

martin scorsese

RAGING BOWLS OF PASTA? CLAMS CASINO? CINEMA'S MASTER CHEF SPEAKS—BUT NEVER WITH HIS MOUTH FULL.

What's your first memory of your mother's food?

Sitting in a high chair, eating pastina with butter. Very comforting.

What's the best meal you've ever had?

I have to go back to another childhood memory, an Easter Sunday. We had lasagna and stuffed breast of veal. I've been all around the world and had some extraordinary meals, but it's tied to the family memory, that warm feeling.

Is there one food you must have at least once a week?

Pasta with marinara sauce. I can't have



Mrs. Scorsese serving a killer meal in *GoodFellas*.

lasagna that much anymore. I'm too old.

Do you make the pasta yourself?

No, I have someone who cooks for me. I never really learned. I can kind of make water boil. The hardest thing with cooking would be to time when everything should be ready. I tried to cook about fifteen years ago and it was a mess. I know how to layer lasagna, but I don't know how to make the sauce or how long to leave it in the oven.

You mention sauce. In your house, did you call it sauce or gravy?

Sauce. But that's not to say that my uncles or aunts or cousins didn't call it gravy. I don't know what was going on in their households. The best thing was tasting it from a wooden spoon before it was finished, or dipping bread in it.

Is making a movie like cooking a good meal?

Yes. It's a good question. A lot of the inspiration that you need in cooking—the creativity, the improvisation—is very similar. In a movie, every shot is like making a good meal. But since you do maybe ten shots a day, that's like preparing and cooking ten good meals a day. And you have a lot of pots simmering. I loved to watch my mother cook. Ever since I was a boy, I've loved to watch cooking shows.

You watched cooking shows as a boy?

Yes. I liked the way things were made. It's like little paintings in a way. These shows are soothing, like music. It's fantastic. Now I watch the Television Food Network.

Did your mother cook a big traditional Sunday dinner?

Every Sunday. There was ravioli or rigatoni or ziti with cold ricotta on the side. The best part was the meat my mother put in the sauce—veal and pork, and sometimes veal knuckles or pigs' feet, which my father

liked. This was followed by chicken with lemon and garlic, which was always my favorite. And there was braciolo; sometimes she'd put an egg or salami inside of it.

What's your favorite dish of your mother's?

Lasagna. It was mainly for holidays. I don't want to give short shrift to ravioli, though. Hmmm . . . very serious things. It's between lasagna and ravioli. Sometimes it's one of them, sometimes it's the other. It's really disconcerting.

What kind of wine did you have at the family meals?

Growing up, the only wine we had in the house was the red wine my grandfather made in the cellar. In the '70s, when I started making movies and had some money, I would bring bottles of real wine. My parents loved that, but it was almost an affectation to have this real wine.

Do you have a favorite cheese?

Mozzarella.

Now, in her cookbook, your mother

scolds people who pronounce it like you just did, motzzerella.

Muutzerella is what she says, which is more American. But *motzzerella* is the real way. I'll eat even the 10-percent-fat mozzarella.

What? Are you an apostate?

It tastes like plastic, but I can't always have the full-milk one. You might as well clog your veins with cholesterol. So this is like a memory of mozzarella, you see.

I wanted to play a bit of Proustian memory association with some of your mother's dishes. Macaroni with lamb and veal in white sauce—do you have a memory of that?

I remember bringing Sergio Leone to my parents' apartment in 1977, and that was served. He liked it very much. He was very much aware of the different kinds of dishes that come from different parts of Italy, especially the south. My mother liked him because he ate well. She was right there saying, "This guy can eat!"

Pasta e fagioli?

With the red kidney beans? Oh, that's excellent. We would keep it for the next night and reheat it. It was even better the next night. Pesci always ordered that during *GoodFellas*. My mom cooked for us on the set. Pesci ate it on-camera during the big dinner scene at her house when they have the body in the trunk.

What did De Niro eat?

Potato frittata. Bob really enjoyed it. That's what he's putting the ketchup on. Joe ate a lot, especially during that scene. Maybe because it was improvised.

Your mother improvised that scene too?

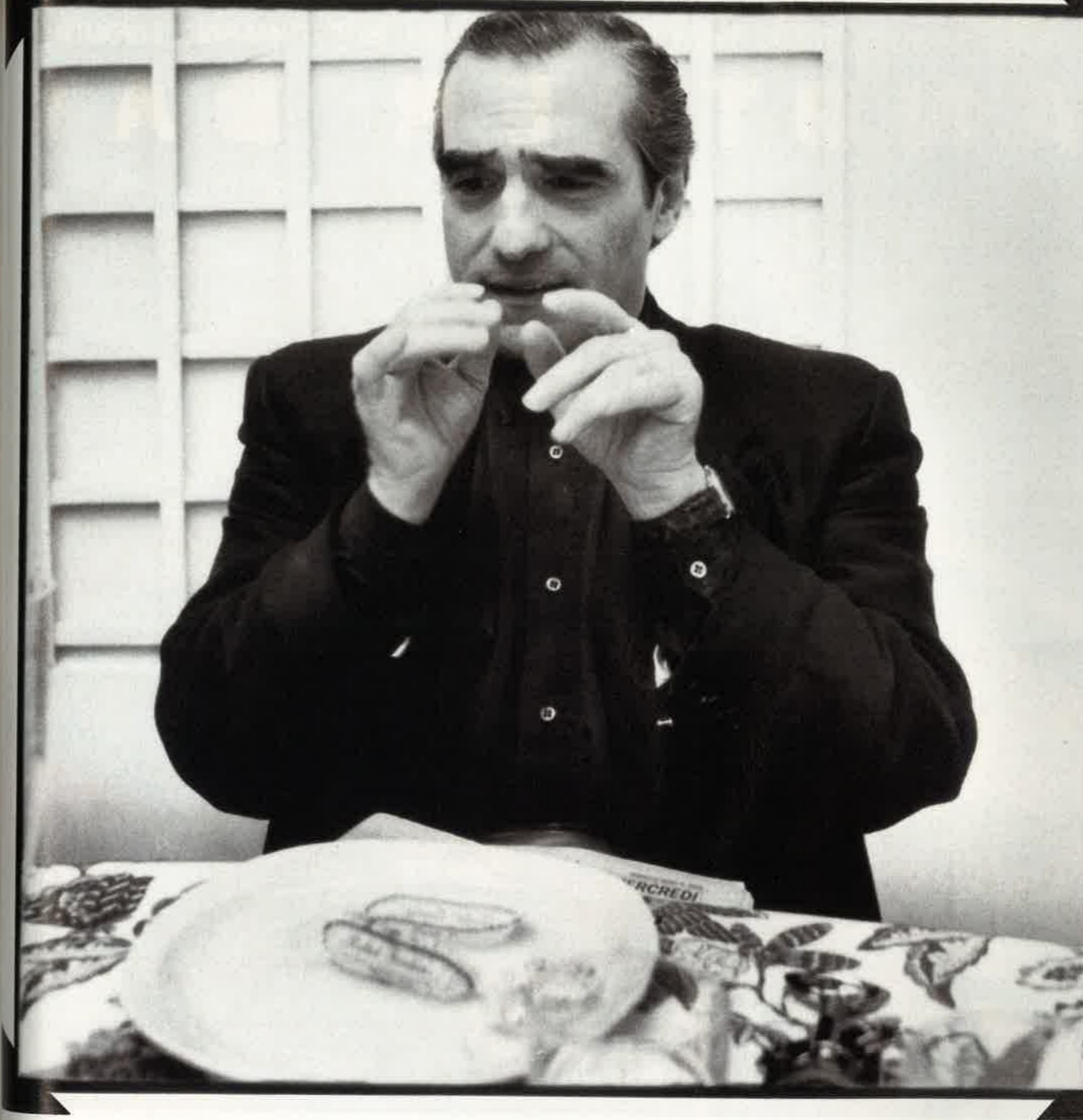
Totally. Except for the one line where she says, "Let me show you my painting." That was the one written line in the script. We improvised everything else. And the painting was by Nick Pileggi's mother, by the way.

Does De Niro have a favorite dish of your mother's?

The pizza. It's thick and simple, with tomato sauce and mozzarella. The trick is to put the sauce over the cheese, so the mozzarella doesn't burn but stays soft and moist.

Did you ever use your mother's cooking to cement a movie deal?

Not really. We'd just have fun. I mean Cassavetes, for instance—I first met John



Cassavetes in 1969 and he came over to my mother's apartment with Peter Falk. The big dinners we had then were great because they loved the food and brought wonderful wine. That's the first group of people I remember bringing over to the apartment, aside from school chums. Then there was Francis when he was about to do *Godfather*. I met him in 1970 in Italy, and when he returned to New York, he and his brother—the father of Nick Cage—came over. They came over many times. We had a lot of fun. Francis likes my mother's lasagna. Also her chicken with lemon and garlic. The chicken is the right amount of food. It isn't heavy and it's extremely tasty.

Any food memories of *Taxi Driver*?

I remember a nice birthday party for me at the St. Regis hotel. My mother made lasagna. Bernard Herrmann was there. He was very finicky and didn't want to eat that kind of thing, but he enjoyed it.

If you had to eat one dish for the rest of your life, what would it be?

That's a hard one. It's gotta be some form of pasta. Probably lasagna or ravioli.

When you went to double features as a boy, did you eat a lot of candy?

Bonbons. Remember those? I liked those.

Do you think that instead of selling candy and popcorn, movie theaters should sell a nice antipasto plate?

That's a brilliant idea. The problem may be trying to eat while watching the movie. But the salami isn't bad, and I don't particularly like celery, but fennel isn't bad. The roasted peppers would be great. People would enjoy that. And cheese, of course. And caponata—then you'd really be on to something. But the olives would go rolling around.

The theaters could put trays on the seat in front of you, like on an airplane.

That's true. But people might get mischievous with the olive pits.

Interview by Michael Hainey, a features editor at *Details*.