been taught by our Italian hosts and mentors, and how I encourage you to approach your time in the kitchen: Trust your senses and pay attention to the information they provide. Listen to the food sizzling in the oil—and adjust the flame. Taste the sauce—salt will bring out its flavor. See the color of the meat—a few more minutes in the pan will bring it to perfection. Touch

the dough—its movement and lightness tell you it has risen enough to go into the oven. Trust yourself. Smell the wine . . .

Then trust your judgment as you respond to that information and draw upon the memories of other dishes you have prepared (either with success or—even more valuable—failure) and eaten and the memories of dishes prepared by others. Memory may prove over time to be your most useful tool while you work in your kitchen and become an ever more confident cook.

But then there is the actual cooking . . .

Recipes are simply guides, records of how a dish has been prepared in the past. It's interesting that the English word "recipe" is actually the imperative form of the Latin verb *recipere*, meaning "to take," a command to collect the goods with which to make a meal. Our modern definition of the English noun "recipe" now includes both a list of ingredients and a set of instructions. Armed with these two things, we still cannot be assured of success.

The cooking of a dish is a sequence of physical and sensory experiences guiding us from one technical step to the next. It is to these experiences that we must pay attention, because they will embed themselves more deeply in our memory than "what to do next." They become part of us, the dish becomes part of us, and we become connected to something outside of us: the history of the dish and all the people who have prepared and eaten it before us. We are having the same experiences they have had in another time and place. This is how a dish becomes classic.

Temperature, humidity, the ripeness of a vegetable, the cook's sense of timing—all play a part in what is placed on the table, and each is a variable. Your awareness of the state of your cooking environment and your responsiveness to those factors will elevate what comes to the table.

Nature is primary to cooking well. Just as recipes are a guide and your senses are the gauge, ingredients are the essence of cooking. Many people plan a meal ahead of time, make their shopping list, then go out and gather the ingredients. But what if it's January and the tomatoes are not very good that day? In Italy, a meal is approached from the other side. You go to the market first—old-fashioned, year-round, outdoor markets where the vendors bring their produce, meats, and cheeses. You see what looks best, and then you plan the meal around these things. Usually what's best is what's

grown not too far away and is in season. This still holds true. Peaches aren't available in March or November. But fava beans are ready in March, spring green and waiting to be shelled. Chestnuts naturally fall from the tree in late October and early November, a treat that heralds the coming of winter.

In order to highlight this principle of seasonal cooking we've divided this book into four sections, four seasons. For each season the recipes focus on dishes that use ingredients available at that time of the year. Within each of these four sections we offer enough recipes so that the reader can choose to create a four-course meal appropriate to a particular season. Each season is also divided into sections: *antipasti* (appetizers), *primi* (first courses), *secondi* (second courses), *contorni* and *insalate* (side dishes and salads to be served with or after the second course), and *dolci* (desserts).

The recipes we offer here ask something of the cook in exchange: to work by the senses; to pay attention; to seek a balance and completion of the senses when you and your guests sit down; to enjoy the meal you've prepared with family or friends. These recipes are for simple, comforting, and graceful food.

Asparagi alla Milanese

ASPARAGUS WITH FRIED EGGS

THIS IS THE DISH to eat on a warm June day, outside in the sunshine, with a basket of crusty rolls and a glass of cold beer or crisp Lugana from the shores of Lake Garda. It is simple and satisfying, especially if you are blessed with your own asparagus patch, or a neighbor who has one, as freshly cut asparagus is worlds beyond that which must travel far to reach your local produce purveyor. This recipe is for one person, but simply multiply to suit the number dining at your table.

2-inch-thick bundle fresh asparagus

2 to 3 tablespoons butter

Salt and freshly ground pepper

2 eggs

Parmigiano-Reggiano

Wash and trim the asparagus of any tough, fibrous ends. If the asparagus is quite large, you can peel the bottom half of the shoots to remove the tough outer layers. In a large skillet with a lid bring $\frac{1}{2}$ inch of lightly salted water to the boil and lay in the asparagus. Cover and cook until the bottoms of the shoots are just tender when poked with a fork. (Very slender asparagus will cook in 6 to 8 minutes, and fat shoots can take up to 15 minutes, but you must pay attention, as overcooked asparagus is limp and all wrong for this dish.) Using the lid to hold back the asparagus, pour off the water. Melt a little butter in the pan with the asparagus and season with salt and pepper. Remove the asparagus immediately to the serving plate(s) and quickly wipe

out the skillet with a paper towel if there are bits of asparagus remaining in the pan. Restore the heat under the pan to medium low, melt a little more butter, crack the eggs into the pan, season with a little salt and pepper and gently cook them to your preferred state of doneness. (At a café, this dish would be served sunny-side up or over easy so the broken yolks provide a dressing for the asparagus.) Slide the cooked eggs directly on top of the asparagus. Top with a blanket of freshly grated *Parmigiano-Reggiano* and serve immediately.

Carabaccia

POTATO AND ONION SOUP WITH FRESH PEAS

WHILE MAKING this soup with spring peas, imagine a rainy day in the fall when the days are beginning to be cold more than they are warm. You return home after a long day of work, and perhaps you are too tired and distracted to compose and prepare a whole meal for yourself or anyone else in your household. But if you're lucky, or at least foresighted enough, you can simply go to the freezer for this soup and put it on the stove to warm up while you go about all the little chores of transition and homecoming.

This is an easy soup to prepare. It is definitely a peasant soup, and very satisfying. The potatoes should be waxy potatoes (which is to say, not a mealy baking potato like a Russet or Idaho). It is not necessary to peel them. I recommend making the soup at least a day before you serve it, but you can get away with serving it fresh from the pot, as long as the soup has enough time to cook very thoroughly. This recipe makes a lot, because soup made in quantity turns out better than soup made for only a few. And it seems to me that soup should always be made to feed many. Soup for few seems so . . . paltry. If it's more than you need, call some friends up—right now!—or freeze the remainder for another day. Serves 8 to 10.

- 4 cups chicken stock and/or water, plus extra water
- 2 to 3 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 to 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 medium to large yellow onions, diced small
- 8 to 9 cups diced potatoes (scrubbed well, but not peeled)

Salt and freshly ground pepper
4 cups fresh, frozen, or canned (drained and rinsed) peas
Parmigiano-Reggiano, a chunk for grating
Extra-virgin olive oil

Heat the chicken stock or fresh water in a saucepan till it is just steaming. In a large soup pot, heat the oil and butter and add the diced onions, stirring well to coat them. Let the onions soften and brown just slightly over medium heat.

Add the potatoes to the pot, along with some salt and pepper, and again stir everything around. Add enough warmed stock and/or water to cover the potatoes by about 2 inches. (If you have stock left over, keep it handy. The soup may need thinning later.) Bring the soup to a gentle simmer, cover the pot, and let cook until the potatoes are tender, about 30 to 40 minutes. (To check, use the back of a spoon to mash a piece of potato against the side of the pot. It should mash easily.)

Add the peas, bring the soup back to a simmer, and cook the soup for 8 to 10 more minutes.

This next step can be done by hand or with a blender: Either mash some of the potatoes and peas against the pot by using a wooden spoon or a potato masher, or puree about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the soup in the blender. (*Careful:* The soup is hot. Set the blender lid on allowing a slight gap for steam to escape and cover the lid with a kitchen towel; puree small amounts at a time; and use short pulses or low speeds at first to keep the soup at bay. If you are serving the soup the next day, simply let it cool in the refrigerator before pureeing.) Return the blended portion to the pot and stir well. The soup should not be too thick. (It's not porridge.) Add some leftover stock or more water if it seems too thick. Taste the soup and correct the salt and pepper.

Ladle into bowls. Grate fresh *Parmigiano-Reggiano* onto each serving, drizzle a little extra-virgin olive oil over top, and serve.