



PANTARUL  
*at home*



PANTARUL\* AT HOME

{ feels  
like  
home }

Ana-Marija Bujić

\**noun*, Dubrovnik dialect for *fork*



## FEELS LIKE HOME



Key word: relaxed.

Relaxed is how we wanted and still want our guests to feel: to forget about the dress code and to enjoy themselves. Our job is to make sure that the food is delicious, and the service kind and attentive, and to play music that creates a pleasant atmosphere. The only thing we leave to our guests is to make sure the mood at the table is right. It has been scientifically proven that good company makes food taste better and that atmosphere is crucial for our perception of food. (Can you remember the best meal(s) of your life? Did you, by chance, have them while on holiday or madly in love? Yes, I thought so.)

If you wish to make a contribution in any domain, the easiest—and usually the most fruitful—way to do so is to start with yourself: write the book you'd like to read, create the product you'd like to use or, in our case, open a restaurant where you'd love to eat. (Actually, we often want to have dinner in Pantarul even now, but if you're constantly scanning the situation, the crucial element of relaxation goes out of the window).

What does all of this mean in Pantarul's day-to-day life? Instead of food piled high up on the plate, we are happiest with a variety of dishes spread out on the table, allowing everyone to sample several different ones. And if those dishes are served on assorted, hand-made plates, our joy is beyond measure. We change our menu three times a year: in April, July, and October. Our spring menu is loaded with short-lived goodies, the summer menu reflects the powerful flavors of the sunny Mediterranean, and the winter menu one provides nourishment and comfort in the colder part of the year. If we are

suddenly struck with inspiration for something new, we always include it on the smaller tapas menu, the one we change on a weekly basis.

There are no tablecloths because we like everything to run quickly and smoothly. The placemats featuring the menu list all the main ingredients in a dish because there have been so many times when we've asked each other: "What did the waiter say, what's the green stuff?" All the wines are served by the glass because we like to start with a glass of white, continue with some red, and end on a semi-sweet note. We have never kept anyone at the door due to their attire because we know that people often become hungry regardless of the plan. The background music that we play to set the mood for your meal often includes old and new hits by U2 because those are the songs that are featured on our playlists at home too. We hope to achieve an energetic but measured mood that will create a distinct feel when you enter the restaurant. There is no fussy presentation. Just good food. We want our staff and ourselves to lead healthy lives, and this is why Pantarul is always closed on Mondays, even at the peak of the tourist season. That way, our chef can go swimming for two days in August.

We love our regulars, know them by name, and consider them to be the most accurate measure of quality and success. Children are welcome, and we have high chairs, finger puppets, picture books, and Pantarul's coloring pages waiting for them. This is how gourmets of the future are raised. #FeelsLikeHome





## TIME TO SET THE TABLE

Deciding how to set the table is one of my favorite parts of inviting people over, but I realize it isn't everyone's cup of tea. If you like to keep it simple, by all means, do so. As I already said, the only thing that matters are the people around the table, not the things on it.

However, as I truly enjoy this process, I will share some of my thoughts on the matter.

Also, feel free to disagree, just as my friend Marijeta does. She told me at a dinner we had at my place: "Ana-Marija, I don't think I could live with so many different glasses in my house. I need to have a set." And that's fine. If you go by Marijeta's school of thought, skip to the section on flowers.

Before taking any action, think about the occasion, your guests, and the mood you are trying to create. A mid-August dinner won't have the same feel to it as a New Year's Eve celebration. Once you've decided on the mood, pick out the colors based on what you have available. You can go for an eclectic approach, but usually sticking to two or three colors (or mixing a color or two with neutrals) makes for a put-together look. If you decide to keep things monochromatic (white only, for example), include plenty of different textures to avoid a factory look. Also make sure to add some shine to the table. Cutlery usually provides a good amount, but a flickering candle here and there will really make the table glow.

### TABLECLOTHS AND NAPKINS

My favorite materials are linen, cotton, and denim. Jacquard napkins add a polished touch, and if you want to be on the more casual side, go for frayed edges. There is no need to iron linen tablecloths thoroughly; the slightly crinkled look gives a very natural, homey, and relaxed vibe to the tablescape. (I do hope this trend sticks around for a very \*very\* long time.)

For a more sophisticated feel, think about **layering tablecloths**. The extra layer(s) will mute sounds and make the table feel softer, all of which gives a high-end feel (think Michelin-starred restaurants). Besides this psychological element, there is a practical issue that layering can solve: if you don't have the ideal size tablecloth for your table, combine two, and you're good to go.

Even though paper napkins are the most convenient choice, I like the fabric ones. They are an easy way to liven up a table setting, and with all the different napkin-folding options, I cannot resist using them. Tie them with a ribbon or a piece of rope or string, add a flower or a sprig of rosemary, or spray paint some foliage and tie it to the napkin for a wow effect.



### TABLEWARE

As mentioned above, I have thoroughly embraced mismatched pieces of tableware. I do have some basic items in white and/or neutrals as well as some sets of glasses, but most often I'll go for a combination.

Start with a set of white plates. That's your base. Then decide on a color palette and keep an eye out for pretty pieces that match your aesthetics. If you keep the colors coherent, you can buy one-off pieces from various ceramicists or other sources and still get a pulled-together look.

As far as wine glasses are concerned, if you're just starting out, a single set of larger white wine glasses will do. If you're looking to expand your collection, get a set of large, "Bordeaux" glasses for red wine or some coupe Champagne glasses. (I like them because they can double as dessert or cocktail glasses.)

Finally, a note on trivets, those more-often-than-not forgotten pieces of the table puzzle. If you're planning on serving food to share, you will need them, especially if warm pots are part of the equation.

I usually opt for wooden or brass ones, but they can really be any material or style that fits the rest of your tableware.

My love of food photography and styling has led me to buy photogenic tableware from various sources—flea markets and eBay being at the top of my favorites list. Don't be afraid to buy secondhand, but if you plan on actually using the items (as opposed to taking pictures of them), make sure that the items are food-safe and usable. And don't forget to enjoy the hunt, as secondhand shopping is how you will find the most unique pieces: tableware, flatware, and glassware too. Vintage tableware has a special charm, and even if it is a little bit chipped, it will add soul to the table.



#### PLACE CARDS

There is something special about sitting at the table and finding your name on a card, but I tend to reserve this practice for very special occasions, as I feel it lends an air of formality.

However, if name cards are appropriate for the occasion, there are enough options to choose from to fill up a book on the subject. I find the prettiest table settings usually include a printed-out menu (avoid plain white paper; go for something either more rustic such as brown paper or more high-end such as card paper with a silky finish), a ribbon, and some greenery.

However, the most personal touch will be added if you write by hand. If you know that you'll be serving one of your popular recipes, you can even write it up on a piece of paper and have a copy ready for each one of your guests. Tuck it underneath their plates for a little surprise. True, it is some extra work, but it can be a meaningful memento for your guests to take home.

#### FLOWERS

If you're lucky to have a good **florist**, by all means let the pros do their job. They will give you the best advice on garlands, centerpieces, or separate stems you can use in multiple vases.

If the florist's is not an option, go out and **forage** some twigs, branches, weeds, or dried plants. Once you start paying attention, you'll see potential decorating material everywhere around you. For instance, a single walk in my neighborhood (which is far from a botanical garden) left me with enough material for four to five different decorating schemes—some rosemary, some berries, several kinds of dried weeds, vine branches, and so on.

The third source of flower power is the **supermarket**. True, the blooms you can get there are almost always the same, but if you combine them with some foraged elements or separate a bouquet into various smaller vases, you'll get a much more interesting effect. The supermarket can also be an excellent source of potted plants that you can use in your tablescape. Just get creative with the plant pots or simply wrap

the pots in decorative paper. If you want to get several kinds of flowers, try sticking to the same color family. Different flowers that are similar in color will look great together. You can also use them to adorn napkins or even cut the stems off and use only the blossoms to create a table centerpiece.

Finally, you can go for **dried flowers** as well; they are reusable and therefore very convenient. If you feel they lack color for your specific purposes, you can always use spray paint to make them pop.

Whatever you do, just make sure that your flowers don't stand in the way of communication; two people trying to hold a conversation with a giant cactus standing in between them may be cartoon material, but in real life, such situations are very annoying.

#### FLOWERS IN BOTTLES

I'm especially fond of using bottles instead of vases, and I tend to collect interesting ones whenever I run across them: mini wine bottles, small olive oil or balsamic vinegar bottles, and, most frequently, liquor bottles (those tend to be quite decorative). Once, during a trip to Spain that I took with my brother, I even asked the waitress if I could take a bright blue water bottle from a restaurant where we had lunch. She smiled as if it were the greatest conspiracy of all times and allowed me to sneak the bottle out of the restaurant. It's still sitting on my bookshelf and is occasionally turned into a vase.



## MUSHROOM CROSTINI

Do you know the difference between *bruschetta* and *crostini*? No? Neither did I for a long time, and I never gave it much thought. But the difference is there: *bruschetta* (from Italian *bruscare* “to roast over coals”), is traditionally made using a large and thick slice of rustic Italian or sourdough-style bread. It is typically grilled over a fire to achieve the famous crunch and generously sprinkled with olive oil. *Crostini* (Italian, “little toasts”), on the other hand are usually smaller (like baguette), toasted on a baking sheet in the oven and rarely eaten without a topping. So now that you’ve got the theory covered, let’s do some mushroom crostini practice.

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### Serves 6

#### CROSTINI

1 large baguette, cut into 1-cm  
(½-inch) slices  
olive oil, for brushing  
1 clove garlic, halved

#### TOPPING

100 g / 3 ½ ounces cream cheese  
1 ½ tablespoons finely chopped  
fresh rosemary  
salt  
freshly ground black pepper  
60 g / ¼ cup (½ stick) butter  
3 shallots, finely chopped  
2 cloves garlic, minced  
700 g / 1 ½ pounds wild  
mushrooms or button mushrooms,  
coarsely chopped  
1 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves  
1 teaspoon freshly squeezed lemon  
juice  
50 ml / 3 tablespoons vermouth or  
semi-sweet white wine

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F. Brush (don’t just drizzle) both sides of the baguette slices with olive oil, rub them with the garlic, and arrange them on two large baking sheets.

Bake until golden, 15 to 20 minutes, rotating sheets halfway through. (If the undersides are not browning, turn the crostini over once during baking). Let them cool on the baking sheets.

Combine cream cheese, rosemary, salt, and pepper in a bowl. Taste, adjust the seasoning, and set aside.

Melt the butter in a large pan, add the shallots, and fry gently for 5 minutes until they are translucent but not brown. Add the garlic, mushrooms, thyme, and lemon juice. Season with salt and pepper, and fry for 5 more minutes over medium heat, stirring frequently. Add the wine, increase the heat and simmer for 1 to 2 minutes, until the alcohol has evaporated. Adjust the seasoning.

To assemble the crostini, spread ½ to 1 teaspoon of cream cheese base on each piece of toasted bread and add a generous tablespoon of the topping. Serve warm.

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**MAKE AHEAD:** Cream cheese and crostini can be made up to 3 days ahead of time and stored in separate airtight containers. The crostini can be reheated before serving if desired. The mushroom topping can be made a day in advance, covered, and refrigerated. Reheat it, taste, and adjust the seasoning if necessary, and add to the crostini as close to serving time as possible.



## BRUSCHETTA FIVE WAYS



Depending on the quantity you prepare and the number of kinds of bruschetta you decide to serve, if you add a hearty salad on the side, bruschetta can even be a whole informal meal shared with friends while watching a game, a movie, or just chatting on the terrace in summertime. If possible, after rubbing the bread with garlic and brushing it with olive oil, char it on the grill. If not, a grill pan will suffice.

## BRUSCHETTA WITH TOMATOES AND ANCHOVIES

*Serves 4*

200 g / 7 ounces cherry tomatoes  
100 g / 3 ½ ounces marinated  
anchovies  
salt  
freshly ground black pepper  
olive oil

Cut the cherry tomatoes in quarters and the anchovies into ½-cm / ¼-inch pieces. Season with salt and pepper, drizzle with olive oil, and arrange on top of the grilled bread.

**MAKE AHEAD:** The tomato and anchovy mix can be prepared 1 day in advance.

BRUSCHETTA WITH PROSCIUTTO  
SPREAD

pieces of prosciutto  
olive oil  
truffle oil, if desired

In a large pot, bring water to a boil and add the pieces of prosciutto. Cook until you can pierce them with a fork. The exact duration will depend on how big and dry the pieces are, but usually no shorter than 1 hour over high heat. Transfer the pieces of smoked ham to a blender, reserve the cooking liquid and mix until they turn into crumbs. Then add some cooking water and olive oil and mix again. Keep adding water and oil little by little until the mix reaches a spreadable consistency. If using, add some truffle oil for the aroma at the end.

**MAKE AHEAD:** The spread can be kept covered in a refrigerator up to 1 week.

## BRUSCHETTA WITH SMOKED SALMON AND DILL MAYONNAISE

*Serves 4*

4 tablespoons mayonnaise  
2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh dill  
1 tablespoon lemon juice  
grated zest of 1 lemon  
100 g / 3 ½ ounces smoked salmon

In a bowl, combine the mayonnaise, dill, lemon juice, and lemon zest. Arrange the smoked salmon on top of the grilled bread and top with the mayonnaise.

**MAKE AHEAD:** The aromatic mayonnaise can be made and refrigerated 12 hours in advance.

## BRUSCHETTA WITH MASCARPONE, SMOKED HAM AND DRIED FIGS

*Serves 4 to 6*

150 g / ⅓ pound smoked ham  
50 g / 1 ¾ ounces dried figs  
200 g / 7 ounces mascarpone  
4 tablespoons finely chopped fresh  
chives  
Finely chop the smoked ham  
and smoked figs. Combine with  
mascarpone. Add the chives and  
season to taste.

**MAKE AHEAD:** This spread can be prepared and refrigerated up to 2 days ahead.

## BRUSCHETTA WITH EGGPLANT SPREAD

*Serves 4*

- 1 large eggplant (400 to 500 g) / 14 to 16 ounces
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- ½ teaspoon sweet smoked paprika
- 1 tablespoon freshly squeezed lemon juice
- 2 tablespoons finely chopped fresh parsley
- olive oil
- freshly ground black pepper

Preheat the oven to 200°C / 390°F and line a roasting tray with parchment paper.

Wash the eggplant, dry it, put it in the roasting tray, and place in the oven. Roast until tender. Let the eggplant cool and then scoop the flesh with a spoon.

In a bowl, use a fork to combine the eggplant, garlic, paprika, lemon juice, and parsley. The texture should remain coarse. Season to taste.

**MAKE AHEAD:** The eggplant spread can be prepared and refrigerated for up to 2 days.



## TOMATO AND ANCHOVY BUNS

For a while, these buns were the only thing I ate at Pantarul; I couldn't stop. They are a variation on the traditional stuffed bread from the Island of Komiža (*komiška pogača*) which is generally something I love, but this style of serving it in individual, soft, warm portions is something else. The advantage of preparing the stuffed bread in individual servings is a hint of elegance and avoiding cutting the bread later. However, this also means a little bit of extra work when you are shaping the buns as opposed to just making one big pie. Whether you prefer the traditional large stuffed bread or these mini versions, a glass of red to go with it is a must.

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*Makes 12 to 16 buns*

### DOUGH

500 ml / 2 cups lukewarm water  
1 tablespoon honey  
20 g / 2 tablespoons fresh yeast  
1 kg / 2.2 pounds flour  
1 tablespoon salt  
100 ml / 6 tablespoons olive oil

### STUFFING

5 tablespoons olive oil  
3 large red onions, thinly sliced  
10 cloves garlic, minced  
400 g / 14 ounces canned tomatoes  
½ tablespoon plucked fresh thyme leaves  
½ tablespoon finely chopped fresh rosemary  
1 bunch of parsley, finely chopped  
freshly ground black pepper  
12 to 16 drained salted anchovies in oil (about 90 g / 3 ounces)  
24 to 32 drained marinated anchovies (about 180 g / 6 ounces)

Put 100 ml / 6 tablespoons of the lukewarm water in a glass and stir in the honey. Crumble in the yeast, cover the glass with a plate, and leave it in a warm place for 10 minutes until the yeast becomes frothy.

Combine the frothy yeast and all the remaining ingredients for the dough in a bowl and then knead the dough for about 10 minutes on a lightly floured work surface.

Place the dough in a large bowl, cover the bowl with plastic wrap, and leave it in the refrigerator for several hours or overnight, until it has doubled in size.

In the meantime, prepare the stuffing. Heat the olive oil in a large skillet on medium heat. Add the onion and cook until completely softened. Add the garlic, canned tomatoes, thyme, and rosemary and cook until the liquid has evaporated a bit, about 10 minutes over medium heat. Remove the skillet from the heat, add the parsley, and season with pepper.

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F and line a baking tray with parchment paper.

Divide the dough into 80-g / 3-ounce balls. Roll each out with a rolling pin on a floured work surface. Place a tablespoon of the stuffing in the middle and add two marinated anchovies and one salted anchovy fillet to each bun. Seal the buns carefully so that there are no cracks at the bottom. This will prevent the stuffing from leaking out. Place them on the prepared baking tray, smooth side up, brush them with olive oil and let them rise for 30 to 45 minutes.

Bake them for about 20 minutes at 180°C / 350°F.

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**MAKE AHEAD:** These stuffed buns can be made 2 days in advance. Let them cool completely at room temperature, then wrap them tightly in plastic film and keep them in the refrigerator. Before serving, reheat them for 6 to 10 minutes at 200°C / 390°F.



## MILOŠ FAMILY

### THE STORY OF PLAVAC

“Success boils down to lots of effort, hard work and a pinch of reflection,” Ivan said casually as he drove his pick-up truck up the steep and narrow paths of the Miloš vineyards, and those words kept echoing in my mind for days to come, words so sincere and so true.

He showed us the dry soil from which the vines draw its very best. Here and there, he showed us a stalk or two of weeds that, in a vineyard that has never felt a drop of herbicide, are plucked by hand. He showed us the differences between the old and the new vines. He also showed us the gorgeous greenery of the vines whose color alone reveals that it has never been treated with unwanted chemicals. “State inspectors don’t need further proof but this green hue.” He showed us the slopes where the Miloš family grows herbs for their teas, and still others, basking in the sun, which Frano Miloš, Ivan’s father and the architect behind this magical wine story, is planning to tame.

Walking through the vineyard in the middle of the vintage, which in 2018 hit a record regarding its early start, we munched on some *plavac* grapes, straight from the vine, and we took a few bunches to our little one at home. It was a heartfelt gift from Ivan, and Karmen put her heart and soul into eating as much as she could as quickly as she could. Once you are certain that the grapes you are feeding your child have been grown following the highest ecological standards, you don’t worry if they gobble them down by the handful. You can be equally care-free while pouring wine made from those very grapes into your guests’ glasses.

*Plavac* made by the Miloš family has been a constant in Pantarul from the very beginning. Glass by glass, bottle by bottle—in our restaurant a river of this wine has been drunk.

The small print in our wine list says: *indigenous grape variety, complex, spices, leather, good tannin structure*. And many other compliments could be paid to this well-rounded, soft wine. However, the most important ingredient is one that cannot be listed on traditional labels but can be felt by the person enjoying the wine—the great care put into even the smallest of details, the love for the work one does, the family commitment to their common vision. When we pour a glass of *Miloš*, all of the above lands in our guest’s hands.

We left the vineyard at dusk. On our left, the sun, just like a ball of fire, lit up the skies above Pelješac as we slipped into Ponikve, into the winery among the barrels, some of which are more than a century old. The Miloš family appreciates old barrels, which allow the *plavac* grape to shine in its purity, without any secondary aromas. And among those very barrels, we felt just like we do in Pantarul, like being at home. When the conversation flows naturally, time flies. Later we were joined for a short while by Ivan’s sister Franica and his brother Josip. Smiling and discreet, all the siblings are included in the day-to-day life of the vineyard and the winery so their dad Frano doesn’t have to worry. His vision is in safe hands.







*dips , spreads and pâtés*



## LABNEH

“OK, and then?” asked my mother-in-law, carefully listening with a pen between her fingers. “And then nothing,” said I, and Zora could not believe her ears. Actually, this is barely a recipe as *labneh* is the simplest spread you can imagine. Moreover, it is so versatile that its uses could easily fill a cookbook on their own. The only important detail is the kind of yogurt you use: it must be full-fat as the liquid ones aren’t appropriate for straining. Once the *labneh* is done, you can form it into balls and roll them in various spices, herbs, or chopped/ground nuts. You can use it just as you would use sour cream or cream cheese. You can mix it with vegetables and make a spread to your own liking, use it in your sandwiches, or even as the base for a cheesecake. I usually form the *labneh* into balls and serve them chilled and sprinkled with some fresh herbs and olive oil with Roasted Tomato and Eggplant Salad on the side (p. 186).

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### *Makes about 20 balls*

1 kg / 2 pounds full-fat yogurt  
(3.2% fat)  
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

Put the yogurt into a bowl, add the salt, and mix thoroughly.

Line a sieve with several layers of cheesecloth or a sterilized kitchen towel. Scoop the yogurt into the sieve and strain all the liquid you can.

Fold the excess cheesecloth over the yogurt, place the sieve on a bowl, and then in the refrigerator, and let the yogurt strain overnight.

Roll the *labneh* into balls or simply serve as a spread in a bowl.

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**MAKE AHEAD:** *Labneh* can be prepared up to 3 days in advance and if you marinate the balls in a generous amount of olive oil, they will keep in the refrigerator up to a week.





## MIRKO MATIĆ

### SECRET SPROUT GARDEN

*“Down at the bottom of the garden, among the birds and the bees, there live a lot of little people, they’re called The Poddington Peas...”*

Anyone who, just like me, grew up eagerly awaiting evening cartoons in 1990s Croatia is bound to remember the BBC cartoon *Poddington Peas*—an animated series in which sweet peas live happily hidden from humans and are up to all sorts of mischief.

The image of *Poddington Peas* immediately came to mind as soon as we entered Mirko’s garden on a hot Sunday morning; it was a hidden oasis that you wouldn’t expect just passing by his home in the Ilijina Glavica neighborhood, in the very center of Dubrovnik. I don’t know if “garden” is the appropriate word here because where Mirko and his family are concerned, nature reigns over the inside and the outside of their home, on the terrace, in the improvised greenhouse, and in the garden itself.

And our first stop was the greenhouse where Mirko grows different kinds of sprouts and microgreens. Just like people, sprouts are in the best mood when they are well fed, hydrated, exposed to sunlight, and spending time at pleasant room temperature. The requirements of food, water, and light are relatively easy to meet, but maintaining optimal temperature during the hot summer months is no easy task, so Mirko’s sprouts have their very own air conditioning and ventilators.

“The notion of sustainability is already outdated; it has been replaced by permaculture and self-sufficiency.” As permaculture (permanent + agriculture) can be a confusing term, I asked Mirko to explain it a bit. He told us that permaculture

is an all-encompassing idea that concerns urban gardening, but that also belongs to a much wider framework of public space. The point of permaculture is conscious shaping of all the elements necessary for life (food, energy, shelter, etc.) in a planned and self-sufficient manner. The resources used should be available locally, and one should strive to create a local community of people sharing the same values and principles.

In Dubrovnik, a tourist Mecca often suffocating with hordes of guests from cruise ships (think Venice), a vision such as this one sounds utopian, but this is something of which Mirko is well aware, as he himself spent time working in the tourist sector. His way of participating in the tourist economy was unique: you could see him dressed in a Renaissance costume (in which the temperature certainly wasn’t as pleasant as the one his microgreens now enjoy), almost hovering above Stradun and selling replicas of historical maps. “I used to work a lot less and earn more, but the job I am doing now has meaning.”

And this is perfectly understandable—in his “Poddington Town” on Ilijina Glavica, he has the support of his wife Lana and the company of two wonderful children who have the privilege that not many growing up in an urban environment do: spending time in a garden full of plants, flowers, greenery, and hidden corners perfect for play and letting imagination run wild. As good as it gets.

The pleasure he derives from his work can—as always—be felt in the final product. The sprouts, microgreens, and edible flowers that Mirko brings to the restaurant are always impeccably fresh, tasty, and colorful, just the way they are supposed to be in order to add instant charm and wow factor to any dish.







## SPROUTS 101

Small but fierce! Even though they appear tiny and fragile, sprouts abound in elements important for our bodies—fiber, vitamins, fatty acids, and enzymes—and they are also an excellent source of minerals.

Additionally, they're rich in flavor, so they mustn't be viewed as just a picturesque topping that will add color to your dish. Quite to the contrary, sprouts and microgreens will add their own layer of flavor and texture, so be careful which ones you use. For instance, radish, dill, estragon, celery, and parsley sprouts are on the peppery side and much more appropriate to be used as an herb than a base ingredient.

Obviously, the perhaps-a-handful-of-these-purple-ones method is not one I would recommend. Taste the sprouts first, make sure they are a good fit with the other ingredients, and then add them sparingly. Sometimes even just two to three gentle green sprigs will be enough to bring the dish visually alive.

Sprouts should always be kept in the refrigerator and washed before use. The less time they spent in the fridge, the tastier and richer in nutrients they will be, so in the ideal case scenario, they will be used very shortly after picking.

To make your first steps in their use, try adding them to salads, sandwiches, and omelets or perhaps dairy-based dishes, soups, and smoothies.



## EGGPLANT PARMIGIANA

*Parmigiana* has been one of Pantarul's most popular meatless summer treats for years; it is rich and comforting and can be a meal in itself. Don't skimp on the cheese; it is what makes this dish pure bliss. Serve with a leafy lettuce on the side.

**Serves 6**

### SAUCE

3 tablespoons olive oil  
1 large red onion, chopped  
3 cloves garlic, minced  
3 oil-packed anchovy fillets  
1 to 2 peperoncini  
800 g / 29 ounces or 1 ¾ pounds  
canned tomatoes  
salt

### EGGPLANT AND ASSEMBLY

2 large eggplants, washed,  
unpeeled, sliced lengthwise 1-cm  
/ ½-inch thick  
salt  
120 g / ¾ cup plus 3 tablespoons  
flour  
100 ml / 6 tablespoons olive oil  
freshly ground black pepper  
6 to 8 sun-dried tomatoes in oil,  
drained and chopped  
300 to 400 g / 10 to 14 ounces  
mozzarella, grated  
100 g / 3.5 ounces Parmesan,  
finely grated  
¼ cup torn basil leaves

To make the sauce, heat the olive oil in a large nonstick pot over medium heat. Cook the onion, stirring often, until it is translucent, about 4 minutes. Add the garlic, anchovies, and peperoncini and cook, stirring, about 5 minutes. Add the canned tomatoes, breaking them up with a wooden spoon. Season to taste. Cook until the sauce thickens, approximately 20 minutes.

Lightly season the eggplant slices with salt. Place the flour in a shallow bowl. One at a time, coat the eggplant slices in flour and shake off the excess.

Heat the olive oil in a large skillet, preferably cast iron or nonstick, over medium heat. Cook as many eggplant slices as will comfortably fit in pan, turning them once, until deep golden, about 5 minutes. Transfer the slices to paper towels and immediately press them with more paper towels to absorb excess oil. Working in batches, repeat with the remaining slices. Let the eggplant cool. Taste and season with more salt if needed.

Preheat the oven to 180°C / 350°F. Spread 2 to 3 tablespoons of the sauce over the bottom of a 25-cm / 10-inch baking dish and top with a layer of eggplant slices. Then sprinkle with a third of the mozzarella. Scatter a third of the sun-dried tomatoes on top. Season lightly with pepper. Repeat the process twice more, until you have used up all the ingredients. Finish with a generous amount of mozzarella and Parmesan on top. Bake until the eggplant is custardy, approximately 1 hour.

Let the eggplant *parmigiana* rest for 30 minutes. Top with fresh basil leaves just before slicing.

**MAKE AHEAD:** *Parmigiana* can be made up to 2 days ahead. Let it cool completely, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate. Reheat in a 180°C / 350°F oven, uncovering halfway through, until bubbling gently at the edges.



## ZEBRA CAKE

This one is a visual showstopper. It takes a bit of patience when it comes to creating the zebra pattern in the filling, but it's bound to ignite some pastry-related conversation at the table. Zebra cake was featured on a special Women's Day menu in Pantarul, and it took us some trial and error to get it right. We eventually did and here is what we've come up with.

And let's not forget the bonus: you don't have to turn on the oven for this one.

*Makes one 25-cm (10-inch) cake /  
Serves 10 to 12*

### CRUST

250 g / ½ pound digestive biscuits  
60 g / ¼ cup (½ stick) butter, plus  
more for buttering the pan  
2 tablespoons cocoa powder, sifted  
1 tablespoon vanilla sugar

### BASE FOR THE FILLING

500 ml / 2 cups cream  
600 g / 1 ⅓ pounds or 21 ounces  
Greek yogurt  
2 tablespoons vanilla essence  
150 g / 1 cup 3 tablespoons  
powdered sugar

### WHITE CHOCOLATE FILLING

4 gelatin sheets  
120 g / 4 ounces or ¼ pound white  
chocolate  
125 ml / ½ cup Bailey's liqueur or  
milk

### DARK CHOCOLATE FILLING

4 gelatin sheets  
100 g / 3 ½ ounces dark chocolate  
2 tablespoons cocoa powder, sifted  
50 g / 3 ½ tablespoons brown  
sugar  
125 ml / ½ cup water

Line the base of a 25-cm / 10-inch springform pan with parchment paper. Grease the sides of the tin with butter.

Crush the biscuits in a blender. Melt the butter and combine with the biscuits, cocoa powder, and vanilla sugar. Press the mixture firmly on the bottom of the springform.

Soak the gelatin leaves for the white chocolate filling in Bailey's and soak the gelatin for the dark chocolate filling in water. Keep the gelatin in the liquid until it softens completely.

Whip the cream until soft peaks form. Add the powdered sugar and continue whisking. Then combine the whipped cream with the Greek yogurt and vanilla essence. Divide the filling into two equal parts. Place dark chocolate with brown sugar and cocoa powder in one bowl and white chocolate in another one and melt both chocolates separately in the microwave set on medium or over a pot of simmering water.

Squeeze the gelatin and in separate pots heat the remaining Bailey's and water; each should be hot, but not boiling. Remove from the heat, add the gelatin back to each pot and stir until it has melted.

To prepare the white chocolate filling, gently fold in the melted chocolate and the gelatin melted in Bailey's into one half of the filling base. In a separate bowl, combine the other half of the filling base with the melted dark chocolate and the gelatin melted in water.

Prepare two ladles or cups, one for the white, the other one for the dark filling.

In turns, gently pour the white chocolate filling and the dark chocolate filling over the middle of the crust. The height of the pouring will affect the pattern: if the filling sinks to the bottom, pour it gentler and closer to the surface and if the filling remains floating on the surface, pour it more forcefully from higher up.

Refrigerate the cake overnight. Gently slide a thin knife around the cake to separate it from the pan and then slide the cake onto a serving plate.

**MAKE AHEAD:** Zebra cake can be made up to 3 days in advance and kept in the refrigerator.





## ROASTED DRIED FIGS WITH SMOKED CHEESE AND SMOKED HAM

These are little flavor bombs; all the ingredients are bursting with that *mmm* factor. Due to their sweetness, they are not the ideal choice for a starter, but your guests will love seeing them at the end of a meal, especially those who are not too fond of dessert but like a little something to nibble on alongside that final glass of wine.

Instead of *prošek* you can use quality red port or another semi-sweet wine.

### Serves 4

12 large dried figs  
100 ml / 6 tablespoons *prošek*  
50 to 70 g / 1 ¾ to 2 ½ ounces  
smoked cheese, cut into 12 cubes  
6 slices smoked ham

Make a 1-cm / ½-inch cut on each fig with a small sharp knife. Then place the figs in a small pot, cover with *prošek* and cook until the wine has come to a boil and the figs have become tender.

Remove the figs from the liquid and insert a piece of cheese into each one. Heat the oven to 200°C / 390°F.

Halve the smoked ham slices lengthwise and wrap one half a slice around one fig. Secure with a toothpick.

Arrange the figs in a baking dish and place in the oven, cook under the broiler until the cheese has melted.

Continue cooking the *prošek* until it has reduced by half. Pour the reduction over the hot figs.

**MAKE AHEAD:** The figs can be cooked, stuffed, and wrapped in smoked ham 1 day ahead. Wrap tightly in plastic wrap and refrigerate. Unwrap them and place them under the broiler just before serving. The reduced *prošek* can also be kept in the refrigerator and reheated before use.













## RECIPE FOR A STRESS-FREE GATHERING

- Step No. 1** Prepare showstopping dishes a day or two in advance. Set the table a few hours before the guests' arrival and enjoy a bubble bath and a few pages of your favorite magazine.
- Step No. 2** When the doorbell rings, open the door with a smile on your face, without panic, forget all about pans and pots, pour everyone a drink, place all that amazing food on the table, laugh and have fun as if you were in your favorite restaurant, rather than just a few steps away from your own kitchen.

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With Pantarul's 110 detailed recipes adapted for the home cook and a solid plan, the recipe above is appropriate even for beginners. And while you're mastering the art of relaxed gatherings, discover snippets of the restaurant business and meet the people who create Pantarul's day-to-day life.

Ana-Marija Bujić is the author of *Da mi je nešto slatko...*, one of the first food blogs to appear in Croatia; the author of the cookbook *What's Cooking in Dubrovnik* and the co-owner of the award-winning Dubrovnik restaurant Pantarul that she runs with her husband Milan Vasić and their business partner Đuro Šiljug.



ISBN 978-953-57984-2-2